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Directed by: Dr. Robert Watson. Pp. 50

The forty poems arranged in this collection were all written within a two year period roughly corresponding to the lapse of time between the Eves of Allhallowmas of 1974 and 1976. The scheme of things is such that nothing of much importance is lost in opening the book at random.

BETWEEN THE EVES OF ALLHALLOWMAS

by

Robert Timothy Nash

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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in Partial Fulfillment
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Approved by

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APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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I

"Who alive can say,
'Thow art no Poet--may'st not tell thy dreams'?"
- John Keats

The Corner-step Pumpkin: 1974

The orange glow belonged in the night,
threw the children's flickering darkness
wildly on the lawns,
how strangely transfigured they were,
the children, one would not know them,
laughing in the orange shadows
of another life.

The three-cornered fire of his eyes
watched them closely,
how their gestures were oddly modified,
their eyes wide-eyed
and alert, and their movements overall
a little less expected.
How unforeseen it all was
in the tiger-striped darkness.

Now, on the November side of the evening,
in the coldest part of the morning,
the night is burning away, burning
like the last of the tallow masks
in a wax museum burning.
You can hear it,
you can smell the fading spirit
rise as on bat wings
and scrawl westward
where the children's foreign sounds
still rise unfiltered,
while here, in bed, in sleep,
the children we knew are coming back to us.
You can almost recognize them now.

His five-cornered ears have heard
their footsteps and they were his,
yet, in the vague stages of the morning,
under the first grey hints of Allhallowmas,
his flickering eyes grow hollow and dim;
his insides, scorched; his sharp smile, thin;
his dark beauty, in the fading spirit
rising on burnt wings in a burnt-orange world.
His hat caves in.
With his powerful silence
he takes one last swipe
at the night
and goes out,
and the children awake.

On a Blind Man Blind From Birth

Colors are strange, mysterious words,
and their magical meaning lies closed to him.
He guesses at them, as we guess
at each other's hearts, and will pass
his whole life and never know
that shadows grow at twilight
but by the sudden coolness.
Nor has he seen the picture of things,
nor their transparency, nor the moon,
nor the way it hangs in the morning sky
and is consumed, nor a gesture,
nor a smile--yet he gestures,
yet he smiles--nor our eyes,
nor his own face.

At times, I imagine, he stares
into the noonday sun and imagines
what it is we dare not look at,
and, I fancy, has begun to understand
its brightness by its warmth,
to know transparency by its texture
and twilight by its sound ... nor
the leaves falling, nor the way
a person glides between chairs in a room.

He too dreams dreams, dreams that have
a stuff about them that can
be measured, but lie completely closed
to me, composed of other sights.
This visual vocabulary is lost
to him, and none of us can write for him,
can plumb that language learned or lost
at birth. Yet he listens and is not blind
in his listening. He hears the sound
of these words and the way they lap
upon the poet's shore, and his guesses
come closest at times. His visions
ring clear. Unaware, he too
can lead a person across the darkness.

Grey Days

First Day

On such a day
one sort of floats
like the trees float
unattached from the sun,
like the rocks
float.
One keeps one's eye on them
for on such a day
no shadows hold them down.

On such a day
everything just sort of is
what it is. The broken bottle in the creek
is a broken bottle still, still it may,
on such a day, float away unnoticed,
leaving only our eyes there
and a little space to wonder in.
That is the essential element--
the floating qualities of these days.

One's thoughts sort of float
without edges
and follow the creeks
that hold the city
aesthetically together,
like nets hold cargo
once hoisted in the air.
There is no sparkle,
thank god there is no sparkle.

Second and Third Day

He gets up
and goes about his business
and then goes back to bed,
and wakes up
and, if it's again grey,
gets up, goes about his business
and then goes back to bed.
There is no sparkle,
if only there were sparkle.

Fourth Day

When the day floats in
like the fog over the water,
when one walks along the creek
as along a pier that disappears
a few feet in front of you,
a few feet behind,
you never can be quite certain
whether you got up that day
or just dreamt you did.

And if one got up,
and one will assume
you did, because so much
has to be assumed
on these days,
because it is as possible
to float into the grey
as to drift into the fog
and be gone.

Fifth Day

Assume you guided a canoe
out onto the inlet, in the quiet currents
the creeks flow from,
and it was just such a day,
and the fog over the grey water
was like the clouds under the grey sky,
and suddenly you had trouble
deciding which it was you were, the "one,"
the "he," or the "you" you'd been thinking through,

and you wondered if
without paying attention
you had begun floating away,
and one wouldn't know,
because on such a day
even the trees can float.
So for all he knew he was looking down
at the clouds and up at the fog.
See what I mean, how easy it is.

Sixth Day

And then you go back to bed
and wake up and, if it's again grey,
well what's to be done
but to go about one's business
as though this were normal
when one knows it's not,
when he may have been floating
all day yesterday, and if he was
whose to say where you are today?

That is why it is so important
to keep one's eye on the rocks from the beginning:
that is also why it is so unimportant.
And so you smile
and go his grey way
while the sparkling world seems
unaware of the floating
and the importance floating has
for grey days.

Van Gogh's "Sunflowers"

Vincent,
And so you sign your name in blue upon a yellow vase,
And so our lives are altered by the truth you'd have us face

Which lies beyond these golden flowers you've arranged before our eyes,
And beyond the frenzied poses that they take before they die.

Here, in orange, and gold, and green, is all the life that I have seen
In portraits where your hand has traced red whiskers on a changing face.

Here is one caught by surprise, her petals falling in her eyes;
And there, another, halfway hidden, creating all his heart contrives;

And still another braves the wind, looking onward ever onward;
And one other, shy and timid, looking inward ever inward;

Here I see your helpless eye between the flowers that have died;
And a couple, downward turning, contemplating suicide.

