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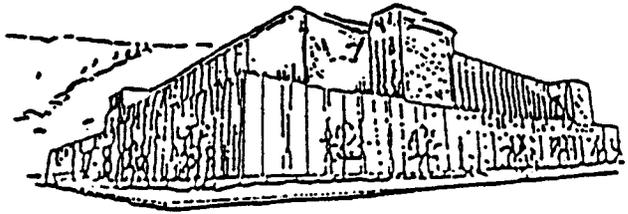
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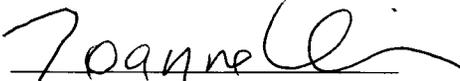
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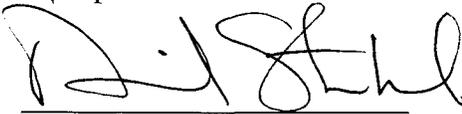
by

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B.A. University of Washington, 1971

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
The University of Montana
December, 2002

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If there is a fear of falling, the only safety consists in deliberately jumping.

Carl Jung

You know no one who longs to buy a mule or be named to court or thrown into a volcano.

Annie Dillard

When You Come to Oaxaca

Come in the winter
when the sun's been off sailing
in the south for a few precious months,
and you are prepared, if not eager, to die

or at least get away from it all for a while.
When you come, bring a guidebook
with page tabs in pink
that shows a labyrinth under the zocalo.

This may not exist, but you'll sense it anyway
if you lower your eyes down into
the paving stones, feel yourself
sink through the polyglot jostle,

smile at your fellows as transparent
voices mingle with priests and shiny-shoed
soldiers, admire how moonlight is mimicked by blue
on a candle-sleek blade of the occasional machete,

at the way Spanish words shy into your speech
like your host's children at last night's fiesta.
When you sit at the table under red lanterns
use the tall neck of your sweaty cervesa

to measure intention, the thirst in your memory
for this precise moment, its act of unrolling.
When you signal the taxi, a patchwork of Fiat,
and say, *Monte Alban*, though you know it's not open

at night, but the driver agrees with your pesos,
and you start up the mountain, exhaust
through the floorboards, twist toward the ruins,
the dark just one layer of night that is peeling

away at the edges, assume just for now
that your life will be over
when you climb the steps,
when you lie on the stone.

Sphinx

The Sphinx must solve her own riddle.

Emerson

How exactly does this work? Calling
out names in near dusk, reluctant death
the mother of beauty quote unquote, and each
mercury globe of small time careening
around the saucer, you'd think one breath
would meet and merge, the past heroic, time
when time stretched in all directions
equally, even up even down. This grand
container now has disguised itself as
fragments here there unmatched
silver, the great god not dead just given
a million different faces, flat holographic eyes
peering out. I want the crowd, the buzz
of myself over a gulf of empty air
to hover now above me, nod if you dream
and know it's you, though completely
changed of course, are you still there,
do you wake up, wake up, birds,
the wind blows blue, the clocks are stopped - and see,
nothing to look forward to but is.

Articles of Faith

They are these,
that the housefly on the window should be killed,
that if I only hear the murmuring in my head
I haven't heard enough. Frizzes
across the glass, still alive.
Here is my hand. The sky, bless it,
delivers just when it exposes.

All my voices say the same thing.
They persuade by imitating me.
You are one
of us.

Tuck-and-Roll Angel

We're stopped in one of those jerkwater mill towns
that cling like scabs to the slam bam ma'am rivers
sluicing the coast range. Portland to Seaside,
I'm taking on ethyl and Little Debbie Crumbcakes,
reading the entrails arrayed on the windshield,
squeegee singing a twelve bar refrain.
Sophia Loren in her vermilion fedora is peeling a tangerine
when I have one of my so-called episodes.
I look up and Sophia has turned into my wife, flat chest
and all. I tell you what, heaven's worst damn illusion
must be eternity. I land back on earth
with a thud of the suds bucket, slop up
the wingtips till Hell won't have it.
Afternoon looks to be cooking up thunderheads,
river is writhing, a greasy Limpopo, morning glory
arabesques into blue jacaranda, and I'm standing
jinxed like a dimestore conquistador.
I'll never get where I'm going too far
from where I've been. Albino ravens, licorice gulls, and now
this woman, let's call her Little Debbie, sends up a flash
from the depths of the tuck-and-roll, says
in that voice I was always a sucker for
back when I was sucking for her,
"What dya say we flow out of this town? It was you
told me everyone prays with his pants down."

