

Songs from the Ocean of Voices

by

Avron Soyer

A Shaman in winter and Other Poems

Lisa's Song

I never called to find out how you were,
I guess it was the only promise that I kept.

I was afraid _or hoped _ you died of love.
I cry for him, I did not cry for you.

I left protecting glass,
Fell helpless for eleven months. I've crashed.

I know I'll ascend the sill again,
I know I'll leave protecting glass and fall.

I fall beneath an always winter sky.
The sky I fall beneath is always black.

There was both light and shadow in our room.
I look beyond my window at the night.

Only on you true beloved can I vent my hate,
Frightened to hate him and our other keepers.

No wet blue dream shall rise to soothe our sand,
Only...and not forever...salty rain.

I look beyond my window at the night.

John's Song

My world held still a while
Against the vacuum of my absence,

Still wife still child still parents.

Then long falling as a stone in water
Through dimmer after dimmer levels of green darkness.

No tongue to touch you with my speech,
Words ebb and flow as water through this skull.

There is no tide to bear me whole to home.

Homeless Now

They do not love me but they hold me here.
The park would hide me and the cellar shield

They roust me from each dark and secret place.
My only solitude is in my dreams.

No rain will wash you clean of me,
Nor all the pinescent in the world restore the air.

I am the scarecrow in their golden fields.
I am crow's shadow in your field of dreams.

Fragments

1

Street man

Entered the restaurant
Swaying like a wounded boat

Told
“Get out!”

Said
“I’ll go.
I know
What I am”.

2

Ruth
Certified in lunacy

Small steps
Foot passing foot

Like frightened halting mice
Down long gray corridors.

Untitled

The beautiful unique

Again
Approaching

Her walk
As always

An unconscious dancing

I touch
No body

Skin and bones

Thinner
Thinner

To bright air transparent

Wasted.

New York, 1986

Buildings,

Corroded,
Stinking,

Ancient
Bodies:

Halting
In the cellar,
Exhalation of heat:

Halting
Passage of heat
Through pipes...

Dwellers here

Turn
Blue

Or cruel
Or fade

Or lost
Or gray

Or self ignite
Or starry night

Or moon cool ice.

Annunciation

When winter
Hesitates

And frozen trees
Almost dare first green in blackness

The chosen couple
Open

All lines between
Dissolve.

They could rest forever
On the flow between them

Or descend forever
Levels of green darkness

Each cloud
Each separate leaf
Transparently
Translated

The chick within the egg
The seed beneath the soil
Are incompletely music.

This time again eternity will flower

Untitled

Exhausted in the bed
Nervous on the wire

Suspended over nothing
Struggling towards the door

Moving towards release
Trembling on the edge

Falling through the air
Brown stain on his pants

Acrobat of death
Broken eyes and smile

The audience went home
Who is reaching out?

Shaman in Winter

I. Opening

1

The setting is nuclear winter
Life continues diminished

No Arno no Nile no Passaic
No Volga no Yangtze no Danube
No sweet local waters or bitter

No Creole no Yiddish no Gaelic
No Jamaican Patois no Shoshone
No sweet local waters or bitter

A place that exists as an absence.

French, Arabic, Farsi
Spanish, English, Swahili
German, Russian, Italian
Greek, Hebrew, Mandarin, Hindi
The great seas of language
Outlive their rivers:
Weakening...dying.

A place that exists as an absence.

2

One common ocean remains
In discourse only with ice

Only people far scattered
As stars in sky's ocean
Sing out into silence.

A Place that exists as an absence.

II. Invocation

The scene is an ice field

Chanting continues

Each repetition unique
Uniqueness again and again:

Word follows word
As the waves of the ocean:

“Breathe with us
Sing with us

Joseph The Lazarus
And Spring Lost In Winter:

Night after night
The journey towards sunrise:

Here beyond seasons
Here beneath bone sky

In kingdom of silence
In waning of blood light

Shaman Of All Seasons End
And The Gift Of The Ocean

Breathe with us
Sing with us.”

