

# POEMS

(1960-1985)



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by  
John B. Ladley

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## INTRODUCTION

I met John in the early 1970s, when he was a Reference Librarian at Bowdoin College. Most of these poems (we both think!) were written during his years in Maine (beginning in 1965), and many show the influence of the time he spent on Matinicus Island, one of the more remote and magical islands on the coast. We shared many friends, and I am almost certain one of them is responsible for the fact that the phrase “whore’s egg” (referring to sea urchins) has only been used in American poetry by the two of us. If this is not the case, I do not want to be disabused of my opinion.

He gave me these poems in the late 1980s, and I am happy to have the chance to pay him back by including them here. I have not changed the order (I simply numbered them in the order they appeared in the typescript packet). Nor have I changed anything other than what I believe were typos. I am sure I have made some errors—falling prey to the principle of lectio difficilior, that is, choosing a simple reading where John himself indulged in a more complex one.

John has been one of the most influential people in my life. And I look forward to having a chance to review any trace of that friendship in these pages.

JAD



1.

IN THE SPRING SEA PASTURE I

He placed himself in the blooming field  
 And moving toward her, offering self-made roses,  
 Felt his face come apart in shreds;  
 In the brilliant reds spelled out how  
 Sufficient to her were her flowered skeleton  
 Her lids of lotus and her meadowsweet toes.

Masks beautiful of the loved, not to be seen  
 Through; despairing of solidity  
 The thorns she thrust through his taught  
 Eye, then an eye withered in non-use  
 No use to see the loved sees everything  
 Nothing; as touching his hand to his face  
 The possibility is of its  
 Absence. He was subjoined where she had ceased.

broken wings of birds  
 his hands were in wind  
 arms flapped remembered  
 seemed only inches  
 long no gesture no  
 stone could aim to rend  
 deft the capsuling

Feeling petals enter a placid shrunken  
 stomach, isolations of Blodeuwedd  
 Achieve a beauty of perfection.

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2.

CONFRONTATIONS I

Things fall.

Small girls splinter.

Love senseless palls

Antic:

    The fetid beings human

    Father you were all I see:

    Turning round trees in courtyards

    Of old houses grey timbered

    In gas light through iron gates

    Clanking our links and our gyves;

    Perusing endlessly one

    The other's self panderings,

    Through streets blooded and boned to

    Apples fallen from the trees

    Venice risen from the seas;

To a peach bloom wine cup

At the wrought iron fringe

Of other confronta

tions, then, on those same streets,

    Soul, bone intricate,

    And the loved too,

    A fragility.

3.

Where will she rest, the swan, brooding her brood  
On winded waters among the silver  
Wood of the dead; and above the sky is  
Changing in still branches where children of sun spark  
Pavement and illusioned water's stillness,  
Winter's play pools, sky, branch, and shadow child  
Fill of silver aspect an eye.  
Burst of birds over cold and vapid suns.

4.

What the morning  
With gesture found  
Invokes from blood  
And the sea locked

In curved time's once  
Possibilities  
Absences  
Curves now where

Sun had lingered  
Rock under  
In the wood rot

To lust bright  
As light lingering  
On this wind's tight  
Spray flower.

## 5.

Out of Penwith's coombes came  
 Warriors dead queens gathered  
 Down from Amalveor Downs  
 Out of the tall hedgerow trees moulded by an old wind  
 By walled stone and life lush varied green in October  
 Rock mysteries at summits  
 Clouds of blackbirds flocked up by the wind and the  
 duskiness  
 Through rhododendron tunneled  
 Groves across summits  
 Dread, arcana, old sorrow

In the night it rained and at morning over the town  
 The sea bird's cry was late and then onl a single  
 Utterance: where people feed the gulls is it love gently  
 Of participation in the vices of the sea; having fled –  
 Of the half-annihilated being – here gently  
 Lightness of flowers in windows  
 In dips of yards and walls  
 Profusions in November  
 Cats tranquil on small walls like idols  
 By an hour and beyond the next  
 Civilized grotesque bulls, chow bears  
 Clotted cream Spanish tomatoes pippins  
 Spiced rolls butter cheese and teas, stone –  
 Sea determined stone – and the sea – reflection of wind,  
 Unbidden whore's eggs, black whales under surfaces.