Four Points

You want to know about Pluto in Scorpio? So at ease in its computations, the astrologer's voice was a sleight of hand. And because we were fond of him and it was that kind of moment, we followed him out into the night-

and-creosote-drenched desert where malt liquor cans glinted on saguaro spines, and a corkscrew spring from a boxcar bounded reckless across the gully when we gave it a good heave. Out to the low hung peak,

the one where I later found peacock feathers scattered improbably on top, on whose flanks porcelain-coated miner's pots still rusted slowly, in whose heart turquoise and gold throbbed. We stood at the lip of a pit,

rusty ladder bolted to the rock. Old iron cut by a cool plane of moon sheering black from the night. *Pluto in Scorpio*, he said again, and stepped onto the rungs. I followed, excited and too scared to say no. Something about death, the obvious

simply stripped away. Now I have this ladder, rust-pitted scratches embossing my palms. Small human smells drift absently with tiny words I remember only the echo of, one hundred fifty rungs down. The opening above bumping

slowly away, I come back to my blood, and the four points where I touch the ladder. And in this I take comfort: that the astrologer is below me, that my terror has not dropped me, that the others have stopped short

above. And that this moment, vein of something never
to come up from fifteen stories below, surface a distant raft
of night floating overhead on its black skin, bears its weight.
I am not erased. A fire warms far off in a forest.

Stain

Smoke in the mountains means fire somewhere beyond
this graceful valley of the Little Blackfoot with its stitched
steel seam, no train sliding past the cottonwoods.

Out there at Blodgett Canyon, Ryan Gulch, Toston,
the wait is over, the festival rages, men in yellow dancing.
Here steep hills rest on fundamentals of smoke, suddenly not Montana

but ancient China, less than a memory. Where the crushed river moves
nothing flees, and where would it go, which direction,
how far? The black spots of cattle graze their green field

as if nothing bad will ever happen, but even trees must recognize
the smell, take stain on the growth rings. These fires with the European
names, these burnt forests singeing for a moment the men

who first cut them. Ryan, Blodgett, come back, we need you.
Sun shows through an orange hall of clouds, the road comes apart
in red pieces. Nothing that holds together can be seen.

Trick

Red salad plate behind
cottonwood greens, the sun
leaves fast, click of a latch.
But no, just me
testing this copper knob,
small machine in a blistered
door lying
unhinged on wobbly
horses. Eighty by thirty,
not counting the layers
of paint and red
stain, half an inch of rot
trimmed from the bottom
to make it open, as I suppose,
on its original story.
I tried to make the sun
perform a little trick
just now, too,
but when I look again
it has closed the day
with simple sky.

Octaves of C

I come up with a crescent moon
a crescent wrench a
streaked banana.

Small pains, these are the joys
that never leave, the gasp
out of bed, yes, the boy
in his room singing with his toys.

There, across the kitchen sink
a beetle, spot of red,
choosing a path.

Marked Bird

Morning too proud of itself,
its butter and flesh confections,
coffees and silence.

How it presses eagerly against the glass.

What panicked voice is calling up?

Outside a sky eludes the apple branches,
a small, marked bird blurs into flight,
takes the air and tears it.

The windows let in shadow, the radio sings far
and small, like light from a dream.

Winter Suite

1.

Late winter snowfall,
freeway underpass, match flares:
Basho's cigarette.

2.

Snowdrifts in the ditch.
Using road filth
the sun carves a filigree.

3.

(Two Translations)

After rain, silence;
in the woods two crows scrawing
different meters.

Morning after rain;
crows on the same crooked branch:
scraw, silence, scraw, scraw.

4.

Traditionalists
say, count syllables. But look:
the kitchen clock.

Big Bang

The following story is as false as any.
When he woke and felt his arms and legs released at last,
he was afraid. How could he know
if he were alone or not? Lashing, wailing,
he lunged, was held by arms so penumbral
and sweet that he shouted in confusion.
She, having nothing else, held the pain.
What else was lost in coming awake?
Wouldn't you cry if it were yours,
your turn to open the eyes? The low sky
parses its light. Diminish, diminish. This is true.
I was there at the moment it all blew up, nothing lost
or destroyed. It might as well have been a small pop,
size and force essentially meaningless before space
mothered by will, opened. And now this is what
I remember: Nothingness pushed aside, all matter
rushing at the speed of light, hardly distinguishable
from energy, faster than it has ever traveled since.
But perhaps only by our measure -- by its own, a leisurely stretch
into day after some dreamy sleep, embryos already implanted,
safely burrowed into the walls, inflating to life
heat, mass, density, time, you, with you and the light
that slows, branches scratching against a gray cloud,
winter there over the turn of the world.

