

ABSTRACT

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GARDEN

Deanna Marie Boulard, MFA, 2008

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This collection includes a prologue and three ten-poem sections. In an attempt to sit quietly, to see and hear as clearly as possible, the poems include much tea-drinking, museum-going, and people-watching. Though most of these poems are in free verse, the vast majority employ traditional line and stanza lengths, as well as consonance and assonance, and the occasional echo of pentameter. At the same time, they try to remain true to the rhythms and vocabulary of American and Canadian speech. Influenced by Elizabeth Bishop, Billy Collins, and Anne Porter, the poems are concerned with the observation of light, the distance between people, the sound of the language, and with finding art in the everyday and the everyday in art

ICE SKATING IN THE SCULPTURE GARDEN

By

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From Bede's *Account of the Conversion of King Edwin*

And one of his counselors added,
*I see now that the lifespan of men,
compared to that uncounted time,
is like a sparrow in the sleet and snow,
who flies into the lighted mead-hall
through one door and out the other.*

Part One

Valentine's Day at the College Perk Coffee Shop

Balancing on my folding chair, leaning
on the dubious wood table, I drink
my hot chocolate and thank God
that there is no pink in this room
and that my hot chocolate has come
with its usual vanilla wafers.

Heather and I have walked here to read,
but I can't stop staring out the window,
the one high up on the wall, almost
square, with its indigo trim,
some of the pane painted too,
and through the part that's clear,

I see bare oak branches in afternoon sun,
and the discontent I feel is lessened
by their shape and the blue behind them,
and it is enough, to sit at a table with a friend
and have a close view of tree branches
and be distracted from oneself awhile.

It's Deafening Sometimes

It's deafening sometimes, living
over the highway's constant hush,
lessening only around three
in the morning or Sunday nights,

and the pavement along Route One,
the parking lots and onramps
with the occasional, evenly spaced trees,
the new *A Livable Community*

with birches surviving
in a triangle of grass, between
an onramp and an off-ramp,
so much longer when you're walking

like I did today, just after it rained,
through the smell of gasoline
and the wake of an occasional truck,
and I considered it for a minute,

on the overpass, feeling my weight
on the rust-stained concrete
and the weight of the cars on my left,
the ones below coming at a perpendicular;

it would be easy to lean a little left,
not impossible to climb up the chain links.
It was on a walk that my grandfather
had a part of his skull crushed in

by something like a baseball bat,
and that's what would happen, if I tried it—
nothing would stop— I would just
forget the names of things, the word for

that smooth stuff on top of *la tête*,
the names you learn at first speech,
the ability to think logically about this
and decide it's unacceptable,

like he always did before the injury,
draining the gasoline from chainsaws
and anything else he could have used,
checking himself into Penetanguishene,

and then coming out again, driving
the blue pickup all the way to Kentucky
to cook steak and pace with his *petit fils*
until his daughter, *Evelyn*, was strong again.

Peace on Earth

Benvenuto di Giovanni's Adoration of the Magi

The oldest of them, bald with a long white beard,
robed in embroidered gold and white,
crawls on the ground, and eyes closed in ecstasy,
grips the calf of the baby and strains to kiss its foot.

In the darkness below Mary— she has no feet,
and not even the pink folds of her dress touch earth—
the wiseman's other hand arches stiff and white on dirt,
a nail-less claw, or the ready blade of a shovel.

Over this, the manger roof glows gold, the star hovers,
the other wisemen look on, their crowns are gold,
Mary holds a bright lantern, or what looks like a lantern,
and the holy family's intricate halos shine,

but what draws the eye is the end of a gold handle,
a circle in sharp relief, the handle of a sword
that hangs at the hip of the standing wiseman,
the one closest to upraised penitents' faces.

And around all this, the frame is a gold inch
with blue and red flowers, except for the base,
only an afterthought? *Gloria in excelsis deo
et in terra pax, hominibus bonae voluntatis.*

Working at Starbucks in December

I came in today and the whole store was decked out
in red, and under our green aprons, we were all wearing
red tee-shirts with white figure skaters on the back.
I kept telling people I felt like a gingerbread man,
and they kept saying, *You're not a man, ha ha,*
and I kept saying, *Would you like a cranberry bliss bar too?*
And that my grandmother cancelled Christmas.
Not that I blame Duncan, exactly, for marrying her
and asking for attention instead of *tortiere,*
but those Maxwells really stink at board games
and I miss driving up to the Muskokas every year,
the house my father and his twin built,
gray-blue wood siding and Vermont Casting stove.

Lately the half-caf quad grande five-pump vanilla
one percent extra hot two Splenda latté
has made me want to jump out the drive-thru window
like Steve did the other day, but of course he just
climbed back in, laughing, and Omar made some comment
about the windows at his grandparents' leather farm
in Scandinavia, and how people from Canada aren't allowed
into Omar World because they don't speak Scandinavian.
I say that Deanna World is better anyway,
but he claims it's only an island, with bad water,
and he makes a barrier of flattened boxes
so we can't get to his espresso bar.

