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Paul Scott. Piper

*The University of Montana*

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SNOW COUNTRY

By

Paul Scott Piper

B.S., University of Montana, 1976

Presented in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Montana

1992

Approved by

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*May 26, 1992*

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•

## SECTION I

The Sun Poem  
for Michael Palmer

The sun poem is in the small Japanese  
     book  
 a friend is lost to me lost  
     in the mail  
 the road is dry the wind is damp the log's  
     bleached  
 branches have broken off after the year's  
     fiction  
 a table is set for four the rock's hesitant  
     blush  
 masked by grey lichen  
     a pine  
 squirrel chatters and sets off a chain letter  
     the last  
 glimmer is a seed in an endless succession of days  
     blood  
 splashed on the snow a wish that haunts the white  
     words  
 that punctures silence  
     outside  
 a friend cries out and his voice reaches me  
     through  
 thickets and clearings like long  
     sighs  
 the sun poem is a circe beyond the grey  
     clouds  
 far off the white bark shines a friend's  
     voice  
 enters the room of prophecy in her  
     hands  
 the soft echoes of trees is an offering  
     to memory  
 the sun poem is whispered by repeated  
     images  
 soon my steps will  
     melt  
 or fill in they cannot be retraced  
     quietly  
 the frost grows a rock breaks free  
     a cloud  
 passes by the sun poem  
     is a seed  
 in the endless succession of nights  
     planted  
 in shadow when the book is closed

## Meditation

I was drinking impatience again this suggestive evening, or perhaps impulse, the link of material to phenomenal mind. The window waded along shores of a marsh where two moose fed. We had a child and named her Passage, and trains flecked with faces shuddered into the mired night. Yet ahead of it all I saw the steamy yellow room, smoke and music burnished by the blind light. The distance from caprice to anxiety was optional. I think it was the Messiaen, or the way you moved pulling yellow across shadow, provocation always lurking like another breath, Outside, the path curves into loss and we call it origin. And outside it is snowing.



## The Whales

It's morning and raining again.  
The sleepwalkers wander the streets  
through thin mist, through  
puddles thick with blurred color  
going nowhere.  
But the man who is watching them  
from the window of his cramped room  
is roaring at the gate  
of his own terror  
like Okeanos storming  
off the coast of Onekotan  
where the whales are killed  
every day of this season  
where their blood rises like camellias  
into the sky  
at dusk, and in the morning  
it always rains.

## The Words

On their way along the path  
that leads to us that is  
not a path the words die  
their husks litter the past

There is no way around them  
no one to sweep them up  
into a pile the wind and rain  
will rot our car doesn't bother  
to swerve

This is all one can say  
there is no one who owns us now  
no one who owes us anything

## Child

Born to walk on water  
systolic lilly  
the color of blood-house  
the color of sky  
you dehisce the blister  
of rain  
with your white hands  
you bury the roots that feed you

How can you help but wander  
calling the goddess' name  
stars framed in the window  
watching everyone  
in the empty streets

## The Questions

The First one falls through the cracks  
shrieking at stars "Do you  
love me? Will you follow  
me?"

The Second is entangled in pensive intaglio

The Third is a machination, a pair of  
legs wound tight  
that walk in rage  
around and around the shuttered house

The Fourth is the color of blood  
hitting oxygen, a painting  
that hangs on the walls of the rich

The Fifth is unnerving, the coming and  
going of surfaces

The Sixth is distraction  
the code of burning fields  
the TV, voices in the other room

The Seventh is shy  
and flees with her reflection  
her production and reproduction  
water remembers her flight  
and the reflection of her flight

The Eighth is a plucked art, a telltale  
heart, the sun-star,  
dervishist and clown

The Ninth is a tongue of corners  
a rived glottis

The Tenth is a table  
set for four  
on which in a shaft of sunlight  
rests a fly

The Eleventh is a return  
to the pause between words, between  
breaths, the silences  
like crows crossing the white sky

The Twelfth is a prescience  
the pressure of fur in our mouths  
as we speak

The Thirteenth is the perfection of circles  
the radiant hunger of mouths and words  
for a wilderness that can never be entered  
an eye that opens only to see itself

## Untitled

He sits in the car and stares straight ahead  
It is night  
The wipers scrape across the dry windshield, scrape  
back and forth, back and forth  
It is the rhythm of ablation  
He feels his presence as aleatoric  
He feels her presence as absence  
He hears the leaves scrape the brittle skin  
He feels they finally had no new words,  
no way out  
He feels the words come and go like breath  
There is no solace in the constant sound of traffic  
The only light is in the kitchen window, it could be waning  
I am not cold he says or thinks  
There is no motion though he hears himself say the word 'sudden'  
He feels himself falling  
He feels nothing, not even lack of feeling, nor feeling that  
a perfect hole  
She put a plum in his mouth once, round, smooth, yielding  
The wipers clack back and forth, back and forth  
Then he is 'here', he realizes it  
And again he realizes it, that he must have been somewhere else  
He feels again the weight in his hands, of his hands  
Smooth and cool he says, or thinks he says  
There are many hands he keeps folded  
He hears the car fail repeatedly to catch its impulse  
He knows there is something there he cannot quite reach  
It is like an itch, like night  
There is a great machine he thinks or says, it is unwinding  
He knows what already happened waits to happen  
He hears sirens

## Haunted Annelidics

The knife is still in the drawer  
 The lights are out  
     It snowed  
 last night without warning, a quiet black light  
     between the flakes  
     A dark lobby  
 muted jazz, a man waiting for a woman in red  
     An inefficient  
 symmetry  
     A half-eaten sandwich  
         No one heard footsteps  
 I always think of this table when I think of the war  
     Spoons tilt, light glints, when you lift  
         your eyes  
 White triangles inside  
     red  
 triangles  
     are the only warning  
         They tell me later  
         the sign reads  
 yield but says nothing  
     They tell me too late  
     the pieces of the puzzle don't  
         fit  
 A wet knife with six inch blade  
     in the quiet drawer  
 Where were you  
     last night, around 3 A.M.?