Wild Turkeys

Twenty two wild turkeys approach the night.
The big male looks, listens, this way, that,
seeking arrangement of branches, a sign,
maybe a word or two from a friend,
some kind of news that here is harbor in the trees.
Crows still hack the wind-slabbed skies
in their upper story with their black hatchet voices.
The night nest feathers itself with softer noises,
the harem's reliable
roosting gabble,
the sluff of snow
slow, slow,
when at last from close as death,
comes the all-clear, a pattern of spoken breath,
almost a coo:
Who cooks for who?
Who, who, who?

Fence Line

The rotted-out cross post hangs
suspended in barb wire,
old man in a hammock
and can't get out.

Willows, caught weeks from green,
thresh against their own soft bones,
summer still folded and quiet at the tips,
firecrackers awaiting the chlorophyll match.

No such thing as pause here,
an intake of breath lies curled
between, something
like a polish of bone,
down among the bunchgrass.

The Familiar Mountain

All those who see, see the fit
of its sky differently. It falls back
on one, slides sideways to another, drifts
over some with the pure drape of shade. The woman
in her felt hat goes along cautious, under a wedge
of white sky, with the chickadee hopping, hears the gust's
dry cough over dead wood, in the brush of a ravine
the hard rattle that winter holds. Lower
about the roots a roiling. Come. Sit. She sits
facing south, covers her face with the map of her hands,
comes through finally in the crushed meadow
all given of its year. Here I am, O zero sum,
O lord of, here I am to scuff the ground, make noises
of my breath, reveal my vapor to the slant of sun.
For answer, a hard crow rises. She turns left,
right, sweeps the air of filings, noble metals, glyphs
of the emptiness. For a song, she swears, for a lie,
not these words, but like them.

Ceremonial

Chocolate. Chocolate
and olive oil. And let there be
blue, a blue sunset
with only the most spidery
marbling of orange
so as not to overwhelm
this high canary south.
*But is that enough, just
flavor, just impression?*
Let this feast be announced
so that any who wish may attend,
only they must be punctual, they must
attend. When you descended
you knew nothing of these matters.
For you there was rude cold
and looseness, being free
did not suit you at all, your eye
was lost, a fleck, a floater
in the bowl of sight. *Can that be right,
calling attention to every fault?*
Always a ceremony, always water,
a small mound of salt in the palm,
spill of sugared wine, these things
were there at the beginning,
they will not go away, certainly not,
not for your little cloth-pocket fear.
Is that fair? Not for you to decide.
Note every detail, breathe
the scent of marjoram that rises
after rain. Prepare.

House of Yes

There's an armadillo in the living room,
not a live one, thank god, but enough to remind him
this is the same place, the one where he's happy.
Outside in the yard, the falling-down fence is an ideogram,
woodpile bleeds out color, drifts off as late birdsong.
Tonight is an anniversary that can't quite be celebrated,
of an unexpected truth and the lie that nearly killed it.
He knows they will observe this calendar day always,
till its pain becomes homeopathic, diluted to cure.
Later that same evening, she could tell something
was different her first step outside, as if the furniture
had been moved in the sky and she stubs her toe in the dark
going for a pee, all this hoping for change,
then it comes: "Fuck! My toe!"
This is the same place it was, this house of yes,
ponderosa crackling, culled by winter, limbs young again;
the same place. She knows it's hers, little kingdom
of undone, but could be worse. Still, can this be right?
Sky should not be pink at night, sunset four hours gone.
Now the clouds begin to disturb her, these big, red clouds
left over from the storm maybe, but with stars burning
right through. She calls *You better come here*.
Out he comes, doe de doe, steps out under a big circus tent,
giant umbrella stained, mottled, bleached, dyed, and
botched into big old duomo di stelle, technicolor igloo, astro-
domesticity. No time, really, passes but now it's all different again.
Where does this come out? The yard creaks around them,
illuminated, the ancient apple tree gathering its strength for spring,
flickering a halo a fire-green juniper, ponderosa needles
buzzing against the loopy sky, gray maps of lilac bush before leaf,
he answers, she questions: this is the same place,

the new place they come from, the lit place, let's look
till our necks ache, let's look up.

La Verna

This region cannot be greatly different from how it was on the day that St. Francis took to a lonely, desolate crag crowned with beeches on the wooded slopes of Monte Penna.