There it is beyond my window and here  
 With my rage  
 Grappling just there below skin almost skin

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Nashed hail, foam streamed over the roof slate  
Howled dead moan of the wind through night  
Behind the house unseen the sky is patched  
Blue winter's storm water deaths  
Harsh cry on the shore of refracted  
Guilt, self rage in old thought,  
Twilight winter and sea roar  
Down by the low tide waves at Porthmeor Beach  
In the powdered foam and the wind leaned against  
Attempt in the empty  
What could I ever have touched  
And I swam in the brilliant corundum like ice.

After anger and the contorts of the quiet of guilt  
And again anger comes candor.  
Over the top of a crooked house I watch  
The sea all now filtered blue in storm dusk  
Mottled blue-grey, white-grey  
Sky framed in the window of a small orange room.

6.

In the sacred weird  
Where bleak where  
The wind sings,  
The surf sifts shadows  
As sky turns:  
Stone frantic withers:

Where rock swirled sea, so  
Tender seedam, standing  
Spear yellow fields, swirl  
The blows of softness  
On grass

Transistings

Protean  
Variate  
The weird keys  
On the shore  
Of the blood  
Like sea  
Or seedam  
Or eye.

7.

Moving in  
This transience  
Of perceiving  
Eye,

I, rock, and  
Bitter stone,  
Wings and wings,  
The sea stormed.

Aye stands stone the wall  
Where mellows the fern,  
Slate bleak  
Brittle grey-saffroned  
Crooks bends  
So ancient endurance.

The eye then  
And lichen rust  
And the felt sharp pierce  
Of sound  
Wind's wing  
And rock.

8.

DELPHI/DELOS

I.

To oracular fields under a silent sail  
 Like Odysseus, like harsher, harsher dreaming.  
 We lingered by crystal and pitch – the sea – this edge  
 Of our most ancient annihilations; looked slowly:  
 Our eyes were pained by the light, entering somewhat  
 Beyond dark pillars, loins hard with sensates into  
 Those heights, our calves, these thighs, and powerful supple  
 feet.

Blows of rain, days of Hecate and of Demeter's  
 Mourning: because the sun just touched, the wind comes  
 And a magpie mantic like all things delighting  
 In the grey bright fall  
 From the light, the blue  
 From the streaming white  
 To sounding pine wood,  
 Sacred silver green, quicked green:  
 Seaward the white blossoms puffed.

Time curved fallen  
 Tomb and up there tomb  
 Harsh truth without sign  
 It would seem  
 As a quest of Oedipus  
 The quanta to obliterate.

II.

Where the awkward steps of the tragic dead  
Whirl like the whorl of the octopus rose:  
Crests on in the white moving, fishermen spare  
Their boats, feet bared in the clear green, and calves,  
Scarlet their limbs. Bird black, white dove, rock tit  
Cry over the tower. Women in black  
Gather round the distaff spinning wool  
Gather round the well beating cloth. A snorting  
Sow hanging dugs protests along the wharf  
Poked, spouting dung. Blood runs in the ruts. Twisted  
Trees' bare silver. Wind whip of soft snow. Out the sea.

Old man with his burro of greens. Du café,  
Ouzo, raw limpets. Young men limber  
On boats: tension of the bowstring in comrades  
Moving in the beautiful sinews –  
Tendons silent like dance – a stern shattering mime  
By white cubicled, capturing the sun, walls lone  
In red light, blue light. To Naxos. To Paros. Round  
The sacred cove. Dead precincts. The collapsed torso  
Colossus. Bearing austere cups, humanity  
Formed hard at the curving of Apollo's smile.

9.

Then I will be here softly be,  
As from the sea in seasons sea,  
Where Ceres' grieving dusks were torn  
In thundered light white over Tinos –  
    Blown to blue of silent morn –  
Nine circling latest doves of Venus  
    By the many seasoned sea  
Sing me to be here softly be

10.

1963

The unhaunted shores are tarnished now in strange wars  
(Of if haunted, gently haunted)  
Copper-gangrened are the once pure things  
Of the north where the winds begin: shattering skies,  
March ragged among the oaks, rippled lattices  
Of powerful, caught, like, self above the sea fresh  
Twist above the May elms and the still chill streets.

