



A Life of Feasting

Poems by
Andrew Gent

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<i>Chicago Review:</i>	“Someone Speaks”
<i>Painted Bride Quarterly:</i>	“Nature Poem”, “Theoretical”, “Reading Late at Night”
<i>Poetry East:</i>	“The Ancient Philosophers”, “Bad Dog”, “Who Writes Poems”, “We Want Everything We Do”, “Not Writing Political Poems”, “What Inches Down”, “The Box”
<i>Quarry West</i>	“Poolside”, “The Root of all Knowledge”
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“That men are not made good by instruction”

— Lost essay by Critias

“The just are given a life of feasting and everlasting drunkenness...
The unjust are plunged into mud or made to carry water in sieves.”

— Orpheus

**That Men Are Not Made
Good By Instruction**

Song

All of this
(which we do) passes

like the flocks of Canadian Geese

that migrate north/south twice a year.
Late, long after

you expect silence
(say, 9:00 or 10:00 at night)

you hear them
honking like old cars

out for one last trip
around the block. Blind, crazy

you hear them
flying at night, guided by

their own crummy, ecstatic song.

You Are Famous

You are famous
and I am not.

(This has nothing to do with
relative worth,

whether one is happier
or more likely to survive, etc.)

You like to think
of the skin over your wrists

as the white sheet
that covers the tray of instruments
in an operating room.

I like to think
of the next minute
as the last I will ever need.

The Blue Face

I cannot wash
the blue face
of last night's television

out of the room.
My own

books, tables, lamps

are stranger to me
than the settings of stories I am told.

A hushed music & and the inevitable destruction

of a character
I have come to identify
as my own
approaches

despite the best testimony of my senses.

The Four Chambers of the Heart

The 4 chambers
that make up the heart

are

Love, Patience, Charity, and Innocence.
Oh look!

See the ropes
that bind the flesh

together.

See the red robes, the fine jewels
we dress our dreams in...

The pale white cave
guarded by two clenched hands
where we keep it

from harm's way.

Morning. Blue Sky

The low nose of a hill
across the river

stands blue in the haze.

Morning. Blue sky
bleached white at the edges.

I am reciting

the mantra of what exists
out my front window,

humming the pine

and the spruce green,
the snow white, the earth suddenly brown...

Convincing myself

these are not
the same words I used yesterday.

Mirror

He parts his hair left-to-right
like everybody
else

He has
no physical defects
to speak of

Although, the right
eye
droops

just slightly
and his crooked teeth

mock the sincerity
of his words

You would never recognize him from his photograph

I Love the Limbs of Women

I love
the limbs of women

that bend.
The folds

repeating themselves
like an old pair of jeans,

or a crease
where pink

is worn away.
Really, I love everything

about them.
But especially I love

those clean, well-used spaces
where what comes to rest is turned to light.

Dear Martha, Signed John

Outside, the moon holds court.
Inside, two figures.

Dear Martha,
Signed, John.

(The narrator is only the conduit
through which the reader sees him or her self, disguised.)

Inside, two figures.
Outside, holding.

(The sparse, objective nature of the report
implies opulence.)

A live cockatoo punishes the air.
(Step back.)

The room explodes with light.
The curtain closes.

A.K.A.

I paint faces
on the reflections in my girlfriend's fingernails.

They resemble me

like the list of aliases
on the FBI's most wanted poster.

But each has one obvious flaw:
a moustache crooked

or beauty mark
smeared from wrestling

on the couch in her front room.
Every night

I plan my getaway.
Every night

I am unmasked.

Pockets

They remind me of my parents' cellar:
the staircase
my hands
climb

hand
over hand
down into the familiar dark.

The blurred outline
of keys, pocketknives, handkerchiefs...
Expecting something
to reach out and hold me

in this pose.

A depression-era sad sack
handcuffed by the holes in his pockets.

We Do This At Night

We do this at night: rowing
back and forth
in each other's arms.

I am Charon,
picking my way through the dead
stillness of the river.

You are Odysseus,
coming home from too much
imagined torment.

Your arrival will finally stop
the unraveling that has marked time until now.

My coming is foretold
by the golden disc of light

in the mouths of the already dead.

The Chinese Poets

The Chinese poets often wrote after climbing mountains
that surrounded their native villages.

Their poems were interrupted, like a sudden wind
catches sparrows offguard in high places.