They didn't finish the wine and their clothes  
     left a trail  
 still warm  
     Nature is cruel  
         Without the additives  
 the cigarettes, one smudged with lipstick,  
     would have burned out  
         Decay is always a factor  
 Past and future meet in the mirror  
     faster than their shadows  
     I turned it over and over  
         in my mind  
 before I acted

Fractions have no faith in themselves  
                                   as factors  
 It was initially a trick  
                                   but something slipped  
 They sifted through it several times  
                                   and got ash on their hands  
 A man can always use a drink

Waiting to remember  
                                   hesitating to forget  
                                   the title  
 of the current number one song  
                                   Like flies  
                                   either on or off  
                                   (alternating current)  
 we are  
 without closure  
 Do you hear the phone, the doorbell,  
                                   the voices of the Tao?  
 She made me do it  
 Each intrusion an eruption  
                                   A voyeurism where language watches us  
                                   through a crack  
 between the yellowed shade & sill  
                                   Or that time I had the chance to look in your  
 drawers  
 The lines so long now  
   So long  
                                   It's been good to know you  
 Did you read that or  
                                   hear it from the authorities?  
 We spend so much time waiting to  
                                   break the lines  
 To avoid delay  
                                   pick up the hairs under the floor  
                                   Blood in the xylem, she's phloem the coup

The knife dreams it is a  
                                   sliver  
                                   in the obsidian cornea  
 of God  
                                   All night it snowed  
 a quiet white loneliness



She passes the salt to avert her eyes

Talking

too loud

I forgot that you had the key

Perhaps it is all relatives or reflexive

Ghosts

in the disappearing rainforest

I dropped my drawers

when some amateurs rummaged them

Her lips grazed my leg

We sat in the folding metal chairs and waited

for the lecture to end

I remember hearing bells

seeing the raven on the ledge, the nun going after

it with a poker

We should have waited

somewhere else,

for something else to happen

The demolition was thwarted by critics

who spotted a radiant clue

The monks walking by shrouded in brown muslin

walking in pairs, chanting

on their way to the grottos

Apples heavy on the green fuse

I was walking by

It was raining in the cave where I waited

for you to show me

your hands

In the room is a presence without a name

I was walking or riding

in a car when it happened,

rain blurring the windows

Traces of the scar on your wrist

You were walking or riding

in a car

through tall buildings like canyons

You held my hand at the door

The scriptures wobbled

in the dark

The drawer was closed when I got there

The knife  
    trembles  
    like a stamen stung by bee's legs  
I remember the smell of rotting timber  
    and camomile  
    I remember it was raining  
my tongue was full of salt  
    Are you still searching  
for perfection? for love?  
The cops are out in droves  
    I can see you now in red satin  
    spiked heels  
I could hear the screams clearly  
from where I stood  
    The knife was drawn on the wall  
    of a cave  
where it hung until we came  
    I reached through the wall and  
    you were holding me  
    I remember  
the world was going to end

## The Terrorist

As an Ecosaboteur, an idealist of violence, in pursuit of an absolute truth, I have turned my life into an absolute fiction. I am forced to create illusion, to wear many hats, to live in mirrors, crouch behind doors.

I have lost locus, existing simply as the transference of energy from one transitory condition to another. Remember Al-Ashid the commander of the Assassins who shouted, standing high in the stirrups of his flaming Arabian, toking hashish: "Nothing is true, Everything is possible." This is my truth, and hence my lie.

My friends and family know me as a house painter, the owner of a large import-export business, a small-town gas station attendant, a migrant laborer, the president, a worker in a Montessori school, an accomplished composer for the harpsichord, a fanatic fly-fisherman, a hermetic monk, a collector of art, a child, a vinophile, the father of 4 beautiful dwarves, a whore of theory, a gay activist, the reincarnation of Mary Magdalene.

Initially I thought this monstrous fiction was for the sake of subterfuge, an evasion of the Law, an anti-toxin for a poisoned culture. I was wrong. It creates its own momentum. It spirals heavenward like some Babel. My family, my friends. They love me as they know me. They love only what they know.

It began, if it began at all, innocently enough, working construction, demolltion, mining - learning explosives. I witnessed what we all do: rivers poisoned by chemical excrement, forests leveled, toxic nuclear waste added to breakfast cereal. But it changed me. I combined philosophy and dynamite

bypassing politics. Zen pyrotechnics. I scorned my history as a liberal. I practiced the way of diamond-heart, the direct flash. I numbed myself to flesh; I crippled only monsters of steel & glass. Destruction always preceded creation. The phoenix rises from corporate rubble. When the pot-smoking janitor bit it in the closet in Tacoma I hardened. When the R&D man evaporated in Indiana, I turned to glass. When a boardroom imploded in Amsterdam, I celebrated with friends who thought it my birthday. Nothing is true, everything is possible.

