Fur Found Rhythm (1969)

Could you stand to be happy

while I

hear the fur

see the warmth

grasp the sound

of your

laugh-burlap-sourcream-mantlepiece body

to my own

as I

sing my poem into your flesh?

Listen to my eyes as I

sleep inside your texture as we

carry off our own

sweetsour burden

& cry

over laughs.

Married.

Found.

Lost

The Way The Heat Pours Out (1970)

Your house where you keep all the lifeless birds,

Ceramic, carved in ebony, prosaic,

Silent statuettes & mobiles moving

In the window wind,

Perching on glazed branches,

Singing unheard songs.

Redwing blackbirds, purple finches & exotic

Chinese canaries

Haunt me now that the ice storms of January

Have made the air too cold for flight.

They’ve all gone back to Virginia now.

It’s too bad we can’t do that.

My house in your absence still has its dust,

Uncolored, soft as a sigh, prolific,

Lying on the window ledges & the book shelves,

Covering the paintings on the wall

With a fine kindness of distortion

Of familiar facial features.

It bothers me with its soundless sorrow,

Now that the dust has covered all

The smudges & the glass-marks,

The cigarette burns & candle droppings.

All the glasses have been put away.

Dust can’t penetrate a closed cupboard door.

All the birds except the songless sparrows

Have made their way back to Virginia now,

& the prolific dust has taken dominion

Over my shelves & your songless glass.

Your house where you keep all the lifeless birds,

& mine where I keep the dust,

These are shadows like the shadows on the snow

That the picket fence makes as night falls.

The songless sparrow picks & searches

Through the frost & snow for seeds,

To keep his warmth from leaving him

The way the heat pours out my door when I open it.

A Night Scene (1971)

A dog howls

in the pasture:

he is alone,

except for a tree.

The tree reaches

bare arms toward

the pale moon:

like a dying man.

It is alone,

except for a dog.

The dog’s howl

is the scream

of a mortar-shell.

The steel-eyed moon

seems to suddenly fall.

The dog is afraid

and so he howls.

Six Sisters (1971)

1.

She was strong, no, long on lies,

so I tried to break that down but

the fit was with her to the last. I

think she wanted me to be her slave.

She tried to tell me about the hollow

feeling she had about her dad. He was

some kind of an account executive. He

was always quiet around the house.

She always wanted me to be on the

bottom under her chaining sweat. I

don’t know what it was. I guess I

simply wasn’t ready for it yet.

2.

One girl was a nature lover and she

always and often wanted me to come with her

on greasy picnics with chicken in this grove

where the trees looked like a huge salad.

Her father was a miner who was killed in

an accident of either Fate or God. She

didn’t have any hangups over that but I

thought that maybe she should have.

She always wanted me to love her green in

the shivering grass and scratching grain. I

don’t know how to put it but I

never felt that close to ground.

3.

There was this other one

she was young and she

always tried to make me go along on

carnival rides and circus trips.

Her father was a deaf-mute but he

fathered such a noisy daughter that I

wondered if he hadn’t simply chosen

not to talk in front of people.

She always wanted to do it standing up with

a Sousa march on the record player. I

don’t know why for sure but I

never felt that close to sound.

4.

I knew another girl who thought she

had a dragon in her basement. She was

crazy about religion but I

think it must have scarred her youth.

Her father tried to get me to merge with

his church. He said he would have been

dead from drinking if it weren’t for

the freedom of the word.

I know you won’t believe this but she

wanted it in the graveyard hard and quick. I

am still not sure why but I

could almost see the point in that.

5.

And speaking of point I guess I

ought to tell you about the one who

made me take her to the mountains

overlooking Denver.

She said she never knew her dad because he

left the house when she was only four but

the F.B.I. had him traced once as

far as Denver when he got away.

She liked to do it with our clothes on

because she said she always felt so cold. I’m

not certain but I think I heard her say that

she always felt afraid when snow came.

6.

There was one who used to take me up

to the roof of her house. She liked

to see the birds fly and

so did I.

Her father was a pilot who had been

on one long milk run for twenty years. She

always got excited when he

came home to rest.

We never did get around to

doing anything sexual except we

talked a lot about freedom and I

guess there is some regeneration in that.