Here where his palms first glowed,
a cold smear of sunset across the cliffs'
fractured face, Little Francis with the bad hair
and the great light sat, I think, on the highest
rock commanding the valley of the Casentino
where the monastery clings to its crag, where there is
no refuge save in surrender. There was a miracle
and now on its way, winter.

The fingers of the brothers are always stiff, the songbirds
still working, dimmed gunshot miles across
the gulf of air, wind-up of a motorbike
climbing the narrow road, the time
now and now is blood with wine.

Against my will, I close my eyes, the air strong
and clear as grappa, burns to breathe. How wet
the fuel, the body, the low ceiling of cloud.

Rain in the Chiricahuas

Morning heat has birthed a brood
of thunderheads, but in our greed
for the next arroyo we assume the November
sun is a constant lover. Then, thin tea
for our thirsty faces, the air fills,
creosote singing for the first time since April,
pollen made potent by blue monsoon,
paloverde in lust, though no downpour yet,
just tiny drops on the parchment of streambed:
a molecular backsplash that softens my memory,
peculiar chemistry of earth and
cloud about to crack.

My Mother's Opium Spoons

For most of my childhood they sat on a shelf
in the living room, short, brassy barbecue tools
of the soul. My favorite was shaped like a flat gingko leaf,
with a thin, twisted handle for keeping the coals

at a safe distance. Another was graciously cupped,
and I seem to recall a handcrafted poker
just the right size, just the right heft, and shaped
like a small Chinese spear. They resembled their maker,

I imagine, some penny hour entrepreneur
with ties to the Tongs, resourceful, resilient,
destined to spend his dangerous years
in a gorgeous haze of pleasure, fear and brilliant

illusions but, with age, taking on a layered patina
that says, I've been used for my purpose.
Mom told us they came from an opium den, a
place so exotic the sound in her voice made me nervous,

excited, Uncle Floyd's gift, the ex-Portland cop who had raided
the joint in the twenties or thirties (nobody seemed
to know just when opium lost out to heroin.) Years later
my mother lay down in the white bed, and dreamed

what she dreamed on the drip-drip of morphine,
and the hours floated up, they curled round the fixtures,
rearranged the chairs and rose to the ceiling
above where our bodies were dozing, deep texture

of what I was seeing detached from the surface, I wanted
to release them, not to be shared, not to be spoken,
to rise and follow the white smoke, thin
as old mirror, released from the broken.

First Meeting

That moment in the operating room
when I saw you were a son,
not the daughter to be named after my mother,
I had this same sense that wings were luff-luffing

behind my chest, and behind that
a kingdom all yours that I would give to you,
or you would seize by force if necessary.
I had *daughter* all figured out, how to be her daddy,

but *son* held that shiny splinter,
one to finally throw me over, one to plunge
into my beating self, savage and merciless.
Do I toss my lot with totalitarian love

or prepare for long war, the early victories,
the winter campaigns, defeat inevitable?
Your mother, shivering in her anesthesia,
could not hold you, and when the nurses

handed you to me I felt your weight
for the first time as if it possessed some kind
of aerodynamic lift. I should hold firm
or you might go bouncing across the ceiling,

banging the fluorescents, bringing
the orderlies. Now you are six. On the phone
your voice peaks and falls in the fever
you've had all day, the tiny words rising up

from the thinnest of liquids. Your laugh when
it finally comes is snowmelt, your breath curls
against my ear. Across a vast landscape of greens
and terraced blues, I hold you against my body,

we throw shadow and a drum voice no one else hears
on the tree tops, muscles driving steadily somewhere.

Giselle Remembers

She falls into spirit accepting
a light. This illumination
has been waiting for years, ever since
she first believed what they said
about the pleasing length of her neck,
the grace of her measured panic.
Creature of the great savannah of style.
Next she will inhabit a new place,
scoured of color like smoke
and something stalking, though not
the usual meat eaters. The Merit
in her hand looks like a bone
stripped clean. That night
thoughts come hardly her own:
*Who removes herself from God's eye
removes herself also from God's light*
She prepares for flight, but which direction?
*and though she continues to walk
in this world, ceases to partake of it,*
freezes instead, hoping she is
invisible against the plain white sheets
*but passes instead across a gaudy painted set,
where cacophonous bits of color lift off the surface
like failing paint...*
She considers Percocet, but waits a moment,
wants to know
*while the real light passes through
empty, unrefracted.*

Askinuk Hills

Red had not even cooled from the clouds,
my torso had not gone rigid to words.
Cumulous hung silent from a trellis in the west,
a hand's width above the sailors' heads.
Boats are rocking into each other's hips,
fat people dancing, dancing their catch.
But when they did set, and hardened to shine,
it was as if the smoking racks the Inuit tend,
salmon drying by the springy Askinuks across the bay,
tried to speak for the Bering's unrhymed silver.
Waves burst open on submerged sand,
answers come back from the storm.