I switched from dynamite to plastique, then to a nitro-glycerine compound set in styrene, triggered by an alkene once positioned at the target. Easy to carry, easy to work with, tastes like wintergreen. I became a master janitor, plumber, electrician, boiler maker, garbage collector, vending machine tender, plant-care person, secretary, technician, boss, cop. I became faceless wherever I went, faceless in my diversity. To carry the lie further I also became nameless, allowing the destruction of a name to germinate another. I preferred the names of celebrities, a name so public it defied any locus. If I couldn't be nailed down, I couldn't be caught. I crept down hallways in Miami, smoked cigars with board members in Minneapolis, stayed forever in Newark, flew planes into Seattle, was constantly on TV. Everywhere I visited I left the burning fragment of a message that would some day become as obvious as the sun. A sun that even now is expanding slightly in size. Even now it expands. This is all I'm saying. That it is going to get a lot hotter before it cools down.

But have you even listened? I lie like a rug. I sell real estate outside Fargo. I drive race cars in the rain.

I am a nun in a convent below the surface of Montreal. I sing love songs. I write books. What difference does it make? We are all in pain. This is my only means of lashing out. The violence of a lie. But whose life now is not a fiction, is not in some capacity created? Who can claim to know intimately and completely themselves, much less the person who sits next to you, or brushes their teeth at your side? How many times do they say, "she seemed like such a nice woman, such a good mother, he was such a quiet neighbor, such a good student, they always gave to the proper charities." Who could ever suspect. Go to the mirror and face yourself. The lie has thin fingers. It touches us all.

As for me. I lied about the wine. I'm strictly Bud Light. But my sentences continue to explode long after you've left the room.

## SECTION II

## MONTANA NOTES

It's always the longest winter

\*

on the shoulder  
of the highway  
a pile of headless deer carcasses

\*

Fences cross  
the wind  
crosses fences

\*

Square of light immured  
in quiet pasture

\*

"Smashed Enfant"  
& "TEX"K.T. in red paint  
on 2 cement bridge abutments

\*

My arrows are made of desire

\*

In Persephone's cow pasture  
a black angus bull  
sleeps with its eyes open

\*

'lots of bar(n)s around here'

take some  
honey home

\*

Small flock of Buffleheads  
on the dark Clark's  
Fork free  
floating signifiers

\*

The last best face  
in the crowd outside  
the theatre

\*

Chipheads and cowchips  
face off across  
barbed wire

\*

Yacking it up  
up the Yak River where  
Rick Bass  
fishes for trout

\*

Ravalli Cafe - The does stop here  
to meet your bucks

\*

Shattered mirror  
on larch needles  
walking along, alone  
pieces of sky underfoot



Sign along highway  
 Bull River valley  
 in the shadow of the pines  
 "Corporate greed is killing us"

\*

Meat farmers lounge on the fence,  
 wave as I drive by

\*

the fact of it simple  
 as standing up, walking out  
 into a terrain  
 that will never be entirely  
 familiar

\*

a stone sinks deeper in the water

\*

Bales of hay stutter in dry fields  
 clouds coagulate  
 'a hard rain's gonna fall'

\*

PARADISE : white letters  
 on a green sign

\*

"The day opens like a woman who loves you"

\*

The billboard's repetitive semiotics  
 skitters like a fresh colt  
 across the obsidian night

Lee Konitz on the radio  
miles from nowhere

\*

"BRKFST - 8 MILES"

\*

The orchards here  
grow frost and  
not much else

\*

the language of pre-cambrian mudstone  
breaking apart

\*

a sudden cloud in your voice,  
shift of wind

\*

Red neon "HOT TUBS:  
C'mon in  
fiddle around  
tickle yor fancy"

\*

a word is a gesture in the air.  
knowing this, one knows that the swallows  
write renga  
above the river  
by the old iron bridge

\*

a woman in a pink top, blue shorts &  
white shoes walks straight after sidewalk cuts  
right  
out onto new mown grass

mountains that are not mountains  
rivers that are not rivers

\*

Birddog and Burdock, Attorneys At Law:  
They'll sue the bull for shit

\*

Embryonic hail

\*

All the places we didn't go  
makes it hard to know

\*

rotting ice in the black water

\*

there's no story that needs to be told

\*

Sky cream, peach  
spears of soft purple

\*

rounded hills thick with lodgepole  
lake flat, dark  
your voice the purr of night  
moving in

\*

the entire thing is made up of  
1 and zero

\*

the collision of atoms  
brings more news

old road  
leads here

\*

the sun through pine  
splinters the story

\*

frost covered spider web  
outside the window

\*

wind blown grass shivers

\*

On page 303 of the collected WCW is the "wind's force"

\*

Wisdom, only 28 miles from Wise River  
which is only 28 miles from Opportunity  
which is only 8 miles from Warm Springs,  
the state mental hospital

\*

Polar Bar

\*

Ed's Road dead ends  
just like Ed

\*

After the author died  
her ashes were scattered  
over rivers and mountains  
without end

The bronze sun/coin  
spins in  
endless cobalt

\*

That night you were too sirius  
at 7200 feet

\*

Sky here  
from ear to ear  
leaks out the eyes  
when the light's right

\*

Sharp chips of juncoe chatter

\*

Once by cloud, once  
by cloister  
the same place  
"yet, yet"

\*

Marasmius in a fairy ring  
picked for the morning's omelette,  
carefully, so the circle  
is left unbroken

\*

In the field  
below silent mountains  
theory decays as  
a flower is held silently  
aloft

sunlight flickers in the shadow  
 chickadees flutter in the lower  
 branches empty  
 coffee cups on the table