Even in times of war, mountains
provide a necessary distance.

Those they loved could not be saved
by words anymore than by ransom.

In better times, bouts of drinking
accompanied any achievement.

And when the writing was done
they came back down into the village.

All done in a few lines
what now takes so many.

What is Beautiful

What is beautiful
escapes us. The sleight-of-hand
of a long afternoon

burning out
on the lawns of Westchester and Montauk.
We rise with difficulty —
precursors of the wind
that, like us,
hasn't moved a muscle
for hours —
making our way
indoors, in anticipation
of the next beautiful moment

of evening, all evening.

Saying No

This trend towards the deification of the president
is troubling for an old atheist. No one is perfect.
Not even the inheritor of this thought.
Not even on this particular night, when I
think the same derogatory thoughts I thought last night
and the fate of the entire nation — no,
the fate of the entire world — rests in some hypothetical
balance. Not even then can I believe
what this man says. Not because tonight
is special. Not because the *national interest* is an excuse
for violating the rights of the individual. No,
because there are rights I don't even know I own
and I am going to take my car and drive
praying they don't find me, secretly hoping they cross my path.

Do I Know the Wind

Do I know the wind?
Those solemn
Solomon breathers

judging one moment from the next
by taste?

Now cold and crisp,
snapping like a carrot
freshly dug and washed in a stream.

Now cautious and circumspect,
coming at oblique angles
so as not to be
noticed

until your mouth is full
and there is no stopping it.

Man, Standing

Man, standing

reminds us
of the achievements
since climbing, one-legged,
single-celled,
from the dank, maternal swamp.
Except for

the penis
curled like a snail
in its shell of hair
half way up the body,
brainless,

and too happy
to know better.

Baseball #1

Michelangelo's *David* and the baseball pitcher

have a lot in common.

That fraction of a second

when the mind goes

blank: you don't know

how you got here, or what it was

you meant to do.

The same fraction

of a second the flash goes off,

someone screams "Surprise!" and you are

caught: permanently off-balance,

holding you-don't-know-what

while the man in front of you wields a mallet of some kind
waiting to strike.

Baseball #2

This is meditation at its best.
Not the studied pose

but the scratch and tic
of habit. Worn like the dirt-colored carpet
outside the office of a Justice of the Peace.
He shuffles and strikes

a new pose.
Looking to first,
holding

the attention of everyone in the stadium

with the exception, perhaps
of two

lovers
smitten and out of place in the bleachers.

Baseball #3

In the end
it is nine men
in badly-fitting uniforms

standing, abstractly, under an impending sky.

Two out, two on
and what they imagine

can change their lives,
justify their careers,
pay back 10 years of practice...
nothing short of

the meaning of life

streaks towards them
disguised as a white sphere

without seams.

Form & Content

It would be easier if I had an idea
what content I was looking for.

I imagine: sculptors
look at stones, thinking
“I see a girl washing her hands in a stream”
or “Saturn, blinded
devouring his kin”.

The final appearance of the object
is ruled by a subsequent desire on the part of the viewer
that is not fulfilled in any other way.

For example: bread
that is the shape and size
of a beautiful woman reclining
to the lonely — is only bread to the poor.

Reaching for the Light

Reaching for the light-
switch

as I leave the room
I have been
reading in,

tonight I expect
the light to go out
of my body
and absence, like a darkness
too small to be seen,
take my place.

Leaving the room
empty, silent

and brightly lit.

Variations on a Poem by Li Po

Drunkenly I rise to stalk the brook moon.

Drunk I rise, stalk brook moon.

Drunk
I rise
Stalk brook moon

Drunk I rise
Stalk brook,
Moon.

Drunk, rise, stalk,
Brook moon.

Rise.
Stalk.
Brook.

Drunk moon.

Carrying Water in a Sieve

The Swimmer

Breathing the blue
measured gulps
of air

the swimmer stands still in the water

drawing
the end of the pool towards him
in a wide, sweeping motion.

At the wall he turns, kicks, and starts again
to pull the other end closer.

The
invisible
blue thread

of water
passing endlessly through his hands.

Sonnet

Sonnet = little song
an anti-gravity device
that peeps & squeezes the body
's heady organs

until they litter the air
like
1,000 balsa wood gliders

or the strains of a new virus.
Suddenly, everyone is talking,
telling their most intimate thoughts and feelings

all at the same time
so no one can hear
what is being said

but enjoying the *sound* of it...

