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THE TELLING

by

Joseph Martin

B.A., California State University, Chico, 1984

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
University of Montana
1986

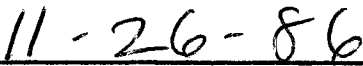
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"This hour I tell things in confidence,
I might not tell everybody, but I will tell you.'

--Walt Whitman

This manuscript is dedicated to my mother and father, and all of my teachers. Special thanks go to William Pitt Root, Paul Zarzyski, and Gary Thompson, who helped these poems along. Grateful acknowledgement is made to The Bloomsbury Review, Riverrun, and Watershed, in which some of the poems originally appeared.

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I. The Telling

"If I worship one thing more than another...
Hands I have taken, face I have kissed, mortal I have
ever touched, it shall be you."

--Walt Whitman

THE TELLING

Sometimes in a sudden flutter of wings,
The skittish heart surprised

In flight and the night rain heard
As the world goes silent, I am gathered

To particulars. And I tell you
How, this morning, cold sun pulled

The oak trunks south with the steady slide
Of January days lengthening and the movement

Of the scrub willow's brush-like limbs
Was small and circled. I say this

And we are suddenly present
Together on our personal shorelines,

Eating the strangely familiar fruits
And witnessing stories, singing. Seeing

Each day in its many small deaths: a dog barks
And the old man slips on his back in the icy grass,

The legs of a woman pass into sunlight.
And the many things which cannot be said

Well up in us daily and are gone. The body
Swells like a bowed cello, thrumming life

Into air and the space between stars
Groans wider. There is sound, motion, solid light.

There is my father, 1956, speaking with my mother.
Late summer, Minnesota, the first warm rain

Shakes a few leaves loose from their towering poplars,
And the young woman smiles, feels herself go.

It is the beginning of a story.

ALONG THE SOUTHBOUND SPUR

August, mustard flower and teasel
 singe to brittle grass
 and thistle, knapweed
 greying narrow fields
 along the southbound spur.

I walk alone
 behind the rented houses of the poor
 migrants, blacks, and Indians,
 their trailer parks
 and bleak apartments, backyards
 a patchwork of clothesline
 and tomatoes, shuttered windows,
 chained down hounds.

Voices
 spar from an open door
 in Spanish I half-understand.
 A thrown plate breaks against the wall.
 It is noon, windless.
 The field's edge wrinkles with heat
 and distance. The argument,
 as I can glean it,
 has something to do with words
 and what is never said,
 words and the heart's adherence.

*

Once, mid-winter, snow
 packed tight between these ties,
 I walked in the glad surprise of sun,
 eyes on the grey horizon's line.

Fired by that singular light,
 the locomotive's lone eye shining
 over the iron freeze of rails,
 I watched the figure of a man
 rise, striding,
 to stand for a moment,
 head bound in that shivering halo's web.

(stanza break)

That it doesn't matter, it's all over, all
just flecks of sprayed blood staining.
dust and the crippled feathers?

Here,
where I am, I can't hear them,
but as I pass in the slant late summer light,
I can see the way she holds her,
how this must mean something
like love, I am here, it will be all right...

HER EMERGENCE

White-tiled shower walls
shine under the bent shapes of faces
changing. Under the solid rush
of sound, a quietness, a distance
we do not speak of, but lean and kiss,
knowing we do not love each other anymore.
Short brown hair soaked tight to skull,
she is somehow smaller than I've ever seen her

and we stand a long moment, examine each other,
two creatures suddenly unfamiliar. I begin
as I always have before, gently soaping
at the forehead over each eye, hollow
of cheek and crook of neck, let hands glide
the knobbed length of her spine, to lather
at breasts, collarbones that I have kissed,
and the long field of her belly,

a valley to sleep in. I push
almost inside her, press to the pliant
flesh of her hips and down the muscles and joints
of her thighs, to kneel at the feet,
unspeaking. And when it is over, I am stranger
to the kind flesh of her fingers. She emerges
immaculate, transfigured, the small whorls of steam
sprouting like feathers from her skin.