Directions to my House

Go away from the sun in the morning
and towards it after noon. This will be easier
by foot, so bring a backpack that will carry
seeds and granola, dried cranberries and jerky,
along with an extra pair of jeans, a tarp, a rope,
your mother's brown sweater, and a flashlight.

I suggest that you start in May, as it will take
ninety-one days to get here, that is,
if you keep a good pace. Be sure to pick berries
when you can, and look for the Indian potato
I showed you last year. If you must, stop
at a corner store. Avoid highways and big towns,

since they have always distracted you.
Once you are over the mountains, the land
will settle by degrees, until you near the end
of Illinois, and the horizon begins to widen.
Then you will be in corn fields, where the stalks
are taller than you, and if you cannot go straight,

you may follow Highway Eighty. You will pass
the river and Iowa City, and when you get close
to Cedar Rapids, keep the sun's rising on the side
of your good eye, and its setting on the side of
the other. Take the gravel road past Swisher,
and when you come to the gas station with

the green door, you will know that the oaks
around the vanished house, you will know
that they are very close, and you will turn
towards the place where they buried me.
Come and sit on the fading grass and
let me see the sun's markings on your face.

Waiting to Play Tennis in Late September

I sit on the bleachers near the middle court
and consider that *septembre* nearly
contains *timbre*, and *novembre*, *ombre*,
a stamp, shadow, month,

and I'm not sure this means anything,
so I watch the two old men
playing the young man,
the way they return so respectfully,

slowly through the evening air,
which is full of waiting for the rain,
and I decide to stay a little longer
with Hass's *Praise*,

finding his tennis poem again,
I wonder what tennis whites look like,
and if I should be making resolutions—
well, not really the resolutions part—

I'm resolved on enough points already,
and would rather sit here with the wind,
and wait for tennis or rain,
whatever comes first.

On Being Home for Christmas

Not the song—good grief—, though I always liked
that version of Amy Grant's, a few years after
"Heart in Motion:" *Baby baby, I'm taken with the notion,*
but being in a house that insists on history.

Not that the house goes back to Ghost Ghost
You can't Catch Me, where the chosen ghost
hides her eyes by the hexagon picnic table
leaning against the old maple where ashes

from wood-burning stoves were dumped,
while the kids advance from the oaks
in Aunt Jan's back yard (the two huge ones
planted side by side with sand in between them)

chanting *Ghost ghost, you can't catch me*
until the ghost turns and catches
whoever can't beat her back to the oak trees;
not that it even goes back to street hockey

in the cul-de-sac, Joey with elaborate, cheap
goalie pads thinks he's Patrick Roy, cries
every time he gets knocked down,
Jesse's back and forth stick handling, the criss-cross

play Stephen and I had down, and my Father,
of course, saying again, *Challenge them*
right away so they don't have time to think!
and *The net was off, the net was off, it doesn't count!*

but the change in thought, the pensiveness brought on
by looking at brothers with the same eye color,
hair color as me, the only redheads in the family,
and seeing pictures of us at the old house,

the Super Eight, the farm in Iowa, empty now,
the house in Hamer Bay, blue, since painted red,
that vague feeling of being displaced
explains itself a little, insists I'm from somewhere.

Also Thinking About This Morning

Sitting on my living room floor with Earl Grey,
noticing again how the white walls, trim,
window-casings, and blinds are rarely monotone,

which I hadn't really considered since last January,
when getting a glass of water around three, seeing
the walls, and especially the snow outside, turned

the deep blue colors of sky just after sunset,
and though today it's light yellows and grays,
it's a relief to think that the right angles

and walls that meet in right angles, and keep
their shape and dimensions day after day,
aren't as predictable as I thought they were,

especially the ceiling, that's a temporary screen
for light in slits from the sliding door's vertical blinds,
moving in the wind with shadows of tree leaves,

impossible since I'm on the third floor,
the sun isn't shining at any direct angle,
and there's no water around, but looking

over the balcony's railing, I see a silver
van parked on the street, its roof shining,
and when it drives away, the reflection's gone,

which makes me think there's a poem here somewhere,
possibly having to do with *The earth, O Lord,*
is full of your mercy, and the nature of light,

leaning *incandescent out of kitchen table or chair*,
but I'm not sure how to get there exactly,
also thinking about this morning.

Visiting the Hirshhorn

I should have known from the first sculpture—
angled, red metal beams, one hanging horizontal
as if from a crane, in process, *AREYEARS WHAT?*
carved out of the base— that this would be about pain.

But going inside, putting my coat and hat in a locker,
I see something like a flock of seagulls
in a room called *Currents*, and closer up,
they're coat hangers, the empty triangles covered
in white paper, hanging one from the other
up to the ceiling, loosely cylindrical
redemption of the everyday.

I consider and dismiss the painted text
explaining how and why to exhibit one's *pictures*,
the video of a girl dancing while a hippie professor,
oblivious, lectures; she too is *making art*.