Tilted to yards lumbered off,  
Are in neighbors' eyes and pits  
The well plumbed structures skewered,  
Barbequed, brightly plumbed,  
Askew. Far gone in inebriate  
Summer's sun, as if  
Consumed without consummation,  
He twisted, adjusted a butt  
Somewhat  
Discovering a slim ambition.

Subtle purveyors of madness are houses  
Round arbors, August green; the crazed women,  
Shrieking among the trees at the fingertips  
Of infants, walk, the gentle, no halt,  
In a nothingness of time, as if moving.  
As they pass and depart, they search – their eyes –  
“You know. You know. Tarnished now in strange wars,  
Copper-gangrened are the pure things ...”

11.

Then is rain, red buds.  
Now let us die. Antic  
To be walking over grass.

For they have died who they are,  
Those like emanations  
Of eternity.

And Odysseus  
Too lived, there on isles of  
Immortality, and wept.

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12.

The bees

Strum

An air of dying

On the air of so

Specific

A spring

13.

## SAMUEL

A passing train has stirred the doves  
 To this inexorable circling of white  
 Against autumn's early dusk; visioning  
 Thus the requisite, even without surcease.

Sky madding high, the trees here vapid  
 Yet fleered in some lace sheer stir  
 In the green and tossed blue clear late  
 Of the year; so without surcease.

Winter of white winds, white trees and seas be  
 Only eternity in. We have walked  
 This wintered sea by an altered time;  
 Like a sea, is this child, in a strange time  
 That should not be strange – lost in a winter's  
 Interstice – at the latter falling  
 Of the leaves: and the last falling  
 Of the leaves?  
 A black bird wing pins the sky; there? soon will be  
 The garden smoke of obscuring bloom  
 As when Ko-Jin crossed the river Kiang.

Then, through a sifting of time, this quietus  
 Autumnly, like the branches, is bared  
 In the dead season to itself. Without  
 Surcease. The sea has broken in upon us  
 Sharp in the north; the whiplash across the sand,  
 Silent; yet not in silence  
 Go the passings in the surges  
 Of the scabrous sea. Straight a gull flies  
 In a line that holds in place the spray.

14.

Spring is always forgotten, every year  
A revelation: as sounds of our pulse  
Amplify the sounds in the surf; they become  
Indistinguishable. This sight returned  
In the mirror, again unknown  
But harshly to be proven.  
Today the sun bursts along the street:  
Beech blossoms and maple; children are crying:  
“You are bad. You’ve been bad all morning.”  
Wandering out, here, now, grown children heard:  
“He will work tomorrow, but where  
Will he sleep and then what is to be done?”  
“You are mad. You’ve been mad five seasons.”  
People are out, clearing leaves from their  
Anchor-link fences, finding grass plots  
Sprouting like new flowers where no foot  
No thought has been for five months.

15.

There where dark tugs through dark  
Underside where orificed beauty  
Lies or fronted in spadix divining  
Music strung on hidden harps,  
Avoided sometimes risked destruction where  
Witches met Orpheus  
Ever leading with his lyre  
Psychopomp through Dis through risks of  
Salvation, may be, to be seen too clearly  
To be hurled whirling with Eurydice back where  
Dark tugs through dark under  
Side where nihilation lies.

16.

CONTINUITY

In a continuity  
Of snowfall  
Spirit tends  
Extends  
Finds medium  
For stance  
Where it moves

Round out  
This house  
With flakes  
Of later  
Winter  
Easily  
beginnings  
Come at hearth  
At closure

So will white  
Turned water  
Drop from bark

Rays broken  
Of the sun

Purple  
Red thrown there  
To spring green

17.

## WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF OFFENSE?

What a terribleness there  
 Through the trees where there is light  
 But dark bordered, the trees themselves,  
 In this time of cold that bone  
 Touches: I reach for the flight broad  
 Moving like the hawk expanding  
 What there is of height (then of ear  
 With a sound like a tropic's cry)  
 As does the jade fly in black wing  
 Filling sky: green like the grass, dull  
 In air, brightest in reflections,  
 Drifting in summer's curves detached  
 From horizons: a stream moving  
 Inward, outward, as does some song  
 A sibilating psalm, phasing  
 Like the moon, neither touching nor  
 Binding itself to itself, where  
 Drives drifting desire for what  
 Is not provided, but itself  
 Providing – now in this time of offense –  
 A fire.

