

What we will

Do you propose to
teach the ocean wave
how to
strike the rocks and
 explode
into air?

Do you propose to guide the fingers
of the fern
unfurling around and up?

What an idea.

Do you propose to know
the purpose beneath
your purposes?

Do you propose to show
the song how to sing?

Simply
answer it with tender care

and the affection you bring
fills the cup.

January 2020

Father

When they ask me on Judgment Day
to explain

 Everything
I won't tell them about what I did
What I sought
What escaped me
how I felt when this or that
 Befell
my mistakes
my triumphs
 fleeting as they were
 and tied to the Conveyor Belt Machine that leads absolutely
nowhere

No.

I'll tell them about my children
A girl and a boy
A boy and a girl
perfect in their eyes
honest in their suffering
indignant at injustice
limpid in their dance
generous of warmth
I'll tell them of this fatherhood unfolding
How mysterious a gift it has ever been to me
Carrying them and then being carried
How baffled I have walked and toiled
Without the slightest dim understanding of what I wrought
Thinking of this and instead begetting
 That
Yet

There I was
and I loved them.

Petals

If you look under the hood of the car
You find the engine
If you look under the hood of this moment
You find yourself

When it rains you get wet
When the sun shines you get dry
 It turns out that many things work this way
Beautiful cause and effect and cause
Arising one by one.
Can you hold it in an open palm
caress it with your breath
 Not grasping but proffering
And let it run?

 A dream
She puts flower petals on the river water
Watches them
 slowly revolve away
Color on the stream.

A Clear Moment

We flee it
 We avoid eye contact
 Its darkness
 Overwhelms.
 The Abyss
 Looms
 Ever-present even though
 We do our utmost

Yet it fits
 Snugly
 The pieces meshing

If you bury your face deep enough into the fistful of basil leaves
 It smells like pure cloves

Color and sound
 Dance and repose
 Small creatures of miraculous beauty
 The gossamer seed flung from the tree three counties away
 Arriving
 Passing
 In its own exact way

The traces
 Of versions
 Of this thought
 Fireflies!

All your dearest friends and loved ones in a circle smiling with inexpressible love

Inherent
 Essential
 Perfect.

Death is perfect.

The Depressed Sardine

The sunlight truly does filter down
spangling shafts of yellow
through the murk.

My scaled siblings glint past
 shoals of bent muscle
 intertwined knives
phalanx of eyes.

Curious strands of bubbles
 waver upward
 silver helix
from the swaying kelp beds
in the vague reaches below.

 But I take no joy in it.
I'm a fucking fish.

December 2017

A Concise History of Humankind

“Love one another.”

“Yes, but –”

July 2017

Ohio Springtime

The wildflowers that grow by
 the side of the tracks
in Amish country where
 small black carriages trundle ahead
fountains of purple and white on
 a background of a green so green
that you lose yourself in its hues secrets
 a gratuitous gesture
made by no person anywhere
 giving
spontaneous astonishing
 it does not know
of seeing and beauty
 but just opens
itself
up
like this.

October 2016

Better than happiness

I gave a kidney.
I am diminished.
Lost
a part of my body.
 But
the kidney still lives
 over there
 inside her.

It turns out that this is better than happiness.

Happiness is a bouquet of flowers.
But this
is the hanging tropical gardens at the
 moment
when the sun first breaks through the mist.

Happiness is a flashlight circle along your dim path.
This
is the night sky in the desert, the canopy
of star souls assembled above, singing
their chorale of worlds.

In the clear light of morning

It is
iridescent
multi-layered
intimately palpitating
enigmatic
venomous
luscious
vulnerable
exasperating
tender
devastating
mendacious
delicious
and compassionate.
That's what it is.

January 2015

Question

As the tree spreads its limbs to the sky
families of branches
unfurling upward
their ever-finer progeny
unto the tiniest leaves and capillaries
that converse directly
with the air
a gesture so silent
and so open
that
it slows the passing of time
is this a giving or a taking?

April 2014

St. Francis

I dreamed I saw St. Francis of Assisi
dancing to a reggae beat
while around him in a circle
 the happy little blackbirds
clapped their wings
and stamped their feet.

A leaf
a face
a wooden spoon
 astonishing
complete.

March 2012

How it works

Each day you add a grain
 of sand
the thoughtless
 accumulation
 builds itself
and before you know it you've got
Greenland
rising from a wave-tossed tidal shelf.

February 1997

Listening

I want to stand alone
to see clearly, directly
bravely, even the most ghastly final truth –
I want to pierce the vacuum –
but the question beyond all questions
does not come.
Nor do answers come.
Only silence – no, only
a single bird singing
aimlessly outside the window
in the dawn of the city.
The fact of facts
continues.
I listen.
The words wither on my lips.
I am bereaved of speech.

June 1984

Just in time

Things,
Things that choke the heart
like memories of those we have loved,
washed away in the upward spiral of time
through the helpless spectator night
where no one has chosen, yet all
are responsible,
things passing
hands dissolving, faces forming
and dissolving,
the airy web that weaves itself
out of itself,
studded with glittering eyes
the outstretched embrace
of impossible permanence,
dissolving, all dissolving
inexhaustible
like memories of those we once loved
recast into premonitions
of future memories, an upward circle.

Come with me
Break my hard heart
Give me your vanishing hand
Let us
be kind to each other
Let us
go into the soft colorless fire
of chaos.

April 1984

Telos

Like a butterfly
trying to get out of itself
when it's not yet a butterfly, when
it's still a caterpillar with no understanding
of butterflies,
nothing
but that hairy, phosphorescent, fat body,
lots of legs,
inching and bumping its way,
creeping blind, nothing
 except for the itch and scratch of the intuition of wings
 of the view from the sky
 of the garden seen all at once, an intuition
like a presence so invisible
you can hardly be sure it's not
an illusory hue, a fleeting
invention.
But there must be a way.
A way out.
Thinks the caterpillar.
There must.

April 1984

Dawn

not night for long and roosters
sounding far off like breath whistling
through an old man's nostrils deep in
bed.
i want for something to hold.

January 1975