We Drink Another Cup In Silence (1971)

This crowded place is like an empty basement room.

These people seem to know who they are and why,

but their evasive eyes say that they too, are alone,

like eggs separated in their celled cartons.

There are, of course,

the mirrors they carry

in their pockets and their purses:

these would tell them

who they are and why,

if the images weren’t reversed.

The images are reduced to a flatness

that is born from seeing life

in black and white cinema shapes.

This stirring room is like a canyon filled with snow.

The faces here do not deceive nor contact me,

because I cannot see their features through this fog,

nor tell you who they are and why it should matter.

Night Watch (1972)

1.

The gates are locked.

I am on watch.

The sun has died & left

The sky rinsed red with blood.

I can see the silhouettes

Of buildings & trees.

They are large black shadows

That loom against the new stars.

The gates are locked,

Like bones buried beneath gravestones,

Or seedlings trapped in the shadows

Of dead & rotting logs.

2.

I am on watch.

I see the eyes of soft-stepping cats

Blazing like the stoplight sun at dusk.

Their shapes flash black as they pass

Against the pinpoint glowing dome.

Slender trees sway tenderly

Like ghosts dancing in the mournful wind.

I dream I hear the dirt break

From the strength of silent earthworms.

I cannot stop the lock

From falling from the gate.

The Last Ballet (1972)

after Tchaikovsky

The swan sings softly with her

arms: the water-movements of her

arms suggest the writhing of a

dying tree, sizzle-dancing in

the ecstasy of fire, its life

spilling out with the juices of

its blood. The sap of her arms is

boiling in agony too, and the

almost inaudible tone of her

song holds the audience in

mute suspension, because they

too, have danced in this ballet.

The dance coveys the spirit of

the dancer: the water-movements of

her arms suggest a fatal desire to

live forever, with fire’s ecstasy

delayed forever, with the sap always

flowing in her veins like stems: her

mute song an eternal note: the

movements of the dying swan

suspended in a final graceful

pirouette: ever seeking

the return to the beginning: ever

lost in a lasting dance.

The Forest (1972)

Here there are many black trees: gnarled non-conformists,

each scarred differently, each with its own concerns,

own silences.

In spring the seedlings pop, pushing through the birth-wet dirt,

thirsting for the life of light, straining thin arms toward rain.

Many never make it through the membrane of leaves.

Some grow straight, assisted by the sun. Their lives will be tall &

easy, a race for the blue ceiling. Others will be left below, imprisoned

by the darkness of a taller shadow. This was meant to be. A life of

desperation for some.

Here there are many still logs: corpses lying silently amid the

turmoil of the new generation. Their influence is felt. Where

they rest a seedling cannot break.

Expressway Death (1972)

Tonight while driving out to

get my wife from a birthday party, I

saw something move 100 yards in

front of the car. A dog had just

been hit & was struggling to

get up. It looked as if its leg

was broken. I drove past on the

shoulder of the road so I wouldn’t

hit it again. So did the other

drivers, although none of us

stopped to help it.

I thought about it: but maybe it

would not know me for a friend &

would bite my hand. The expressway

traffic was tedious with people

coming home after another day. I

thought: stop at the next exit

& call the humane society. I began

to feel excited over what I hoped

to do, but then I passed the exit &

kept on going. I stayed with the

traffic until my own exit.

On the way back home I wondered

if it was still there. When I saw the

lifeless shape, I recognized

my own blood staining the long road.

Triad (1972)

I. RAIN

1.

He said,

“What I have written

I have written.”

And,

“No bone shall be broken.”

Later he had still not

been able to wash.

2.

Witnesses swear

that water mixed with blood

splashed upon the earth.

Sour wine stained

the stones below.

3.

They wrapped their love in linen

and laid it on a stone.

4.

They couldn’t find him.

His clothes were still there

but he had gotten up

and gone without a word.

He’d left the door open.

Two white birds had flown in.

II. WIND

1.

His breathing had stopped.

A grey wind scattered the dead leaves.

Bare trees clicked their branches.

Wind bit their faces with cold teeth.

They looked with fear at the yellow clouds.

2.

