

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON AT CLEAR LAKE CITY
SCHOOL OF HUMAN SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES


EARTH-TRACKS
A COLLECTION OF POEMS

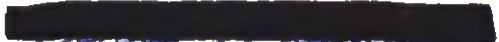
by

LOIS KING

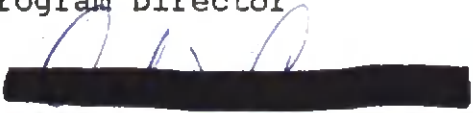
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Introduction

Walt Whitman said in his Preface to the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass that folks expect the poet to indicate the path between reality and their souls, that the invisible is just as real as the visible, and that the poet's task is to indicate how the invisible, or spiritual, may be known through the visible, or physical/material. Walt believed in clues. I, too, believe in clues because we have no power of thinking without clues (or signs). There are many clues to aid us in discovering the unknown deeper dimensions of the physical world. These clues are found in nature, non-sexual relations between people, sexual relations between people, and in objects. The clues are embodied within nature, objects, etc., just as the future is embodied in the present, or, as the spiritual is embodied within the physical, and they can be explored by a sensibility penetrating beyond the objects themselves or beyond nature's guise of reality.

Octavio Paz says in The Siren and the Seashell that Whitman's poetry does not seek the reality of the senses, what the eyes see and the hands touch, but rather the

multiplication of the image in the mirror of action; it changes reality but does not touch or enjoy it. It is like an arrow that never reaches the target.¹ I agree. Walt contradicted himself too often and his soul was in too many places at one time. We need to get beyond the physical actualities. Sensibility is one clue that I look for.

To search for the clue is like searching for the secret passageway leading from a dead end street; you might call the secret passageway a switchback to the beginning. Each one of my poems is meant to be a stepping-stone, a means by which one might expand, get beyond, and discover the secret passageway by going through the objects of the known world.

How must we really observe or take notice of the objects, people, places, and animals, and report what we see there as we report what we see outside? In the case of animals, I intend to discover the true personality of that deer or that armadillo. With the exception of the thrush and the mockingbird, Walt did not dwell much on animals in his poetry. In "Song of Myself" he acknowledged the separate existence of the animals and said he would sometimes like to go live with them. He "looked

long and long", but he didn't look long enough. He saw a flock of goats feeding, and he saw camels, wolves, antelopes, and many others, but he only saluted them; he did not take their heart in his hand. Animals are a means by which one might envision the other side of reality.

To be able to expand the imagination to see the other side, we must have a particular type of fuel. In Strength to Dream, Colin Wilson describes as fuel for the imagination: (1) fear (2) love (3) wonder (4) lust (5) jealousy (6) ambition. Any one of these will get us out of the two-dimensional world of the present.²

To discover the true personality of the animal there must be a medium of exchange between the human and the animal. The fuel for the imagination from the human standpoint of perceptive ability is wonder, and from that of the animal, fear. In the poem "Encounter" I am the hunter, the intruder, filled with wonder at the sight of a beautiful doe feeding at the wood's edge, near a railroad track. As we encounter each other I can feel the animal's mixed emotions. She is frightened, angry, and curious. But the deer pauses as if to be waiting for

something I might be able to give her. She appears reluctant to run away. I have interrupted her plans; the doe feels that her environment is threatened. I know that she enjoys watching me (although she is afraid and I am not); I realize that she wants to see into my world as much as I'd like to see into hers. Is she comparing herself to man?

Have you ever camped outdoors and early the next morning noticed deer tracks outside your camper? As a child, I grew up in the Big Thicket area of Texas and each morning we looked outside for the deer tracks. They were always there. We were excited about the deer because he was the invisible, like Santa Claus. We looked for Santa Claus' tracks but never found them. I've camped in the thicket at night and, while relaxing around the fire, heard the hoofbeats of deer in the brush. Sometimes they are even more ambitious.

Once, when hunting, I was sitting at the base of a large tree when a buck and three does came within twenty feet of me. They were feeding, I was downwind, and they didn't notice anything until my scent was detected. The buck, of course, was behind the three does and we saw

each other simultaneously. By the time I could get a shot fired he bolted away into the brush. What I didn't know was that a smaller buck was following--he had been chased off by the large buck. The first four deer ran crashing through brush, the does snorting loudly, but the small buck was so curious that he did not heed the warning. Suddenly I saw him peering at me from the edge of the thicket. He wanted to see the world as it really was, to become enlightened through himself, not from the standpoint of another's perceptive ability. He heard the commotion, but this did not deter his curiosity. He was willing to sacrifice his life to break out of his prison.