I walk farther in to see small black-and-white figures,
immense white space around them
(though the plane of paper is actually small),
three seagulls in an empty sky, as if we had just
looked up, and it takes some thought to see
that beside this, the line of tiny, indistinct shapes
is patterned palm tree, palm tree, palm tree, telephone pole.

Then there's a large blue square hanging,
thin, loosely from the wall, rounded lines
drawn on Mylar in colored pencil, ink,
something like the reflection of sky and sun on water.

I may have been ok, at this point,
frowning at the sculpture of glowing intestinal
or brain-like matter in translucent rubber,
the picture of someone with a shaved head, index cards?
pinned to the wall with people's names in brown,
if a man hadn't frowned back at me, said,
Read about it, it's worth reading at least.

So I walk over to the picture again, and read
that the woman standing there, looking back
over her shoulder, had tattooed, for eight hours,
the names of murdered gays and transsexuals

all over her back, the back of her thighs,
and the names on the index cards
were made by pressing paper to blood.
Everything else is gone.
She's making a memorial of her body, blood,
and it cannot be dismissed, this pain
is real, it demands remorse, something.

I walk back to the escalator. This is not
what I want from art, an intensification
of the pain we cause each other every day,
the nakedness, confusion of being without beauty;

what is left, if all we have is the new,
the sharp clarity of pain?
And is it clarity, really, when it must
be explained, and for that matter, can it be new?
Going upstairs, I enter *MORRIS LOUIS NOW*,
thinned paint poured over canvas, called staining,
and he offers me nothing in titles like *Alpha Epsilon*,

and everywhere I see desolation in his colors,
barcodes in this one, no clear forms,
and there is too much left to the imagination, an emptiness,
and I want to go somewhere noisy with people.

Late Morning Downtown

I choose the Marvelous Morning Muffin
and the blueberry green tea, and walk
to the park. In the center is a dry fountain
with three half-naked white stone women
who remind me of the Three Graces,
moss and white arms in the south of France,
watching the hurried blue trains, the *manège*,
the owners of homeless dogs, Mac Do's silver
chairs. I've never seen a French muffin.
Over there I always ate des *pains aux chocolats*,
or an applesauce pastry whose name I can't recall.

This muffin, though, is truly marvelous with its bumpy
top like an avocado's peel and its inside of carrots,
raisins, and cinnamon. It's a lot like the apricot muffin
I had at my cousin's hippie bakery on Bardstown, so I call
her, but she's busy selling bear claws, then she'll be
sweeping uneven wood floors. We decide to watch
something black and white that night, maybe on three-way
with our Ohio cousin, maybe Humphrey Bogart or Fay Wray.

Peeling the last piece from its paper, I crumple
up the brown bag and walk again past the crowded
bookstores and the Thai restaurant, wondering if
I'm a little too affected by muffins and the sun
and statues, when cigar smoke hits me smack
in the face, and I'm reminded of the teal office
where I sat waiting to make photocopies, staring
out at the algae green pond with the overzealous
fountain spraying up and up, blown sideways by the wind.

Part Two

Light at the Baltimore Washington Airport

It's after eleven at night, and after waiting
too long for my luggage, I walk upstairs
to wait for my ride, outside of the baggage claim's
noise, fluorescent lights, low concrete.

There's no one at the airline desks, and only
one guy, looking sleepy, sitting at security,
the black, retractable boundaries for lines
empty, the new video showing how to pack

neatly, silently playing over and over,
while I sit, slumped over like the security guy,
on a bench; clean lines of wood and metal,
but too high, too curved toward the middle.

Wanting to be less impatient,
I sit up, cross-legged, and close my eyes
to hear the escalators continuing,
the escalators continuing.

When I open them, the faux marble floor
is right there, so shiny it reflects the ceiling;
round pockets of light, dark where the bulb is out,
puddles of garish yellow from security signs,

and behind me, the glass wall reflects
the white metal beams, lights from inside,
and looking through the reflections, the outside
cars and concrete look transparent.

Finding Rembrandt's Sketches

Having slept too late to be on time for church,
as happens too often lately, I exit at Navy Memorial
and walk to the west side of the West Building,
where there's a fountain and an old, spreading oak,
and sit on the bench to watch the light
through the leaves, the lines of tourists walking
past the Air and Space Museum, groups, thankfully small,
walking up the marble steps to my left, and figure
I should read a little, since I am skipping today,
and I am in Proverbs, and they won't let you take tea inside.

We come to *Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful*,
and Irish Breakfast tea, but my hands are cold,
so I go in to check on Renoir, and as usual,
the three portraits of little girls are there in a row,
where there used to be, I think, only two,
and *Oarsmen at Chatou* was on the left,
my favorite, because in spite of the too-soft
shadows on the oarsman's white jacket, the pink water,
the lady refusing to look up, it was most
like *Dance in the Country* and *Dance in the City*,

and wanting the joy I felt at seeing them, I kept
coming back, until *Sculling* took its place,
duplicate men in beehive hats, colors flat as noon,
I asked a guard where Renoir's *Boating Party* had gone,
and he looked at me, said he didn't know, and then
even the beehive men were gone, and Degas'
ballerinas were moved from the side of the right wall
to the center of the back wall, and disoriented,
as if the plot of my favorite novel had been switched around,
I went to the gift shop to look at postcards of the missing painting.