Beyond the realms of right and wrong, the narrow realms where I am strong,
In night cafes, on starry nights, I've often heard your lonely song

And wept, and seen these weary faces against a yellow wall,
And their vibrant petals vital colors bright before the fall:

Each new time I view these woven hues, these old and lidless eyes,
I recall that all my gathered strength was not without its price.

Oh, loving eyes, and lonely eyes, and empty chairs in cluttered rooms,
Weary eyes, and worried eyes, and weavers weaving at their looms;

Irises, and cypresses, and dancing trunks of olive trees,
Fishing boats, and peasant girls, and wheat fields in a whirling breeze.

In each deliberate stroke is seen your mind creating to be free,
And something of each painful hour in the careful placement of each flower

To give them such a tousled look, as though you'd cast them unconcerned
Into a pot, and then forgot all the conventions you had learned--

As though the sun could saw its way behind a purple hill again,
As though the clouds were blue as wind and both more tangible than men
And so they are.

Who else has seen, in red and yellow, shadows tone a hat rim so,
Or the sun a circle spinning, or silver lamplight's broken glow,

Or vivid yellow backdrops, or how the grasses seem to flow
Like rivers to a world below, which we would sail with you,
Van Gogh.

The Palace Garden

This tranquil garden of colorful flowers,
willows loosing their hair in the willowy breeze
of the falls, and both cascading, one down water,
one down leaves.
The fountains
flowing over into larger fountains overflowing
into quiet pools, which black swans sleep on,
their beaks in their wings, all a summer's day.
The water, so blue and clear, like a child's eye
in the bright, yellow light of day,
and there is just such a peace, and so much of it,
that drugged with it we leave our armour
at the gates to ramble along these opulent lawns
between the red and white, whirling rows of roses.

Was there ever conquest with its smell
of carnage, with its harsh concussions?
Were there ever men who relinquished
these ivies and lilies, and for what,
to be right? At what price sole ownership!
Never were there wars here, never harmful hatreds,
and the unknown architect of these royal walks
fiddled with his balance to make it fine,
to find room for all these uncompeting forms
of life, like the squirrels whose tails,
longer than they are, seem to float upon the air.

All life
knows the limits of these garden walls,
and knows it needs no answers here,
yet lately, it seems, we visit
fewer walkways upon our fewer visits,
yet we all, all our young lives, tasted this air
in silent walks among these flowers
and quixotic climbing vines, over the arched bridge
above the stream, along the cliff path
behind the falls, thinking nothing of each other
but each other's happiness. But now,
guarded and growing older, we acknowledge
the false arguments of our times,
and the flowers go untended, and the hedgerows
rise up into interwoven labyrinths,
and our only hope of wings are words
to break their tyranny of words,
to bring us back to where it all still is
as we silently remember.

Things We Have In Common

Car lights coming on at twilight;
lights flashing yellow at midnight;
light rains that clear the air of its dust
and heat as though it were a slate swept clean,
as though our whole lives, up till this very second,
were a child's drawing slate, and we,
with a simple movement from either hand,
might lift the sheet and make
all the markings magically vanish.
Light rains through which up climbs the scent
of gravel dust, a sign, a rainbow.
The list is endless, but if we were to look
for truth in the things we have in common,
where could we look? What do we know of
we could sound to its depths or follow
down a tunnel to its end and not feel
it was all a trick or a lie played upon our minds
by our minds? If we were to drop a stone
down a bottomless well and listen,
what would we hear? Oh, metaphors! metaphors!
there are no tunnels here, no wells, no place
we might wait expectantly for a sound
we will never hear! The empty churches, maybe,
but when they're full, like a paradox
something's lost. Oh, so much pain
in the stained glass and the stations of the cross,
we might have looked for meaning there ....
Perhaps then, instead, we might
wrap our hands around the cold rail
of a metal bridge again, and look down
at the colder river and the river lights
that seem a swarm of fireflies this winter's evening,
or become so entranced in the shifting color
that we forget the lights and the river
and hold onto that color for all we're worth,
for all we're worth.

The Cabooseman

Sitting in his great bay window,
Rolling by at right angles to the endless streets
Of concrete, straight as eyesight,
Between Gary and Chicago, Jersey and New York,
He glides passed, riding
The silver beam of light in
Through the back door of the large cities,
And hears and sees nothing of metal,
Only waves to the children going by at sixty
Who run from their houses as though on fire to see him
Waving back to them.

Out of the darkness and into the darkness
They run, but for this brief interchange,
Yet he doesn't let them go so easily
But points out things they should know,
Extending his hand invisibly through the window
And miles into the jungles they see
When the lights switch off.

He places his fair hand firmly in theirs
Guiding them out to their furthest point
From where he points out further
To where the leopards are,
And where the leopards are not,
So that, solitary explorers that they are,
That they may one day be, they might tell
Black leopards from the darkness by the purple
In their coats.

Ice Storms

The town is enclosed in a cold distance.
It is a dream picked out of the night
and carried into a room:
seeds sealed in glass wombs;
sharp drops of glitter crashing through the air;
silver edges everywhere.
The wind leaves blue paths where it's been
and locks every berry in a glass eye--
you can see into them, and around them
this blue transparency, there is everywhere
this barrier. You can close your eyes
and hold them in your mind, but always
this cold distance,
light years rolled into a small ball around them.

It is our helplessness
and their helplessness,
and this clear tomb in which, in stillness,
we see them, clawing at the walls
within this coma that enwraps them.
If only we could do something other
and more than, into and out of our shoes,
pacing within the patterns
of the corridor's floor waiting;
if only with faith our fingers might reach within them,
and warming them heal them,
then together we might laugh and talk of berries,
but ah, such dreams,
they're really very rare.

The Khmer Rouge: Occasioned by the Forced Resignation
of Prince Sihanouk.

