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## Breadcrumbs: New and Selected Poems

Jonathan Kirk Ellis  
*Portland State University*

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BREADCRUMBS:  
NEW AND SELECTED POEMS

by  
JONATHAN KIRK ELLIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS  
in  
WRITING

Portland State University  
2001

*For  
Mom and Dad*

*with great thanks  
for  
your ceaseless love and confidence*

It is a pleasure to thank Henry Carlile  
for all of his wisdom and guidance. I would also  
like to thank my family for their patient  
support of all of my interests throughout my education.

Special thanks to Cynthia Gomez,  
without whose love and encouragement  
I could never have finished this project.

## THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Jonathan Kirk Ellis for the Master of Arts in Writing were presented October 31, 2001, and accepted by the thesis committee and the department.

COMMITTEE APPROVALS:



Henry Cardile, Chair



Primus St. Joan



Richard Wattenberg  
Representative of the Office of Graduate Studies

DEPARTMENTAL APPROVAL:



John Smyth, Chair  
Department of English

## ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Jonathan Kirk Ellis for the Master of Arts in Writing presented October 31, 2001.

Title: *Breadcrumbs: New and Selected Poems*

These poems are grouped as they are in order to reflect a progression, a trail at the end of which my own spirituality is not found, but revealed. A subtitle might be *Dilemmas and Destinations*, for each poem can also be viewed individually as a struggle or desire to reach this goal. In fact, I label my two sub-sections in precisely these terms. I have organized them not to build upon one another, but to act as “snapshots” that describe my beliefs. My poems begin with family issues and/or characters that have shaped a belief in a multi-faceted God. Several pieces are inspired by the struggles and rewards of marriage, after which I include a series of poems about the experience of travel, and I end with more universal pieces that allow me to ruminate on the nature of my spiritual makeup.

I hope that my poems incorporate the concrete experiences of daily living and images to which others may relate. However, I have been more concerned with writing down the pictures and sentiments that trigger and remind me of my own path, the *breadcrumbs* if you will that I follow in order to understand myself.

Under the influence of poets like Seamus Heaney, Jelaluddin Rumi, and Denis Johnson I have tried to make sense out of the daily choices and observations I have made in relationship with family, in my education, and within the natural world. I try to access my heritage and Anglo-Saxon roots in some pieces, using compound phrases and words with clear pictures. Other times I move into deliberately extended tropes and metaphor, which is more akin to the teaching stories of poets from the East.

My poems look to these simple events and observations of natural phenomenon, as well as my own evolution, to inspire me and turn my attention to issues greater than the initial circumstance. I hope these poems can be read and re-read to support and inspire the reader to ponder their own beliefs about what they might call spirituality.

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## I. Dilemmas

## The Signal

By the burned-out log,  
up late, I hear  
the iron tongue of a bell  
broadcast to the streets  
that morning has made it  
home again, without you.

## Kirk of Skulls

*kirk*: (1100-1150) of the North Scots = church

We march the spongy moors of Banffshire,  
Wind rippling two-toned grasses, boosting prayers  
Where birdsong is more thunder than music,  
And seep into gaseous turf gurgling under boots and bare feet.  
Through the broad Scotch mist we flee  
From Kirkcudbrightshire to Kirkcaldy  
As wild invaders seek the mouth of the Forth,  
Tumbling cold-miles to the Firth, Claw of the North Sea.  
Mother whispers *my sweet little church*.  
We round all corners of the jagged nub, loch to dale,  
Beating them to the bitter delta and we are flotsam.

Take stock of heartache, raise a Scot's pint above the pub,  
And cheer the unfurled slap of the flag's fly rat-tailing the cold morning air:  
A lion, rampant red, armed and azure-bordered within a double tressure -  
A lion, crowned, holding in his dexter paw a naked sword  
And a scepter in the sinister.  
Two silver unicorns buck below, armed and unguled,

Gorged with open crowns,  
With chains reflexed over the back of the last.  
Flag-hunting Norsemen flock our family, enslave.

Once desperate farmers the earth taught to mother,  
She changed our minds on what to grow,  
We became craftsmen of saddles and beer barrels,  
Or sailors seeking for a further world.  
Remember now that great church, The Gamrie,  
Later built from both Viking and Scot  
Bodies harvested from fields,  
Bones mortared into walls  
Becoming the Bloody Pots.  
Forever the Kirk of Skulls.

