The Possibility of Actual Happiness

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This thesis titled
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Abstract

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This thesis entitled, *The Possibility of Actual Happiness* contains a collection of poetry and a critical preface entitled, “The Discursive Mode and Interpersonal Relationships: How Chatty Poems Dodge Sentimentality.” The preface describes a few strategies that discursive writers employ to avoid sentimentality in love poems. I draw heavily from Frank O’Hara’s work, as well as from other contemporary American poets, to illustrate some of the advantages and disadvantages inherent in using this chatty voice. I hope the critical work illuminates certain line-level and thematic choices in my own poems.
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The Possibility of Actual Happiness
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The Discursive Mode and Interpersonal Relationships: How Chatty Poems Dodge Sentimentality

In an intermediate poetry class at the University of Missouri, John Estes, my poetry instructor, gave us the classic workshop assignment: pick a poet out of this contemporary American poetry anthology and try to write a poem that mimics that person's style. I came across Frank O'Hara's "The Day Lady Died," and was transformed. I was familiar with Frost's famous lines: "Poetry is what gets lost in translation," or "Poetry is a momentary stay against confusion," or Stevens': "The poem must resist the intelligence / Almost successfully," but then I read O'Hara's line about poetry in his mock manifesto, Personism: "You just go on your nerve. If someone's chasing you down the street with a knife you just run, you don't turn around and shout, 'Give it up! I was a track star for Mineola Prep," and thus found my literary forefather. As a man in my very-early twenties, I was particularly obsessed with writing the perfect love poem. I swooned over Shakespeare's sonnets in my hopeful moments and reveled in Bukowski's anti-love raunchiness in my not-so-hopeful moments, but no one writes like Shakespeare anymore and no one should want to write like Bukowski. In O'Hara's poetry I found a writer whose reflections on interpersonal relationships seemed to click with my frazzled-desire aesthetic and my neurotic-associative logic. In the first few years after that assignment (and perhaps still) most of the poems I wrote seek to attain that O'Hara-specific combination of light-hearted wistfulness and deep emotional turbulence. Where I failed to successfully mimic O'Hara is where I found (what I'm hoping is) my own voice.

Key to O'Hara's aesthetic is his voice. This voice is characterized by language one finds in casual conversation: general jauntiness, playful joking, meandering narrative,
constant subject changing, and quick observations. The conversational aesthetic celebrates the ordinary, the everyday, the current (though often the poems are not so limited), and views the loftier universals (love, death, nature) through a down-to-earth lens. Why this mode is art, and why it would not be sufficient simply to record and transcribe overheard conversations about these subjects is because the poems still do the work that poems do. The poet arranges language on the page to efficiently communicate something about life, and, as with any other aesthetic, the ability to do this work successfully is often a product of close attention to language rhythms and intense revision; as Yeats says: "A line will take us hours maybe; / Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought, our stitching and unstitching has been naught." Though O'Hara wrote many (probably mostly) quickly written poems, other poets under his influence struggle, as Yeats suggests, to render the particular powers this kind of aesthetic can produce.

One such power is the ability of this style to produce fresh, vibrant poems about one of the oldest subjects in poetry: the complexities of interpersonal relationships. In short: love poems. This idea might seem a little counterintuitive, since the chatty-voiced poet is probably more apt to write: "love has nothing to do with the clock / though you do blush redder at 2:30 in the afternoon, when our love seems a little less possible / and though your lips have incrementally lost their pink over the years" than, "Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks / within his bending sickle's compass come" which might seem to simplify rather than expand our notions of love and relationships, and might, in that simplification, unleash the dreaded three-headed beast: sentimentality. (Its heads being cheesiness, cliché, and shallowness of thought.) However, it is the conversational tone's navigation of, its play with, and sometimes its direct treatment of
sentimentality that distinguish it as an effective mode for writing earnest love poems. Writers employ several different poetic strategies within this mode in order to avoid the pitfalls risked in poems that treat a subject as old as interpersonal relationships. Within this form, the poet undercuts sentimentality through the use of humor, careful "you" deployment, and by taking advantage of the dynamics of high and low pressure language. I do not want to suggest that these moves are exclusive to this kind of poetry, but I do want to illuminate a few ways in which poets take advantage of chattiness to avoid sentimentality when writing poems about interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, it's important to note that though these kinds of poems tend to use "accessible" language, and that though these kinds of poems do not necessarily prize economy of phrase, this mode still engages in the pleasures of poetry that precision and economy afford: nuance, language-slipperiness, performative language, and the "good line."