\*

five-toed track of black  
 bear in  
 the snowbank

\*

Dumb fucks  
 in pickup trucks

\*

a pile of pages to pick from

\*

Hail the size of tennis balls shatters  
 the Capitol's skylight

\*

and Cheryl, walking her dog  
 Rio De Janeiro in Missoula, MT  
 finds a street named Poignancy

\*

Sitting  
 on a log  
 eating  
 watching  
 a squirrel  
 that watching  
 me eats  
 nutmeats

mallard quacking while flying  
peppers popping while frying

\*

narrative is oedipal

\*

truck tires tipped against the blue metal shed

\*

My eros is a maid of desire

\*

early afternoon after making love  
walking  
limp green hose  
on white picket fence

\*

"Not my hands but green across you now"

\*

this north wind  
which tears even our sorrow from us  
scatters it over a landscape  
of mountains and rivers  
without end

\*

and you so Lacanic

Swapping stories at  
 Liquid Louie's  
 "the desire to eat your apple  
 got me in this halter," sd horse

\*

Umbrage of beauty and will

\*

flesh and blood, skin & bone

\*

"DEER CROSSING NEXT 53 MILES"

\*

flies buzz  
 wind purrs  
 waves slap  
 crows caw

\*

Two Swainson's thrushes communicate  
 in a language much quicker,  
 much more beautiful  
 than ours

\*

On my desk -  
 yarrow stalks, spool  
 of thread, scat, scat-  
 tered letters, empty  
 glass

\*

High of -16 today



ghost dance

\*

Four women -  
 one comes to bear  
 one comes as bear  
 one comes bear-masked  
 one comes bare-assed

\*

Ted Berrigan dead,  
 read it in  
 "In Transition" Newsweek

new week starts tomorrow  
 with a rosy-fingered dawn

stirring milk in my tea  
 need more time, send some

\*

a woodtick crawling up my levis  
 meat at the end of the Denim Desert  
 only shadow a hand overhead

\*

Wheat stalk sways  
 one way, another sways  
 another way  
 in western wynde

\*

often I am permitted to enter a meadow

\*

reading that  
 porcupines too, masturbate

Silver gash of aspen

\*

And he was saying, ignoring  
the dying fire  
that grizzly bears still  
consider us a delicacy, eating  
the buttocks and thighs  
first, often before  
the victim is dead

\*

In the beginning was the word  
now there's the work

\*

a V of geese gagging

\*

Coffee 'thick enough to float a crowbar'  
cools in tiny styrofoam cups,  
in huge hairy hands  
the clink of spoons  
buzz of conversation  
men at work

\*

Through the heatshocks  
4 mountain bluebirds  
fly toward us, kamikazes  
of color

\*

semilancerata, semilancerata, semilancerata

the wind's white far  
c(r)ows in a stubble field

\*

Car window churches

\*

the deer skull bleached white  
Glacier Lilly growing through  
left eye socket

\*

Dolly Varden spawn  
in the Sand Carrying ceremony  
of Yugyo

\*

Postcards  
in a chrome rack  
spin from  
drugstore  
to the mail sack

\*

the phrase "BUTCHERED HAIR"  
carved in log wall  
of the john

\*

Sun ignites  
the white wall  
drums  
the blue sky

On my knees  
 breaking down a tent-pole -  
 princess pine, spagnum moss, wild  
 lilly-of-the-valley, bracken ferns, pine  
 towering overhead -  
 I bow to such diversity

\*

Cry of Swainson's thrush shatters  
 jet thunder then  
 silence again

\*

Umbels of ideas

\*

a river runs through it all

\*

Ultimate postulants -  
 rock & roll  
 stop & eat  
 get some sleep  
 drive he said

\*

Be still and REALIZE!!  
 the Curlew Cattle Company

\*

the oil, timber, and mining concerns  
 would have us believe  
 in rivers and mountains  
 without end

\*

Video Corral

Lewis and Clark were here

\*

roots cleave  
the song-bones free

\*

Lovely, she,  
at the Mission Mountain Merc  
blond hair, green eyes, smile  
nipples  
stretching green turtleneck out into  
the small space between us

\*

In Helena  
in a store window  
a DeStijl washbasin, white  
with red lip clean orange  
rings

\*

russet mushrooms  
white strawberry blossoms

\*

missile silos piloerect  
on the sage flats near Choteau

\*

growth throws  
concentric whorls

\*

Yoo-hoo Li Po  
the moon again floats on the water  
for us to grab

artichokes at Chico

\*

can't seem to  
get you  
out of  
my mind (life)

actions still  
completed by you  
my sense of it  
creating two

\*

in Helena  
round fan whirls  
in upstairs window  
walking square circles  
for a beer

\*

Horse snorts. Dogs  
flush birds ahead.

\*

sun spokes through the pines

\*

plastic wrappers, styrofoam cups &  
beer cans most common litter along highway

\*

pissing, listening to  
vireos  
top of Evaro Hill

Russulas in a ring  
under the spruce wing

\*

tense white vapor trail  
across blue space  
near the Airforce base

\*

Rolling stones gather no moss  
rolling logs lose their ants

Rolling Stones are all washed up  
rolling logs are washed away

\*

94 degrees in the shade today  
fish won't bite  
lying on this foam pad  
all my energy turned to matter

\*

'to fill, to fill'

\*

voices of creek  
no end to what's in the water

\*

A bad day fishing is better than a good day working

\*

Charybdis, Charybdis  
Charybdis I cry  
if I don't drink Charybdis  
I surely will die

