

MUSEUM

Poems like dreams

ONE

Museum

This museum with its bright red walls
open all day and all night. No charge,
if you can find it.

This first picture, framed in black and gold, is
a thousand rocks at the water's bottom, as old as
the museum. Glinting water covers the rocks with white lace
that disappears in a moment.

In the picture, massive black rocks jut up out to sea;
the blues go out to the horizon and up into the sky
where a few small puffs of white cannot wait -
and glide along as if vaguely aware of
an eventual appointment with the night.

A low rising and falling sound emits from the picture
counting the seconds since the utter beginning.
Brown bears in white ties and black morning coats
lumber down the museum's halls, responding
to questions, directing guests, serving guests tea
(stealing cookies and cheese from the serving carts),

whispering to each other: "There is no time."

Works of art are displayed on ceilings and floors
in addition to the covered walls. Penguin attendants
waddle back and forth putting pictures up,
pulling them down again to put up down the hall.

The penguins huff and puff. It takes three or four of them

to handle the heavy frames. It takes ten penguins to carry

in a net an explosive oil by Van Gogh.

Patrons tire sometimes and sleep on the floor,

or even move in. Above me, a raven flaps past

holding in her beak the canvas of a Vermeer,

the duke's eye in the unrolling canvas scrutinizes

the gray weasels scurrying in the shadows, where white art deco rats hang from the
weasels' teeth by their marble tails.

Across the long hall is a painting of a family

driving down Highway 68

in an aging yellow van,

each family member staring

out a different window,

each seeing a different hall

in the museum

on a different day

in a different century

**The steps down the hill to the house,
ten minutes after the dog's bark**

Rough dark red bricks
morning rain-soaked
their old brick patio rows are leaning
mossed cracks green in muted sunlight
straight lines among stone family

Wet air surrounds the foggy long branches
greening up toward the woods' early afternoon
gray-blue cloud light
an hour of drizzle and rain already
clouds hold hours more

edges suffuse a glow
Ten minutes after the dog's bark
a bird begins soft singing
past time's transparent inhabitants
walk down stairsteps of rain

On Portuguese Beach

"ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny"
*Before our spine grows,
during the second month
of pregnancy life, our fetus grows a
cartilagenous spine called a notocord,
just like the cartilagenous spines in all fish;
we human fetuses then also have gills.*

Above Portuguese Beach on the Pacific just North of Bodega Bay

the sun is down we are in after-light; white water foams up around eighteen black rocks just off the coast here at Portuguese Beach north of Bodega Bay, the sound of their meetings a continuous soft rising and falling roar; a pickup truck goes by on Highway 1 which winds along the cliffs above the water; the trailer the pickup is towing is empty;

truck motor hums level, tires a soft hiss. Bodega sailed into the Bay sometime around 1775 and invested in two-acre plots which have retired him, so he's writing post-post-modern novels in the countryside, above San Jose, Costa Rica, green all around, sky all blue. Here at Portuguese Beach, the blue waves and sky, white foam rolling forward

toward this beach, ancient gray cliffs forty feet high above the water, the beach sand a dark gray as if basalt had been pulverized here long before Bodega and his crew came slicing sails full and billowing around this tossing emerald green turn; we swim we swim we swim; we slide through the water - we see it all from the point of view of an air-

breathing fish on land we swim we swim.

Bodega stares out across the moving waters, the leaping white foam, writes down the first words. The ocean says it is all a kind of swimming

The not-rhinoceros

1

Associations – just associations – no big deal. Just like somebody gives you a note and you pass it on through. The lion is not pawing outside the back window. The red hen is not in her nest.

Even if weasels wore headlights (to see more in the dark }, and even if we got more often where we say we are going, still, night falls without hesitation, without error, without fail.

2

Every night the late point comes when my eyelids grow so heavy that I put the book aside, fall slowly onto the bed, get under the warm covers, and, for the night at least, expire.

There's no hope in words (the time ticks on without a hitch), years stacking like old soup cans in the trashheap beneath the cupboard. The ducks quack and paddle. There's hope in words, though there's no hope at all.

3

Fish talk fast, bubbles floating up, while Octopi gather in their tentacles stones of great beauty, which they drag back and array in their doorways to their homes. "Pish-tosh" says the clown doll. "Pish-tosh back" says the whale.

A big fleshy nose emerges from our writing room floor pointing straight up. People are writing energetically. They ignore the growing nose. It is now three feet high and has black nostril hair.