Indeed, the pleasingly complicated way in which language enacts or performs certain central ideas finds a comfortable home in conversational poetry. A classic example of what is often called "performative language" is found in Robert Frost's "Spring Pools." Frost writes: "These pools that, though in forests, still reflect / The total sky almost without defect, / And like the flowers beside them, chill and shiver, / Will like the flowers beside them soon be gone," (245). Here, the last two lines reflect each other in the same way that the second line suggests the pools reflect the sky: "almost without defect." Frost reinforces the parallel fate of flowers and water later in the poem in another moment of performative language: "These flowery waters and these watery flowers" (245). All of this language reflection sets an example for the trees, whom Frost charges to think twice—or take some time to reflect—before sucking up the pretty spring
pools. Frost's use of performative language here calls a lot of attention to itself and almost becomes the central operation of the poem. Like Frost, Frank O'Hara uses this poetic device in, “[When I am feeling depressed and anxious sullen],” but in a way particular to the free-flowing conversational form:

   When I am feeling depressed and anxious sullen
   All you have to do is take your clothes off
   And all is wiped away revealing life's tenderness
   That we are flesh and breathe and are near us
   As you are really as you are I become as I
   Really am alive and knowing vaguely what is (349)

The juxtaposition of "anxious sullen" in the first line sets a quick pace for the poem. This speed sets the reader up to blow right through the complicated interactions happening between the "you" and the "I," which are falling into each other, enacting the speaker's wish for the two lovers to become one, as the speaker hopes: "as they really are." O'Hara begins this combining in the fourth line with the phrase, "we are…near us." These mirroring pronouns reinforce the idea of the inextricable bond between the two people. Moreover, in the fifth line, the phrase, "as you are really as you are" linguistically reflects "I become as I really am," the "Is" replacing the "yous," miming the speaker's desire for oneness. Unlike Frost's slow, meter-driven cadence, O'Hara's paratactic structure (a device that is typical of O'Hara's work and many writers of conversational poetry) moves the reader quickly through the lines, discouraging meditation on individual words, relying instead on the power of voice. O'Hara uses performative language, but he uses it almost in passing so that the overall effect of the poem is urgency and immediacy which serve,
in part, to enliven the banality of the phrase "all is wiped away revealing life's tenderness" and the final, nearly uber-sentimental phrase, "since once we are / together we always will be in this life come what may" (349). These are not throwaway lines; they are moments of earnest declarations of love that O'Hara gets away with by nestling them among his signature urgency-filled lines while simultaneously using a classic poetic technique.

Urgency, though, is not the only way the conversational mode hurdles such problems. In "Les Luths," O'Hara's conversational voice allows room for humor and displays of raw emotion to co-exist to the benefit of both attitudes. By "room" I mean the ability of a voice to contain disparate emotions or images and yet still maintain some feeling of consistency and authenticity, and since jokes are a part of conversation, they find a natural home in this mode. For example, though the subject "demanding proximity to lover" is an old one, O'Hara gets away with the sentimental line: "... and the clock that will not make me know / how to leave you" mostly because of the humor that preceded this final line (343). The poem begins with a kind of slapstick-y gesture: "Ah nuts! It's boring reading French newspapers / in New York as if I were a Colonial waiting for my gin... where is Gary Snyder I wonder if he's reading under a dwarf pine / stretched out so his book and his head fit under the lowest branch" (343). This collection of in-jokes and wistful ponderings prepares the reader (if he or she is familiar with O'Hara's work) for a slice-of-life/portrait-of-the-inner-workings-of-the-mind type poem, but then O'Hara takes a turn toward the sentimental in a line that combines sentimentality with humor: "and I am feeling particularly testy at being separated from / the one I love by the most dreary of practical exigencies money" which makes digestible the directly
emotional: "when I want only to lean on my elbow and stare into space feeling / the one warm beautiful thing in the world breathing upon my right rib" (343). Here, O'Hara uses the romantic affirmation as a check against the poem's initial jaunty humorousness. Moreover, the direct romantic feeling of the lines at the end of the poem asks the reader to reread the initial jokes through this lens of longing on which the poem eventually settles: "where since we are / together we always will be in this life come what may" (349). The first image—a Colonial waiting for his refreshment to arrive—becomes a self-deprecating joke about the entitlement inherent in demanding the presence of a distant lover. One reads the Gary Snyder joke as the speaker's attempt to distance himself from that feeling and perhaps from the hectic city world that occasions this moment of longing. We begin to see the initial jokes not as O'Hara spinning his wheels, but as an integral counterweight in the poem.