“Take my hand. Let me show you

I am real.” he said.

She took his hand,

& felt his breath

Filter through her body.

3.

They went out fishing.

They didn’t catch a thing.

Later they went out again.

This time they filled their nets.

Wind blew over the surface

Of the cold water.

4.

When you are young

You travel where you like.

As an old man you must follow

Where you have no desire to go.

III. HAIL

1. The lamb’s white coat

was drenched with blood.

The moon was red.

Men in white robes

passed the bleeding lamb.

2.

She was dressed in a sun-red robe.

She was so pregnant that she

cried out to be delivered.

Later she gave birth to a boy,

but he was bitten by a snake,

and he died.

3.

The hail began to fall.

Someone said,

“Goddamn the hail!”

But it came down so heavily

that you couldn’t see the mountains.

Ribcage In The Sand (1972)

Over the peninsula arm

Seagulls braced the shore like bombers:

The bar had torn a skiff from life,

And left it to the fingers of the surf.

The rotting ribcage of its past,

Like a bleached skeleton half-buried,

Marked its place of pain and death,

Where water’s blood had ceased to love.

The hands of the breaker-sea,

Like brothers to the waters of my heart,

Lurch with their memories,

And burden the beach with their touch.

A Person’s Death Hits You (1972)

for Kirby Congdon

A person’s death hits you

When you walk through a door,

& the room is dark.

Or pull out a book.

Or turn a corner on the street,

& see someone you both knew.

In the winter,

The snow breathes against the window.

The earth shines from the moon.

In summer, on the island, swimming,

You’re diving down:

The bottom reaches up to touch you.

It hits you.

The Accident (1972)

“Damnit, I don’t care anymore!

I’m getting a divorce,

and that’s final!”

she said.

He said:

“Then you’ll never see the children

or me alive again!”

And he slammed the car door.

And then he roared off.

The children were screaming

in the back seat.

The oak tree stood at the end of the road.

When they got to the car

they saw it was wrapped

like a fist on the staff

of the steel-armed tree.

The children had come to earth.

One was already dead.

One gasped horrid breaths

that wound down while they watched.

He was still in the car,

his hands wrapped so tightly

around the steering-wheel

that they couldn’t pull him away.

“Look at how his hands are grafted

to the goddamned wheel.”

the young cop said.

“Nothing could have pulled him

from that wreck. Not a thing.”

Something Like The Moon (1972)

1.

Your tired breathing was like

the dream I had later,

of death, the stillborn child,

the dream of beaten men.

2.

The panties pull away,

soft and wet with sweat,

like dew on the growing lawn.

Green and growing smell of grass:

the smell closes around me

like a thick cloud.

I bite the growing nipples.

I think of babies nursing,

their lips warm with milk.

3.

Sometimes the birth of a poem

feels like coming together.

Other times the words rip you open,

like a cesarean section.

When you’re through

they leave you broken

This is as close as I can come.

My tongue curls into wet cream,

feels the inner walls,

the corridors of birth,

but still I live alone,

creating only words.

4.

Only words that scream like cold

and naked children. To be let out

to be warmed by the sun and to fly

like seagulls above the pier.

Sometimes words can fly,

but too often they rip the earth

as they fall. Do not push. Do not

expect too much.

Something like a flood of words

floods the rivers of our bodies:

something crying to be born:

something like the moon.

Seeds (1973)

for Thomas Fitzsimmons

“But friend!

What will grow

in this dust,

without any water

or wind?”

“Tiny seeds.”

he said.

&

they did.

Soon (1973)

Shadows whisper

through the halls.

Moonlight licks

against the glass.

Below the window

on the snow

a bird’s ghost

leaves its body

& rises toward the moon.

Someone crying now

in another room.

Something’s going to happen

soon.

The Insomniac (1973)

I lay awake

where the river bends:

the jams of logs,

the broken, confused

rocks, (heads of frightened

bathers), deep funeral places.

I breathe in the murky shadows.

I float incessantly

above the weeds. I suck

the black muck. Every morning

I am killed by the hot passing sun.

Tonight (1973)

White horses will rush

From the weird surf.

They will not be tame,

But wild, like rain.