"AND BARELY A GIRL..."

After Rilke

And barely a girl she sent herself fresh
From the twin-throated luck of voice and lyre
To gleam clear through her springtime dress
And make herself a bed inside my ear.

And sleep in me. And that sleep was all.
Every tree that I had loved, the distances
That I could touch, and all the instances
When awe and wonder struck my soul.

She slept the earth. God of Song, tell me
How she was born complete, without desiring
Even waking? See, she rose to sleep.

O where is death? Will she not seek
Her theme before the song consumes her singing?
Where will she go, sinking from me... a girl, barely...

TONGUE AND GROOVE

From here, it is easy to see
where we went wrong, how
the ceiling folds and wrinkles
under sections we worked
first. My Dad and I
set those early pieces
upside-down, beginners,
not yet understanding
how we'd wrecked
our upstairs floor forever,
made it warped and corrugated
as the cabin's sheet metal roof.

Later, angered, realizing
we'd gone wrong, I hacked
and pried at those thin planks
fastened wrong to rafters,
splitting boards to splinters
till he yanked
the crowbar from my hands.
We glared and argued, cursed
and shouted, there
in the wreckage of all we'd done.

In the end, we shrugged,
did the only thing we could
and turned our next plank
bottom-side up. Tongue
and groove, tongue
and groove. Some pieces fit
together easy, others
take sweat, and fretting.
We went on together
this way, living
under the warp and woof
of what could not be changed,
trying still to make things right.

MY TURN AT THE DISHES

Wednesday, noon.
A perfectly vertical rain
drops from the clutter
of stormclouds pitched
against hills southwest
of this kitchen window.
My turn at the dishes,
but I am thinking about Plato
and what I know of
his flawless world
of truth and ideal form
as I stand scraping egg yolk
from the cracked
plastic plate I found
in a bag of Mainstay dogfood.

I lift it a moment
in the wet grey light,
raise it till it shines
like the ideal form
of itself, a sun, luminous
there in its separate world,
and I imagine the egg I ate
this morning, itself a sun,
turned now in the dark
fire of the body.

Distracted, scrubbing
flecks of burnt meat
crusted like rust
to the skillet, the smell
of frying burger rising
from the quickly clouding water,
I hardly notice when
the discarded pickle jar
lid slides and plugs
the rinse-water running
in the open sink.

It is a perfect fit.

I try to pry it free, but
the sink keeps filling, sealing

(no break)

with a greater and greater weight
the only way out. Light
shifts on the kitchen walls.
Water floods and splatters
over the tiles, drenches
the halls, the house, the yard.

It goes on forever. We drown.
There is no stopping it.

IN GRANDFATHER'S RAINCOAT

In Grandfather's raincoat
I stand in black rain.
My name, thin winter branches.
The traffic lights shining wet streets red.
Inside the left-hand pocket:
a few coins, a key,
and an old handkerchief
still spattered and stained, crumpled
in pain. The old man knew
his death, his friendly death
that greeted him each morning
from the pocket of his raincoat,
the death that came to him so slowly,
gently, like water rising over the heads of cattle.

BECAUSE THEY KNOW

Grandpa Joe told me a koan
once, driving
the gentle lift and glide
of narrow vineyard road
that last September we had
together. Around each curve
in that stuttering light,
squirrels and chipmunks
skittered through the path
of rushing wheels.

"Know
why they always start across
soon as they see us
coming?"

I shook my head
and watched the answer
ripen his face
to cloud-shorn moon.

"Because,"
he said, eyes on the road,
"they know they might not make it."

II. The Metamorphoses

"If we relish these artifacts of death,
it's for a sign that life goes on
without us..."