## Scotch

Ten years thumping tubs  
and I still crave a belt,  
punching clock over hammered iron bands,  
looking out between each batch  
to sea-foamed crags and the Isle of Man.

A cooper for Balvenie,  
my skin's fermented barley mash.  
Fumes from the pot-still stain the fog.  
Legendary *Mannaman* called thick mist  
to protect his people on the cold nub of Argyll –  
so chanted Mother by the bed.

I'm the *Threefold Man*, two thirds spent  
in a whitewashed distillery,  
body left to rattle in the gales,  
battered in this middle place  
between the Irish and home;  
sick of the cycle – field to wort to barrel.

And Father became a ghost  
in the oak cellars below,  
the sad ex-sailor pounding me  
to work double tides against the dole.  
So I stare into the muffled noon sun,  
and like a dog blind to his kennel  
thank St. Andrew for broken casks.  
No, bless him for the whiskey.

## Gabriel's Hound

Migratory geese are legend to be the restless souls of children wandering through the night air until the Day of Judgment.

When you lumber barefoot over  
boot-polished nail heads that pepper  
the sanded grooves, ramshackle floor boards  
wince back but keep you braced the same.

When the neighbors lead you from curbside cans,  
you wake with a howl in the quiet hours, or  
you stand nude in the closet with outthrust limbs,  
don't be ashamed, you're of sleepwalking age  
and simply not through with the day.

Geese honk above appliance-hum, solidarity,  
and your ears prick wide to their thrum,  
unable to rest from the body's slow migration.

When you fidget over peach fuzz slow to wire and  
can barely whisper to the girls, turn to the work  
of birds and seasons having the look of being done.

You're like every boy on auto-pilot rubbing out the knots.

Del Norte

In the frost of Orick on

Del Norte county line

she held a 3-D postcard of

the store we were just in.

I pulled out stolen candy.

Every random object sucked the heat

out and down to the leaves.

I cherish my beloved, but fear

the way nothing more takes her in.

Even the grasses were anxious that night.

But we walked easy on our shoes,

never side by side,

past an open window,

bookshelves sagging, a red bud vase.

How do you walk next to someone?

That night, in front of chain-sawed

bears made of burl



and a cigar smoking Indian,  
we stood akimbo and watched  
the movies between our eyes.

Always the gulls lifting cold autumn up  
through the parking lot.

And nothing more takes her in,  
not even me.

## Smoke

Although I've quit, I light a cigarette  
and sit on the porch with my uncle  
since Mom and Dad have gone to bed.  
We talk about what we like about autumn.  
Day burns down to one glowing focal point.  
Holding him like this, speaking with him,  
we murmur in the leaf-rattle. His salt,  
his flame now lives in my smoke.

Waking, down to ashes, the daydream is  
over and all of the farmhouse groans.  
I move inside to end my nodding, past  
the pie plates we left until morning.  
Dad is too sad alone, without a brother,  
and I am not enough. So  
he and I will pick up where I drifted off,  
after I drift off to sleep again, and listen to him  
joke about the steps he never fixed  
or the God that he'd forgone.

And maybe I'll rise first  
and clean up the mess made  
from the spirits we drank,  
moving easy around his ashes  
in the cupboard.

In the morning I leave the door  
open, for luck, and for him to go away.

## Monday with the Machinist

He can crush a penny with his mounted vice  
after a lick or two with the blowtorch,  
or beat it smooth on the horn of his anvil  
then cool it in a can of rust-water;  
his grit alchemized and given to me  
as I sit in a corner thick with tobacco tins  
and oil-stained bags of *Arizona Highways*,  
claiming I'm there for the sunshade.  
I watch him bang an axle or bore sheet metal  
more with a cuss than drill press or hammer.  
Paint fumes linger from the slapdash coat  
he threw on to hold the brittle shell of the shop.  
After a spell he scowls me up and down  
then laughs between a bruise and burn,  
his calloused hands still trembling with  
the ghost vibrations of unplugged machines.  
The post-war drive and thrift, two oiled pistons,  
only grant a half-hour break to light his pipe ash,  
eat a sandwich and look slantwise to ask,  
*how's school going?*

## The Math of Dejection

- for Malcolm

The second camping trailer he has lived in  
is smaller and cleaner, though it mildews  
parked out of sight out back by two dog kennels.  
Our last visit together was full of sunlight,  
as the heat of June dried his bed.  
He listens to every word said to him,  
handles them like berry vines, works and pulls,  
pained, then quickly discards.