Lustful wind & crazy water

Will beat upon the beach.

The ocean cannot keep them

Locked beneath its sleep.

Burning (1973)

for Alan Britt

1.

Leaving, you may go

to Pluto, or to

another island.

It’s like when

you mark a coin,

& it returns to your hand.

You go to bed,

fall into a dream,

& wake up dead.

2.

Some form

flies past your

window.

Some form of

some thing

that used to be

some other

thing.

Your hand

feeds your face

involuntarily.

You find

you are

somebody else.

3.

Getting there,

you find yourself

where you always were.

It’s like seeing someone

you’ve never seen before,

but they seem familiar.

You eat an orange

& feel teeth

biting your flesh.

4.

It’s like you fall asleep,

& wake to see

your own shadow

staring at you.

Black Milk (1973)

1: THE GOLD STANDARD

Satin razors bake in open shells.

Maniacs seek degrees in Law.

Butchers cut up teenage girls

Shot during season by professionals.

The eyes of Michelangelo’s “PIETA” crack,

& blue snakes flood the Vatican chambers.

Women give birth to mortar-shells.

Men marry their dogs & cats.

Diamonds gleam from the President’s mouth.

Chains of dead birds surround Washington D.C.

2: STONEHENGE

Rabid apples circle the Lincoln Memorial.

Shiny purple purses float above the churches.

Yellow fishes ooze from a crack in the moon.

Black leather flowers grow from a hospital bed.

Burning oysters writhe deliciously

In moist brown flames.

Priests turn xray eyes

On congregations of wooden legs.

Fathers penetrate their daughters with frozen darts.

Mothers smother their sons with hand-sewn lilies.

3: EDGAR ALLEN POE

A virgin turns on her radio

& raspberries pop from the speakers.

A man begins his long descent into the earth

Carrying only a gun, an old anchor, & an umbrella.

A flag courts a fire-engine,

& wins her hand in a heavy wave.

Cookies leap from their jars.

Tuna-fish sandwiches bare their teeth.

If a man drinks milk that is black

He will turn into a stringless kite.

Ice Feathers (1973)

for Ben Tibbs

1: MUSIC

Ice feathers fall from the wings

Of the giant black swan.

The swimmer in the wind

Is drunk as a sleeping rock.

Poor men make music

By using their eating utensils.

A shot rings out in the shadow factory,

& foxes run out, speaking in tongues.

An odd animal rises up from my garden,

& ceremonial rain falls on the silken zoo.

2: SEASONS

A stray nose appears at the door.

“You’re just in time.” I said.

Jeweled hornets buzz around

The home of the Clown.

April is a vegetable month.

February tastes like lilacs.

Meanwhile, down by the smiling pond,

An Angel cleans her sooted wings.

March is a time of abandoned zebras.

January causes frogs to howl in desperation.

3: SORROW

A donkey laughs at nothing

While a monkey cleans his fish.

Seven hundred sunflowers

Break from their stalks & run away.

In the evening by the moonlight

I can hear those elephants dancing.

All the graves in Cuba

Erupt in a fountain of sugar.

Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen.

Nobody knows my monthly electric bill.

Blood Curtains (1973)

1: DEPARTURE

Long shadows haunt the silent hillside.

Sleeping buildings & statues suddenly awaken.

Two people approach each other,

& their shadows melt into one.

The hillside shivers in its sleep,

& the sky snores deep basso harmonies.

Behind the tall blue curtains

The dead are rehearsing your dreams.

A slow train starts up the hillside,

& suddenly the shadows reverse themselves.

2: FOREST & DOVE

The captive heart beneath the dirt

Strains in its anguish.

Deep in the middle of the mountain

A bird is waiting.

The trees lift their hands to the dying sun,

Roots reaching inward, toward the bird.

Snow hides the black surface,

& blinds the frozen leaves.

Finally, the frozen planet cracks from the sound

Of the plaintive voice escaping from within.

3: ON THE BEACH

You walk along the shore & see

A grape lying next to a dead bird.

An old stuffed chair is moving toward us.

The melody of the waves beckons.

The empty street is suddenly full of people.

A building changes shape. Another.