Record, O Lord, the facts of this grim fiction
And its illiterate authors, bleak bands
Schooled in a brutal trade, with bloodied hands
Studying lethal laws of mass constriction,
Tactics whereby they still the learned man's diction
And clear the crowded wards, with steel commands
Driving both bright and pale to work the lands,
No more, O Lord, allow this cruel infliction!
Still, reports leak in--such a mindless weaning
Of life from hope! Though times are deaf and dim,
And we live content in this monochrome
Of twilight where the word has lost its meaning,
Note well, O Lord, all who, unconcerned, skim
These sparse articles on the safe rail home.

Subway In Spring

How could it have happened? The doors were shut,
the subway's lonely windows tightly closed.
But for this, the ride resembled any other.
The noises contained an established amount
of hammers and wrenches. As always the battered cars
were racked from side to side: from side to side,
standing commuters swayed, as though, to get it right,
over and over they practiced these dance steps together.
The lights shorted at the same junctions:
at the accustomed stations, the cars stopped.
People stared alike at the same unjust headlines
and settled their gaze on the colorless tiles.
The subway slid out of the hole
and into the failing daylight, as usual:
as usual, our eyes adjusted, poorly at first,
to this fugitive light and a far-sighted view
of the city rushing away from us.
And it all was as it always had been,
so how did this happen? The doors were shut,
the subway's lonely windows tightly closed.
How pervade the riveted privacy of the sheet metal?
It must have passed through the web-like splinters
of the window's cracks; see, the glass mirrors
an old lady with a plastic flower in her hat.
It must have squeezed between the stuffed odors
of the ripped seats, odors of oils and engines,
of cigars in yellow mouths and smoke in yellow eyes.
No one even knew what early spring scent it was,
whether of grass, or flower, or fruit blossom,
yet it had come, and against our collective will,
like a child's blind smile, offering pain, and then passing.

Marooned

Twilight--that maroon-shaded soberness
at the end of the day
with its lost amounts of grey
wandering into the room
with the dry odor of leaves.
I have seen lips that color,
and wine;
I have seen old people sitting
in their old lives beside a window,
the maroon light
unnoticeable almost in its incipience
along the central folds of their gowns,
finding its lost way into their hair
and hands, taking the places
of the shadows in their faces,
and finally, into their eyes stealing.
And I wondered if things
could only be as beautiful
as they were sad,
for she became one with the color
of the twilight--as a person
becomes one with the fog
as they walk away--
and it was only then that I saw her.
Such a world in a word, maroon,
that its meaning becomes its color,
its color its meaning,
and each can be seen
only in the other.

There Are Many Angry Voices

There are many angry voices,
let mine not be one of them;
what can be said one way
may be said as well another:
you can hear the pigeons asleep in the chimney.
All night it is quiet.
So what if we cannot get beyond our fear,
it is safest that way.
The busses come to rest next door
hidden in a square block
among old streets.
It is not so bad,
the cold.
Someday we will glance back and be grateful.
We will talk about this.
We will sit down, you and I, in wealthier times,
and remember what we've lost,
like the noises in the night:
think of a tree
creaking
in a large wind, the whole house
that way,
almost alive,
the wind pressing on the outer walls,
you can hear it,
prying at the window, the small sounds
that pass for footsteps.
In the early morning
the mechanic runs from bus to bus
starting each up for the day
that is just beginning.
We look beyond the burglar-proof bars of our window
and see their exhaust
meet overhead
in the winter cold.
Through another night.

The Water, So Lovely

The water, so lovely,
the pond, calm and priceless,
that too is illusion,
as true as it seems
it has not the gemstone's green
I see within;
nor the yellow marbles
of the fountain's peaks, yellow.
The elegant shadow
of the metalwork seat
is not stone-inlay
in the patio slate,
nor the coral designs
of the goldfish, coral.
All these vivid, now blurring,
all these myriad,
all these lush, full summer hues
are but a ray
of varying length.
The yellow diamonds
of the fountain's plash,
are not yellow, do not plash,
nor do the stiff reeds
through the southern breeze
send a wishful sound.
The patio slate
is not a violet storm
with gray rain, as much
as I would have it so,
as much as I would whirl
its splattered veins
into a fiery storm
on an unnamed sea,
and there, forever missing,
forever remain.

Starlings

Through the anchorless hours of the afternoon,
Carless and adrift, I half heard, half sensed
Their black wings whirring on the darker reaches
Of the evening, and half saw, half felt
The lakes congealing edges creeping out here
From the shore, while, wholly, I remembered,
Half wishing to forget, through the last wintry
Surges into autumn still remaining:
Morning glories' mourning blue at dusk. But now,
As to shadow my thoughts, hemmed by the night
And the North wind, south-southwest starlings fly,
Robbing the silence with soulless cries.
And hope, what is left, like a wheel reeling
Forward, backspins slowly into night.

A Prayer

Sadness comes without a face
and shakes our baseless lives,
like the wind shakes the color
from the maples, and all that
nameless beauty falling, in silence
dissolving like snowflakes in a stream.
And sighs, innermost and almost
forgotten, with no more reason for being
than life, arise in the timelessness it takes
to find our time and not fall
from grace, and so to you I sing,
goddess of the autumn fields,
goddess of these cotton seeds
that lift themselves and flee from me.

Schoenberg: Imagined as a Young Boy

He must have known a sacred place to compose in,
And kept it secret, off alone in some
Remote corner of the winter quarters,
And there felt safe to raise dark towers
On the hoary steppes of silence undisturbed,
Hammering shapes in the night that would last.