As, in the bluejay's cry plaintful  
 In the spring snow with the black starlings turned  
 In a flock, six in the still barren tree,  
 Now dominant though restive in the white  
 Wet turned foul (the dread spring where dark  
 Trees are bleak though stirring unnoticed,  
 Flushed and golden), a winter bird sounds  
 And there's no song yet; I seem silent  
 Wavering where the bluejay lacks price,  
 Voice hidden in deceiving sound.

DEADMAN'S POINT, MERE POINT, GUN POINT

The land here reminds me of that shaggy and eloquent head:  
These tentacles stretched unwilling into grey,  
Trapped there beyond epithet, elegance:  
Oak not invulnerable twists. There in  
The sun is the sound of snow fall: new print  
Made with the movement of moisture drop, toe,  
Tide-line, or eye. My eye lingers where time  
Holds the branch crossing light: we cross step  
With the incomprehensible, dare movement.  
At times there is left one print and a blast  
Sounding in our airy spirit, airy  
Words working the inspirited:  
And I do not understand how love holds;  
I do not hold what there in the nothingness of it is held.

19.

Leaves turn, fall, leaving  
Haze, in light, unseen, turned lake  
Green screen to smoked silk.

The grey birds fall. Ice-  
Cicles jam sight. I  
Cannot make order of this hall.  
Christ will not come this night

Such hope gestating, refusing  
A poor place, thrice the allotted  
Time, next year in the world's  
Too swollen belly crushed  
May come, though still-born, bursting  
(From press to pain to an end)  
The fabric of hall, of sight.  
other and Child,  
How can we bear another year?

21.

THROUGH PORTLAND TO THE PROMENADE

Silence then silent in this sun.  
 If I went further north I would become  
 An Inuit in the right time.

The park is cool in the void under trees.  
 I remember love and I grieve.  
 The Revere bell has two mellow tones,

Sounding. “Where  
 Are you going? By the short cut? It’s right  
 There. I’ll show you.” – voice small in yellow weeds,  
 Sand. In sun

Move following the first tiger swallow  
 Tails, a flock:  
 Rose, cobblestone articulations of

A stray feather; to old follies, vista  
 And oak, villas: a Bronze Age of survivals,  
 And periods’ endings numbered.

22.

How does she fit between these bricks? House, stunned  
Oeil-de-boeuf in its mask, caterwauls drunk,  
For coaches cries, up streets that tangle, spread  
Unraveling to esplanade, opening to eye  
Horse black estuaries, pale wharf walls  
Fissured as a face with a million cracks:  
The woman bowlegged, shuffling round uncleared  
Snowpiles out beyond grey gutter lines where  
Brick sidewalks flail for survival, would whirl  
And does – face, a bastion tough – collapsing.

Survival clings between these bricks that hold –  
Or fall – the bone together: this Louvre itself  
Topped off to filigree and spire entangling  
Moon, pale blue squares, pale grey, pale tree core. She  
Seeps, established root, to deep crevasses.

23.

DREAM IN THE WELL

Kill the shark  
In the dark  
See the rat  
Eat the bat  
And the squirrel  
Climb the whirl  
Of wind.

To the bend  
Now quick  
From your bed  
Be slick

And flee the well  
Hit the bell  
Find the dime  
When you climb  
Up  
Out  
Fly  
About  
The bucket  
Now chuck it  
Your out.

24.

In alien place, an alien spot  
Of the self struck  
Where the dead leaf falls once.

25.

## THE OLD WOMAN

Among effulgent trees and sunsets  
 She brings a flower from the spring  
 Waywardly  
 Growing flowers of care; in these others  
 Flowers discovers where are only  
 Rose-like commemorations  
 Of loves found in a darkening  
 In a now some small ground  
 Claimed and breaking  
 Among effulgent trees and sunsets.

This green  
 Seeds  
 A bloom  
 Deceiving  
 Pavid  
 To weed.