Actually, I wouldn't have known where the gift shop was
if I hadn't had to go to the bathroom that one day,
and thus had gone left instead of right, followed signs
for Rembrandt's sketches downstairs, been directed
to an empty series of rooms, and smelling salmon,
had found the café and then the water lily-thin umbrellas,
black cat art nouveau magnets, and thick picture books,
learned the correct title of my painting and then wandered
back through small Rodin sculptures to—
Rembrandt's sketches, just arrived, mostly

intricate engravings, beggars and old women,
four crowded, darker, lighter, darker versions of the crucifixion,
David kneeling in nightcap and gown by his bed,
contemporary except for the identifying harp,
and then going up what I thought were the same steps,
finding myself in religious art from the Middle Ages,
Mary glaring at me through the slits of her eyes,
and they've reduced You to an infant
with a small man's body, baby's head,
all gold and blue paint, vibrant red, even wisemen

cower in the dirt, peasants keep their distance,
no wonder they burned so many relics, beautiful lies,
to bring back the dung-smudged shepherds,
the beggars and old women to the foreground,
horrifying to see these remnants, and horrifying
to think of them being burned, that the devout
may have believed the geography of this,
that the wisemen, with their crowns and swords,
could approach Him, that Mary's dress never touched earth,
and that the wiseman comes before the old woman and beggar.

Lunch

The café's too busy, but Anna
wants her mango smoothe and I
want my tomato-mozzarella panini,
so we sit with ladies, walking partners,
who tell each other, *Watch out for Naples* and
It's best to keep your money in your brassiere.

It makes me smile, this woman-to-woman tone,
the hint of scandal, makes me think
of yesterday's minestrone soup with Aunt Ev
and my mother, the pink flower tablecloth,
the blue and white bowls, the way they started
on abusive men, I don't remember why—

no, it's because Lindsay's dating a Vandenberg,
and she's sort of a cousin by marriage
and Aunt Ev was talking to Aunt Louise—
and apparently when Aunt Ev was engaged,
Uncle Darrell said, *Now we'll always be together*
and she said, *Not if you ever hit me*,

and this sounds kind of odd for someone engaged,
but she had her reasons, Grandma Emma
was abused, and this reminded my mom
of when Dad—*He had a temper*—threw a hammer,
and she said, *That really makes me respect you*,
and if the anger had been for her, oh boy,

and *Don't you ever stand for anything like that*,
and they know I won't, the way they know
that their husbands will love them
even as their bodies get older.

Visiting my French Canadian Grandmother

At 9:36 in the morning, driving to the McMichael Gallery of Art, the shadow of my hand and pen write along with me in the back seat while her new, Scottish husband explains that the ships are CSLs, not Upper Lakes, and they spray the decks when it's hot like this so they won't hog— bend in an arc from bow to stern and overshoot the seaway's twenty-six foot maximum draft— the younger generation thinks in meters, we go back and forth.

Like my grandfather, the country I was born in has become unreachable. This Queen Anne's Lace growing out from the sides of the road, these vineyards, purple clover, some sort of tall grass in the ditches— I can't say what I mean. She tells me about scrubbing floors as a girl, on your hands and knees with steel wool, then wax, cleaning the stovetop with wax paper and grease, *ma Tante Evelyn* insisting you read the newspaper at the table, then fold it up and wash your hands, but she won't talk about *Père*.

In this one by the Group of Seven, the white pine grows up crooked between rocks, and whether the wind is blowing or not, it leans to the left while its needles lean right. We're on the Georgian Bay, so the wind must be blowing, and looking at the shadows of other islands, I know their details without seeing them, or almost, because I won't name them correctly, I'll call it Highway Ninety-Nine instead of Sixty-Nine, Canadian Tire instead of Beaver Lumber, and the name of my street has changed.

At sixty-five, he went for a walk and was found by a neighbor, without his name or second language. That Christmas, he wore sweatpants for the first time, called his hair feathers. What could you do, my elegant grandmother, when he sat in his corner of the couch and drank black coffee, couldn't sleep or read, couldn't pace the whole house? What could you do but put him somewhere with a schedule, with regulated beer and cigarettes? This is not to be talked about. You would rather beat me at Scrabble, explain how to make proper scones.

But isn't there a story? "No, not really. We got married and lived down the street from my parents in *Sainte Thérèse*, then in little towns on the railroad, and you know the rest." I agree because you want me to, but in phrases like *Il fait chaud chez vous*, *maitre Pierre* and *Crêpe de crêpe*, in the years when *Père* was an Electrolux salesman in Ottawa and Thorn Hill, my father bailing him out of jail, there are songs he played on his violin, hair still dark at fifty, smiling his smile and tapping time with his left foot.

