

## GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO

Constellations arc across the sky  
Unseen, unnoticed, and unconcerned  
With civilizations and the street sweeper.

The light and dark, flush and fade,  
Of this year's seasons inexorably  
Plait the web of life forward.

Vees of geese somehow connected,  
Honk across coral-splashed dusk skies  
To where they must again return now.

Sentient beings live and die before us—  
The wonder if this is all there is;  
That is, the purpose of living is living.

And so, glory to God in the highest:  
Chill winds drive us forward systole diastole  
Into the fragrant grey dawn unfolding.

*(Written during Christmas 2006)*

## MODERN PHYSICS

We are both particle and wave.  
Moments of insight and enduring memories,  
Awaken a time and face of love  
That endures in mystery  
But that will never return.

We are particle and wave.  
Every effort gone in its own expenditure.  
Details of every embrace forgotten in intensity.  
Every chance and opportunity taken, spent,  
Reserved, and spent again.

We are a particle and wave.  
Alone in our separate identities—  
Body and mind merged again in a passion  
That returns us to these very unions.  
Step into presence, expectation, fingers, and breath.

We are particles and waves.  
Present at any one moment only,  
Juxtaposed with your this, that and your other.  
Alone in the cosmos from whence we come,  
Always here and always there.

We are both particle and wave.  
Infinity's purpose in a moment,  
Past and present's intersection corporeal.  
Fingers touch with such purpose,  
And grace creates the prints that mark the place.

## NIGHT

“The night is an experience of our desire’s inability to find its depth and intensity matched by anything in this world.” Welch, *When Gods Die*, p. 113.

When it is night again, I weep  
For too many unknown dreams dreamt,  
Missed signals, underestimations,  
Placations of the spirit world.

When it is night again, I touch  
My face in places you would have touched,  
Gestured in ways only I know,  
Closed my daily door on hope’s love.

When it is night again, I shield  
My heart’s flesh from harm with silence,  
Wait for a time that I create in earth,  
Dig in my heart’s heels out of love.

When it is night again, I yield  
The only way I know, to mystery,  
Empty desire and fill with desire,  
Surrender to the night ocean.

When it is night again, I smell  
Riparian, alluvial, cold peat smells,  
Celtic, sylvan, ancient spells there,  
Omens or portents of another time.

When it is night again, I tend  
A young hermit’s hidden garden,  
Pace a well-worn walk, vigilant  
For a blooming of lemon thyme.

When it is night again, I bend  
To pick up a shoe, a bone, a ring,  
Fling everything into well-worn boxes  
For another time or celebration.

When it is night again, I hurl  
My heart out into this dark night—  
Messenger, envoy of Eden’s call,  
Stunned since Adam’s flesh-felt fall.

## **SPARE TIRE**

The second helping  
So hard to resist  
Upsets the balance  
Of calories in and  
Calories burned.

A spare tire forms  
Before you know it.  
Energy storehouse  
For leaner times-  
Fat, beautiful fat.

Impatience, anger, greed  
All do the same-  
Build up a residue  
Of negativity hidden  
In your secret trunk.

A spare tire forms,  
Rolls on long after  
You're ashes and dust-  
Alienation,  
Resentment and pain.

There is no self  
To feed, so  
Breathe in, breathe out,  
All are suffering  
As you suffer.

No self, no wealth  
To accumulate  
When you leave-  
Svelte and eager,  
Carrying no spare tire.

## THE HOLIDAYS

Enigmatic monoliths arranged to reckon the days,  
allow the sun to pierce through, shelter pagan ceremonies and couldn't.  
Multi-story glass and stone skyscrapers with offices, shops, and penthouses  
withstand the shock and sway of earthquakes but can't.  
Stone facade estate houses built on one to two acres of prime view land  
that still sprout alfalfa from years of farming scraped off don't either.

*Nothing protects us from our death  
Like the touch of another human being.  
Like embracing in love and friendship.  
Like being together in the purpose of silence.  
Like the impulse and act of giving out of love.  
Like serving food and drink to those sitting at our table.  
Like our children coming home from out of the cold.  
Like caring for the sick who have left themselves somewhere.  
Like knowing that someone in another place loves us.  
Like sending out love to someone far away or departed.  
Like praying for someone because someone prays for us.  
Like looking up from our hands into the face of the stars.*

There must be time for this.

For nothing protects us from our death  
Like the touch of another human being.

The touch...

Of another human being.

## SAFE HARBOR

Trade winds and jet streams move weather, are the weather,  
So banal, those animated computer projections on a big screen.  
Their rhythms and cycles, those we can predict and plot every year-  
El Niño, La Niña, Hurricane season, Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall,  
And even those beyond our ken, below our radar, like climate change,  
Give us a sense of order in disorder, predictability before our certain death.