III Shaman Song

A. Ice Walk

1

I walked
On field of ice
To die

Sought
Thinnest point

Then
 Without warning
 Love
 Lost
 Young
 In winter
 Rose up within me
 From the depth of the ocean

As water through ice skin
 As drink for the thirsty
 Dream song and death song
 Arose in my dry mind.

She a ghost
 I almost a ghost
 Sing out into absence
 Sing out into silence

Dancing on thin ice.

We entered the ocean of voices:

We enter blood converse
 Of grandparent shamen:

Sang
 Dream songs

Sang
 Skull lust

Sang
 Shadow

Sang
 Twisted mirror
 Junkyard of children
 White machine
 Absolute midnight

Sang
 Foreshadow of All Seasons End.

3

Each vision song shaped
Lives in its own right

Child of our singing
Dream we inhabit.

Wave on wave of shadow and light...
Wave on wave of rise and fall of speech.

So much is lost despite love

B Songs of the Grandparent Shamen

The Junkyard of Children

Because the children of the poor are trapped in twisted mirrors

Because they are reflected
Steel sharp
Rat cruel
Fierce as dwarfs with tiger heads
Transforming gentle touch to twist of knife

Because they are abandoned
In endless schools
In endless junkyards
Abandoned to rain and mud... abandoned to the moon

Because they are quick to flight_ to ecstasy _ as birds
(For it is _after all_ all done with mirrors),

Because blood presses against glass until glass bleeds

From rusting of illusionary steel
From weeping of imprisoned birds
From corpses of nonexistent rats

Air and water die.

The White Machine

1

Machine magnificent
World's wonder

Statues in motion
Wheel in wheel turning

White _ unchanging in light's variations – unsullied.

2

On top
Creator:

Almost breathing in marble
Almost natural motion.

Inheritors:
Conduits,

Imposing
Their
Rhythm
On those who
Beneath them
Move as one person.

3

Shadow,
Blood shadow,

Not blue as snow shadow
Or night black or purple,

Shadow as shadow...

Creator:

Chose and danced freely
Death's gesture completed,

Creator/betrayer.

Inheritors,
 Shriveling like apples,
 Spit venom
 Then their faces clear:

Her mouth is acid seared...is burnt.

4

Locked together in a room
 He draws his power from the cold machine

He her stabs.

Blood
 Drips
 On white. _

More than rain
 Wore away this steel.

Absolute Midnight

1

Mechanical motion
 System components
 Items in flow charts

Sharp thin figures chanting:
 "Inside or one of the marks
 With it or out of the loop
 Player or hung out to dry."

2

Suddenly
 At absolute midnight
 Sunrise triumphant
 The Beloved returning.

3

Sharp figures thin figures chanting:

"Believe us

Be frightened

This is no story:

The Beloved
Returning

Her light dissolves us
Our shadows eat us

Burn out your eyes
With molten metal
Puncture your ears
With knife or needle.

Kill all that moves.”

4

Deed done.

IV. Return

1

The story let me go

I saw myself
Alone on the ice field
All ghosts departed,

Faltering _failing _
In boneland of silence:

Here beyond seasons
At the eyeblink of passage

Love Lost Young In Winter
Reached out to hold me.

2

Dance walking
We turn towards the village

We sing to each other

The Song of the Shaman:

“Long nights seeking lost name’s secret vision
Where dreams suck poison from the wounded earth.

If hair is wire you are fire_
If hair is silk you are a bird in flight,

Streak of red in black sleep haunted night...”

We sang to each other
The Blessing of Flight Song:

“O solitary birds in lonely flight
Dream together through this winter’s night

Seasons of the blood, rebirth of light.”

V. Epilogue

1

Let us dance away from him now
(Leave him alone on the ice)

Let us dance away from him now
(Leave him in the ocean of voices)

Leave them together
(Now he is also a ghost).

2

We all know what happened.

We all know the story
We enter tomorrow
From sunrise to sunset.

Let us forget to remember.

3

Let us
Be with him
As
Feverish
Shaking
Already gray headed
Already limping
Through the cold night
Unknown
He
For the first time
Walks towards us.