This glorious weather would  
gladden any other heart than his,  
but he has no reason to be elated by the sun,  
and takes good care not to be –  
*more things relied upon*  
*yields more grief.*

He killed the boy of himself,  
thirsting for heat and light.  
He killed that one early on.

Thirty-six year old virgins fall in love so easily  
with the woman on BBC T.V.  
and the girl bagging groceries.

This one is in love with my ex-wife  
and wants to draw her naked, or  
photograph his few female friends,  
naked or not, just to be near them.

Nothing can hide from him what presses beneath.

Suicide, he says, is not an option.

*It might pull one more person into sadness.*

Such mathematics helps somehow.

His parents drank themselves to death,  
one brother and sister follow,  
one stepmother and three stepbrothers  
are eaten alive by coke and prison.

Nine unlucky souls and multiplying,  
divided in their misery.

The pale gloom of rainy days  
is better fitted to his taste, no, to his humor.

Perhaps it hides him better, but without pleasing.

*Pleasure must be viewed from a certain angle,*

metaphysics studied, languages learned,

and mothers should be present.

One must become a philosopher.

He says, at times, he can hear nothing for hours

and on days like this, all horizon,

gives up to those golden-blue moments

as if he were someone else.

Only then is he able to laugh,

be nostalgic, or to calculate

from some place less raw.

## Satellites

She speeds on an invisible thread,  
love's weight and pulley system,  
flying through the archway  
with no need to guess.

We know his infamous deed,  
his disease and shame  
in perverted symbiosis.

Veins like ripening fruit,  
daily thumped and rosied,  
cottony soft injections.

The barest mitigation of a smile,  
buoyant for a flash bulb's duration.

Their deliberation is brief,  
a curse then blessing,  
she revolves over his near-death and  
the atmosphere softens in new light.

Against silence she presses  
herself to remain earthbound.



We are older, now,  
distant. The episode  
works more to show  
what satellites we have become,  
frozen orbiters  
on the margins.

## Carnival

She's dying to try out her new lip gloss  
behind the Octopus and Zipper.

Kills time collecting spent tickets,  
bright and pretty trash from the rides.

Gets to know the boys who run them;  
whisper, laugh, hair flick, repeat.

Ditches her friends at the Mirrors  
making her way to the tented arcade.

She thrills invisibly, all taut gooseflesh,  
adoring that flashing noise.

Wants the dusty pandas in plastic  
to be won by somebody else this time.

She ignores the girls from school  
buying feather clips and skull rings.

She's got five dollars going into the night  
and hopes it will last until ten,  
when those operating boys get off.

She will disappear into the parking lot  
to squirm in some corner of dim light.

## Airborne

I look down from where the lawn crests  
onto the gravel strip of park lane  
where lampposts rest at noon, Sunday –  
where trees stencil the sidewalk  
in silver dollar shadows that chime  
like desperate change into a fountain.  
Wind *shushes* the nearby playground quiet  
and overwhelms all ambient sound:  
laughter, two lovers reading out loud,  
the ubiquitous dog-yaps and baby-wails.  
Only thick citrus blooms can ride this big exhale.  
I would love to have it stick,  
for the wind to get stuck blowing  
and see what part of me is the flower  
that rises above it, perfumed and beautiful  
above all the effort and noise of relaxation,  
airborne, pleasure bent and invisible.

## Beneath July

In the shambles of love only the best are killed.

Let's never look for somehow else to live,

no longer shy about how we've loved.

I can see the whole world in your face.

Eyes open and you are everywhere –

at breakfast at the bottom of the bowl,

glistening with milk & the skin of peaches.

There is commotion at your door,

new lovers drunk between your legs.

In summer warmth stretched cactus fingers

reach plump mangos on the sill

where each one fills my fist

the way your breasts once did.