And fulgent trees and far sunsets  
 At this safe distance claimed, are crisped  
 And flamed yew trees and marigolds not  
 Plucked from loving's decimations;  
 The victimed  
 She brings a flower from the spring  
 Waywardly  
 Among effulgent trees and sunsets.

26.

Sea shimmers lines out  
Beyond barren head  
Rock to the muffled  
Lighthouse: a sea depth  
To adumbral rocks

Shelved, more and more shadow drowns.  
On the shore at the point of being and departing the self  
Waits a bird of iridescent crown and nape,  
Shoulder wings, black mask, white  
Jowl, belly, under tail, tiny  
On the single strand of cable preening,

Pecking wing, tail and belly.  
In pairs they also stab the air.  
Oaring wings circle the cove;  
The gull in the spruce patterns shifted.  
Blue of the mother and the child among

Rock, drift, blackened weed,  
And white fringes of unmarked sea,  
The soul's; shimmers of the sea bring this sibilance  
In this heat, oxidation of memory and memory,  
Circles of the occasional coolness of water:  
Wavelets' illusions adumbrating rock.

27.

## THE HURRICANE IS OFF NEW JERSEY

In the grey sky  
 Birds perturbed reel.  
 In a chill wind:  
 Small ones nearly  
 But not quite flocking through the spruce  
 Forest, coming  
 Together and apart flying.

Here something besides  
 The north classic  
 Red-orange, blue-  
 Yellow buoys  
 On a grey wall:  
 The grey wharf traps rain  
 Birds stirring.

It is I:  
 My presence  
 The scene  
 As I move  
 Shatters.  
 Water fragments sky.

Kelp with the tide in the harbor rises;  
 It lives as I, and exists the drowned log  
 Though dead. The birds – the possibility –  
 Are preparing to die.

IN THE SPRING SEA-PASTURE II

Felt, placing self in that bloomed field, his face  
Come apart in shreds; in the brilliant reds  
Spelled out – masks beautiful of the loved, not  
To be seen through – how touching hand to lips  
The possibility is of their absence;  
While waiting for the body hanging  
By the nail held strung  
Where it is spitted  
At the pit of him  
Where he is not nor  
Will be lust grovels.  
In the air not his, in dawn's rose, gulls glide:  
The ducks flattering themselves about have  
No knowledge: the problem in myth as that  
From dream, not what it represents, but is:  
Everything unsettled  
In this light and strange weather the sea makes  
Out of itself its own schools, these black backs  
Slightly leaping against white light we  
Move into, shadows on the dense mists  
Rising at unknown distances falling  
Patterns of whites on whites on greys on blacks.

When you figure yourself out  
Against the sky at the edge  
Of things,

Figure yourself at edges,  
Shadow moving across  
Curves under the maybe

Sightful apparitions  
On insects' wings; he mouths  
Alien orifices as himself

And he does not love: where limbs  
Lie, heads hover fleshed  
And mysterious as this, caught

In a net of branches budded  
And leafed out into them, held  
To the white; how to support,

Permit to exist  
Selves? A question of fiction.

29.

Out of the clay white sky came the Kouros:  
Anemone streams rising on warm branch  
Leafed: balls curling in night wind fell he  
Deeply into that flower: asphodel  
Of narcissis? Hips swung to such prowess  
In the complicatedly strung beast  
His left ankle shred blue.  
Gathering to mouth and heavy crotch  
(Underside where beauty lies)  
Sea-born mounds like tombs, he knew in flesh  
Then the strange death may be of death  
And the alterations of grief?

30.

From the dark  
 Wood path to  
 Quietly  
 Effulgence;

Now it is yet  
 And wild it is still  
 Wild lotus

On the pond,  
 Air sung in  
 Sea pasture's  
 Spider thread.

Mysterious  
 The butterfly  
 At blazed  
 Flower.

This dying  
 In transparent  
 Wings  
 One sucks at leaves

Out of void  
 Fading to  
 Being and  
 Out into

Subtlety  
 Where hopes lie  
 In mountain's aura  
 Spin

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Physiognomy

I

Vegetant

And flowered

31.