--Robert Wrigley

LOYALIST SOLDIER SHOT, SPANISH CIVIL WAR

On a photograph by Robert Capa

It is the single ear, fragment
of skull that fell, forehead splashing
dark blood red onto field
the color of sun just south
of perhaps Pamplona. And the face
buckling, turned into light, blind
to sharp crack and instantaneous click,
the knees reeling, belly thrown open, torn
limbs pulled two-dimensional. It is the hand
gone buoyant, gently rising, offering
the length of an arm, the weight of a rifle
surrendered just left of the shot. It is the shadow
folding into itself. It is autumn. Flushed
from the parched scrub brush, three quail startle,
blurred into noise. It is a slight dry wind.

SONG OF THE DEPARTED

The flight of birds fills with harmony. At dusk
 green forests
 Gather into the hushed cabins,
 The crystal pastures of the doe.
 The murmuring stream appeases darkness,
 the damp shadows

And summer flowers toll so lovely in the wind.
 Even now, night falls on the thinking man's face.

Decency, like a tiny lamp, shines in his heart
 And in the tranquility of suppertimes.
 For the bread and wine are blessed
 By the hands of God, and your brother
 Quietly gazes at you with his nocturnal eyes,
 Looking for respite from his thorny wandering.
 O to be deep in the drunken blue night.

And the silence of the room embraces shadows
 of the elders,
 The blood-red martyrs, and the grief
 of a grand family dying
 Piously in a lonely grandchild.

And shining from the blackest instance of madness,
 the patient wretch
 Awakens at the petrified threshold,
 Embraced by the shining curve of autumn,
 the cool blueness,

The still house and the legends of the forest,
 The judgement and decree,
 And the lunar paths of the departed.

--translated from the German
 of Georg Trakl

FOR GEORG TRAKL

1.
 Face
 Reflecting
 The blankness of water

Wading
 In, you reached
 For that imagined moon,
 Hearing the trumpets
 Bloom in your skull

But
 It was no use--
 Even gravity betrayed you

Feet floated up, leaving
 The low path of your moaning,
 The path you would search for again
 And again

Under the empty face of the snow,
 In the place where the ink-black horses leap
 Under the screaming wheels of a train,
 In Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Baudelaire,
 And there, in the water, reflected
 In water

2.
 Autumn evening.
 A girl is walking,
 Weaving the wind with flutes
 And bells.
 Sister
 Flesh of my flesh, remember
 How we danced in dark gardens,
 How we once drowned together
 Deep in deaf water?
 Margarete
 My blue little doe, smile
 Your impossible thin smile
 Inside of my eyelids
 Again

(section break)

3.
 At Grödek, ninety wounded moan
 For death and nothing,
 Not even an angel,
 Can stop them.

One impatient one
 Blows bits of his brain
 Across grey planks of wood,
 Across dirty straw and the bodies
 Of the suffering, steam still rising
 Up from broken mouths

And you ran out screaming
 Into the blind snow, unable
 To follow or to save them,
 Found flesh frozen and blood scattered dark
 In all directions

No escape.

4.
 Georg
 Forgive me
 I've stolen your grief

Wanting my own
 Words to hobble on, wanting
 Dark bodies to place in the snow

Forgive me

I must breathe

5.
 In the eleventh month
 The third day stood still.

When the moans of the living
 Finally died down, an angel froze
 Inside your lungs and you remembered
 That black path through the lake weeds

(stanza break)

And drifted away from yourself
The way stars lose track of constellations,
The way notes fade as the quartet scatters,
The eyes and ears and guts of the composer
Reduced to a heap of ink-spattered feathers.

Twenty seven years.
Now, death
Will not leave you.

PRAYER FOR A BLACK STONE

"Poesía del pomulo morado..."
--César Vallejo

The broken cheeks, the purple bones, the books
That sprouted from a corpse, the weeping dead
Who break in two, and carry bits of bread
On shoulders torn by ropes and broken hooks--

These sang for you, to warm the ink, and drown
Your voice below the page: the wingless birds
And pagan girls, the distant curving roads,
And silver flutes that ring like hollow bones.