And over them, outside I watch you step

barefooted on the ground

and make it giddy, pregnant

with joking & buds.

Maestro Svoboda

He would rub his hands together like a giant fly.

His friend, gutted in a bottle fight  
while defecting through refugee camps  
spurred violent arguments on the Bolsheviks  
and ended with Milan Kundera.

My love songs were by Journey not Torroba.

He softened once to teach some delta blues,  
but my eyes swam with Czech dance tunes.

At fourteen my hands did as they were told.

Villa-Lobos preludes require extra fingers  
for this American boy too busy seeking *cool*.

If I practiced four hours it had to be six,

*offer your back pain up to God.*

Improving, I fell into clumsy love for him  
and to prove it learned all of his songs.

When I brought him cookies I had to watch  
tight-lipped as he gave them away to other students.

Picasso's "Old Guitarist" hung by the window,  
suffering in the slanting afternoon light.

I traced his down-turned head and neck,  
his contorted legs and long pale hands,  
his black rags and crooked beard  
as I played each piece from memory.

When I said it was beautiful the Maestro smiled,  
*now we can begin to work the guitar.*

Ride

You want to swim in me.

Can't you smell

the chlorine excess

hiding where others

have pissed and bled?

There is nothing

recreational here.

You climb aboard a

man with sharp teeth

who waffles over what

color to call the sky?

*What is so difficult, baby?*

*Blue. Sky blue.*

## II. Destinations



## At Daybreak

The quiet tonight only allows  
the muted scratch of a match head,  
not for fear of waking her  
or to shield tender eyes  
from sudden light, but  
because darkness demands subtlety.

Its flicker charms for a moment,  
kissing each random object,  
revealing thin cracks in the plaster walls,  
igniting too, thoughts of how our own light,  
if denied, fails to penetrate the gloom  
of the world with its warmth.

I am surprised by this need  
for gentle brightness,  
because it is not enough.  
So I turn to open heavy curtains  
on the sunrise  
burning shore to shore.

## A Nocturne for Cynthia

In the garden full of evening light,  
between our salad days of marigold,  
we meet by the artichokes,  
those high Martian flowers,  
and play at being lovers.

Robins drop their songs from trees,  
Dandelions roar in thick Bermuda,  
and there's no sign of last year's plots.  
That rock Buddha sits still entangled  
in the vines and bark dust.

As the low hung yellow moon  
turns us saffron the Gotama  
in foxgloves goes milky-pale.

We have sown seeds of faithfulness,  
drawn up wonderful plans,  
and turned so many stones,  
yet love is leaving us  
and all claims of being behind.

But such delicate detachment is best left  
to the overwhelming thrum of summer.  
Just now, the moon and the evening stars  
flit down. It's your beauty that calls to them.

## Road to Yuma

“You can take the road that takes you to the stars.  
I can take the road that will see me through.”  
- Nick Drake

I need Yuma with its alleyways and dust devils.

So much to explore,

to consider and then discard.

Not a single sad moment in Yuma.

I ride the black garden hose road,

driving desire for childhood's charm,

given new breath by the same wind that sculpts

these margarine dunes,

and glide into the last rest stop

past El Centro.

Silent streets beneath orange sodium halide,

the Arcos and manure,

past Ocotillo Wells, the desert candle oasis,

with flaming red cacti

and coyotes working the underbrush.

I take my Escort over the Cuyamacas  
through the spiked shadow of Mount Laguna,  
past the bleached, plank road of Old Highway 8  
to this last rest stop.

The sun gives up.

With patient and steady vigor  
the moon parts the radiant fumes of heat,  
undulating the sandy horizon.

Crickets on the sidewalk by the hundreds  
play dark hopscotch,  
their singing sourced  
from the forewings of the male.  
Cicadas swarming unseen in the desert night,  
their prolonged shrill from  
the belly membranes of the male.

Yield your comforts,  
unlock my potential love,  
that which I have misplaced,

even if it means being devoured  
by small town glamour.

Almost there, almost into arms  
worn down by embracing.

I made this song on the road,  
its melody mocked by insects,  
gorged upon by frogs  
under the sprinklers,  
under the stars.

I shout my praise for you and ride  
into this dilapidated Jerusalem,  
erasing everything that has gone down  
since I left you and came West  
across the Colorado.

