

1979

# Friend Walking Toward You

Richard Robbins  
*The University of Montana*

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

---

## Recommended Citation

Robbins, Richard, "Friend Walking Toward You" (1979). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 2407.  
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/2407>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

THE FRIEND WALKING TOWARD YOU

By

Richard Leroy Robbins, Jr.

A.B., San Diego State University, 1975

Presented in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1979

Approved by:

Madeline De Free  
Chairman, Board of Examiners

R. C. Murray  
Dean, Graduate School

6-1-79  
Date

UMI Number: EP35245

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35245

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

THE FRIEND WALKING TOWARD YOU

Some of these poems have appeared, or are scheduled to appear, in the following periodicals:

Borrowed Times: Resume; Photograph with the Fish: 1958; Whatever You Say, Wherever You Are

CutBank: Whatever You Say, Wherever You Are

Graham House Review: Photograph with the Fish, 1958

Intro 10: Silhouettes

The Nation: The Gift; Crossover

The North American Review: Coming Home

Pacific Poetry and Fiction Review: Leaflet Tour of Avalanche Lake

Poetry Northwest: The Patron of the Garden; The Well

Portland Review: Chronicle of Redemption at Lolo Pass; Crane in the Shade

Quarterly West: Report to a Friend North

Yakima: The Windmill

Uzzano: Toward New Weather

Several of these poems also appeared in Toward New Weather, a chapbook published by the Frontier Award Committee, and a selection was included in Where We Are: The Montana Poets Anthology.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### 1 Toward New Weather

Resume.....	1
Photograph with the Fish: 1958.....	2
Silhouettes.....	3
At Hoover Dam.....	5
Whatever You Say, Wherever You Are.....	7
The Windmill.....	8
Report to a Friend North.....	9
Self-Guided Tour of Moiese Bison Range.....	10
Leaflet Tour to Avalanche Lake.....	11
Elegy for a Stranger.....	12
Emory at the Curtain.....	13
On His Birthday.....	14
Christmas Eve.....	15
Toward New Weather.....	16

### 2 The Patron of the Garden

Museums.....	18
Topographical.....	19
What Should Not Matter.....	20
Bottom Sheet and Comforter.....	21
Four Times Round the Lake.....	22
Skin Diving.....	23
From a Far Balcony in Autumn.....	24
Beholding, The Trapper.....	25
A Horizon Between Them.....	26
For My Grandfather.....	29
Marriage in Winter.....	30
The Patron of the Garden.....	31
Leaping the Chasm at Stand Rock, Wisconsin Dells, 1887.....	32
Soda Lake, Carson Desert, Nevada.....	33
Sunlight in Winter.....	34
Coming Home.....	35
The Gift.....	36

### 3 Crossover

The Friend Walking Toward You.....	38
Chronicle of Redemption at Lolo Pass.....	39
Morning in Newfoundland: The Pastor Writes a Letter.....	40
The Well.....	41
Li.....	42
Reports to the Plateau.....	43
Sunday Mass at Mission Saint Ignatius.....	45
Holy Saturday.....	46
Crane in the Shade.....	47
African Proverb at the Crossing.....	48
Crossover.....	49

# 1 Toward New Weather



## Resume

Born before sunrise, the moon still west  
and waxing. Someone said Los Angeles  
knew wind, the first light registered  
in gray. I can't remember goals: that brown  
house shrank nightly. A dead uncle,  
his broken leg, these are in pictures  
I recall, while the snows of hydrangea  
remain.

My dog was a dog and school  
meant nuns and Communion. A turtle dried out  
in my window. I buried it  
near the walk, in a box where I'd kept  
my cuff links. This was my education:  
books and the Chinese elm. Later I learned  
that these two were cousins, that talk  
was not king but you could listen for it.  
Ambition then: to hear a snail sing,  
the great hurrah in willows. Now, I wonder  
at my ears. I would like to make  
shells of them, lay the fluid curves down  
and let them fill.

Activities: a sometimes  
runner, photographer of black  
and white. Honors: my trouble breathing,  
where the air becomes more precious  
to resist. Someday I would like to work in Spain,  
and in that citrus-colored light  
watch how the sun bulges and flattens. Call this  
an aim. My ambition now: totemic.  
Style: indirect. You may employ me  
for any reasonable purpose. I will give you  
the best of a life, its education.  
You may phone. I am always home,  
piecing my summary together.



## Silhouettes

Eddie Henning drew me in the first grade,  
my ear pressed flat to black and one eye  
straining to watch sideways out the window  
where a robin flew. Eddie was never  
good at outline. His hand shook. If he were  
center during recess, he'd blow  
our last ditch Statue of Liberty. He'd hike  
into the shrub--they'd call a safety.  
Here, his pencil tickled my ear, snagged  
at hair on the long circuit of my head.  
I didn't hate him. I hated explaining  
my crooked shadow, glued over pink  
and restless for the edge of a white  
cardboard frame.

Grandma hung it in my room above the dresser.  
Sometimes I surprised myself, another  
me in the dusk of that room, looking  
left and jittery toward a window  
on a day when there were breezes and a bird  
flew sideways and it was hot.  
Sometime around then I felt the first  
angel tap my shoulder as I fell asleep.  
I told Sister, and the next week Jeannie  
swore her family went to every Mass.  
I hated her. She was a liar,  
and she was rich. She was a Busy Bee  
in reading, but with God's help Jeannie  
flunked religion.

The Baldwin Dam cracked in spring. Frank Salazar,  
house drowned in the basin, moved  
away. We watched families on the news that night  
crowd around their chimneys, the flare  
a helicopter made on water  
rushing over lawns. I noticed Eddie's house, his  
Chinese elm slumped toward the driveway.  
A dog whined in the leaves. It jumped  
toward its shadow. I imagined Eddie then  
on the second story, gathering in his arms  
a jumpy ukulele, his rocking frog.  
If he stuffed the silhouette I drew him  
in his pocket, then I was there when he showed  
at last at the window, flew calm as a wren

toward the fireman's raft, toward second grade,

what twins always know about themselves for good  
past baptism. Shock of the ghost in each hand.

## At Hoover Dam

A boy is as young as ten feathers  
that wouldn't burn,  
as the chopping of wood  
spring mornings, the gaze five miles  
out of Boulder City falling  
long and down. Over drowned sage,  
over hill cuts tracking  
the dream of hands--the secret den  
already filled--water there  
backed up far to the north,  
and in the scream of gorge, in desert blue  
lifting, a river went on  
changed though still the motion  
of a century's snow,  
what the mountain chose to lay down.

Though he died there, though that storm  
on another lake turned owls  
loose at noon, the heart draws in  
its flurry of doves, its black fire.  
Draws, though a hill sags  
at the marriage of waters in all places  
raining, though a woman closes  
on her garden of flint,  
though earth, fern, the split rock  
of green lines, though the boy  
saw stars with his name,  
wakes to find the city gone.