## WAITING

Something, like a cold sea,  
Or perhaps,

The mountain – if found: touched  
In spring; in winter entered,  
Like the first pact lost, of love,  
With a body of earth, dirt –  
Dead matter – shall assure  
Does not melt out under weight  
Of atom or Adam to myth come,  
His body.

When this glans shall  
Pass through mounds of sea foam,  
Venus hair, darker chambers  
Of seas; through surfs, ripples,  
These loins tossed shall come  
From sea with sea within:  
Semen foam:

Dead hair red, blond,  
Brown protective the flutter,  
Languor of still leaf shall arm him.  
Body this in let him live  
With what grace. Fathers were fathers  
Of no one This glans too shall  
Pass through death.

Into that world I seemed to enter, wind  
And cloud; cut from the mainland, water  
Going into the sun-filled grey; watched  
Young eider: by the clatter could tell when  
The lone black-backed moved.

In the trees close followed the bird bright  
With yellow breast, black mask; colors flashed  
Others through the green. Followed the bog  
Through fern, patches of blue where flower's

Hidden head hung white; by sea pastures, banks,  
Brindled rock sea-bordering; dryness brought  
Ranging of colors myriad in grass.

The passage was mine, air moving in insect  
And seed, through dense spruce groves where weird  
movements  
Caught in the boughs' twists, by patches of moss,  
Green carpeting of once wild flower stems.

Bobolinks cried – not in our world. But we  
On legs of spruce and spruce move to the  
Rock – skin to the touch.

33.

All day gulls soared  
High over the island,  
Swallows, meadow larks,  
A high flying crow  
Crossed.

Each seemed tending to group,  
Turning the same moment  
In sunlight if only  
Two, light through their wings, slowly.

In trees'  
Forest sea  
Strung birds hung  
Falling south.

34.

I splash and run here. From the wharf you left.  
On this beach is such life. Behind it sparrows  
Flock from the wild wheat to the wind worn branch.  
Beyond it, blue, and rock and abstract blue.  
It is sufficient.

35.

## ISLAND FIRE AND FOG

These leaves clatter: fog, no rain; the field burns  
In a burdened dry summer; the sea burns;  
And grief, loss's luxury, affirmations  
Fires. Nets now harsh orange, chimneys old red,  
Charred the hall, seeming long dead; fresh the shed.  
What is gone, passed in flame? Those who have come  
In heat hard pressed, not present were they. Some  
Move to the near island when the fog goes  
And the sea calms – to more lush fields, the rows  
More richly singed to gold, purpled and rosed,  
Shattered with butterflies, rising with birds.  
With them I. Those not present, are they loved?  
Lost track wide skinning in Aegean sea.  
Hurricane passed far cooling where we see  
Left us, our need is so great, rollers hoved,  
As our souls' surcease for soul's labor, these  
Other surges, other surfs, other seethes.

36.

The edge's brutal fragility,  
A balance point, subtle chaos of the sea,  
The sound from this distant window, a stunning  
Blow to the head. The sly crab, that high  
Crustaceous sweetness like the spider's  
Wheeling spin: the way grows less clear and is  
More easily followed, diffused by way  
Of the blown leaf that arrives. From the wood's  
Shadow I hear the fish crows unseen wave  
Over wave over ... and I hear the herring  
Gulls' cries that I see in a wind flock.

37.

MY LAI

I March 1968

Under foot  
A perfect shell have I crushed at a point

Rust-rock white? Swells' sounds break, shift, shift  
In a wind disintegrate

As perpetuation's  
Koto din

Pursuing to a point in the trawl

Rifle of the tide, shells sanguine, lush rose.

II Calley

Mothers never look at one  
Except sometimes with stricken eyes:  
The eternal Pieta, but  
The boy's not dead, not yet.

III January 1969

Among all  
Those bodies  
The baby  
Lies primordial  
And hollow.

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Omenous  
Ceremony,  
Knowing  
In hollow body.

IV Southern Sand Beach

Approached clarity at rock blooded:  
A shore's raven, ominous as sea,  
Not its proper element, curved cove  
Waters, haunt to haunt moved doubling  
Omens, eye bright in sable, through pastures  
To point at vantage thin in the clearness  
Cool of serous light tides in the green leaf.

38.