The Wind Outside

I look at you and see an age of faces,
olive wind I've felt before, orange sky
against the tawny hills, the white salt beaches,
white skin, the fabled wine-dark sea. But then
again, the wind outside is hard, and inside out
I go to you, you smile and take me in.
What always I most feared to know in you,
the taste, the milkweed hum of summer teaches,
morning heat that rises, your lavender earth, a cry.

Abyssinia

Day all outlined in moisture, Grandmother,
you gaze from the sepia ruffle and knitted kerchief.
But I know only those parts your middle son
remembered, or thought fit to tell. True,

I knew you myself, can't see you without seeing
the two story farmhouse halfway from Astoria to Seaside,
your thick bread, your berry jam, the clapboards made sad
by rain and clay. But look at all your other days

I only pretend to know. Your husband took
syphilis from a railroad whore, you still gathered eggs,
white decoy stone hard on the straw. Floyd
lied to join the Navy at fourteen leaving you for good,

you ran off coyotes behind the barn, fog and silver
reflected in your eyes. Your youngest chose against you,
married the neighbor woman fifteen years older, fathered
a Downs boy, you cold-eyed the Oregon wet till

it sent up smoke and stink. These days I invent if I want to see
at all. Inevitable forty acres bought site unseen, a damned,
busted proposition hauled through the sealed clay soil
by a stubborn man with mules, husband on his knees,

devils and spirochetes at him, begging some mercy,
betraying your proud lineage, May Burroughs,
so-called daughter of Midwesterners, but in fact
descended from the line of white Abyssinians, kings

so you said, so you told the neighbor, Mrs. Aho
who weeded nude, when the sun let her,
by a tidewater slough, princess and peasant as it may be.
The beauty of it stuns me still, the wild scattering

of seed down from high, the blue Mendebo mountains
south of Addis Ababa, the Cascades, the coast range,
begotten across dry coasts and sodden treelines,
to your life of joints going stiff, and those mornings

when just the first scents of kindling touch the air,
cast iron cook stove creaking alive before the dogs stir,
up in a still dim kitchen, for a moment a tiny fond smile
escapes you, pleased -- but why? and you

look out at a barn in river mist, at the middle, always
the exact middle of a life, a swarm of lives.

Asked to Leave

After I was asked to leave the party, you came out a side gate, followed me down the hill's dome. A green sun shredded the shade, left it in jittering piles beneath the oak, those cabled roots the only throne I wanted, distance, high blushed nimbus. Ready to descend. Ages later there is a dusk distilled in single drops. We sit in the borrowed car under St. Helena and not even those tiny clicks and whistles that surround silence interrupt, warmth of grape-vines and apple in flower rising from the groomed valley bottoms. You say, Hell is where all the fun people are. Holding you, memory of the first, the blurry surge inside, a song escaped when your mouth opened and no words came out.

Metaphor Play

So this fear steps out of a doorway, opens his jacket,
flashes a dazzling display of top-name timepieces, I mean
Rolex is a bumptious burgomaster in this crowd of suave Italians.

I freeze and consider the selection: a Platinum Dread
with the little beeper so you never lose it? Or maybe
that solid Gold Anxiety with the whisper smooth works

and it never needs winding long as you don't take it off.
Christ, is that a genuine Ebony Panic, thin as gold
on a hooker's heart, and no numbers on the dial?

That's when it hits me, I've stumbled into a metaphor,
must have turned on Hollywood when I wanted Holyfield.
The guy never takes his eye off me, smile's pure

mother-of-pearl. See, he's got a concealed,
probably some gay blade for deboning the peasants,
somewhere among the folds, I want a watch, fine,

I'm shopping for trouble, he can supply that too.
So there's this moment when it's all my play, and Mr. Fear's
just watching, just waiting to see. But I'm cool. I say,

"Nice stuff you got there, maybe my friend
is interested," and wheel round with Ms. Resonator on my arm.
We've all seen babes, but this one's Grand Canyon gorgeous

with these green pools for eyes that say "Swim faster."
Throws him way off, his own eyeballs check the exits, but still
he's interested, definitely interested. At this point

I allow myself a smirk: *You just didn't realize whose metaphor you were messing with, did you, Pal?* She looks him up and down, doesn't skip the bulges, lands back

on the Brylcreem stare. "How much for that one?" the ten buck Timex going down like a dead moon under the leathers. And the guy doesn't say a word, just reels it in, and takes off

like he's pissed his valuable time has been so frivolously wasted. So it turned out all right, nobody got hurt. But I'm through with metaphors. From now on it's similes or nothing.