Yet the undersea currents, the stratifications of feeling and reaction  
That swirl inside our inner planet, tilt the emotions of our seasons-  
The unpredictable weather of these minute movements of sensation,  
This is the weather that plots our course, steers by our Polar North,  
And pushes, pulls us onward, forward, into uncharted waters  
Where safe harbor awaits us, where it must await us.

## BIG BANG AFTER MUSASHI

Look out, look out, at a universe expanding.  
The stars and planets, of course, rushing out  
From their one point of origin beyond belief.  
The will of god created light and dark from nothing,  
Or some chaotic perturbation jostled things into place.

It matters not, Dear Children, the explanation's logic.  
It matters not, the beauty of a particle of light.  
It matters not, the belief in or about that.  
It matters not, the correctness of one's rectitude.  
It matters not, to matter or not.

What matters is the movement after willing,  
The extinction of the pause between them,  
The continuity of expansion in arms, gestures,  
Blows, touches, all in the action of action,  
My Dear Children, in the action of your action.

Thought precedes will, will precedes action;  
Strike your opponent just after their reaction.  
From emptiness into emptiness attack your opponent;  
Leverage your power from the tiniest component,  
My Dear Children, from your tiniest component.

*(Miyamoto Musashi was arguably the greatest swordsman and strategist during the Japanese Edo period. His strategy was based on the fact that gaps occur as a result of lags between the will to attack and the actual movement: 1. Attack at the moment when your opponent is about to attack you; 2. Attack at the moment the adversary has just parried your attack; and 3. Attack when the adversary's attack has failed.)*

## A CRUST OF BREAD, A BOWL OF OIL

The oval loaf, freshly baked,  
must be torn apart by chunks.

The savage hunks are dunked  
into the liquid's olive essence,  
pushed down into that oil,  
scraped along the bowl's bottom,  
and up, up quickly  
into my eager mouth.

The green viscous translucence  
dribbles down my silly chin  
and is wiped away by my napkin  
as I chew the bread and oil.

Duet of ancient sustenance;  
perhaps some salt  
and a glass of red wine,  
other ancient foods, would do,  
but no...

A crust of bread, a bowl of oil  
is all I want to feed my soul.  
What a pity  
when there is no more bread  
to wipe up the rest of the oil  
waiting in the bowl.

## ANIMAL

I turned its head and faced the threat.  
Unknown, the animal awakes.  
The only sign a silhouette-  
I sense the subtle sound it makes.

Approach within my shields detect  
The presence of a friend or foe.  
I marshal forces then collect  
Myself, my weapons, apropos.

The animal emerges here  
Ancient and alluvial.  
Rears up to quickly disappear  
As mind ascends mercurial.

A modern man I am, I am,  
My animal is hidden well;  
Its dominance, alas, condemned  
To lurk within my hubric hell.

## ARMS

My arms  
Have held  
Strong men,  
Ardent women,  
All four  
Of my children,  
My parents,  
Bags of groceries,  
Laundry, and  
Dusty boxes  
Of moving.

My arms  
Have a watch,  
Two rings  
From my wife  
And mother,  
My hands and  
My fingers  
That cook,  
Make music,  
Touch skin, and  
The universe.

My arms  
Do much  
To bring me  
The world.  
But mostly  
My arms  
Want to  
Pull you  
More closely  
To me and  
Hold you  
Forever.

## I DON'T KNOW WHY IT IS

I don't know why it is that  
After spending all morning  
Skewering beef, chicken and shrimp  
Onto wet bamboo sticks,  
Cleaning counters and sinks  
And dancing around my wife  
In the food prep area,

Why it is that when  
I get into the Accord  
To rush to Albertson's  
To buy 14 bottles of Merlot  
To celebrate belatedly my birthday,  
Why it is that everything  
I pass on Beacon Light Road  
And in the perfect store aisles,  
And everyone pushing carts,  
Waiting for their salmon steaks,  
Chatting about their children,  
Seems so starkly, sadly exposed,  
Naked, unprotected from  
The world and my gaze,

With the cytoplasm of  
Everything and everyone's cells  
Nakedly open against  
The onslaught of time,  
So that when I look,  
Even inadvertently,  
I want to cry.

## POETRY

What can you do about mortal sin?  
We're born with it, can't shake it.  
We're stuck with stuff like  
Speed limits, ER's, dental floss,  
April 15, garbage cans, mold,  
Not to mention  
Errant parts of our spirit.  
Can't post bail to fly the coop,  
Fly free into that sky,  
Let gravity pull us deep,  
Disappear into green forever,  
Kick, squawk and spit.

Writing poetry lets me.  
Looking for the right word,  
Synonym or rhyme,  
Is a search for what itches,  
Where the contusions  
Of the heart and spirit are,  
Is the band-aid or kiss  
To make it seem better now  
Even though it's not.

