EVE AND THE ARCHANGEL IN PARADISE

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Eve and the Archangel in Paradise
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*For you*
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The following poems have been previously published or will be soon published:


"Eve believes he's the best looking man" "When the music stops" "What Eve recalls of that day" "Exiled from her body" Queer Poetry 5 (2005). http://www.queerpoetry.cjb.net

"In the beginning" "When the voice finds body" "The mist spins out to gold" "Ankle deep in earth" "No one's image" "Somehow Eve senses" Living Waters 10 (2005). http://www.geocities.com/waiola.geo/issue9/openingpage.html


"Destiny is Memory" was recently used in a performance entitled "Dissident Voices: Collateral Damage: Poets Against the War," at Toi Whakaari, New Zealand's national drama school.
ABSTRACT

Tia Ballantine’s *Eve and the Archangel in Paradise* is poetic text, a sonnet sequence of 125 sonnets divided into twelve chapters, that narrates an alternative legend of Eve, banished from Paradise to the endtimes not because she was tempted by a serpent but because she wanted to speak and swallowed forbidden angel words. After being banished, Eve tries speaking for a brief time but soon returns to speaking only through her body. Unfamiliar with the history of the world to which she has been banished, Eve must examine her surroundings with a beginner’s mind and eyes; thus, she often sees and hears what others miss. She is a peculiar sort, the quite-quite, the half-half, as Jean Genet might say. She falls in love with the archangel, with men, with women, with hips, but none of this works: not pink tassels, not roses, not sugar daddies. She becomes a bar-tender in a strip club, moves to mountain caves, and spends some time wandering in war-zones, as a witness to the dead and the dying. Finally, at the end of the book, Eve at last decides to speak. “You,” she says, and green mountains start walking, and then, she stands at the edge of things, hidden and alone, and sings. The sequence loosely sketches a map of new territory, trundled into being as various philosophical, poetic, and art historical foundations gently move as echoic waves against the deeply rooted western cosmogonical narrative of Eve, Paradise, and angels. That motion allows for a quiet and almost unrecognizable intersection of eastern and western philosophy and also permits, perhaps, the development of a deeply felt resonance capable of revealing valuable connection, rather than separation.
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Every moribund or sterile society attempts to save itself by creating a redemption myth which is also a fertility myth, a creation myth.

- Octavio Paz.
- *The Labyrinth of Solitude*
Eve &
the
Archangel
in Para
Dise

Tia Ballantine
2005
dark wood of error
In the beginning, all dark was banishedy a voice singing small:  *let there be light.*
The voice sang land into being—and night.
The voice rolled fruits behind teeth and polished
up the moon. The voice spoke words that vanished
into damp black earth, still unapparent.
(Some might call it stone.) The voice had talent,
an odd ability to revise mist
as wild civility, as parable,
as pain. When singing only consonants,
the voice spoke feet like rivers, skin like dance,
sky hands with fingers that clawed terrible
chasms into mud and formed two creatures.
Called to the first, commanded him: *leave her.*
When the voice finds body, it’s as blue light—winged and prismatic, unconcerned with touch or density, disturbed by nothing but an intensity of exchange: the sight of Adam with hands on Eve, hips untied. When hands close circles, odoriferous wings beat cold air to fume, call mermaids to sing (the half-half, the quite-quite, oh so sublime, so free) and when womb dark translucency has shrunk to words, the voice moves circumference, climbs the wordless, settles into distance. Left behind, the Archangel stamps his feet. Eyes open valleys. Stones breathe, and cliffs step out. Eve feels her heart give way to mist.
The mist spins out to gold, then falls to song.
Eve's glad her heart's not stone, but Adam fears
what he can't see. He wants stone valves set to keep
the heat below. Eve holds her hands to fog
until her skin runs with rain. She wraps clouds
about her head while Adam stamps mud flat.
He makes noise with teeth and lips. Eve backs up
to color. Dodging the building pressure,
she leans on green and feels her mouth turn red.
When she fits her hips to earth, Adam's eyes
turn her, but before his hands can touch her,
the sky grows wings. Soon, the muddy ground crowds
with angels, stomping and swearing. They spit
light and with hands draw transparent circles.
Ankle deep in earth, Adam moves his tongue fast. When his voice sounds rivers and nights that end as waves, words rain beaches to seas edged white with the spume of birth. Eve's mouth stays shut, but she opens her arms. Words like frogs' eggs bounce against her skin, hover close as clouds. When she touches them, they bloom. Vowels flood her toes with color. After the voice speaks angels, what happens? Adam just listens like any decent schizophrenic might, but alarmed by angelic talking light, Eve stiffens, slips stones below folds of skin. Adam answers the disembodied voice. Eve puts her ear to earth; she likes the noise.
No one’s image: these creatures pulled from mud.
(when the voice speaks, it’s not as flesh and blood)
Locked down by skin and bone, Eve enjoys touch,
but terrified, Adam wants absence back.
‘Nothing’ won’t survive presence; so, he stacks
the words the angels speak as pyramids,
lays traps for stars. Blood rushes to his head.
He tastes muscle, breath, finds his tongue. Adam craves
absence, but he’ll settle for reorganizing
the solid things of earth. Eve can’t agree.
Order disturbs her hearing birds and bees.
After Adam takes to sermonizing,
Eve grows annoyed and motions to angels
to restore the void. They shoot her daggers.
Somehow Eve senses that the Archangel wants her gone, so she takes a walk past crisped brooks where roses tangle with privets on banks arranged with mantling vines. Adam’s voice haunts her, settles nights as ocean tides. She wants him to talk to her, but he finds angels more engaging. This distance spells danger, but she can’t tell him that. What Adam wants, Adam gets. Down by the spring, water spills to a pool where she sees her face swept free of clouds. She touches image, tries to speak, moves her tongue against her teeth. Her mouth fills with perfumed air that tastes like fruit still hard, dry like stone. She breathes out, but finds no words.
When night comes, Eve sleeps in squat fern forests
where royal palm trees hold the last notes of light.
Pressed once twice to lava cliffs, sea swings blind,
dips to gather stars, but leaves angel words
draped on trees. Their flickering light keeps Eve turned
to dawn. She listens to the smirr of rain.
She's years apart (mute) still a twin, her face
inked with spirals drawn as homes for new gods
asleep behind old sounds of clouds and frogs.
This is not a place for dreams, not even
a place for memory or future plans.
This is a place of hammering out locks,
drawing breath and keeping color safe from sounds
of voices speaking death as hallowed ground.
The angels come daily to sit on rocks
around her mirror pool, and Eve listens
to their endless chatter about her missing
words that they rudely tattooed on her back.
They never talk to her, just about her.
“She’s soft,” they say, “but he has a fair face,
a noble frame. He walks with easy grace,
and - oh yes - those hyacinthian curls . . .
and let’s not forget - the boy can sing.” Eve
tires of their pronouncements. She wishes
they’d talk about stones, explain silver fish,
outline their reasons for setting fire
to her heart, mention desire as silence,
describe ignorance without violence.
The Archangel is chatting up his pals,
but won’t speak to Eve. If she moves her lips,
he makes a smart remark about her tits,
delicately stated, casually phrased, all
dressed in vowels floating like carousel
tunes. Lots of drums. No flutes. If she persists,
he puts both hands over both ears and backs
away. His wings blush pink; feathers whistle
wide against the wind. Eve discovers words
can’t really float on air - they fall to ground.
She picks them up, rolls them on her tongue, holds
them behind her teeth. Silence is absurd.
She swallows once and speaks, rearranges
words she chewed and spits out: “FUCK YOU, Angels.”
At first, the Archangel demands Eve spit out every word she swallowed, even those she chewed. Of course, she can’t. They’re in her blood. Then, he makes her sit, feet flat on ground stained red with trampled fruit. SHHHH, he says, then speaks for hours in bird paragraphs. (His first words are feathered with beaks and claws.) Wings murmur past her mouth. She can’t swallow beaks and feet. She chokes. As birds spin nets from air, Eve waits for Adam. He never comes. “It’s like this,” the Archangel mutters soto voce, “Adam’s left you no song, no verse. Too late to ask for help.” What happens next is legendary. Women are banished.
Eve will be sent to the endtimes, Adam will exit through another gate, taking with him an unhatched egg. It's heartbreaking, but no mind: the angels are adamant. They ask Eve: “You want DEATH?” She thinks not.
The way the word rolls on their tongues, “DEATH” seems colorless and plain - incomplete - extreme. Nothing she wants. The word’s on fire, too hot to touch. She chooses life and banishment.
Adam leaves, taking his egg and fistfuls of shining angel words, packed in crystal jars. “DEATH” tangled with “desire,” “dream,” and “fall.” As he walks into black, the jar grows red. She can’t remember the last words he said.
True, the Archangel’s wasn’t thrilled with Eve’s first words. He calls his birds to spin circles around her, to bind her, to keep her still (voiceless). He stamps both feet and shouts. Fifteen hounds and sixteen black-winged angels arrive. They gather, before, behind, beside her, wings beating red into word-filled air. Each grabs hold of flesh and all lift Eve high above the ground. When the Archangel yells, they fly away from Paradise central to Heaven’s front gate. They set her down, tell her she can’t come back. Banishment’s not hell - so what if she’s flushed out to the endtimes? Living the end provides her the meantime.
the crossing: paradise lost
When Eve arrives, she falls from sky, grasping shreds of lost paradise: the small of sea, dried marigolds. With no delicacy, she steps to streets scraped free of lasting ice. Winter's flushed to crowds. Traffic passing sounds like wings, she thinks, but that's all history, best left alone. Now, she's simply hungry. A man with a glass eye and a distinct scowl sells her a hotdog topped with mustard and sauerkraut. Amazed, she sees he has no feet - he's strapped to a black box with cast iron wheels. Eve steps carefully from the curb, fits her toes to trash, heels to melting ice. Her decision to take a cab leaves her breathless.
Daedalus understood that wings and wax
are essential to those pushed against walls
and dreaming crisped brooks and sands washed to gold.
Eve's stunned by the creaking of all this ice
and puzzles over blue-edged air ragged
on her skin. Each breath she takes is fragile,
and when she walks on dirt, the earth haggles
and complains. Silence breaks against traffic
and sirens. No wings. She recalls her trip
from Paradise: a flight through dry color,
shaded red to pale to hate. It hurt her
to fall on empty air. She longs for mud
to hold her, water to rock her, sky
to fold her. Here, she's stuck with high-rises.
When the new moon weighs markers of morning
as unavoidable, clouds pale and sink
to some god-awful shade of piss green.
Eve hears night come and see angels swarming.
When dark cuts out, heat's quick tongue alarms her.
Colors flood to corners: yellow's too thick
to breathe in white-gold air. Blue cuts her skin
and she's washed out to red. Wind hurts her.
To ask forgiveness of the past allows
the body breath: "Man for the narrow stream."
Skin sings aloud: "Woman for the broad stream."
When waters mix, width joins to ebb and flow.
Borders come apart: Bodies disappear
to shade, but light confirms a certain peace.
Drowned in noise, Eve’s memory of Paradise
greys out. Although new frontiers open up,
Eve finds backgrounds difficult to make out.
Much around her she doesn’t recognize:
Squares of black cloth flying two stories high
attached to tree trunks and roof tops. Blue shows
where gusts of wind cut holes in cloth: windows
reveal gutted buildings as fragments, sky
as jewel. At night, the plains are crashed with light,
and mountains stay richly dark. Sea sings waves
of stone, and the winds tell tales of her cave
(back in Paradise). [Oh, she can’t stand it]
She’d lived those days in peace, listening to birds,
no words. Time’s changed all that once was confirmed.
Hunger is hard. Stone-faced, it hangs out long after food appears. No wonder Eve plucked apple words from rain-soaked air. Just her luck to live alone where the best food was wrong: forbidden, or clustered close to dry ground as bright-lit beads that fall apart when touched. Harvesting manna is like trapping sound without electricity. Difficult. Once, she lay flat on rock and snaked her tongue to dew-laden petals, but sun drank it first. A new moon rocks small on sky tonight—bumping trees, attached fast to cradled rock. Memory rewrites history, replacing wings with mud then dew. Moon blanches all, she thinks.
In the small time before dawn, a lizard chirps; the city whines and steams. Car alarms steal centuries from air. Eve dreams wizards with liquid eyes and hands that do no harm. (Not Medea who killed all her children then fled past arms of human jealousy - Not Pluto who kidnapped Persephone, but wizards who ask marigolds to sing.)

This morning's colorless, the harbor flat with no waves, no wind. Traffic outweighs birds. A man runs through puddles, splashes water on Eve's bare legs. She leans down, puts her hand on earth and finds a torso carved of stone, armless, legless, but with a folded robe.
This is not her paradise, but she’s glad
of that. Sun goes, night makes holes of brick walls
defaced by neon. When she touches skin, all
names rise past her eyes. Red sings blue to mad.
She no longer needs angels or Adam
stone explains. Every leaf on every tree
sings names for every thing: strange forbidden
memories mapped by rain. Long after midnight,
she walks empty, listens. Sudden language
seems the norm. Knotted sound invites passage
to rooms trapped behind walls where neon light
speaks crowds. The crazy overlap of words
attracts her. Speaking, she thinks, might just work.
Time confuses Eve: hours, minutes, months astound her. On days she can't speak, she feels thick, desiring. She drinks water from steel drums painted blue, eats handfuls of gold dust laced with sand and warmed by rain. She's cold just the same. For days she's blind: her heart's revealed as dead to men. Some nights, she lies concealed by logic, black lace, and songs breathed by monks, but when an alto sax spins out, she wakes in a rose garden, flush with last year's bloom. She watches birds feed on hips and ants move seed. Beetles come to blows in sand. She lays her head on mud near ruins with polished pillars and statues of men without heads.
While listening to music, Eve learns of time.
She draws circles on sidewalks to chart moons
and vertical lines on glass to stay tuned
to sun. She loses track of names, aligns
herself with mother, daughter, sister time.
Away from Adam, she discovers room
to be woman. She calls herself that. Soon
winter acts yet another crazy mime,
marking starved arcs with arms, pregnant circles
with hips, staccato lines with feet: a dance
that mocks her own. Although such magic can’t
explain absence, Eve knows if icicles
redefine winter light as constancy,
summer might be well used as travesty.
Eve moves geometry to narrative
and inches past the multiplicity
of 'Eve' to a singularity of 'she.'
Time settles down, and Eve soon learns to live
in houses. She opens and shuts her door
twice daily. She finds papers there and gifts—
chocolate, rubber balls, flowers cut from dirt.
She discovers money, hunger, and stores.
Some nights Eve hears the leathered tips of wings
tap her window glass. If she looks, she sees
muscle backs and thighs, disguised as history:
angels taking a break from night flying.
No longer iridescent, they remind
her that origin lies outside of time.
language re-arranged
In spring, Eve as woman sees the world speed to glass, thin-blown and easily crashed by words spoken too soon. Unprepared for floods of memory, Eve’s over-active mind peels skin from paragraphs that leave her pale green with heat. She can’t think. Outside, small finches with yellow beaks and black circled eyes test the wind and make a racket. Life’s too lean.

Below two girls dressed in silk kimono sit still on stones, speaking what they don’t know: how birds are called, white exhaustion, dyed bone.

One moves when Eve woman lifts the window, and sun opens wide cracks behind her head.

Both cheeks are etched with spiders black and red.
Listening to words rising from below, Eve hears spiders interfere with well-mannered phrases waved high like ancient silk banners sewn to night words like \textit{peacock} and \textit{believe}.

The girls in kimonos write notes on leaves, lay them flat on paper rafts and float them out to sea. One writes prayers to Kuan Yin: “Goddess of Mercy,” she writes, “Sum kine thieves steal da watah from my heart.” The other writes (to no one in particular): “Don’ ask time to feed da kine heartmind. No can starve for long. Da void will drown da motha.”

Neither girl addresses angel legions.

Both, however, use a grammar of pidgin.
No matter how many words are spoken,
how many paragraphs peeled back, Eve thinks
she'll never understand these voices. She
hears only noise: too many words for 'DEATH,'
too few songs. Someone she doesn't know
is sliding into those body places
where she never goes. Darkness erases
everything she thought she knew. She ignores
wings and words alike. When the 'someone' speaks,
Eve's surprised to hear the voice as her own.
She listens to words disguised as greenstone,
carved like mirrors. Outside winds rise; rain leaks
past river drains. The 'someone,' the stranger
is she. Woman rises. Eve grows fainter.
"It's the storm," the woman says. "It's the storm," Eve repeats. "Lie down, lie down and sleep."

"I will," the woman says. "I can't," says Eve and touches woman skin. She feels alarmed. As Eve, she's beginnings, but as woman, she lives in strange confusion. If she sleeps, the dark speaks time. Eve hears voices bleeding universes. 'Woman' hears only words broken from spines, scratched on skin as history.

Eve doesn't know quite what to make of it. She's both cast of mud and attached to blood and bone. Not storm but electricity.