Billy Collins also takes advantage of the weight/counterweight dynamic integral to conversational poetry, but his approach is slightly different. In "Nightclub" Collins uses the conversational tone's ability to lower the pressure inherent in grand, universal ideas (in this poem love and beauty), in order to ultimately increase the punch of what could have been an overly rosy metaphor. The poem begins:

You are so beautiful and I am a fool

to be in love with you

is a theme that keeps coming up

in songs and poems.

There seems to be no room for variation.

I have never heard anyone sing
I am so beautiful
and you are a fool to be in love with me,
even though this notion has surely
crossed the minds of women and men alike. (92)

This slightly humorous, chatty language deflates the idea of love, beauty, and foolishness which stands in contrast to Collins's next move to slip into a description of Johnny Hartman's music which, the speaker claims, handles these large subjects so deftly:

It feels like smoke curling up from a cigarette
someone left burning on a baby grand piano
around three o'clock in the morning;
smoke that billows up into the bright lights
while out there in the darkness
some of the beautiful fools have gathered
around little tables to listen,
some with their eyes closed,
others leaning forward into the music
as if it were holding them up,
or twirling the loose ice in a glass,
slipping by degrees into a rhythmic dream. (92)

This relatively elongated sentence, this slightly richer language, seems more significant by virtue of the analytical language that precedes it so that the chatty language adds prestige to the speaker's description of Hartman's music. The speaker then fully submits to the jazz club fantasy by switching the poem's concern from a conversation about
poem/music conventions to the metaphor he uses to describe Hartman's music, until Collins again relies on the conversational tone to pull out of the fantasy in order to declare the poem's half-ironic, half-sentimental conclusion: "we have become beautiful without even knowing it" (92). The idea here seems to be that if we allow ourselves to ignore the artificial constructions that reason and analysis tend to reduce beauty, love, and foolishness to (subjects which are often treated in music and poems) those old subjects can actually seem fresh and new, which, Collins reluctantly suggests, is for the better. Collins' play of conversational language and rich metaphor enact this idea, and the conversational mode's ability to seamlessly contain both poetic strategies facilitates that operation.

In "Steps," O'Hara's treatment of the "you" works to banish sentimentality by making the reader forget that the poem is about a "you." Though it is clear from the first line that the poem is about loving a place—New York—O'Hara personifies the city with so many details that they ultimately charge the final "you" in a way that suggests that the "you" is not just New York. In the first two stanzas we get three yous, but after the third you O'Hara does not give us another one until the very last line of the poem. Instead of constantly addressing the you, or riffing on all of the things the you does, O'Hara gives us a few lines about his job, commentary about the Pittsburgh Pirates, wise one-offs, and details about architecture before finally bringing us back to the you: "oh god it's wonderful / to get out of bed / and drink too much coffee / and smoke too many cigarettes / and love you so much" (371). The complexity of the details preceding the last "you" throw the reader off the trail, so much so that the original "you" is washed out from the reader's memory. The reversion back to the direct address momentarily transforms the "you" into
the reader, or the speaker's personal love interest, or any other object of love. Moreover, the last few lines' sudden romantic celebration in the midst of complex details reminds the reader that the poem is about the concept of loving in general, and not just the hustle and bustle of New York.

Frank O'Hara combines all the techniques supra in a little poem, "Song" which, since it's so short, I will reproduce in full here:

Did you see me walking by the Buick Repairs?
I was thinking of you
Having a Coke in the heat it was your face
I saw on the movie magazine, no it was Fabian's
I was thinking of you
And down the railroad tracks where the station
Has mysteriously disappeared
I was thinking of you
As the bus pulled away in the twilight
I was thinking of you
And right now (367)

This poem dodges sentimentality by putting a new twist on an old form: the refrain. Instead of using the refrain to break up a narrative or a meditation on a subject in order to make the refrain mean something slightly different each time, O'Hara uses the "you" as a binding element that juxtaposes evocative and disparate images. In this way, the "you" becomes charged with the mysteriousness of the railroad tracks, the workaday feeling of walking by Buick Repairs, the brief sweetness of having a coke, etc. Additionally, the
incessant thought of the person invading the speaker's consciousness injects the poems with urgency, the repetitive "yous" invite the reader to keep chugging along, until O'Hara pulls the rug out from under the reader with the humorous ending: "and right now."