Poets & Politicians

Poets & politicians
are essentially opposites:

one trying to build a world
around him, the other...

But this argument
has gone on for years

while poets vote
and politicians rave...

Maybe it is time

to elect our poets?
And politicians

can learn their craft by starving...
But I am not the one

to speak.

Reading Late at Night

Each shoosh of tire and road
represents

one life story
up to page 16 or so

that I have not read.

Driving home, or to work
the late shift

each car sounds like pages
turning rapidly

in the hands of a god
or a disinterested reader

asleep

whose lips move
but make no sound.

Content & Form

Content is what I *mean* to say
and form is what it *is*

I say.

Not meaning, which slips through my hands.
What is tangible, what survives

is
the clay pot, the brightly painted amphora

dug from the earth
empty, but intact.

In the end, form is
the thin fabric that does not hide

Greek women.
And content is the stone

the women and the cloth are made of.

Nature Poem

That blob of green is *tree*.
And over there, that darker stuff

is *pine*, a special kind
I can identify. Other than that

they are all the same.
Although I always wanted to be able

to say ‘this is birch’,
good for reprimanding children

or ‘that one’s ash’, patron saint
of tree houses and campfires.

But for now, they are just *tree*:
the anonymous providers

that guard my house
and haunt the woods I walk in.

Story

Comb: veil

A parting of the ways

A way of parting

Entrance to the subway

A bicycle rack

Front grill of a '56 Ford pickup

A piano with the white keys removed

The forest (by night)

A funeral (by day)

A dilemma with too many choices

The loon, the thresher, the sieve

A crowd, a fence, a harp

The Acropolis

Rain with cloud (inverted)

Theoretical

Dislanguage me
with scissors, with picks
& shovels. Unman
the hands & delicate steering
that holds six-foot one
of me upright

without speech.
Leave the tongue to wag
& burn the body in sleep
like a Hindu bride. Make no bones

until every last thum
and flicker is ash,
and the ashes are ash again.
The crime is hidden and the wind speaks for itself.

Twenty-Five Careers

In fact, we do not want to be
football players

wide as tall, and deadly
in the 8
seconds

it takes
to run left
off-tackle and two yards
forward. What then collapses

like a black hole
or a train in the absence of track
is beautiful.

Like and unlike us
in the brutal present.

Forecast

Low overcast. Colder.
Highs in the mid-fifties.

The deep thrum
of an aircraft engine
drifts in and out

like a curtain
drawn in front of the open window.

Today's colors are
yellow, green, and burnt sienna.
Today's geography is local.

Several birds come to inspect the empty feeder.
The trees and the fields beyond
appear quiet. Within the earth
others make plans to survive...

Sirens Go Off

The sirens go off
to appease some god

who finds the long and piercing strains
melodious

like a foreign music.
In fact, the darkness

of evening
reminds us of a concert hall
in which the stage is dimly lit.

The listeners sit, hushed
in that singular pose
of one who expects at any moment to understand —

while the victim of stroke, accident, fire, or seizure
drifts in and out of this fragile world.

The Spring That Holds My Toaster Together

The spring that holds my toaster together
(I didn't discover it until now)

is very similar
to the wire that holds my notebook together
and the thought that holds this poem together
and the DNA that holds the author together...

It is like a staircase
or the "great spiral"
that rules our coming and going...

That is, if you believe
there is something that rules
our coming and going.

It's a thought.
If not, I'm still happy my toaster works.

Waking

It is pre-dawn.
Ghost time.

Before the alarm signals
the end of not being.

This is the moment after
the half-life
expires.

Seconds caught in the teeth
of a giant machine.

Primeval.

Before light.

I must slaughter a wild animal for meat
and weave cloth for my shirt
and tie.

Someone Speaks

Someone speaks
and the room fills with words.

I am surprised by the whiteness
of sheets folded in cupboards and drawers.

Because the leaves have fallen
footsteps can be heard much farther away.

When I entered the room
I could see what had passed between them.

These and other things
mean nothing at twenty below zero.

If we were ghosts, he said,
we could pass through each other without causing harm.

If we were ghosts, she said,
we would not see each other coming.