Any thing and nothing can happen.

Rants and Didactics

Street Rant

Dirt over skin, caked-
Dress over dirt, torn-
Rag over rag, ripped-

Cannot
Contain

Words
Screamed
Exploding:

“They hurt me,
I’ll maim you.
They cut me,
I’ll slice you

Rip off and rot gut
Bite off and spit out.

Pissed off and played out
Broke down and beat up

Hard times and hard lines.”

Sam's Song

Do I have family?
Yes and no.

I am what you young people call
A birth father...

Three daughters.

I drank a bit.
There were divorces. -

This is my tenth year sober.-

For my children
I am a monster in a horror story.

They don't want to know me.

I don't know if they have children.

I knew my grandfather
Although
I overheard
Terrible stories
My mother, his daughter,
Told my father:

He was sick
In hospital,
Influenza,

My grandmother never visited,

He didn't know
She,
Also mother,
Who was nine,
Were also bed sick,

He came home
His wife
Just crawled from bed
Down on hands and knees

To scrub the floor

He
Kicked the wash tub
Warm soapy water
Flowed
He fist raised
Screaming,

There was a son
Born dead.
When grandfather saw my mother
Born to replace him
Did not have a penis
He tried to throw her out the window.
It took two nurses to restrain him.

Grandmother told her.

When I was nine
Like a machine
Wound up and wired
I kicked him in the shins
Said
'Mean man
You hurt my mommy'.

Brave boy hero,
I thought he'd squeeze me into grape jam
Eat me.

The air
Went out of him

Slowly
Like a big balloon

He stood there empty.

I guess you feel
Good
He had it coming.

It didn't play out that way
He cried
I cried.

I began to guess
There were no monsters
(Except maybe Hitler).

There were other stories.

His wife was suddenly dying,
He ran through the streets calling weeping
“Doctor! doctor! Is anyone a doctor? Help us!”

He was in Siberia
(Serious prison)
For anti- tsarist leaflets,

Was freed
By the doomed Tsar for his doomed sons birthday.

In America,
He helped to organize a union.

Painted houses.

Fell off the ladder
Broke his back
Was paralyzed
Recovered,
Got back on a ladder.

Is that why I don't slit my throat?

I saw him
Gentle with my mother and father
Waving his voice and arms together
Almost dancing
As they spoke in Yiddish.

He smoked.

Guess what he died of?
What I've got...

Mother and father knew him.
I knew him.

Yes, I loved him...

Young ones now
Think skim milk. -

No.
Please.

Let it be.
Don't call them.

I know the plot,
I've seen "Law and Order".

There is no forgiveness.

There is "the box":
Inquisition,
Breakdown,
Confession,
Retribution...

How many times
In this hospice
Have you stood in for children?

Memories and words
Sacred rivers
Flowing through you.

Daughter of the world,
Receive my blessing.

I am going to sleep now

Welcome to the Art Show at Phoenix House

Speaker 1

Welcome
 To this show
 Of paintings
 By recovering addicts

You are
 Envoys
 From a place
 Residents here
 Literally
 Pray
 To enter

Your visit
 Assists
 Healing,
 Reversing
 Amputation
 From the social body.

We are
 A narrow bridge
 Above the shoreless water.

Welcome.

Speaker 2

Last “opening”
 Many invited
 Eight appeared
 The choir was Singing
 “Come Back Home to Jesus”

Suddenly
 People
 Ran to the window
 (which overlooks the river)

There was I swear

(Some of us now here were there and can give witness)
A double rainbow

I thought
Welcome
Halleluiah
Welcome.

Speaker 3

Some of these addicts are artists
Some of these artists ate garbage

Some sold their bodies
Some collapsed inward

Some were stone, ice, knife or bone.

In this house
Of broken masks
And open secrets

Where nerve naked ghosts
Dance with the living
Where distance collapses

Art is
Beyond
Repetitive confession
The long lost
Intimate honest voice
Returning

Art is
Hope incarnate.