Furthermore, this poem exemplifies a particularly effective trait that pervades most conversational poetry: the sense that the writer knows that you, the reader, are present. The line, "and right now" suggests that the poet is aware he is writing a poem and that he wants his reader to be aware that he's aware that he's writing a poem, and perhaps part of the reason why he did not just put this little poem in an envelope and send it to Vincent Warren (or whomever O'Hara was in love with at the moment) is because the love note is not just for the love object, but also for the reader. As O'Hara writes in the more widely anthologized, "Personal Poem": "I wonder if one person out of the 8,000,000 is / thinking of me as I shake hands with LeRoi / and buy a strap for my wristwatch and go / back to work happy at the thought possibly so" (335). While I'm sure O'Hara has a particular person in mind, it seems to me that the reader is included in that desire for connection, for conversation, for a quick lunch or a coke. The wish that maybe someone special could be thinking about oneself in a world of billions of people is expressed in countless songs, but O'Hara's combination of operations that the discursive mode affords prevents this from seeming trite.

What draws me to O'Hara's poems, and to the conversational style in general, is the idea that the poems ultimately seek to act as a communicative device. Of course, there are other ways in which poems serve to "communicate." Language poets seek to tap into veins deeper than a word's ability to "mean" anything, relying instead on rhythm and the mind's amazing ability to make its own sense of disjunctive images and sounds. More
lyrical modes—those that especially prize economy of phrase and those that utilize
traditional forms—seek to speak through those forms in a way that relies on a reader's
sensitivity to the history of poetic technique, or to what is perceived as a language's
"natural rhythms" (I'm thinking of iambic pentameter), which can be extremely powerful.
One can hash out many other categories of poetic approach and the advantages and
drawbacks of each when it comes to trying to avoid sentimentality; however, the
conversational mode foregrounds the feeling that the poet is sitting down somewhere—
right now—writing a poem for someone and for you and the thing desperately needs to
be said and there's not much time to say it, while all the while seemingly backgrounding
poetic artifice, and it is this mode that first attracted me to poetry and it is in this mode I
primarily use when writing about the thing that is so hard to write about: love.


Common Decency in the Village

We have laws in this town that dictate
when you can and cannot steal a boat.
Custom demands corduroy at funerals.
You must invent at least one dance move,
the Tyrannosaurus Shimmy is taken.
This place was founded by Andre Voronov,
and if you sleep with any of the Voronov girls,
(esp. Polina) your future in public service
will be limited to park maintenance
(though Polina may proffer a lemonade
if you seek repose from your mowing
on the shady benches dedicated to her progenitors.)
Don't make off with the chrysanthemums
flanking City Hall; those are for everybody.
You are required to spend two entire evenings listening
to Murry recount the time he spent at the plastic factory in Frankfurt,
a story which concludes thusly: "Then the saw caught my arm.
Then I couldn't work. Now I'm sitting here talking to you."
No snowball fights in the kitchen. Don't swear in front of birds.
It's considered rude to buy mustard greens from Julieanna only
to let them wilt in the fridge. Of course you can inhabit
the windmill apartment recently vacated by Petri,
who burned down Polina's carrot fields in a fit of love-rage,
where you can play your heirloom viola to the now fallow fields,
and you may, of course, politely decline your invitation to the Cherry Festival,
but don't expect Polina to hum Love Me Tender to you
in the stolen gondola as you lay the oars to rest on the gunwale,
don't expect her then to look over her shoulder
as evening pinks the hills and roses the rising dust,
as the reflection of glimmering row houses begins to waver
in the barely troubled water beneath the Japanese bridge
that connects the industrial district to the nightclub district,
don't expect her then to look at you and whisper, "Welcome."
Working Days Off

You are easy unlike each little trauma
of my waking. You are go back to sleep.