What We Do

Although it does not affect
how or what we do,
we do

think about the cause
(sometimes called “god”
or, in antiquity,
“the fates”)

responsible
for our arriving at
this specific point in time
in this particular place.

If they are stern, we repent.
If they are wise, we rejoice.
Our work is their work.

The Scientist

The scientist
pushes his glasses up onto his forehead

so he can peer
into the microscope
at glass slides

of cancerous tissue
highlighted with red dye.

Outside, women
waiting in line for bread

gaze at the windows
of the institute

as they have done every Tuesday morning
for five or more years

for lack of anything better to do.

Memory Device

I make a note to myself
to pick up milk on my way home.
And lettuce.
And eggs.

The ability to concentrate
requires paper and pencil.

After I write my note
I put it in my pocket

and tell myself to remember it

when the time comes.
This is a memory device.
It reminds me

that there are things I have forgotten
like the dream of a telephone that wakes me but is never answered.

Thanksgiving

Gobble, gobble, gobble
Whack!

Oh,
I'm not sure
hunger

justifies
the platters of
potatoes, corn, cranberry sauce

and the mounds
of soft white flesh

like an allegory for the prodigal son
before anyone knows he is leaving.

The people are so happy
they slaughter their herds in celebration.

Christmas

Christmas day: in a strange town
in an equally strange house
with relatives, stranger still.

Who invented this lesson
for the overly proud?

I sing, off-key,
to a battered phonograph
while others wrestle in the kitchen
with huge, stone-age utensils.

It is dark. It is late.
I am wearing a hideous sweater
that was knit by hand.
I am the luckiest man on earth.
There are none luckier.

A Life of Feasting

Starting Over

I am starting over with a rock.
Nothing I have done has come out right.
So I am starting over with a rock
and the table the rock sits on. Forgive me.
I am thirty-one years old and married
with two cars and no children, but it is time
to start again. The rock says
I am not a harsh man. The rock
says I am still flesh and blood.
The rock, the table, and the chair I sit in
revolve around a central point
once every twenty-four hours.
If I leave the room
this will continue to happen.

Out of Sorts, I Mutter

Out of sorts, I mutter,
with the world

and other matters.
I hope they all go away.
And having

said my peace, slouch
back into silence. It is a trick
to gain attention I learned
in second grade.

Of course, there being only my wife
and the television
to ignore me

this vote of protest
goes largely unattended.

Snow

Finally,
physical proof
that the (gray) world

is coming apart:

paint letting go
in the vacant rooms
of an abandoned schoolhouse,

a jigsaw puzzle
without a picture.

All washed clean
by the representation in physical terms
of an event we have long expected.

And fear, no longer our own, surprises us
with its gentleness, covering everything.

They are Building a Box

They are building a box upstairs.
They are going to pack their dreams in it.
No, they are going to sail around the world
using an old shirt for a sail.

They have been working on the box for days.
Sometimes I see them
when they come downstairs for food
or to sleep. They are our neighbors.
They have lived here for six years
without showing any signs
of this latest obsession.

They are building a toy house for their youngest child.
They are robbing us blind.
The box will never be big enough.

Centerfolds

Best dressed

in the filmy veils
of not-seen

and can-you-imagine,
I do

and wonder
what good

the dream life affords?

Perhaps no higher meaning
than an interest in sex

or, perhaps, a singular desire
for a thousand yous

dressed or undressed
in each of the thousand coming days.

Query

The first question is

how can I tell when I am lying?

This is not as simple
as it sounds: do you believe,
for example, that I care
or not whether I am lying to myself
when I am alone? And if not,
is it a lie

to ask myself this question?
Or to be more direct: do I love my wife?
Of course I do, but... I am lying
if I don't confess to asking myself the question
which in itself raises doubts about my truthfulness.

I am walking on thin ice, and talking might break it.

The Daily News

The newspaper sings
the familiar songs

of death and tragedy.
I don't remember the words

from day to day

but the eluctable, one note
hums in it

like a sixty watt bulb.

No one I know died today.
Nothing I treasure was stolen or burnt.

It is a song of praise.
The rollcall of the surprised, the influenced, the apprehended.
And it is a song of joy

for the names that are missing.

Not Writing Political Poems

It is an act of courage

not writing political poems.

Not making speeches
every time the news comes on

or they interrupt the regularly scheduled
program.