A hand, then an arm, breaks the surface

Of the ground. Reaches toward you.

You grasp the arm, & pull:

As you clear the ground you gasp for air.

Tears (1973)

for Ben Tibbs

Crowds roll frozen eyes

toward the crazy foil of the moon

Insane chords of thunder splash

between the earth & the madly melting sun

Tall trees fall terrified

under the weight of the wild rain

& churchbells laugh

above the drunken clouds.

Crossing (1973)

We are moving through the door.

These floors sway with the tide

of the ejaculating train. You lean

on me for support. I am leaning on you

tonight for support. We grasp hands

& the hands open up & graft together.

The blood flows freely between us. We are

swimming spinning through the door.

Crossing over the frontier we

hold our breaths anticipating

the cold plunge. I am your support

in my dependence. You are crying.

Go ahead. The rushing snow inside us

now rushing pushing as outside the train

the country is white with anticipation.

This is the entrance. Go ahead through.

The grey clouded ceiling will protect us.

I can feel your blood bubbling in confusion.

You are afraid to go ahead afraid to

return. Your fear is my support. I will

hold you inside me behind me as the

hard & emptied train pulls away.

Waking (1973)

1.

There is silence & then

the trees gleam.

Sunlight beams

through the glass.

Outside:

the noise of birds.

2.

Leaves sparkle

in symphonic light.

A shot explodes

They flutter in patterns.

(Like leaves in the wind.

3.

Or like wishes.)

Fish leap from the stream,

over the falls,

where water falls

like night.

4.

Stars spin on.

Some are dead,

but we see their light.

The salmon crashes through

the ceiling surface,

& splashes back down.

5.

Grandpa still lives where

his light beams ever outward.

They swim upstream:

light above & below.

6.

A shot explodes.

In my eyes in my nose in my brain

the nerves flinch & jerk:

the sound explodes

in my ears.

7.

I am thinking

about tomorrow.

I am thinking

about yesterday.

And what to do about

today.

April (1973)

1.

Alone in this room

again.

No way

To get out.

She’s got a ticket to ride

&

She can.

2.

Today is a sunny day & I

went to the mailbox in it,

whistled an old song in it,

Remembered the feeling of it.

3.

I think

it’s got to be

something new,

but also old

in me.

You wander

the sun’s roads.

You wonder

why you feel so old.

4.

April air

is spinning now.

Bright sun flowers

swirling into one.

Today’s old lines

are mine.

April 17th,

alone with you,

and myself:

another birth,

& other words.

In another time.

Morning (1973)

Birds’ hearts flutter

Through roots

That drink the sky.

The autistic moon

Turns away

From moths that scrape

Fragile wings

Against its shoulders.

Worms tunnel deeper

Toward the heart

Of the sleeper.

The Wheel (1973)

Time is

the vehicle

that describes

the rain.

The moon

rolls on.

The clock

falls off

the wall.

What To Do Next (1973)

You arrive at the station

With your pockets full of time.

You’re so invisible

That girls walk right through you.

Throw away your ticket

& skate away.

The clouds burn out

& ashes rain upon your head.

Your bones ache

From being used as jail bars.

Get up & move on

To the next holdup.

A dog on the coffee table!

A roller derby in the ice cream!

A piano roaring down the road!

A monkey with a gun

Has got you covered.

Keep your eyes straight ahead.

She has too much

But she wants a little more.

The room is loud

& the walls are turning brown.

Your ears are burning with old sounds.

Don’t die.

Just take a deep breath,

get up,

& fly.

The Broken Lock (1974)

1.

The Chevrolet beneath the seaweed

Resembles, say, a pendulum.

In the glacial sewers

They all look like abandoned books.

They gather in fields of blood.

They wait another minute.

Falling faces scrape sharp edges

Against us as we watch the stars.

Our marching machine begins to fill with foam.

Our slowly cracking table says “Goodbye.”

2.

In the prison of the glossy blanket

Strangled paper cars claw in

Sober luxury. Handgun. Caress.

Membrane. Attempt. A silver

Tunnel carves an orphan

Illustration on our fragile female

Hatchet. A tiny cutlet

Whirls in nude simplicity. Our magnet

Signs the blank, transparent

Mortgage of the jealous cartoon.