You are taking the day off to be with me,
though we are not in love with each other

are we? You are make coffee for the caffeine.
You are drive to the store for more milk for me,

but you are steer with your knee, but we have not
made love yet or will we? You do not return from the store

all afternoon and I worry and take a walk and skip
lunch. I want something from you as the silence

now seems to want something from me,
but spend the afternoon idly and alone in the heat.

You are come in later with no explanation bearing a surprise
of Spanish wine which we drink immediately and walk off
down 10th street where you make the architecture blush
and I laugh a lot. We spend the night sitting and drinking

and talking interminably about ourselves
at the lazy little center of this July Tuesday, yet another

interim of our lives which comes, of course, to nothing.
So I practically dance you home where you are

lie in bed wearing nothing presumably. I try imagining
a better day off spent less in the light of your company,

in bed, alone, but can't—you who shuffled through the market
past the green apples and bulging oranges, you who casually

sampled the charcuterie before picking up just enough milk
to get me through the week—you fell to sleep easily, didn't you?
To Cupid

Like overheard headphone music
I sense you in the shushing audience.
How dare you make me find you
in this mess of fanning playbills
and antsy-legged dress rustles—
this cacophony of quieting gum smacks
and breath. God, the lady at the box office
should be my wife. Or maybe I could take
the red-haired house manager back to the mother country
and raise sheep and children and be
happy with natural things. The lights go out.
The low-level hum of the still-
stuck arrows of old love buzzes
(ouch) but fades when someone excuses herself
by me (ouch, sorry) and falls a little
on my crotch. Ouch. The play starts
and you’re still at it with the
look how the light falls on her cheeks,
and did the usher really mean it when she said hon,
and should I act on the accidental
arm bump from the husbanded
blonde next to me? “Oh, hello”—
the first words I hear of the play. Great—
I’ve missed the maid’s banter
and have just been introduced to damn you!
the most beautiful Nora Helmer
I’ve ever seen walk across a stage
and display aptitudes surpassing mere wifehood.
Is there no intermission? Curtain?
I see you’ve been represented on the new ceiling,
Cupid. How small your wings are, fat,
naked baby—how reckless your bow.
How endless your quiver, though,
now that the house stands for Nora
and the glistening clappers flash their teeth—
their sequins—silently blinking signals—
every star a target, every mouth an
O. You beaming bows,
throw off your sights!
Aubades

Heathers and Sarahs, and sleeping with them, is complex—there’s all kinds of types! Sometimes, in the morning, they hook their bras with their backs to me, or else hold the blanket over their breasts, which are everywhere, and it’s impossible to do before I return from the bathroom and catch them embarrassed, and then I’m embarrassed. And sometimes they sit up in bed boldly, and I get to marvel conspicuously at their funny sexiness. And sometimes I sit up in bed and they have disappeared! Once a Sarah asked if I wanted cereal, and I said of course I want cereal and we ate it together while giggling at FOX news, and another time I shared a banana with a Heather, quietly. My favorite was when I got eggs sunny side up with rosemary, toast, and cranberry juice from a Sarah who clearly led a purpose driven life. There are other diversities: Rachel had hair that looked like a magnum of Zinfandel exploded and suspended in ringlets, yet: no spare toothbrush. Iavora was a Young Democrat crushed after Councilman Jerry Wade’s defeat, but a champion kisser nonetheless! Dawn was an opera singer and this in the 21st century! Most were social workers. To say that I have merely been in search of an orgasm next to a good looking person is to give me too much credit, and to give no credit to the venture, which is human and worthy.

The best is hearing a Heather sing in the shower, and if you’re lucky she’ll sing You’re a Grand Old Flag, and you’ll be in love with America and her and yourself.
Sarah At The Martini Bar