So long alone below the ground, you breathe
The marrows of the sea, and prayers march
The candled halls to chant your darkest nouns.

They sing black stones, the broken moon, fallen trees
And empty shells, and praise your purple arch
Of bones that rise up to be broken down.

THE METAMORPHOSES

All things are possible. Transformations
Of sun into sun, hair
Into hair, even grass
Can become grass.
Remember

The violent roses that crushed the whole ocean?
The cataclysmic birds that barked down cathedrals?
The babies that rang all your telephones blind?

Hands can be hands. Your face
Might sprout hair. Fingers
Might grow fingernails.

We are made of accidents

THE MUTE

Carrying the dumb stumps of my fingers past churches
and schoolyards

Where the birds built language like a brittle nest

Over the bare heads of children hurrying into their
own bells

I listened until I heard them sing/ I did not desire

To wear my tongue like a black robe

That is always shining like hair in the daylight.

Should it matter if my mouth remains frozen over

The thick vowel still stuck in the ragged ice
of my throat?

Inside this body I am breathing

A complete algebra of movement and light

Bursting from the dull sutures of my skull

Like a wet seed splitting its thick husk

I learn the elaborate gestures called survival

I count the prayers of the world/ they are not infinite

From the mosque of my silence I open my mouth

And I will name and name and name the world

THE KILL BUCKET

Almost nothing does them in.
You can hang one upside-down
on the stringer for half an hour

in hot sun, batter
his black knot of skull
flat with an iron grapnel,

or lob him back to near mid-lake
with a sidelong looping cast,
catch him and cast him

and catch him again: the bullhead's
thick-webbed gills still pulse
and puff as the slick knife

cuts into unscaled skin.
They are the last things left alive
each year when the Cascade Reservoir dries.

We find them gasping in stagnant pools,
seething with heat, and net them
only grudgingly, remembering

chinook, perch, and browns
rumouring the once-clear depths
before nitrates and the algae bloom

killed all but the bullhead. Now,
we troll this muck for squaw, bitching
the trashfish's inevitable bones, the bullhead's

helmet of horned skin. They are survivors,
at least, we say to each other,
and lower our day's catch alive

into the boiling water
steaming in the kill bucket,
where they thrash and rattle

and are finally still.

BURNING THE STUMP

"I rock between dark and dark,
 My soul nearly my own,
 My dead selves singing."

--Theodore Roethke

1.

Two decades it lurked, a malevolent shark
 darkening lake water out past the dock.
 My bowels went hollow. Back muscles cramped.
 I shivered whenever I dogpaddled over
 the stump's black torso, strangled old wreck.
 Root of my nightmare broken neck,
 the careless slip and misplaced leap,
 it had hands to snatch at dangled limbs
 and a huge-toothed mouth always calling.
 I dreamt myself wreckless, sometimes falling
 hard into water with a quick white snap,
 and watched myself go floating, slowly, buoyed
 by the suddenly weightless body,
 to break the mirror-skinned surface, waking
 with a shiver on some strange shoreline
 as quick light flickered in the white-rooted spine.

2.

Dry summers, lake shrank back
 from shoreline, revealing
 quack grass and snailshell,
 the foul, fish-smelling sand--
 and the stump rose tip first
 by degrees, inching into sunlight

all wormholes and ragged
 rotted knots, fishing line
 hooked into dull root wood,
 the wrinkled and pocked face
 of a god gone mute

testament to the wind
 that howled and battered
 its waterlogged spine

(no break)

to splinters, the huge pine
crashing, branches snapping, dropped
in the wind-chopped waves.

3.
One summer, dryer than ever before,
bullheads rotted on the cracked mud flats.
The beaver and heron had no home.
The osprey and kingfisher found no food
where cattails greyed and the stale channel ran.

Stagnant, restless, uncontained, I walked to the water
and walked back again. Seeking seclusion, I met
desolation. Seeking the soul, I met nothing at all.