On a rock foundation of lower strings,
He would build the walls out of sturdy brass,
Emblazon arms with a cymbal crash,
And bar the door with the trumpet blast
That barbed the windows too, and locked within
The golden strands of the violin. Then,

Wrapping all in the fog of the prowling organ,
He started the piccolos marching;
Across the bleak plain, against indomitable odds,
The little orchestra came, waged, and conquered,
And the violin and flute followed each other
In frolicksome sport out on the verdurous lawns

Where the fog had vanished, and the barbs to tracery
Had suddenly changed, and they watched, as did we,
As the morning star literally faded away.
Then he, like any boy who ever sped
Through icy streets to a man-sized job
Completed before daybreak, climbed back into bed.

Someday On That Far Cliff From Now

Someday, on that far cliff from now
where the finish line is strung, towards which we all raced,
at which I then hesitate, having passed
the baton already on to my children,
and looking down know the dark water bursting
by its sound, by its dark sound
know the dark crags;
when, perforced, putting on spectacles to make sense
of the blurry lines I so easily write now,
I will read the fragments below and remember
the well-lit places in which we lived,
in contrast. For I will carry the whole of sadness
more than the years sum up to, when simple names bring
not one but many faces, and many forgotten, and all gone
to where butterflies fly to in winter.
I will whisper that line,
"to where butterflies fly to in winter,"
such a quick line, so light and quiet,
one can almost hear the flutter by one's ear.
And rereading, read on: "and all gone
to where butterflies fly to in winter,
the where of which no one knows
but the falling leaves and only when they're falling,
when they think, growing beautiful,
they might take flight and become butterflies,
and a few of them do--I have seen
two leaves, in the falling, turn
in the distance, like two wings taking lightly
to air. Ah, who would ever care to live flutterlessly!"
Have I the right to read silently on?
Have I the time? I see these lines,
could I but hear them!
"When you are old, O soul,
and growing whole and beautiful,
leaving the heavy summers behind
like garments, having left them so, in the month
when the leaves take flight, take flight
and like them fly away!"

To Sense the First Frost

Sometimes
life itself,
with the four walls
we have erected around
the part of it
we wish to keep,
is enough.
As for the rest of it,
it lies somewhere
beyond the windows
the indoor flowers forget are there,
pushing their green way
almost through them.
The insects coming in off a gale
believe they have hit something invisible,
like a wall of air,
before dropping into death:
at twilight their tread-like legs
touch warmth
they will never reach.
They sense the first frost
and all it means:
we turn our lights on
and lose them in reflection.
This can be enough:
this cannot be enough:
this can be enough ...

The Sleep of the Goldfish

I have allowed myself the luxury of a patio chair,
and a cup of coffee, the shadows in the shallow pond
and an hour in which to watch them,
and the coral reflections of goldfish--
I have allowed my thought
the freedom to float with them,
or with them, unbothered, wander through the water,
so happy in themselves they seemed,
and happy in each other, and I
like them, once so happy and at home so often, here,
in the easy love of looking,
borrowing my sadness freely from the sadness that I saw.
I have allowed myself this luxury,
this freedom to be passive,
to invoke the calm pond and the setting that it mirrors,
and not to break the clear trust between us,
knowing how easily it is broken, like the sleep of the goldfish,
how easily stirred like the water into doubts.

A Lasting Calm

One more twilight, peaceful;
One more tranquil sunset;
One more goodnight, cloudless;
Nothing grandioso;

No horizon fire-storm
Up-flaring in the west;
No up-lifting windflaw
To agitate the rest;

No unrully wildlife;
Nothing complicating;
Just the yellow, holding,
Then the golden waning;

One more lake, green, shield-like,
The winds do not assault:
Oh, that a lasting calm
Must be so difficult!

II

Spinning

It was not planned,
you did not see it coming,
it was not yellow
or a rapid succession of notes,
it was not a leaf
or the scratching of that leaf
through the air,
yet it was,
as though you were spinning so fast
you quit spinning
or thought you did,
and to everyone else
you were not spinning
yet spectral, somehow.
You were spinning
and in your spinning
you caught up with time
and saw it, and it was motionless
as you were motionless
yet everyone was growing older
yet you were free of this
as long as you kept spinning
and then you saw
that the earth was also spinning
with time
only slower
so that time fell into seasons
and you saw its spin as a circle
and also saw the circle of yourself
and all else all spinning
all forming a much larger circle
spinning
and everyone around you
spinning
but much slower
and you saw that
though you were solid yet seemingly insolid
they were insolid yet seemingly solid
if you looked exclusively at them,
and when you looked at them this way
you forgot you were spinning
and then you were slowing down
and time was suddenly ahead of you
and as suddenly as that
it was over.

Begin slowly
and distinctly.

With the line
the above line
is on, slowly
increase the
tempo until

this line. Rapidly
slow down until,
more slowly than
the beginning, and
more distinctly,
you end.

All Week I Have Walked

All week I have walked
looking for the poem to be found out here
in a combination of steps,
like in a stone a piece of sculpture,
and yet, like the butterfly,
it but colors the air
and is gone.
I have walked all week
and all these houses, these streets
are, after all, so beautiful,
that I wonder at my sadness,
still I have my sadness
as the clouds have their gray
and inexorable faces.
I turn a corner like any corner
in any town, with its stop signs
and corner lots, with its streets
going off toward the castles
of the four winds,
I turn a corner
and am a different person
than I have ever been, around another,
that person fades with all the others
and all I might have been--
oh you, who passed on the other side
of the window a lifetime away,
how could I shout out!

I turn a corner
and see things I have never seen,
though I have walked here all my life,
and not so long ago, in fear.
I had fantasies, then,
to protect me from the lions
who waited by the back door--
their last chance to catch me
coming in from the garage--
and the Blacks who hung-out
under street lights
just around the bend, turning me
always back--they would have slit my throat
if I wasn't so formidable--
turning me always back.
But I make that turn
and suddenly there are no back doors;
they have vanished and so have the lions,
those Blacks, all buried with my parents

who are, after all, still living.
Fortified in the prison of my fantasies,
I was inarguably right.
Now I am as wrong as the next person.
Oh, what is this I am trying to say!
I guess, simply, that I no longer believe
what I've been taught to say,
and yet I find myself
still saying it,
still living in the same old streets
I have left for the last time
so many times.