Poetry is voodoo,  
Prayer, statues of saints,  
Praying the rosary,  
Profound bows,  
And dancing,  
Ancient scratching  
On rock outcroppings.  
I call out  
To the mute universe.

## DRUMS ALONG THE RIVER

Drums along the river,  
Thunderclouds rise up,  
Waters flow into water,  
Dawn breaks suddenly,  
Day confuses night,  
Night forgets day.  
Call out to this.

Those gone,  
Those who are,  
Those to come.  
Call out to them.

Cook fires burn out,  
Smoke floats up and away,  
Embers do not remain long,  
Ashes dissolve into earth.  
Remember this,  
Eventually.

## NARCISSUS AND GOLDMUND

I spill the oil accidentally sometimes.  
What a pity it is to do that—  
Have to stop what you're doing  
And clean up the single-minded mess.

The oil resists the paper towel's impulse,  
Leaves a smudge where it was,  
Refuses to go away quietly, leaves  
Its conviction on the counter.

I fell in love like that once—  
A surprise, not a pity though,  
Perhaps not an accident either,  
Who knows about these things?

That first love left its mark too—  
Like the oil, rich, thick, persistent,  
Impossible to ignore or avoid,  
Even in the cloister.

We worked the harvest dipper,  
Prunes, walnuts, fruit of the Spirit.  
He loved God, I loved women.  
We loved each other.

In the silence we understood, and  
When I left, the silence came with me, and  
We continued to point our words and hearts  
At the love mystery of God's passion.

When he died of pancreatic cancer,  
The earth received his bare body,  
I shoveled dirt onto his body,  
And the winds carried his spirit up.

When I love now, love a woman,  
I call out to him, tell him again,  
That everything and everyone is love,  
Love him again with the tongues of silence.

## THERE IS AN INLAND SEA

There is an inland sea concealed in me—  
Shoreless reservoir holding my heart.  
Deep underwater canyons lurk unseen,  
Subduction zones shudder secretly there,  
Tectonic expanses collide unobserved  
Then enflame dumbfoundedly.

Harmonic powers pile up, inarticulate,  
Affective upheavals reverberate, and  
Massive swells move out undetected  
Across the sweeping surfaces of my sea  
Into a vast dimensionlessness—  
Netherworld of my feeling cosmos.

Hidden headwaters of mighty inner rivers  
Scour my lands, strip off rich intuitive alluvia,  
Rush into those deep-sea waters unceasingly,  
Fill up limitlessly, discharge and release  
With every moon— tides of feeling,  
Tides of pain, tides of healing,

Healing in the hounding for words—  
Fluidic images, metaphors, and connotations,  
All struggle upstream stroke by stroke,  
Seek out those shimmering headwaters,  
Return eventually to their spawning ground  
Where unknown ancestral forces beget Logos—

The power to part and subdue the waters,  
Dive alone into the strongest turbulence,  
Swim unafraid, solitary with primordial floods,  
Inner waters where cataracts of concatenations  
Proclaim the always and nevers of my heart—  
Wellsprings of the words' world's wonders.

## THE FIRE INSIDE

Swells of cloud banks roll out across  
The valley foothills, relentless,  
Unmindful, pulling me with them.  
I go easily, eagerly.

Rather than pulling me to them,  
They provoke me deeper somehow,  
As if the farther I follow,  
The further I elude their storm.

I seek deep shelter, oasis,  
Welcoming caravansary,  
Where a fire burns unceasing  
At a secluded inner hearth.

It is a still point, a word point,  
Where I struggle to make dense sense  
With a faith in every moment,  
The temptation of unknowing.

I go to the inner fire,  
Stoke it with words, feelings, phrases,  
So it will burn, so it will burn,  
Burn emptiness, pain, love, missing.

The fire burns white-hot in me,  
Everything thrown on the fire,  
Want, have, do, feel, think, understand,  
Everything charred in this fire.

Fire, summon words; words, fire.  
Touch fire with phoneme, morpheme.  
Taunt fire with fervid metaphor.  
So it will burn, so it will burn.

I carry a fire in my mouth.  
Put fire into my hands to speak.  
Hurl every moment onto fire.  
Squat close to this devouring.

## PLANTING BAMBOO IN MY 58TH YEAR

Planting bamboo is like planting anything else—  
First decide what plant you want, variety, size, cost,  
Find where they have it, drive there and buy it,  
Put it in the car, drive it home, take it out of the car,  
Get out shovel, bag of good soil, B-1, bone and blood meal,  
Walk around deciding where the plant will go,  
Dig the hole where you want it to be,  
Throw in good soil, the fertilizer,  
Cut the plastic container, put it in the hole,  
Slip out the container and toss it aside,  
Position the plan, stand back and look at it,  
Reposition it, step back, look at it,  
Cut open the bag of soil and dump it around the plant,  
Fill the space around the plant with the soil,  
Pat the soil around the plant, step back,  
It's in the ground now.