Clearcuts suck

\*

petting  
the dog named Zeena reading  
Gertrude Steena

\*

the ten gallon hat  
cost twenty

\*

Scree slide  
across the creek

Sedimentary slivers and  
slabs of sheared shale

\*

Rock ring  
with a grill on top

bottle caps  
in the tulio box

\*

It's the end of the world as we know it  
and we feel fine

\*

love  
you harbor rage as well

tho night has many lights  
as well



the marlboro man on the billboard  
 stares all day at the shopping mall  
 practicing samadhi

\*

Early July and the arnica leaves already  
 droop

\*

Headline on paper in cafe -  
 "Mine Tailings Kill Thousands of Trout"  
 Slogan on john wall in Libby -  
 "Remember Bo Pahl"  
 Book on the coffee table  
 "For Whom the Bell Tolls"

\*

Fire snaps dry sticks

\*

Form is no other than emptiness  
 emptiness no other than form

\*

I started my campfire  
 with an American flag  
 and called it Art  
 Garfunkle 'cause I was lonely  
 wanted some company  
 up here in the hills  
 so I hummed a few bars of my silence

\*

Sunset Hill  
 Sunrise Basin  
 Avon calling

oro y plata

\*

a kind of singing  
just after the storm  
driving, windows open  
some animal crying out  
against the darkening  
or for its coming

\*

heifers and haute cuisine

\*

Twin Bridges -  
fraternal or genetic?

\*

"moving to Montana soon  
going to be a dental floss tycoon"

\*

The Necklace Lakes  
I hang around your neck  
The Island Lakes  
float in your turquoise eyes

\*

when we kiss under the stars  
the world imperceptibly comes apart

\*

spiculate visions

Dog fights and gun shots  
 across the creek  
 this evening. Lou  
 and Tatsy's friends

\*

the gatha of pine squirrels -  
 wizened eyes  
 and a sharp tongue

\*

earth rising into mountain  
 mountain rising into sky  
 sky falling into valley

\*

April is the Blackbird's month  
 and May the Warbler's  
 Pale dawn  
 and you are in and out of me  
 like air, the curtains yellow,  
 parted

\*

Jewel hail

\*

I come from Montana  
 I wear a bandana

\*

a rose of blood spreads across the sky  
 the sexual heat interrupts dinner

Sign at county fair:  
 "Top Herefords at stud -  
 get entered soon"

\*

Arcurate cloister

\*

Where I am: Sun  
 Green Buzz  
 twitta twee twee  
 nhooooo  
 chi-chi-chi-chi-cheet

\*

Yesterday we saw the blue  
 Yves Klein leapt into

\*

green bottles on the shoulder of the road  
 green bottles with no shoulders on the shelf

\*

Blue aster  
 Dis aster  
 trans and cis aster

\*

the canyon slick between your legs

\*

The violence of love  
 that it could so wake you  
 and so startled you  
 reach for my hands

Thistle grows  
through the empty window  
of an old DeSoto

\*

the water still  
is also cold  
and flees with our reflection

given back  
the sky's embrace  
ancient imprint of our face

\*

Jocko Hollow

\*

I called to her  
crossing the sage in fading purple light  
after much wine and slippery words  
but when she finally heard me  
she could do nothing  
her horse recalcitrant  
her distances misaligned

\*

Circle K's  
plastic sign  
obstructing stars

\*

Nightcrawlers \$1 dozen

\*

a town of 64 decent yolks

another bent aluminum beer can ditched  
in the ditch

rust never sleeps  
aluminum never rusts

\*

Motel motifs

\*

"HEAVEN CAN WAIT  
800 PRIME ACRES FOR SALE"

\*

Objects in mirror  
disappear

\*

Yippee kyi yi yo  
let me kiss yor toe  
Yippe kyi yi yee  
let me lick yor knee

\*

Drummond -  
"Bullshipper's capital of the world"

\*

Big Sky  
Security

\*

Cowshit dark in thawing fields -  
excremental writing

Autumn dogwoods & willows  
along creekbottom  
"bad Russell Chatham"  
says my buddy

\*

Black plastic garbage sack  
snagged on mullein stalk  
blowin in the wind  
flag of the new west

\*

The mother of all rivers

\*

Hysteric point one-half mile ahead

\*

Honey, take some home

### SECTION III



## The Heart

I felt for years that the heart  
was an organ  
but I could not play it -  
too many valves  
and variegations, a complexity of keys and locks,  
complicities.  
Now the music comes easy through an open window  
as my son picks peas  
in the garden, or the thrushes last night  
while fishing. I find  
enough to believe in, to hope for, reach across  
an always impossible distance,  
feel you moving toward me under the crisp sheets,  
sun, like heavy faith, across the bed.

## Sunday Morning

Stayed in bed late after a night of  
dancing to the Big Sky Mudflaps, now  
Verdi's Requiem on the radio  
but nobody's sad, we're wolfing french  
toast, scrambled eggs, coffee, a thousand  
things dangle like spider silk in the thin-air  
sunshine, new snow on the mountains, you  
kiss my neck as Jordan drops gobs of  
eggs on the floor, the cat stretches, yawns  
as if to say there's enough time  
for anything.

The Middle Road  
for Jordan

I walk, singing, you ride on my back,  
sky in your hand  
and out, slippery,  
walking the edge of a ravine, weaving  
in and out under alder  
on a thin path  
of crushed quartzite, cliff cleaving  
pure blue space  
to the left.

Down in the ravine, twisted  
currant thickets, loose  
shale, the scrape  
of sun on rock and thorn. We feel the eyes  
of shadows stare at us, shadow ourselves  
silhouetted against the light  
prussian-blue sky.