4

The nose grows up to five feet, begins loudly to breathe in. Its high pitched vacuum sound grows to fill the room. The writers write on, not looking up, though their hair flies toward the vacuum. The translucent white clock on the dark oak table

shudders, slides noisily across the tabletop toward the huge sucking nostril. It flies up through the air and SMACKs into the vortex of the left nostril and disappears. The nose stops vacuuming and shrivels up completely and is gone.

5

Words disguise themselves as succulent red tomatoes, as red nipples, as green-filled afternoons in yellow-white sun. Fluttering deer wings. Bhopal and Kesterson. Kyoto abandoned. No daisies.

Marmaduke rhumbas; Sylvia freezes, thinking: Life lasts a minute and twelve seconds. Garbage men in black suits slam down can lids. Birds in the trees wear silk ties. They warble: "Havana moon."

6

About 26,000 days. Time enough? Dark blue night. crackling bonfire at the beach, waves rolling in as beach foam. Silence. Flame images rise, then turn, blacken crisp, and begin to float up in the smoke.

The universe, disguised as a huge rhinoceros, looks down its long gray warty nose and burps. "Well, it's a start," it thinks.

To Amy, leaving for college; I think of you as

I'm driving the Volkswagen up the
Ashby hill, passing the tower of the
white Clarement

Hotel, rising above where the
Avenue becomes Tunnel Road.
Shafts of strong late

afternoon sun's light fall down
through the open sunroof and paint
bright white the

turning wheel, white my hands upon
it. Suddenly, I am thinking how the
sun must

have looked to the original animals
in their days in the waters upon this
earth, how

they must have long looked up
through the deep and ancient waters
and seen some

strong light flickering from above,
how, on that first morning as they
climbed, one foot

after another, up onto the dry land,
how the sun must have warmed
them, how they must

have felt the dazzling yellow above
shined just for them. Sunlight floats
in this front

Owindow. Bright green bushes flow
by on either side. You begin in your
mind to pack

with your favorite things the first
suitcases. Some birds rise from the
tree branches and

begin to wing toward you with white
flowers in their beaks. Other birds,

bright green, blue, red, begin singing
for you in the tall trees, for it is morning

and, again, the first day of the world.

Please answer me quickly

I think it is noontime here,
bright sun directly overhead,
light blue the whole sky,
small white clouds traveling across.
I sit on this green carpet of grass.
What I think is me watches as,

up in the trees nearby, small blossoms undulate and
turn into white flowers right before my eyes.
I will sit right here till midnight.
It will be silent. I will look up again at the sky.
It will be all black as the bottom of a tunnel,
Except, across it, tiny white twinkling lights.

What is the truth about the sky?
Is it light blue or black?
Does it have small white clouds or pinpoints of light?
What is the truth? Please, answer me quickly.
And those two fish in the sea making love -
it is twenty million years ago:

Do you remember our being inside them?
Can you still hear the caress of their scales?
Do you remember, when they birthed us later,
our coming out into ice-cold water.
We stayed close together.
Our parent fish began falling

down toward the ageless bottom of the sea.

I cried. You cried. You and I swam upward,
tiny, side by side - blue-green everywhere,
shoulders moving as fins. Now we are here.
It's twenty million years later. Our fish-parents'
remains are bottomless gray sea mud.

But, still, are they alive even now?

And are we fish still?

Is the white flower a tree?

Is the sky blue or black?

Please answer me quickly!

What is really your name?

Waking

The morning fog floating up this wooded
canyon reflects across the green
polished marble cube of this day
I turn around in my hand.

First we wake and then we sleep.
The surgeon picks up the knife.
The veil falls away. Death falls
like a hammer, rises like a glove.

I take death in my teeth and shake
it like a dog shakes a rag doll.
The surgeon puts down the knife.
First we sleep and then we wake.

Through hillcrest evergreens,
thick fog floats this way, rises
higher and covers the whole canyon
in white

Two

Gray mouse crying in the cat's mouth

There's a gray mouse crying
in the cat's mouth.

The old clock whirs and
bongs the wrong hour again.

The metal hands fall off with a clank.
The circus dissolves - the glittery

costumed animals slink away
and are gone. The sky closes up

like a dark blue valise, and the click echoes.
On the lam again, chased by the wolf of time.