Art is
The Phoenix singing

Art is
An unexpected rainbow.

Tom's Song

Mad.

Thorazine stelazine haldol prozac,
Spitballs thrown at the black screaming on- rushing train.

When I heard the wind
Blowing night towards me
Like waves of ashes
Like a wall of flame
Like the flood in the bible
I ran screamed and scampered
Stark howling naked
Resisting resisting
Running and running.

Yet the wolf was inside me
Biting and chewing
Digesting

Wolf ate me
Lungs filled with water

Flames cooked me
Fat oozed and drooled from my body

Each tooth was alive and on fire
Squealing and screaming

What kills and eats one
Makes one stronger

Bone cannot be eaten
Ash cannot burn

Except for this dream that returns me to life and then eats me
I am in college again
Then I love and am loved
Then I marry
We have a son
I have a career
I slowly grow old
You know the story you live it

The end is always the same
One night he calls on the phone
Says
“Dad I am frightened”
I say
“Tell me.
What is it?
I want to help you”
He says
“Dad I am frightened of you.
You are crazy”

I think of my father
The one time he was drunk
I was 10
He came to my bed
Said
“Don’t worry
Please don’t be frightened
I am drunk but it’s me.
Don’t be frightened”.

I say “Don’t be frightened”
I am holding the phone
There is absolute silence
The phone disappears
I realize I don’t have a son
Blood drips down the wall
I awaken.

For years when I woke
They restrained me
Now the strait jacket entered my bones
My tongue is a sock in my mouth.

I scream at myself in my mind
“O merciful God with your army of angels
Who sees what I do to myself in the bathroom
Burn into my bones
I am childless.”

No child
Of mine
Saw the shit bastard face of my madness.

Untitled

The wound may heal
Yet the cut in life the wound inflicts
Never close.

Many visited.
None call now.

Crisis can inspire
Active kindness.

Chronic suffering
Now
Normally
Inspires disengagement:

Images of drowning,
Images of quicksand
Everyone pulled under.

I choose statue.
She lives bamboo in winter.

Thoughts of a Gentile Refusing to Help a Jewish Friend in Nazi Germany

Always almost shaking,
Unable to sustain the normal human face.

Voice can be locked into a wall of teeth by will,
His eyes exposed are always begging now.

We know, despite all private virtues, he shall die in hell.

His face becomes transparent to the skull
And gray as ash.

His fault he did not leave in time.

Remembered friendship,
All promises, oaths and loyalties of youth

Should not wound full summer bloom,
Or halt the step by step advance of rational life.

Life calls to life.
He is a child of death.

I deny this stranger.
No no no.

When he is consumed by shadow
Past all help

My friend will be reborn in me
And I will mourn.

Untitled

1

I watch this nothing
Swallow everything
Digest to gray
Breed repetition

2

Her smile
Born
In love
Now bought and paid for
Harsh red wound
Grimace
Stop and go and money fucking

3

Inside
Winning is the only thing
Although the whole world perish

Outside
No wall from wind
Waves of snow
Eternal winter

Homeless

Untitled

Robot swift step

Blue born
Rhythms
Recycle

Faster faster

Vocal cord
Could break
Nerves sweat blood

Electric fury
Strains
Metal wires

Red horse
Steel rider

Guardian or killer of black rose?

Reading Torture I

1

Inappropriate mathematics:

Dichotomies,
 Combinations,
 Permutations.

Done to
 Do to.

Top or bottom

2

Done to

Forced cross dressed
 Or forced naked

Piled up
 Kicked
 Pushed

Penetrated

3

Do to

Laughing
 Smiling

Videotaping,
 Photographing.

Do to likes to see it.

4

Make him naked
 Make him pull his penis

Like to make him do it to him.

Crushing,
Strangling.

Love to get them coming and going.

Reading Torture II

1

Fingers, toes and penis wired,
Promising electric torture.

Grandfather Whitman
Sang "the body electric".

We electrocute the mind directly.

2

Unmuzzled dogs
Howling,
Broken to machine precision.

The leash hand opens or closes.