But bamboo is different.  
You figure, if it's a clumper,  
It will just stay where it is. Fine.  
But if it's a runner,  
Phyllostachys, for example,  
You know it's going to take off,  
Send off those "invasive" rhizomes  
As far as there is dirt and water,  
For as long as it's alive.

I won't be here to see how far  
The bamboo rhizomes travel,  
How thick and tall the bamboo culms get,  
How the wind rustles the green leaves  
So characteristically.

I just plant it, and trust in nature,  
Like my marriage, my dear children,  
My poems, my teaching, my intention,  
Every moment sending out  
Into the cosmos earth.  
Please grow.

## NIGHT

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For too many unknown dreams dreamt,  
Missed signals, underestimations,  
Placations of the spirit world.

When it is night again, I touch  
My face in places you would have touched,  
Gestured in ways only I know,  
Closed my daily door on hope’s love.

When it is night again, I shield  
My heart’s flesh from harm with silence,  
Wait for a time that I create in earth,  
Dig in my heart’s heels out of love.

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The only way I know, to mystery,  
Empty desire and fill with desire,  
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Riparian, alluvial, cold peat smells,  
Celtic, sylvan, ancient spells there,  
Omens or portents of another time.

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A young hermit’s hidden garden,  
Pace a well-worn walk, vigilant  
For a blooming of lemon thyme.

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To pick up a shoe, a bone, a ring,  
Fling everything into well-worn boxes  
For another time or celebration.

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My heart out into this dark night—  
Messenger, envoy of Eden’s call,  
Stunned since Adam’s flesh-felt fall.

## FLOTSAM AND JETSAM

Oddly small but sharp pins from new shirts,  
Safety pins of all sizes, washers, bolts with their nuts,  
And several sheetrock screws #6, #8 and pan head,  
Six cough drops, dry cleaning tags, two spools of thread,  
Grey and dark blue, a thirty-eight special hollow-point bullet,  
A new package of needles, thirty-seven cents in change,  
Five used toothpicks, a key, and three double A batteries,  
Charge unknown, all found their way by way of my hand  
Into the antique Japanese plate crackle glazed  
Matte black and turquoise blue. It sits  
On my closet shelf ready and willing to receive  
Any flotsam and jetsam from my dressing rituals.  
Don't get me started on my desk, a forest  
Of faded coffee cups and Medaglia D'Oro  
Coffee cans bristling with every color and shape  
Of pencil, pen, or marker, 4 scissors, bamboo flute,  
Five carpenter's pencils, large Sumi brush,  
Bundle of Shrinivas Sugandhalays incense,  
Calipers, rulers, protractor, French curves,  
Nail files, hole punch, magnifying glass,  
3 fletchless darts, screwdrivers, both  
Slotted and Phillips, all with squatters' rights  
Next to round plastic containers of  
Paperclips, rubber bands, stack of napkins  
And Post Its, small match box, blank CD,  
Notes about poetry competition, old cup of  
Green tea and a desk set that my son made in  
School with a clock that stopped at five twenty three.

My world is like this.

Memories of those I loved once  
And still love, Paul, David, Paula, Lark, Greta;  
Monastic ghosts in the fields, offices, church, shops,  
And monks I knew, Father Paul, Bernard, Timothy with  
His heart and head blissful in God's fields;  
My parents' deaths, children's births, pain  
And separation so many times and places,  
Disappointments like not publishing and  
Intensity quotient, where will my children  
Go and what will they do with life,

Students whose hearts and minds I know I touched,  
Dreams I remember vividly still,  
Mental shopping list of what I forgot  
For tomorrow's Thanksgiving Dinner  
With thirty-seven family and friends,  
Salt, liquid smoke, God knows what else,  
Why is the check engine light in the Mountaineer  
Going on when I just took it to the shop?

My mind is like this.

The stars and planets blasted free  
From their constraints are  
Also cosmic flotsam and jetsam  
As we all are,  
Washed overboard,  
Tossed into the oceanic,  
Across a thousand sea miles  
Of bobbing and floating,  
To a distant shoreline washed up  
With all other animal, mineral,  
Vegetable, and human detritus  
Into a foamy, undulating scud line.

My life is like this.

## SMOKE

A pile of winter cuttings grew,  
Spent pumpkin and tomato vines,  
Sere summer and winter grasses,  
    Dry wildflowers colorless now,  
Daylily bare stalks once saffron,  
Still sharp and angry rose prunings,  
Layers from this summer's harvest,  
    Autumn's unexpected cold snap,  
    Winter's silver dun undergrowth,  
And my fifty-eighth year conscious.