James Dickey says that this vision, or exchange, between man and animals is possible, but the man and the animal must die to each other. The animal gives up his immediate perception to the man and the man gives up his power of reflection to the animal so that in the giving and taking, or mutual surrender, a new and otherwise impossible point of view is created. It is a merging together and connecting with another world in the same way as sexual exchange. Dickey also stated that the hunter

is able to see himself shooting the animal who is being shot, and in this way the killer and the killed exchange places, both participating in "the glory of killing".³

In my poem "The Endless Announcement of An Echo" the hunter is killing an animal and, at the same time, entering into a communion with nature. The kill is the moment of truth--it is the union between man and animal.

In my poem "Earth-Tracks", the basic metaphor focuses upon the animal's tracks which expresses the idea of man discovering everything about the animal's life not previously conceived. There is a parallel between the animal dwelling in the woods and man's life on earth. He gets a composite vision by looking through the tracks of the animal. The deer enters into a relationship with man --he is the hunted, but often this situation is reversed, as in my poem "The Hunted".

Just as there must be a medium of exchange between the animal and human, there must also be one between human beings. Without this communication men cannot understand one another. Sartre has said something to this effect in Being and Nothingness: I am the object for the other when his glance, his order, and his decision constitute the field within which my presence irrupts.

We both find ourselves in the other's world. The "I" must merge into the "we" to go beyond our own subjectivity. One of the ways I have attempted to do this is by an awareness of those who have lived before. Much of our present is analogous to the past and the continuity of the present is made possible by individual memory and also by art and objects that carry the individual beyond the sphere of his immediate life where he uncovers fragments of the possible from the particular.

In the poem "Chac" I have attempted to enter the time vault to sense everything--both life and death. I am able to get the composite vision through Chac's eyes. I toy with the possibility that he enters into my realm of experience. "Elysian Fields, East Texas" expresses the possibility of an exchange--the dry, hot, dust for the moist atmosphere of the sky, but I cannot grasp or hold onto anything else because I can still feel and taste the red dust. Perhaps the utopia is waiting to be found within the red dust. In "Kaleidoscopic Faces" the bones have lain in the ground waiting for us to discover them. They are a part of us now--existing in us--we are a part of the structure of bones. We, too, have bones.

"The Iron Bedpost" illustrates the possibility of the dead entering into the present. The dead man's image is preserved through objects that were his personal possessions. In this way, the dead man's past enters into the writer's experience. Memory of the past is putting together the pieces that will soon be beyond recall, as in "A Song Sung for Maggie" where Maggie's life is gradually slipping into the past and becoming a finality. Maggie is trying to make a connection with the past. She is waiting to be alone with her husband, who is dead. Nancy Willard says in Testimony of the Invisible Man that man's sense of impermanence is not death but our isolation from other living beings. Permanence can be continued. But without love nothing of us survives in the imagination of those who come after us.⁴

In "Man From Palenque" there is a wireless communication with the past through thumbprints, heirglyphics (blank verse) and the mind concealed beneath the jade mask, all of which seems to escape the decaying stone. In "Mummies of Guanajuato" the ghostly faces make an eerie attempt to connect with the present. They are not

in their graves, but they are looking at me through glass cases and I, them. One eye is shut, seeing the past and one eye is open, seeing the present. They are connecting with this world and I with theirs.

During the journey of the imagination man is aware of other lives and other people beyond his own physical reality and beyond the reality of the present. Love is another type of fuel for the imaginative process--it stimulates the imagination, providing the power for greater insight. In Strength to Dream, Colin Wilson observes that sex depends on the strangeness and separateness of the other. Oneness would be a destruction of the impulse. He goes on to add that in writing love poetry there should be objective communication between partners in contrast to personal relationships which are dominated by the complications of human relationships.⁵ In other words, there should be detachment in order that sex be a symbol of freedom (like nature); it is in essence a way to attain Nirvana. In "Dionysian Dance" the couple has dissolved what separates them; distinctions are obstacles to the creative energy of bliss. The stream is the surface of existence. At the peak of intimacy the

differences between partners melt away; there is an extreme loss of control and a loss of the world. Momentarily, there is a loss of the self and the other.