Eve stops speaking. Now, when she breathes the rain, she tastes all the angels left at the gate.
The wind has stopped, but Eve's skin feels pebbled, shot through by shade and something much like rain. Pulling her finger across window panes to melt frost that isn't there, she's troubled by a need for sense: thinks she must be crippled or in disguise. Angels washed by last days flutter about on clouds of color laced with words she sees but cannot hear. She's riddled by pain. Her heart's a strange forbidden place — she enters surreptitiously, alone not blind. Offers all she has, but is told to go. She can't. Charon limps to the gate, locks it, never looks back. Eve breathes in words, exhales flesh. Her heart skips once, leaves with birds.
Angels mock her, train peacocks to swallow
words first then honk squalid notes that chop
up uncontrolled exhaust. When Eve looks up,
she sees lizards pump to red in shallow
dawn. They block any clear view of crow paths.
Those black-winged birds fly circles of night sounds
too frail to last beyond this dressing down
of dark. Day arrives as blue-veined and cold,
and prints taped to walls wash out with sun.
One is El Greco’s St. Jerome with hands
flat on translated word. His eyes demand
she notice leather bindings, songs unsung.
All that red swamps her. She longs for sea-green,
Corot’s lake scenes, a grammar for memory.
Backed by lava cliffs, city lights blink out
while wind complains abandoned water spouts.
Eve’s unconcerned when night conceals the sun,
but comes apart when the moon is lost
and morning sun cuts valleys into clouds.
The city picks up speed. She hears anger
disguised as churches, sorrow cued as bells.
When dawn covers her bare body with shrouds
of noise and real things take the place of dream,
memory abandons mystery. Eve finds heat
replaces desire. She wants joy and needs
to taste color, but finds she wakes to steam
and argument. Walking through trash-filled streets,
she finds words sprayed on walls, scraps of beauty.
It's easy to come apart when no one
offers word for words. It's all a set-up:
real is make-believe. She drinks cough syrup
because she likes the color and no one
tells her not to. It makes her feel pleasantly
round, somewhat askew. She smokes cigarettes,
but doesn't cough. At noon, she sits alone
under fig trees spiked with birds: twitt-twitt-twee.
Soon, she thinks, I'll understand this chatter.
She waits, but nothing happens. The wind blows;
it rains a bit. A young girl comes and goes.
Eve lifts her hand to ask, What's the matter?
Clearly, the girl doesn't know, but answers
(Anyway) in language of residence.
What Eve recalls of that day: a white bear
and a pregnant woman in the same room
with a map of the mind. True, she assumes
green walls meant something. Without windows there
is no way out (or in for that matter)
but she’s not trapped by walls. Bodies, she says,
are real when minds are unmasked. Near her face,
angels sing songs that make her sound sadder.
Black bears keep perfect time with silver spoons,
and she’s locked to a voice she cannot own.
When music stops, Eve knows she’s left alone.
She counts rows of corpses, color exhumed
from painted skies. No one (except you) knows
she died after giving birth to roses.
When the Archangel hears about roses,
he’s pissed. Stealing words shouldn’t yield bouquets.
Re-mapping his plan to keep Eve away
and woman flat, he arrives one night, poses
as a man in need of conversation.
He tells her he loves her. Eve doesn’t know
what he means but stays. His rounded words hold
her, keep her from leaving. She finds patience
inside their breathing, joy attached to hands.
He moves beyond her, comes back slow. She floats
out long, but then she falls. When she hits ground,
skin mixes blue and feet give way to sand.
When she looks up, the Archangel has fled.
He’s left a curb of light where he once stood.
siren song: between parked cars
After many years, the Archangel flies
to islands to map trees at the edges
of things. He writes in Latin. Eve watches
white sun turn blue sea purple grey, relies
on night to draw red across twice revised
plans for work: *Solanum incompletum:*
armed with reddish prickles, scattered on stems
leaves simple, flowers perfect. The rest: lies.
She stays away from crowds, keeps both eyes closed
(stays awake) digs up mud to mark her place.
Herbs gathered from wetlands near limestone caves
are spread on countertops to dry. She chose
to accept solitude instead of death,
but can't account for the pain in her legs.
Processing herb is noble but boring,
so Eve finds work at the Pussy Cat Lounge,
a strip joint behind a warehouse downtown.
Not much to the place. No glitz. No glory.
But good tips and she likes the odd story -
At five, a man comes, sits in the same place.
At seven, he yells out, "Cover your face!"
By twelve-thirty, he's dead drunk and snoring.
One of the girls (Misti) puts a rose near
his mouth. When Eve wakes him at 3:30,
he sees the rose and cries, "Oh, my baby!
I counted your toes, our fingers, your ears."
Eve signs a question to Misti, "That your Dad?"
She never heard anyone laugh so hard.
Against flat black, hungry ghosts come to dance,
arms hiding teeth. They spill vowels on waves,
burn bay leaves and bone behind fences, saved
by fire, left to drown in flood. There's a chance
Eve might survive if left alone. Distance
alarms her. Neon lights up spider masks
and she hears music meant to quiet crowds.
She can't resist the stage and joins the dance.
Old ghosts make new demands. E. Pound recites
a list of auto parts disguised as verse.
J. Donne adds a coda: fleas bite. It hurts.
Somewhere in Shadow under velvet, lights
from haloes surround Dante and someone
stripped of skin and choices. Perhaps, no one.
Thursdays, Eve leaves the bar before midnight,  
and takes along a bottle of rotgut  
(keeps her satisfied); unless some fat-cat  
buys her champagne. These days she’s quite the quite.  
By Friday, she’s left flat on rocks to dry.  
Wanting another drink, she sends smiles  
to each man who passes and meets her eye.  
On the street corner, men in drag lounge, high  
on drugs, voices ripe with last year’s color  
raw with next year’s news. They sing. Next March, five  
will die, drowned by politics, soaked in jive,  
junk, and concrete. All debts paid out by war.  
Fighter jets in strict V-formation write  
night as neon. Eve goes unrecognized.
None of this is working: not pink tassels, not roses, not sugar daddies. Eve throws her bottle at the wall and whiskey flows to gutters. It's such a fucking hassle to keep smiling night after night. She needs a way out. If she hears one more story about destiny, she'll puke. Yup. Roaring drunk right now, she's ready to disagree with all who profess faith in archangels. She's pissed off. Life shouldn't be so damn hard.

Once she sat under trees heavy with fruit, picked white poppies. Three cheers for all strangers! She wishes someone else might speak -

For a change, it happens: Thoth visits Eve.
Scribe to the gods, inventor of numbers,
marker of time, he records and tallies
the weight of hearts. Originally,
he was a moon. On dark nights, Eve wonders
if he's still okay. Tonight she's disturbed.
Every little thing bugs her. Light competes
with noise, the waste of neighbors' loud TVs.
She listens as words round out to thunder:
"Friends come and friends go. Mostly they just go."
Eve wants him to stay. On the street below,
three couples dance to Mississippi blues:
Goin' up river, won' be back real soon.
Rest, he says, pointing at the sky. Pain runs
behind her eyes. She looks up and finds the moon.
Music keeps Eve going, night after night.

One night, after midnight, the Archangel (what a surprise) waltzes into the bar and orders a Pisco sour (No light on his wings) She serves him two - not a word.

When Aphrodite takes the stage, he grows agitated. When her seaweed fan slows above her painted breasts, his body jerks. She steps carefully from her pink clamshell into her shallow pool, then flicks water onto his lips. He melts. He tries harder to sit still but can’t. This water nymph tells him stories he can’t refuse. By three, he wades into her pool up to his knees.
Needing to close the bar, Eve flips the light but the Archangel is mesmerized. He keeps his hands on Aphrodite’s hips. He gently moves his wings to perfume the night. The water nymph’s equally entranced, but she keeps her hands on his back pocket. She knows for sure he’ll pay up soon enough. She tells him no one touches her gratis, and if he tries it, so help me god, she’ll make him pay. (She keeps her eye on Eve.) She frowns, puts her painted breast inches from his mouth. (Her hand stays on his chest.) She plays for high stakes - this water nymph who cares nothing for hearts. Eve turns the music off and makes a chart.
When the music stops, she hears horns, the sound of toeless feet tapping on the universe:

Drum Boogie: yeah, it's a killer. What's worse than a world without jazz? Eve looks around sees masks with shells for eyes. She's going down fast, won't come up again real soon, but first some words for G O D: eating those words was worth real money. First bite: lightning strike. She found space inside that bite: color, hollow bones stained dark blue, echoes of murderous thunder. Whenever she spoke, he crept inside her. She tastes footprints on her tongue. If she shouts, ashes trap the sun, and if she swallows: her heart explodes the silence down below.
When Eve sees oranges heavy on branches,
she thinks again of words, resting on air
as fragile as ice, as fragrant as pears.
Words, she thinks, are fruits - the result of chance
encounters with the voice, a quick exchange
of fluids: blood red rain and milk. If words
are fruits, where’s the flower, where’s the mother?
Eve looks to blue-paved sky, watches edges
come unhinged. When she moves her hands to touch
stone beneath her feet, she’s sure the voice can’t
make fruits alone. Where’s the mother? Why can’t
she stand up? Hands on dirt, Eve know this much:
Angels don’t give birth. She remembers mud,
rising from the womb of earth, rain as blood.
dao dua and the mother
Just before dawn, Eve staggers home to sleep but can't. She sits upright in an old chair with both hands flat on wood. Salt and sea air press through window screens. She wants (needs) to dream. Is this, then, what happens in the endtimes?
The center cannot hold. Everyone lies. Staring past dark at green, Eve fights against a rush of wings, hears night unwind.
Tomorrow the rent is due. Everything's owned here: women, men, trees. Even water and the air she breathes. Morning grows tighter and still she doesn't sleep. She only loaned her heart to silence, never meant to give it away. Now, she needs to learn to live.
Eve sleeps all day. When she wakes, she chances moonlight, stretched and green, liquid spilled on floors. Outside bells chime midnight and she hears stars. When she remembers the Bacchic dance in rain, she holds her hands in flat defense then steps outside to solitude. Before this after that: fishbones cast up on shores wet with dying - flat on rocks - just as vast as the great empty waste that rushes her when she drops her hands. When sky gathers up the jeweled blue of midnight, she tastes ice-cold words hatched deep inside her. Speech is tougher than she thought. Confined by walls lined with glass and stone, she listens to circumference crash.
Say your prayers: in passing, on beaches,
on freighters anchored beyond breakers.
Crowds of men with guns are apt to forget
the sounds that made them mad. Two male finches
prepare a shelter inside a shelter
as apology from fools who think she
has nothing more to say. She drops between
whispers, sews sequins to ribs as filters,
thinks that fantasy might be worth the hype
but she missed the flash: clear blue jade, Hong Kong,
and solemn questions sounding more wrong
than right. There are no answers, just searchlights
steeling lava cliffs. To survive, she falls
asleep, refusing to dream maternal.
Eve knows earth, what it's like to be mother—passion, amazement, fear—she's rocked babies in stranger times. One year heat came in spring and stayed. One winter cold lightning cut through snow. One child was born in normal weather: a blizzard that lasted days. When it left, her world caught fire and burned down to "the heft of cathedral tunes." No doubt, air pressure affects the timing of birth, but so what? Magic might be explained by science, but it still works in mysterious ways, shuts down the commonplace, resists the logic of progress. Allowing for concentration, effective magic needs no concussion.
When afternoon departs, Eve recalls time
and dry land: dark caves with wide-mouthed angels
holding persimmons with skins too fragile,
spare and blue. Voices travel down her spine
as fingers tracing circles around her,
slowing breath and speeding time. She hears danger
sound as drums and then runs off to strangers
who watch her fall. Songs peel back so tender
she tastes stars erasing. When night silence
rides her back, she's stripped of masks, left naked.
Flutes and drums bury her. [No sensation
matters outside memory] Violence
of mind attaches her to angel song:
what she has is emptied, what's lost is wrong.
Eve's confused by fire, worried by ice and emptiness. She can't understand men who come and go with greater confidence than archangels (and with greater malice.) 
On her windowsill, wood doves scratch for seed, pushing millet to marshy ground below.
Some seeds will sprout, she knows. Some grass will grow. At dusk, she sees sky flame out. By morning, she'll sleep as night turns to ash. What kind of world results if nothing stays? Eve wants to be woman but can't accept decay. She feels words as skin music but fails as woman. Angels thrive in two worlds—in Paradise, on Earth—but Eve's not so easily revised.
After flames, Eve tastes hail like borrowed pearls.
She rolls her tongue behind her teeth, finds words:
abandoned parables (bell tones) absurd
She spits semi-colons. [Some say the world]
She picks up commas. [God bless Robert Frost
and Yeats] When poppies bloom, wings lie exposed
to breath (insects are slow to change) She knows
when petals dry, color fades. [What cost
consistency] She’s afraid of holes
cut beside her: corridors dug deep
between what she recalls, what they forget.
When night bends back and stars leave, skin moves cold.
She needs hands to fill the holes, uncover
eyes. She wants songs to reach the mother.
By morning, Eve’s reading *Savage Beauty*,
accounting for a life lived at high speed.
She’s conscious of scent: rain on hot concrete,
privet hedges in bloom and toast burning.
(A man on the radio screams about fear.)
She reads again: “The heart is slow to learn
what the swift mind beholds at every turn.”
Despite arguments outside, she’s safe here,
swimming in words - could be she’s just floating
or confined to carefully engineered
pagodas, anchored to Mekong mud, freed
at last from war. Peeling an apple, she
puts down the biography of Millay,
picks up the diary of Dao Dua.
As US soldiers—scared young men—deploy
to jungles, Dao Dua rewrites power
as circles, as shelter. He walks from tower
to tower, from Saigon back to Hanoi.
He refuses guns and readmits the void.
Men whose hearts and minds bade them leave the war
march slowly behind the coconut monk,
tracing circles of peace, protecting joy,
and eating only what falls from trees (coconuts,
over-ripe fruits). They share their food with birds.
When war ends, arcs from circles are buried
in empty lots; their centers fixed on maps.
When war begins again, Eve wonders how
many circles the monks need to walk.
Later after sunset, automatic
heart-beat circles Eve's bones with monotone doves
and chainsaw whine. Lizards above
doorways flash blue to green. Eve's gut is thick
with potato consumed at noon. She's sick:
her skin dries to scales. As fingers move too
fast, stepping multiples of three, brand-new
demands are posted daily by sexless
angels dressed in flowered shirts. She can't keep
up. She wants to pray like the coconut monk,
smile with her whole head, sleep like serpents sunk
in valleys shaped like moons. A refugee
from war, she moves through canyons wide enough
to hold wrongdoing rightdoing (like love).
In her dream, an ibis lies belly soft
and dead, feathers scattered on yellow silk,
an altar of open eyes. No longer sick,
Eve sits alone, feet pressed to lava rock
and watches hot lights of fighter jets cut
deep across the Milky Way. They drop stars
that flash red to green and leave circular
scars, cold records of fear, revised abrupt
commands. In three hours, skies will wash to red
and fleshy pink. Eve dreams sweet potatoes
trapped in green serpent mounds under windows.
Holding one still warm with stars, she weighs it
against her heart, finds flesh not as weighty
as light but heavier than snakes. She's ready.
eve's dream
Night's not allowed silence. Hours are thick
with traffic and shadow skimmed green. Eve's leg
keeps her from sleeping. She feels a dull ache
tighten round her thigh, thinks she may be sick.
Lizards make noises louder than trucks: quick
clicks that echo jets. Although she wishes
for rain, her valley stays dry. She misses
hands, breath stretched wide when stomachs press to backs.
In past years, mountains kept her company -
every night, she'd swallow tracks of stars. Now
she filters noise. Before dawn, she recalls
Merope's quick exit from constancy
revising seven to six, herself to
one. She's divided from her world by blue.
If stars leave skies to come to earth, Eve thinks
she can leave the bar for a day or two,
go downtown, ask the hospital crew
about her leg. She writes a note and drinks
what’s left of the vodka (it helps with pain).
When she gets to the clinic, she finds crowds
milling about outside, talking aloud
to one another - all women, no men.
“I’ve been waiting days,” says one and passes
a silver flask to Eve. Another shrugs,
offers Eve a seat. “She exaggerates,
Don’t worry; they’ll call ya. Relax. Drink up.”
Before long, Eve’s inside, filling out forms
as fiction. She can’t know when she was born.
When Eve lays both hands flat against her thigh,
she feels dry bone and warm remembered flesh
attached to song, but knows she’s not been blessed.
Confused by walls and an absence of sky,
she doesn’t ask how long she’ll be alive.
Around her, women sit, holding anxious
palms closed as fists. They listen to cautious
breath, broken down by x-rays trapped inside
another room. Outside her shoes, she moves
her toes. She needs to know that they are there.
Feet recall what she forgets: mountain air,
meadows alive with poppies, night too soon,
years stacked up as miles, washed out to fume.
If she laughs just once, color fills the room.
The woman on Eve's left has one arm wrapped around a younger man, her son perhaps. His back keeps her from falling - one hand grasps her wrist, the other circles the marked map of old bones, stopping where disease lies trapped. The woman on her right smiles and laughs but keeps both hands flushed broad against her breast. When the nurse calls her, her eyes flutter shut. There's no music, just droning court TV, interrupted by ads for laxatives and anti-depressants, a litany of woes. Little beauty here, just machines spitting flame through flesh, steel that sounds as wind. One woman cries when metal touches skin.
Eve’s surprised by the woman’s cry, forgets that he is she is her is me is you.
She shuts the door, unsure what else to do.
If the disease causing pain in her leg requires knives or poison, she’ll say no.
She locks her teeth and thinks about her job.
Lately Aphrodite’s been acting up.
One night she came to the bar without clothes.
“Look,” she said, “Look at my FACE.” Then she asked,
“What’s sexy about sparkles glued to breasts, naked women dripping sweat on stage, dressed with feathers and make-up to mask bruised backs?
You think you’ll own it? I’ll tell you something: Possessiveness creates distance that keeps.
But what of possessiveness? What the hell is it? Simple greed? Lust for life? Fear of death? Eve picks the latter; lets go all the rest.

War has always been about survival.

Fight to the death! Winner holds the Future!

(Impossible irony there) OKAY—what about memory? Isn't memory a way to ensure the past? Jesus fucking Christ she has at least four versions of the day the black-winged angels whisked her to the gate. (How secure is that?) If time makes rivers of mountains, the mountains will leave her flat. Green mountains walking. Yes. But stone women give birth again and again and again.
After her adventure with steel, Eve hears nothing from doctors. She goes on working at the bar. Each night she walks a different route home. Lately, car bombs have been exploding a 2 a.m. She closes up at three.

One night five men follow her across town. Doubling back across a bridge, she slips down the river bank and waits—her heart racing. The heavy footsteps stop and then move on. She breathes relief, but feels her body lapse. She falls down in mud, across tufts of grass, settles her head on a pillow of stone.

There are crickets and stars and rats slinking to water. She closes her eyes and sleeps.
Inside her sleep, Eve sees the Archangel
walk on water, hand-in-hand with Perfect
Aphrodite. The two of them connect
so completely that sound stops and light fails.
When Eve tightens her eyes, the Archangel
takes three steps back. If she listens to breath,
the Archangel flies - his giant wings stretched
through flames. Keeping her face masked, her arms still,
Aphrodite watches him fly away.
The scene fades to Aphrodite alone
on stage, surrounded by piles of bone,
polished mirrors, and stacks of matted hair.
Two dancers dressed as mermaids with pearl tits
move hips and legs to trace perfect circles.
Perfect! Perfect! Perfect! She's not perfect.