The bulletins tell us
that we are a great country.
The bulletins tell us that we are in danger
or that danger was recently averted
by the men we employ

as our representatives.

The danger is over. Go back to your houses.

It is safe to cook dinner. Write poems about flowers or trees.

What Inches Down

What inches down
below the rime ice,
the snow crust?
Through the increasingly dark
halls of snow
what thread pulls loose
and digs the cold earth?
Not us, exposed
to the weather,
surviving but blown bare.
What gives
but takes hold?
Seed.
Root.

Taking the Earth Home

I am taking the earth home.
I am carrying sackfuls of soil, leaf, and mulch

to a place in the woods
where they belong.
When I find it
trapped in the seams
of a boot,
or swept into a corner
of the garage,

I gather it
into my hands
and take it back.

I am its keeper.
I am its lost, demented son.

The Only Art

The only art I haven't mentioned
is music:

played by Terpsichore
handmaiden to Zeus
who plucked, naked
the lyre

ancient ancestor
to the modern day
zither, but with sweeter tongue
and fewer strings.

This I know from books
and other things
from life.
Let us pass on.

Tectonics

Is the room where it used to be
ten minutes ago?

Five?

One?

Now, as I am speaking
the earth moves to displace me,
shifting furniture just slightly
like a practical joke on the blind.

While under the oceans
huge chunks of the continent
break off, separate, and collide.

I have grown too fond of my senses
and learn only now that I am searching for something to trust.
Don't move.

Introduction to Philosophy

Televisionary.

The ability to tell the future
the way the media will portray it.

Electricism.

Cult of the devout
believers in human radio transmission.

Deja loom.

Where images of the future are woven
on a loom so slowly, so meticulously
that the actual event occurs moments before
the tapestry is complete.

Vehicularists.

Beyond buses and trucks, we are riding
the continents, entire planets, with no one at the wheel!

Self-Portrait

I look back
at what I have said
and what I have written

and recognize myself
like a letter from an old school friend
who is writing to the person I used to be.

My enthusiasms are not my enthusiasms
any longer. And I am sorry

I misled you. Please write again
and do not be surprised

by the stranger
you find

and the stranger you feel
writing back.

Poem

I have a friend who's a poet
and who drinks too much.

He's a good poet.
He calls me up and tells me
the same stories night after night.
He lives in New York. He's a poet.
He drinks.
These facts

are unrelated.
But he goes on drinking,
he goes on living in New York,
and sometimes he writes.
One of these days

he'll stop.

Syncopation

There is a way, in music,
by which the sound
travels

from hand to hand
like a ball in the hands of a juggler.

By alternating
every second or third
note, the listener
is drawn to add the note
that is missing.

In the same way
I get up every morning,
make coffee, eat breakfast, and read a book

as if you had never left, as if you never will.

Poolside

Women with large breasts
attract attention.

Other women

men, and family pets
stop what they are doing to stare
at the bathing suit that could.

The only people who are unaffected
are children diving for nickels
and pushing each other

into the pool.

The world revolves, momentarily

around her

and around her

the sinking coins gleam larger than life.

Knocking the Pins Out

They are knocking the pins out
one at a time.

First it was my mother's father, not unexpected.
Now it is the father of my father, after two years
of illness and dementia.

I can't see them — they live and die in another country.
All I hear is the hollow ring
of hammer and wood
as the pins are slipped
out of place.

Auntie Annie, Auntie Nora...
The rigging strains to hold it down.
There is no reason, there is nothing

to stop the sky from moving away from us now.

Talking Blues

How many of us get into the car and drive to work?
Not just any car! I'm talking about
the blue Toyota Tercel
with vinyl seats and brown floor mats
left over from the Pinto I used to own.
How many people

get out of the bed in apartment #23,

brush their teeth (ought to call the dentist),
eat corn flakes and a container of yogurt,
drink one cup of coffee, get into the car
and drive to work?

I'm talking about
how many people it takes to get one arm in the right sleeve
and still have the strength to deal with the other.

Attraction

It is the glass of water that attracts
the eye to the drinker. Water
is available

from cups, taps, glasses, fountains,
bottles, barrels, cisterns,
rivers, lakes, oceans,

and tears.

Water reminds us
of the moral tale of our upbringing
because of the transparency of the story that holds it.