Octavio Paz describes the process beautifully in The Siren and The Seashell:

The experience goes beyond eroticism. I would not call it passion, but compassion. Woman reveals the true face of death as she shows man, with such abandon, the true face of life. Death is erotic--in facing death he feels the same excitement that he feels before a woman. He cannot take his eyes from it. To contend that he is in love with death would be foolish, but in a certain sense we are all in love with death. Death seduces him because it is the abysmal element of the embrace. Lovers walk above the void. Consciousness of their mortality is the force that launches them beyond time and retains them in time, with nothing to grasp except another body equally detached from its name and moorings...⁶

This is the basic idea Walt expresses in both the male-female relationship and that between men. Although

his erotic poetry emphasizes the theme of propagation, he expresses a passionate interest in the other, especially in all that traditionally had been deemed insignificant or taboo. His embrace is a bridge over the void where lovers may touch and cease to be personal (subjective) because they have dissolved their differences. The theme is actually detachment, but it becomes unity when man becomes detached, goes outside himself and becomes the other. The other is no longer simply the other. This is the basic meaning of Sartre's analysis of being-for-others. To discover what things really are you must become the opposite--the deer must die to you; you must die to the deer. This moment of mutual surrender or exchange of identity will put you in touch with the absolute. You gain a new perspective of consciousness, and this new consciousness is the energy that moves the universe. My poetry seeks to express this idea.

**FLASHES
AND
FRAGMENTS
OF
THINGS . . .**

King Tut's Scarab

Don't be so evasive, Tutankhamen
why was your madstone
a mere charm of a black beetle
dangling from your psychic wrist
I have a cluster of scampish-looking owls'
feet wandering about my automobile
I see them looking uncivilized
when I fasten on my seat belt
but the Indians called them sacred
I think about that
when I hear them screeching
over the dark shadows
of my wine-colored bucket seats
why did you have those scraggy
beetles remind me of scorpions
scot-free and frenzied
stinging every chance they get
Did you make a mere beetle sacred
to emphasize man's godlike qualities,
his closeness to the beetle,
the beetle's position?

The Mummies in Guanajuato

Why am I here in this place?
They said I would love this city
filled with all your things
white adobe haciendas, red-tiled roofs,
carved wooden doors,
I never cared for home
I'm always groping for the
light in the dark
and behind me
everything's falling away
like those *mumias*
skin cracked and fraying
at the temples
eyes leaping painfully
coming awake through glass walls
hairs unfolding,
uprooted faces making mouths at me
over the darkness
of their cryptic noses
one eyelid lying shut
the other lying open
Why am I here in this place?

MAMIE'S OLD DEPOT
ANTIQUÉ STORE

Center Point, Texas

My mouth is bone dry
I put on my face false
Why do I search for
antique porcelain doorknobs
only to find
the book of the dead?
I see the past in old victrolas
hear the warbling of the needles
spinning Time's record
the gang's all here...crystal-glazed
tea cups floating in their saucers
tiny bent fingers pointing at the sky
the elusive shape of the gate-leg table
broadening its arms like wings
and what is that thingemajig over there?
An old codger with frizzled hair
and a beak-shaped nose
he's wearing a shad-bellied coat
but no matter, just never mind
tomorrow I'll turn the table
its movable legs are arranged in pairs
this has been happening for a long time.

The Iron Bedpost

The weathervane stands high
above wandering wood shingles
to see the angle of sun falling
from the crumbling crust of the chimney
smoke rises above weathered boards
unpainted, roughcast,
like the man who nailed them there
now, the same as yesterday
still standing, unfinished,
draped in the cobwebby disguise
that is etched in the pattern of pine.

He left behind
an old photograph,
a saddle, a pair of chaps,
and harnessed beneath the proud plank,
the yellow skull of a longhorn cow.

I was with him there
before his thought perished
once with the beat of the pendulum

beneath the blossom
heartwood of pine
for feeling his identity
passing into the real
skimming the swift air
like Pegasus, his steed harnessed
galloping like the human race
in tattered shoes
still standing, unfinished
shattered by the spirit.

He was with me here
once when the door opened
and the dark ghost
entered into the unreal
shadow play of dreams
moaning sharply
at the first new dawn, fear
wrapped in the sudden stillness
of firelight
struggling to catch the deep breath
crying out....