You do not dream the passion of trout,  
short breaths of cedar.  
The woman who loves counts lines in the eyes  
of another, and you are  
the one familiar to a sunken road,  
to bad light honest for its fault.  
If trees blow away,  
folded ground. If elk vanish, whistles  
gone the way of song  
and those who brought you here. Nothing  
matters like a road. No one cares  
the sky died overnight  
responsible for sin. Here,  
a blast of magpies. Grin of concrete  
four wars out of tune. Out that spillway

the tumble rush a boy  
heard faintly, the wailing now, a praise  
of things about to disappear.

Whatever You Say, Wherever You Are  
for Rick Heilman

Birch and maple bow, giving themselves back  
to the ground this autumn, and every walk  
through leaves begins the clatter of all  
that lies detached. Something from a river  
in that noise: the voice calls, coming at you  
in water bending speech around the rock.

I hear you tonight in the scuff of heels.  
Whatever you say, I risk believing:  
the room you sit in now, the gold decor  
and light, children, a young wife, anything.  
Whatever you say follows like a bell  
ringing itself. Bell of autumn walking,

bell of incense and our First Communion,  
bells of longing--the bell these fourteen years.  
I sit down at the bank and your words  
catch current in the stream. My feet stalled,  
I wonder at my trust of shoes,  
their ever-walking toward, a dream of meeting you

some Sunday at the store. You'd buy your smokes,  
turn, walk out, and there we would be, agape:  
longest gone of friends. But all the leaves  
are fire now, candles burning low and rising  
as our voices rise. The prayer of priests here  
drowns out whispers in the fresco, breath

of saints. This Mass they celebrate for children  
lost at night, carried with the fish to sea.

The Windmill  
for John Bangeman, M.D.

Forty winters on its side  
in North Dakota, fish tail crimped and gears  
locked into rust-- Now we hoist  
the windmill to its legs, bolt it  
to a slab. Blades tick in the long arm  
of new wind that can't, at last, blow it down.

Your health keeps long enough  
for this, and gardens maintain you  
while the spring blooms open  
on your wait. The lake  
freezes and thaws. Your child grows up.  
And always that space  
left bare at the pier's weathered end, your heart  
always worse than before.

Lisa tells me years  
you dreamed the customs-house, Alaska,  
the Stikine River draining  
toward the strait, and you alone for seasons  
with that wind. You'd set up practice there,  
guide your flatboat to the upstream  
villages. And there were always gales  
to your return,  
standing straight, balance sure.

You bury dahlia bulbs in pots  
around each leg. Dream yourself young enough  
to sail. Pine are tuning up for one more  
gust before the lake turns gray  
and pulls the moon above the hill. You recall  
your age in her rising, the slowing  
down wheel of blades.  
A fish jumps up for the last wafted fly.



## Report to a Friend North

In Ocotillo Wells, wind  
comes down the slope  
with trains. Mail is all  
we get here, the uncoupling  
of a car. You ask if we  
grow tired of the orange groves  
far as our horizon. Friend,  
we die for their  
blossoming. We shiver nights  
to keep the smudge  
pots lit, curse the devil  
frost that burns  
this valley scent away.

A spiny shrub, tangle of  
wooden bone, names  
this town. Pheasant  
brood there, far from  
dogs or the stone of a boy.  
The day I came back, Emory  
died before my eyes. Fog  
burned off near  
dawn, heat went over  
ninety while Mother cried  
there are no children  
who return only for a death.

I am staying here, her last  
son, until the fruit  
rots or she comes away  
of her own. These  
clouds make no promise  
for rain. Coyotes range  
our grove at the edge of hills.  
And you, friend-- From you  
I need more news  
than I could send. Stars  
here trail smoke  
this cooling night between  
the ridges. They decide  
with me an hour, then go.

Self-Guided Tour of Moiese Bison Range  
for Allan Anderson

It's hazy here, nothing in sight  
but the bluebunch wheat: our state grass,  
the pamphlet tells us. Where  
are the buffalo? Where are the horns  
stampeding a failing sun? They've all been  
rounded up, we read. Shot with vaccine,  
culled.

A slim cloud bends like an arrow  
and halves October sky. Larkspur droop,  
Elk Creek is drying. I "watch carefully  
for antelope"--and deer crop up on the ridge  
like homes, straight out of a fog.

So this is a Saturday, day of metal  
and the smiling lake. Grouse and dove  
call from somewhere in the fir. I keep  
driving. Slow.

There's a marsh hawk circling  
in air glaring with lint. Memory turns south,  
recalling stories of the wide wing. The man there  
blinded us with knowing, talk of fish  
that rise into the wind like birds. Clues  
in a caterpillar moving toward cocoon.  
Where? he asked us once. Where have we hidden  
our eyes? And he left it at that.

Now we drive alone. I drive alone. Out even  
of the comfort of film, the caught ray  
in a curve of pinions. Two of them falling  
into the palms of the gorge, the horns and tuft  
of my first bison, spotted--survivors--at last.

## Leaflet Tour to Avalanche Lake

The first hard frost, varied thrush song, ground  
cracking in the green light of noon  
and cedar bowing. Goatsbeard sways from a limb,  
a face in that jagged face where a trunk  
broke--stump of its body, crown far back

of its brain. There are no eyes here but yours.  
The trail you walk on leads to bird call, trees  
you've never heard of. The tips of hemlock  
praising east, dwarf yew and the mild clutch  
of roots halving a stone. Swirling of rock

grinds out potholes in the creek bed  
falling down a gorge. The bridge you watch from  
trembles. Water ouzel dip for insects  
in the spray. And this is where the leaflet ends,  
where name-stakes end, and wood that rises

to your right begins an unmarked climb.  
At first, you know your way by the furrowed  
bark of cottonwood. A snowshoe rabbit track  
points up. But then the five-pointed bract,  
nine-note humming from a branch. And now

this darker walking, through the brittle white  
on each leaf and chip. The trees thinning,  
the air thinner and cold up there  
where wild goats graze, you come at last upon  
the lake, the high curved wall of glaciers

sliding down. The shallow water here  
froze weeks ago. Logs from unknown trees  
glow gray under the ice, leaves held up  
in their sinking. You choose a rock,  
skip it across the freeze. The sound now

of a bow let loose, quiver of air going out  
in a strain for name that comes back on itself.

Elegy for a Stranger  
Cynthia Herbig, d. 1979

It's twenty miles to that scare of mountain,  
the trail you walked the only June  
I knew you. It's white now, snowed-in for the third  
month of winters like here. I remember  
the heat wave and Hubbard, long evening  
near the second story rail. We talked about jazz  
and trees, about the East you knew--  
how the sun, after hours of dust, finally set,  
letting the breeze come in.