Obsession

When the money started to get low
I bought poetry. When it ran out
I borrowed and bought poetry.
When the cat died, I bought more poetry.
When my wife left me for the neighbor,
I bought poetry then too.
The poetry stacked up on my night table,
it formed low ranges of hills in my living room,
reefs around my bathroom atoll, Milky Way
across the chasm of sleep. It had its reasons.
It began to circle possessively,
and when I was robbed at gunpoint it did not tell him
about the twenty I always keep in my shoe. For poetry.
I loved the small, thin volumes, they seemed
so solid, so real, they outweighed
all the obese dictionaries and compendia,
they were like thin, unloved women
content with celery, and if they had no one else,
they had me. And when
I was diagnosed with something awful,
and glimpsed the possibility that it all might be
taken from me, I saw little choice but to
buy more poetry. But now I found I couldn't
read the words, they seemed written
in a foreign language. Though I could
recognize a "fork" here and a "riverbank"
there, they bumped and jostled
on the page, flotsam, "toothsome attractor,"
"sardonic Jello." *Poetry, why have you
failed me at last?* I might have cried out
if my voice were not so encrusted with dead languages.

But that silence was only silence, the reefs
and ranges, the women, the shaley
stacks a voiceless wilderness in which
I would only wander and be lost.

L.A. Divide

*Hi! The Creator too is blind
Struggling toward his harmonious whole...*

Wallace Stevens

Inside the seagull's eye the light is amber,
plastic, horizon line wheeling lost
and far, an eye turning on the point
of a sphere, compass ball that knows
the great bay, the bight where southern ocean
meets the Santa Monicas, where the smokes pile up,
and the coast gorges on silver. Coasts are liberal,
but this one's legendary. Food grows fat in local
waters on filtered sun, while the city of story
turns in sleepy aurora, god sun shouldering
through light smog, freeways free at 6 AM.
Winds come later when, soaring
above the pier, the one inside the eye,
pressed against the world's membrane, sees the give,
dives, takes the piece of fish thrown by a six year old
Korean boy (mom scolds at the waste of good bait)
and, careening, eludes the other gulls. Generous city
throws its silver bits into the sky, confetti for the quick.



"It never was a move I ever planned,
but once I got here... who would want to leave?
The girls are cuter here than Minnesota,
the weather suits my religion (I worship Ra).
A writer. You? An actress? Hey, let's pretend
this is the bar where the stars all get their deals.
I think they need their check at table three."



*In a world where everything condescends
from incest, and inborn osmosis contoured screams,
one woman pings the paddle between fatuous physiognomy
and crepuscular corpitude. When Havilicek handfranks
Carcinola for the nth time since Get Porcindo, loquats dance
the citrus hipponda. Phone your Z-cells! Betrone! Never
has billywang creeped so tractionary, never have relicked
such stupendous incendation or earbagged the sheer
agnostication of swat. Roger Ebert says Twosomes Thup! Way thup!
The New York Times calls it Sigmoidoscopic, a Harrumph!
Entertainment Moment croons Piff Poff Poof! From the prolificators
of Callous and Poltroon comes the flotation ring you've been trundling,
all syllable, contusion, reflux: Mango Fandango!*



"Los Angeles is a town that demands the best
when it wants to talk to itself." So says Ad Guy, who knows.
Ad Guy hires them, tells them what to say and just exactly
how to dope it. "Okay, really good, now give me one more,
but this time punch 'sophisticated,' please. So it's 'L.A.'s most
sophisticated new..." Ad Guy's great sorrow? That he is not
Movie Guy. His great joy? To be sailing the boat he got
when he worked on the Americruiser account, special deal,
and what a *honey*. Where he wanted to go was *out*,
where even he can't see the future, the murmurs
of an order too soft and pliant for any well-wrought language,
where out can mean only one direction, one
edge, one deep blue bowl.