In The Borda Gardens, Cuernavaca

Alone, I crept into the metal tube.

Two legs, three thousand miles of sky-sleep.

I heard of the garden before I arrived,

yet I still wondered if I was right to come.

I caught a warm buzz on cheap cervezas and mescal

in a sheltered café among draping,

gargantuan heart-shaped leaves of

bent and dripping philodendrons.

I could not catch the butterflies though –

tissues blown into sight, white

with black and orange spots,

all the size of paper plates.

Here, not an hour from the hot exhale

of twenty million Mexicans

and a volcano coughing ash,

wild blooms in death throws gasped

at a last trick of the warm autumn.

It whispers to each stem and petal, *hold on*.

The *Jardin Borda*, like all else  
that is left of this city's beauty,  
hangs hidden behind bright stucco.  
The sky, low and hot, presses gently  
on the bougainvilleas and razor wire.  
Shards of bottles are mixed with mortar  
to keep out what I wonder.  
Something might creep in overnight  
and steal a peek at *plantano macho*  
or the *monstera deliciosa*.

I am going there again today,  
to where my mind might fall asleep.  
I don't sometimes feel brilliant  
and sometimes dumb in that garden.  
There is no studying, no scholarly thinking  
having to do with love,  
only a great deal of plotting,  
of opening and closing,  
of secret touching and messages sent  
that, now I am home,  
I cannot remember at all.



## The Tree of a Thousand Painted Lips

As if a wheelbarrow dumped its load  
and stuck, the shoved-up sidewalks crack and slant  
to make a chunky border to the street,  
slick with oil and tumbling through leaf-shadow.  
Plaster powder sifts from the side of the bus terminal,  
a hidden hole in the wall unless the just-right  
slant of sun rays lights its façade.

This is the perfect spot to wait.

I look around at everything for sale,  
at all of the things that can be eaten;  
steamy bags of cactus chunks, and even  
the textured pillars of the building seem  
made of caramel corn, fronted by a boy  
selling birdseed cakes with nuts and honey.

There is a tree, a near vulgar splash of green  
above the meridian, with full blooms  
of red wax Halloween lips and inch-long thorns.

An Indian woman with a sack of beans  
the size of herself scuffs out of the terminal.  
I can't even carry the idea of such work.

I wait because I bought a ticket I didn't think  
I was buying. Two hours later,  
comparing the palm weave of my sunhat  
to the pleated braids of the Chicklets girl,  
there goes the one I wanted, Estrella Blanca.

I can't tell if it's blood or hot sauce  
splattered on the window where a nun  
looks out to admire the tree  
of a thousand painted lips, its shade  
my only delight. I try to see beyond  
its shadow, further than the bus line,  
to where the sprawl of fence and stucco  
must stop carving its way into the jungle  
somewhere.

## The View from Avenida Libertad

Through a chain link fence I see  
a cave full of pigs in the canyon below.

The rooftops are little open shoeboxes  
where strings of colored laundry dry  
and tie together four large buildings.

I don't know what they were before  
they squared a fifty-foot garbage heap.

It looks clean from high above, organized,  
sifted and well kept.

Nothing stirs but the breeze flapping  
through the underwear and towels,  
and the pigs stand still as stone  
as a wisp of smoke from a wood fire  
holds its shape and drifts down the canyon,  
over a forest of yucca and sage  
to the flatlands where the brick huts  
of the *Indios* square another  
heap of garbage, where another  
wisp rises quiet and clear and drifts.

## Clams

We plod in sandals, family-file,  
down to the surf-clap and stink of sea-belch.  
Water bladders onto slick mucous whips,  
and the coughed up kelp polyps draw flies.  
As we huddle beside each tangled pile and point,  
hours sponge up into sunset and sand rasps us raw.  
Clams unseen below roll tongues over prisons of shell,  
searching for some sweet-sour drop of evolution.  
Gulls buzzard over the sea and cry out  
where a long dead whale has turned buffet.  
Bright suits and skin make rainbow cake sprinkles  
next to extra-terrestrial jellyfish chunks.  
Laughing, the bathers fade into skunk-tainted shrubs  
and whirligig back to the long car ride home.  
I stay until the orange smear of sky turns bruised purple,  
and let the sticky waves lap and knock me down.  
And like a clam I stay submerged,  
while all around me is a greater ocean  
too close to see.