Measuring Half Batches

It's coffee of the day, and the thing itself
isn't so bad; cutting open the five-pound bullets
of decaf—Sumatra this week— and pouring it
into the grinder, set for seven or Starbucks Utopia
or flat bottom paper filter, holding the metal canister
underneath, and measuring point three sixths of a pound
for each paper bag, folding the top four times
and fastening it closed by folding in the metal ends.

I don't notice the smell anymore, unless I'm asked,
How would you describe this coffee? in which case
you must take the sample cup in one hand and
cover most of the rim with the other and smell,
and then audibly slurp, look thoughtful, and say,
This is really earthy or nutty or citrusy or complex,
but usually you smell the coffee in your hair and skin,
after leaving, and it smells, because it can, stale.

But I suppose it could be soothing, this continued
measuring of coffee beans and folding down of paper,
a rest from the hundred or so lattes you've made
or the hundred or so customers you've greeted, asked
if they want an eggs Florentine breakfast sandwich
with that, and explained that a skinny latte means
sugar free and skim, so if you say skinny, you should
specify a syrup, like cinnamon dolce or hazelnut.

It could just be the time of day; early afternoon,
probably around one, when you've been here
since five, and the tall skim cinnamon powder latte
that you drank on an empty stomach— except for that
maple scone that was broken— is starting to get to you,
make you nervous for no real reason, make you keep
nearly dropping the spoon for measuring, but really,
this gives you too much time to think, alone in the corner

with the grinder's hum blocking out other sounds
and the convex mirror for watching the door
is at the wrong angle, so if you look, you just see
a warped version of yourself and the pastry racks
behind you, and your coworkers are busy making drinks
or making mocha or talking over by the espresso bar,
which is fine, of course, except I start thinking
about what Yermo said the other day, offhandedly,

while he was waiting for Komodo Dragon to finish brewing, standing there in his motorcycle gear, he always looks so eighties, thinning dark hair, German, that he didn't mind waiting, didn't want to go back to his office, would just stand there wasting space— as if a human being, and one who would bring us six fans when our air conditioning broke and with the heat from the sanitizer and the bar and the ovens

we would've all been absolutely miserable, as if he could waste space, and you might think I'm taking this too seriously, but he says things like that, and I know he means them more than he should and that his friend Duncan has a wife and kids, but Yermo doesn't and he's intense and he's lonely and he comes here to talk to people and listen and all I can do is talk and listen and make sure his coffee's fresh,

and that doesn't seem like enough, and I'm mostly sincere with Yermo, but when you wear a green apron, you have to pretend to care, and say *thank you* at the end of every transaction, so the guy who had the nerve to ask for a second doppio (he drank the first one, but it was too watery) and explain to me the caffeine levels in coffee versus espresso and how Cubans drink shots in Tampa at coffee stands for sixty-three cents and how he

cautioned our regional manager down there about branches being opened too rapidly, this guy has to be listened to and smiled at and given a free drink and thanked for being such a demanding, earnest know-it-all, and now I've forgotten the point— ah yes— that I'm frequently insincere, and this bothers me when I have time to think, but I guess that's not really the point, because really, the loneliness, the over-eagerness to talk is the main thing.

Thursday Night

Sitting at my desk with chamomile tea,
I'm thinking of the Satsuma mandarin oranges
in the kitchen table's blue bowl,
and how they would go nicely with some toast,

and how I would rather watch Gene Kelly
than try to fill up a blank page,
the morning scene in *An American in Paris*,
where his cot is on a pulley,

so when it rises to the ceiling
his towel's underneath, and he's almost
dancing, such precision in pushing aside
the rolling chair, opening the closet

for the table with its purple flowers,
then closing it again with his right foot
as he turns to open balcony doors,
setting the water pitcher and fruit bowl

beside what must be a battered coffeepot,
and not giving his breakfast a second look
(it's something like a bagel, lightly toasted)
he smudges out a charcoal self-portrait,

which I might do too, except I'd eat first,
and then he's distracted by *Eh, Jerry!*
and joining Adam and Henri downstairs,
they sing and dance like crazy people,

about the waltz and Strauss
when I want a melody ringing through the house,
and the café-goers look up from their omelets,
and they declare George the Emperor,

and Gene Kelly takes the hand
of an older, curtsying florist,
and they gracefully waltz
around the piano and onto the sidewalk.

Toute figure est un monde

Frenhofer, *Le chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, Balzac

By this the bent artist meant, *Every form is a world* or
Every character is a globe or *Every image is a universe*.
I lean towards the image translation, though the form
is fairly convincing, and Frenhofer's so obsessed, hiding away
in his shadowed *atelier*, velvet draped around paintings of his,
women discarded for the imperfection of an elbow,
the untruthful tint of the little toe, he probably saw
everything in a form. Yes, an image would be too large,
a landscape's breadth in a portrait painter's eye.