As the first black train, boxcar doors nailed shut

As the first black train,
boxcar doors nailed
shut,

turned toward AuchwitzBergenBelsenDachau,
the immense metal doors at the end of the modern age
swung open with a gigantic all-pervading creak; then, with the sun-

fire above Hiroshima, the door began to noisily close; and, as Nagasaki flew up into the
air and disappeared in the
all-consuming flames, the door at the end

of the modern age slammed shut with a pounding
shriek that shook the world, pulverized
the old answers, and set off echoes which still

enter our deepest dreams, and set fires in the world:
Us falling onto hot sand, some post-post-modern desert,
the possibility, after all, of no promised land

Perhaps perhaps perhaps

1

He sat down at his machine and began to type
so much was gone he hardly knew
what to think or where to begin

perhaps it had been because Mergenthaler
had substituted the newly unpacked androids
for the last of the people; perhaps it had been because

Thulon had marched with the art police
in that sunny Saturday parade; perhaps it was
the blue bird who quickly flew away, mouth open wide, crying.

2

perhaps • he sat •
gone hardly knew who •
marching • flew away • Mergenthaler

Thulon marching, beginning to type,
the tree police, the feet police,
sun going down • Mergenthaler's robots

sitting at their machines and beginning to type
so much was gone they hardly knew
what to think or where to begin

Nothing the Clown

Nothing -- It opens up wide,
like a clown's mouth.
Inside it is pure black,
no shadow, no gray,
like the pure blackness inside
a large keyhole.

The clown and I stand facing each other
deep in a very parched forest.
In the unmoving left hand held high, the
clown holds a gray metal wand,
like a king's scepter.

The clown's face is painted:
A big painted red smile reaches up to
the ears; painted blue tears fall down
the white cheeks.
The clown's baggy yellow polka-dotted

costume begins flapping, like
the clown's orange hair, flapping
in the growing wind about us. Brown
leaves in the dry trees rustle, crackle, flutter down.
The clown looks hard at the sound.

The leaves turn to dust and keep falling
through the breeze as brown powder.
The forest dissolves into rock.
The rising wind is hot.

The clown is now stone.

The clown's blue-painted tears are now
water flowing down the clown's rock cheeks.

The orange hair is now moss and lichen.

It is a keyhole for which

I am becoming a gray metal key.

July 20, 2002

Ramallah today

“I have been worried about my son and his children,” Rajah said into the NPR microphone.

“See, his children are four and six and when

the Israeli soldiers broke into their house, in the midst of explosions, and took it over, the children were standing there. The soldiers

violated the children’s world” he said. He paused, himself flown back in that moment, Ramallah during that siege.

Interviewer

Terri Gross, waited, then asked him another question. I could not leave his last reply. The words kept repeating in my ears: “They

violated the children’s world.” I guess I am one of those children; I know this as I know my own name: For the rest of my life, the

soldiers will again be battering in our door. Little, tiny, I will be perpetually standing there, hearing the explosions outside, seeing,

as in a nightmare, bayonets pointing angrily at my beloved father. All my life in the future I will be asking myself:

“Will they kill

him, kill us before they leave?" Each time, in the night
before the explosions begin – it is always the same – before
the gunfire and

yelling, before the pounding on our dark red front door, I
dream of a large yellow balloon in the morning breeze
rising slowly off the

gravel and sand of the front yard. I watch it rise, big, into
the air, the yellow like the bright yellow of my dear sister's
dress, like the streaming yellow of the sun.

It is my heart

1.

The world tears the heart from my chest
and throws it bloody, pumping
into the night field, the field of swaying wheat.

The world tears out my memory
of the past and burns it on
the leaping red-yellow flaming pyre.

My eyes see my memories as white smoke
rising into the night sky - wrapping itself
around the crescent moon.

My hands wrench free of my body altogether
and flap up like the wings of birds into the sky
flapping up into the smoking billowing rising up...

2.

Down from the foggy sky, rain begins to fall.
Each drop is itself weeping.
My hair falls with it to the ground.

Into the now-soaking night soil, my legs sink
down to my hips, then to my waist - and I sink
and disappear - my eye sees last the

smoking sliver of the moon.

No light.

In the aeon-long blackness,

3.

leaves begin to extrude from my trunk.

I can't see - but I know I'm green.

A thought tries to rise to my mind,

but it's no use. Nothing is there.

Then how do I know I am green?

I sense time passing - ages - new dinosaurs come up

then pass down away. Rain seeps down through
the ground and visits me. Its messages are wetness
and cold but I waken.

4.

In the distance above me,

I hear a scratching

through the days and nights.

God knows what time passes.