3.

We take the tapered candles past

A nest of burnt-out lightbulbs. We

Shake our messy napkins in the

Trans-Atlantic air. Our teeth

Are scared. Our hands are

Running in front of

Speeding snake bracelets. We

Have lost our shoes! We

Have lost our season tickets! We

Have lost our fried potatoes!

4.

A placenta of noise

Masturbates in the ambiguous

Bandshell. Car-pool. Vendetta.

Banshee. Balloon. Barrels of

Dead kittens crouch on stereo

Loading platforms. Juicy

Manikins balance on

Shrouded pedestals. Our grief is

Greater than all the porcelain in

Mexico. Our grief is a polar bear.

5.

Candy-striped plants lean toward

Windows of music. Strawberries

Buzz obsessively in the creeping

Rain. Bulldogs escape

Omnisexual worms. Our

Harmonicas are leaking! Our

Underwear is illegal! Our

Grandparents are alive! Our

Rescue gear is stolen! We grease

Our feet & slip into the night.

6.

Sandwich. Beacon. Crawfish. Mistake.

Persian maids lounge in secret

Frameworks. The bells of

Mystery ring a song of strange

Graduation. Our bluebird

Reeks of soy sauce! Our bean-bag

Unfurls in hymenal splendor! We stand

On the threshold of a

Kitchen revolution! We teeter

Near the edge of an insect rebellion!

7.

Our eyes are bankrupt! Our

Noses are overparked! Our

Brains are under arrest! Our

Bones are bushwhacked! Our

Hair is ringing! Our

Legs are braided! Our

Toes are psychotic! Our

Hearts slowly stretch in the

Direction of Hudson’s Bay. Meanwhile,

We hide inside a giant football.

8.

Our bed is stacked with

Grey-haired magazines, squirming

Amid discarded

Hats & umbrellas. Rusted scalpels

Litter the quaint fairground. Con

Edison. Sample. Woodcraft.

Needle. The sweet blonde

Morning declares itself. We

Inhale & hold excited breaths to

See the tortured, raving day approach.

Postcard (1974)

The sky is grey here.

My room is quiet & near.

Thinking of you

in my little cocoon.

The Song (1974)

for Bill Oldenburg (1936-1974)

A child plays quietly

In an old man’s room.

A song of brave infatuation

Rises from the moon.

A windmill spins

Above an ancient heart,

& the crocuses are in bloom.

The broken-hearted bricks

Hum a strange, sad tune.

A newborn child

Emerges from its womb.

It’s morning once again.

I’ll see you soon.

Carnival Rail (1974)

Admit defeat, ant, bear, tiger,

Liar! You occupy your winter

Chair, boots on, coat fastened like a

Frozen oarlock!

Many song to orange touch,

We stand among the pyramids of

December, vanishing, morbid, alone &

Diffuse.

Like punctured loaves in

Flesh dusk, your mouth is

Grey & white, like money,

Like tropical fish.

My cranberries sink in a sludge of

Discarded buttons! Oregon! I want

To wrap Oregon! Pajamas rushing,

Helplessly manicured.

Your teeth, so horrible,

Unique, bring pain to the

Bathing, joy to the

Table top.

I settle like an awful light

In the furniture of your silver

Cave. My bone is river train!

Vivid, intrepid.

The Clown Choir (1974)

The choir loft was filled with an awful quacking,

as if ducks. But it was the Clowns. Their new

identity.

When they were in a church, they quacked.

When in a bar, they barked like dogs. In courtrooms

all across the land there was mayhem - caused by

the Clowns, chirping like parakeets.

A reporter asked them why they did it. They could

only meow. Finally, doctors examined them.

When the exams were over, neither the doctors nor

the Clowns could do anything but moo.

The Crystal Mummy (1974)

The crystal princess wakes from the stomach of the

pyramid & rises straight through the ancient bricks. She

hovers in the light above the peak, shining transparent &

green. An anthropology professor sees the apparition &

screams. The sound breaks her body into fragments that fall

on the pyramid, shattering, glittering, laughing.

May (1974)

Rain is streaming down my hair,

& everyone alive is dreaming,

Whether they’re awake or sleeping.