We are attracted to the possessor of the glass
because of what it contains
and the glass because of what it might contain
and does not. And aspires to.

The Box

The box I live in
has changed.
The air is thinner,

more ethereal.
The walls are the same color:
black, but different
as when someone in another room
turns on a light.
I can hear music,

dinner arrives late
and is more appetizing when it finally does.

Something is up.
I put my ear to the wall.

I hear a rustling in a paper bag.

The Art of Living Together

There is an art
to living together.

There is an art to speaking

together like strangers
that makes us more like lovers
than friends. I am fascinated

by your hair
and want to keep you talking
because of the way it makes a strand dangle

beside your ear.
You want to know what I think
because it will keep us talking

until late in the night when we go to bed
like lovers.

We Want Everything We Do

We want everything we do
to be music.

Not *like* music
which casts the illusion of grace,
but music

with each note in place
and the beautiful instruments
polished and finely tuned.

When we wash the dishes,
when we sweep the floor
we want the music to rise

with the dust and dance
in the lapping water, moved
to a rhythm of its own design.

Science Fiction

When people make love they are flying
a giant spaceship through the darkness.
If he turns his hips
or she squeezes her thighs

the earth careens deeper into space.
Each stroke and tremor
alters the orbit
until the other planets
must adjust their course to keep up.

He is staring into space, she is flying upside down.

Balanced on top of their unwieldy ships
in bedrooms and parked cars
around the world, couples
grope for the controls.

Who Writes Poems

Poets, song birds, and homeowners.
Oh, and couples waiting for a baby.
Expectant, with the look of saints.
Troubled, in the waiting room
waiting for doctor
to knit broken bones into arms and legs.

After the hospital, they will go home
where the dog has written ten poems
of sorrow for its owners
and the cat continues to sing about itself.
Because home is where poetry begins.
Where, in the quieter moments, we write
the history of paint and wallpaper, the lyric of the lawn
mower.

The Batesville Casket Company

The Batesville Casket Company is burning.
Several city blocks are abandoned.
Alarms are rung,
residents are asked to conserve
water due to the dry weather
and serious nature of the disaster.

Summer's in full swing.
The procession of clouds stalls over the city
like a cartoon of greedy capitalists
each one larger than his predecessor
until they cannot fit through the door.

We cannot escape the lives
we taught ourselves. We follow the smoke
hoping for a glimpse, praying for rain.

Study

My zenness is missing.
My mantra is broken.

Oh, I stare out the window
and do not recognize the darkness

as my darkness. It is new
and disturbing.

What has become
of the lilypad I memorized?

Who is sweeping
my square inch of dust?

After practicing the essence of a pure soul
for twenty-eight years

my subscription was canceled.
A new darkness replaces an old one.

The Ancient Philosophers

Pythagoras says: don't give offense to the sun.
Good advice.

Hesiod says: don't urinate in plain view.
Similar, but more direct.

I am attracted to the beauty of fine speech.
To the homily that improves character
and cures social ills.
Especially, the dead

and great writers
make me think there is good
in mankind. They also remind us

that some people haven't learned anything
in two thousand years,

as Critias predicted.

The Ugly Man

There is an ugly man in my mirror.
He is lying.
He is threatening.
He is not

someone I want in my house.

If I sleep for 100 days
he might go away
or he might take a vacation
and come back tanned, well-rested

but still ugly.
If I have an enemy,
he is it. After he is gone
his friends
will come to assassinate me.

The Root of All Knowledge

All knowledge (or *mimer*)
can be classified into three areas
according to Norwegian myth:

Son, Bodn, and Odrarer.
The gods saved most of it
by guile and theft,
but were caught pinching
the third cauldron.

What follows is an allegory
of modern life, or

literature down through the ages:
the dregs saved as pure art
while the major part
spills over the countryside like rain.

Islands

Temples. Greeks. White columns
like towels hung out to dry.
The clean, regular folds
carved into stone.

And the background is painted blue.
The sky: blue.
The sea: blue.
Even the outline of mountains
on distant islands: blue
in the haze.

The ghosts of ancient philosophers
roam the grounds nudging the sparse grass
back to life, or to be eaten,
come back as goats.

Ideas of You

I am in love
with the being
in love.

The measured pause
between ooh and aah

scientists use to calibrate their instruments.