What can be done with all this 'perfect' noise -
'Music of Paradise': computer toys -
cell phones - sirens. Lies make the most racket
and cause the most damage. Even silence
lies. Unsigned letters (all addressed to Eve)
pile on the bar. No one (they say) sees
who leaves them. 'Protective' lies do violence:
sear her, scare her, drain her. The Archangel
has been stepping out with a Pussy Cat
who uses seaweed and shells in her act.
She strips to water, seems to drown (gurgling),
cries a tear or two, then pleads to be saved.
The Archangel falls. He can't (won't) explain.
When angels dance on pins, women keep backs turned with feet flat on polished floors. They shift left forward back right buttock up (one inch) past the rear. *Come into the Pussy Cut Lounge.* A man on a bar stool takes one hand from his face, then pretends he means to kiss her, pull her from the stage. He can't. He just flips his wrist, blinks his eyes. No one commands his heart. He turns as dancers move stage right and wipe sweat from behind masks deeply etched with lines but free of eyes or nose or mouth. Her legs collapse. (The stage goes black.) He fights to catch his breath. Outside, the wind cuts in, snapping flags on poles. He counts a dozen.
Later, the water nymph grows much crueler.  
With a sharp thin knife meant for gutting fish,  
she cuts death threats in the bar, puts her fist  
in Eve’s face. Lounging near her pool with her  
seaweed fan spread across her breast, she smirks  
at the archangel and wiggles her hips.  
He collapses, reaches to touch her lips,  
offers her favors, words, money. Sex works.  
Eve spends long hours untangling drag nets  
the water nymph leaves on the bar each night.  
She’s amazed by these creatures of light -  
the blindness of angels - more amazed yet  
by her patience with the nymph turned serpent  
and with those who banished her to snake-filled lands.
necessity of courage
After that business with the serpent, Eve discovers joy by sleeping near portraits of creatures with fur and claws. One Thursday, she sleeps near a painter with fur-trimmed sleeves: he stands firm, mouth aligned with disbelief. The painting's old. Eve still older, but fit for dreams. She dreams of clotted milk and stale bread, Vermeer's uneven heat locked beneath flames on charts of beachless coasts, dry light tacked to corners, scrawled dark blue. She wakes and sees painted eyes, signatures. She's undeceived, touches first her leg, then her lower back - feels pressure, muscle, blood. All the same she runs her finger on the portrait's frame.
All day without knowing, the woman dreams
him, between Flaubert, Cezanne and flat turns
of cars and yellowed torsos, then confirms
by neon what she missed. It seems extreme
this loneliness. She waits for him to leave,
rubs her thumb past eyes, feels the press of arms
like liquid spilled across her breast. No harm.
She sleeps, naked and alone, wakes to thieves
stealing cars below. She counts six red birds
perched atop a chain-link fence, then outlines
with her finger the black freighter, anchored
beyond the breakers. She wants to tell him
of color and fences. Instead, she folds
red silk squares, stacks apples in wooden bowls.
Eve believes he’s the best looking man she has ever seen, even when he keeps his glasses on (in the midst of it all) she discovers she’s pleased (in spite of all this) she breathes. He keeps his arm slung around his lover’s neck, sighs, whispers songs in his ear. (Angels are like that) She thinks she sees his eyes flash red to green. Boom. He disappears. (Angels are like that) She counts cockroaches dodges latter rain, watches stars confess to lies. Astounded by her loneliness she turns the TV off. Moonlight touches cold edges on her bed. She falls asleep reading Takuboku: POEMS TO EAT.
When the phone rings, Eve answers it. The voice she hears belongs to a woman alone in a stone house on a distant island. She speaks from evening, recites her day: joys listed one by one - the turquoise sea, moist earth breathing rain as night begins its show. For Eve, dawn inhales and night skies turn gold, but when the woman speaks of stars, day's end joins to dawn and time assumes an unfamiliar dimension. When a day completed begins again, the tyranny of age gives in to subtlety of skin. What's yet to come bumps softly all that's passed in one long day. Her heart collides with places far away.
Not all distance is woven as garlands
of stars and perfumed air. There’s still the void:
dangerous yet ecstatic - home to the voice
and expanding circumference - a far land
where things (joinings, objects, stone) are lost,
not for a short while but forever.
Eve recalls what the Archangel had said
when he flew from that place, through flame and dust.
He spoke love as fragile color: blue trust,
red joy. His mouth had seemed too small for words
that large - each word a bubble big enough
to capture trees. If its skin touched a rock,
it broke to seas. That flood swallowed her.
Eve gives up on telephones, collects mail
rarely, lets her arms talk to latter rain.
When Eve receives the letter, she recoils, 
recalls Loyola with difference: windows 
brashly lit by morning sun, her bed low 
against the wall. No smoke. No fragrant oils. 
No weeping family bidding last adieus. 
No pious joy; no excuse for this loss - 
so entire it swallows her, spits her bones 
to God. She feels his last words, finds too few 
that stay well closed. Most stand out, open-mouthed 
and loud as questions branded on her skin. 
She bleeds vowels. Cliffs, no longer distant, 
look less like skinless limbs. All this growth costs 
her time and grace. She imagines breathing 
the same thin air, alone, without speaking.
In the roar of dawn, a small lizard voice
crawls from dark to lie above the traffic
whine. Without ado, one small bird attempts
a larger song. Eve feels her skin as moist,
feet as skeletal and dry. Outside, sky
drops to acid green. The Archangel's flown
away and left her speechless, disarmed, blown
out. He's gone. She can't fathom why he lied,
how green masks the sky, who erases white.
Birds on fences (even the caged parrot)
stay deathly still. She knows there's no merit
to this rumor, but draws horizon lines
on window glass anyway, divides waves
from sky. She hopes midnight will soon explain.
At dark, Eve walks down a poorly lit block
and stops before a dressmaker’s window
where roses are arranged on beds of fake snow.
Birds with real feathers hang on nylon cords,
and fans make them look as if they’re flying.
One with a face slips through glass into light
and chases three dogs with black spots and white
tails trimmed like brushes. Now, too tense to sleep,
Eve keeps hands across her face: sur le pont
d’Avignon . . . When angels in disguises
gather in corners, she realizes
she’s quite alone. . . Sur le pont d’Avignon.
Convention overtakes her. She bumps square
into the moon, spins past light, unaware.
Before pulling closed the blinds, Eve woman notices knives and razor blades. She holds a pencil stiff against her cheek, unfolds a sheet bought thirty years ago. Her hand stays flat against her thigh while light expands dark green to blue. Without his skin, she's cold. (exposed too fast) Throwing words at windows, she burns. The Archangel can't understand the holes he made when he told her stay away. She's poison. She's fear. When sirens end, some hearts become tight-fisted tyrants, arms-crossed, backed against the wall. With eyes shut, she sees babies rushed by heat, sky bone white. Eyes wide: nothing but blue electric light.
In less than two minutes, Eve hears lizards

click their throats and men laughing, as sirens

fold traffic into sheets of glass. When sun

clears out shadow too soon - (She finds this hard
to say) He abandoned her. Life's absurd.

She can't understand light on dark nights when

stars seems explosive yet balance on thin

wires stuck in desert sand, bending like birds

or stamens. She can't decide. Never mind,
she says aloud. This too will pass. Night air

tastes fissured - rotted - green. She doesn't dare

breathe. Angels should announce themselves, post signs

on fences before demanding answers

to verbless questions: such 'perfect' dancers.
Alone, Eve woman closes her left eye.
When words find focus, she's slightly amazed.
Green flashes red; orange moves to blue. Today she will stack the remains of 25 years. She pulls open white blinds behind a bronze Buddha with his back to pearl gray clouds and waves. Below are rocks black with rain: boulders as hard as sorrows once confined to dawn. In spite of herself, the woman makes a pot of tea and finds the incense burned to columned ash and stained by fragments of words she cannot read. Perhaps she can copy each character in ink, but when she touches ash, it falls to dust, and then—
what is decent
Another dawn with rain and thunder crashing
into window glass as gutters roar. Still,
wide banana leaves hang onto light, spelled
out of dark. Like Hiroshige prints, screens
of grey slant pink across tops of bay trees
where small green finches thrill against the fight
of wind. When sun climbs high enough to light
the sea, a single brushstroke of red and green
cuts black from clouds and steals color from land.
The woman works her pen across the page,
tracking typhoons of light and shade. Hands can’t
move fast enough. The drawing ends up vague.
At noon, drainpipes still leak clouds and rainbows
have fled. She tears up the page, packs to go.
The woman in the white cotton wrapper pours herself a cup of jasmine tea, tries to cut a slice of bread. Outside night sky, a blue neon star newly placed traps her into thinking about birth: warm water that reeks of paralysis and a revised tale of past history. Locked on either side of the high-rise star mount, red light markers keep planes from crashing into Bethlehem. She's in love with a man who loves a man who told him good-bye. She holds her hand flat to sea wind, rubs thumbs along the rim of her tea cup - translucent bone china cracked by the last earthquake inside her.
When hot water disappears and no one comes to fix the pipes, the woman recalls years without water: Snakes asleep and curled near milk cans stored in shade (no grass), the ground dark from water spilled. When she looks around: empty chairs, plastic carpet on the beach. He stands there, hanging back in grey extremes, his one arm wrapped across his mouth. [No sound]

She unfolds her hands to aria, signs her voice. Four fingers trip small fast notes that leave shadow unexplained. If she wants to keep her heart, she needs to breathe. She draws quick lines, bird tracks that disappear beneath black waves. Everything he said - names and words - erased.
Stubborn belief in the ‘truth’ of destined life rejects useful memory. Such a waste.

Love gone wrong. Black freighters, cracked teacups, caves - women in love with men in love with men in love with women wanting love to offer profit or return, to weave rich brocade, labeled first as destiny then as fate,

but if love’s a weaver, she’s a spider, warping makeshift looms with fragile threads that resist high winds and rain. Eve’s fed up with commerce and flat commands. Love’s web’s not an object. Spider threads are body threads, flying on air as traps for light and wings:

old seeds that sprout as new and unplanned things.
In this wasteland of broken webs, Eve moves at a snail’s pace, lurching into brick walls no longer stable, threatened with collapse. Bedraggled crows settle down on white roofs, and thousands of green finches perch like leaves on barren trees. What a relief to see birds with wings outstretched, feet in parallel. She wonders what they’ll eat and why angels don’t speak. There’s not much for her to do, stamp out coals, close eyes of the dead, fetch water from pools as black as stone. Without color, she loses touch. She finds a pen, a lamp, and notes time and place on a calendar she takes from the storm gutter. Stones are stars.
Is it perverse to withhold the verb 'sing'
or merely resolute? Eve bellies up
to death, gives up on books, hope, self, reason
as mystery: the low planetary wheeling
of pre-dawn circles scratched on black. Nothing
withheld, but behind closed eyes, broken lines
like nets in need of mending bend her spine
to galaxies. She blinks. Do starfish sing
when caught by waves? On the far horizon,
the Southern Cross drowns as cliffs hold back sea,
and red streaks traced by bombs move past the east.
The heavens are won by Leviathan,
earth by innocence. After a fashion,
Eve rises from unmapped unmarked ocean.
She quits her job at the bar and takes off
for mountains where she might find a dry cave
and SILENCE. Unrolling a rug to pave
the dust, Eve can’t give up - not yet. She just
needs a break. Give her some time. From the mouth
of the cave, she sees vast oceans of light
bordered by even greater wastes of night -
sky above and sky below, red stars tossed
to a quiet sea. Mirror writing, she
thinks and arranges stones to match the lay
of stars. Mapping the heavens is one way
to pass the time, but the futility
alarms her. Charts can’t explain the traffic
patterns of angels, why love seems drastic.
Eve knows a far-off place, a small island that holds
the last remains of the Delphic temple,
held up by carved earth. He who assembled
and moved what's unknown from heaven to stone,
now crashes walls, muffles cries of long-legged birds
with longer beaks, stalking thin-skinned creatures
buried in rain-washed pebbles near rivers.

Bird song dives headlong as full moon anchors
white coral beds to unmapped centuries
of rock. Mouths carved as wide nets catch moonlight
and lava cliffs disguised as birds in flight.

Night terror comes, wingless, mute. Treachery
steals words from mouths, leaves broken glass and feet
as claypots overturned . . . Delete. Delete.
On the dry side of the hill where even insects fail to thrive, Eve discovers hands able to lay fingers flat on strings, stand up to heat. She amazes God when she holds out her hand to say hello. Five years have passed. The angels have abandoned plans to rescue her. When day fades out, a crescent moon cuts stars through clouds. She has ways to speak out loud by using only hands. He laughs.

(She cries *I miss the words I never said.*
*I'm lost to rivers, trapped inside my head.*)

When rain sews screens to trees, she holds above a patch of clear blue sky that saves her skin from floods of rain and words. Her arms breathe him.
After months of sleeping on piled grass,
Eve picks her way down crumbling lava cliffs
masked by ferns. She is wary of every step.
(deep chasms stay hidden beneath sweet grass
and morning glory) This is no easy task.
She walks with her mind attached to her toes,
inching along dry ground, feeling for stone.
Time to go. Damn, it's hard to ditch the past -
harder still to stay alive in the NOW:
descent exhausts her. Below, city lights
flick off then on: red then green. She wants wine,
thinks she'll make straight for the Pussy Cat Lounge
(and the archangel) laugh about the past.
Just this once, Eros speaks a paragraph.
When Eve arrives at the Pussy Cat Lounge, she finds boards tacked over windows, the door locked. There's graffiti everywhere: NO MORE WAR in letters several feet high. She's astounded by the piles of trash blocking her way - beer cans, broken glass, and two painted rocks she recognizes as props. She picks up a black leather mask and a paper weight. The mask belonged to Misti. The plexi cube with a bee in full flight trapped inside was hers. She'd used it to keep checks piled neatly on the bar. When a couple crossing the street stop, the woman steps to shadow and without a word hands Eve a yellowed scroll.
Eve holds a silver point on gessoed ground
just barely blue: A tower (blowing up)
a town exploding: Red black lines that cut
each other into squares. The woman frowns
and looks aside. The man, she says, has found
if he keeps his eyes closed and his mouth shut,
he hears finches. If he keeps his hand cupped
to his ear, he sees rain. It was war, bombs,
she says, flushed out his brain. She points at waves
breaking far from shore: like white whales breaching.
Strong winds. No time for sailing. She seizes
hold of breath. He wraps his hand on hers, shaves
thunder from her skin. If silver can leave such marks,
Eve can move past waves, find a place to start.
language of war
Lack of memory keeps the woman fog draped,
aware of speed as arrows shaped like bees.
Eve can’t breathe, but still seeks sanctuary
outside of hours on rivers that taste
of words dressed-up like winter ice. She breaks
apart the vision of his hands and keeps
inside the distance that he needs, retreats
at once to shade attached to stones (then wakes).
Life’s not dialectics, Emerson said
but if man’s a Gold impossibility,
what then is this untold Antiquity
that abandons odd words inside her head?
Trapped by a bright silence she can’t explain,
she lifts the night, listens once more to rain.
5 a.m. Rockets shoot stemless flowers
skyward—instant curtains of red and gold.
The woman’s husband sleeps elsewhere, Eve knows.
When he sees her, he condemns her, shows her
he’s bored. He falls asleep and snores. Showers
begin at dawn. To keep from feeling cold
the woman wraps herself in silk and holds
wool against her cheek. It’s been two hours
since she woke to rockets and flame. No sense
to sleep again. ‘Ribbon wrapped bombs,’ Breton
said of Frida Kahlo’s work. Innocence
that blows sky high. Pens leave imperfect tracks
on bare arms as beautiful as poison
as rare martyrs to the great unreason.
After speaking a forty second tale
about a poet who wandered to war
before receiving his due much too late—
a strange woman, wearing gray silk and a veil
of lace, laughs and fans scarlet fingernails
beneath her mouth. The moon stabs her. Eve sleeps,
disturbed by bombs, unmoved by rare conceits.
She wakes as boat horns sound and tall ships sail
pass at postcard speed, then recalls the day
before the explosion: A bagpiper
playing unfamiliar tunes, notes tighter
than need be, backed against a wind-fat bay.
She's not consoled by such memory. She hears
traffic, sirens, fighter jets, tongues of fear.
In the hours before any attack,
sky glows military green. When Angels wave,
borders turn to gold. Eve, as woman who fell
to earth, keeps one hand clutched behind her back.
In this light, she can’t see eyes or teeth. (Talk
in rapid beats slides past her face) Deceived
by false promises of armistice, she
questions rescue and the clutter of clocks.
She eats her nails, spits out words. He’s excused.
With hands over ears, sirens turn breathless.
Time heals nothing; such notions are senseless.
Eve turns and dodges cries released too soon
as stones to scarlet waves that should be blue.
The world has changed. The ‘I’ has lost the ‘You.’
At 8 a.m., sea winds funnel gold flags
into blue squares between buildings and far
distance: Blue black sky still attached to stars.
Eve dreams more sirens, ripping bombers wracked
to brick. Wings are gone. Orange trees cut to black,
and jasmine’s ringed by flames that burn the shed -
Perfumed smoke settles thick about the dead.
At five, a woman walks by, begging rags.
She wraps what’s left of bones and flesh. At six,
she’ll walk upriver past oil refineries
to trees with loose earth and stones, then bury
rag-wrapped bundles, sing as the Phoenix sings.
When planes return, she’ll open mouths, close eyes,
keep her hands pressed firmly to breasts and thighs.
Eve lies with her head on red silk pillows
stuffed between stones. Her feet are propped on stacks
of melting newsprint and plastic trash bags
tied with rope piled round her head to slow
the wind. Her eyes are closed. She keeps a cell phone
close at hand (wrapped in oil-stained cotton rags).
It doesn’t work. She doesn’t care. She walks
near gold-winged angels with lavender tongues,
and serves them green tea, crusts of fresh-baked bread
left daily by the clerk from the bakery
nearby. She dances tales of fakery
and snobbery and laughs. What goes unsaid:
These angels never answer. They’re not there.
God is dead. Bombs keep raining through the air.
After bombs remove oil-stained pavement, bricks, and what's left of the garden wall, Eve finds a shoelace and three plastic cups designed to look like Mickey Mouse. Under thick black ash, a patch of blue. In for the long haul — he'd say, shoulder pressed to hers, hands resting on her thigh, breath collapsed. They watched western skies go gray. Now, out of clouds, books fall: Complete Milton lands near The Silent Clowns. Shakespeare breaks its spine against the carcass of the kitchen sink. Pages flutter past flame . . . kin with ken and kind with kind confound disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny.

A fire burns the last remaining tree.
When noise rises to such a steady pitch,
Eve's bones sound like razor blades. Then, she needs
to rest. She can't. Her body's trapped by years,
confused by angels (naked ghosts) back-lit
by flames of burning buildings. If she sits
with knees tucked to her chest, she dreams skies clear.
She can't. Watching explosions wrap yew trees
with butterfly wings and leaves, she forfeits
paradise, spits out battered angel wings -
then feels her skin grow cold. Below, the street
trembles. A beggar with fire at his feet
looks up amazed. All is changed (undying)
love remains. A tiny green bird with framed
eyes perches on the fence and sings the rain.
Months later after battles end, Eve knows
her landscape's changed. Her mind has moved aside
to give her heart some space. She feels disguised.
Reaching out, she pulls channels of air close
beside her, waits as night pressures explode
oceans of pin-prick stars to masks and tides
of sound. She lifts one gloved hand past her eyes
then stops, allows her arms to drop. She's cold.
Beneath the highway overpass, a man
draws pictures of stick figures, crawling out
of unexplained squares with hands and feet bound
and heads round like stones. Eve watches his hand
move in slender arcs, imagines dances
with the moon leading and dawn enchanted.
When at 9:15, jets cut thunder trails
in rain, the woman takes him by the hand
and gently leads him to her bed, bids
him lie, curled into himself. Sleep, she says,
sleep. Alone, she sits on a straight-backed chair
and listens to him breathe. Moonlight fails,
but outside, the sea breaks against stone walls
where roses bloom in salt spray. Petals gathered
yesterday curl to cradles as they dry.
Years ago, she spent hours in the Louvre
standing beside “Victory of Samothrace.”
When she felt feathers sprout beside her eyes,
speech flew to skin, and words found shape as birds
with crystal wings that sang the wind to world.
War (it is written) can't be avoided—