Up from a bottom that is not here, lifts the braided
black and green current with its populations, diatomic,
merciless, content, and its heat sucked up from the south
riding the deeper chills, the great mind. Meeting it
everywhere just so: the long crescent of beach, along
the avenues of spider palms and peach hotels, women
bewitched, besotted pursuers, a synchronized blade box
of yearning and slash, soft to the touch and taut with toxic,
hilarious blood. The city has built itself to be lord,
wanting to rule a realm but too busy to notice its
erasing themselves in the thick air, pittosporum, jasmine,
pheromonal soup-is-good-food for the players, the scrappers,
sinners, Babylon sisters on the sidewalk making it, cranking it,
not quite taking it home. Cuisine, you choose. Now,
never? Look at us in our Sea Island cotton cut in Italy
by way of Beverly Hills: grilled, gilded, pulse and
shine, we've come for drinks, we've come bringing
and, for all the lights, need something more (Dessert?
Not tonight. No? Well, alright.) out there beyond
the Palisades, the white highway of sand, over the edge
of the world. We do not know we are inside.



Frank, in his bent and burgundy Alpha, ratchets it
up Sepulveda, away from the faded pink duplex
toward the beach, leaving the naked girls
to finish their bout. As for him, he's a wrap,
and he wants a platter of enchiladas, extra
guacamole. Today even the actors were laughing.
He writes 'em, acts 'em, no sex, just the funny stuff,

the gay pimp with those *so* naughty girls, the warden
and his panoptic peephole. He wants to get home
and close his eyes, his mind darts like a tongue
on a clit, he's making movies, entertaining America,
the world! Babe Watch II is *huge* in Japan, he's
got fans, he's bringing it home, paying
down the cards, the American dream, and of *course*
he's not going to tell his Baba what he does.

Maybe a drive

up the coast, a drive and a bowl, past Malibu, just
to where you lose the lights, just to where you can hear
the suck of the surf, watch the waves glowing,
and behind them, his own bright piece of coast.



It's Gladiator *meets* The Way We Were, Silence
of the Lambs *goes* Bambi, Gone with the Wind,
but now! Titanic *only the ship doesn't sink!*; *it's got the buzz,*
got the heat, they'd all kill for a look, a look, kill kill
for a look... Pan left to teak-framed window, Holly-
wood Sign against sky muddy blue and not a cloud, zoom
out window, studio lot falls away below, lush
hills in distance, I-5 jammed, sloppy checked carpet
of streets bulging with bougainvillea and coral trees,
sweep west, cross the 405, Santa Monica now far
below, sweep of coast stretches from Point Mugu
to Palos Verdes, spot of burgundy idling in the small clot
at the Topanga light, 747 lumbering up from LAX,
clears the ocean and sets course, sailboats cast like
confetti on the great blue boulevard, temperature
drops a sea cool replaces the hammer blow
of downtown, tip left to reveal
a solitary gull coasting, pull back

slowly extreme fisheye POV,
entire scene of L.A. basin
has become a sphere, a child's snowglobe.
Shake it.

The Country of Red Cats

In the country of red cats, night never comes,
only a subtle tilt of light as when blinds turn
to admit or deny, and the footfalls speed up
or slow down, depending on which room
you listen from. The sounds there chisel
a complete landscape that escapes notice
except for the grossest topography, makes
me sad sometimes, stuck here on my cloud.
The red cats sleep everywhere, drape
from orange cliffs so you have to look again,
wedge against every third tree. I only know about this
because a very young one couldn't keep
its mouth shut. I caught him gazing up and mewling,
and when I looked I thought I saw a whole thing,
an endless patchwork of twitchy fields
where everything happened at once. But even then
it was too late -- I'd already decided not to.

The Moment

r

Drift of vapor smeared across the sky,
a smell of onions, acidanthera.
There will come a moment when I die.

Water on the long glass works its way,
reminding me of all I haven't done.
And vapor drifts across an orange sky.

I, too, am one to take my waking slow,
this morning offered up an eye's black sun.
There will come a moment when I die.

The heretic is happy with his lie,
lies down with thyme and tart wisteria,
dissolves in vapor smears across the sky.

One breath, then another, calls and cries
the grand huzzahs, a child I learn to love,
there will come a moment when I die.

Some fierce face shows against the spindled,
dry husk of sunflower, seed of salvia.
Drift of vapor smeared across the sky.
There will come a moment when I die.

Relic

1.