The third match I strike takes hold,  
    Transfers its flickering message  
To the dry grass, to the crisp leaves,  
    Catches slowly in freezing air,  
    The flame lingers, descends into  
    The deep pile of winter cuttings,  
Wisps of tiny white smoke pulse up,  
    Carried away by a west wind  
As the flame catches fire and spreads  
    Like cognitive epidemic.

I lean on my hoe watching this,  
    See smoke billowing, swirling,  
    Smell sweet acrid burning brush,  
Look where the smoke disappears,  
    Think of Gandhi's funeral pyre,  
Ask for more time, more burning,  
    Bless my fathers and mothers,  
Thank the ones whom I have loved.  
The smoke shifts, enfolds me inside.  
    I close my eyes, and am gone.

## THE POEM AS AS IF

As if fiddling with the meter and rhyme  
Could make life any different, clearer;  
The search for the perfect connotation  
Remove suffering and disappointment;  
The discovery of the unalloyed synonym  
Replace ennui with eagerness and passion;  
The minor triumph of finishing the poem  
Beget victory over mortality's grasp;  
The self-satisfied glow of rereading it  
Fill the inner darkness permanently.

As if this poem could unfold a map  
To when the gods spoke directly;  
When there was no mental demarcation,  
No separateness, no me, no you,  
No history, no what-if's or but's,  
No separation anxiety, orphans,  
Generations, intentionality, clocks,  
Catalogues, books, make-up, or keys.  
Everything wants to be a metaphor  
For living except living.

## LOVERS EMBRACE

Lovers embrace while parting in airports,  
They wait, resisting the pull of the check-in line.  
With an arm around each other, they cling to their last moments together.  
They kiss and cling to their time and place still as one,  
Before check-in separates them into their own separate limbos,  
Inevitable, like real death.

Why we don't cling to each other  
And kiss while we wait,  
I'll never know.

## WITHOUT WHICH

Spirit drum,  
A freshly shaven face,  
Angst at aging,  
A baby's powder smell,  
Another's breath of intimacy,  
The sweet descent into sleep,  
A throbbing hangover,  
Paper cut,  
The taste of dark chocolate,  
Diving into ice cold water,  
A steaming streaming hot shower,  
Heaving into the impersonal porcelain of a toilet bowl,  
The hazy universe of sickness,  
Barbequed steak and corn with homemade salsa,  
The sound of two cars crashing,  
Take-off and landing,  
Parallel parking down or uphill,  
A speeding ticket,  
Lingering over a luscious French kiss,  
Splinter under fingernail,  
Hitting the same thumb twice or even three times  
With a framing hammer,  
Blisters on hands or feet,  
Waiting in an ER with a loved one,  
Sour gummy worms,  
Too young and middle-aged faces in the daily obits,  
Skidding on ice,  
The first daffodils of Spring,  
Painful estrangement and its subsequent isolation,  
Identifying someone's body on a slab,  
Punching down risen bread,  
The first taste of red wine,  
The click of a torque wrench past its limit,  
When merengue takes your body.  
When you die,  
These too,  
Are inadvertently deleted from your page  
Without which

## WORLDED AND WORDLESS

“Symbols hold in relationship that which consciousness would separate.” (Welch, *When Gods Die*, p. 142)

“The mature person has to live with paradox which can be done only if one’s language and imagery are capable of supporting apparent contradictions.” (Moran, Gabriel, quoted in Welch, *When Gods Die*, p. 144)

What is a way to tell you that I climb into undulating green foothills, lean into sudden corners as a road rounds up every bend and peers out over each cornered vista, feel earth pull as road rises through grasslands, into chaparral and pine, redwood and spruce, crests into high alpine meadows and granite-grazed peaks, where scents of warm stone, wild lupines and snowmelt ride currents of thousand mile wind forces that arrive eventually from wide far-distant valleys; how could you know that I stand there alone now, but with you somehow, exposed to all the elements of earth and sky; that I circle ‘round an axis of polarities—gravity, dusk, dawn, invisible forces merged in you and me, history and future spinning around a moment where in the moment neither exists, where someone never comes down, and no one else ascends?

From the mountain peaks I ride your wings higher into another atmosphere, invisible, where a vista opens into pure sky of curve, inclination, cool mist, and devotion—how could it be otherwise, so that as we fly, not higher but farther, we are pulled back around by earth turn, proclivity, and weariness, and the only way to sleep refreshed is to find where the waters bubble up from the valleys and creases of the mountain, touch down silently, and enter the river hand in hand, into the liquid caress of current and flow, movement and undulation, leaning into and away from, slipping from separate into identified, where every touch of flesh is laved by other floods of liquid heart, mercy, consolation, recognition, and the dissolution of boundaries, limits, dichotomies, understandings, so that you and I become incomparable, as if we always were, which we were, wonderfully worlded and wordless, harmonious correlates of a fresh return.