“Natural,” they say, “as grace,” a currency
of life. Eve can’t buy that. Flourishing
can’t demand killing: such logic’s devoid
of reason. When dark enshrouds the wreckage,
rain coaxes scent from earth and waves boil
hard on rock. Eve makes a pact with the voice.
She won’t mention any errors of fact
to angels if they let her talk, listen
to her, but the voice offers no reply.
(still persona non grata - can’t say why)
With sticks, Eve clears trash. [she should’ve kissed him]
Using stones, she draws two more maps of stars.
Could be she’s just an accidental traveler.
tomb architecture
Heat disguises the voice as pitched battle,
as bizarre concession to clouds gathered
on mountaintops. Hard to know what matters
in all of this. The city's been flattened.
The sky collapsed, and now, sea is saddled
with heaven's debris. Eve marks where scattered
stars exploded, where rivers drained water
onto land, where trees blazed, where stone blistered
into green. She puts one ear against earth
and listens for jazz riffs, edgy music:
longs for trumpets on mountain trails, classic
guitar with tabla drums. She misses angel
wings scraping glass. Memory's a lousy map
with no roads marked except as parallax.
Long after dark, Eve hears a lone curlew repeat two notes above the traffic noise.
Before him (on days crossed out in black), joy settled her hands as cold December dew.
Now, bird song rearranges blue, removes red markers she’d kept as reminders. Joy’s excused. Time can’t heal. Off-balance and poised on the brink of things, she feels battered, bruised.
She picks his photo from the floor, tacks it to the wall. When she saw the black monk, she knew the gig was up. Like Chekhov’s Kovrin, she refused to listen. Parataxis - she thinks: he came, he sat, he spoke, she died - bored finally with food, with sleep, with eyes.
Deep and long, candle shadows are loose-limbed
dancers. Eve’s free of electricity -
tired enough to sleep for weeks. Pity
she cannot breathe. Night falls thick: no more wind,
just moon and traffic lighting crater rims.
Without wind, dark finds body and flies free.
Without light, the town is bodiless, empty:
a bit more monumental, starved and thin.
She waits for slow-flashed warning lights, constant
echo, red sparks attached to blue neon.
Glitz has been reduced to black pipes cut clean.
She was cooking rice when the power quit.
The Misfits on TV, tuned to the scene
after the chase before Marilyn screams.
Two Norfolk pines catch x-rayed moon
as sharp blades pinned at random to branches
rain-wet and naked. Midnight stays its threat
of storm. Eve sits, relieved of passion.
She lights a candle, then sets the match on
green lava stone, allows it burn to red,
then black. Thunder rolls her. She’s been misled.
Here’s the question: Why didn’t she catch on?
Her solitude’s unremarkable: ice
cold, fragile, electric blue, lit by need
dissolved beneath her tongue. She’s been deceived
by time and archangels who more than once
have refused her logic, words. She’s been turned
aside. When rescued from flames, she still burns.
Eve woman discovers she can't exhale
and when she pees she pees a shade of green.
Time has passed since she last had food to eat.
The mirror says she's looking rather pale.
A bird flies by. She thinks: a swallow tail.
(Is there such a thing?) It circles then shrieks
before it falls almost dead at her feet.
Cost of dream: hand-out, palm up to angels
with no tongues no teeth. Eyes closed, undeceived,
they paint fingers (toes) silver-edged with green.
While deep in salt marshes, Eve finds red seeds
and swallows them. When color stops, she breathes.
Black birds wake and whistle misremembered songs,
then, flap red wings twice, fly away from ground.
His fragile break of skin, her density
of bone keep Eve from angel wings. When dawn
defines her as woman growing old,
when in blue half-light, excruciating
beauty alarms her, she finds that breathing
allows her to stay transparent. She steps
first to dark, then back to sun. If she lets
her body speak, her mind stops its reeling.
Below, young women walk with small children.
One lifts a crying child to her hip
and moves, unburdened, to the pier. A ship
(a black freighter) docks. Steel cranes lift coffins
to concrete. Someone plays dirges and hymns.
The woman clings to bouquets of jasmine.
When guns sound, she throws blooms to water, stems and all. A faint aroma of that flight traces arcs in air, etched as purple light. Once on water, petals spin as fences, as lips of blue mouths, as wide circumference. Using these blooms as pens, the sea draws maps of fallen stars as incoming waves carve out heart places. She finds no evidence of anguish there - just uneasy splendor, a casual elegance, a simple grief: sunlight slipping slight on waves, music brief on stone. The land breathes. Eve used to wonder what it is if it’s not about belief. Finally she knows: Paradise has teeth.
Deep in the black pool where the rocks fell,
a lotus root digs deep into rich loam
until it breaks hard against earth and flame.
From the root comes a stem, and rising pale
from the stem a leaf: flat broad transparent.
The leaf is ordinary, round and plain,
yet when it touches waves, the water stains
dark blue as ink: writing what is decent,
words that rise then disappear. Lodged against
reason, history gives way to yellow clay.
This pond has its own life - it stays away
from sky and won't reflect memory, faces,
or bits of trees. After time ends, only
dust, debris, and perhaps, a wine dark sea.
rice paper screens
Eve woman lies with one leg propped on furs, piled near the kitchen door. Concealing her mouth with both hands, she knows that envy for ceiling fans seems dangerous, quite disturbed. It's speed coupled with instability and productivity. Night heat turns her into moss but acting as a carpet turns her off. She keeps her dignity.

And what do you do with carved stones and dirt? Pack them in bamboo, cover them with ferns. Throw them far away to the Sea of Ur. Tie me up with silk (promise) don't get hurt. Voyages begin like this (in the dark) alone (naked) with no reason to start.
Eve moves quickly across the floor, then cuts
past a folding screen, a room divider
hung with masks of Eve as old - beside her
a Tree, a red River, another Hut,
disguised to seem regal. Above that -
fat pigs with wings, a white paper lantern
that pretends to be the moon. No concern
of hers: these masks. On certain days, make-up
conceals flaws and nonsense keeps dark at bay,
but today's not one of those useful days.
Outside, a polished sea reflects the tracks
of fighter jets. Eve finds it difficult
to sort birds from waves; she imagines light
with wings as sky fades out to finer things.
Nights without wind collapse. Across the way,
a man keeps one hand clenched against his eye,
the other flat on stone. Eve feels confined
by secrets not her own: Without debate,
the conversation ends. The man relates
harmony to lies and she sees birds in flight:
pink and green and gold (Nature redesigned).
He claps his hands and ends the masquerade.
Again her dreams are nondescript, the sky
embattled grey, alive with Vincent’s crows
that swoop and dive and cry. She makes a show
of drawing blue to circumvent the night,
but red triumphs, sucked from bone. Dawn arrives,
and lifts all memory on wings that write the sky.
Memory offers watered-down confusion
(certain things disappear) but lacunae
make room for dreams and diagrams of moons.
Sky charts tell her angels were in collusion
with the voice: history. They kept her breathless.
She recalls lava rock, a pool with fish
that talked. Time divides trees to whispers,
vines to purple fruits. They left her breathless.
What makes women put on weight? Gravity?
Fear of flight? Clouds above sand cool to pink.
No ceremony here. Men dress to think,
strip to sleep. Having no such sanctuary,
Eve moves to rooms occupied by color
only. She abandons herself to storm.
As grey woman, she walks without solace,
keeps a beat, square hands rhythmic on her hips.
She wears a red sweater, green skirt, black slip.
Above on TV screens, men in soundless
talk show yellow tobacco-stained teeth, tobacco tongues.
They breathe hard, swallow dark. Behind them, loss -
an altar: hands spiked to a wooden cross,
blood spilled against an urgency of mouths.
Sun floods the alcove where the Prince of Peace
falls to purple grey. The woman finds a coke machine
beside the newspaper rack: WAR, Sixteen
towns destroyed, Tanks on the move, X-14
downed, Pilot Dead. Eve remembers warm days
without end, roses, rain that smells of hay.
She notices her yogurt tastes like mold.
The oatmeal runs with bugs. The bread's gone stale.
Drums and bagpipes sound below. Poppies fail
to bloom: Fourth of July. No sun. Eve's cold.
How did she come to be so still? Why did
she not notice when the center began
to fold? Long after dark, she hears a man
(no, an angel) complain about hardship.
He prays. She knows that prayer can't outrun
decay. Birds rearrange color as song
as galaxies, as clouds. Night speakers want
to stay but can't. They flee before the sun.
If night can simply yield its weight to day,
hers heart might just as easily give way.
As woman, Eve grows old. Her sorrowed skin
is matched by silence in her eyes. When time
divides and stands unused, she abandons
urgency. She’s remained too long confined -
Outside, clouds gain weight, ballooned by heat, threat
of storm. Out on the bay, a freighter moves
at speed. Black jets cut crosses into blue.
Days seem anxious; the sky is out of breath
and so, she thinks, is she. She recalls him:
his eyes (sometimes disguised) the frail mystery
of his hands, fragile strength wrapped in history
kept restrained. Below, a sailor hauls in
the tow line of his boat, then shouts aloud
to a man who stands apart from the crowd.
It's hard to focus waves as mirrors, slipped 
up against the cliffs. When the sea foams and bites, 
it spits debris to beaches: spent rockets, 
shattered glass, bone, and disconnected limbs 
(arms and legs). Eve's unsure how to register 
What she sees. It looks like a map but this 
map has no 'key,' no way to define distance. 
Perhaps the mapmaker was unaware 
of how to draw real distance past the heart. 
Thinking absence the better guide, he failed - 
went for the grand gesture, missed the detail. 
If these raw maps of killing fields can't chart 
buried mines, what then? She needs a center 
but wants escape routes, spirit trails.
In conclusion, Eve thinks, holding fingers against toes, I'm no longer certain that angels ever knew the right words to that song. Every morning, when blue mist hungers across the valley span, black-winged singers perch on widowed branches. [Eve takes a breath]
Out to sea, strong winds cut paths to the west where white-winged seagulls rest. If she blinks her eyes, the world goes black. She knows she's near death, but can't say why. When she eats, she cannot swallow. When she swallows, she cannot breathe. Flames leave land charred black, but she's defined by red. When she cries to angels, the voice answers with words much like hers. She'll take her chances.
geometry of hands
Exiled from her body, Eve sits apart
and watches women with hands like water
turn wide hips against the wind. She suffers
a loneliness that builds as hips move hearts
and eyes stay tunneled away from hers. A hard
distance, this absence. These last years taught her
that anguish makes a lousy instructor.
She’s learned little from sorrow. If she starts
again, she’ll start blind. When the archangel
returns with flowers, finally takes her hand,
it’s too late. Earth opens holes in dry land,
ciphers wider than hips, where she might fall.

*Your face would put out Jesus,* the poet
said. More than faces get erased, she knows.
When Eve breathes in, she bathes in runways: noise confused with melody hatched in backyards. She’s uncertain which notes belong to cars and which to trees. In between, she finds joy laid gently down on skin. She has no choice - It’s foolish (truly) to keep holding on to uncontrolled absence. What seems extant is not. Her body’s swamped, heart drowned by void.

She sees it, describes it, but can’t feel it: flat, without circumference, it moves away.

When it goes, she tastes color again: red behind her teeth, words decked out in scarlet, songs in the wander of centuries. If God’s not dead, he’s called his angels back, the sot.
Eve needs the palace of her heart, but settles
for a room facing the sea with windows
that open and a blue door that stays closed.
No longer disturbed by hosts of angels,
she sleeps for years, bathed in shadows more subtle
than those recalled. At dawn, when thunder clouds
cover mountains with threads of pink and gold,
she thinks, Fish nets. Must be the archangel
means to net mountains, keep them from walking.
She laughs out-loud, sits naked on the floor,
and lets the new sun tremble corridors
down her back. Aging moths with yellow wings
light on window screens. Alarmed, she watches
wings tear off. Nothing's as cruel as plastic.
The woman decides to recalibrate
the corners of her life. She needs to cut
new windows in rotting walls and brick up
unused doors. On hot afternoons, the shade
reverses heat, turns sky electric blue.
Tar-paper roofs melt onto window glass
and small red birds search out silence locked fast
to heat while earth under hedges stays cool.
Drying streams gain in weight when springs erupt
near doors. Eve watches green dump trucks attempt
to back through trash-filled lots. Today, she slept
with birds, not knowing life had come undone
at 2PM. When the phone rings later,
after night has come, she doesn’t answer.
No one speaks, but from elastic silence
comes a cry, hard and round, that falls like stone
through the night. Eve hears the voice as her own.
When she cries out, words break against distance
and salt the dark with light. "Apple," she says,
and a red shape flat on a blue background
floats midrange between her hand and eye. Clouds
of wings confuse her, but she speaks again.
"You," she says, and green mountains start walking.
"You," she says again, and ocean lifts her,
keeps her, turns her. She becomes a drifter,
trapped in stars. In dark, she stops her talking
and holding onto words, she returns to earth:
*mountains walking, stone women giving birth.*
On full moon nights, the earth stays cold. Eve wakes chilled as the full moon sinks to orange. Hungry for heat, she pulls on silk. A winter breeze slips ice beneath her skin. Her voice shakes - she tries on paragraphs, sounds to placate threats of Minor Gods. They’ve set up boundaries, built chain-link fences disguised as mysterious magic. NOT FOR SALE . . . Eve lays her heartbreak on stone as offering to the voiceless moon. When dark clouds coax birds to sing, it’s not mirth exactly but not sad. Dawn stays diverse, can’t settle down as tragedy too soon. Before Darwin, Blake’s Angels kept the keys to hell. Now, the door’s flung wide, if you please.
The archangel's flown back to Paradise
with the water nymph and her knives. Rumor
has it she's pregnant, but Eve can't know for sure.
Archangel's aren't the only ones who fly
away to take up residence beside
beaches, but they may be the only ones
who get out alive. Everywhere are bones
of men who ran who screamed who sang who died.
Even the dear man who loved men has drowned
in mouths of hungry ghosts. Eve looks up
at rocket stained skies, hears the boom of guns
and then, the gentle who-who-who of doves.
In spite of this, because of this, she breathes,
opens her heart, makes still her mind, and speaks.
This is strange barren territory: stones
adrift on dry sand - no birds perched in trees -
all the air now filled with words. “If you please,”
she hears. She kneels on rocks and finds a bone
with words carved onto its skin: a way home,
she reads, desire is a cliff. “If you please,”
she hears, and islands disappear. She sees
bodies collapse to fume. Walking alone
on beaches she still has words she retrieves
charred bits of flesh and silk that slide and slip
on waves. She piles them in pyramids,
steps away from skin, folds her heart to tiers.
She speaks again, but now no one hears her
or sees the anatomy of mirrors.
Doors open and close to white walls embossed with gold. She looks long at the pineapple balanced against the roof. The walls are blank, leaving room for asking, offering response, words of thanks, remorse or invitation to celebration: solemn memorial mass. With her thumb, she draws a spiral, a ghost carried from centuries long past, impatient, bald, and undisguised. Inside the spiral, she puts three red dots and an equal sign (=). Outside, the city finds its way to light lifting fog from cliffs, serpents from her heart. She hears a murmur beneath the tissue of sirens, birds and wings: I could kiss you.
On earth beside her, Eve finds scattered bones and feathers, some as big as waves. She sweeps small piles, then floods the flower bed, feeds the birds. This stubborn attachment to form blocks her. Mostly, she needs to be alone in places with tangerines and cubes of lava stone. The air about her seems rude, cut by rough-edged words. This is not her home. She still sleeps naked on rugs, keeps her head turned to one side, dreams of Van Gogh's yellow field burned cadmium red, pale blue sky concealed behind a flock of black-winged crows, weighed down by tufts of grass. At the edge of things, she stands, as woman. Hidden and alone, she sings.
NOTES

NB: The notes provide acknowledgment of texts directly quoted plus a vague map of the mind of the writer while writing. Although most notes identify texts quoted as well as various characters, both historical and mythological, who appear in the poems, there are also more detailed notes concerning Buddhist and Hawaiian thought, foundational to this text. Notes that are not quotations but are instead comments offered by the poet are identified by the initials (TB). Also, please note that all quotes from the Bible are from the King James Version, numbers refer to page numbers, and page numbers are assumed as poem numbers. (TB)

At a time of being, standing at the summit of the highest peak; at a time of being, walking on the bottom of the deepest ocean; at a time of being, three-headed and eight-armed; at a time of being, sixteen feet and eight feet; at a time of being, staff and whisk; at a time of being, pillar and lamp; at a time of being, the average man; at a time of being, earth and sky.


NOTE: Shōbōgenzō can be translated as Treasury of the Eye of True Thinking

See also note for poem 18.

* * * *

1. “dark wood of error”

Midway along the journey of our life
I woke to find myself in a dark wood,
for I had wandered off from the straight path,

How hard it is to tell what it was like,
this wood of wilderness, savage and stubborn
(the thought of it brings back all my old fears),

a bitter place! Death could scarce be bitterer.
But if I would show the good that came of it
I must talk about things other than the good.


2. “let there be light”

3. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
4. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

Genesis 1.3-4, King James version
Also see notes for pages 5 and 22.

* * * *

"let there be light"

-- turning the light around --

As a beginner, there is something fundamental in oneself, when one turns the light around (shifts attention from sense experience to the essence of mind) one ejects form, sound, smell, flavor, touch, and phenomena, and attains tranquility. After fully accomplishing this, one does not grasp the sense data but descends among them without being blinded, letting them be, without interference... The Zen "art" of looking into the mind source instead of pursuing external stimuli is called eko henshō, "turning the light around and shining (or looking) back."


* * * *

"(some might call it stone)"

As the unattached mind of Zen, stone lives, breathes, and gives birth; Hawaiians acknowledge stone as living and capable of reproduction. Christian scriptures also find a place for stone as birth, as heart. Also sec note for poem 65. (TB)

God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham (Matt. 3.9)

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezk. 36.26)

The lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit (Psalm 35.18).

George Herbert, the Early Modern poet who dedicated his life as a poet to a conversation with his God, writes: "A broken ALTAR, Lord, thy servant rears / made of a heart, and cemented with tears/... A HEART alone / is such a stone." Broken or not, that stone is serviceable as an altar to his God. (TB)

3. “the half-half, the quite-quiet”

"No," said Mimosa, "I'm the Quite-Alone."
She also meant: "I'm the Quite-Persecuted." When they had to express a feeling that risked involving an exuberance of gesture or voice, the queens contented themselves with saying: "I'm the Quite-Quite."

See also poems 3 and 76; also note for poem 70.

* * * *

“odoriferous wings” (see poems 7, 76)

When God hath shrowrd the earth; so lovely seemd
That Lantskip: And of pure now purer aire
Meets his approach, and to the heart inspires
Vernal delight and joy, able to drive
All sadness but despair: now gentle gales
Fanning thir odoriferous wings dispense
Native perfumes, and whisper whence they stole
Those balmie spoiles.

-- *Paradise Lost.* IV. 152-159.


4. “She leans on green and feels her mouth turn red”

For Buddhists, color is understood as both an active communicant in spiritual dialogue and symbolic of the results of that communication. For example, White Tara and Green Tara act as Buddhas of compassion and their respective colors are symbolic of their meditative and compassionate acts aided by color itself. White is thought to activate the mind because it is a color that can transform ignorance to wisdom by revealing reality, and as a color representative of the eyes, it symbolizes clear vision and the restfulness granted by such seeing. Green, mixed of blue and yellow, links mind with body and represents the land.

Yellow, as the color of light—especially the brilliant sunlight of day—nourishes the body yet paradoxically restrains the powers of perception and, therefore, is symbolic of increase and sucease. Although the light of day appears to reveal all, after dark it becomes evident just what has been restrained and even concealed by the light. Having the power both to reveal and to conceal, yellow then encourages greater awareness of continuity as necessary. The whole is available but not always visible, that which is now seen will later be hidden, that which is hidden will later be seen. Yellow is a color the Buddha adopted as sacred because it had been the traditional color worn by prisoners, those who are restrained yet reveal much of the levels of compassion in any human society.

Blue (of air, of water) both symbolizes and promotes the act of whole-body listening needed to transform anger and violence to mirror-like wisdom. Blue can usefully weaken the control of yellow and thus heighten an awareness of necessary continuity generated by the more nutritive qualities of yellow, thus encouraging greater patience and useful
compassion (see poem 60). If yellow reminds of the light and its ability to reveal and conceal, blue recalls the breathing of unattainable distance, the reach of sky, and the feeding that rises from the equally unattainable depths of the sea.

Green brings distance of blue together with the brilliance of yellow as the color of the land, capable of sustaining the body. As a demonstrable union of the physical and the abstract, green symbolizes the observant mind, alive in the body, and acts to encourage a knowing release from human desire and fear through considered action. As the interpenetration of blue with yellow, green serves as a color of balance, of compassion, and of action.

Red is a color associated primarily with the body, especially with the tongue, and thus is a color both symbolizing and activating summoning, attraction, desire, and speech. Red can, however, transform the delusion of possession into the wisdom of discernment. (TB)

See also poem 31 (Corot) and the note for poem 62.

* * * *

"He wants stone valves set to keep / the heat below"

The Soul selects her own Society --
Then -- shuts the Door --
To her divine Majority --
Present no more --
Unmoved -- she notes the Chariots -- pausing --
At her low Gate --
Unmoved -- an Emperor be kneeling
Upon her Mat --
I've known her -- from an ample nation --
Choose One --
Then -- close the Valves of her attention --
Like Stone --

-- Emily Dickinson, 1862


5. "When she touches them, they bloom."

When a flower blooms the whole world comes into being.