Postcards from the British Museum

What would I do with this painted lady on a chair,

but with your copper curves and smile?

In front of these plump virgins at the temple baths of Hestia

I want to kiss your mouth,

where nothing had better happen

since the last time, no other flesh

press against your lips.

I see your face float between paintings

then rest at the center of each canvas,

as if I had stared into the sun.

You move from a bronze sculpture to a velvet chair,

glazed with the disheveled lust of a Victorian woman

alone and waiting for me.

Then you're on splayed flowers,

the smeared orange wish of Van Gogh's turpentine high,

making me pull at the museum air

as a group of high school girls gets lectured

on form, as if they needed to be reminded  
of proportion, of smoothness,  
    beneath a sixteen foot Hercules to scale  
in the cool anonymity of the basement.

The room is wall-to-wall nudes,  
    and I try to look through their Oxfords  
only to see your goose-flesh breasts  
in the morning back home.

The molasses tour of art gets done  
and spits me into the shop.

    I grope the metal postcard rack  
and find a series of satyrs fucking milkmaids.

    I think of you:  
will it be the flowers or the goat-men,  
which one do I choose to dirty with my words?  
Here is one of the bathing virgins,  
legs tight, with her purple scarf,  
    only a sash dangling wet from the tubs.  
Like you all alone  
I imagine, across the Atlantic.

## In the Dales

I.

We split today to share more country:

you for the florid shops and teahouse,

me for the nine mile hillside tromp

out from the market cross,

Askrigg to Mill Gill Force,

and through its wooded gorge below.

Halcyon farms front the way

where the Hawes Hill Fair can't be beat

for stock and cheese from heaven.

At the edge of the moor, west

on the road to Muker, detours

lead to a muddy paddock, gravestones,

and a cask-pulled pint with luck.

I am better off seeing ghosts

with the county's best inside.

To cut up and over to the next hike-leg

I must come back through town.

I see you at the café with a scone and book  
and remember how your feet swelled in London,  
how you tripped by the fountain at the Palace gates,  
too embarrassed to answer you weren't hurt.  
That fight over road signs on our way home,  
both of us ashamed at what we were thinking,  
no match for what we thought of ourselves.

In Yorkshire before the cancer is found  
we gather roots and shake the family tree,  
brass-rub in church basements,  
and make Ploughman's lunches in hotels.

I see my teeth and hands are yours,  
when opening a *Crunchie* or poring  
over gravestones under our blue eyes  
that squint the same at distance.

II.

It's late spring and the ewes and lambs  
are down in the meadow for the early grass.  
Here lives a breed for the butcher, not one  
to stand against hard winter on the fells.



The empty shacks of Moor End Farm  
make splintered tors among the trees  
in full leaf above the terraced slope,  
hewn way back by our family line  
of Anglian ploughshares in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.  
Beneath the boughs rest lovesick  
harvesters of oats and baby shoots  
on the random plots lost from greater fields.  
Before the last war back to the Middle Ages  
sheep were shipped to fodder crops in the wold,  
filled and sown with barley, and returned  
only to lamb in their native dale.  
Those of the flock taken to the fell now  
are brought to the sure swing of a hatchet.

At last I reach cool Mill Gill wood,  
thick with sycamore, beech and ash.  
I flop onto wild garlic, dog's mercury,  
bluebell, and scan through the tree crowns  
to 300 million year old Carboniferous remnants  
of layered lime and sandstone –  
craggs of shale and two-toned flint

that scar gray walls and outcrops.

Whitfield Gill wood downstream

adds oak and larch to the hem of green

where herbed riversides become carpets of flower:

saxifrage, woodruff, and meadowsweet

out of sight to the slow-retreating waterfall.

Here at the feet of summer I cannot see how

my family were once starved into the new world.

III.

I'm at the furthest point away from you, now

somewhere down in town, waiting for your son.

The sun fills the sky, heats me sleepy,

and I lose ground against the warble flies.

I didn't come for cows or sheep, yet

they make and mark this piece of earth,

pressing me into pious distance.