## MAKING BREAD

“Only the baker knows that bread is a form of our deepest human wish, a shape of love...

Love is a massive compass and several gravity, numen manifest in what can be eaten. Know how bread is knit by salt. For tears alone are active seed, leavening perishing forms, apparent at an imperishable wheel of hunger...No one merely kneads any wheat with water, the way is remembrance to the one whose hands are had by love's cold ache, suffering the adjustable flesh.” *The Winged Seed*, Li-Young Lee, p.139

I never knew, when I was making bread, that I was loving you,  
The flesh of wheat now yeasted by a craving for the taste again,  
A slice of thickness cut by ardent hands that make this bread for us,  
An ancient transformation of the inner dough that is a heart.

The simplest mixture in my bowl becomes a struggled meeting there,  
With forces pulled and pushed by salt and yeast within domains of need,  
The yeast within the water's life expands and swells the ardor of the dough,  
While salt from distant seas controls the swelling merger's blossoming.

My hands that lift a stone or wield a tool and write this leavened poem  
Are hands that pull and push and turn the heavy mass of dough into  
Itself, dissolve desire into dimensions all inside its  
Silky outer sheen of gluten stretched to tears and healed again.

The warmth that swells the loaves of bread expands into our waiting world,  
For expectations and the smell of baking loaves now overflow  
Our poorest hearts to find the loaves turned out to cool upon a board,  
Where soon desire will meet the warmest fragrant flesh of human need.

The loaves I've made and eaten then, rise up to fill my mem'ry's hearth,  
Become an off'ring as I work the dough into an adoration's shape,  
And mystically transform into our bodies' warmest heart and flesh,  
The golden amber wheat ground fine of luscious effort and reward.

## THE FRESHEST BREEZE

The freshest breeze wafts coolly through my dawn bedroom window,  
Like celadon silk tulle spills over the musked sable bouquet  
Of Matisse's Odalisque, in cornucopian vermeil and gold-lamé pantaloons,  
Like her glazed and starry eyes stare out from the incense and worship  
Of her lovers' caresses and kisses, like the dew on her saffroned flesh,  
The undulating valley, ridges, and hills of her taut golden beauty,  
Like the twilight's blush on the soft surface of her serene sensuality.

I touch sweet jasmine, bougainvillea, and wisteria along the Ganges,  
I light forests of sandalwood incense and watch the smoke ascend,  
I bathe in the holy milk waters of the sacred Himalayas as they descend,  
I smooth coconut nectar, ginger, mint, tamarind, rose water onto my body,  
I lose myself in a passion of Rumi's springs of sacred intoxication,  
I chant a sweet lover's breath from the princely *Bhagavad Gita*,  
Memories of the Alhambra, the Taj Majal, a perfumed melody and touch.

What deep flowering of color, pattern, elaboration, and ornamentation  
Came into my bedroom like a morning raga of sitar and bamboo flute,  
Like a mockingbird or red-winged blackbird's evanescent song,  
Like the creamed inner flesh of the day lily opens in the early dawn,  
Like memory of sweet laughter and kisses, Persian melons and pomegranates,  
Moorish reflecting pools where dissonant strings lament a Gypsy seguiryas,  
Like shivers of coolness and death woo my glazed and starry heart?

## IKEBANA

*“The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence.  
When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers.”*

Thich Nhat Hanh

In the coolness of an early morning's breath  
I stepped outside to linger with the freshest blooms  
Of flowers in my gardens' world,  
That I might cut and carry in my worry-worn abode their color,  
With no logic or purpose other than attract attention to themselves,  
As they do now serve me so.  
I cut an embrace-full of Party Girls laid down by wind,  
Their pink bell blooms so tiny in gorgeousness,  
Then darken r pink Hydrangea too many to count  
Whose blossoms held cups of beauty's shadows,  
Then Day Lilies, apricot and yellow,  
Statuesque on their thin ballet of stems, five to be uneven,  
And finally a woody stem of fragrant purple Lavender,  
Whose sharp aroma'd honey covered my fingers.

I laid the swathes of floral grace and excess in my basket  
And carried them inside like in a wedding,  
Carefully placed them on the jungle green granite counter  
Where their repose gestured of rainbows,  
Then I placed them in the water of a large glass vase  
To see the vigor of their stems, dark and light,  
One by one I cut the ends, trimmed leaves, cut off broken blossoms,  
Placed the splays of Party Girls,  
Then tall Hydrangeas in the middle,  
Finally the Day Lilies and the Lavender sprigs all here and there,  
And it wasn't 'till I had finished and stepped back then  
To admire the arrangement, that I noticed  
On dark granite suddenly, stem cuttings, blossoms, leaves, ants,  
Strewn into a tiny seduction of miracles.