See also note for poem 22.
“Slips stones below folds of skin”

As far from pity, as complaint --  
As cool to speech -- as stone --  
As numb to Revelation  
As if my Trade were Bone --  
As far from time -- as History --  
As near yourself -- Today --  
As Children, to the Rainbow’s scarf --  
Or Sunset's Yellow play  
To eyelids in the Sepulchre --  
How dumb the Dancer lies --  
While Color’s Revelations break --  
And blaze -- the Butterflies!

-- Emily Dickinson, 1862


6. “he’ll settle for reorganizing/ the solid things of earth”

Now one should ask Baso, what do you call “living beings”? If you call the nature of things living beings, it is what thing comes thus? If you call living beings living beings, it is if you speak of it as something, you miss it. Speak quickly, speak quickly!


7. “roses tangle with privets on banks / arranged with mantling vines”

Flours of all hue, and without Thorn the Rose:  
Another side, umbrageous Grots and Caves  
Of coole recess, o’re which the mantling Vine  
Layes forth her purple Grape, and gently creeps  
Luxuriant;  

-- Paradise Lost. IV. 256-60

Thus talking hand in hand alone they pass’d  
On to thir blissful Bower; it was a place  
Chos’n by the sovran Planter, when he fram’d  
All things to mans delightful use; the roohe  
Of thickest covert was inwoven shade  
Laurel and Mirtle, and what higher grew  
Of firm and fragrant leaf; on either side  
Acanthus, and each odorous bushie shrub  
Fenc’d up the verdant wall; each beauteous flour,
Iris all hues, Roses, and Gessamin
Rear'd high thir flourisht heads between, and wrought
Mosaic; underfoot the Violet,
Crocus, and Hyacinth with rich inlay
Broiderd the ground, more colour'd then with stone
Of costliest Emblem:

-- *Paradise Lost*. IV. 689-703


See also notes for poems 5 and 22.

8. “smirr of rain”

THE SMOKY SMIRR O RAIN

A misty mornin' doon the shore wi a hushed an' caller air,
an' ne'er a breath frae East or Wast tie sway the rashes there,
a sweet, sweet scene frae Laggan's birks gaed breathin' on its ane,
their branches hinging beaded in the smoky smirr o rain.

The hills around war silent wi the mist alang the braes.
The woods war derk an' quiet wi dewy, glintin' sprays.
The thrushes didna raise for me, as I gaed by alane,
but a wee, wae cheep at passin' in the smoky smirr o rain.

Rock an' stane lay glisterin' on aa the heichs abune.
Cool an' kind an' whisperin' it drifted gently doon,
till hill an' howe war rowed in it, an' land an' sea war gane.
Aa was still an' saft an' silent in the smoky smirr o rain.

-- George Campbell Hay, 1915 – 1984

Poem sent in personal letter to poet.

9. “hyacinthian curls”

For contemplation hee and valour formd,
For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
Hee for God only, shee for God in him:
His fair large Front and Eye sublime declar'd
Absolute rule; and Hyacinthin Locks
Round from his parted forelock manly hung
Clustring, but not beneath his shoulders broad:
Shee as a vail down to the slender waste
Her unadorned golden tresses wore
Dissheveld, but in wanton ringlets wav'd
As the Vine curles her tendrils, which impli’d
Subjection, but requir’d with gentle sway,
And by her yeilded, by him best receivd,
Yeilded with coy submission, modest pride,
And sweet reluctant amorous delay.

-- Paradise Lost. IV. 297-310


See also note for poem 43, Botticelli Venus.

12. “DEATH”  *telos*: perfection; completion; death

**Teleology:** 1. the study of final causes; 2. the fact or quality of being directed toward a definite end or of having an ultimate purpose, esp, as attributed to natural processes. 3. a belief that natural phenomena are determined not only by mechanical causes but by overall design or purpose in nature. 4. the evaluation of conduct in relation to the ends it serves.

“DEATH”

When *the whole works appears in death*, though it is the whole earth and all the space, not only does it not block *the appearance of the whole works in death*, it doesn’t block *the appearance of the whole works in life* either. For this reason life doesn’t obstruct death, death doesn’t obstruct life. The whole earth and all space are in life and in death too.


13. “fifteen hounds and sixteen black-winged angels”

First, what Revenge? the Towrs of Heav’n are fill’d
With Armed watch, that render all access
Impregnable; oft on the bordering Deep
Encamp thir Legions, or with obscure wing
Scout farr and wide into the Realm of night,
Scorning surprize.

-- Paradise Lost. II. 129-134.


16. “Daedalus”

Daedalus, as the first aviator, understood wings as future, but Eve only understands wings as ‘history’ (see poem 14). Daedalus may have been the most ingenious artist of his age—the inventor of the axe, the level, sails for ships, and other sundries that made voyaging possible—but this great architect of the maze of the Minotaur, was also dangerously ego-driven. When his nephew Talos showed his ‘talent’ as an inventor, Daedalus killed him. As
punishment for his crime, he was a-mazed, confined (together with his son, Icarus) to the labyrinth he had designed himself to hide both mystery (the pattern of the crane dance) and the shame (the Minotaur). With wings built of wax and discarded feathers, Daedalus and Icarus escape. Icarus flies too close to the heat of the sun, falls to the sea, and drowns, but Daedalus lands safely at Cumae, where he builds a temple to Apollo, the god of the sun, of fine arts, medicine, music, poetry, and eloquence. At Cumae, the Sibyl, an oracle of some repute, establishes her residence in a cave with one hundred openings to sky and wind. She sings. (TB)

* * * *

“crisped brooks and sands washed to gold”

And Country whereof here needs no account,
But rather to tell how, if Art could tell,
How from that Saphire Fount the crisped Brooks,
Rowling on Orient Pearl and sands of Gold,
With mazie error under pendant shades
Ran Nectar, visiting each plant

-- Paradise Lost. IV. 235-240


17. “Man for the narrow stream” “Woman for the broad stream”

O kane iā Wai`ololi. O ka wahine iā Wai`olola
Male for the narrow waters, female for the broad waters


* * * *

The words Wai`ololi and Wai`olola are applied in everyday speech to a narrow entrance through which water passes with force and a wide one which receives them without a struggle. Thus Pokini says the first term is given to a narrow bay along the coast where water carries fish in with a rush, the second to a shore line where the surf rolls in without breaking . . . . My informants read, ‘Man for the narrow stream, woman for the broad stream.’


* * * *
“O kane iā Wai`ololi. O ka wahine iā Wai`olola” has also been oddly translated, first into German and then from the German into English. That odd translation raises an interesting question, if others translate `olola as ‘broad’ and `ololi as ‘narrow,’ do westerners, who choose to translate the same word with added shading of ‘acquiescent’ and ‘strong,’ think of ‘broad’ thinking as ‘acquiescent’ and ‘narrow’ thinking as ‘strong?’ (TB)

That translation is:

And male for the strong generative power, and the female acquiescent.


18. “sea sings waves”

Because arising is the arising of formation by compounding, it is only by many elements which is this body arising, which is the “I arise” of arising. It is not just the seeing and hearing as sound and form; it is the many elements of “I arise,” it is the unspoken “I arise.” Not speaking is not not expressing, because expression is not verbalization . . . . As we arise, we vanish . . . . Even though there is suddenly extinction of arising, it is not the extinction of arising, it is the extinction of elements. Though it may be the this is of extinction, though it may be the this is of arising, it is just the ocean seal concentration being called myriad elements . . . Concentration is actualization, it is expression, it is the nighttime when one reaches back for the pillow . . . . as soon as one wave moves, myriad waves follow.


* * *

“sea sings waves of stone” (see n. 2)

O ke au i kāhuli wela ka honua
O ke au i kāhuli lole ka lani
O ke au i kūka`iaka ka lá
E ho`omālamalama i ka malama
O ke au o Makali`i ka pō
O ka walewale ho`okumu honua ia
O ke kumu o ka lipo, i lipo ai
O ke kumu o ka pō, i pō ai
O ka lipolipo, o ka lipolipo
Pō wale ho`i

Hānau ka pō
Hānau Kumulipo i ka pō, he kane
Hānau Pō`ele i ka pō, he wahine

At the time that turned the heat of the earth,
At the time when the heavens turned and changed,
At the time when the light of the sun was subdued
To cause light to break forth,
At the time of the night of Makalii (winter)
Then began the slime which established the earth,
The source of the deepest darkness.
Of the depth of darkness, of the depth of darkness,
Of the darkness of the sun, in the depth of night
It is night,
So was night born.

Kumulipo was born in the night, a male.
Poele was born in the night, a female.


At the time when the earth became hot
At the time when the heavens turned about
At the time when the sun was darkened
To cause the moon to shine
The time of the rise of the Pleiades
The slime, this was the source of the earth
The source of the darkness that made darkness
The source of the night that made night
The intense darkness, the deep darkness
Darkness of the sun, darkness of the night
Nothing but night.

The night gave birth
Born was Kumulipo in the night, a male
Born was Poele in the night, a female


Po: Night, darkness, obscurity; the realm of the gods; pertaining to or of the gods, chaos, or hell; dark, obscure, benighted; formerly the period of twenty-four hours beginning with nightfall ([Traditionally] the Hawaiian “day” began at nightfall)
Po’aha: circle, as of flowers
Po’ai: circle, as of friends
Po’ailani: sky circle, horizon

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Po’ailewa: air circle, firmament
Pohaku: stone, mineral, tablet, thunder, stationary, not moving
Pohā: stone;
Hā: breath, life; to breathe, exhale, to breathe upon, as kava after praying and before prognosticating; spirit; four, fourth; Po’ahā, Thursday
Pono: goodness, uprightness, morality. Excellence, well-being, prosperity, benefit, behalf, equity, just, virtuous, fair, accurate, eased, necessary, must; completely, properly, rightly, well, exactly; piha pono, completely filled; use, purpose, plan; HOPE


Po: the source, that which is whole, unbroken. (TB)

See also notes for poem 26 “black and red”

* * * *

“Time’s changed all that once was confirmed.”

Time of being means time is already being.
Three-headed, eight armed is time, is yesterday’s time, is being time.
Sixteen feet, eight feet is today’s time.
Pines are time. Bamboo is time.
Going into the mud, going into the water is time.
Walking on the bottom of the deepest ocean is being.


See also page 138.

20. “Medea who killed”

There are those who say that Medea, the powerful enchantress who gave life as impetuously as she took it, was herself enchanted, that Jason used Aphrodite’s gift of the Inyx, the ever-revolving ‘wryneck,’ to trap Medea with the bonds of obsession generated by the attractive Inyx, spinning round. The Inyx was a device that fascinated. The multi-colored and nearly delirious wryneck bird was secured to a spoked wheel, and every time this nervous bird jerked its neck, the wheel turned. The sight of the bird turning in its colors was captivating, mesmerizing, and thus served as an artifice of possession. Reportedly, Jason used this device on Medea as a means to encourage her to develop more fully an obsession with Greece, an obsession that would ultimately free him—and trap her. (TB)
“Pluto who kidnapped Persephone”

Even after regaining her right to return to the breathing world, Persephone is never free. After Pluto dragged her down into his palace of death against her will, after she ate six pomegranate seeds while confined, she was doomed to spend six months as the empress of the dark, but granted six months as a maiden of light. However, when in the dark, she craves light. When in the sun, she longs for dark. (TB)

* * * *

“Wizards who ask marigolds to sing”

-- Merlin --

21. “Every leaf on every tree / sings names for every thing”

The sound of water
says what I think


* * * *

Birds and flowers, birds and bloom, birthing birthing birthing birds and singing, birds and bloom

THE BLOSSOM

Merry Merry Sparrow
Under leaves so green
A happy Blossom
See you swift as arrow
Seek your cradle narrow
Near my Bosom.

Pretty Pretty Robin
Under leaves so green
A happy Blossom
Hears you sobbing sobbing
Pretty Pretty Robin
Near my Bosom.


The watercolor that illustrates this poem, from “Poems of Innocence,” focuses the viewer’s eye first on leaping red and yellow flames that lick across the poem’s title. As the fire bends its tongue, the flame recreates itself as a useful seat for a pensive angel dressed in green. The angel stares down at the words The Blossom while six tiny cherubim fly madly about the
seated angel, leaping and dancing, and hugging and kissing. There are no pictures of birds—no robin, no sparrow—and, other than the painted words The Blossom, no blossom, just angels quite at home in flame. (TB)

* * * *

"Every leaf on every tree / sings names for every thing"

A monk asked ... The whole world in all ten directions is a single bright jewel—how can a student understand this? The master said, the whole world in all ten directions of a bright jewel—what does it have to do with understanding?


* * * *

"Speaking, she thinks, might just work."

My advice to the writer who thus is well-prepared
Is that he carefully observe what life
And manners seen first hand are really like
And bring their voices alive in words. (ii.3. 442-445)


* * * *

"Speaking, she thinks, might just work."

Transforming the environment, transforming the mind is something scorned by great sages;
speaking of the mind, speaking of nature is something not approved by Buddhas and Zen adepts;
seeing the mind, seeing nature is the livelihood of heretics;
sticking to words and phrases is not the expression of liberation.


See also poem 105 and note for poem 105.

22. "songs breathed by monks"

Shobogenzo

Born in Kyoto in 1200 CE, Zen Master Dōgen, the founder of Sōtō Zen, was highly educated as a very young child in classical Chinese studies. He was reading Buddhist philosophy by the age of nine, and by the age of thirteen, he had become a monk, dedicated to the study of ethical precepts and of Tendai meditation techniques, best described as the
techniques of “stopping and seeing.” As the first Buddhist text to be written in Japanese, the Shobogenzo resembles other Zen texts in its deliberate and unexplained intertextuality. Without concern for context but with deep concern for communicating clearly, the Shobogenzo interperses bits and pieces of traditional Buddhist literature, written in Chinese, with Dogen’s own thoughts written in Japanese. This practice is useful for breaking habits of seeing, making it possible to erase, or at least move more easily through, “barriers of knowledge.” The italics in the passages quoted from the Shobogenzo indicate that these words were originally written in Chinese in this Japanese text. (TB)

* * * *

“in a rose garden, flush with last year’s bloom”

...know the blooming and falling of sky flowers and earth flowers, know the blooming and falling of world flowers, and so on, and know sky flowers, earth flowers, world flowers, and so on are scriptures. This is the guideline for Buddhist study. Because that which Buddhas and Zen adepts ride on is flowers in the sky, the world of Buddhas as well as the teaching of the Buddhas are in fact flowers in the sky.


See also notes for poems 5 and 46.

24. “opens and shuts her door” “origin lies outside of time”

The poetic word and the religious word are confused throughout history. But the religious revelation does not constitute—at least insofar as it is word—the original act but its interpretation... poetry is the revelation of our condition, and for that very reason, the creation of man by means of the image ... poetic language reveals man’s paradoxical condition, his ‘otherness,’ and thus leads him to realize that which he is. It is not the sacred writings of religions that establish man, because they lean on the poetic word. The act by which man grounds and reveals himself is poetry. In sum, the religious experience and the poetic one have a common origin; their historical expressions—poems, myths, prayer, exorcism, hymns, theatrical performances, rites, and so on—are sometimes indistinguishable; in short, both are experiences of our constitutive ‘otherness.’ But religion interprets... Poetry opens up to us the possibilities of being that is intrinsic in every birth; it re-creates man and makes him assume his true condition, which is not the dilemma: life or death, but a totality: life and death in a single instant of incandescence.


* * * *

“opens and shuts the door”

BIRD WINGS
Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror
up to where you're bravely working.

Expecting the worst, you look, and instead,
here's the joyful face you've been wanting to see.

Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes.
If it were always a fist or always stretched open,
you would be paralyzed.

Your deepest presence is in every small contracting and expanding,
the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated
as bird wings.

-- Rumi

Sent in a personal letter to poet.

25. “language re-arranged”

One who knows does not speak;
One who speaks does not know.

He
    Stopples the openings of his heart,
    Closes his doors,
    Diffuses the light,
    Mingles with the dust,
    Files away his sharp points,
    Unravels his tangles.


26. “etched with spiders black and red”

Arachne, daughter of the dyer Idmon, was a skilled weaver, confident and somewhat proud
of her skills. She impetuously challenges Athena, Minerva of the snakes, goddess of Wisdom,
to a weaving contest. Arachne's cloth is beautiful—shimmering and as light as the most
gentle breeze—but Athena has little interest in fragile beauty. She lifts the cloth from the
loom and rips it straight across. At first shocked and then despairing, Arachne hangs herself,
but at death, she is changed into a spider and allowed to continue her weaving. (TB)

Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos, is an equally skillful spinner of threads. She uses one
of her fine-spun threads to lead Theseus out of the Minotaur's maze; she leaves with him,
loves him, but soon finds herself abandoned on the island of Naxos, a barren island filled
with circling obsession. Apparently, Theseus has been most happy during those many hours
spent with his friend Penthous, the only one to whom he would be faithful to the end.
Nothing can separate them, not women, not drink, not song, certainly not Ariadne. This may
be so, but Perithous is not, after all, the reason Theseus abandons Ariadne. Theseus simply loses focus, forgets for a moment something that he had needed to remember and wanders off without looking back. Dionysus appears soon after Theseus disappears, and although Ariadne believes them to be accomplices, she cannot be sure, and she falls headlong for the dazzle of Dionysus. She gives Dionysus her spindle just as she had given Theseus her thread, but Dionysus, like Theseus, soon leaves for other more placid harbors. Ariadne, the spinner, is once again alone, but unlike Arachne, she survives as woman to spin fine thread for finer cloth, as fragrant as light as song. (TB)

* * * *

"black and red"

In Buddhist thought, color is highly yet variably symbolic (see note for poem 4). Black, for example, is the color of DEATH and the color of hate, but it also a color that represents origin, the threshold of experience and can be transmuted to compassion with the power of wisdom, but perhaps not Athena's brand of wisdom. This benevolent sense of black, of dark, resonates with the understanding found within the Hawaiian word, Pō, as the source, the deep dark, the generative night, that which is whole and true (see note for poem 18: po). Red is equally paradoxical and powerful—representing both the force of life, as blood, and the overwhelming strength of death as transformation, as fire. (TB)

* * * *

"white exhaustion, dyed bone"

Bringing one up, it is flowing; bringing one up it is not flowing; one time is flowing; one time is not flowing . . . You should engrave this statement on your skin, flesh, bones, and marrow. You should engrave it on body and mind, object and subject; you engrave it of emptiness, engrave it on form. It is engraved on trees and stones, on fields and hamlets.


See also poems 45 and 135 and the note for poem 128.

Engrave it, dye it, tattoo it, write it: it is flowing, it is not flowing, it is dark, it is light. (TB)

27. “night words like peacock and believe”

Peacock: one of the southern constellations, below the Phoenix and near the Toucan, the Crane, and the Indian. (TB)

* * * *
“Kuan Yin”

A goddess of compassion in Chinese Buddhism, Kuan Yin is identified in Indian Buddhism as Green Tara or White Tara, just as Thoth is identified as Hermes (see n. 41), Aphrodite as Venus, Tara also more than one birth narrative, more than one ‘dentity.’. According to one legend, Tara, like Aphrodite (see n. 43) who rises full-grown from the foam of the sea, is also born of healing waters. Seated on a lotus, Tara is carried skyward from the depths of the pool formed by the tears of compassion, cried by Avalokiteshvara. The lotus that brings her to air becomes her island sanctuary, her place of meditation, from which great waves of compassion flow into the suffering world. Tara has alternatively been described as a high-born princess who spent many years studying the Buddhist scriptures. When the monks who are her teachers offer to pray that she be re-born a man, she adamantly refuses their ‘help,’ stating quietly that she prefers to be re-born in the form of a female so that she might help relieve the suffering of the world as a woman. Tara, the goddess of compassion, might thus be easily described as an early feminist, certainly an activist. Kuan Yin/Tara is most often depicted with one leg outstretched, ready to spring into action while balancing in one hand either a pitcher or a bowl of water with a blue lotus. (TB)

28. “mirrors”

Pseudo-Dionysius conceived the illumination of the soul in terms of light metaphysics . . . . Light emanates from god as a ‘divine procession of radiance.’ It is imparted to angels and transmitted from one to the other in descending order, that is, through celestial hierarchy. Celestial members of the hierarchy are compared to ‘bright and spotless mirrors which receive the Ray of the Supreme Deity.”