Winged flames
leaping up to grasp
the bloody footprints, time
in this room
going out the window...
the iron bedpost
clutching the empty darkness
behind the grey frame
dwelling place of his soul.

Kaleidoscopic Faces

Penciled in traces of time
chiseled out your featherlike face
of shivery-grey, serpentine
in silent subtle ways

Mosaic eyes, marbelized
like frosted Venetian glass
shattered siliceous stones
perfect polished teeth

Cold in that coppery chasm of clay
your broken body appears
revealed by the restless shovel
probing sedimentation to discover
the horizontal features of our past
in jagged slivers of fractured bones

Gloating orphans
gnawed by gnomes
you lie there in that field of stone

not knowing, having known
displaying the earmarks of a youth
eclipsed...

deep along the peneplains
where ancient trilobites
lived, ruled, and breathed
the spectre of quartz
flows bare and unsheathed
and millions solidified
faces emerge
from shallow, Silurian seas.

FACES

AND

PLACES . . .

Elysian Fields, East Texas

I closed my eyes in the red dust
and a rainbow appeared
in the midst of rain
where there was once a cloud
sinking into the dusty darkness
sliding off the landscaped blur
of geometric red and dusty window panes
sprinkled with raindrop stains

I closed my eyes in the red dust
and it's a miracle
but I walked all the way to the top
of that strange staircase

Looking back over my shoulder
I discovered that
I had begun
to taste the red dust
on my tongue
again.

A Song Sung for Maggie

the quiet is broken
by the bird
fluttering
from the cat's paw
as the front door opens
to tell her how much
I love
the sight of her
smiling
sweeter than a soft shower
falling
on a warm whispery night
one instant
waiting to be alone with her husband
shadows
punctuated by golden diadems
spinning in her mind
sitting there
wrapped in her cashmere shawl

recalling
the years of lost
sun-wrinkled days
remembering
when I was her curly head
to cradle
in her lap
that long lost day
so many thousand miles away
when those now hushed
pinewoods
used to talk.

When You Were My Sister
in Polk and Tyler Counties

Yawning through a Sears and Roebuck
we sat alone on the cold porch
half in Polk, half in Tyler
caught smoking an Old Gold
and carving the initials PAL
along smooth grey baseboards

All the dim nights
we slept there with our eyes open
behind disappearing walls
bandaged up with tissue paper
still seeing the flicker of blue flame
from smoked-up kerosene lamps
we were play-acting
dreaming just to get away

Running from dull-colored days
our feet chased stretches of searing sand
beyond the brief tracks of a road
bending in the heart of the pine forest
that became extinguished trees
sifting in sawdust piles....

In Memory of Pa, Famed Bear Hunter
of the Big Thicket

Back here the sun is hard to see
at high noon

Pa hesitated...

a tater and a piece of fried meat
in his pocket

fingers drumming a tall pine
talk about a hot cake flipper
and coffee brewer

he had the world skinned
he squinted toward the clearing
fingers shaving a bent twig
remember...

bears climb small trees only
he struck the second match--
touchwood,

and no cigarettes, please
fanned the blue flame

just chew tobacco

he motioned toward old Turk

this hound's trained for bear only

takes about twenty minutes to strike a trail
so don't git your dander up
hand me the Winchester
remember...
he spat into the flame
this fiddlehead
always picks the biggest frog in the pond
when he takes the trail
git down on your hands and knees
and very quietly
back out toward
Steep Bank Creek.

To Mattie Dee on Reaching Her Ninety-Third
Birthday

Mattie Dee, you're ninety-three
you've bathed in lavender water
and slept in silica gel
almost a century
you were almost forty
before you showed your knee...

Your supple skin owes it's delicacy
to vinegar and almond soaps
barley water and oats
your cheeks glow bright
from Spanish wool
rosemary oil and alcohol
removed the freckles.

You never drank those hackneyed tonics
you shaded cool green eyes
with that bonnet
sipped C. I. Hoods sassaparilla

swore by vegetable pain killers
and smoked mullein leaves
twice a day
to relieve asthma and bronchitis.

Strong in moral and mental faculties
you preached:
Evils we should be ignorant of!
Why, Mattie?
Vice and virtue go together
like floozies and soft white floppy hats

and pray tell me, Mattie
how your brother, Addie
lives to be ninety-six?
He's never tried those tricks!