Then one day something happens.

Fingers break down through to me

through the dirt. Down through the hole,
the cold air hits my head like a blast.

The fingers seem somehow familiar.

The dirt falls away.

I look up. It is cold and very dark.

I see nothing but the edges of fingers

scurrying above me; I feel them brushing the dirt away
from my head and out of my eyes.

The hands are all there is.

Hands to the wrist.

The dirt is out of my eyes.

The hands caress my forehead.

They are my hands.

Way above me, I see a dark cloud moving aside.

The tiny moon.

My hands reach down brushing dirt aside
from my shoulders. They grip my shoulders
and pull me up. I am out of the hole. I am green.

We are in a wheat field.

A mountain is to my left in the
night shadow. It is thumping,

thumping.

It begins singing.

It is my heart.

Wily Coyote runs

White, gray, what hair there is. eventually we will be transparent.

Wily Coyote has just run off the cliff, and, in the cartoon,

still running forward oblivious to the fact that there is
nothing below to run on, just chasm.

Now it is that instant before he realizes,
and he runs resolutely forward into thin air.

Three

Back the night before,

I yearn for the huge silver airliners to pull backwards
out of the buildings they've slammed into,
for the knives to retreat from the flesh as if
they had never thought of entering,

that the blades return to only their box-cutting,
with no move to the left or the right.

I plead with the explosions
to return back into their bombs,

their hand grenades, their mortar shells, back
into the airplanes filled with fuel for the long journey home.

I plead that the great expanses of rubble and broken stone rise
back up into the buildings they had been before the attack,

the roads back into being, leading again to the
homes of loved ones. I beseech the blood, the
pieces of flesh, the eyes, the guts, the skin, the
organs of love-making to float up from deep in the rubble

and soil and weave themselves back into the
living bodies of family and community.

I cry that we must gain the determination to climb
back before the deathly events, back the night before,

the night of September 10th, while the angry and oppressed talk outside, people are
talking and listening with each other inside over dinner - how to live fairly with each
other, how to live in love with our only planet, how to bring those outside in. The next
day the same people

climbing onto the same airliners, flying successfully to their destinations, the balance of things swinging back toward a fair center, minds flooding with visions of a new century and millennium. I reach my hands up toward the sky and plead

that cooling rain fall down, that a bright moon rise into the black sky, that all the stars are luminous against the backdrop of utter darkness and that the families are all safe and home again, that the only fires are in the fireplaces and in the stars.

Seagulls

Overlooking the Inner Harbor, Victoria,
British Columbia, before my 50th birthday

We sit on balconies

watching gulls in flight.

Every creature fathoms time and space.

We hear caws, see stroking

wings, watch floating clouds.

Eternity and universe are feelings in each heart.

Swimming through the moment tells us

how the shimmering Inner Harbor shows the sky.

All breathe in stars. All exhale galaxies.

All around us, the morning fog rolls in.

All boundaries fade and disappear:

Just luminous light gray all around, just boundless light.

The years

for Polly

The sun lowers soft yellow toward
the glowing waves. Clear blue water
flows up the sand, covers my feet,
ice cold, flows back away with a

hiss. The name of every grain of sand
is in gravity's open mouth.

Thin sweating runners sprint
along the beach, carrying black

batons, picking up speed as they pant
toward the Northern horizon.

The faster the sun goes down,
the darker it gets, the faster they run.

There is no room – five notes

1. Once when I was young and afraid there would be no bottom to my fall, I lay down disconsolate upon the morning grass. To my body's shock, I did not sink. Lying there, I could let go every muscle, every thought and did. I settled into a state of quiet bliss, like going to sleep. But I was awake, beneath the summer sun, held in the arms of the green.

2. I find myself standing next to an oak desk in the dark wood library of a great house. Varicolored books of poetry fill every bookcase. Shelves cover all the walls. A worn deep blue carpet sleeps on the floor. I look up and find the poetry book-lined walls are so high, that clouds floating there obscure the ceiling. Wing feathers held wide, a black and yellow bird pushes off. From an upper shelf and flies up into the mist and disappears with a cry.

3. I turn around and around, still stunned by the number of pages of print in this room. Mine will add nothing. I feel exhausted and sit down at the old desk. A red fountain pen on the desk sits up, walks over to me on its fountain pen legs and climbs into my waiting hand.

4. Thirty sitting wordsmiths, rhymesters line the silent shadowed evening zendo's walls. There is nothing in the room.

5. There is no room.