It makes associative sense too, the way a sun-leaf's form
on pavement says strawberry, which says summer,
and so could be called a world, but Frenhofer isn't
into association, he prefers *une vision sublime*,
ideal form breathing out of canvas and paint.
This is why he doesn't draw in lines, why he calls himself
the creator, god, lover of his *chef-d'œuvre*, masterpiece
of ten years, Catherine, who reclines in silks, 3D,
shining, smiling at Frenhofer and only Frenhofer,

because he's the only one who sees her, ten years' fervor
has buried all but a foot, nude and alive, under color's debris.
Most disturbing though, is his mad realization,
canvas burning, and death. Where does this leave his ideas?
The worlds in form and the courtesan imagined in meticulous,
meaningless paint are ash, and the young artist says
one shouldn't mix philosophy and poetry with paint.
But that's too easy, and we know it, he knows it, and
Frenhofer's Catherine Lescault opens her eyes in the shadows.

Things I Remembered Today

The way light hits water
at nine in the morning
with that particular, patched brilliance.

Why Sarah, too old for that sort of thing,
pretends a parking lot outside her window
is the lake, at night, with cars moored

to cement docks, and streetlamps
shining off rain-damp blacktop,
trees larger, leaves louder in the dark.

Milosz calls it *scanning faces*
in a crowd of strangers
for that one face, uniquely and ardently loved,

which I do now without meaning to,
overhearing *champignon*
instead of *shopping now*,

accepting a Canadian quarter
just to turn it over in my hand:
the deer, the queen, the deer.

Is it our careless way of leaving
that makes a landscape inescapable,
or is it the changing of things once loved;

the stone steps replaced,
the splintering dock gone,
and cars rusting over lilies-of-the-valley?

Quatrains

Like the fiddles in an Irish pub, playing
a Johnny Cash chorus faster and faster
for half-drunk, dancing businessmen
on a Thursday night, wishing it was Friday,

or MGM musicals like *For Me and My Gal*,
Gene Kelly's début as vaudeville clown
turned troubled lover of Judy Garland,
ambitious draft-dodger ending a hero,

or six cups of tea in one day: Zen,
Wild Sweet Orange, Passion, Awake,
Berry Blossom White, Tazo Chai,
poetry is a kind of desperation.

Ice Skating in the Sculpture Garden

In the summer, the ice is a fountain, marble,
with benches all around it, and weird
modern art around that, gravel paths,
a café with an art nouveau Métro stop
flown in with its mint copper and mango lamps,
concrete tiles and chairs where the steps would be.

And though *the Present is the point at which
time touches eternity*, I keep looking past
the string of white lights around the rink,
upside-down arc meeting upside-down arc,
and the benches that are too cold to sit on,
the dimly lit, headless sculptures. It's not

that I don't see my friends skating
beside me, the full moon between clouds,
the ice marked by so many blades,
it's not that I'm unhappy, just
that the memory of summer and other cities
is insistent, having seen this place in the same light,

a thing familiar as the motion of
finding my balance, foot to foot,
though now the thin blades
take some getting used to,
and the left foot nearly slips
each time the right crosses over.

Part Three

In the Beginning

That's what they've called this exhibit,
Bibles before one thousand, housed
here until January, underground
in this marble, geometric museum.

Kept in half-light, the earlier ones
are plainspoken shivers of papyrus,
some of them brown, unpretentious
fragments persisting in their own way,

like the homeless man who keeps
coming back to the same set of lights,
holds cardboard to chest and shrugs at us:
Out of work two years, God bless.

Their violence astounds me, the art
of time and water, fraying papyrus down
to splitting fibers, staining, reshaping
thick paper. I've seen this one before,

purple washed from ink, spread like
watercolor over the page and its
unknown alphabet, was it a picture
or stationary that I saw? It is somehow

known to me. From what nightmare
have these colors and men escaped?
oval faces without angles, arms wrapped
like clay around wooden beams,

letters red as wet blood,
tissue-thin paper cracked at the sides,
saturated in crimson, Byzantine,
wax apostles chaining a cortex shut.

They are making the word into flesh,
or trying to, and the Carolingians, flowery,
the treasure book gold with peacocks,
are willing the wilting flesh to be spirit.

Pantoum

Ma deuxième langue me manque,
So I look for it everywhere,
Wait like I do in the metro window
For the lake to flash by.

I look for it everywhere,
Eye hungry over bulldozed land,
Until the lake flashes by,
Much too quickly.

Eye hungry over bulldozed land,
I wait like I do in the metro window
For the lake to pass by, much too quickly;
Ma deuxième langue me manque.