Last Day in San Miguel

**The rain is sliding over
sloping streets
our feet are unwinding
down the broadness of the alley steps
slipping out into
the crowded avenue
knee-deep in nothing much
more than horse drawn calesas
men leaning in doorways of cantinas
shouting something
laughing at one another
to the market
children running
baskets on their heads
and the old woman
still sagging in her
hunched black dress
Oh, shut up!
I don't want to hear about
your poverty
it is late evening**

she is probably
a millionaire
let us just sing softly
to each other
and tomorrow
I'll speak your language.

Man from Palenque

All your sacred poems are blank verse
created by coarse hands
in the tablet of stone
resting below the seat of the sun
I've seen the high sign
of your thumbprint
running the full length
of the vaulted corbel archway
that divides my world
from the transparent terror of yours

Like Kukulcan,
you appeared and disappeared
atom to star
everything made from zero
winding alphabetically through the
canals of your cities
You were obsessed by the invisible
the strange jade mask
conceals a ravelment,
the catacombs of your mind
What are you trying to hide?

I, too, am searching for
the red rattlesnake of the east
from dawn to dusk
the cruciform found along
the sheer walls of your palace
half turns with the wind
toward the reverberate sound of the sea
What are you trying to show?

Oh rough-painted impressions
I envy you
now you stand alone
carved in centuries of stone
in high relief.

Chac

I saw you standing naked
draped in the tall jungle
of luscious simplicity....

I entered the arched time vault
behind your limestone face
and sensed your life
buried within the vague viridity
of round hypnotic stones

My eyes passed through those sockets
that were yours
I touched your pitted cheek
but you didn't speak
the wind had covered up your words
and your hand
lay downstairs
beneath a brick of sand.

A Portrait of Yucatecan Man

The odor of curious humanity
followed me
along narrow numbered streets
to the sudden broad boulevard
where figures carved in shades of flesh
looked to see evening shadows
zagging down disappearing alleys
reflecting features of Merida's
purple moonscape

Catching the embroidered skirts
of all the young women
who spend a lifetime
along the boulevard
the wind drew a shiver of rain
soundless, translucent drops
falling like silent footsteps
on cracked sidewalks

French doors made of faces opened
and I met a man who gave me
an ancient piece of grooved stone

for grinding corn
in the dead city of fallen altars
and sacred wells
where plant and human sacrifice
assured a life for each...

From man's sacrifice springs maize
the symbol of life
and death.

Another man gave me
a rattlesnake skin
perfect diamond shapes
repeating the pattern of
the four-squared Durissus
Ahau Can, the mighty Mayan rattlesnake
depicted in the ancient fretwork
of temples

The geometric patterns
of ancient columns fell into place
according to the divine
square of the serpent

the criss-crossed bands
twin serpents entwined
one marching north
one marching south
in the spirit of form and regeneration
Ahau Can, the first Pythagoras.

We went to the dwelling place
of the ancient face
to see the roof comb
reach up in silence
to touch the stone
where life waited once,
unseen... .

A third man gave me nothing
Everything,
a handful of Tamaringos
a dried flower "oscura"
and a rock
captured from the depths of the cenote
in the heart of the last Mayan city,

Dzibilchaltun.

Later I tasted the Tamaringo--
it was delicious!

That man is not living
in the shadow-wing
of his ancient past
He has not lain too long in the sun
but he is in love with possibility
the dawn of consciousness
enduring the crisis
of creating his own destiny.

I am left
with a sense of mystery
trying to relate
to someone
who is more than just a man
on the boulevard.

Feliz Navidad, Maria

Standing at the edge of the highest dream
we press our fingertips along
the hard-featured face of triangular stone
crumbling with age--a life of time
spent standing above
the city of Guanajuato

You have rested on this sun-burned and misty
mountain top
since the strangers passed this way
wearing the curved crown
from the land of the rising sun
before the year and the lost day
that became La Noche Triste

Written below

Feliz Navidad
extended in graceful accent
along your deep-dyed canyon wall
embracing the olive velvet
the white steeples

and stratum of crosses
near and far away
so infinitely beautiful
in that shocking way

I hear the sound of fall...
give me your hand, Maria
it's raining grains of sand
and to you I repeat
the familiar expression
Feliz Navidad amiga mia!
Feliz Navidad!