* * * * 

“mirrors”

The *tao* is the flowing course of nature and the universe; *li* is its principle order, which can be best translated as “organic pattern” and water is its eloquent metaphor.

Like a sword that cuts but cannot cut itself
Like an eye that sees but cannot see itself

-- Zenrin Kushu


(Is it possible to separate appearance from the breathing?) (TB)

* * * *
“mirrors”

In seeing forms with the whole-body mind, hearing sound with the whole-body mind, though one intimately understands, it isn’t like reflecting images in a mirror, it’s not like the water and the moon . . . Studying the Buddha way is studying oneself. Studying oneself is forgetting oneself . . . already one is the original human being.


* * * *

“mirrors”

3. Sonnets to Orpheus

Mirrors: never yet has anyone described knowing, what you are really like.
You, interstices of time
filled as it were with nothing but sieveholes.

You, squanderers still of the empty hall--,
when dusk comes on, wide as the woods . . .
And the luster goes like a sixteen-pointer
through your impenetrability.

Sometimes you are full of painting.
A few seem to have gone into you--,
others you sent shyly by.

But the loveliest will remain, until in yonder
to her withheld cheeks the clear
released Narcissus penetrates.


29. “As Eve, she’s beginnings”

See poem 2 and note for poem 2.

* * * *

“Eve stops speaking”

Dōgen’s teacher Nyojō describes what one should do as a beginner, first setting foot on the Way. (TB)
You should gouge out your eyes and see nothing at all—after that there will be nothing you don’t see; only then can it be called seeing . . .
You should block off your ears and hear nothing at all—after that there will be nothing you don’t hear; only then can it be called hearing . . .
You should ‘pull out’ your tongue, so that the world is silent—after that your ebullience will be interrupted; only then can it be called speaking . . .


See also notes for poems 18, “sea sings waves”; 21, “speaking, she thinks”; 25, “language rearranged”

* * * *

“she stops speaking”

The softest thing under heaven
    gallops triumphantly over
The hardest thing under heaven.

Nonbeing penetrates nonspace.

Hence,

I know the advantages of nonaction.

The doctrine without words,
    The advantage of nonaction— (6[43])


30. “Charon limps to the gate”

As the ferryman on the river Styx, Charon ferries the dead from shadowy border regions crowded by voices speaking desire in a thousand languages to the darkly silent depths of the underworld—but only for a fee. Few manage to board Charon’s boat who have not received a proper funeral that has provided for a coin clamped firmly between the teeth. One notable exception to this ‘rule’ of passage is Orpheus, who charmed his way aboard Charon’s craft with his clear singing made sweeter by the music of his lyre. (TB)

31. “Day arrives as blue-veined and cold”

Closest to the sky, blue breathes; nearer to the sea, blue feeds (see note for poem 4). To grow, to thrive, the earth requires blue. The Virgin Mary and the Christ often wear blue, and blue is also associated with sky gods such as the Egyptian Amun, the Sumerian Great Mother, and Zeus. One sky god, the Hindu, Indra or Vishnu, has a blue-skinned incarnation, Krishna, as great a believer in action as is the Buddha. When Arjuna asks him to
tell him, please, which is better, the yoga of action or renunciation, Krishna speaks quietly in reply. (TB) He says:

Renunciation and yoga
both lead to the ultimate good;
but of the two paths, Arjuna,
yoga [of action] is the more direct.


* * *

“El Greco”

Born on the island of Crete in 1541, Domenikos Theotokopoulos was the son of a tax-farmer and trader. To study painting, he moved first to Venice, then to Rome, finally to Spain in 1576, where he would live, known to many as El Greco, until his death in 1614. Painting with brilliant reds, greens, yellows, and blue, and stretching space and all that filled it, El Greco’s created religious works that reflected his unambiguous Catholic faith. (TB)

* * *

“St. Jerome” (C. 340-420 CE)

St. Jerome had a dream that changed the direction of his life, but there was no fallen angel in his dream. Jerome dreamed of Jesus who sternly expressed his disapproval of the Pagan writing Jerome so loved. Chastened by such dissatisfaction with his way of living, Jerome fled to the desert to do penance. There, surrounded by emptiness and deprived of green, Jerome devoted himself entirely to a concentrated study the scriptures, translating the Bible from Greek and Hebrew into Latin, a task which took him 30 years to complete. For Jerome, women were either strumpet, wife, or virgin, a view upheld by many practicing Christians for centuries, if not millennia. (TB)

* * *

“El Greco’s St. Jerome” (c. 1600-1614)

El Greco paints the 4th century saint as a cardinal, an office that did not exist in Jerome’s time, and thus asserts the hierarchical authority of the Vulgate version of the Bible, validates Jerome’s renunciation of the society of man, and ‘rewards’ him for his actions as a translator. In the painting, St. Jerome faces us, electric yet serious in his bright red robe. His hand rests on the Bible; his narrow face with sunken cheeks, his long white beard, and his shimmering red cape effectively hold enough light to keep the overwhelming black background at bay, but because the light and dark are so strongly contrasted, we are reminded of the struggle—and the turmoil of that struggle—produced by the hierarchy El Greco’s portrait privileges. El Greco painted two St. Jerome canvases, the best of which hangs at the Frick in New York City; the other, equally impressive, but without the explosive clarity of the first, hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. (TB)
Leonardo da Vinci also painted a painting of St. Jerome but his Jerome is beardless and cloaked in plain cloth that covers one shoulder only. Like El Greco's Jerome, Leonardo's painted saint is gaunt but his ribs are not wrapped in the luxury of red velvet. They are clearly visible above his thin arms, barely sketched in, barely part of his body. At his feet lies a lion, equally thin and serpentine with an open mouth but no teeth. Painted in hues of gold and yellow that spring away from a drab desert background of darker browns, Leonardo's *St. Jerome* (c. 1482-85) is suffused with the same light that floods the canvas, seamlessly linking background and foreground and offering the viewer a sense of unity that is absent from El Greco's startling portrait. Jerome's head is turned in such a way as to focus the viewer's eye on that area of the skull that Leonardo has marked in a later drawing (1489) as the *sensu communis*—the meeting place of all senses, the residence of the soul. (TB)

See also note for poem 34 “map of the mind”

* * * *

“Corot’s lake scenes”

Born and raised in Paris, Jean Baptiste Camille Corot (1786-1875) often traveled to Italy, England, Switzerland, and Holland to paint the varying natural light he found there, seeking always light that might illuminate the heart (and mind) of a landscape. Unlike El Greco, Corot used red only minimally, sometimes allowing only one red dot in a vast sea of green, as if he needed that red dot to anchor, or more simply to balance, the blues and greens he so favors. (TB)

Amoghasiddhi, a Buddhist god of action, is associated with green, as is Kuan Yin. (TB)

See also notes for poems 4 and 27.

33. “language of residence”

The millipede said to the snake: "I have all these legs that I move along on, but I can't seem to keep up with you who have no legs. How is that?"

The snake said: "It's just the heavenly mechanism moving me along—how can I change the way I am? What would I do with legs if I had them?"


* * * *

“language of residence”

... there are worlds of sentient beings in clouds, there are worlds of sentient beings in wind, there are worlds of sentient beings in fire, there are worlds of sentient beings in earth, there are worlds of sentient beings in phenomena, there are worlds of sentient beings in a
single staff... there are mountains concealed in jewels, there are mountains
concealed in marshes, there are mountains concealed in the sky, there are mountains
concealed in mountains. There is a study which conceals mountains in concealment.

See also notes for poem 34, “map of the mind”

34. “a white bear” “black bear”

Fascinated by bears, Leonardo sketched numerous finely drawn, small-scale studies of bears
and also created larger drypoint etchings that he later re-worked with pen and brown ink.
Perhaps, he was simply drawing the familiar creatures of his world—bears wandered in great
numbers in the mountains of Tuscany and Lombardy—but Leonardo has also left us
writings that suggest that he ascribed to the commonly held notion that the bear was a
symbol of ire. He copied in his notebook a short fable derivative of Pliny that identifies the
bear as such. (TB)


* * * *

“map of the mind”

On the border of a drawing of a skull, Leonardo da Vinci writes:

The soul seems to reside in the part of judgment, and the part of judgment appears
to reside in the place where all the sense meet; and this is called *senso commune,* and
[the soul] is not all-pervading throughout the body as many have thought, rather it is
entirely in one part. Because if it [the soul] were all-pervading and the same in every
part, there would have been no need to make the instruments of the senses follow
the same path to meet in a single spot."

Carefully examining human skulls sawed neatly in half to reveal both inside and outside,
Leonardo undertook meticulous studies of the skull, drawing both the smooth outside and
the fissured inside of the bone. He drew as a way to discover how bones support the skin
and also to reveal the residence of the *senso commune,* the living place of the soul. After years
of study, he thought he had indeed located that holy spot. On one drawing of a skull, he
marked this location with intersecting upright and diagonal lines. This then: the language of
residence, the geometry of hands. (TB)


See also poem 33, chapter XII, and the note for poem 33.

* * * *
“map of the mind”

In 1974, Michael Goodwin, editor of *City* magazine, asks Allen Ginsberg if he “sits down and polishes his poems until they get the perfect rhythm, perfect images . . .” Ginsberg answers: “You know, I try to sit down and polish my mind until it gets perfect.” (TB)

*Kant’s categorical imperative—“Act so that [the motive of the will] may be capable of becoming a universal law for all rational beings”—reminds philosophical folk of the west ‘to do unto others as you might want them to do unto you’; Buddhists remind one another quietly to refuse evil, to do what is good, and to polish the mind—this is the Buddha. (TB)*

36. “siren song”

The sirens of the war-torn world, both metaphorical and actual, are as captivating as the sweet siren songs of Calliope’s bird-women daughters who once lured sailors to their death with their haunting melodies. Post-modern siren songs, although more strident, are equally blinding. The sailors of the ancient world lolling helpless on the decks of their foundering ships, enchanted by the voices of the Sirens, until they starved to death. Only when Odysseus stuffs wax into his own and his sailors’ ears and thus passes safely by the sirens on their rock, does the enchantment end. The Sirens throw themselves into the sea in a fit of despair—and drown. It is still a mystery as to how the denizens of the endtimes will deal with siren songs, or how those who sing those songs will behave if thwarted in their mission of seduction and possession. (TB)

37. *solanum incompletum*

*NIGHTSHADE (end) Pópólo kei mai, pópólo.*

Shrubs armed with reddish prickles, scattered to abundant on stems. Leaves simple, alternate, ovate-elliptical in outline. Flowers perfect, with up to five orders of branching, leaf opposed pedicels; corolla white, broadly stellate. Berries maturing through yellowish orange to black. Occurring in dry to mesic forests.


38. “Misti”

a dormant, yet trembling, volcano near Arequipa, Peru, a high mountain city that for years served as the headquarters for the guerilla fighters of the *Sendero Luminoso,* “The Shining Path,” who struggled violently against successive repressive regimes. (TB)
Hungry ghosts are not yet ready for rebirth. Shaken by, and still clinging to, their lives on earth, they enter a parallel zone away from the breathing living earth, outside the womb of death. There, they wander about with distended bellies and out-stretched hands, desirous of conditions ‘enjoyed’ while living. When alive, they had opened wide their mouths and sucked in all that surrounded them, chewing rapidly and swallowing without tasting. After death, greed continues to plague the hungry ghosts, just as it propelled them through life, but they are no longer able to satisfy their overwhelming hunger. After death, the mouths of the hungry ghosts, cavernous in life and capable of swallowing lives, have shrunk to the smallest of openings through which little will pass. If the hungry ghosts are somehow able to eat even a tiny bit, that food bursts into flames in their bellies. Only the generosity of the living can free the hungry ghosts. (TB)

* * * *

“E. Pound”

Come my cantilations,
Let us dump our hatreds into one bunch and be done with them,
Hot sun, clear water, fresh wind,
Let me be free of pavements,
Let me be free of the printers.
Let come beautiful people
Wearing raw silk of good colour,
Let come the graceful speakers,
Let come the ready of wit,
Let come the gay of manner, the insolent and the exulting.
We speak of burnished lakes,
Of dry air, as clear as metal.


from: “Further Instructions”

Come, my songs, let us express our baser passions,
Let us express our envy of the man with a steady job and no worry about the future.
You are very idle, my songs.
I fear you will come to a bad end.
You stand about in streets,
You loiter at the corner and bus-stops,
You do next to nothing at all.

You do not even express our inner nobilities,
You will come to a very bad end.


* * * *

"J. Donne"

VII.
For the great soule which here amongst us now
Doth dwell, and moves that hand, and tongue, and brow,
Which, as the Moone, the sea, moves us; to heare
Whose story, with long patience you will long;
(For 'tis the crowne, and last strain of my song)
This soule to whom *Luther,* and *Mahomet* were
Prisons of flesh; this soule which did oft teare,
And mend the wracks of th'Empire, and late Rome,
And liv'd when every great change did come,
Had first in paradise, a low, but fatall room.


* * * *

"fleas Bite"

Marke but this flea, and marke in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is ;
It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled bee.


“our two bloods mingled be”

All things are subject to causes and conditions, none are independent . . . . All are born from causes and conditions, and because of this they have no intrinsic nature of their own. Because of having no intrinsic nature, they are ultimately empty. Not clinging to them because they are ultimately empty is called transcendent wisdom.


* * * *
“haloes surround Dante”

.... At noon on the spring equinox, Dante, still in the Earthly Paradise, sees Beatrice gazing into the sun, and he imitates her gaze. In doing so, he becomes aware of an extraordinary brightness, as though God had placed in the heavens a second sun, and feels himself “transhumanized” in preparation for his experience of Paradise....

The glory of the One Who moves all things
penetrates all the universe, reflecting
in one part more and in another less.

I have been in His brightest shining heaven
and seen such things that no man, once returned
from there, has wit or skill to tell about;

for when our intellect draws near its goal
and fathoms to the depths of its desire,
the memory is powerless to follow;


40. “Thursday”

(birth, life) day

hā: breath, life; to breathe, exhale, to breathe upon, as kava after praying and before prognosticating; spirit; four, fourth: Pō’ahā, Thursday

* * * *

“midnight” kāhuli ka lani, when the heavens turn

O ke kane huawai, Akua kēnā
O kālina a ka wai i hoʻoulu ai
O ka huli ho`okāwōwō honua
O paia’a i ke aua ke Manawa
O he’e au loloa ka pō
O piha, o pihapiha
O piha-u, o piha-a
O piha-e, o piha-o
O ke ko’o honua pa’a ka lani
O lewa ke au, ia Kumulipo ka pō
Pō nō.

--*Kumulipo.* 15. ll. 112-122.
A husband of gourd, and yet a god,
A tendril strengthened by water and grew
A being, produced by earth and spread,
Made deafening by the swiftness of Time
Of the Heʻe that lengthened through the night
That filled and kept on filling
Of filling, until, filled
To filling, 'tis full
And supported the earth, which held the heaven
On the wing of time, the night is for the Kumulipo,
'Tis night.

--Kumulipo. ll. 112-122. Trans, Liliʻuokalani.

The male gourd of water, that is the god
From whose flow the vines are made vigorous
The plant top sprouts from the earth made flourishing
To frame the forest bower in the flow of time,
The flow of time gliding through the long night
Filling, filling full
Filling, filling out
Filling, filling up
Until the earth is a brace holding firm the sky
When space lifts through time in the night of the Kumulipo
It is yet night.

--Kumulipo. ll. 112-122. Trans, Rubellite Johnson.

The man with the water gourd, he is a god
Water that causes the withered vine to flourish
Causes the plant top to develop freely
Multiplying in the passing time
The long night slips along
Fruitful, very fruitful
Spreading here, spreading there
Spreading this way, spreading that way
Propping up the earth, holding up the sky
The time passes, this night of the Kumulipo
Still it is night.

--Kumulipo. 15. ll. 112-122. Trans, Martha Beckwith.

See also note for poem 18.
HOLY THURSDAY

Is this a holy thing to see,
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine.
And their fields are bleak and bare.
And their ways are filled with thorns
It is eternal winter there.

For where-e'er the sun does shine,
And where the rain does fall:
Babe can never hunger there,
Nor poverty the mind appall.


The poem, from “Poems of Experience,” is penned on a pale blue ground with each stanza separated from the next by a twining vine. In the upper quarter of the page, a fully clothed woman stands, facing the reader, with her pale head turned to stare at the prone and apparently dead body of a small child, lying naked on the grass near a mountain lake. Below, resting in shrubbery that creeps up the right hand side of the page, is a seated woman, comforting two weeping children, and at the very bottom of the page, lies another naked child, flat on her back, arms out-stretched. (TB)

* * * *

“Friday”

the day after the day of birth (TB)

41. “Thoth”

A character from Egyptian mythology, Thoth has the head of a bird, and as poem 41 states, he was scribe to the gods, a measurer of time, and an inventor of numbers. Hence, he is the god of wisdom and magic. When serving Osirus, the god who presides over the realms of the dead, Thoth recorded the results of weighing hearts—and, yes, originally he was a moon. The Greeks identified him as Hermes, messenger to the gods. (TB)
42. "friends come and friends go. Mostly they just go."

Friends stay. (TB)

**hoa:** n. friend, companion. nvt. To tie, bind, secure

**hoaloha:** n. friend, *lit.* beloved companion

**hoapili:** close friend, personal friend

**pili:** to adhere, join, stick, touch, adjoin


See also poem 53 and the note for poem 53.

43. "Pisco sour"

Distilled from grapes grown south of Lima in the warm sun of coastal Peru not far from the Nazca drawings, great earthworks of birds and serpents scratched on the desert floor, Pisco is a brandy first produced in the Pisco province during the 16th century. A Pisco sour is 2oz. Pisco, 1oz. lemon juice, a bit of sugar, and ice. (TB)

* * * *

"Aphrodite" "this water nymph"

Aphrodite was not a water nymph, but one legend does suggest that she rose into the breathing world through the ocean foam near Cyprus. Others claim she was born as the daughter of Zeus and Dione, but everyone knows her as the queen of laughter, the mistress of grace, and the goddess of beauty. As the inventor of the Inyx, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, understood enigma as possession. As alluring as the bird-women Sirens, the inyx, a peculiar wheel with the brightly colored wryneck bird attached (half-machine/half-living being), linked the human mind to the circular motions of the heavens but fell short of defining such connection as 'freedom.' As it turned, the Inyx issued forth a call of possession. Finding it difficult to control her desires, Aphrodite had a bad habit of getting herself into one scrape after another. Notoriously unfaithful to her lover Hephaestus, the twisted son of Zeus, she bore many children as the result of her love affairs, including Eros (fathered either by Ares or Hermes), and at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis (who was a water nymph), when Eris, sister to Ares, rolled an apple inscribed *for the fairest* onto the floor before the gathered guests, Aphrodite was one of the three goddesses who greedily claimed sole possession of this 'apple of discord,' the other two being Athena, and Eris's mother, Hera. Later, at the Judgment of Paris, the apple was awarded to Aphrodite, who had promised Paris Helen. And so began the Trojan War. (TB)

As a bar dancer, ‘Aphrodite’ of the pussy Cat Lounge is attached to the mythological Aphrodite by name only. Responding visually and physically to her world, this Aphrodite has attempted to create a stage set for her dancing that might somewhat mirror Botticelli’s
Renaissance painting “The Birth of Venus.” Looking a bit like Milton’s later description of Eve, Botticelli’s Venus stands unadorned on a large clam shell with her long auburn curls winding from her head to lie gently on the wind and also twining, as her only garment, as vines across her skin, concealing nothing except her pubic hair. As short-stemmed pink roses blow through blue air, a fully-clothed maiden to her right moves to cloak this ‘new-born’ Venus with a cloth richly embroidered with small white flowers still attached to stem and ground. (TB)

Aphrodite. See also poems 3 and 67 as well as notes for poems 20, 27, and 58.