I feel the sun, the weight & release  
of the heat of it,  
as surely as I feel your weight  
which I climb into, as we climb.  
You must feel  
the giddiness of weightless sky,  
near flight. The earth rises up  
to greet us each step.  
Earth, sky,  
we walk a simple path between them.  
'The middle road.'  
You wave your hands and yelp  
at crows that circle above us, cawing.  
Here we exist it seems,  
for no more than this, walking in,  
talking to, this world.

## Living in Real Time

Next door the light is on in the living room;  
David sits at the dining room table reading,  
drinking beer. His wife left him  
2 weeks ago, taking their 4 year old daughter  
back to Minnesota. She called  
before she left and talked to Joan of betrayal.  
Then again, 5 days later, to say she'd made it safely  
after driving all night through North Dakota.

The other night out walking the dog,  
I saw him at the same table, crying,  
head buried in his hands. His shoulders heaved  
against the rhythm of reggae music that leaked  
through the windows. "She told me I was  
incapable of love," he told me the next day. "Fuck  
love," he said. "Fuck it. I tried."

The night I saw him crying, I walked further than usual.  
Far enough finally to see empty highway flee  
the sweep of headlights, fields of dark wheat  
heaving in unseen wind,  
stars crashing through the windshield of the car  
where mother drove and daughter slept.  
Stars that hurled on, leaving no light.

## The Fields

When I was a boy  
I stood in the fields of common erasure  
watching the monarch butterflies  
as if under a river of orange and black water  
moving south and there was no end to it  
nor to me until I turned away  
and walked out of the field of waist-high grass  
into the remnants of my mother's voice

## For Mother

It is the body's own hunger  
that fills its lungs with water  
instead of air, that needs this weight  
to bear it down.  
And the air, like breath full of light  
slips away  
through the twin, tall windows,  
through the towering elms. And roots  
grow down through the heart  
to their last thirst. And the heart  
comes to rest like a folded bird.  
And the ripples on the water still.  
And the reflection on the water stills.

## This Bear

This bear slipped into my mind  
as easily as a hand slips  
into a familiar pocket not its  
own and curves around the leg toward  
but can't quite reach  
like mist over bowed saw-grass  
on the morning of the first real heat

her face broad, scooped body rippling muscle  
shimmering copper the color of wire  
I'd strip from old radios as a kid  
and unravel and quit unraveling realizing  
it would take a lifetime to get it all out

## Boy on the Beach

the boy  
in black shorts,  
white sweatshirt holding  
the limp stem of kelp like a snake  
eating its tail  
his arms spread wide  
spinning slowly clockwise around  
and around and the beach  
disappearing in all directions  
into the receding fog



## Walking

on an abandoned logging road  
sunlight splashed like puddles  
in stride to the fragrant song  
of thrushes the revving hum of bees  
splash of the silver creek legs  
in synch swinging out and up  
the gradual climb to a wooden rickety  
lookout where we float on an island  
of glacier lilly and lush bear grass  
in an ocean of boisterous cumuli  
hub in a wheel of hushed mountains  
spinning slowly through the empty blue sky

Vigilance  
for Bill

I'm skiing at dusk as soft clouds  
move in and the air stills,  
tired, having laid down several miles of tracks  
through 15 inches of powder,  
now skiing good slick tracks I've been over 3 times,  
skiing fast, listening to Brian Ferry on the walkman,  
mind wandering from thoughts of family to Desert Storm  
to the Soviet breakup, not lighting on any one thing  
but flitting like a hungry insect -  
technology, simulation theory, ice cream  
drifting in and out of the shushing of the skis,  
thinking about Talk Radio which I saw the night before  
and disturbed me terribly, skiing faster  
in the thick blue light when you visit me in the form  
of a grouse erupting under me, snow exploding  
every which way, wings whoosing air as it flies  
into a dark fir where it sits complaining,  
and I hear your voice in my head saying "Be ever  
vigilant sucker, be ever vigilant!", the hair  
on the back of my neck erect, and a giddy shivering electricity  
rises through my body, crystalizing my face in a perfect smile.

Where the Raspberries Grow  
"desire is full  
of endless distances."  
Robert Hass

It is barely morning sun just breaking  
the crest of the Swans and we  
are miles up a gated logging road talking  
about terrorism, my friend having just read Mao II  
by DeLillo, saying  
that psychologically we cannot escape  
it, it is everywhere,  
everywhere but here I say, the dawn  
like an old friend, and I  
pick a handful of raspberries and give him one.  
They are wild beautiful red, like aggregated rubies,  
each one so potent they remind us of candies  
from France we ate as children,  
packed tight in a tin,  
and he smacks his lips and puckering  
blows me a kiss,  
and we're stopped, bent over picking methodically,  
when overhead a jet catches the glint  
of sun and seems to ignite as he points,  
and we stand watching it fly on  
beyond the explosion we imagined  
no sound yet and then  
the roar of engines backfiring  
through the canyons.

I think of the passengers in that tiny steel cylinder  
staring at magazines, talking, sleeping, each  
with their web of dream and desire,  
their great quiet faith in what burns,  
they don't know where the water is,  
they're as lost as we are in the long run,  
nameless they've entered our lives.  
We've stopped picking berries and stand silent,  
and it's as if everything has stopped  
in the eye of this ubiquitous fear.  
Our human violence, our terror, our dumb love  
like the rhizomes that connect these bushes,  
in some strange way giving birth to each other,  
as the great roar fading into thickening sunlight,  
the passenger's imagined faces still hovering  
like butterflies above the raspberries.