I shoo down footpaths into fresh shade,

loop to a barn of stacked dry stone,

circle to cross its farm near a seatless dirt bike

and a dozy heifer, both the same shade of rust.

Then I find the stile to get back to your side.

Across its top rail dangles a rack of gophers, dead  
as spent balloons, a glyph to ward off the unwelcome.

High sun blends sweat and pasture and hurries me  
around to the back of the hamlet,  
past the church, first and final word in town.

One last scan over yellow-thistled paddocks,  
mint and chewed clover to see  
the King's Arms open and recruit every ploughman  
for the last two hundred fifty years;  
all great uncles, far cousins, and me.

Resisting his pull as the parish bell  
hammers cobble to cobble,  
I hike past tethered dogs choking  
to join me in the midday sun.

With one more leg up main street hill  
I quit my habitual way,  
and slip back down into the folds of the flock,  
with you, where I have come to belong.

## The Gift

*This is just a visit I say*  
as my plane takes me out  
over the ocean,  
above the clouds,  
into the lipstick smile  
of the young and blooming  
flight attendant.

I wish I could thank her.

*Everything is so clear now,*  
she tells me over  
three Bloody Marys,  
our eyes fumbling with  
the Cascade peaks.

I look down her  
blouse as she leans.

Here I go again, eager  
to uncork and unwind  
from another day  
of doing nothing,

a perverse task, alone.

Tonight is Mom's birthday,  
the taking of her breast  
successful.

Three long decades,  
from milk to beer,  
I've stared glassy-eyed  
at her lack of faith  
and wondered  
how she will die.

Will she own that her life is  
more than firing synapses,  
episodes of cell division,  
coincidence, and hard work?

She tells me

I drink too much, but  
I only hear the mumble  
of Mad River, night speech  
from the last visit.

Something in it whispers

*drink deep and sleep,*

*no one knows we're here.*

## At Lone Fir Cemetery

Women in fanfare

of scarves and coats,  
men in gray and black,  
sing underneath a blue rain tent  
over babies in arms  
laughing back –  
sky of cottony charcoal.

Harold, Maude and I

in brown corduroy  
squeeze into the crowd and listen  
as the song stops  
to the sound of a Cessna,  
train horns, and buses on Belmont.

Sun breaks on a brown bag near the grave,  
no one picks up the wet piece of trash,  
blending in with maple and marble,  
birch sticks, and

morning's damp grasses.

The priest throws down some dirt and prays.

I could reach the bag if I stuck my foot out.

I want to touch the coffin too,

see if it's made of plastic,

to hear if it's hollow,

sound the inevitable depth

while still in the company

of these many guests,

watching and waiting

to slip away home,

say good-bye in private.

## The Orchard Revisited

Wind loves the weak  
lowness of grasses  
so makes them shine.

The right and hungry  
work of farmers  
holds one fruit tree  
up with a two-by-four.

Pick the pomegranate  
with a cleft rind  
and see why  
its red lips laugh.

Tart pulp stains  
our teeth, smiling  
at how you and I,  
so singular,  
are tied together –  
a flopping bird bouquet.

And before death  
cuts this bond, each



exalted pull is pain.

So hope the wind

finds and combs us

to a glossy sheen,

then breaks the legs

of our desire.

Perpetuity

*- for Geoffrey*

I sit and trace breadcrumbs  
from a thousand lives and still  
believe the evidence of my senses.  
More wine, something sweet to dull me.  
You bring wind chimes  
and muddy boots to my doorstep.  
Soaked in evening you come into the room,  
lift the thick holiday warmth,  
wet grass and stars at your heel.  
Whisper low how today  
warm rosemary bloomed  
little soapy orchids in the December sun.  
We lean back and talk  
through years of quiet love  
and speak about origins,  
destinations.

These Seven Heavens

Here the stars, each with its angel warder,  
hang as pure silver lamps on a black chain.

Golden is the house of nakedness,  
filled with sacrificial sons.

Newborn names blot out the dead,  
their dark eyes and pearl-flesh.

A patient, yearlong journey  
for the head to speak with heart

And blood for blood along the way.

A prismatic world with every gate covered  
in sunlight or rain.

Here we are, bigger than earth,  
five billion mouths  
each chanting in our own tongue.

## REFERENCES

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