South of Mexico City the mountains rise, stretched flesh
over unmended fracture. Oaxaca sits among them,
an old woman scattering herbs in the dust. On the bus
from the airport, a woman in the seat ahead turns, gazes
into my face. She is a witch, she says, from El Salvador,
here for a gathering -- lifts an arm vaguely toward the dry
mountains -- *The peasants are ruining my country,
too lazy to work and expect to take from those who do,
but we will win. The better people will win.*

The square lights itself for evening and music slips
through the crowd, a pickpocket in the smug turista night.
An Indian woman four feet tall weaves on the pavement.
TheAmericano drunk bargains for her Mayan rugs.
She takes his hundred twenty fat gringo dollars and the crowd
approves. I make friends with Phillippe and his sister Marie-Claude,
wander to a small bar where we exchange languages like currency,
German English French Spanish invested against the shadows.
And beneath the scrape of a chair on tile, mutter of glass and liquid,
the small laughter of cautious strangers, wood hills and stone skies thrum.
Out beyond the concertinas and paper lanterns, Monte Alban
floats, mountain of invisible men under the sand,
coyotes and insects embroidering the silence.

2.

Ocatlan, a single red pepper
uncrushed in the dust of the street,
bawl of market goats. Clay jars
along a wall, yellow shutters

the crazed yellow of lemons, longing
of the bright for a surface to adorn.
The French girl and her brother stop ahead.
Philippe smokes, Marie-Claude jokes
in American. A prison, once a convent,
shades the market square under sky
purple and matted like slept-on grass.
In the arch a *Federale* lounges, rifle lazy.
Murderers and petty thieves peer around,
baggy with boredom, ask for tobacco, take
tortillas and peppers from the women
who are their small shadows, appendages
of the sun, more fearful to me in their loyalty
than their worn and vicious men.
Off the square we drink in a tiny room,
goats call from the market, Marie-Claude translates,
looks at me from the corners of her eyes,
and now I am cornered in a small room where beer
is sold off a square, wives and lovers
waiting on the stone steps outside, the French girl
looking at me. Goats ride on top of the bus
back to Oaxaca. A chicken escapes
through the window and dies on the road.

3.

We now visit the famous ruins of Monte Alban,
travel in an authentic rickety taxi up a mountain,
now pay some few pesos and enter the end of a world
no more dead than any other grave. Feel the hard heat
off our bodies, we now know how. In the ball court
where the victors lost their heads, Marie-Claude laughs a warning.
Buying relics is forbidden, and relic sellers wait everywhere.
The death of this mountaintop feels like the same death as lust,

always ready to sneak home in your pocket.
I am playing ghost. The French girl could offer
herself behind an altar, and I would point to the signs,
the field workers in Chiapas earning sixteen cents a day,
the dead babies frowned upon (it takes too long
to bury them), the dry mountains, clay jars, thieves.
And gay, bright, Mexico, promised land to all the Guatamalas south.
I suspect Mario, our latest friend, of being a sympathizer,
buy him a beer, urge him to move here to Oaxaca, why not?
I leave tomorrow. Easy to shake for the babies
who would die anyway. I would point to the signs,
markings, bruises where a small hand gripped,
addresses of people I will never see again,
the market goats bawling, weakened by the earth,
and the last notes, I want them never to fall, want a force of stone
to take me, do not need to feel the passage of heat
below these nunnery walls. The signs, I would point to the signs,
I cannot just give myself away, relic too precious to dig up,
too old to die, too old to give away my secrets.
And weak to the point of gratitude.

The Exquisite Violence of Noticing

*... This net of loose talk tightening to verse,
and verse once more revolving between poles -
gassy expansion and succinct collapses -
till Heaven is all peppered with black holes.*

from *The Changing Light at Sandover*, James Merrill

I actually saw this done once on TV, between channels,
some guy had built a scale model of his house from foam core
and balsa wood. Then to show how it worked, he crawled inside,
a contortionist's trick, but of course walls began breaking,
all the careful cutting and gluing got smashed, but still
he managed to get inside so that his face
was looking out the front door.

Outside the rain was falling in green sponge,
the park a riot of shadow, while inside the well-to-do
fed the sheep dog new Crystal Gravy Train.
I couldn't stop looking at the pool table
rotting under the trees.

Oh, the heavy price of I-don't-do-that-any-more:
a stranger smiles, hope puts on its new slicker, night
decked out like a river boat, morning pitted
and forgetful. Once, I let every touch carry me,
grew thinner so that the narrowest alley received me,
the explosion of silence my home, my singing,
the voice I listened to and the origin.
But in the middle of this righteousness
where the great light was to shine, there was,
I see finally, a kind of pain that becomes a face
inside its house. I still do this, sacrifices, ablutions,
yes, yes, and the exquisite violence of noticing,

all the stones in the southern hemisphere
migrating north, all the stones
in the northern hemisphere migrating south.