## ALONE ON THE ISLAND

In the house, the near cricket  
 And the just discernible light  
 Whine of a distant diesel.  
 Putter in the debris;  
 Sorting out, becoming relieved;  
 The house clears; space opens.  
 There is a high silence –  
 A fly caught in a spider's  
 Web is the sound of sheer life  
 Shrilling on and on: silent  
 The spider, shrouding, wrapping:  
 So completely rational  
 These two equalized.

As if I were manifest  
 As ineffable phenomenon  
 Communicated only  
 By an error in meaning.

So again  
 Summer comes to summation, turning to goldenrod  
 Singing singeing of the fields. We have sailed, my boy  
 And I, far, sifting a shifting skin,  
 Clear to great depth, schools solidifying sight,  
 In dementing heat to red  
 Cliffs, gulls on trees in meadows;  
 Then, before expected, seals  
 Came toward us, curious.

On this one morning  
Are so many dawns  
Birds keep rising  
In dense sea-light  
Owl's sight breaking.

Must save our souls, fading,  
Like, at the approach of  
Fire in grey light in  
Snapping twigs of locust,  
Snow. Graves by the flowered

Branch. See.  
After body love  
In the physical human night,  
Shifts light.

Vision tilts in the wind,

And, turns toward eye, once  
Broken, the quickened branch  
Alone of flowering quince.

40.

ARIADNE

The morning's  
Sea raven  
Rasps to  
Bell in our  
Love make  
And sea sounds  
The sea  
Thalassa  
Thalassa  
We enter

41.

What is there among the lichen that shatters  
Grasses waving in the failing light:

Splits them in awed ramoses of seethe?  
A lust to waves the grass blades weave.

We have loved all day and seen the sea change  
Avert the eye from itself that instant  
When the sea is seen and is no longer the sea.

42.

All the sweet conveyances of love end:  
So fallible to sweetness, illusive  
This body now where only need and loss  
Conveying.  
Clash  
Drift  
To gulf  
Engulfed to grief we to  
Grieving so great the incriminating,  
The flaw, faulting our  
Sometime so sweet love.

43.

STORM OVER GRAND CAYMAN

In, out, coral-moon-rock breathes.  
A sound of seethe speaks over the reef  
In green shifts of the lagoon. Here's a rack  
Where nothing's divulged  
But where appetites  
Devour as emerald intensities.

Naked we move among the beach wrack. It's turned  
To pure sky around our feet. Here seethed we might  
Sight and savour the other's and the self's  
Souls, discover them  
In analogic purples to reflections pearled;  
Notice the sand fades  
Like rich flesh to a liquid not white or jade;

So we and cameo and nacre, like  
Sumptuous Petetrus, are fashioned of  
Light slack sifting through opals  
The consistency of sky.

The gasping

Rock of coral and the moon  
Rasps and mutters and queries.

44.

THE PACIFIC FOR THE FIRST TIME SEEN; BACH  
REMEMBERED

Where once turned from, now we  
Turn towards, holding what held  
(Yet never again)  
At this moon's sea can be.

Here on sand with rock  
Between us,  
With fear at skin,  
We change,  
As the rock changes:  
Opening,  
Unloading  
Cores,  
Slitting  
And letting fall  
Slivers  
Of powdered  
Stillness

Now we turn toward  
Holding what held.

For, there rise  
From this same stuff,  
Horses  
In flying  
Sea meadows,  
The eucalyptus,  
The groves  
of cedar,

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The cliffs  
At headlands;  
The high piled  
Shapes  
Minutely  
Falling  
Above a jade  
And jasper  
Beach.

Sniffing high bay leaves; caught within this  
Particular hour, blue horses, purple  
Disintegrations; chewing anise seeds:

We bathe where gold is gathering and climb  
The crumbling bank that terrifies, suspending  
Our limbs where our heads these fragments stir.

Where once turned from now we  
Turn towards holding what held  
Yet never again  
At this moon's sea can be.

Loathsome to selves and air assailed  
Like collapsed anemones closed to light  
We burst now fanning to the fanning sand

In arabesque as suns – like that chaconne  
In a singular time discerned and in  
A frame promising relevance fastened.

45.