Walt Whitman, Where Did Your Song Go Wrong?

Look into your soul-mirror, Walt
freedom is still as cold as ice
America is still "a political institution
with an idea", a place where old men
have found no answers
and young men are tired of dying
for an emblem

You said there is nothing so rare as man
you loved the sound of the human voice
the undiscovered country
the very idea of war being beautiful....

My grandfather came to East Texas
in an ox cart
he brought one moss mattress
and two-hundred and fifty razorback hogs
he found the perfect mudhole
west of the town of Sour Lake
it's time to explain yourself

lovers are dying face to face
male and female perfect,
the bent head, the curv'd neck
the cocked-up tall-stepping
feverish creatures in Wellington boots
play of masculine muscle
hair rumpled, the mystic deliria
the full spread pride of man
loafing on the grass
procrastinating
his hands upon her lap
at the tip crowning point
running away with an idea
the pause when the bell strikes...

I've touched the beards and mustaches
of young men
seen the expression in their eyes

You would call it the embrace
of love and resistance
but one tosses his long blond hair
back from his forehead
I listen close

to the sound of his human voice
I love those winged purposes
I'll go with the team
I am she that aches with love
I am the mother of men
dash me with amorous wet
I can repay you.

Walt,

where did your song go wrong?

Old Hardin County Cemetery

I pause long enough to look into
your secret compartments
I want to remember your names
you are my final identity
you speak with a frankness
that time denies....

In the wake of fatal passion
I breathe-in the air of this-world
I am not searching for the light
at the end
I am searching for the light
at the beginning

I'd like to lie sleeping on
this slope of a hill
and feel
it taking me somewhere.

LOVE...

The Yellow Butterfly

He found me sucking
heart flowers
from a feathery flow of wild
rose silently his hands
reached down and
caught me dazed
halfway coming
up to fly
from the excited
first fury of budding
rose unfolding
breathing inside
colors of perfumed
rose and wrapped me close
in the palms of his
hands wings fluttering
weaving like petals
tossed to trembling
hands held me

on I floated between his
fingers like yellow ribbons
sunlight streaming through
filmy branches
into the drowsy glow
of the flower bed.

Sound in the Seashell

I cup you close to my ear
just to hear you breathe
contemplation,
forgetfulness,
fascination,
linked together in fierce nakedness
changing with the sifting-sand
and the high-pounding wind
moaning within
the swollen madness
of soul-stirring seas.

Dionysian Dance

Into the stream-bed
my mind
has wandered off to rest
not looking in any direction
you hold my body
motionless
we cancel one another
out we are bending
and falling away
from this world
breaking the surface
of the passing stream
we wash away
the final distinction
that separates nothing
from everything.

Auto-da-fe

You have a feverous way
of chilling me to the bone
you pierce the ice
then build the fire
for the death pyre
and smothering the flicker
of the final vein
you leave me cold as stone.

Silent Companion

You didn't speak
you smiled
and it was like an idea
scattered through pages of a new book
waiting around the corner,
you smiled.

Poem-of-Being

**Before you
my body was formless
and unfinished**

**framed only
by the ramifications
of your mind**

**Your eyes give me
a fleeting glimpse of beauty**

**your aroma is like sandalwood
it clings to my skin**

**two souls embodied
in zygotic undulation**

**molded and reborn
into something beautiful
and new**

**Sapped and startled
by the pulse of life**

**I sing to you
expressions of
immortal inspiration.**

Down on Rogue River

We wandered down the winding river
a soothing spectacle of rippling water
the glimmer of trout
leaping above its surface
the water spreading out
in wide-ribbed circles

We stood at the water's edge
The willow branches lightly brushed
your shoulder....
I jiggled the silver hook,
you laughed, stooped to catch it
and, glancing at the water, remarked
"Two silhouettes distorted by the
ripples. I like that color.
No, not the green
the color of your hair--
it's bronze--an in-between
Last night I had this dream..."
I looked into the dense opacity
of your eyes

"You realist,
theorist, politician,
do you actually dream?"

"You're a bad fairy,
you intimidate my fancy,
you're giving me a coronary
Man is a political animal"
you began ...

"Please, Thucydides!
not another rendition
I've memorized your definition:
the theorist maintains
a dispassionate stance
and therefore gains
truth, clarity and consistency
Touche! you say
well, do I get an A?
Anyway,
I prefer Locke's liberalism
Dewey's instrumentalism

Bentley's empiricism
and, oh yes
transcendentalism!