On Main Bar

You start out with finding shot glasses, steel pitchers, calibrating thermometers by sticking them in ice water and with a set of pliers, holding the metal base still, while you turn the face until the needle is at thirty-two degrees. It is with a sort of determined authority over metal and glass and gallons of milk, your own movements, that you begin timing shots

to exactly seventeen seconds and making the milk whisper in its pitcher up to one sixty so that the liquid is sweet and the foam dense or, as the sign says, *velvety*. Yes, you begin with calm control of the elements, with clean steam wands and wrists, and you make a latté for yourself and an iced venti, one equal mocha for the woman who gets that and the *Times* at drive through every morning. She asks if

there's anything interesting on the front page, and I say, *No, I wish they'd talk about good things sometimes*, and she says, *Me too, but that's just not reality*. I agree and wish her a good morning, but I want to say that reality is here, even at drive through, with the light rain falling on blacktop and sidewalk, roofs of cars, our hands as I hand her the drink, in the wet, indiscriminate reflection of deep blue that'll turn gray once the sun rises,

and in the pitcher of milk that I knock over with my elbow and feel the liquid cooling on my thigh; not ideal, but no disaster. Hank Williams is playing on the new CD, that song that goes, *so I jumped in the river, but the dogone river was dry*, and toward the end of the song, Noll comes in and sees the tall coffee guy in his Stetson, and asks if there's something going on, and Tahn tells him it's our newest promotion, the cowboy latté, and he

believes her for a minute, until we say, *No, it's just new music. That guy always wears a Stetson*. And start theorizing what a cowboy latté would taste like; either an extra couple of shots or molasses, and it's not busy, so I can make his grande latté and ask how business class is going, now that he's stopped writing screen plays, and he looks like he's seeing more sun, so I believe him

when he says it's going well, he feels like he's getting somewhere.
And then, around seven, people start waking up and
I have three venti, no foam no water chais for lobby
and a tall soy caramel macchiato and hot chocolate, and so on
until I've marked ten cups and still need to steam the milk
and have chai splashed on my arms and the guy with
the solo espresso stands there tapping his cup on the counter,
tapping the cup while he waits for his tall, skinny something-
or-other, and I would tell him to stop if I could do it politely,

and the line keeps up for two hours straight until the shots
are off and my stainless steel counters are, shall we say,
no longer shiny, and we can't have breaks yet because
Kellen and Daniel both called in, so we're short
until eleven, and milk residue is building up on the outside
of the pitchers and there's no time to rinse them off,
and the tall chick says her white mocha is *like, totally too hot*,
could it be made again, and I smile and say yes, it'll just

take a minute and when Miss Edith comes in for her venti red eye,
I say, *Yes, I'm alright. Doing well.* And she says, *Yes,*
I'm fine thanks, and goes to find half and half for her coffee,
and by the end of the day I volunteer to wash dishes, so I won't
commit some act of violence, and I scrub the pitchers
and the pastry trays and the inside of the cream dispenser
and Souweinne comes in humming "Folsom Prison Blues" and starts
finding clean shot glasses and calibrating thermometers.

Special Exhibit at the National Gallery of Art

Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych is long gone,
and *Cézanne in Provence*, though a small contingent
has been kept in a back gallery, past
the ballerinas adjusting their dress-straps,
Monet's light and dark sandstone in Rouen,
Gauguin's landscaped women, and Van Gogh,
and I'm glad to have them here, if only for
the largest painting, on the far wall, of his father
reading *L'Événement*, with thick fingers and slippers
like my grandfather's, provençal and québécois.

This is the third time I've come, trying to see
J.M.W. Turner. Too impatient with the crowds,
I walked in, and out with a brochure,
the next time through the near-empty Chinese vases
into placquettes, a smug bust of John the Baptist as a child,
and then beside Francesco Xanto Avelli's elaborate
Shallow Bowl with the Death of Laocoon,
there's *A Crow*, probably Florentine,
perched on a perfect sphere
on a perfect cylinder, examining its right foot.

Today I glance at Turner's translucent watercolors,
those in-between lights and shades,
and almost walk out again, but there are fewer
large men to stand in canvas-middles,
and only one stroller, one lady with a cane, so I walk
farther in, scoot to the side, try not to back into anyone
while looking at his vanishing point suns,
finding that he "secured the post of professor of perspective,"
and that *The Confluence of the Thames and the Medway*
was accepted by H.M. Government for inheritance tax.

Then we have *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight*
and *Whalers (Boiling Blubber) Entangled in Flaw Ice*
and *Endeavoring to Extricate Themselves*,
which we'd never know except for the titles,
the light and water luminous, with ship masts and sails,
smoke and fire around the keelmen, silhouettes
are best in these landscapes; a face, as in
The Battle of Trafalgar, looks flat, straining back
from the neck of its dying body to stare past us,
somehow underdrawn, it's just canvas.

In a side room to the right, there are six-by-twelve sketches,
watercolor, all around the room, *The Burning of the Houses
of Lords and Commons*, repeated and repeated at eyelevel,
blurs of red and yellow, black, mostly red, repeated
in the two finished pictures, facing each other,
the Houses from one side of the river
and from the other, a chance, the sign says,
to explore the elements: fire, water, air.
I look from one picture to the other, and back again,
and, mourning a little, walk into the larger room, past seascapes,

until *Mortlake Terrace* takes hold, the yellowing sun
making shadows of trees and their ivy—
solitude in the alternating lines of shadow and sunlight,
the river to the right, this is a place I'd like to go
and stay awhile, so instead of looking at books, postcards,
I walk back through to write down its name,
and to find the main hall again, to find the stairway,
the hallway where the crow is, still
in the same place, beside the shallow bowl,
still contemplating its right foot, the front claw especially.