I thought a lot about quitting,

But pictures kept arriving,

& then I found a meaning.

Insects have been waking

This month, regretting

The absurd decision, I think.

For you see, it’s been raining

In my heart all week,

& now a seed is straining

Toward the light, attempting

Reconciliation with the shameless

Wild water in my veins.

The Rain (1974)

The red, orgasmic clouds

Explode sweetly above us,

Arresting dying breezes

That escape our green lungs.

Dragonfly. Maroon. Stampede. Incest.

The grey pearl moon

Incites a riot in our dreams.

Ashes rain upon the wet, enduring leaves.

3 Water Dreams (1975)

1.

The lovely bones

of a duck

on a black rock,

& the silly melody

of the waves.

2.

A baby wakes

afraid in the dark,

feeling the hulk

of the lake

softly humming.

3.

The white canoes,

flying from the fire,

rising to the heights

of the snow:

painfully departing.

10 Things I Do Every Day (1975)

for Ted Berrigan

Wake amazed, in love again.

100 Int. Units Vitamin E

Watch TODAY on T.V.

Check the mail for new friends.

Go back home, again, alone.

Call Ronnie Lane on the phone.

Send my heart in pieces through the air.

Comb my hair.

Play guitar.

Wonder where you are.

Our House (1975)

Summer’s gone, the garden’s in,

the grass in back is tall

& green. Robins are flying

south again. We’ll see them

when they return next spring.

The trees are red & brown. Autumn

makes me feel too old. Especially when

I look ahead, to the coming snow, & the child

we waited for so long.

& looking back, I think I see

the fading tracks that led us here.

This winter,

our new house will keep us warm. But we

were warm before we had it. For now,

it’s just us three: you, & me,

& the cricket in the attic.

October (1975)

It’s 6 AM in the Universe, &

Cold. The yellow sun

Makes another dawn in the lake

Above my head. Warm blue air

Lifts the blanket from my bed.

Yesterday I wiped my father’s blood

From the white cloud walls

Of my home, in another dream.

Now, awake beneath the lake, I am

Alone. The cold grey water of the lake

Invites me in, but then

I am rescued by my lover, the sun.

The History Of The Birth Of Memory (1975)

1.

They climbed the hill & watched the forest burn.

She was frightened. He took her hand. Then he

was frightened too, & lame.

2.

They sold their time & bought a home.

They thought they were alone.

3.

They went out shopping, buying hats, shoes,

gloves, sunglasses, dental floss, earplugs, makeup &

shoe polish. Then they played birthday games.

4.

They sat. They drank. They watched their T.V.

sets. They borrowed pretty thoughts from the past.

Each breath they took was nearer to their last.

5.

Then, they died. Their children grew long hair & cried.

They sold their names to buy more time. They all went blind.

6.

They traded off their cars for rocket ships, &

flew to Mars. They traveled far & saw Plutonian snow.

Then they went as far as they could go. They still didn’t know.

7.

They quit. They fell asleep. Then we were born &

blood began to pump inside one tiny living heart. The

nerves inside the stars began to pitch & start.

The Diplomat (1975)

for Pablo Neruda

The moon is an owl. It growls

& yawns. It greases its wings

Against the rain. A blind

Soldier paces outside an outlawed

Cathedral. Mexico. Revolver.

Singapore. Artaud. A mantle

Of banana trees infests the orchard

Of the sun. A sleek bone twists

Through a frozen crust. A star erupts

Inside a lung. We stand upon

A cloud. Rangoon. Aluminum. Coffee.

Madrid. The land

Is empty & reflective. The ring

Outlives the hand. The map

Outlives the road.

The key outlives the lock.

Memory (1976)

I wake, in Civil War,

Play endless games

Of solitaire. I die,

& am reborn. I breathe,

Until my breath is torn

By unexpected stare or look

In mirror, sudden laugh

Or uninvited tear. No one knows

How slowly I have grown. No one

Knows the feelings I alone

Have given skin & bone, to float like ghosts

Past shadows of the piers & reefs, then

Rise on bells to walk asleep

Through burning cities of white peace,

Where green dreams bloom

On the pastures & plains

Of my newly wounded hands.