## MINIATURES

When morning sun washes the highest tops of the forest canopy,  
And from the high green redwood haven of each giant  
Flutter out softly clouds of tiny white butterflies,  
And they circle together 'round their mountain sanctum,  
Then before your very eyes they one-by-one gracefully  
Gradually float off and disappear suddenly from view.

When off the lake the evening breeze invisibly arises  
From where the Spirits lurk unseen,  
And with the warmth of lush embrace  
The mystery of the wind's invisibility  
Enfolds every pine, spruce, and redwood  
To sway within its sensual and ecstatic swoon,  
And tiny limbs and twigs and needles are jostled to the ground  
Where they lose their own identity and disappear  
Into the blissful forest floor.

When heat shimmer above split burning pine dances and distorts  
The clearest view beyond your furthered vista,  
And superheated iridescent air attracts and repels you  
From the passion of its thermal evanescence,  
Sparks of knotted serpentine gold writhe and disappear,  
And flames consume the wood's flesh so that  
All returns to utter translucence and sheer memory.

I see my death within these miniatures, subtle, hidden,  
As the fleshly focus of my senses and spirit returns  
To the inner wash and shimmered breeze of my heart,  
And I return to an origin without an inner or outer, where  
My hidden heart, spacious and hungry for sweet living and loving,  
Departs the canopy of sensation, thought, and awareness,  
And ripples, washes, dissolves, flows, back into the heights.

## STOPPING TIME

*“Serenely let us move to distant places / And let no sentiments of home  
detain us. /*

*The Cosmic Spirit seeks not to restrain us / But lifts us stage by stage to  
wider spaces.”*

Hermann Hesse *The Glass Bead Game*

Each night ticks off another second on our clock.  
No one counts how many gone, how many more.  
What good would it do to know what’s left of life?  
We are being swept away by time.

Nevertheless, there is a special place I’ve gone.  
Secluded, private, without dimension, farther inside.  
Like an old beveled mirror or high on a mountain top.  
Something simple reflected forever there in a day.

I recognize the shimmer, glance, and gestures.  
A yearning from our hearts swells into life.  
There is where a current slows ‘round a bend.  
Gaze into calm waters, deep, tranquil, cooling.

We prepare there dark bread and blood wine.  
Pick vegetables and fruit to cook and eat.  
A table holds a simple feast set for two.  
Food in another realm of communion.

Words of feeling, sadness, beauty, loss.  
The seconds of our clock move in reverse.  
We eat every crumb of earth’s fruit.  
We recognize something permanent.

Let go our fleshed embrace in deep sleep.  
Touch again the spark of our skin’s wishes.  
Venture into unknown, unconscious worlds.  
Hand-in-hand, wider places call us deeper.

Let us travel there, ally— shield, sunset, dawn.  
Find respite in that overlook that beckons us.  
Destinations, a lane, a vista, call us home.  
We are swept away by time.

## CONTEMPLATION

*“But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”*

Luke 2.19, 51

The seeds that fall upon the ground are covered up by time, accretions' mystery,  
And then, unknown, a germination, secret, hidden, undisclosed until its time,  
Within a warming ground, it swells, accumulates, sends out its understanding,  
Pushes up into the air of daylight, where, against the earth's rich soil and must  
I notice petioles and leafstalks green and slight, suggestions of a world beneath  
All splayed and balleted, overspreading into walkways trod by leather shoes.

The eyes take in the panoply, processions of our daily movements here and there,  
Sights, intentions, intrigues, unaware we are, of every person's mutilated gestures,  
Which, unlike the simple seeds that sprout and grow in fertile places hidden out,  
Reach out to find another man or woman walking parallel upon the path set out,  
Call out to echo back the sound of raindrops, sighs, and ecstasy, in yearning so,  
A contemplation of a deepness in the earth of every ground and every seeded touch.

Unheard, unspoken understandings that, unfurled, undo the generations' detours,  
Into realms of thought directed outwards, onwards, instead of deeper into rootedness,  
Holding in my hands with fingers cupped the cooling waters' stillness there,  
The eddies, torrents, lucent depths whose bottom is not bottom, stillness there it is,  
The multiplicative and burnished surface of a gemstone there, within a furnace there,  
Annealed, revealed, and harbored gently in a body's heart, beating in a man apart.

## TOMATOES

My fingers grope, into the tangled mass of pungent green I push my eyes  
To touch the sudden glimpse of red and yellow globules hidden there,  
Tomatoes clustered, ripening, beyond the chicken wire taunting me  
To touch, and squeeze, and pick the luscious ecstasy of color, seeds, and juice  
I know will fill my mouth with liquid bliss explosions' joy,  
Tomatoes, yes, tomatoes, every one is beauty's heart, apart from others,  
Waiting for an expectation of a kiss, caress, seduction into shadowed realms  
Where vines and tendrils wind and spread around my legs and hands  
So that I plunge into the pungent must of mystery calling, "Pick me now."