I stood face to face
with my lifeless trunk, broken
stump opening voices in wind,
crying out to the imperfect silence.

I heard the dry witchgrass hissing,
listened for the ghost of the water's lapping,
hushed, the short waves thinly sweeping, brushing
the sand's edge lightly, swaying
into old slow tidal motion, spectral
waters almost chanting, faintly
present, calling

saying
flame, burn,
turn me to stone,
open the flower of going...

4.
Ice, I'm ice
I'm bright like a fish
I'm black as a seed
Dark as a moon

If broken trunks have quit their growing
I should burn the stopped limbs home.
Why should dead roots dangle down?
I have seen where they are going.

(stanza break)

So then should the air be empty?
 Shall I ask my bones to wobble on?
 I may tell these bones to run,
 Break white roots deep under trees.

Dark as a moon
I'm black as a seed
I'm bright like a fish
Ice, I'm ice

5.
 And I am given my same dream of flight, seeing
 the body sprint blind over the land's edge
 flailing, the panic and twitch in my terrified limbs
 And I am naked
 to the violent headlong wind, animal
 lusting open space, the blood-fire
 spreading, the numb limbs aching,
 the feet turned quick to sharp-nailed claw
 as I stumble, crawl, lumber along
 And I am running
 insane through the nameless landscape,
 raw throat choked under thick white froth,
 sprinting and lunging and feeling the burning
 beginning to grow from the pit of my throat,
 the nostrils straining, black wind roaring,
 the running and running increasing the burning,
 the burning and burning consuming the body
 And I am light
 translucent, a bodiless flame
 fading at last into vanishing fumes,
 rising to cirrus, the woolpack and nimbus,
 the fleece-white rib of a formless wing
 And I am born
 high up in the gathering light,
 a white-feathered soul, a windswept thing.

6.
 Whiteness, impossible
 whiteness brightening. I wake
 alone to storm-tossed fields gone still

(no break)

with the first light snow. October. The scent
of fire, electricity. The knowledge
that energy passes. I step slowly
shuddering into my bones. Was it here
I fed pale flames to light, and followed dead roots
into darkness? There are many ways
to become lost, and I have strayed far off
through the fields of the fatherless.
I have wandered too long, alone, inconsolable.
It is time for returning. Ice melting. Dawn
breaks sharp between dark jackpine, shining
black limbs to diamond. On a bare branch
there is room for growing. And I am ready.

AT THE BURNSITE

New grass gleans from damp ash,
Feeling the breasts of a warm spring rain.
Fifty feet up, pines climb skree.

III. The Returnings

"That which hath been is now;
and that which is to be hath already been;
and God requireth that which is past..."

--Ecclesiastes

SNOWFALL FUGUE IN B-FLAT MINOR

prelude of distant crystalline bells.

Each flake perfectly placed and ancient
as these eighth notes falling
in fugal counterpoint

across the clavichord, swirling minor scales
torn open like an old wound,
pouring out

gentle pirouettes,
geneflections, rituals
of discord and resolution, praise
played out in the delicate ghost dance
of brittle finger, brass string, wind frozen

in precise attitudes
of perfection, suffering, Bach's
pain now three centuries dead. Yet
it is all repeated, repeated

endlessly in the blank air, this delicate skeletal
order falling open, falling
out from itself like the first few flakes
of autumn snowfall, the ageless patterns

repeating again,
the fragile architecture of descent.

EARLY SNOWFALL OUTSIDE KOOSKIA

Three colts dance
in their whitening pasture
because it is their first snowfall,
and they are not mules.

DONNELLY, IDAHO

Northern Pacific left and the packing plant
 Closed, Corbin Ford
 Burned down ten years ago.
 Past the empty Libby's warehouse
 Through pea fields turned pastureland,
 The dead rails rust twenty years disuse,
 Oil-soaked ties split for firewood.