## The Garden

"Well said," replied Candide, "but we must cultivate our garden"

They were romantics, Alice and Joe,  
 moved out  
 from Maryland to 'live off the land.'  
 They believed in a terrible symmetry, in Arcady and  
 the moon, yet craved a simplicity,  
 calling the antipodes day and night, love  
 & hate.  
 Suddenly though, there were more ravens  
 in the trees, and at night they talked  
 of the annihilation  
 of the sun which Alice had read would be inevitable.

The cabin they built  
 of lodgepole pine, pressed a rough cement floor  
 between 2 ridges fanning north  
 from the valley mouth, small knobs actually, tits  
 as Joe liked to call them, though only dust  
 and flakes of rock really, under sparse  
 scrub juniper and bunchgrass.  
 In a bed of logs bleeding amber  
 under goose down, they crushed themselves together  
 to make a child which never came,  
 to make spring,  
 finally to make it work at all.

This land, once swelling in the mind  
 like breasts to the hand,  
 became a convexity of hunger,  
 the very air eroding it all away, this  
 place called home, where only the sky grows  
 in profusion.

And the sky. It empties the windows and the eyes.  
 Joe and Alice still talk of yin & yang,  
 systems of sense, but what allows January  
 wind to rip heat from cracks is blameless.  
 They talk always of leaving,  
 but scrape dry soil with a rake, planting  
 what they will, harvesting what they can.

This First Snow  
in memory of James Wright

This first snow comes in early september, before  
we are ready; flakes almost breaking  
their form to form water,  
yet hesitating, hearing dark winds  
far above earth too thin for light,  
in a matter of minutes whitening the bruised  
colors of this small city,  
the lumbering, peripheral mountains.

It is suddenly quiet.  
Quiet enough to hear the earth breathe,  
the billions of seeds lengthening into their  
temporary oblivion, suspended, safe. Across  
the street a girl has stopped walking  
and is looking up, up into the slow fury  
of the hurling snow. Even from here  
I can see her eyes are closed,  
that she is falling backwards into the sky,  
into the origin of snow, of herself,  
the huge flakes break wet on her warm skin.

## The Painting

At the opening, the attorney stops  
 to consider a painting,  
 pure arctic white, and his female companion  
 whom he has not known long, but known  
 in the 'right way', and who invited him here,  
 asks him what he thinks.  
 And although he has not stopped thinking  
 all day, about a case in which he represents a mother  
 accused of sexually molesting her little boy,  
 he doesn't think when he sees the painting,  
 instead, he sees a white hole in his blue office wall,  
 a rectangular moon,  
 sees under his eyes the dream he had last night,  
 of himself as a little boy  
 on a run-away horse under a white sky.  
 His father chasing the horse, running frantically  
 stumbling over hummocks in the swampy field,  
 and he is laughing wildly, riding farther  
 and farther from his father's grip.  
 But he cannot stop thinking about this case.  
 And he curses silently the chaos of the world  
 that prevents him his perfect machinations.  
 He knows exactly what he needs, a witness who quavers  
 between hilarity and hysteria, a woman  
 early 30's, like Streep, who seduces  
 the jury into their own imbalance,  
 a sacrificial lamb he can deliberately slaughter,  
 driving the jury to pity, and acquittal.  
 He hears muted talk, laughter, sees in front of him  
 a painting that now tells him nothing,  
 and he loves it. Peace in its very lack  
 of information. "How much" he asks?  
 "\$16,000" she answers.  
 "Is that good?"  
 He feels oddly panicked by the question,  
 as if his lack of knowledge has opened a wound,  
 ("Is it good? I don't know. I don't know that.")  
 and his reaction is to want  
 the world to be *his* world, to hang  
 where he can tip it just so much, bring it back,  
 balanced like chords of Bach, poised, sunlit  
 crystal, yet his reaction to Bach is always sorrow.  
 "Is that good?"  
 "It's steep. I think we can bargain  
 with her directly. Ditch the dealer's 60 percent.  
 Get it for maybe eight." She stroked his arm.  
 You like it?"

He sees a blizzard and is walking through it,  
head bowed, streetlight sparking the snow.  
He sees an egg. If life could only be as simple  
and perfect and round and white as an egg.

And he's thinking of eggs then.

Did he need some? Did he eat too many?  
How many things were they in. Foods, women;  
how men tried to reach them, how many things  
hatched out of them.

And he remembered with startling clarity  
the first time he'd helped his mother  
make cookies, how he'd gotten her an egg  
from the refrigerator, and was carrying it back to her  
balanced on the tips of his fingers, and how  
it suddenly tumbled off in out-of-reach slow  
motion to the floor and splattered.

He heard his mother yell "SHIT!" and begin  
to cry for no reason, for no reason  
he could think of, and in the painting he saw  
a tiny vein of blood.

## Memory

He remembers walking at night once late  
holding a bottle  
the sky a wash of stars  
the scrape of gravel the bitter cold  
his head craned back looking up  
a sudden dizziness a giddiness of depth  
as the blanket of sky withdrew  
grew a sudden third dimension  
stars abandoned to black emptiness  
he climbed a barbed-wire fence and sat in the door  
of an old shed the stillness clipped by an owl  
the shimmering clarity of stars through  
the smoke of his cigarette  
he sees how far from town he's walked alone  
what he's left behind and what for  
how he consumes himself  
to produce this isolate light he calls "I"



## Snow Country

for Rick Newby

The snow is very fast. Two inches of cold powder on an icy crust. Fifty yards ahead of me I see your red parka disappear into the trees. Then my skis catch the slope and start to float. I take the S-curve through the fir staying in your tracks, the shift of weight as I cut the turns, and I'm in there, on top. Then it opens up and the bottom drops away. I'm in the sky, the closest I've come to flying. Blue air. Above the roar I hear Katrina's voice pound in my head. "Don't fight it. Lose your control. Let it go."