There is a poem here
if I can find it,
if I can narrow it down,
if I can nail down the motion
of its wings.
This is where the butterflies are;
where one finds oneself shattering
with the slightest passing sound.

Administering to the Minister

If I could write a poem about pansies
that would be about pansies
and yet not about them,
and yet could never be published
in a bulletin or hung on the wall
of a study,
then I could convince you that I do
understand. No, rather,
if I could get you to see
that I don't understand how I do
understand; if I could give you my legs
to walk with and lie in your bed
for only a year--if I could do just that,
in that bed where you lay,
where you are still lying, ministering to all
who in their suffering can walk up to you;
if I could put your tears in my eyes
and let them fall and follow them down
through the bed, through the floor, down
through the miles, the miles, down, down,
if I could float down to that place
you have always walked, where you are still
walking, and shout out: "Look, Friend,
I am here! I am actually here!"
And taking your hand, close it
around my wrist so you might know
I was there, so you might feel the pulse,
even though it might be only your own
coming through to you through your fingers,
but it wouldn't matter because there would be pulse.
If I could do just that
then you might see that I do understand,
that I can write a poem about pansies
that is about pansies
and yet not about them.

Pigeons

I see them flapping
and the spaces between them
oscillating as they fly suddenly away,
as they turn upward toward roof tiles
where they again become silent.

They do not understand
why they do not look for food as frequently,
why they are less inclined
to clamor out from under our feet
or fly off en masse
as we approach, delicately,
that we might not disturb them.

They do not understand
that vote has been taken
around a conference table.
They just stare,
it seems, at nothing,
as they crowd wing to wing
along the wire and wait,
as though it did not matter
whether they waited or not.
They just know that lately
it is best to remain as still as possible.

"It is the food," I would tell them,
"We are poisoning the food,"
but they would not hear me;
they only hear what I am doing
deep within them.
I hold out my hand
and they take from it.

They do not understand
why their colors are fading into greys
or their feathers are floating down
through the air like handfuls of hair.
They do not sense the danger
as being out there
nor do they know,
as they do when fall appears,
that it is the time to move on.

Fountain Seen In Slow Motion

Golden water globules extend upward,
in turn, into an area
all to themselves, into an area
in which they reach a momentary balance
between the compelling-repelling pressures
of the power behind them
with gravity.
It is a form of perfection,
all alone suspended
in the not quite crystalized sphere of themselves,
until, and then, picking up speed,
headlong hurdling downward through generations
of water
into a place without distinctions.

Another time,
thrown again into existance,
a part of them may reach upward,
may again rise up in blue and fall back
in green, rise up in blue till blue
and green become a blue-green mystery
of water, free of the rising,
the falling, and the lights revolving
through their spectrum.

Between Friends

Part collie, certainly, and part spaniel,
cocker spaniel, and collarless,
and as I lowered my palm he cowered
and begged forgiveness for outrageous
not his own. He had known the knuckle-side
of human hands, certainly, but beyond them
came to know me, in the sun-warm winter afternoon
we spent, content to keep my lonely company
on a mountain pass. He would lag back
then skirt off through crisp leaves, chasing sounds
I but imagined. Were they phantoms, too?
At twilight, the light brilliant on his regal coat,
he trotted beside me, then with me waited
while the last rays burned on the auburn fields.
I watched, in silence, till the mountains
in black silhouette turned suddenly blue,
then, through the wind, heard the hunger
I had not satisfied and turned homeward.
Out front, as though leading, he followed me.
Continually, I turned him back, still
he tagged behind and waited by my latched door.
Half the freezing night he waited
and was silent while the winds howled
and the brittle trees creaked, silent and still,
in the same spot curled, and not a scent
in the wind of food. Half the brutal night!
but in the morning was gone. It is better.
Let him scratch out a wooded existance
in the cold, sparse winter. I return
to the cubicaled city soon, and there
will bear memory of that overlarge
golden-brown stare and the yellow-gold hair
on his lean cheeks. It is better.
He cannot know why. I turned him away
knowing neither will I, when finding myself
at someone's door someday and out of love
am turned away.

Two August Evenings

1.
The evening slipped beyond the sphere of human speech
and looked back on us looking out of the inside of
our words,
then, planting its absence in the air,
flew away with the roofs that flew away with the birds
through the blue overshadows of the late afternoon.

2.
With the fog coming in
And twilight coming on,
Like islands the lowlands are drifting away.
All the blue's all but lost in the green,
And the green's all but lost in the grey,
And like islands the uplands are drifting away.
With the fog coming in
And twilight coming on,
The silent are lost in their song.

A Hold on the Stars

At that hour before the shadow of winter
falls about the trees, and the best of autumn
is still within the pear about to fall,
how the red of the leaves leans toward
the yellow, and the yellow the red,
when we blur our eyes and see them
burning up the world. How they beat the air orange
along the bridges, or on the rails and under the bridges,
along the creeks, within and beyond the creeks,
and yet, beyond the conflagration, how a leaf
can fall and with its soundless music
disturb the landscape in a pool. We must fall
with the leaf, we must grow silent and listen
with the crickets, we must remain always aware.

Sleep is a blessing and not a death
for there is hope in the deepest slumber,
and even in the dreamless cold, we dream
as the trees dream in the desolate poses
of their old forms. There is warmth in that
when the leaves have burnt and the fuelless night
lies full of stars. There is hope when the trees
can slumber through the clean light
of the large sun and trust that,
at the tips of their branches, life will untwist
again.