Another Adoration of the Magi

There is always that older wiseman,
closest to the child, kneeling, and in this one,
his head is turned slightly toward us
as he gently lifts the baby's foot,
touching the heel barely with his fingers
and looking at it sorrowfully, intently,
which you can see if you stand close enough,
and that his left hand is holding, gently, the toes.

I always walk past this round painting—
with its thick gold frame it could be a mirror—
and tours stop here on their way from Rembrandt,
tourists pause just to take pictures, like this girl
in her silver trench coat, standing too close
and too close again, leaning back on the wall
to the right of the frame while the guard says,
No, step forward. Forward please.

I am startled by the tenderness of this one, that
the baby actually looks like a baby, and though
he's still blessing the crowd in front of him,
in their elaborate robes, the wisemen young
and almost like angels with their light hair,
kneeling on the dark green that's spread out
like a thick carpet, he looks a little nervous
about the man who has his foot.

And getting bored with the wisemen, I look,
as always, for the shepherds, so notably absent
in Giovanni's and the smaller versions,
and the shepherds are here! Darker, skin and clothes
the green-browns of earth—ragged— but they are here,
and there is one standing behind Joseph in a crevice,
in the same posture; right hand raised, looking down,
and he has come in his contrition and loves the child

and the child is God and man at once; he will not
resign himself to white and gold paint,
his mother will not glare at us for looking,
and if our reflection is here, it is forgiven.

Driving to Cedar Rapids

There's a depth to the Iowa landscape,
fields and fields brown with corn-stubble,
the horizon at the end, wider than usual,
that makes me want to crawl into something,
stop myself from seeing too far.

My mother says it's just land,
it's unfair to judge by early winter.

My brothers argue the possibility
of measuring changes in distance to the moon.
Jesse's sure it's impossible, it's not a sphere,
so Joey says you could make it one
and calculate distance from imperfect centers.

The correlation might be off, but if calculations
are consistent, they'll show the pattern.

This takes an hour, at least, of back and forth
while I'm trying to sleep, and the next suggestion
is transmitters, at the poles and four equal points,
Joey's index fingers show the straight lines
they would draw through the Earth, the moon.

Mom threatens to throw water
if another word is said about it.

Jesse keeps insisting on infinite variables,
nothing being constant, and Joey says,
You're making this too complicated.
He's the only one with a Kentucky accent,
though we've lived there eleven years.

That's the thing about Joey, he can
code switch, his gift is making you understand.

He's wearing an Army winter hat,
partly, I think, to bug our parents.
Mom, every now and then, will glance
back at the yellow star and start again
on how he'll lose an arm if he joins.

My father said that's how he felt
when Jesse joined and just left.

What I felt was anger at his assumptions,
the stiff letters addressed to no one,
his quitting boot camp fragile, untrusting,
I couldn't tell him how crippling it is,
this willful limiting of vision.

I Think in French at the Airport

Je pense en français à l'aéroport,
while drinking tea out of styrofoam,
leaning on the stainless steel armrest.

They call this gourmet: Bigelow,
hot water separate and no milk,
the only sweetener, Sweetn'low.

In spite of this, *c'est pas fantastique*
to say in French that the concrete garage
est transparent dans l'aube, ou presque.

Though a transparent parking garage,
even in the predawn blue of five o'clock,
should be ridiculous in any language.

View From my Apartment as *Mortlake Terrace*

At this same
time of day, late afternoon,
the sliding door's blinds cut
the sun into alternating lines
of light and shadow
and the lines of the balcony railing,
freeway, and winter trees
take the same angle
as the stone wall, the river,
and the city horizon.

The Life of Saint Paul

Like days that fade in tempered decimeters,
beautiful as Cyrano's five-minute
death scene at *crépuscule* every show,
slashing enemies with moonlit panache,
so he died daily; pain polished him to shine.

Only this daily dying was not The End,
day or play's closure. It was death
like the death of forgiveness; the pain
of ceasing from anger, after hoarding
it as the deciduous, peeling birch hoards sap.

And this strength-leaving was life, as seed's
loosening breaks green from earth's darkness.
So stoning and shipwreck, snakebite
and irons failed to bring silence, and
death made him weak, thus invincible.

Last Judgment

Notre Dame de Paris

It's the middle door, the largest, arched like
a bishop's hat. They've carved its frame devoutly,
six apostles on either side, Jesus in the center,
a column between doors. He raises one hand to bless
or admonish the confused multitude above:
jumbled priests, knights, and peasants called
from their graves beneath the line of the damned
on His left, the blessed on His right. Strict angel
holds the scales, Devil looks mischievous.
Then a city above and Jesus on His throne,
Mary kneels on the right and a man on the left,
curving around are two rows of angles, four of saints.

The stone's white now, with tinges of yellow,
though it once writhed in color,
green demons and red blood, white faces
of the damned, not that we know demons were
green, anymore than one can tell without study
which apostles are which, or if they're standing
triumphant over vices or sins or something more finite.