Here in the snow country we watch out for each other. Carol and Jessie take care of the angora rabbits, the goats, llamas, and our malemute Al. Keep a fire going so the plants don't freeze. Steve picks up the mail. Others ask if there is anything they can do. Kirby drives us in his old dodge truck with the radio eternally tuned to C&W. Returning from Spokane, I think of them all and thank them silently. Clouds obliterate the mountains. We pass white fields just coming to light, cut square from dense lodgepole that cover the valley floor. Split rail fences and horses huddled head to rump. The tests were conclusive, the bone marrow transplant failed. This doctor, Erlington, a young guy with a permanent tan, pulled me aside in the hall. 4 months at the most. He holds my arm for a moment then walks away. The highway is snowpacked, chitinous in the wavering headlights. Three crows fly low over it

looking for carrion. Snowbanks 8 feet high. Kirby sucks on an unfiltered camel and squints into the fading night. Tire chains slap the wheelwells. No one talks. Huge flakes begin to fall as we reach the Goat Creek turnoff and the one wiper that works squeaks into action. Almost home. Katrina begins stirring on the bumpy road, her blond hair thrown back, her thin face peaceful. As I watch her she opens her eyes, stretches, and softly begins to sing along with the radio. A nameless country song. Her throat thrusts slightly forward, trembles, catches the light of the dash. Her voice is so clear it startles me. I look over her head at Kirby who meets my eyes and smiles faintly, sad & sweet. In this way we enter another day.

Here in the near dusk on our down quilt Katrina softly scrapes my chest with her nails and whispers in my ear. She is leaving soon she says. When, I ask? Soon, she says. Overcome with sorrow I shiver in her arms. We have been over it and over it. To her, it is a matter of will. Be brave, she says, I will visit. In the night coyotes come within 100 yards of the house, floundering in deep snow. They howl at the sliver of moon which slides in and out of the fast-moving clouds. Al picks up their song.

Although our country is known for snow, this year is an exception. The first flakes fell on August 28th and didn't stop. 21" by Thanksgiving. It is now December 18th and almost 4 feet have fallen. Snow clogs the fir and silences the sky. Closes us down, returns us to intimate space lit by candle, kerosene, propane. When I reach for Katrina in the long night, under the heavy covers, an emptiness, a slight depression where she lay, is all I find. Instantly awake, I sit

up, see her, unaware, staring out the window into the radiant moon reflected off perfect snow. So thin her clothes seem to hang from her like cloth from a tree. Her body is a hole in the light, a shadow.

I crack ice with an axe, dip the pan, and carry it into the cabin. Icy water from a metal cup reminds us this life stings with clarity. The Swan peaks are immediate, so clear Katrina says they're right here in the room with us. They move in and out of us like air. Her hand is hot in mine as we stand watching the sun fall behind them. At night when I am inside her I confuse our movement with the soft shushing of skis. I see the tracks shine behind us. The light in the holes the poles leave is blue.

At night the wind howls in the stovepipe and fine snow rakes the windows. Katrina's fever is unremitant now, a new symptom. Smoke rises lazily from a bay leaf candle which flickers on a book she was reading. Unable to sleep, I watch shadows turn to memories on the log wall. Watch them fade into the soft shudder of her breath. Her sudden coughing like someone shaking a gourd. The next morning she is baking blueberry muffins and singing. I am filled with joy to see her like this. I put my arms around her from behind and we stand holding each other. So thin, she is becoming air. Our 12th winter together.

In dream we ski at dusk. Katrina's tracks are illuminated ahead of me. I watch her powerful thigh and ass muscles compress, spring open in perfect 1/2 rhythm. She disappears ahead of me over a small rise. I ski faster, desperately trying to catch her but when I top the rise she is gone. Dusk closes in fast with

the north wind and I sense fear. I yell her name over and over but it is torn from me by the wind. Then I realize the tracks will always lead me to her. I wake laughing, joyous. The bed is soaked from her sweat. I get up and go outside. Shining a flashlight up into the snow I watch it hurl down like a meteor shower, let it bury me in disorientation. Biting black cold, no wind. I feel Katrina's heat begin to fade. In the Snow Country we come to know death intimately. No different than sleep, its dreams are the same. Its season never changes. It seems the reason for our lives.

Sun after 4 days of snow. Everything glistens. Bran waffles smothered in maple syrup for breakfast. Norm stops by and has coffee. We listen to some jazz. Talk. It is like always. A flock of chickadees in the alder outside the window scatters. Days go by and Katrina doesn't leave the bed. When my tears fall on her bare back she wakes, asks if it is raining. Is it spring yet, she asks?

In the Snow Country we are like family. Bonnie uses the horses and Norm keeps a spotlight on the ski tracks. Ernie, Alec, Ralph Townsend, Carol and others use skis. The rest wade through waist deep snow in the wake of the horses. We know what we know but also what we must do. With unbelievable strength Katrina has climbed the south face behind the cabin to the ridge, climbed the ridge until trees thin out and the steepness of the slope stops us. An avalanche chute breaks off on the left and plunges 2,000 yards to where it cliffs 170 feet above the river. Sky and stars, dwarf fir buried in snow. Norm turns the spotlight off and we watch her tracks cross the bowl, then veer sharply, dropping straight into moonlight.