That breeze comes now, and snow  
trails off the peak into thin air, marking  
a way to nothing. Is that what the hills mean?  
Did the bitterroot you find mean a trap  
of loveliness, their pushing up surrender  
to blue and only blue, to a high road  
dead-ending in sky? I think you'd say no.  
The little I knew you, I think you'd say the air  
is another sort of home, ground floor  
to stars and what hides the dream of larch,  
what we're always growing into.  
Forgive me if I'm wrong. Forgive me  
presuming. Stranger, Sister, I haven't bled  
in the rear of a cheap flat, miles from family  
and the land I left to come home to.

Me, I read of you dead and I remember  
others, absence I didn't feel for uncles  
older and closer than you, others  
I never knew. Here, two stories above the snow,  
that mountain, that sun rise more glaring  
than this dark--and what we said,  
what we are always saying, is the grave  
I look into, the song I barely recall.  
Friend, you let me trust jazz and now it's jazz  
that stabs you, your walk  
down streets where a dime rattles hard and someone's  
dead inside to rob you. Stranger,  
we shared this house. We shared a same July,  
same August. Let me speak to you  
as to the casualty I might have been,  
the dead I am. The stranger in me  
climbs on for us both, never looks back, but climbs.

## Emory at the Curtain

A daily jogger passes into blue  
while bare trees bow in zero-nearing air.  
The home maintains its own shade, fire, and you

may not forget. Cold's a lack, memory a new  
room waiting for a desk, that leather chair  
to watch the daily joggers pass in blue.

Days into fall, your knee gone wrong last June,  
you cross the slow river drifting green. And where  
the home shores up a lame shade, fire, it's you

who always walks now. Gray light, ice, that hue  
of berries on her skin: your runner there,  
a daily jogger passing into blue.

Helen is dead. Your breath's mainly out. Soon,  
maps of burning leaves may fall beyond the chair.  
The home puts on its fall shade, fire, and you

give in to waving. If those hands were new  
you might raise them high, like a gift, to air.  
A daily jogger passes into blue.  
The home creates its own shade, fire, and you.

## On His Birthday

Had a belly eyes, he'd stop consulting  
elms as to their dying, town as to the roads  
that led him here. It's hope

against hope, that's for sure: skin moves out  
along the body and his old friends  
keep a belly in their eyes. Comfort

means little. Vineyards at dusk are enough.  
In leaf light settled near the ground, a dark  
hope blazes, disappears, and what was there

can never be remembered, nor could death  
in smaller moments--when the mind is turned,  
distracted by a sound--give the belly eyes.

He wishes himself well. He can't do more  
without the graves he carries in him  
vanishing. If it's hope the day requires

something's lost. If it simply means  
the rain's come, a trout strikes hard and sirens  
always pass, then eyes anywhere open  
lavish gifts of hopelessness he'll trust.

## Christmas Eve

Began blue over the near hill, cold  
from the clear night storms had left them.  
They brought mums to Holy Cross, and in their steam  
they knelt at the Mullica graves, last  
leaves of poplar rusted beside them.  
It was clouding. Began to snow on the way  
back to fasting and the midnight Mass.  
Grandma rubbed and rubbed her bad hands.

South always came blue, even in rain.  
Even if the ocean turned winter  
for a morning, south came always blue, better  
late than never. We were a family  
by then. Los Angeles our dead uncles, a green home  
left behind. That new house on the hill  
kept quiet about the history of grass--  
the field we filled--and some of us

could hear it, rolled on without knowing  
toward the wave-sliced cliff where the story  
told itself. Christmas Eve we spent alone  
without cousins. It darkened early.  
When I was young I looked for the comet,  
but I only saw stars, and each one  
was brighter, each one red and blue  
if you stared. I never knew to ask

about Pocatello. They might not have talked.  
After all, it was the future coming: my loud  
cousins, the immortal ham,  
what was left of us for beginning again.

## Toward New Weather

Bad times: drought, Egil's dog had mange, the white  
lilies fell like hair around our house. Crows  
gave us up, let the corn dwarfs holler  
on their own for hail, dull wind. It's the kitchen,  
midnight, Father says Leave it all and feels  
the last scotch burn. Lost calves low far away.  
The mountain cries for snow, drawing sheets

of lightning to its back. Father dreams the green  
of moss on northern shingles, coiling dust  
between his fingers. The rest of us  
wonder from our corners of the evening, this  
table. The next thing he says will be Move,  
and it will be Pocatello then, bench land  
and always rain, alfalfa that swallows the cows.

This is our second pestilence.  
When Mother died the dying lilac bloomed  
for days before a hot wind browned  
the flowers, spread them over the field.  
Everything goes wrong then. For some reason  
Kansas burns, a well bottoms out. Father  
laughs, leaves the sky to itself. We drive west,

and now he is singing. Now he is singing  
If a person don't have but two teeth  
they look better if they're close together.



## 2 The Patron of the Garden

...as of a single world  
In which he is and as and is are one.

Wallace Stevens

When the time comes to you at which you will be forced at last to utter the speech which has lain at the center of your soul for years, which you have, all that time, idiot-like, been saying over and over, you'll not talk about joy of words. I saw well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?

C.S. Lewis

## Museums

After jade the color of my eyes, stone  
elephants and medieval prayer  
in wood and oil, we step outside,  
hunch our backs through the Japanese garden  
blooming something all the time, rest  
on an arched bridge above  
lily and carp, the faces we own today  
giving themselves back to water.  
On the way to Natural History  
you stop. Down a lane the chalk  
body of a man on pavement, the crime  
we don't reconstruct. We walk on instead.  
The ocean's not far, and its wind  
comes with us, through eucalyptus, over lawn  
the color of someone else's  
envy. Everyone's guilty but the orchestra.  
They haven't played since June.

It's a scene from our past: the wattled  
hut and clay jug, fire handed down  
since you or I was born. In the tanks  
our same dream under glass. The lantern fish,  
blinded from its own light,  
moves green, dark, moves green and away.  
Five miles down, we'd leave too,  
swim to be always leaving, pass what we found  
out our gills.  
It's dark after the blue whale.  
We drive south toward where those lights  
thin. Down the coast without  
moon or star, down a line  
of breath between what rises,  
what falls down into sea. Sculpture  
hasn't failed us. This night,  
endlessly autumn, opens up.  
That voice we hear is water. Your heart  
is what came this far.

Topographical  
for Kathy Roch

Not tricks of flesh, nor blue-bellied  
laughter in the sky. Prairie rather, ten  
below and all of us move crossways  
over ice. If the creeks jam, say they die.  
Say a hill could always melt--but this is  
winter and that won't do. When the landscape's  
violent, we won't do: the worst memories  
become our life.