3

Cat opens space to flee in mouse imagination
Within parameters of cat retention

Until cannot conceive escape
Lies hopeless panting.

4

The body lives or dies,
The mind knows death forever.

5

This seed no longer dreams of sunlight.

Reading Torture III

1

Constructing secret hopeless spaces.

Forcibly arranging
Sexual positions

Punching, slapping, kicking
Naked feet.

Threatening with rape
Actually raping

Threatening with a loaded 9mm pistol
Sodomizing with chemical light wands and broom sticks

Hanging people arms down
From the ceiling

Avoiding “the torture word”.
No blood no foul.

2

Images constructed to distract
Flood of rage
From cold machine

Plant seeds of winter. -

Children trained to know
Strangers murder
Cookies disguise razor blades
Kindness masks unnatural shark lust.

Also sex is death.

3

Beneath rich green
These leaves are dying

Is this the autumn we turn fascist?

Waiting on the path of dying birds
Waiting for Antarctica to melt

Candy

1

You melt in my mouth
Slide down me inside

I love Vanilla
I love Chocolate:

I love Chocolate butter cream,
Vanilla fudge.

You are juicy in the center:
Grand Marnier, strawberry cream.

You have sugar candy nipples...

You are the perfect grace of taste.
You are candy and you lick me.

2

Your tongue
In me
Completes the circle

Our flesh
Miraculously sweetens.

Flowing through each other warmly melting.

3

One moment you are softer than marshmallow

The next your silken smooth arms tighten:
And you are warm hard breathing chocolate,

Ever changing
Always tasty

You sweat warm caramel
I love to lick you.

4

When we have licked away our faces.
All separation is illusion.

There is only candy.

Walking through the World

Visitation

1

I cannot leave this room unless you spell me

Outside these windows

Outside the circle
Of this ceaseless sleepless vigil

Rain has been falling now
For either hours or days...

Sounds of an ocean that the rain embraces
Between each house each person each apartment

2

On this island
You appear each morning
Untouched by wet gray moods and shadows

You are the only one who ever visits

3

Sometimes
I
Forget
Enabling winds of commerce

Dream
Romance

Imagine
Intimate
Design

Yet

Unembellished
Straight

It is a wonder

That you
Not some anonymous other

Are born to us
Each sunrise
From the sleepless ocean.

To The City Hall Chess Club: On the Death Of Anders Schuster, A Member

1

One of us
Anders Schuster
Died in August Nineteen Ninety Five.

He lived in Blimpies many nights,
The place we play
As much home as he had.

2

All word traps
Programmed in the mind
To snap shut on the homeless
Did not in life
Will not in memory
Enclose
That
Kind
Hard working
Compact
Sensitive
Self-sufficient
Intellectual
Man.

3

He did not die of homelessness direct
But was so worn and tired from the street
That pain and weariness foreshadowing death
Was lost in each days search for that nights rest,
Until he could no longer move his arm
Until disease was to far gone for cure.

4

In the nursing home
We always met him in the yard
The only tree
Behind the wire fence
Was a fine dancer

In the wind.

5

He

Sat up

All night

In Blimpies,

Quiet

As a rock

On a beach

Within the ebb and flow

Of noise and gesture,

Reading

Or asleep

Beneath

Artificial sunlight of the bulbs

Artificial moonlight of TV.

Hospital Song

Our neighbor in the hospital
Is withering

It is her winter

Her dark graceful feet
Silhouetted on white sheets
Suggest her flowering

Two women help her

One is fifty
Soft
In pastel colors

The other
Slim and strong
Brown rose skin
Blue and crimson clothing

I think I heard

“O mommy
We know
Away now slowly
In drift of snow

Yes time
Body away
We know
O mommy
In drift of snow”

Or perhaps these words
Grew in my soil
From seeds
Of murmuring speech
Of constant music
And of endless snow

The curtain is almost always drawn
Their care and sickness
Is closed in upon itself...