She likes to think that her white dress is a kitten she saved
in the war-fog of other white dresses,
that her body was the formula that nursed the white dress
back from a combination shrapnel-and-love-lack-induced coma,
that she takes on a regal demeanor facilitated by the play
of light and shadow that catch on her dress and texture her confidence
with a look that says: I have won at the front, but flaunt surrender—
that it would be a faux pas to mention the faux pas
of her wearing a white dress well into autumn,
but most of all, she thinks that she will not be loved purely in her white dress,
the way the white dress means. Carefully, she eats
a strawberry in front of the bachelors. She sips
from the martini glass. She likes to think she will leave
with one of three young men scarfing hors d’oeuvres.
They are foxy and youthful in their khakis and blue shirts.
She would like to change her mind about her white dress.
She wants her red dress to also be her white dress.
One morning, she hopes a man will tell one perfect joke,
which will bloom into one perfect twilit ice cream,
four years, one ring, one serviceable hovel in Santiago
where she would eat lightly in the summer, and in the winter…
roasts, roasts, roasts! heavily rosemaried and thymed topped
with melting eggs! Then—midlife—niggling desire,
glorious divorce! Uproarious custody battle! Voilà! New start
selling honey with baby Ada in Vermont! Alternatively,
she will wake up and stride down the cobbled streets of the German Village
where she will have kisses with her companion over tiny cups of steam.
Every other Sunday she may wake wanting to cloister herself
with priestly men too intimidated to touch her body
for fear of befouling her clear and apparent seraphic beauty.
Her Ada will be the unmothered and fly-pocked infants
of an unloving world. Surrounded by a hell of petit fours,
an empire of chandeliers, a forest of fake wood,
she folds her shoulders into a laugh—a bright one—
and she could be anyone she wants to be—until her bobby pin falls,
until her strap slumps off her shoulder, until she feels,
in the birdbath hollow of her chest, her heart beat alone.
Everyone thinks the white dress was a smart buy.
Everyone drinks more martinis and leaves.
I do not want to slow dance with the prettiest girl at the wedding in my ill-fitting department store argyle. I want to slow dance with her intensely adorable friend who is frustrated. Because the lily keeps falling off her wrist when she reaches to refasten her earring. Because she must remember casually juggling more intricate vanities. Two years ago, two gins more into the evening, she was a blessed and steely twenty-seven. This ceremony has fostered the fear that she’ll have to cover up more and more parts of her with shinier and nicer smelling things until she’s all rocks and flowers and no pain. And the day is a sentence. And the love is a vow. Come on, Bridesmaid, leave the lily on the seat, put your diamonds down, let’s dance to not knowing for certain, for now.
A Blazer Doesn’t a Gentleman Make

When you slipped on the smashed pumpkin,
all of North Lancaster St. came running
with makeshift icepacks and apologies,
but this just isn't a good time for me right now.
Though I crack at your heart with lusty
hammer and chisel you always send it back to me
in one piece, beating. Please stop doing that.
I know we share the same birthday,
I know the angles of your smile at diners
are better than the coffee and pie.
Please don't make me tell you why
I refuse to act on our substantial attraction
as if there were no such thing as dancing.
You say, If I dropped my juggling pins,
wouldn't you help me pick them up?
The Chicano on the boardwalk with a fist full of cashews
doesn't fall into affirmation traps, so neither will I.
Sure, I crawl six-legged to your bed on the floor on occasion,
but you wish I would gallop towards you
like I just invented steak, but I'm not in the mood.
Really, I would just like you to smile at the thought
of me before a prayer at some future dinner table
surrounded by your family, and then everyone
will look at you and say What? and you will say
That Richard Smith, and then later you could share
a secret smile with yourself while you remove bobby pins
in the mirror, but I think I would be happier if I could
stop trying to maintain devastating impressions.
You say, It's an easy fix: buy a farm,
worry about vegetables,
take off your boots in the mudroom—
poof—flowers await you at dawn.
But darling, I burnt the croutons in the oven
for our salad this afternoon, but I didn’t wonder
if you would have improvised with crackers,
or if you would have suggested light fare at Belle Salade—
when I’m with you I always wish I had to go.
You should have stomped off in a huff, you should
have slapped my chest or shouted,
but you only looked at me as if you were looking through
the dark windows of a restaurant,
trying to make out a solitary man halfway
through a two-egg breakfast, or a waiter
absent-mindedly setting the tables,
trying to determine if you were too early, or late,
and then you turned away. Nothing interesting
happened with the light, or your hair.
Noncommittal Sexual Relationship

Like a button you fall off
in the street, or in the stairwell,
and someone comes along,
picks you up and says,
_Hey, just what I needed for my coat!
until after ten or twelve fastenings
you fall off because no one
who has to accidentally find
a button is good at sewing.
Within Me a Dawning Breaks