I do, and then my hands are darkened green from autumned dusky vines,  
So rough, they hide their fruit so well, I know, I show it now,  
In overflowing baskets piled with purples, yellows, greens, and reds,  
Tomatoes in their splendor there, unseen before this moment,  
Ecstasy again, again, again my eyes are lifted to the curving shadows  
Tumbled there among the heirloomed beauty resting now, resting now,  
Tomatoes for a table where a man, a woman, friends, await the moment  
When tomatoes glisten in their splendor, oiled and peppered, salted,  
Heaven in a moment turning on tomatoes' nepenthenic acquiescence.

## BLACK HOLE

At the center of our universe, and at the center of every universe,  
There is a black hole that eventually will pull everything into it.  
Twenty-four million miles from this poem it slingshots stars back,  
Back upon themselves, repulsed, and accelerated, a vicious circle,  
As if the huge lordly stars were pinballs in a mindless mechanism,  
And although we act freely, from compassion, anger, or ignorance,  
The slide past the event horizon already began when we began.

Look up, look up, into the celestial enchantment of sparkling stars,  
Ponder the day, the fate of man, love between a man and woman,  
Watch the long night count the minutes of a lifetime of mornings,  
Wait for day's blinding light to captivate each moment with hope,  
Another word, another breath, another realization, a moment alone.  
Brew a pot of coffee, batteries in a remote, stop the newspaper,  
Hear dog bark at night, a paltry birthday gift, a zipper breaks.

Every inner dread, every mental reservation about this finality,  
Each sadness at the passing of friends, self, morning, meaning,  
All questions of origin, destination, direction, dualism, or deity  
Answered once and for all, in the eternity of a lingering moment  
When I heed the spark of feeling that draws me to you wordlessly,  
And I pull your warm body to mine, embrace in this time and space,  
Halt the pull into nothingness with this touch, and never let go.

## THE ULTIMATE EXPANSE\*

You look out the window of a speeding car and see the trees rushing;  
In a wash of blurred colors, the world flashes by the other side of glass.  
You notice again the weariness of your hands, their perfection and age;  
In the length of a heart line you realize that you owe them everything.

The hem of a new garment, a flat-felled seam, a scatter of thoughts.  
Curved shirttails to be tucked in again, fingers push them down inside.  
Delivery of yet more mail and a newspaper as regular as clockwork.  
How many tiny red electronic power lights glow mindlessly on?

You never wondered how much further beyond your mind limits  
You could push your thoughts, understand something, come back.  
Where is the receptacle of your previous thoughts and feelings?  
Is it Rachmaninoff at the virtual spin of a clicking polymer disc?

To and fro, systole diastole, it seems there is no end, but there is.  
Scent from your body, flush of your neck, movement in your limbs  
Through the time and place where you find yourself wondering  
If there is a way to understand everything that happens to you.

I will make an appointment with you to meet in that expanse, at  
A table set for your mind and mine, where there is no daily menu,  
Where a pilot light sparks the darkness all around us into brilliance,  
Where the first language recognition of this feeling is like Teflon.

Come with me into the unknown where we will plot a course, a course,  
To a magnificent alpine lake, still, where winds rush without touching us,  
And where the expanse is ultimate, vista without end, countless miles  
We might travel without night, and where stars for our eyes light the way.

\* A Tibetan Buddhist definition of what English refers to as “mind.”

## **THE TIME AFTER**

Wind blows through window cracks, howls insults no one hears,  
Sacred fires blaze and dance, hiss and snap in anguished captivity.

There are no priests to tend the fire, no gods to nod approval,  
There is no sacred smoke from incense, no sacrifice of blood.

I cut my flesh, mark my face with ancient signs and symbols,

Listen for the voices I was told would speak to me in this.  
There is no message in these marks, no power in my silence,  
There is no sacred water on this land or in my mouth.

## METAPHORS FOR DEEPNESS

I used to pray  
How deep can I go metaphorically before I get lost?

Lost, can't get back  
Detached from reality  
In another dimension  
Enamored  
Enchanted or enraptured  
Mentally ill or schizophrenic

Focus or aim  
Depth  
Clarity  
Cleanliness  
Order  
Concentration  
Holiness  
Favor of the gods  
In synch  
Quiet  
Observant  
Looking longer like kissing  
Sanding or polishing  
Pruning  
Saturation or lack of saturation  
Expertise  
Pregnancy  
Select everything  
And click ungroup  
And you see the handles  
Of each image