A tent...a womb_ a chrysalis... a garden

The young woman
Is naked
Every night
In water

Conversation is always open to the dying woman
I am aware when her voice briefly enters

The other voices dance with her
Supporting,
Then flow on together

Her voice will be remembered
But the circle closes
Her memory will be sweet
And yet the song continues

Merry- Go- Round

1

These horses are
In mid leap always

Yet he who shaped them moving
Pinned them to the ground

He who froze them static
Set them turning

Moved them up and down
Through cogs and gears and wires

2

It was not
Lust
That lured
A tired
White haired man
To watch
The tethered horses turn

The mothers
Perched like raptors
Were all wrong

Long tied and broken to a circling stage
He twitched as tethered horses turned.

Untitled

About to swipe my transit card
I stopped

As when I lose my way
In well walked streets

Suspended
One hand raised,

Fading inside voice,
“Not entering, leaving”....

Their sensate water flows around all rocks
Their patterns disregard what they discard

The homeless woman singing to a ghost
This white haired man who's incompletely there

Alzheimer Image

Still efficiently
Peeing and pooing

Finding the bathroom
Wiping and flushing.

"Good days and bad days",
Dressing is labored.

Inner mother and father
Look on assisting

Now also infected,
Ghost shadows fading

From the Background

Cooks
Part time teachers

Maintenance workers
Clerks

Don't read charts
Never lead encounters

Yet the, hopefully, recovering addicts
Who generation after generation

(One way or the other)
Move beyond

Haunt

Bone screen.
Insomniac theater

Reruns
Behind eye balls

I yell

"No
Not that path
Vampire
Slasher
Werewolf
Haunting shadows"...

Look long enough at flow
One catches patterns:

Brave bull
Caught in matador's
Calculated dancing,

Butterfly
Senses too late
Quivering
Vibration
Cautious spider,

Sirens sing
Outside this window,
Long resistance
Lost in sudden outleap

Devolution
In act of falling....

Children of Akhnaten
Arise beyond blood water

Dawn sun blessing.

Untitled

Nothing here
Is made by human hands.

Perhaps the tabletops were wood
Yet in construction provenance was lost,

Waste scraps compressed:

This cellar where those called homeless are allowed:

Not one flower...
More alone.

Here every bottle makes one smaller:

Milligrams of grayness
Wither,
Root, branch, flower,
Words
Natural as breathing.

The bud would blossom
Yet soil is stone now,

The will unbroken
But the larynx cut.

Di Fara Pizza

Brooklyn,
Is the borough of pizza
(Also churches)

Only the old man owner prepares food
Morning to morning 11 A.M. to midnight 7 days a week

The pale Italian
Always moving
Never hurries

Cutting cheese now
Holds his finger
Against one side
Slices thin strips

Sharp knife
Pale long unscarred fingers

Customers
Faithful

Almost endless waiting
Always finally rewarded

“Can I to take a picture?”
“It is a pilgrimage to be here”.

Subway Figure

Pale woman
Head forward

Mouth closed bird beak
Paints on lipstick

Tightens cheeks for rouge

Lifts brows locks lids
Brushes in eye shadow

Grimacing in a mirror

Preparing
Day mask

Boy friend
Gets the night mask

Only strangers
Know her naked.

F Train Blues

The destination is too far to reach on foot.
Subways now are terminally ill.

Our minds are laced with fear,
Adrenalin exhausted,
Constant red alert.

Signs proclaim,
“See it, say it”,
“Suspect, Report”,
“Tell it to police”.

On bad days
A demented howling
Fills the locked in moving boxes

Are they saying,
“Rat mutations occupy the station”
“Life is indefinitely suspended”
“You have fallen through the conscious mind”
Or only, “scent of nerve gas in the air”?

On good days,
Bad news we can understand:

“This F is now an A”
“Now this express is local”.

A rose by any other name,
Yet if the F is A

I will not reach my job
I might not be employed....

Homeless people roam the stations,
Wander through the locked in moving boxes:

Smell like death warmed over,
Begging for spare change.

If three months unemployed
Then I will be extracted,

Too old and frail
To seriously compete for empty bottles.