Rest, though. How little we've  
earned it. An all-week fast, the sweats  
at dawn, maybe men walk sideways to be sure  
of air. Maybe it's the stiff spine, lodgepole  
straight, that scares us. While a hawk hunts,  
mediate and high above the land turned  
toward itself for warmth, we see only  
snow. Something might die in the white. Something  
grows strong as that bull.

You said it: Long for  
what you never had. You were right. Fishing  
marries evening and the day. On a line  
dropped down to fluid wind, among peoples  
of the reed-sway, we keep sending  
the bodies home. With fish, a return.  
And with returning, a sky we might go home  
to walk through.

Forgive my details. You see,  
I'm crazy enough to want what is  
nothing here. I'd offer fields of corn  
if they were mine to give, fields of pure  
sashay and green going on, going yellow  
on and on. To you, to anyone,  
the silk-dusk, safe harbor. If I could give  
anything, it is this. Let a ship bulge  
and glide across the swells. Let a prairie  
schooner straighten its ragged course, drive west  
beyond all coulees, always west.

## What Should Not Matter

The bee at impact  
on your windshield, its stinger  
left a good three inches  
behind it, and the bee's  
flying, held back by ligaments  
of gut that trail the bee  
in its plunge to leave the glass.  
Somewhere near the wiper blade  
it dies, wings in a windy  
hallelujah. It finds  
a lean-to there. Emptied  
of itself, an ugly road  
behind it, the whole life's exposed  
at fifty-five.

It shouldn't matter either  
that you killed two pheasant,  
November, 1965. Or that a cow  
sings, homes break down, or that you lose  
your voice one Sunday  
when your head is wrong, and a  
mirror you look in  
gives away the world. What matters  
is your mattering,  
the state of the state of  
this heart. You let a cat come in,  
let it live until it  
leaves you, name it with a word  
that still means gone.

When you die, let there be  
questions: Did the wood speak. Did  
a cottonwood bow down  
in the deepest dream and walk.  
Was an owl there. Would a river trust you.  
Driving, you let  
the world come clean. What should  
not matter: that it dies. In the best  
of times you can remember  
this, follow  
your own deaths back  
along the road you've dragged them.  
Your voice  
will have not been lost.

## Bottom Sheet and Comforter

When you dream you dream the jungle floor  
you lie on, the tiptoeing flamingo  
and giraffes paired up to make the long  
browse across a torrid Serengeti.  
Sometimes you hear tigers and the one  
lion, whispering. It's not you they want.  
They plan the kingdom for a night, jackal  
cries and orchids breaking open,  
while spiders (spiders being the worst  
gossips in the jungle) carry their rulings  
abroad.

It's home here.  
But sometimes, if the beasts aren't talking  
or the weather's bad, your dream goes airborne.  
You fly like these quilt-birds, exotically  
and fast. Green as a parrot, tropical,  
the sun never bothers you, and all you breathe in  
is air and the speed of air  
and the vertical sweep of diving, climbing,  
toward what is always next, always  
never sure.

In the dream, you could  
be Adam: you name what you do not own, own it,  
and give it back again. You are of  
the jungle, and, flying, you are  
of the sky. In the morning, you lie between  
these worlds, blurred into their wrinkles.  
If the snow's gone, you dream yourself on that  
hill's ridge out of town,  
looking across fields of ruined  
grass, looking up, walking, looking out  
like any hiker once the home ground's  
turned foreign and a footprint says, I'm here,  
I am not here. I have left myself behind.

## Four Times Round the Lake

There are goldfish, yes. And the edible trout  
loud children catch, jerking a life, one  
by writhing one, to shore. We walk  
around the lake, that's all. Four times--  
I won't forget the number--pass the pintail duck  
snatching weed, geese in their slow curve  
toward a middle calm.

It's a children's park, Las Chollas.  
Even the name says summer, and my first year  
of necessary drought. I am leaving,  
we are talking my leaving over. Eucalyptus  
shave away their bark, drop the aromatic  
seed as a boy casts out the best worm,  
searching his limit.

Maybe trout don't fight as hard for the young.  
Maybe there's surrender to the gray voyage  
into sunlight, air, the sure winding of what goes on  
above them. Ten fish lay in a row,  
slough off their oil to new heat, the mud  
they'll soon leave for the odd vocation  
in a meal.

We are like them, you say.  
I am like the ten, a creel full of old selves  
I'll be dying to, there in that place  
toward where I'm moving. The geese  
fly north: there's no autumn turning here. I leave  
for north tomorrow. Let's walk more. The child,  
that child is bearing me home.

## Skin Diving

Fingerling sturgeon in the cove around  
Angel Point, all day swimming naked, friends  
and you, the listening near dark  
for those propellers out of tune inside three miles  
of the water's ear. You know about thunder  
then, its lake-rest scaring the trout  
shallow. The moon, if there comes a moon,

rises yellow from the Swan Range  
that never flies away. At dusk, a swallow  
and its thousand flies. Your back the island  
rising bare of shrub or goose nest, diving  
at a glint, the skin all yours  
and flooded. If air were the only rescue, promise  
of breath, you would stay among snagged

lures and die without that savior. Your chest  
swelling, the heart-quiet of the ear  
goes out to water. Gravel darkens  
under insects wandering home. Inside  
this dim room, bauble fish and light always  
failing, another man swims. A fogged mask,  
a black suit coming closer, the air since

left you for a cloud. His hair waves upward  
into black. The two of you surface  
as one skin, breaking that interior  
to sky. Rain then. Thunder comes from everywhere,  
above and below. A part of you  
breathes. In the darkness between friends,  
you hear a swimming, a diving away.

From a Far Balcony in Autumn

I ask about the sky, but the answer  
is about a rope.

Proverb

First the yellow, then the white house  
breaking into open spaces once  
the leaves go. There they are again, old friends  
from another winter, mapped with the dark  
limbs of a yard. Two hearths in fog. At home  
with themselves, as always--maple leaves bare

flat as a hand at their doors. A man chops  
kindling near the far shed. Nearby, it's Susan  
in the berry shrub, filling a blue-stained  
bowl. These might be anyone. Tomorrow,  
when the courthouse clock strikes nine,  
they may have traded jobs. For now, though,

there are the two of them, private  
as fall could allow, the breaths  
of a task escaping into small fogs,  
rising in pair to the sky. From a far balcony  
much is kept from you. Hear the wood split,  
the shrub snapped back from a hand. But talking,

talking comes no clearer than a crow,  
talking to itself in birch. I lean my ear  
to the voices, my cold blurred eye  
to their eyes meeting. We are neighbors only  
under this dull sun, finally burning through.  
Any day now, snow will break the patterns

on those far lawns, the grain of this birchen  
porch my feet scuff. On borderless ground,  
all of us walk one as winter-poor,  
hedges dying back, the whole town our white  
road leading everywhere but home, smoke  
from the hundred flues joining in a cord.