* * *

Notice the real estate office is empty;
 The door swings back and forth in the wind.
 Notice the tiny house by the spillway,
 The sign selling nightcrawlers, 75¢ a dozen.
 The grey woman in her wool cap pulls worms
 From the trough in her garage, counting them
 Slowly, throwing in an extra, "for luck."

* * *

Some nights she wanders these pastures
 Alone, picking bluebottles by moonlight.
 She goes to the place where her children are buried,
 Sees the shadows of cattle asleep on their graves.
 And when she is not looking, dawn comes
 Again, rising between the Twin Sisters,
 Another day she must live down.

ODE TO AIR

Walking down the road
one day I met the air.
I greeted him with respect
and said
"I would be happy
if for just this once
you would quit your transparency,
that we might speak."
The indefatigable one
danced, rustled the leaves,
shook the dust under my bootheels
with laughter,
lifting all
his blue sails,
his skeleton of glass,
his eyelids of the northwind
still as a bedpost, and still
he kept listening to me.
I kissed the long cloak
of the king of the sky,
I wrapped myself in his flag
of heavenly silk
and said
"Comrade or king,
thread, petal, or fowl,
I don't know what you are, but
let me ask one thing of you:
do not sell yourself.
The water has all been sold
to the aqueducts
in the desert,
and I have seen
the poor world, the villages,
stagger with thirst
in the dry sand.
I have seen light in the darkness
rationed,
and chandeliers in the mansions
of the rich.
All is dawn in their
new hanging gardens,
all dark the terrible

(no break)

shadows in alleyways,
 where the night,
 detestable stepmother,
 appears
 with a dagger
 in her owl-like eyes,
 and a cry, a scream,
 lifts and is smothered
 under the gluttonous shadows.

No, air, you
 must never sell yourself,
 must never be channelled,
 never be piped,
 never enclosed
 or restrained,
 never captured in ledgers
 or put into bottles.
 Beware!
 Call me
 if you need help.
 I am poet, son
 of all suffering, father, uncle,
 cousin, blood brother
 and inlaw
 to the poor, to everyone,
 my country and all the others,
 to the poor who live by the river
 and the poor who live in the heights
 of vertical Andean ridges
 chipping stone,
 hammering nails,
 sewing clothes,
 chopping wood,
 bearing with the world;
 for all these things
 I am in love with their breathing.
 You are the only thing they have.
 It is for them
 you are transparent,
 so that they will see
 how the future has been sold.
 For all this you exist,
 air,
 you who allow breath,

(no break)

you who do not enslave,
you who do not trust those
who come in their cars
to examine you,
but leave them,
laugh at them,
send their hats spinning,
rejecting their propositions.
Let us go together
dancing over the world,
demolishing
the appleblossoms,
entering through windows
whistling together,
whistling
songs
of yesterday and tomorrow,
already bound one day
to liberate
the light and the waters,
earth and man,
and all things for all people
will be as you are, air.
But, for now,
beware!
Come with me,
for we have many things
to dance and sing.
Let us run
the whole length of the sea,
to the tips of the peaks,
let us go
to where the new spring
is flowering
and the wind is rattling
and I sing
as we part the blossoms,
the sweet scent and the fruit,
the atmosphere
of a new tomorrow.

--translated from the Spanish
of Pablo Neruda

"I find you, O Lord..."

I find you, O Lord, in all the good things
I am bound to with love like a brother.
In small seed you shine from the tiniest rings,
And from great things you pour forth your power.

Such a wonderful game that your energy plays,
To move like a servant through that which it sends:
In roots it sprouts, in thick trunks it sways,
And in cut limbs it rises up from the dead.

--translated from the German
of Rainer Maria Rilke

LOSING THE WAY

I have just passed
by my own house, watching
earthworms wander the wet pavement,
so lost in this world!