No longer audience,
But underground performer,
Hand out for a quarter.

See you later.

Subway Image

Subway station walls
Created carefully ornate:

Mosaics of historical New York
On buff, faun, cream or ivory tiles. -

Love lost,
Replacements cheap and careless:

Rough raw colors,
Harsh white tiles. -

A new ecology emerges:
Garbage moving, snouts and tails,

Water dripping
Carves in filth of ages

Fallen angels,
Filigrees of dust.

Subway Scene

A teenager
Runs at closing subway doors

Sprinting
Gets in

Places foot
To hold door open,

Friends
Running headlong reach it.

Suddenly pulls his foot out,
Freed door closes...

Friends now outside,
He is inside laughing.

Betrayal?

Play or practice?

To John

Devoured by A.I.D.S,

Icicle in sun melting
Dream ice,
Blood ice:

All metaphors broken.

Amoeba
Breed, swim in lung sacks.

Blind skeleton
Dancing.

Again and again
Rallied unbroken
We sang in chorus

“Here is a man
Here now where he stands

And wherever he’s going”
(Where we’ll all go at last
Only sooner).

Hail and farewell.

This Moment Now

1

One cat
Is deeply and entirely asleep

So still
I touch his side
To feel him breathe

The other
Prowls

Stops
And stares

Intent
Where I see nothing ...

Close enough
To touch.

Yet where and who?

2

The scaled, furred, feathered
Did not speak to Adam ...

“I am Zebra,
Here is deer and gull and sparrow”.

Adam named

They do not know we think they're cats in rooms

3

I see
A light and shadow
Serengeti
On the screen...

In the equation x eats y
Substitute our cats for lions, mice for Zebras

Yet these two

Lost the gift
Of covering their scent

Their night soil is displayed upon their sand
Expressive of their inner life
Authentic and direct,
Published to the world.

They will not hunt,
Any mouse not in their bowls is safe:

I do not know the space in which they move
(Neither room nor Serengeti)....

I don't know who I am to them,
Or who they are.

Yet we do well enough
With food and pats...

I call them friends because they rarely bite.

Love Art

To show you
The passionate grammar
Of painting's visual speech
I spoke in color on paper
Two orange-golden women
One with child inside

The next day
In an island park
You dreamt in paint
A wounded shadow boat
In purple, black and grey
And then a church of light.

Untitled

1

Forty years ago
When my white hair was dark

I knew this man
To nod and say hello.

They said he hurt my friend.
I hated him.

Every time I heard his name I cursed.

My allies served themselves,

Competitors who bit to eat his shop,
The terminally bored who feed on rotten talk.

I volunteered to harm.
I cursed and schemed for free.

2

One night
Last year

Desperate for a smoke
(It was so late all other stores were closed)

I walked into the diner that he owned.

I saw a winter face
Washed pale

By grit and storms of life.

I saw
A photo of his wife

Read date of death.

We know
Who we were before.

No speech between us of the past.

Is he the one who did the hated deed?

Long ago

The road from here to there

Was washed away in both of us by tears.

A Vision

World is itself

Yet I know only
What appears.

She inherited
A burial plot
I don't
Have a death home
Waiting as I wander
To consume me
Like a vampire shadow.

My mother was afraid
Of being buried living
Waking up in blackness
All world gone
Although of course
Existing somewhere
Hard and stony.

My wife said quietly this Saturday
I can't read well now dear.

Told me Sunday
A cloud descended
Over half her vision.

Time trembles on the edge of nothing,

Who knows behind my mask here
What is missing?

Her sun and stars
Her cats and I
Her red and blue
Returning....

Colors are for us
Cats see black and white precisely

The blind
Deprived of moonlight
Still can touch the ocean

To Julie

Her walk
As a high sailed ship in temperate weather gliding
Long lost

Unhesitating passage
On tenuously balanced bones through waves of pain,
Grace on the edge

Age is a diminution that remembers
Thus it is a ripeness

Spring dreams are beautiful and finite

The girl you were
Still in your face
Is smiling

How strange life is
How unexpected.