## Beholding, The Trapper

As from a wide window, looking out on spines  
returned to elms by snow. As snow, filling  
the shoe-print, striking the ground blind. Once,  
a sky fell. The air in dapper white,  
you were five months digging the animals  
out. Your face changed. One bird wouldn't  
leave you or that window ledge, where the last thatch  
shaped its circle out of wind.

An elegy is a sort of welcome  
to the absence, addressed to the man always  
putting on his coat, closing the door  
behind him. That winter, it was wood that sang,  
a brick hearth humming the space between  
fire and cold. If you died, it was every morning  
as you left to check your traps. Coming home,  
the cabin rose before you from a drift  
some wind dreamed, then had forgotten.

Now these elms. Now your face in this window,  
beholding you, spreading itself out  
across the snow. You could live between these  
worlds. Turned on yourself, the snow falls  
upon another: a face is never buried.

Once before, you were this immortal. Trappers found you  
blind, eyelids frozen shut. You said  
the trees were old men, resurrected,  
hung your trap their for the bird, cold, that song  
your welcome to a forest of stiffening coats.

## A Horizon Between Them

### 1 The Contrary

Among many of the Plains tribes, if a person dreamed of thunder or lightning, he was obligated to live out the rest of his life in an antinatural manner.

William K. Powers

Not my mother, but I will hate you, friend,  
because you knew me when I was dead  
and older, and that was tomorrow, before  
the dream. Black snow blazes from my heart to sky:  
I look for vision larger than this earth  
never answering back. When I run  
naked to river ice, I ask the magpie  
for its bonnet. This sun, why won't it dance  
with me, or fit in my pocket like a dog?  
I settle for hellos. Leave me, friend,  
and as you walk away I'll finally greet  
your face. Hello, eyes. Hello, Great Owl, climbing  
that branch of light. Take care the thunder-wild  
mice don't snatch you from their cloud.

### 2 Day of Silence in Bali

Once a year again, no temple dance or market,  
no cockfight raising the dust of town.  
If I sit quietly enough, a spur  
passes, the rooster wind--dead voice snarled  
in thatch--will pass and hell fill up again.  
I was five on this day when we found  
the old priest who dared chant his morning  
prayers. He wore palm wings, soared naked  
from a ledge into the river. He bribed me for  
directions: I still wear this bell he had hoped,  
in his madness, to trade for the knowledge of north.

### 3 Waiting for the Forester

Meadow-rue: stems slender, leaves 3 times compound, fruit an achene turning backward at maturity. Thickets, woods, meadows.

Wildlife of the Northern Rocky Mountains

I could begin now without him. A yellow dawn, meadow-rue sways fog away: deer might be feeding for the hunt. I wait, and the gun barrel beads with dew. A spruce is telling stories of how it dressed the sky. The last fog lifts. I am waiting, but I hear beyond a thicket first browse letting the ground go. For all my knowledge, my trust in this compass and the smell deer leave, I can't begin. Breeze through a stand of fir showers snow on the darkness beneath them. The forester knows his way there. On his own day, he guides.

### 4 Advent, Wind Storm in Bakersfield

Every tree will memorize its fall. In the sky, last blue leaving us this driven dust, a desert at our throats. Sirens, that candle behind curtains, fading. When were we young once, when the arm of Grandma gave the wind away? When did a cloud lack locusts of grit, and those four palms draw an ocean to its rest? This much is clear: the dust will survive us, valley fever visit in our blood come spring. Where birds went, we too would go, given half a chance. God, somewhere God composes questions for the poor and newly injured: if I answer, wind claps through that motel sign, flapping at its wrist.

## 5 At 10,000 Feet

You can't fly here, unless eagle.  
You can't walk, unless the camas clears  
a path, snow leaves, and air allows a space  
to your walking. You probably won't breathe  
easily, homeless for nearly a week.  
From the circular rock you'll hear voices  
that lack direction, the closed meadow opening  
only up. You can eat here, sleep. Don't  
be sad: dying is always like this. Thunder  
in a high field silence. Larkspur  
pushing upward at the stall in wind. Name this  
"earth", and that, "heaven"--or simply sky.  
You walk, a horizon, between them.

## 6 Spirit Meeting

Friend, say this and fill the pipe  
Say, "I want to live with all my relatives"  
If you do, it will be so  
Siouan song

Willow stick and cloth, the black scrap stands  
for west, where our ancestors live. Outside  
is a darkness; in here, light blows out.  
Under a quilt, in his own third night, the old  
man sits: tied at the neck, hands, and feet.  
Sage sprigs quiver in our ears. The drums  
pound, women sing, and no one rattles gourds  
but a black hand sparking blue through ceiling  
and wall. Nothing then. Old Fox's voice,  
asking each a question. We tell him  
our sicknesses, all of them, and he delivers  
our answer to the dead. He walks that ice, each  
river crossed, the rope balled near him now in light.

## For My Grandfather

Autumn light, light of afternoon, the crows  
you blessed last winter cross the yellow  
corn rows homes have made of air. Inside,  
a wall, here and there your furniture  
in company with leaves. You'd expect your rug  
to turn, domestic lawn, to red and gold  
October. The trout you're cooking, kitchen  
yellow as the flame, gives off all memory  
of weed, the lake in summer, a hard green  
light down thirty feet where fish swim and swim.

Coming into the world, fraternal, your twin  
left all his air to you. Paired up  
for those months, you swam the first dark waters  
mindful of another heart, the way of touching  
men are born with. You never found him  
again. Stars turned over  
over London, Pocatello. Now, when you fish  
you troll for green light left behind you, gone  
down lines the sun gives water in supreme  
control of itself. It's the light where autumn comes from,  
filling up your home, where the twin still  
turns your colors, year after yellow year.

## Marriage in Winter

This is not sadness, it is a lake.  
Holes in the ice are not  
crying but the fish's eye on weather, an early  
death. Sparrows love you  
when you dump your trash. A cougar  
seen three years before returns:  
it doesn't love you, but loud summer's  
gone and you're the only one  
who draws the animals out. This is not friendship,  
it is blood. Murder won't belong  
while the tenth-year freeze  
goes on and no one can drown until April.

Set-lines hedge against not sleeping. Snow blind  
at a Z of shuffled boots, a path  
leading north beyond the islands, you Our Father  
the cutthroat, pray the whitefish smoked  
before the animals know. Later,  
come to table, this evening lifts from the same range  
where winter rose, sent out  
talk and breeze over the waves. You'll auger  
new holes soon. You'll sadden other lives  
for hunger and still remain  
blameless as weed, a blameless fox,  
crosser of the ice.