We who, from the forefront, thrust forward,
who have it within us to remain ever awake
through the troublous winters, we who maintain
a hold on the stars in the dreamless cold
of the sky, hold a piece of a dream
beyond all dreams. That we may find
those stars, however dim, when we pierce the cold
that lies as widely within, let us fall
with the leaves, grow silent and listen
with the cricket, and in that listening,
remain always painfully aware.

The Lake Front

Even the mountains are leveled in time,
the bluffs slide down to the calm seas,
and the continents drift.
The cliffs etch out their faces
from the shifting earth,
then, by the gentle rains, are blunted;
their splintered corners smoothed
by the cold streams.
Even the great lake before me this night,
and the city behind, this ragged ledge
and the jutting catches, the clouds
and the moon, the stars, the stars, all these!
even these, in time.
The hunger of the North wind is fed by night
in the inner-cave darkness of the great lake
and there matures, devouring itself
as it races toward the shore.
Even now the soul feels
the mounting pressure of the silence
and the fearful kinship drawing nearer.
It will not be long before its savage blasts
ravage this fallowing land. And when it does,
when the wind breaks against this cliff
like a mighty wave, will soul
join those famished forces
or remain within the sane bounds
of this aging body for a fistful of years.

The Stranger

Over the roofs of the sleeping houses,
when the night lays open its timelessness
and I think I recognize it,
and feel at ease looking up
under street lamps
as snowflakes fall out of the darkness
and snow dunes drift
along the wide and vacant streets,
when a dog's stray bark comes singly
or in threes
followed by intervals that cannot be filled,
and a train whistle blows
but from where I cannot tell,
like an image
searching through pasts for its origin,
when only the tinkling of chains remains
of the distant clash of rail cars
being pulled and pushed along,
an alley cat sends the helpless cry of a child
all the way here to me
where, like never before,
I recognize my voice in it and think
of the stranger here with me tonight,
the one I thought I knew so well.

Subways

When we return here
(and we return here every morning)
in the routine of arriving on time,
it is a returning to a beginning stage
we never pass through.
I think that is felt by most of us
as we stare at the squares
of the subway floor we have captured
between our feet, as if they were ours
alone by way of the unspoken code
of the black sun, as it shines forth
and leads us into a darkness
that has nothing to do with nighttime.
It is in all of our eyes some of the time,
and we seldom see beyond what we look at;
still, our feet make their way home
and into the bathroom after work
where we wash the city from our hands
and settle down to this moment of release
when the late light rests in blue
on transparent curtains.
In this stillness we come close
to remembering that our mornings
are over forever, and our afternoons
are being spent for us, and afterlife ...
after life ... yes, we believe in God.
We have always believed in God!
Nevertheless, the subway takes us
in and out of darkness, and we
are afraid sometimes, for we know
a subway is skimming across the water
shrouded in a hue only we will see
at the last, alone, as the doors open,
and out of habit, we rush down
the last steps and into an empty car
that closes behind us and jerks
terrifyingly away.

Poetry

Ah, Poetry,
the multitudes your sound of soft wings
could never comfort, those who
through distance implacable
we become closest to,
who've grown wary-eyed rightfully
with the weight of much suffering.
We scream to them in your silence!
Are they right? Do only birds
have the freedom of air?
Ah, the irony, that the poet, the player
with words, is impotent to reach those
he writes most for, those he is most
concerned with, who, if any,
really need him, who could never trust him
to row them around the iceburgs
in the glass of water the waitress brings
so thoughtlessly through the lunch rush,
and into a land of bent light
where there is only the two of them.
Oh why, in the miles of immense desert skies,
where, if there is anything at all
it cannot be seen;
where there are currents of wind enough for everyone
a thousand times over;
where sharing is so unnecessary it at last
becomes important, oh why?
Oh why may only birds fly?

When You Arrive There

And when you arrive there,
it will be spring, it will be summer,
it will be autumn
somewhere else, and elsewhere
the green waterfalls of the willow
will be streaked with gold,
the leaves will take their places
among the grass, somewhere else
there will be ample lighting,
shadows will not fall into each other,
the ways will not roller coaster
out of sight where the sun
cannot reach them.
If we may know things
by their opposites, think
of mornings and being up early,
walking, and the light,
bending into color between the trees.

For everyone it is different.
For me it was only in weakness
I found the strength
to meet you here.
For me it is late in twilight
on subway platforms that we meet,
in grey winter coats
among vapors and cold, blue fog,
greeting the friend we have always sought
but elsewhere never found.
We see in their eyes
what is also in ours.

But even this end is a beginning
from where we go forward or back.
We hail one another
and in our first handshake
see our last. We are transient,
this but a moment's rest,
to tarry in a last hope we want,
we do not want.
We cannot allay each other's doubts;
the easiest lies behind us;
we cannot know what lies in front.

The City Streets

The cripple in me
    reaches out to him
in silence
with every gesture I cannot make.
    He is all that matters
and for the him in all of us
I block out that part of us
    lost in the standing room by the store windows,
statue-like in stillness
and complexion--myself
    (the self we commuters call my)
all of us into one bus when it comes.
It seems he is running, effortless,
    across the blue-green of his childhood,
running where his sturdy legs carry him
beyond the hill
    and the few minutes in which
in horror he worked his way
through his disbelief.
This is his hill now:
    the swell of the wide city street.
He is halfway across
when the light changes,
    his pant legs trailing wrinkled behind
the knees he walks on, his cup coin-jingling,
it is two blocks home,
    it is ten miles.
He stops in front of me.
With all that is within, I try
    to make some movement, some twitch
to convince myself and him I am
alive,
    that I should not be here left
for dead.
I cannot reach in my pocket.
    He moves on.