## MUSIC IN THE FIELD

This has beginning  
And end, like the wind:  
Flute and bassoon  
Come out like violet  
And root and this  
Raw stuff of our  
Genitalia.  
But behind the rush,  
Weightily at our  
Differing displacements  
Of air, sounds  
At pitch, heads  
Flushed,  
As the wind  
Stirs things  
Of the earth,  
We hear, besides  
The preposterousness of us,  
The energy of the sun.

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46.

AT THIS MIDST, IS MEIS VAN DER ROHE

At height of brain, wit of steel,  
Sea out of glass is the lake  
To limit of distance perceived  
Setting the measure of a sky.

Far byways the strand tacks  
Eye moves, spiraling mind.

At this midst

And nowhere gather times focusing  
Props brain devised to energetic  
Jumble. We at glass that's death, at thighs

And fingertips have blood, details  
Seized consuming it, it strives to  
And survives coveting things all  
Between steel and Orion set.

We now familiar blood thrust  
At each other; range, then turn;

Of the hunted take hold  
As a not possessing

Possessing. At this midst  
And nowhere the wonder

Is at any being.

47.

## AT PLEASANT POND

The clouds pierce like pine needles,  
 Are more solid than the intricate lake;  
 A point pricks thought of ambiguity:  
 Lichen at rock thrives: maple  
 Leaves, one red, shield to the shore; is one birch.

You left abruptly then, and I stop here,  
 Touch leaf, alone with what? like thought, crossing,  
 Between, that is myself in dissonance.  
 We have been cohorts at both  
 A core and edge, listening  
 With hands like eyes, connecting  
 To a fecundity, yet  
 At that instant left behind  
 In the clarity of clouds' whites on whites.

Curious what I am left, with this lake:  
 In the day's time its intricacies shift:  
 The light is measure. Where we entered light  
 High, thighs transforming, saw trout,  
 Ravens, peaks like receding  
 Time: where? as where did we move into?  
 Verification? of authentic bone?  
 Breath? Sudden the tastes, then  
 The odors strong, the lake itself, the far  
 Shore a darkness: threat? disintegration?

Or are you now, the piercing red, myself  
 Separated and grasped? A hard question  
 At this quickly turned leaf at mid-August.

48.

The face of the river caught, while still  
And reflecting at low tide, barely  
Moves at the turning point. The heron,  
Huge of primitive grace, not ours, skims,  
Slips in, freezes with head, neck forward, raised  
Left leg stretched back, jerked frontward, lowered through  
Altered water. Sudden turn – alertness – new  
Choreography, as bill darts to fish;  
Collapse, fish flips, chaos, swiveled head twists.  
Then the stately movement resumes; is seen  
Another world's grace:  
We might assume that of the dinosaur;  
Presume, our pride so monstrous, to know it ours.

49.

Starlings arrived.  
Pull the gentle  
Grass gently; it,  
If broken, survives.

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50.

FROM BENJAMINE'S NOTEBOOK

Nerves' ends pained.  
A move, each one,  
Seems a sorry one.  
Fearing a step I want  
To stay, stillness in,  
Heart-soul's space  
Terror is: fearing  
The source, seeking it:  
My mind spins the labyrinth.

51.

## FROM HIS FRIEND, JONATHAN

He was a joy  
To encounter  
Unexpected –  
At a New Year's  
Concert – in Oakland.  
We walked through the crowd.  
Many knew him.  
A medieval  
Jester he  
Of legerdemain  
And tinkling bells.  
Him I loved;  
I never thought  
He might not appear  
Sudden on  
A California  
Beach. At sad times  
He comforted me  
Brief and dear  
Brought me to laughter.  
Many knew him.  
Would burst upon us,  
A jack-in-the-box  
With lip jutting  
And brows raised  
In strange mischief.  
They voiced the memory  
“He saved us  
From darkness.”

AFTER BENJAMINE'S BIRTHDAY

Through the ashen cloud, a November wood,  
Autumn brown, winter gold, and dunning rain  
The river flows in dissolution.

(After that midnight, through the risen sun,  
Was there wet scarlet on the mountain's stone?)

Through the changes in the winter light  
The thorn tree flutters in the scream of birds.  
(Is it the fall of bone they heard?)