At first I wrote *languorous*, but when had you ever languored?
I wrote *bravely* instead, so bravely you sat there with toast.
But everyone is brave in the morning, so I wrote *leanly*.
It is a memory of you eating rye toast, drowsy in a blue
and white checkered wingback, on the day I remember
you kissing me and me thinking I am so tired
of you kissing me, and with each subsequent kiss
I felt driven deeper into the black and the wolf of me,
but you couldn’t tell then, could you? As of this moment
there is a permanent white, iron-lattice chair waiting for you
among the snapdragons trumpeting fragrantly
in The Garden of Women Eating Breakfast Forever,
but when I don my vestments to hover among the kind women there,
you are off holding court in a bathing suit
with the Women Blown in from the Fields,
or rearranging all my kept settings into some cloud,
or the statue of a cloud. And so now
In The Hour of Serious Memory in which I remember
what I thought was The Hour of Our Souring, you aren't here
with your rye toast, or the blue and the white,
the yolky light all over the brushed cement of the floor
that morning and your eye tearing up then,
and me thinking this was evidence of an oversensitivity
to the sun simply rising over St. Louis. Which it was.
Weights and Measures

I too often feel you are The Great Mystery Corporeal
whose significance locks and unlocks every hour,
or you are The Wholesome Muncher of Apples in Autumn
facilitating my slide into a suburban codependence.

I guess if we’re speaking in utilitarian terms
you are a preset idea-frame I am susceptible to,
but that ignores how gorgeous you look in a newspaper hat,
how crazy you get for almonds and honey.

Mostly I want to be grandfathered into the sense
of actualization one projects on monks, the winningest
politicians in Kansas, and old couples, but this impulse
is called entitlement, which must be resisted.

My love for you is not political but it can be expressed politically.
As in, you are the Iowa caucuses of my heart, the senatorial
backstab of my longing. You filibuster my impulse to congress
the woman who walks into the café knowing exactly what she wants.

I am the seething other party.

You get the sense, don’t you? That I want to whisper,
Marry me Victoria Whitsun, for who has ever known love?
I don’t understand so many parts of that sentence,
it just comes out, Victoria, who has ever known?

Shirking desire, skirting commitment: done, done, and dull,
but you never get dull, except for when I feel entitled,
or when I feel the stingless catch of a new blue eye,
but what an awful metric for love, my feelings.
The Ever-Cresting Thought

And now that I am finally ready in my brown coat
and lightly packed, your body with its disarming symmetry
reflecting the complicated power line hubs near the highway
gives me some spur on a new day rising over the airport
where I am most truly alone, but in the way
of the cosmopolitan, the man running
late through security. I think of you,
a woman I glimpsed too powerfully too briefly,
and I think of how I have only the thought of you
not your story or your poolside cocktail demeanor.
The moment comes in the bathroom mirror
where I wonder if that is enough, knowing
there will never be necking between us,
never a mouth on your nipple and mine,
and yes, for the moment the thought is enough,
but now I feel I owe you something like orange zest,
but I do not know how to deliver the zest substantially.
There are few things better than looking
out of the window of an airplane
without the pressure of having to say anything
(which is a special feature of being alone),
just as I had nothing to say at the top of the Alps,
or down by the froth and silence of the mud river
where all moments give under the weight
of their unimportance. The pilot is so apologetic
and hiding his youth. It's ok, pilot, I trust the youth.
The nurse next to me who is my age
is visiting her father, like me! And I think
of you even after a drastic and deliberate change
of subject. I wanted to end this poem back at orange zest,
but you keep attacking my mid-conscious mid-heaven
with your big eyes and my fantasy of your willingness
to change into pajamas right in front of me.
I can shut my eyes against the flight attendant pretty
and overdressed, the gorgeous Korean at the edge
of my periphery, the beerfoam clouds,
but darkness does not hide you who live
in the disquiet of a mind trying to quiet for sleep
with all the other images of unutterable awe.
Manicure

Is there evidence that she clips her nails in bed? If so, don’t worry. It’ll grow on you. You’ll soon be charmed. You’ll soon make a little wicker basket and collect the dead crescent parts of her. The ones she clipped off half-dreaming in the morning of you.