You will not be less alone. You won't be  
lonely, because sadness  
is not this lake, even if you are widowed,  
even if you are matched. When your wife arrives  
she finds you groom to more  
than your simple wedding. You point out to her  
the tracks of morning drinkers at the holes,  
low-slung clouds on that irrelevant  
peninsula. You tell her you could love each other.  
By dinner, she believes. Both of you believe in  
snapped air, the largest raven  
of the season. Winter does not part,

it is a marriage.  
This lake is not land, it is a going on and on.

The Patron of the Garden

what became of the sea's dream...  
and the onion that died like a saint  
from the head down

Philip Levine

There seemed always the fleas, Mister Dog's  
maybe, come to lay eggs in his shirt.  
He remembers pumping water, the chick chick  
of a small bird, gliding to nest  
in his pocket. Where this all started, he can't  
be sure: the air steps aside when he walks now,  
earth goes thanks-please-thanks which each new squeak  
of a heel. Their green tips creased,  
his onions salute him. Mushrooms bow down.  
When neighbors call, they find him kneeling  
in tomato vines, two worms inching up his arm.

Years ago, he thought he died. He woke to find  
his wife gone, her half of sheet smoothed  
down and pillow fluffed. In that purple light  
he could not feel his thinking,  
could only rise, forgetting everything  
as it came: floor, light on wood, teeth along  
his coated tongue. He ran through alders in the fog  
toward where he thought  
he left something. At the creek, a trout  
still kicked. Leaves sang hallelujahs to its gutting,  
fell and snagged their edges in his hair.

He can hear his thinking now. He can  
recall. He can weed his rows of carrots  
and feed the village children when they come.  
One day, a prelate's carriage draws up, dusty  
cassocks grow into their shadows. When they bless him  
in a rain of holy water, make him saint,  
he bows, turns back upon his onions, and spits  
into a furrow. Until his death, he never tires  
of the leaching salt, modesty of tubers,  
or the three-sided wondering of crows.

Leaping the Chasm at Stand Rock,  
Wisconsin Dells, 1887

No one dared you but the breeze said  
century's-end, said what-the-hell, and you leaped  
in your best clothes toward the sandstone  
mushroom, giant rock. Midair, your new wife screamed,  
an oriole ducked away. Somewhere in the brush  
Bennet got the perfect shot, froze you  
at that same apex where your mind blanked, stalled  
between gone and future, everything but yourself  
taking account of you--foolish hawk.

Only your arms blurred. Bennet joked about that  
later, called it fisticuffs with sky,  
with the jack pine you might have landed in.  
You remembered different. Having jumped,  
you split in two and saw your first half overshoot,  
smash face-down in shale. The arms  
remaining reached for this as much as for  
the rock-pie target, the perfect lark.

Bennet got rich, we'll presume. And let's say  
you got rich by 1900, not from royalties  
nor leaping hoodoos, but from the mercantile  
in Portage, from three kids who helped and that wife  
who never screamed again. She never stopped  
loving you. Even that Sunday when you told your oldest  
to jump. He didn't, and she didn't  
understand. It wasn't murder or the fun

you had in mind. It wasn't flying. You knew  
your boy needed sky under him, push-  
turned-to-pull in midair, that empty moment,  
the grab of a moment for the man.



Soda Lake, Carson Desert, Nevada

Jacaranda, our favorite tree, means nowhere  
to the ghosts with only one  
desert tongue. They cracked a joke  
at Sand Springs, and the Dutch came west  
without laughing, saw the wild, immoral horses  
stamp a ring of dust near Lovelock.  
Sure, there were mountains. A railroad  
ran dead-straight-without-looking from Ely  
to Reno, from Searchlight to the black  
rock Paradise became. What no one  
expected were these borax plains,  
a whole team lost. The Toquemas bore up  
like an excuse for watershed, for not  
becoming sink like the rest.

What sort of pair lived here, where pots  
go white after a day, where helping  
meant useless or dead  
before your time? A day owl carved the lake  
in half. The land agent kept them still  
for his company photo. They stayed  
that way, two lives in debt  
to the fresh-killed rabbit that wasn't grain,  
to water, still as themselves  
and flowing up invisibly, up because  
this was desert, this was the way the ghosts  
should have it. Someone  
never heard from them again.

Jacaranda never grew here. Never  
our favorite bird, the nutcracker, nor  
trout which also means nowhere  
to the embassies of sage. If we hear words now  
they're the same one. If talk, it's the view  
refusing signatures. Let's  
go walking. We've been alone for at least a century.  
It doesn't matter nothing here  
has anything to do with us. Boron means  
coyote, love. The Kawich pile cinders into sky  
of their own. Lost for a while,  
we find why dead means always, our passing  
just a way we sign our name.

## Sunlight in Winter

It's Paradise, December, where four hours means all the day you're getting. Prairie grass ruins at a tilt. The trains have stopped. Hills, the hills proceed above you, steep as polestars pointing you toward ice.

This time of year, Dixon's fair. Light falls sideways through a valley running east to west. Where the Flathead bends water yields up its dark to all-day sun, as in Lonepine, as in Ronan, Niarada.

Driving, you are always blinded. What wheat there is throws off a glare, and last night's snow goes on. Come February, March, the heat returns: grouse molt back to tan and Paradise can wake. But even now

you see the shivered rising. Trees you thought exploded inside from the cold are swaying, swaying back. It's you they do not hail, here in the winter's weakest sun. It's you on this thin

forest road, driving through the struggle.

## Coming Home

Something of a morning turns you pilgrim,  
light rises from the gloss  
off your desk. Out there, dawn is never  
slow in coming: saws begin their see-saw whine  
lifted to the ocean of the air.  
A song you've never heard before, these limbs  
scrubbing themselves in breeze,  
hammering oil drums, that finch just back  
from its nomad winter. Something comes with you  
out of sleep, the weak hours--light  
slants hard across your desk.

And the window opens when it warms.  
And next door, the porch lamp goes out before  
a woman parts her drapes. Even with the first  
passing siren, those near or finally dead,  
you are drawn out to the conference  
of it all: a shadow on the lawn, high blue  
washed across with clouds.

Your home becomes the house  
of a day's first steps. When you walk out, take on  
the cold--still in the air--like a jacket  
you might buy, you make this pilgrimage  
to whatever comes next. Your saint  
lies at the far end of shrubbery, a shrine  
in the web. At its edge spins the patron  
of your morning, preparing  
the death of a fly.

Walking away, something is left  
behind you, wind through the lines of that home.  
In the long weave toward evening  
you have made a thousand journeys, and at the inn  
where you are lodged, a waiting room  
to once more make your own. Wind  
through an opening in glass, shuffled  
papers on the desk where light fails--  
letters bearing home like ships  
that script you're never sure belongs to you.

