

Kah Tai Purgatorio

I could carry a little boat out
through sandy hillock and marsh grass
and slip it into the water and slide
over that bluegreen glass in silence.

I could cruise the waterways of winds
around this small lagoon where
terns nestle into shadows and herons wade.
I could, I could.

I want, like this little body of water,
to let my body reflect the stars and moons
of midnight. I want to lie that still.
I've seen this water calm as a dreamy boy.

But then I'd have to, sooner or later,
return. And doing so, I'd have to choose.
And any bank I chose
would be the world.

Sonnet

Often I return to the half-
hidden bower beside the sea
as though the sea were a woman
and I
her occasional man.

From the hill unwinding to her shore,
I watch her languid dance unfold:
blue riffs of power, blue swirls
riding forward in her channel.

And the man I think I am comes down
to muse near dark-shadowed pools
in the bower of the woman the sea is -

she, the forever faithful,
in whose dark eyes
the reflection of self,
mercifully, is lost forever.

Song for Tulips

Little flower cupping rain,
you are early this year
and my friend who planted you
is not here. Little gate
of pleasure dew with arms
upraised to the rain,
little red-lipped queen
or king of nothing but the rain,
detain your smile until
the hands that planted you
come home again. And then
smile wetly in the rain,
lips parted, through which
heaven's gate is seen.

A Lover's Quarrel

There are some to whom a place means nothing,
for whom the lazy zeroes
a goshawk carves across the sky
are nothing,
for whom a home is something one can buy.
I have long wanted to say,
just once before I die,
I am home.

When I remember the sound of my true country,
I hear winds
high up in the evergreens, the soft snore
of surf, far off, on a wintry day,
the half-garbled song of finches
darting off through alder
on a summer day.

Lust does not
fatigue the soul, I say. This wind,
these ever-
green trees, this little bird of the spirit -
this is the shape, the place of my desire. I'm free
as a fish or a stone.

* * *

Don't tell me
about the seasons in the East,
don't talk to me
about eternal California summer.
It's enough to have
a few days naked
among three hundred kinds of rain.

In its little plastic pot on the high sill,
the African violet
grows away from the place
the sun last was, its fuzzy leaves
leaning out in little curtsies.

It, too, has had enough
of the sun. I love the sound of a storm
without thunder, the way winds
slow, trees darken, heavy clouds
rumbling so softly
you must close your eyes to listen:

then the *blotch, blotch*
of big drops
plunketing through the leaves.

It is difficult,
this being a stranger on earth.
Why, I've seen pilgrims come
and tear away at blackberry vines
with ev'rything that's in them, I've seen them
heap their anger
up against a tree
and curse these swollen skies.

What's this? - a mountain beaver
no bigger than a newborn mouse
curled in my palm,
an osprey curling over tide pools and lifting
toward the trees, a wind at dusk
hollow in the hollows of the eaves,
a wind over waves
cooling sand crabs washed up along the beach.

Each thing, closely seen,
appears more strange
than before: the shape of my desire
is huge, vague,
full of many things
commingling -

dying bees among the dying flowers;
winter rain and the smoke it brings.

If it fills me with longing,
it is only because we are wind and smoke,
flower and bee;
it is only because
we are like the rain, falling,
falling through our own most secret being,
through a world of not-knowing.

At the end of the day,
I come, finally,
to myself, I return to the strange sounds of a man
who wants to speak
with stones, with the hard crust of earth.
But nothing listens.

When the sea hammers the sea wall,
I'm dumb.
When the nighthawks bleat at dusk, I'm drunk
on the sadness of their songs.
When the moon is so close
you can almost reach it through the trees,
I'm frozen, I'm blind,
or I'm gone.

Fish, bird, stone, there's something
I can't know, but know the same:
I hear the rain inside me
only to look up
into a bitter sun.

What do we listen to, what do we think
we hear? The sound
of sea walls crumbling,
a little bird with hunger in its song:
You should have known! You should have known!

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Like any Nootka rose,
I know there are some
for whom a place is nothing.
like the wild rose,
like the tide and the day,
we come, go, or stay
according to a whim.

It is enough, perhaps,
to say, *We live here*.
And let it go at that.

This wind lets go
of everything it touches.
I long to hold the wind.

I'd kiss a fish
and love a stone
and marry the winter's rain

if I could persuade this battered earth
to let me make it home.