* * * *

“this water nymph”

Daughters or wives of the lesser gods and attendants to the higher gods, including Apollo, Hermes, and Dionysus, nymphs were eternally young. The most renowned of the water nymphs, the nereides, included Thetis, mother to Achilles, and Amphitrite, wife of Poseidon. A water nymph is also an aquatic plant, a water lily with large leaves and showy fragrant flowers that float on the water as sanctuary for insects and the occasional frog. (TB)

44. “gently moves his wings to perfume the night”

See also poems 7 and 76 as well as the note for poem 3.

45. “Drum Boogie”

“Drum Boogie” is one of Gene Krupa’s best known tunes and one that is featured in Howard Hawk’s 1941 comedy film Ball of Fire, starring Gary Cooper as an English professor researching slang, looking studiously for the odd invented phrase. While doing field research in the street, he encounters the sultry siren, Barbara Stanwyck AKA Sugarpuss O’Shea, a tough-as-nails gun moll looking for a place to hide. She finds her hide-out with Cooper and rapidly turns his life upside down—and inside out. (TB)

* * * *

“Hollow bones stained dark blue”

See also poem 135 and note for poem 26 “white exhaustion.”

46. “words, she thinks, are fruits”

In the Hawaiian language, words are fruits. (TB)

nā hua: fruits

hua: nvi. 1. Fruit, tuber, egg, produce, yield, ovum, seed, grain, offspring; to bear fruit; to bear a child. 2. n. round object. 3. n. result, effect; credit, as for a university course. 4. n. testicles. 5. a vulgar gesture. 6. nvi. Word, letter, figure, watchword, rallying cry, note in
music: Kāne ku i ke kala, kūalai ka hāua o ka waha. Kāne stand to forgive, forgive the words of the mouth. 7. (cap.) n. name of the thirteenth night of the lunar month. 8. n. name of a star


* * * *

“blood red rain”

ua koko

In Hawai‘i, during certain times of the year when the rain is close to the coast and the sun is low in the sky, you may be lucky enough to see the blood red rain streaking to the earth without staining sea or sands. (TB)

* * * *

“If words / are fruits where’s the flower”

.... when a flower blooms the world comes into being. A flower blooms in front, three by three, in back, three by three. Nirvana and life-death are flowers in the sky. Nirvana is ... the resting place of the Buddhas ... Life and death is the real human body. Though nirvana and life and death are these things, they are flowers in the sky.


See also poem 5 and the note for poem 22.

* * * *

“to touch the stone beneath her feet”

STONE

Go inside a stone.
That would be my way.
Let somebody else become the dove
Or gnash with a tiger’s tooth.
I am happy to be a stone.


* * * *
“She remembers mud, / rising from the womb of earth, rain as blood”

**uakoko:** n. 1. a low-lying rainbow 2. rain so heavy that it turns stream waters reddish-brown with the wash of the hillside.

*Lit.* blood rain; rain as blood (TB)


47. **“Dao Dua”**

Also known as the coconut monk, Dao Dua was a Buddhist monk who walked endless circles to protest the Vietnam War. On a small island, somewhat reminiscent of Kuan Yin’s floating island, he built two tall towers—one symbolizing Hanoi, the other Saigon. When he had finished building, when the towers scraped the sky, he began to walk, steadfastly and completely, hour after hour, day after day, winding first around one tower and then the next, linking both within the harmony of his circle. He did nothing else for months, for years, but walk these moving circles meant to hold as united the symbolic towers of Hanoi and Saigon.

After time passed, soldiers fleeing from the war joined him on his island, and they all walked together, single file, one behind the other in circles, endlessly moving from one tower to the other. (TB)

48. **“the center cannot hold”**

THE SECOND COMING

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

---William Butler Yeats, 1920


* * * *

tomorrow"

This is the only use of this word in this text . . . And the rent is due. (TB)

* * * *

49. “When she remembers the Bacchic dance
in rain, she holds her hands in flat defense”

Pour, Bacchus! the remembering wine;
Retrieve the loss of me and mine!
Vine for vine be antidote,
And the grape requite the lole!
Haste to cure the old despair;
Reason in Nature’s lotus drench’d—
The memory of ages quench’d—
Give them again to shine;
Let wine repair what this undid;
And where the infection slid,
A dazzling memory revive;
Refresh the faded tints,
Recut the aged prints,
And write my old adventures with the pen
Which on the first day drew,
Upon the tablets blue,
The dancing Pleiads and eternal men.

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1847.


* * * *

“she listens to circumference crash”

I saw no Way – The Heavens were stitched –
I felt the Columns close –
The Earth reversed her Hemispheres –
I touched the Universe –

And back it slid – and I alone –
A Speck upon a Ball –
Went out upon Circumference –
Beyond the Dip of Bell –

-- Emily Dickinson, 1863.


* * * *

“she listens to circumference crash”

When Yakusan asked Baso what was the living meaning of Zen, Baso replied:

_Eyebrows and eyes must be mountains and oceans, because mountains and oceans are eyebrows and eyes._


50. “say your prayers: in passing, on beaches”

**ON PRAYER**

You ask me how to pray to someone who is not.
All I know is that prayer constructs a velvet bridge
And walking it we are aloft, as a springboard,
Above landscapes the color of ripe gold
Transformed by a magic stopping of the sun.
That bridge leads to the shore of Reversal
Where everything is just the opposite and the word is
Unveils a meaning we hardly envisioned.
Notice: I say we; there, every one, separately,
Feels compassion for others tangled in the flesh
And knows there is no other shore
We will walk that aerial bridge all the same.

* * * *


* * * *

“refusing to dream maternal” _ab, Eve, ab, Eve, evoe_

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise,
Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man

I resist any thing better than my own diversity,
Breathe the air but leave plenty after me,
And am not stuck up, and am in my place.

-- Walt Whitman. Song of Myself. 16. 1-3; 20-23


51. “Heft of cathedral tunes”

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons –
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –
'Tis the Seal Despair –
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –
Shadows – hold their breath –
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death –

-- Emily Dickinson, 1862


53. “men / who come and go”

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.


See also poem 42 and the note for poem 42.
"What kind of world results if nothing stays?"

Although Baso’s statement all is the nature of things is truly an eighty or ninety percent statement, there are many points which Baso has not expressed. That is to say, he doesn’t say the natures of all things do not leave the natures of all things, he doesn’t say the natures of all things are all the natures of things. He doesn’t say all living beings do not leave living beings.


* * * *

“Eve’s not so easily revised”

“As Eve, she’s beginnings.” See poem 29.

54. “Some say the world”

FIRE AND ICE

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I’ve tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To know that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

-- Robert Frost,


* * * *

“she wants songs to reach the mother”

HEALING, PLAY IN TWO ACTS

ACT I.
Unlike as Life and Death they met.
The younger spake: Who are you, mother?
The older: A little, lone, old woman, gathering herbs. And you, daughter?
The younger: I gather flowers.
ACTII.
Less alike they meet again.
The younger spake: Where are your simples, mother?"
The older: what would you daughter?
The younger: Forgetfulness.
The older: Gather herbs.

-- Cora Buzzell Millay, mother of Edna St. Vincent Millay


55. “Savage Beauty”

**ASSAULT**

I had forgotten how the frogs must sound
After a year of silence, else I think
I should not so have ventured forth alone
At dusk upon this unfrequented road.

I am waylaid by Beauty. Who will walk
Between me and the crying of the frogs?
Oh, savage Beauty, suffer me to pass,
That am a timid woman, on her way
From one house to another!


See also notes for poem 54.

* * * *

“The heart is slow to learn/ what the swift mind beholds at every turn.”

xxix.

Pity me not because the light of day
At the close of day no longer walks the sky;
Pity me not for beauties passed away
From the field and thicket as the year goes by;
Pity me not the waning of the moon,
Nor that the ebbing tide goes out to sea,
Nor that a man’s desire is hushed so soon,
And you no longer look with love on me.
This I have known always: Love is no more
Than the wide blossom which the wind assails,
Than the great tide that treads the shifting shore,
Strewing fresh wreckage gathered in the gales:
Pity me that the heart is slow to learn
What the swift mind beholds at every turn.

--Edna St. Vincent Millay


* * * *

“Dao Dua”

Dao: the way

See also note for poem 47

56. “readmits the void”

See poems 6 & 76.

58. “ibis”

When the terrifying Typhon (who fathered with half-serpent half-woman Echidna a slew of monsters including Cerebus, the Chimera, the Sphinx and the Hydra) attacked Mount Olympus, the gods went out of their way to avoid Typhon’s multiple fire-breathing mouths. When they saw him coming, they abandoned old ways and discovered new. Hermes transformed himself to an ibis. Apollo took the shape of a crow. Aphrodite became a fish. (TB)

Ibis: See poem 41 and also notes for poems 41 and 70.
Crow: See poems 31, 88, 120, and 137.
Aphrodite: See poems 3, 67, 70, 121, 130.

* * * *

“sweet potatoes trapped in green serpent mounds”

He ʻula ka ʻai hoʻōla koke ka wi.
The sweet potato is a food that ends famine quickly.

A plant that matures rapidly, the ʻula, the sweet potato, ranked second only to *kalo*, or taro, as a staple food in Hawaiʻi prior to European contact. Although no one has definitively established how the sweet potato arrived in Hawaiʻi, it has been suggested that at least one variety of sweet potato, the *kumara*, was either carried to Polynesia by sea voyagers from South America or by Polynesian voyagers who reached South America and then returned to the Pacific with the plant aboard their double-hulled sailing canoes. The South American name for the sweet potato, *kumar*, is nearly identical to the name by which this particular
variety of sweet potato is known in the Society Islands: *kumara*. As botanist Isabella Aiona Abbott suggests, “It would be a remarkable linguistic coincidence if these two cultures had devised these names separately.” (TB)


* * * *

“green serpent mounds”

Ancient earth constructions resembling serpents can be found in both Scotland and the Americas. The largest known serpent mound, 1/4 mile long, lies covered with green grass in Adams County, Ohio. Studied by archeologists since the 19th century, the uncoiling Ohio serpent mound undulates across the landscape and lies with its mouth open, as if ready to swallow a large egg (See poem 12). (TB)

Most believe that the people of the Adena Culture (800 BCE-100 CE) constructed this particular serpent mound, but few can agree on its 'purpose.' Recently some have posited several solar and lunar alignments corresponding both to the coils and the mouth of the serpent. No cultural artifacts have been recovered from the interior of the mounds, which are constructed primarily of dense clay and rock. (TB)

Sweet potatoes will grow in any soil, except clay. (TB)

On first glance, one might easily mistake this drawing as an anatomical illustration, but this first map of Great Serpent Mound appeared in the 1848 publication *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippian Valley*, by E. G. Squier and E. H. Davis. (TB)

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/serp/hd_serp.htm
59. “Eve’s dream”

In Book V of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, after the Archangel Raphael tells Adam and Eve of the war in heaven, Eve reports to Adam that in a recent dream she saw a creature who seemed to be an angel but who acted most strangely. This luminous winged creature, she remarked, plucked and tasted (without consequence) the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and then suggested that if she were to do the same, she would become godlike. (TB)

And as I wondering lookt, beside it stood
One shap’d & wing’d like one of those from Heav’n
By us oft seen; his dewie locks distill’d
Ambrosia; on that Tree he also gaz’d;
And O fair Plant, said he, with fruit surcharg’d,
Deigns none to ease thy load and taste thy sweet,
Nor God, nor Man; is Knowledge so despis’d?
Or envie, or what reserve forbids to taste?
Forbid who will, none shall from me withhold
Longer thy offerd good, why else set here?
This said he pau’d not, but with ventrous Arme
He pluckt, he tasted; mee damp horror chil’d
At such bold words voucht with a deed so bold:
But he thus overjoy’d, O Fruit Divine,
Sweet of thy self, but much more sweet thus cropt,
Forbidd’n here, it seems, as onely fit
For Gods, yet able to make Gods of Men . . . (V. 54-70)

Eve’s dream frightens Adam, and he argues that the ‘lesser’ faculties of the soul must remain subservient to reason. Together, they pray and then go to work in the garden, pruning the extravagant growth of the mantling vines. Eventually, Raphael returns, and while Eve prances about as a naked serving woman, filling cups with sweet nectar, Raphael tells Adam first that mankind will become godlike—if they remain obedient—and then relates the cautionary tale of Satan and his fall. This time Eve dreams something else. (TB)


60. “Merope”

Originally one of the seven daughters of Atlas who at their death were placed in the heavens as the Pleiades, this Merope was once married to Sisyphus. Legend has it that as she was the only one of the Pleiades who had married a mortal, she abandoned her sisters in heaven and thus became the ‘lost’ Pleiade. Merope, apparently, didn’t marry well. Her husband, Sisyphus, was condemned by Zeus to spend eternity rolling an unusually large stone to the top of the hill only to have it roll down again. His punishment was designed to fit the crimes of his unforgivable insults to Pluto and of his abduction of Aegina, daughter of Asopus. Sisyphus, identified by Homer as the ‘craftiest of men,’ was perhaps not the most upright of men, but, by most accounts, he did not kidnap Aegina. Zeus did. Another Merope, a later Merope, was the reputed mother of Oedipus. (TB)
“divided from her world by blue”

See note for poem 4.

65. “Green mountains walking. Yes. But stone women / give birth again and again and again.”

A ‘foundational’ tenet of Zen Buddhism is “Emptiness within existence, existence within emptiness.” (TB)

Master Dōkai said, *The green mountains are forever walking; a stone woman bears a child by the night.*

*At the precise time before signs; as well as from the other side of the king of emptiness, in stepping forward and stepping back, walking never stops for a moment... Because the green mountains too learn walking, and the eastern mountains learn traveling on water; this learning is the learning of the mountains. This doesn't change the body and mind of the mountains—keeping the face of the mountains, they have learned on a winding road. . . .

As for a stone woman bearing a child by night, the time when a stone woman [the barren woman] bears a child is called night. Generally speaking, there are male stones and female stones, and there are stones neither male nor female; they patch the sky and patch the earth. These are the celestial stones and earth stones. Though this is a folk saying, it is rare for anyone to know it.


(Though this is a folk saying, it is rare for anyone to know it.)

Ka ʻiʻiʻi hānau o Kōloa

*The reproducing pebbles of Kōloa*

The pebbles of Kōloa were believed to reproduce—the smooth ones being males and the porous ones, females.


67. “dancers dressed as mermaids”

See poem 3 and the note for poem 58.

70. “nymph turned serpent”

What is the difference between a mermaid—a woman with the tail of a fish who swims in the sea—and a creature such as Milton's Sin or Echidna who is woman above and snake(s) below? Aphrodite, goddess of love, becomes a fish, but others more desirous of worldly
possessions seemingly transform to snakes, equally slippery but, like humans, far more comfortable on land. (TB)

Apollo uses an arrow to pierce the scaly flesh of the serpent, Python, who is water born, springing as he did from filthy flood waters. DEATH shakes his "dreadful dart" at his father Satan when that fallen angel flies near to DEATH's sister/mother, SIN, a "woman to the waste, and fair / but ended foul in many a scaly fouled / voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd / with mortal sting" (Paradise Lost II. 650-3). SIN stays put, guarding Heaven's gate, but like some hungry ghost, Echidna, another half-woman half-snake, roams about the earth as a misfit, giving birth to monsters. (TB)

Mermaids sing and breath water. (TB) See poems 3 and 67.

Athena, goddess of wisdom, Minerva of snakes, struggled with Aphrodite for Eris' apple, inscribed for the finest. Superlatives—the best, the greatest, the finest—perhaps define a desire that separates. (TB)

See also the note for poem 58.

* * * *

"meant for gutting fish"

See the note for poem 58.

72. "portrait of a painter with fur-trimmed sleeves"

In 1658, when Rembrandt was fifty-two, he painted what is perhaps his most magnificent self-portrait. Staring directly and calmly at the viewer, without apology or question, Rembrandt is pictured sitting with one shoulder in shade and the other thrust forward into a golden light, flickering across his face. Dressed in a robe of such a delicate fabric that it wrinkles into a thousand folds across his barrel chest, he has one arm wrapped with the rich brown fur of a voluminous cape and his head protected by a soft and very black beret as wide as his shoulders. In one hand, he holds in a hand a staff, delicately balanced between two fingers. (TB)

* * * *

"Vermeer's uneven heat locked / beneath flames on charts"

In Vermeer's c.1658 painting, Officer and Laughing Girl, a military man and a young woman sit before an open window beyond which is only light. The 'officer' sits in shadow with his back to the viewer and the bright-eyed woman, bathed in soft yellow glow from the window, sits facing both the viewer and the faceless man. The same light that flows pale across the woman's face turns to blue on the map above her head, the only view of the outside world, a reminder of the coasts and rivers, mountains and stones, that remain hidden by the veil of light that fills the spare geometry of the window. (TB)
As a symbol of obsession, Flaubert's exotic parrot is nearly as legendary in the post-modern world as Aphrodite's brightly colored Inyx was to the ancient world. (TB)

His name was Loulou. His body was green, the tips of his wings were pink, his poll blue, and his breast golden.

Unfortunately, he had a tiresome mania for biting his perch, and also used to pull his feathers out, scatter his droppings everywhere, and upset his bath water.


* * * *

"between Flaubert, Cezanne and flat turns"

Painter Paul Cezanne writes to Joachim Gasquet on 27 Sept 1897:
Art is a harmony parallel to nature.


On 20 February 1886, Ishikawa Takuboku was born in the Zen Temple where his father served as priest. After writing several remarkable books of distinctly modern poems, he died a scant 26 years later of tuberculosis, exacerbated by a poverty so desperate that he was forced to live through bitter cold winters in unheated spaces. A committed poet, Takuboku agitated for social change but also knew what it is to 'stop and see.' His poems reveal the sustenance the simplest of objects provide a poet and the life a poet (such as Takuboku) can offer to the world by revealing with humor and with unfiltered honesty, the fragile thread that links the objects of the world to both mind and heart. (TB)

In his Romanji Diary, Takuboku writes:

The qualifications of a poet are three: [s]he must be a human being, first, second, and last . . . having no more or less than the qualities any ordinary person possesses . . . . and a poem should be a strict report of events taking place in one's emotional life (for want of a better term) . . . this means it has to be fragmentary, it can't have unity or coherence.

. . .

accidentally
broke a teacup—
reminds me
how good it feels
to break things.


77. "Loyola with a difference"

Born in 1491, St. Ignatius of Loyola dedicated himself to God after first living an affected and rather extravagant youth. His conversion occurred in 1521 when a cannon ball tore through his left calf and broke his right shin. The recovery of this young soldier was brutal, to say the least. The leg was first re-broken and then re-set; afterwards a bit of bone still sticking from his flesh was sawn off, and his shortened leg stretched out by weights. While enduring the agony of such treatment, he read the lives of Jesus and of the saints; not his first choice by any means, but the only reading material available to him. He read these works as avidly as he might read his more favored tales of romance and victory. One night, after hours of reading, a luminous Mary appeared to him with Jesus, lying blue-skinned in her arms, and he felt such an overwhelming sweetness, that he pledged to reject all that had belonged to his past life. His conversion was complete. (TB)

CONTEMPLATION TO GAIN LOVE

(Second Point.)