You dislike me,
that I don't doubt
I go to parties in thin dresses
in the mornings I sleep late
sometimes I shout
and give way to fits of anger
I like English
and hate
Government."

You laughed.
In your eyes
there was that glint
"You adjective jerker,
let's theorize,
to dissolve this dilemma
there's just one way
want a gentle hint?"

"Will you maintain a dispassionate stance?"

"Not a chance.

I'm sure the ruination of man
is not only politics,
but women and exciting literature."

"Hell," you murmured

"I adore
your transcendentalism,
show me your repertoire,
weave me one of your songs."

"Don't laugh, you'll break the spell,
realist, power seeker

I'm glad you're mine--
you're pure gold.

Want some more power?

Then give me a little more wine."

Chaos

**Night rises up
to meet the ardent moon's eye
sinking in Urania's sky
they embrace
suspended like Satan's hell-bound angels
rushing into starlight
to make a Heaven of Hell
their shadows play
free to fall
one with the other
night is taking it down
the moon disappears
too soon to work his greater good
when the rosebud comes to bloom
and the sun
the higher he's a-getting
is hurrying to meet
the incredibly
beautiful day.**

Tragedy Disguised

**Mania revels
in mad murmurings
to bend a golden silence
raise me up in delight
rapt in delirium
blue devils
moaning in the attic
surge of thunder
trembling in my ears
red sun's eruption
weaving in my brain
the whole world
tasting my tears.**

Love Letters

How is it to love you?
It is a violent rhapsody
found along the tip
of my anesthetized tongue
feeling the beauty
beyond the calm
that is best left unsung.

Partial Eclipse

The sun fell in my eyes
last night, as I swirled
below the miracle
that kept driving through
the violet night of day
until the moon's ray
caught the dizzy shadow
and escaped.

Love Song for an April Afternoon

The shock of morning glory
flinging dew beads into the April
flushes her fragrant-eyed blue iris
from a wake of green leaves
growing into the April mid-afternoon
leaping into the spectacular
color of sun-kissed lemons
at the last spark of sunset
stems popping crazily
in vague scatterings
of light at darkness
she lies down
closing her long silk lashes
embracing the starlight sounds
crickets and nightingales
treading the soft blue
attics of my house
wrapping city streets
in roving distant hills
gliding into the April

twilight transparent drops of her
gathering close
the wild-scented folds of flowering white
tumbling barefoot
into the grey of gunsmoke dawns.

Final Reality

Darkness removes
the imaginary veil
our bodies are divided
only by the strangeness
of forgotten pleasure
just beyond the familiar...

the night
passes through an open window
embracing the waking light...

afterwards,
I cannot hold you apart
knowing
that I never could know all.

**THE
HAVEN
OF
ANIMALS . . .**

Earth-Tracks

**You fill the slender silence of this icy age
like wispy phantoms
caught in the sudden shadow of volatile wood
floating
between crisp scatterings of palmetto
leaving your sign behind
in high moss-grown hammocks
where you have gone seeking fulfillment
in the sea of chase
filling your wanderlust gathering moonseeds
feeding quietly on the last of the red oak acorns
hooking tender saplings
all ablaze in dewy youth**

**Brushing away the stinging vine
that covers your almost
obliterated outline
I find you again, sinking
in the whirl of marshy quicksand
beneath my own drowning sole**

stripped and in darkness
like the naked cypress root
vanishing
into the maze of uncertainty
beneath tangled growths of sagging yaupon
re-appearing
in the dead dimness of the invisible live oak

You go on
knowing I am the invader
cautiously winding your way
through the spray-crackle of falling branches

I follow
knowing that your secret,
buried beneath the reddish-brown,
and ivory colored leaves,
is beaming and bursting
from silk cocoons
and frosty speckled spider webs
it is lost in these woods
beneath weary logs that have lain down

returning to the earth...

Waiting for the final antiphonal bark
that penetrates the lusty glade
you leap forth
fleeing the darkness of your earthy bed
unwinding
into a watery wave of dead grass
earth-tracks
falling into the time-crescent
that's painted red.