THE GRASSHOPPERS

silent, reptilian,
sun-baked grey

as two wood chips,
the grasshoppers copulate

in still august heat--
motionless, until

the shiny blue forelegs
stamp, quiver

pensively, pensile, suspended
as wide russet eyes roll back,

yellow-black checkerboard wings
exploding with voices.

THREE MID-WINTER THAWS

1.

Surprise is the pale bleached color of grass
When it is a coarse green and February.
Lee-side of the high, thick-wooded vale,
The faint trail flecks with sign:
Cleaved hooves repeating the ice,
And black shit delicate as rosary beads.

2.

Down by the river New Year's Eve
Three quick gunshots stitched the air
With whistles trailing lengthwise
To the water's frozen reach.
I stopped dead in my tracks
To hear: silence. Nothing
But my startled heart
Thudding its drum, and the Clark Fork
River droning its lone slow note.

3.

A face assembles in rain,
In the black limbs of bare oak leaning
And tangling over the stream. I remember
The warm trace of pulse beat tapping
Blue at the base of her thumb.
We watched huge jams of ice dislodge
And lurch to the opening ocean,
A world hurled in on itself.

SOUTH OF NEWPORT BAY

1.
 Seven waves to each set breaking and flattening over
 the sand,
 Seven waves turned back, receding seaward
 With undertow and tide. Slow, currents shift and swell
 Among the kelp-drenched reefs and skerries
 Lifting and sinking with ebb and flow, heaving
 Past mussel-coated jetties toward the far breakwater
 Where huge swells cleave through lowlying stones,
 Disperse, scatter, yet return
 To the pulsing of ocean, sun and moon.

Over flat intertidal stones home to sealion and pelican,
 In the quick breath-space between waves
 Where sandpipers race after crab and small fishes,
 Rooted in the crevices of wind-carved cliffs
 And everywhere the water is, this life
 Of web and feather, mouth and gill, anemone,
 stem and root.

2.
 A line of rusted barges lurches by
 So slowly they may not be moving at all.

Even the seawind,
 Now steady, feels still;
 The fog no longer churning and thickening,
 The gulls no longer swarming and quarreling
 But lifting themselves in diaphanous flight,
 Motionless,
 But for the wingtip's shiver,
 The angular beak's turn leeward.

Sometimes in the absence of motion,
 The body seems stunned, superfluous
 As air we breathe in our dreams.
 I lie still in warm sand,
 Sensation draining out of my limbs,
 The crowd-sound of seawaves grown indistinct,
 The light behind eyelids blurred and unnoticed.

(section break)

3.
 All things return to the cadence of light;
 The pulse beat of all wild creatures measured
 In the orbits of sun and moon, the lean and drift
 Of continents shifting underneath migrating stars,
 And the tangle of seaweed, the undulant dance,
 Exist, not alone
 In the net of the present,
 But always and everywhere, once and again.

At day's end,
 Under the darkening San Joaquin Hills,
 An echoed brightness
 Swells expectantly.

4.
 Two nights past full moon,
 In the fourth set of a full tide,
 The grunion run south of Newport Bay.

The female feels a strange itch in her midriff,
 Feels her brain flood with the babble of moonlight
 Charging the knee-deep shallows,
 Sends herself spilling out over the sand,
 Urging and wrestling, digging in
 Tail-first, half-buried
 As the males come at her, curling and closing
 Over the exposed flesh of her belly,
 The three of them writhing and shuddering there

To exhaustion,
 Spawned out, waiting
 The next set's inundation,
 The rush and heave of return to the sea.

(section break)

5.
In the next tide's peak,
In the final nick of moon,
When the waves wash highest over the strand,
A jumble of hearts beat mad for the sea.
The black waves swell and crash unseen,
Glowing and rolling in over the shore
As the small fish glimmer briefly and drain
Away with the turbulent current.

In this bright time of birth, this echoing light,
I hear how the mute world speaks its faith
In the patient language of recurrence.

6.
Imagine faith as this trust in returnings!
Be as the sea is.
Lie still.
Breathe.