## The Gift

Praise the snail, sailing across the walk  
on her own sea, bobbing. The tenth part  
of a blossom in her jaw, she fans  
her head, sweeping in this rain  
while the shell deflects like a prow.  
Genuflecting before cracks, she then moves  
on: to the new stalk of begonia, smooth  
enough to climb, to the kinked neck  
of her mate, to their sea-fight consuming them  
both in foam, to the slowest navy setting forth...

The moon sets early with its tide, and I have  
no place here. The leaves rattle like gulls  
preening at once. My walk becomes wind-swept:  
I am the giant here, reeling among those  
slower than me, surer than the march  
of my locked knees in the lines they draw  
and leave. Stooping, I offer a finger  
to the snail. When it hesitates, I lay  
a leaf-carpet down for it to mount,  
a wax ocean to sail. I raise her then,  
high into first light, buoyed on her rainbow,  
the green host. Later, the blood shakes with its gift.

### 3 Crossover

He brought hem thurgh a quyke sand  
and so in to an Ile.

Caxton's Chronicles of England

And there was no one watching,  
Neither did Aminadab appear,  
The siege was being raised,  
And the horsemen,  
At the sight of the waters, were  
riding down.

Juan de la Cruz

The Friend Walking Toward You

There is a friend that sticketh  
closer than a brother.

Proverbs

In the first spring heat, birch limbs flare  
behind their sash of old deaths. Even the fattening  
raven, roost nearer to sky, takes on  
the white of sun in new, unwinding bark.  
Like a root spray around the corner  
of the house, the friend comes at you  
from afar. The click of heels bends  
over homes, closer now than chattering jays.

A young moth pads tracks along your window:  
dust comes back to cross itself  
with the wings' unsure returns. The friend,  
you know, has always lived here, closer  
than a brother, walked with you your half  
billion steps toward this tree, sashes  
waving. In the second breeze of April  
wooden arms claim green and sweep the air.

And you walk with your friend, even as  
you await your friend's return. A field  
flattens between you--see your old friend  
come to meet himself. Someday, you'll be  
arm in arm. Word for word you'll talk  
of the fellowship in blood, the family  
of bones in each body walking. The root spray  
tells you of this same tree, doubled,

sprouting its kingdom of leaves underground.

Chronicle of Redemption at Lolo Pass

...the principal spring is about the temperature of the Warmest baths used at the Hot Springs in Virginia. two other...are much warmer, their heat being so great as to make the hand of a person Smart extreemly when immerced.

The Journals of Lewis and Clark

There are histories of snow here, a lake inside the mountain, scalding hands from Clark's to mine upon its rise in scalding mineral baths. The Indians trained jays to trace this ridge and find some sign of it from sky. Wise men, white and red, dug their deepest holes, planted fir and lodgepole upside down, to course through rock and make wide passage to the lake.

The history of failure here gave rise to new religion. Crested jays became old souls unwilling to yield. As totems of the chiefs and colonels--long dead but with a never dying urge to swim that lake, that inner eye awash in mountain wisdom--these birds fly forever singly. Their side-eyes look out for a cloud of steam, the cave it rises from, the at last dark passage out of light

toward marriage of the fire and lake. We know the score of the living. We know the number of the men who stopped here, stayed, and died in trying. As for the gray-headed jays, we can never tell. Is that one there the same I saw yesterday, skirting a band of fog? Or does this one hear the tree code rumoring some sage ancestor's find? The likeness between birds confuses us.

We would rather not waste our time with the forever dead and wandering. If more than my hand were scalded, I would not waste my time at this lookout, those pairs of wings like a fixture to the eye. I would not say, I came here for a day, will leave soon, and as the heat of earth flared higher in my boots, pretend that blood could thicken, that this is running fever through the snow.





## The Well

The more we draw from it, the more red silt  
comes up suspended in our drink. The sun,  
soon enough, will not shine through our water,  
and as light catches, turns onto itself  
by the inner swirling of flecks, we know  
this lies in the nature of something else,  
some failing we have overlooked.

Our birds  
leave us, circle for an entire morning  
before heading north, toward rain. Expecting  
calamity in their departure--  
movement of earth, a seven year drought--  
the young ones whisper among themselves  
about escape to the mountain, living  
high at the snow line, in caves.

Each day crust  
grows thicker inside the bucket, until  
at last a woman draws her full  
issue of mud, skeleton, and the purple eye  
of carp. Some take then to packing the ooze  
in presses reserved for wine. Drops fall slow  
and blue with lead. Others, knowing their task,  
tie rope, carve blocks, climb down into the well.

All winter we line the earthen walls, drink  
what little snow heaven sends us. By spring  
the level rising pure from thaw, and those  
who have not died from poison flesh or lead  
sing orisons of thanks--draw freely from the well.  
Some still blame demons, though we know better:  
as birds return, dip wings, they too seem changed.

Li

Leaf rollers cling to the tree, their spun silk  
the death of an orchard. With a dog  
it's bones, it's the man or grass dogs scratch  
their backs with. Birds cling best because they hold  
to what is airy. Over years and years  
they hollowed out themselves, clung more  
to what was hardly there, flying higher,  
still bound to the earth for food.

Water clings to itself. You watch the hesitation  
at a tap, its rise past the rim of a bowl.  
Should the rivers dry out, you'd find water  
clinging elsewhere: in a lake, a cloud, in these  
veins. Fire, likewise, to its wood. To its  
oxygen, to the fire that came before.  
If a man is full of fire, we say his temper  
is from the past and knows no end. If a man  
is gloomy, he has the moon inside him,  
and like all satellites, all moons  
cling to their sun.

Thus the green shade to shrubbery,  
thereby the twist of smoke out chimneys, pipes,  
the orbit of a trout and angler: focused  
in the fly. Thus men to women,  
and back again, and both of them to a family,  
sanctified or not by the quality  
with which they cling. So the ship over crest  
and trough. So the man to his troubles,  
the cling of cancer to its source.  
There is even interchange in wind,  
wind which blows always toward some particular  
somewhere, which like time passing clings to nothing  
but what is put in front of it, which is  
everything, really: like a sail, like a tree.

## Reports to the Plateau

1

Wood is what sways and creaks,  
what arches in the hand. Rushes save  
the pond from ignorance,  
marking its bank. When I first  
came, birds weaved crazily  
over a field. Not one  
landed. Passing them  
I felt the earth shift for an instant,  
and I was frightened.  
Water here is the same we know,  
clinging and pouring. People  
talk like us but use  
forgotten words. I am not homesick.  
I'm learning what the valley  
takes for granted, this air  
yields to. There are names  
for each thing.

2

I want you to know  
how this tree surrenders, what  
its crow says, the way  
of young green. An elm commands  
the westerly, and storms,  
if they come, rain loud.  
Let fire take that hillside, crack open  
seed. Let this town's  
father be a wind  
those east snows promise  
never leaves. We will live here  
anyway. Mountains half our sky, vision  
warped, let the tributaries  
join, sinking this deep valley more.