The second, to look how God dwells in creatures, in the elements, giving them being, in the plants vegetating, in the animals feeling in them, in men giving them to understand: and so in me, giving me being, animating me, giving me sensation and making me to understand; likewise making a temple of me, being created to the likeness and image of His Divine Majesty; reflecting as much on myself in the way which is said in the first Point, or in another which I feel to be better. In the same manner will be done on each Point which follows.

from: Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola


See also poems 9, 28, 67, 125, 135 and the notes for poems 4 and 28.

79. "sur le pont d'Avignon"

When 12th century St. Benezet, then only a young shepherd, decided to build a bridge, he lifted from the earth an enormous boulder and set it in place as a foundational stone for the bridge. He declared that he had only been able to move such a gargantuan rock through the inspiration of his God. However, he had managed to lift the stone, with levers or with breath, the bridge he built caused everyone to dance. (TB)

Sur le pont d'Avignon,
L'on y danse, l'on y danse,
Sur le pont d'Avignon

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L'on y danse tout en rond.
Les beaux messieurs font comme ça
Et puis encore comme ça.
Sur le pont d'Avignon
L'on y danse tout en rond.

80. "blue electric light"

I SING the Body electric;
The armies of those I love engirth me, and I engirth them,
They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,
And discorrupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the Soul.

Was it doubted that those who corrupt their own bodies conceal themselves;
And if those who defile the living are as bad as they who defile the dead?
And if the body does not do as much as the Soul?
And if the body were not the Soul, what is the Soul?


See also the note for poem 4.

82. "incense burned to columned ash"

There is brand of incense that comes boxed as ¼-inch round sticks of solid material. When the incense burns, the ash, rather than falling to one side or another, remains standing as a solid but fragile column. As the red heat creeps to the base of the column, Chinese characters appear, one by one, on the standing ash until finally, when the flame dies, words are inscribed on the ash. (TB)

* * * * *

"Buddha"

Buddhism makes no promises but keeps them, Christianity makes a thousand promises but keeps none.


"Buddha"

Taking refuge in the dharma means that the experiences that go through your life, pain and pleasure alike, are also sacred teachings... discovered in human hearts, in

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buddha nature... The Buddhist canon is based on somebody's experience. It is all somebody's discourse. The one hundred and eight sutras are spoken words—communications from one human being to another... the truth never comes out of the sky; it has always come from the human condition.


84. "Hiroshige"

One of the six great Japanese master artists of the Ukiyo-e school, Hiroshige (1797-1858) created traditional multiple-plate woodblock prints that reveal both the strength of the land and the tender, necessary, and tenuous relationship of the human to the land. Hiroshige's prints revolutionized western painting of the 19th century, influencing the work of such painters as Monet and Van Gogh.(TB)

Hiroshige's "Ohashi Bridge in Rain" served as the subject for Vincent Van Gogh's 1887 oil painting "Bridge in Rain." While Hiroshige's print features a dark sky crossed by grey-streaked rain that slants across a pale yellow bridge spanning a still body of water stained pale blue, Van Gogh's painting is painted in deeper tones of forest greens and cobalt blue; his bright yellow-hatted travelers cross the active jade-colored waters over a golden bridge, alive with light, despite the rain. (TB)

85. "her tea cup—translucent bone chine / cracked by the last earthquake inside her"

See note for poem 74.

86. "snakes asleep and curled/ near milk cans stored in shade (no grass)"

See note for poem 58.

87. "if love's a weaver, she's a spider"

See note for poem 26.

88. "bedraggled crows"

When faced by Typhon with his hundred dragon heads and his serpent covered body, Apollo temporarily transformed himself into a crow, but in the world of stones and trees and heat and cold, although black lustrous crows may quoth a word or two, they are also scavengers with ravenous appetites who tear apart the bodies of the dead and glean the grain left in newly harvested fields. They are, however, intelligent scavengers, capable of making and using tools. According to science writer Sarah Blakeslee of the NY Times, "Crows not only make hooks and spears of small sticks to carry on foraging expeditions, some have learned to put walnuts on roads for cars to crack" (1 February 2005). Oracles of Apollo have been known to crack a nut or two. (TB)

See also note for poem 58.
“stones are stars”

See note for poem 2, p. 139.

89. “The Southern Cross”

The Southern Cross, a constellation of the southern hemisphere, was essential to those navigating the ocean to and from pre-contact Hawai‘i. Voyagers traveling to Hawai‘i always planned their voyages for a time of the year when these stars would be visible in the Hawaiian sky. Hānaia kalamalama, or the Southern Cross, can be found just above the horizon in February; it remains barely above the horizon as spring swells and rains encourage fecund growth. (TB)

Hānaia kalamalama: the Southern Cross, also Kaulu
kāulu: 1. Ledge, step, jog, as on a cliff. 2. (cap.) the Southern Cross, also Newe
neve: 1. plump; filled out, as a pregnant woman; moving, as a current;
billow, as a cloud. 2. (cap.) the Southern Cross.
malamā: to protect, to save, to maintain; protector, custodian; preservation


hānaia kalamalama: to protect the protector (TB)
malama: to move toward the light; the way of light (TB)

* * * *

“Leviathan”

Artificial man

For by art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMONWEALTH, or STATE (in Latin, CIVITAS), which is but an artificial man, though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended.


90. “from the mouth / of the cave”

Learning wisdom is space. Space is learning wisdom. ...The whole body is like a mouth hung in space; without question of east, west, south, or north winds, it equally tells others of wisdom. Drop after drop freezes. This is the speaking wisdom of the lineage of Buddhas and Zen adepts. It is whole body wisdom, whole other wisdom, whole self wisdom, whole east west south north wisdom.

91. "Delphic temple"

At Delphi, Apollo slew the monster Python, and Delphi is the site of one of the more famo
mous oracles of Apollo, but this temple that Eve sees is not at Delphi. It is Delphic; it is a
mirror. (TB)

See also poems 9, 28, 67, 125, 135 and the note for poems 4 and 28.

* * * *

"Mouths carved as wide nets"

See poems 11, 70, and 130 as well as the note for poem 89.

93. "Eros speaks a paragraph"

Eros, the god of love, is alternately identified as the son of Aphrodite and Ares, the god of
war, or as the son of Aphrodite and Hermes, messenger to the gods, weigher of hearts, who
was once a moon. (TB)

94. "graffiti everywhere"

Graffiti, unexpected and perhaps unwanted, nonetheless provides access to the multi-voiced
border and, at times, offers an unobstructed and sudden view of the whole. (TB)

Graffiti has much to do with language and people taking back the language because
the media has co-opted the language to such an extent that the people don’t have
their own language anymore. They just have media newspeak and that’s how they
relate to one another, and themselves. . . . Graffiti art is free for all to come and
view—no one can own it, it belongs to all of us.

– Eskae (AKA Ezra Li), Oakland.


95. "a silver point on gessoed ground / just barely blue"

Leonardo didn’t limit himself to painting bears, madonnas, and saints. He was equally
talented at designing—and marketing—military technology. In a letter of application to
Ludovico Sforza “Il Moro,” he writes: “I have methods for destroying any stronghold or
fortress, even if it were founded on rock.” In 1483, he prepared a small (8 3/16 ” x 11 1/4”) paper on one side with a blued gesso while leaving the verso raw. On the naked side of the paper, now yellowed with age, he sketched in brown ink a collection of gun barrels, gun
mounts, mortars, and a six-barrel ignition device. On the prepared side of the sheet,
Leonardo first etched with silver point two separate sketches—one of two towers exploding
and the other of a bird’s eye view of a fortified town that is also being blown to bits—and
then, re-worked the etching with a soft brown ink to give delicate form to precisely drawn destruction. (TB)


97. “Life’s not dialectics” “Gold impossibility”

But what help from these fineries or pedantries? What help from thought? Life is not dialectics. We, I think, in these times, have had lessons enough of the futility of criticism. Our young people have thought and written much on labor and reform, and for all that they have written, neither the world nor themselves have got on a step. Intellectual tasting of life will not supersede muscular activity

A man is a golden impossibility. The line he must walk is a hair’s breadth. The wise through excess of wisdom is made a fool.


98. “ribbon wrapped bombs”

In 1938, surrealist André Breton described the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo as “adorned like a fairy-tale princess, with magic spells at her fingertips” and her work as art that is “more exclusively feminine, in the sense that, in order to be as seductive as possible it is only too willing to play alternately at being absolutely pure and absolutely pernicious. The art of Frida Kahlo,” he concludes, “is a ribbon around a bomb.”


In a 1934 lecture “What is Surrealism?” presented at a public meeting organized by the Belgian surrealists, Breton also suggests that:

_The liberation of the mind_, demands as primary condition, in the opinion of the surrealists, the express aim of surrealism, _the liberation of man_, which implies that we must struggle with our fetters with all the energy of despair; that today more than ever before the surrealists entirely rely for the bringing about of the liberation of man upon the proletarian Revolution.

Breton also quotes Louis Aragon as stating in _Une Vague de Réves_ (1924):

It should be understood that the real is a relation like any other; the essence of things is by no means linked to their reality, there are other relations besides reality, which the mind is capable of grasping and which also are primary, like chance, illusion, the fantastic, the dream. These various groups are united and brought into harmony in one single order, surreality. . . This surreality—a relation in which all notions are merged together—is the common horizon of religions, magic, poetry, intoxications,
and of all life that is lowly—that trembling honeysuckle you deem sufficient to populate the sky with for us.


101. “Phoenix”

In the Garden of Paradise, beneath the Tree of Knowledge, bloomed a rose bush. Here, in the first rose, a bird was born. His flight was like the flashing of light, his plumage was beauteous, and his song ravishing. But when Eve plucked the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, when she and Adam were driven from Paradise, there fell from the flaming sword of the cherub a spark into the nest of the bird, which blazed up forthwith. The bird perished in the flames; but from the red egg in the nest there fluttered aloft a new one—the one solitary Phoenix bird. The fable tells that he dwells in Arabia, and that every hundred years, he burns himself to death in his nest; but each time a new Phoenix, the only one in the world, rises up from the red egg. The bird flutters round us, swift as light, beauteous in color, charming in song. . . . In Paradise, when thou wert born in the first rose, beneath the Tree of Knowledge, thou receivedst a kiss, and thy right name was given thee—thine name, Poetry.


102. “God is Dead”

In 1882, when Nietzsche declares God dead in his Gay Science, he has that statement burst forth from the mouth of a madman in a crowded marketplace who, on a brightly lit morning, rushes about with a glowing lantern in hand, screaming, “I seek God! I seek God! . . . We have killed him, you and I! . . . Do we not hear the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction? - for even Gods putrify! God is dead!” When none in the crowd pay him any mind, other than raising an amused eyebrow or offering a dry ironic question, the madman throws his lantern to the ground where it breaks into pieces and extinguishes the flame. He mutters in a voice well above a whisper: (TB)

I come too early. I am not yet at the right time. This prodigious event is still on its way, and is traveling - it has not yet reached men's ears. Lightning and thunder need time, the light of the stars needs time, deeds need time, even after they are done, to be seen and heard.
He goes then into churches, "the tombs and monuments of god," to say as many prayers for the dead as he can before being heaved once again to the street. (TB)


103. "The Silent Clowns"

A clown is a poet in action.


Walter Kerr's informative The Silent Clowns, published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1979, offers a history and discussion of the clowns, the poets, of the silent film era: Charlie Chaplin, Harry Langdon, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, etc. (TB)

* * * *

"kin with ken and kind with kind confound disorder, horror, fear, and mutiny"

Shakespeare. Richard II. IV. i.

Bishop of Carlisle: And in this seat of peace tumultuous wars
    Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound;
    Disorder, horror, fear and mutiny
    Shall here inhabit, and this land be call'd
    The field of Golgotha and dead men's skulls.
    O, if you raise this house against this house,
    It will the woefullest division prove
    That ever fell upon this cursed earth.
    Prevent it, resist it, let it not be so,
    Lest child, child's children, cry against you woe!

105. "landscape's changed"

See the note for poem 21 speaking she thinks/2

106. "Victory of Samothrace"

Discovered on the island of Samothrace in 1863, this headless marble statue of winged victory has her wing arms thrust back and one footless leg, draped in clinging fabric, thrust forward. She stands now in the Louvre. (TB)

108. "tomb architecture"

See the note for poem 102.
“she puts one ear against the earth”

See poem 5.

* * * *

“no maps marked except as parallax”

**Parallax:** Astron. The apparent difference in the position of a heavenly body with reference to some point on the surface of the earth and some other point, as the center of the earth (geocentric parallax) or on the sun (heliocentric parallax); the parallax of an object may be used in determining distance from the observer.

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110. “the black monk” “Chekhov’s Kovrin”

In Chekhov’s 1894 short story, “The Black Monk,” Kovrin is a philosophy student on the edge of a nervous breakdown. His doctor orders him to the country to rest. While walking about under fruiting trees, Kovrin meets a young woman with whom he falls madly in love. He tells her the story of the “black monk” who lived for decades in isolation in the desert but whose image, hovering above dry sands as a mirage, has been appearing to desert wanderers for centuries. As Kovrin is convinced that the back monk will soon return to the earth in the flesh, he is not at all surprised when the black monk shows up in his garden. They have long secret conversations, and Kovrin soon redisCOVERs his creative heart. Once again, he is working, scribbling all night and reading all day; he appears cured. He and the young woman are soon married, but after the two move back to the city, Kovrin is once again discovered in feverish conversation with the black monk, whom, of course, only he sees. As a result of these peculiar but definitely useful dialogues with the black monk, Kovrin is sent away for a second time. After a perhaps more rigorous ‘rest’ cure, Kovrin no longer talks with the black monk, but this ‘cure’ is a more of a disaster than a success. Deprived of his conversations with his muse, Kovrin loses all will to work, sickens, and finally dies. The monk re-appears only when Kovrin is on his deathbed. (TB)

111. "The Misfits"

Starring in John Huston's 1961 film as a young divorcee with a deep appreciation for the value of life, especially for the lives of the eccentric and the wild, Marilyn Monroe committed suicide soon after filming The Misfits. (TB)

113. “the mirror says”

PALM OF THE HAND

Palm of the hand. Sole that walks now only on feeling. It turns over, becomes a mirror, shows the sky roads, which themselves are walking. It has learned to walk on water, when it dips down, moves on springs, causes all roads to fork. Comes forward into other palms, those like itself turn into a countryside. Through them it travels and arrives, fills them with having arrived.

---Rilke, October 1924


See also poems 9, 28, 67, 125, and 135 as well as the notes for poems 4 and 28.

114. "(a black freighter)"

In The Threepenny Opera (1928 Bertolt Brecht/ Kurt Weil), 'Pirate' Jenny works as a maid, scrubbing floors and making beds. As she works, Jenny gazes out to sea, and imagines herself as the queen of all pirates, musing about what will happen to those who have treated her wrongly when "the ship, the black freighter" pulls into port and she, Pirate Jenny, is identified as the Queen of the pirates, the one who decides who will live and who will die. (TB)

You people can watch while I'm scrubbing these floors
And I'm scrubbin' the floors while you're gawking
Maybe once ya tip me and it makes ya feel swell
In this crummy Southern town
In this crummy old hotel
But you'll never guess to who you're talkin'.
No. You couldn't ever guess to who you're talkin'.
Then one night there's a scream in the night
And you'll wonder who could that have been
And you see me kinda grinnin' while I'm scrubbin'
And you say, "What's she got to grin?"
I'll tell you.

There's a ship
The Black Freighter
with a skull on its masthead
will be coming in

Popular version as sung by Nina Simone. Trans, Mark Blitzstein.

116. “a lotus root digs deep”
See note for poem 27, Kuan Yin.

*   *   *   *

“history gives way to clay”
See note for poem 58.

*   *   *   *

“wine dark sea” Homer
If rain makes rivers run as blood, what then makes seas as dark as wine? (TB)

   Yea, and if some god shall wreck me in the wine-dark deep,
   even so I will endure, with a heart within me patient of
   affliction. For already have I suffered full much, and much
   have I toiled in perils of waves and war; let this be added
   to the tale of those.

Available online November 2004: http://www.gutenberg.org

See also poems 29 and 118, voyages begin like this

118. “sea of Ur”

Ur, an Ancient Sumerian city that valued the power of the moon, contributed much to the ancient world—writing, metal, art, and laughter. Located in what is now Southern Iraq, what was once Ur is currently occupied by American troops who control the nearby airbase and decide who will get water and when. When the combat troops first arrived in the region, a
70-ft high ruin of a Sumerian pyramid built originally for the worship of the moon god Nanna still stood on the desert floor, but whether that pyramid still stands is anybody's guess. Founded around 4000 BCE, Ur had become a thriving metropolis, a cultural mecca, by 2800 BCE. In Genesis, it is recorded that Abraham set out from Ur on his trek to Canaan in approximately 1900 BCE, two centuries after the pyramid of Nanna was built. (TB)

And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. Genesis 11. 31

Later, at the age of ninety, near death yet pregnant with life, Abraham's wife Sarah gives birth to Isaac, whose name means laughter. "God has made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me (Genesis 21.6)," Sarah declares. (TB)

120. "Vincent's crows"

Painted in the last year of his life, Van Gogh's 1890 painting "Wheatfield with Crows" is a stunning portrait not only of loneliness, as so often suggested, but also of an acute consciousness of landscape as mind and that the mind of this landscape, like perhaps that of the artist, is conscious of impermanence, but not darkly so. The brilliant wheat field checked with red reaches upwards towards an active and deep blue sky. The yellow of the wheat is opened by a rough road of green that ends abruptly midway through the field. A flock of black crows, wings outstretched, each an ending and a beginning, fly to the far horizon and the dark clouds above. (TB)

See also note for poem 4 and for poem 88.

128. "Your face would put out Jesus"

Christopher Marlowe begins his most well-known lyric with "Come live with me and be my love," and in 1863, Emily Dickinson trims the line by one foot and begins:

I cannot live with you –
It would be Life –
And Life is over there –
Behind the shelf.

.... She goes on to say by mid poem:

And I – Could I stand by
And see You – freeze –
Without my Right of Frost –
Death's privilege?

Nor could I rise – with You –
Because Your Face
Would put out Jesus’ –
That New Grace

.... She concludes:

So we must meet apart –
You there – I – here –
With just the Door ajar –
That Oceans are – and Prayer –
And that White Sustenance –
Despair


132. "mountains walking, stone women giving birth"

See the note for poem 65.

133. "Blake’s Angels"

William Blake favors the human realm, even with all its misery. (TB)

THE DIVINE IMAGE

To Mercy Pity Peace and Love.
All pray in their distress:
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy Pity Peace and Love
Is God our father dear:
And Mercy Pity peace and Love
Is Man his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart
Pity, a human face:
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace the human dress.

Then every man in every clime,
That prays to his distress,
Prays to the human form divine
Love Mercy Pity Peace.

This poem, from “Songs of Innocence,” is framed by a flash of flame that curves through and around the poem, separating the first three verses from the last two. This robust flame is twined by leafing vines and is strong enough to support four figures, two above and two
below. Of the four figure, two are clothed and two are not. Those that are nude appear to be male. A woman reclines on the green ground near the root of the flame. (TB)


135. "she piles [flesh and silk] in pyramids"

See also poem 6.

137. "Van Gogh's yellow field"

See also poem 120 and the note for poem 120.