Moving On (1979)

for Ronnie Lane

The walls bear weight

Until they break. Drainpipes

Crack, & flood the wounded fields.

Rotten apples fall from neglected trees.

Tall winds rip off limbs, but

The crippled shapes still get new leaves.

You walk the roadmap on your hand,

& wake, among friends,

In a foreign land.

Love Gloves (1982)

for Ben Tibbs

Birds flutter through his hands. He’s

Histrionic, sympathetic, empathetic,

Never cluttered, nor apathetic.

He’s been clever. He’s some lover! He’s

My father & my brother. Zen

Icecream koans advertize

His tender metal lives.

Surreal science is his triumphant plan.

Mystical alliances canonize his monumental plight:

His fingers walk the pages of delight.

His feet tiptoe the earth with bombastic pleasure.

Apple blossoms rain on him forever.

He plans his moves. He butters his words.

His hands massage the sky of love like birds.

Colors (1985)

for Roseanne

A white sun sank into a cold jade sea.

A red rose fell upon a snow-covered lawn.

Black clouds flew before a coming storm,

While something waited, mysterious & warm.

Blue songs spilled through a still grey fog.

Starvation stood guard in a yellow glare.

But secret eyes cried a brave white tear,

& something escaped through purple fear.

Now something creates under colors seen

Beneath depths of paints, ancient & green,

In shadows of dreams that fly between

An infinite spectrum of you & me.

The Lake In Winter (1986)

In November every year,

Before the solid ice forms,

Many migrant seabirds arrive

To rest in our cove

On the edge of the ice shelf,

While the local kingfisher

Guards his throne on the old high dive.

By mid-December

The waterbirds have gone.

Then boys on skates

& ice fishermen come around.

Christmas tree lights

Illuminate the circle

Of lakeside homes.

Drifting snow covers the boat docks.

We wake in the dark,

Startled by internal alarm clocks,

Suddenly aware of the desert of snow

That begins at our shore.

Northwest winds blow down the lake

To rattle our door.

On New Year’s Day,

If the ice is thick,

We’ll take a walk on the frozen lake,

Where summer dreams

Are locked up tight,

Beneath a cold blue sky,

No thaw in sight.

After The Ice-Storm (1987)

We walked among the pines in back,

Accompanied by clack & click of branches.

Some boughs broke & took others down

To a frozen floor, to skid across

A crust of hard snow,

Like sleds that are out of control,

Stuck on GO, no hope, & ‘No more slack.”

We mounted wooden ladders, then,

With worn-out hatchets & a broken broom,

To break off backed-up roof-ice,

It gave us bad leaks & went inside our walls,

While all night long I heard it drip,

While waiting for day-break & still more work

On the weary roof that sheltered our sleep.

So now, we wait, protected & safe,

Until another bough may break.

Good Friday (1988)

We said goodbye

To the last ice on the lake,

Then climbed our high bank

To take a walk

To check the smaller lake

In the hills behind our house.

We saw the last small patch of snow

Where the pine woods is dark,

& continued our trek

Back to the ski-lift shack,

Where we discovered yet a third lake

Hidden in a hollow between the slopes.

After our walk, we watched from our warm chairs

As free breezes crossed over open water.

What I Do Every Day (1992)

Shower & shave.

Love & rave.

Save myself.

Try to be brave.

Think of you.

Laugh a few.

Turn a page.

Break in two.

Procrastinate.

Challenge fate.

Jump another gun.

Lift off toward the sun.

In Another Time (1994)

I tell myself a dream to go

Into the yellow stone

That sings inside my throat.

The sky is grey & sweet.

My heart is an abandoned planet.

Even as I launch this tiny ship,

Someone looks for me

In the populated soil.

My ancestors roll in the waves.

Their vain blood floods my bed.

I tell myself today’s old lines.

Today’s old lines are mine.

Alone with you, myself.

Another birth, & other words.

In another time.

Per Diem (1994)

Rise from my coffin

Think of you often

Coffee next door

Nap at 4

Put on old boat shoes

Listen to the news

Play the blues

Search for clues

Laugh out loud,

Bloodied but still proud.