I am in love
with too many

ideas of you
and must tie myself
to the bed we use

as proof: you are here

each morning I stagger into the world
stripped of dreams but living.

Simplicity vs. the Mind

Simplicity vs. the mind.

The opera: complete

with brightly-clad bearers,
singers, dancers, and slaves
reduced

to a few bars
whistled intermittently
by the waitress

serving me lunch.

She doesn't stop

even when I ask
for an extra napkin and a clean glass.

Now that's art.
That's fucking beauty.

The Examination

I stick two fingers
under my ribcage: no pain.
I tap my knee
with my nephew's rubber mallet: yow!

Hobbling to the dining room table
I make a mental note
not to repeat that test next time.

I am checking out the hardware.
I am listening to the blood
roar through my pressure points
waiting to hear what doctors hear.

What is it they are listening for
as they tap expectantly on my chest? Something loose?
Rattling? The first signs of a long unraveling?

A Man Describes

A man describes
the dream of a fish
so perfectly
you can see the sun
glint off the slick
emerald green
scales.

Another man describes
a robbery
in short, breathless sentences.
A police officer on the scene
records it all
in a small notebook.

Which is poetry?

Cavelight

Do we sing for each other or for ourselves?
The pure hum of it
riding neurons deep into the brain.
You hit a single note
and stick with it
feeling the vibrations
echo through the lungs, through the ribs,
until blood shatters like glass.

Science calls this *natural frequency*.
But we don't.

We sing for each other
in the same garbled words
cave men used to calm their dogs
and sing their children to sleep, by cave light.

The Wood-Boring Insect

The wood-boring insect
is insidious. It is, by nature, secretive
building tunnels through buildings
in its search for wood.

If you see one, assume a thousand.

If you see a thousand, move out.

The only thing worse than wood-boring insects
is catastrophic illness

or lack of insurance.

These things we learn when we grow up,
get married, and desire
security. We learn to lock doors and store household cleaners
safely, in fear of being visited

by misfortune.

Sonnet for Nicholas

This is to say I'm sorry
I cannot write you a poem.
You are small, about the size
of a small suitcase
and pink like new wallpaper
is my guess. More importantly,
you are 3,000 miles away
and uninterested in poetry.
For this, I don't blame you.
For this, the world grows bright
with possibility. And your parents,
those huge, soft mammals
carry you in their arms, unaware
of anything but the desire to keep it that way.

Saturday Morning

Thud. Silence.

My neighbor is awake.

In fact, the whole neighborhood is awake
and speaking the tribal language
of the apartment dweller and the semi-detached
homeowner. Like the rumble of the evening news
slurred through motel room walls,

we are witness to the intimate details
of each other's lives. The shouting matches
drained of words, silences filled with the noise
of inanimate objects: thump, thump, groan.

Today, they are the sounds of an average Saturday.

Although we cannot make out the words,

the news is good.

Life With Fish & Birds

The brook says things
no one understands
which is why it repeats itself,

its soft tongue tripping over the vowels
that water contains.

Occulant with trees,
married to Winter,

the brook carries the hillside
downstream

in tiny cupfuls.

Shush! The pine siskin won't stop talking.
Brother Squirrel is at his prayers.

All is well with the world.
All is well.

Bad Dog

What many of us want
to be when we grow up.
Out from under

the raised fists and loud voices
that threaten,
cajole.

Sniffing around any tree
we please.

Whose life is this, anyway?

In our hearts we all want
just once, to stand
in our own ill-doings. Deaf

to the admonitions of failed training:
Bad dog! Bad dog!

My Wife Watches Movies in Her Sleep

My wife watches movies in her sleep.
I am not supposed to disturb her.

Not dreams. Movies. On television.

She plans this days in advance.
Checking the *TV Guide* for late shows.
Asking me to watch them with her.

When the night arrives, we go to bed.
Turn on the tv. And she sleeps.

I know she is asleep. Her eyes are closed
and she does not answer to her name.

But she is watching.

I don't understand it. But experience
has taught me. I cannot turn off the tv.

Or she will never know how it all ends.

Everlasting

For a few seconds
I thought I understood.

The job
of making useless objects
to sell to people who do not need them

(for which I am paid handsomely)

made no more sense, but fit
into a larger scheme of things.

I was happy.
My wife was happy.
My neighbor's dog

barked and chased his tail.

In another life
another life would be needed.