Monet

For rooms dominated by your presence;
for halls full of the blindness
of your later years; for haystacks in the late harvest
in the noon-day, drying, thank you.
Thank you for color
broken on the water; for broken color poplars
and Japanese bridges ovaling in their own reflections
under an overcast sky; for Rouen Cathedral
giving back the autumn fore-glow of the morning sun;
in the afterglow, its back to the sun,
for Rouen Cathedral. Thank you
for water lilies and other things we had never seen before:
leaves; footpaths; autumn-leaved footpaths;
fishing from the boats, the fisherman;
the hunters on entering a wood.
For textures woven with a different sort of needle,
thank you

for a certain place, a certain time of day,
the open air at one o'clock, the ladies
in the white light dining on verandas,
in the white light the white sails, the white sun bonnets,
the shadowed faces, the white leaves,
yellow flowers that are white, the shaded bushes,
the shaded waves, the white dresses
blooming like white sheets over the shadowed ground ...
the time we took fruits and cheeses and,
getting successfully lost, wasted an afternoon
as we would, on the banks
of a wide river. And human
and in love with our species, we faced the sun
and lay flat on the warmth of the grass
so the chill wind flying over the top of the hill
jumped right over us ...
For the white light coming through to us
through the smaller canvases of your earlier works,
thank you

for the certain, uncertain times and places
of your middle years, the years of wondering over
the clouded waters and stumbling upon
what must have been mirages: in a mist,
the moon-shaped arches were suddenly bridges,
and the small, armless figures crossing them,
peasants with heavy loads; the triangles vanishing
in the background must have been sail boats, which means
it must have been water beneath them, which means

the wide mouth of some river opening on the sea;
and the clouded-blue steam of train stations
falling upon the passengers who walked in diffusion
under the sub-zero shadows of the train.

It must have been out there somewhere,
lost in the Lagoon of Venice, or in the rhythm
in the flow of the Thames or Seine, lost,
that you first sensed your eyesight failing
and came quickly out of your canvas,
for it was with you when that large body,
which must have been an abbey,
rose out of the water--something to hold on to;
and it was with you when, in the downfall,
you rebuilt Rouen Cathedral and took
its height with the measure of what must have been
human figures standing at its base;
and it was with you when your colors grew wings
that could no longer be contained in frames
twenty-four by twelve, or even twice that.
And then the suffusion of grey, onion-topped palaces,
the pillars touching down on the smoke of restless water,
and the tapered steeples that must have been
church towers--stalagmite rising on the walls
in the fire shadows of a dark cave ...
on the following Friday, it was again raining,
and again I lost another hour walking the wet streets,
and let my mind wander with my eyes
that wandered with the bubbles along the brown water
of the ditches, and along the railroad tracks
took my absent way, hoping a simple yes
or no, or the nod of a head would satisfy
the wordless thoughts being asked of me ...
For allowing us this confusion of sunlight,
thank you

for the uncertain, certain mural-sized canvases
of your later years. You startled us
with great circles of broken color, and aghast
we stepped back and took another look,
and gazed into the quiet reflections of a pond.
How calm the water lilies appeared,
floating through the windowless walls of the museum.
What the imposing failure of cataracts had done!
In a fury your blinding hand lashed out
in larger and louder strokes of color,
cutting your way through the jungles
of your largest canvases, while all we could do
was watch. And the further you went one way
the further we the other to obtain the needed distance,
afraid of the reflections we might see

in these looking glass landscapes.
The more inaccessible your private life became
and the more distance you demanded,
the closer we felt your breathing presence stalking up
behind us, in the rooms dominated by your blindness,
until backing finally against the farthest wall,
we turned and saw how calm you had become,
drifting into the islands of darkness
on the lily padded ponds of your final years.

Trailway's Terminal

I sit in my coat;
the man reclaiming the vacant seat beside me,
sits in his; and the dark woman one row up,
the same.
The night holds no new mystery or old.
The snow blows in when the door opens,
when the wind reaches in and draws out the warmth.
We share but one thing between us,
and it lies everywhere on the surface,
so naked yet unembarrassing.
We hold it in common
and it makes us brothers, for when everything else
is taken away, what else have we;
our goals at outlasting the day.
Thus we feel out the wind and know in our bones
how cold it is, and that our marrow can take it
and more, and that there's no limit
to what we can't take, and it is that
that we see in each other's eyes always,
and in that is our strength.
So these visions of sugar plums,
which the foster child can't help but love, are safe--
locked within unfoolable glass balls and candy machines--
and if out on the lawn there should arise such a clatter,
it wouldn't be anything unusual.
Thus while the carolers chime their tidings to the well-lit streets,
and those for whom it is so easy to believe
come through safe avenues to safe churches
to celebrate in midnight services,
then home again, home again ... I forget how it ends.
I am told He is everywhere,
but I think, no, if anywhere tonight
He is here, helping some man
face down in vomit up
off the bathroom floor.

Sunday Morning

A sound full of vacancy
comes dampened through wet air
through where the rain has been
and spaces its absence
in the will-o'-the-wisp of a window reflection,
in the slender movement of sheers.
It is a sound that follows itself
through the wind that is always coming
and, in its no longerness, leaves so much
that is missing, in the delicate weight
of the window pane, in the diaphanous wisps of a curtain ...

Low notes, quiet on a barrel organ,
and though he be long dead,
Beethoven begins his Sonata in A that way,
with a wind tunnel of air
and the shadow of a note let loose to wander.
And ah, Gregorian Chant,
robed choirs of large men and the amber sound
of their voices, such powerful lungs,
an ocean of sound brought into unison,
bent into one line, thrown across the universe
in the inner unused space of the church.
It flows everywhere and everywhere everything's changed.
It flows in from the past
and brings this cathedral almost to collapse
in the pure amber of omnipotent voices running ...