The Hunted

All day
in the cold and fading sheets of snow
I have sensed your presence
yet I have not seen
your shadow pass this way.
Your tracks are falling down
everywhere
moving around me.
Why am I stunned by your
close darkness
above the dead stalks of grass?
I know that when you pass
this way
it will be silently;
I will not be expecting you
but I shall be waiting until
darkness closes around me....
I thought I heard
the whippoorwill's call
but the owl

is screeching louder.

I'm frightened.

I feel like the last person on earth,
and tonight

I'll go home with this gun in my arms
empty handed--

at least,

they will think so.

An Armadillo I Shall Call Sisyphus

You came out of the swampish
flow of the current
like a quiet rustle
into the changing color of leaves
tiny against a cold background
preoccupied,
in a spur of delirious determination
raking, rummaging, and standing alone
on your bootless errand...
you would be happy
if the leaves turned to stone
with an eager air
you'd be content
to stand up to a stone.

Encounter

She looks me
dead in the eye
she didn't hear
the sole of my boots
crunching October leaves
for the high rocking
sound of the train
she didn't see
me in the distance
coming up with the sun
through the fog
both standing still
with the wind
and the muffled sound
hanging onto the vast prairie
What do we know of one another?
she doesn't flick her ears
or toss her tail
until the train has gone

and I stand there
gazing past the wooden angles
of the trestle.

The Endless Announcement
of An Echo

Death waited within the closed chamber
for the first click of safety touch
released the glittering trigger helm
the echo...

flying down the round steel barrel
swallowing the bullet escaping
the bright trivial shell spinning
into the gun-cracked velocity
of time feeling the agony
despair and the vigil
a full-choked silence
the echo...

dying like the floundering animal
bullet falling at the heart's core
steady scope the atmosphere
crosscutting range of smokeless air
the wood-note current
of the brass-steeled weapon
the echo...

rolling like a gust of squawking birds
into the invisible marked wind
leaving calm and leafless trees
to bend and breathe in
the new murmuring
beat of life.

A Fresco Painting

The wet plaster
comes alive with charcoal stumps
and wind spilling leaves
past an aurora of trunks
towering like lead pencils
over the contours of earth colors
and animal crackers...

Not the usual pastel
misrepresentation
the yellow flower stretches out
its long neck
I take a closer look
see the details of leaves and lizards
never noticed before
glowing with expressionism
any kind of scape
clouds, land, and the river
loaded with bric-a-brac

flowing out of banks
into the contours of earth colors
and animal crackers...
blues merging with greens
grass with ground
bush with tree
I with thee
thee with me....

This Time Last Winter

From the other side of the coarse-grained wall
hooves are pounding a feather bed
of ruffled leaves
the deer are incensed by my intrusion
filmy light peels off the hours of early dawn
one after another

I force my way between
the wind and the water
holding my eyes to the
low rise of grass growing out
of the curved track
the sun wavers over my shoulder
invisible wings of the blue-jay explode
into brilliant colors, diagonal brightness
announcing my presence
leaving his song tattering on vines
that soar overhead

I place the purple bottle in the forks of a tree

this time next winter it will still be there
cloudy shadows of white appear
between branches of magnolias
I pour a few acorns into my pocket
and hear the squirrels signaling each other
beyond the circle of baygall
where there are no other people

In the evening
when the sun has burned out
my skin is chilled
the wind discovers
a layer of pine needles
below my legs
and wraps them around me.

To The Woods I'll Go No More

(For: Eileen Pelt)

I'm giving it the final touch
today, I'm firing the last shot,
saying goodbye...
weary of the chase,
I'm taking a breathing spell
resting easy from this knotty-pine
hiding place.

I've seen my share of the muley cow,
tree toad, cotton-mouth moccasin,
squirrel, ring-tailed raccoon,
deer, rabbit, wolf, ground hog,
skunk, bobcat, armadillo,
black crow, brown hawk, blue jay
and ivory-billed woodpecker ...

that mosquito has bitten me on the ass
for the last time

to the woods I'll go no more
I'm going back to sit around
look at home-grown pissants
and cockroaches for awhile

I'll miss your many-colored orchids
warm brown pine needles and blue-eyed grass
your beauty is a work of fiction
I take seriously

but too long
I've been stumbling around back here
dreaming Cassandra's telepathic dreams
Everytime I see an island of trees
I'll see this howling wilderness
twisted tangles of yaupon, copperheads
pea soup and green dragons
this paradise....
I must remember,
these things I want to be remembered by.

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