3

God was not Christian  
when the river drew Maggie  
down. At a shallow bend  
that horse found her--nosed the hair,  
arms like real sponge--  
until the farm girl found them both,  
there in a late sun.  
No one prays to the dead  
here. Friend, I am like them. If you ever  
read this, know that all the streams  
lead in, gathering the sound  
of a name. Crows are  
what is foreign to you,  
speak to you for once, then soar  
like a dark breath  
lifting beyond your sky.

4

Think of me there when it snows.  
On the coldest night, tie a sapling  
to a stake and let it  
burn away. Remember that fire,  
open to our stars.  
If its light  
thumbs the lake, remember  
the color there, that I am  
coming back, like trapped air  
eventually rising. And know this:  
their smoke is what we call gone.

Sunday Mass at Mission Saint Ignatius  
for Ralph Burns

During sermon, the epileptic girl  
who couldn't hold her tongue, thanks her mother  
for the quick slaps. Saint Paul rides  
across our dome, a window laid between the dawn  
and us, that one flat palm and God. Your hand  
is a fish, leafing through the missal.  
Saint Ignatius is a town where mountain grays  
collide, where glaciers on the backs of Appaloosa  
snow up, when heads turn down to browse.

Why is it so bad, she says. The damned bird--  
dirt in my mouth--to die? Snow fields  
on their backs, and hail moves over the Missions  
like a hare, mowing down the lawns. Today  
you saw an egret fly, shadow widening  
on swamp grass, that confusion of turns  
to its dive. A small bass bled to surface,  
and you saw sunlight slapping, red as horses.

Father lifts the Body to a clay glow.  
Our windows lighten, wine going up, wind  
around the hollow edge of bells. The girl  
strikes her breast, and a whispering begins:  
Bad. The grass is badder than a gray rock.  
The girl's mother holds her,  
shaking her back again. Here.

Our windows never leave us. In high air,  
beneath his telescope, a man traces light  
back far as just beyond creation, just this side  
of gas, the big bang. A rain starts. The dome  
is closing. On his radio,  
long waves of the first star dwindle  
to the longest, lowest hum. Our hands close  
at benediction. The girl: exhausted.  
In the highest window, Latin's lost its edge  
from years of light. A blue robe  
bleeds on a phrase, and through this dyed, falling  
air we turn, walk into a strange outdoors,  
where spotted horses turn.

## Holy Saturday

Down to the city under the earth,  
past well bed, walls shored against earth,  
down into coal sky and quartz rose, to the dead-end  
alley full of shoes. Down darkly  
into catacombs, a saint's breath burned over  
and over again on the torch, down the silent tower  
under wide rivers moving, down bones  
below this compass of birds, a wide sky  
settling in the ribs.

No one dreams a country  
under earth, rock in perpetual rain.  
In a last hour, where wind leaves, where the bed  
we lie in hardens from its headboard down, light  
may draw us onward, into trees. Weight we carry  
falls there, wide sky closing over us  
like storm. Ears and blood down fossil come to root  
in a bee-reed candle, thumbled with fire.

Where in that cave  
did the ash we threw there rise? Where south  
or north the swaddled robe, heart-cage broken, feet  
and belly-side templed with our oil?  
In this city under earth, down thunder cloud  
and valley, our hands are giving us away.  
Down stiff wrist comes earth  
quaking, the black of olive in our palms.

All morning, low sky and half  
light, the quartz raining. Come midnight freeze  
or seed pod breaking open into heat, we go waiting  
under dark. Down to the city in the country  
under earth, forsaking our shoes,  
bathing the feet of old strangers, down  
a season always doubt. Tomorrow, when the someday fire  
down well shaft falls, the tongue will come upon  
a word, that tower speak  
our silence one within my city skin, a raw stem  
cut suddenly to air.

Crane in the Shade

The superior man abides  
in his room.

Confucius

The crane calls its young to nest.  
Her brooding here, close to a low bridge, the nine  
pipes of wind humming in weed and dusk.

On weeds, they call it hoarfrost: spikes of ice  
that add onto themselves in some deliberate  
rise to break or fall. And never a moon here,

or whatever the moon would mean--fall of something  
in her light, falling on the marsh.  
These pipes are nothing, really. A hard wind

down heavy on these limits to the shore.  
Shore receding into season. The pipes  
invented, as the limits were

invented: call of someone that could not  
be waited for--as a crane waits  
for its young, return, the swelling of her nest

at the end where it began. This arch of ice,  
weed-flower and light, its fire in the egg,  
in cramp of wings abiding in their room.

## African Proverb at the Crossing

The path has crossed the river,  
and here, where a flaxen garden sways  
the way the water sways, each side  
a tilted bank of blue star-flowers,

the river has crossed the path.  
Every thing grows up or away. July sun  
burning at your wrist, the damp ground  
steaming, neither you nor a fern could ask

Which is the elder  
and hope to know. In the cedar live  
the first voices, fashioned after crow sound,  
wild dog. If you hear the wind say

We made the path and found the river,  
believe it, believe that they live still  
in the memory of bark, a sky always  
leaving to return. If your heart closes

the river is from long ago,  
and you can learn, if you wait here longer,  
the time of your only mind.  
Rest, then. Nothing has ever been written. At night,

from the center of the universe,  
stars arc down to join you. Listen  
to the beasts: you don't concern them.  
They might as easily stare you down as run.



## Crossover

In the year of the comet, light  
fell through our windows blue  
as the palest sky, shafts of light  
all our wondering had  
turned toward: those disappearances  
of dust and smoke  
finally made clear, columns of white  
two flies would angle through, the grace  
light brought in which invisible  
wishes, lost objects found themselves,  
were seen for the first time  
as real, able to  
reflect, breathable as air.

All those years we slept  
with curtains open to a sky  
revolving in our dream.  
In the midst of downed stars, a crowd  
scene unlike anything  
we would have ever imagined,  
the comet--the idea  
of it fixed as perennial  
blooming--slept with us too,  
and we were alone with ourselves  
and with what comes  
from far away to touch us. Dying  
or alive, we'd be touched.

That first night, caskets  
opened at a trace  
of the comet's tail. We saw graveyards  
shift the angle of  
their slopes as bodies, new dead  
and old, rose  
in single acts of upheaval.  
The year the comet  
crossed our sky, lilies closed,  
evening and morning. We  
burned candles hoping night  
would bring in all its fears, this  
one fear, to join us in the world.

We were not denied. Stars  
went away, returned with weather.  
Years of horse or dragon  
turned and we grew timely, old as  
animals we'd passed through.  
If none of us would ever again see  
the comet, we thought that  
fitting. Once in our lives, afraid  
for the world, for ourselves  
and the life we'd made, we had  
had our chance to be human.