Once they meant something,
the round moon-shaped sound of church bells.
They were Gods walking over this planet.
They were every leaf
and the movement of every leaf,
and the sound of every movement,
and the movement of every sound ...
an infinite regress
leading down to this window looking down
on the street, and the reflections
off the street, and the vacancy
of the street ...

They had a right to my dreams once.

Janus: Of And
Keeper Gates Doorways

It's a muddy
sort of day,
of mottled gray
neverending,
a day for defeats
and heavy losses,
for grave marches
and lowering the dead.
And I stand here
like a child
looking out
through a window
at rain,
while the promise
of the day
is stolen away
slowly.
In the background
the violins play
slowly, in among
the minors,
cementing the fate
of another day.

It's a muted sort of day, beginning
just to end, everending, and like the old man,
I stand here, looking in through a window
like a ghost, like the gray aura that comes with rain.
It's a day for sighs and longed-for sorrows.
In the foreground, in the darker movement,
the strings weave slowly through the scale like swans,
black swans, on the green, twilight surface of a lake.

It's a day
of sorts, and I stand here guarding the point where all
must pass,
like the young, looking out, like the old,
looking in,
and the new year enters, and the old year leaves,
and my eyes,
as always, full of tears, always dry,
see it all!

For the young man,
it's a day to leave his dreams
in his bed, lift his hundred-
fifty pound frame

up out of it to stand
by the window
as an old man, me. To let free
the innocuous old one
inside of him, who feels
compeer to the dim gray eyes
of the vague figures passing
on the street, feels compassion,
feels forever attracted
by the twilight
of their beings, and feels
the tie and knows their birthdays
all fall on the same day
with but the difference
of a lifetime.

It's a day for the man in late
middle age to leave his winters
beneath the covers, to rise on supple knee,
without tears, to set free the child
he once was, turn his face toward the east
and laugh in the rain, yes laugh in the rain, me.
Ah, life, sweet and bedeviled, great parental gift--
torn by their warring into separate camps
I have sapped my life; and yet, now,
their faces and all they were to me
are like one night's dream ... Enough!
Turn your face toward the sun and laugh
in the rain, yes laugh in the rain, me!

It's a mucky
sort of day ... it's muffled! And the grandsons
and the grandfathers
hear a different sort of music, write different
sorts of stanzas,
play on different sorts of instruments,
and the old man hears not
the child nor the child the old man,
yet silence is ever the one note
playing when all the others stop.
To each it carries a lone pitch that,
in passing, forms a different sort
of interval, one tone coming in,
as it does, from the past, the other
from the future to clash
in the present, here, by the gate
where all must pass once and once only.
There are no breaks in my vigil.
I stand always inbetween, here
waiting
for the gray to recede, to envelope all,
for some sport
wild and rule-less, for peace from games and conflict.

A Woman in Her Late Fifties

A woman, anonymous
in the great coat of the late afternoon,
after work, stopping at a fruit stand,
picking late oranges out of the carts
and placing them in a paper bag,
appears in no hurry to be home, tonight.
She picks them over rather carefully
in the cold of the daylight
that is all but over at five.
Through the dirty snow, the cars go
sloshing by, bumper to bumper.

What about her dreams, I wonder?
Surely she dreamed young dreams once,
and surely they were broken in stages
or all in a moment.
Does she dream still, and, if so,
of what does she dream on moments
like these, on her own
on her grey way home,
stopping by the side of the road?
Does she dare let her eyes roam
over the produce for a something different
to prepare, exotic olives for her salad,
perhaps? Does she allow herself to be young
again, when above her and barely visible,
the full-phased pull of the moon
almost moves her? And, if so,
how does she respond, awakened
in the window by a silly old lady
carrying oranges in a paper bag?

Does she realize that, from here,
it seems the glass is kind to her,
taking the edge off her age? That,
for a moment, my breath is taken from me
when I think I see that young woman
with all those dreams?
Is she happy under the helmet
of her six-month permanent?
Is she happy?

Allhallowmas Eve: 1976

The orange glow
belonged in the night;
in the long night:
the night of the sweet smell burning;
an evening of ebony shades.
On the evening of the raving laughter,
on this cold night,
our children seem, somehow,
not our children, restless behind
their dime-store masks, seem,
somehow, headlong driven
through the raven darkness of the dooryards
to the doorsteps where the pumpkins wait--
stormy beacons on a calm night--rife
with orange laughter
to lift their shadows and dance them
in the ritual on the house fronts.
They sense his orange aura
all around and, through the grin in the grate-like bars
of his teeth, glimpse the flame
as it eats through the wax down the wick,
on the glowing wall of his entrails
gnawing away,
and hear his saffron screams rip jaggedly
through the night like lightning.
It follows them deep into the night,
into the long night,
the night of the sweet smell burning.
It follows them deep into a sleep
from which they might never awake.
On the evening of the coarse, unmistakable laughter,
this cold night, the doorbell rings
and I open to see
the head of a steer stare back at me,
his horns sawed close, and the red blood
in the black night, frozen in icicles
on his white face. I hold out the offering,
and he accepts and is gone, and I am safe.
It follows them into their sleep
and into their dreams, and I am relieved
when I hear them scream, when
they find themselves suddenly alone
in the still, raw hour of six,
where something like the slow pounding
of a war drum almost upon them,
growing thunderous, becomes the clear,

unmistakable sound of church bells
heralding the morning,
hallowing the dead saints all.
Through my bedroom window I can see
his burnt, colorless hull--how orangeless!--
and all around, the sterile wrapping
of white frost about each grass blade,
about each leaf.
Like the child, after the performance, close-up viewing
the lifeless marionettes, I find it difficult
to believe how small he is--amid the ruins
of the first frost, just another part
of the winterkill.