When the basket overfills, dump it out. They’re only fingernails.
Before You Leave

You should have left me after twenty-three seconds
of complete silence wherein we both stared unblinking
at a goldfinch singing and perching and reperching
before coming to rest on a telephone wire,
and then we would turn to each other as if we knew that yes,
the goldfinch has so ordained your future in the offing.
I wanted to cut to ten years later when I would take
the slate stairs of St. Catherine's Cathedral
quickly, a moment which would finally banish the last wild
oat that keeps us from ascending to the ranks
of the people willing to make the thousand tiny sacrifices of rearing,
and as we turn to each other we would agree
that the first son be born on good English soil.
I longed for you to rise to say Darling,
I shall return to you as the salmon return,
and in the blank and lonely moments after your departure
for gravity and wind to best the fresh dead leaf,
for the sun to blaze despairingly about its distance
from its simulacrum moon, and then I would know
that every image after your leaving was the natural world's
condolence for its indifference to us.
But you pushed in your chair. You said take care,
and on the breakfast table sit two squat mugs
of milky coffee, cold and too sweet.
Like Father

Father, you would not be surprised that I lose at cards. I get very drunk, and I lose at cards. You are not dead and you would not be surprised. I also make many modern mistakes. I know that I am in love with the idea of love and not with someone. I make mountains into molehills and then regret the loss of mountains. I deny the sexual potency of ambition. I remember calling you while we were both boiling eggs at night in our kitchens to tell you about this.

You said, Son, we have both been clouds in the rooms of undressing women. I found a photograph in your dresser of an unfamiliar woman wearing a grey t-shirt standing beside a newly asphalted road bordering unmown Midwestern grasses, and I ached for dull, hometowny spring. You are not dead or clearly dying, but I am going through your stuff. I want your leather-bound Superman comics, your Kingston Trio, your bamboo Buddha. I have been in love with two women who look like the one in your photograph. I think I have only seen you three hundred times. I am twenty-four and you are sixty-five. I need a box spring and a bed frame if I’m to be at all comfortable in the coming years. Suddenly, it is embarrassing not to own a table. Today I replaced the burnt-out light bulb in the bathroom with the light bulb from the hallway, which used to be the light bulb from the bedroom, which used to be the porch light. To what extent, father, does this sound familiar?
You Being I

It was all that God early on,
all that chocolate cake,
all that silhouette of a woman
in the window with her hair up
making her bed before going to bed
under the hot gold profusion of cheap light.
You fight the mounting fear of looking—
of feeling invited to look but not to stare
by virtue of the parted drapery—
and then the subsequent looking away,
and the subsequent looking back
at the window after she's extinguished
the light, a light she won't let you in on.
There is so much we should not see,
but do. We are broken by it.
It being guilt, we being you.
Unheralded

I feel like a soaked clot of newspaper
at the edge of a driveway after a thunderstorm—
the leftover rain drops mocking dew, disingenuous—
me the little—and only little—hazard, little obstacle
for sweet Lucas—the neighbor boy on the path, on the way—
half determination, half backpack, all blond and high-stepping
into the future—until it gets dark enough not to feel this way,
when I become a lump among other lumps—
distinctive enough to provoke but not sustain
cautious inquiry—an unlikely lost scarf, a sleeping
or a dead thing—a time that trumps the hours
when I sit in the sun and curse sweet Lucas for his unearned enthusiasm,
the hours I curse myself for cursing sweet Lucas,
the hours I sit very still and wait—as if waiting will assuage,
will put me in concert with the physics of those hours
when my disuse will find its place—
as if there were a choice except to wait
for a routiner to break routine,
to be fed up enough on an off day to take on the tiny burden
of peeling me from the ground to clear the way:
be it the one who first flung me, or sweet fucking Lucas,
or the Great Unwelcomer on whose driveway I rot,
in whose home I could have at least lined a cage,
killed a spider, reprimanded Toby—and yes, at last
this dull and dulling darkness—blanking the surrounding fields,
rounding off the corners of houses with shadow—but then, but O!
the flick, flicker, and buzz of moronic streetlights illuminating
all the newspapers wrapped in clear-blue plastic, dewing.
If the ground won’t swallow me, old raindrops, youthful dew,
get together and gather to a storm. Fall at full torrent,
so that I might—at least—disperse.
I want to capitulate to the wisdom
of the bathroom stall aphorism—*seize the day*—
but Lord, I equivocate. I am lazy of brain and tired of leg.
I stand stagnant before your wavy brilliances:
Your Shakespeare, Your Bach, Your honeydew,
Your hollyhock. I am glutted with Your nuance
and beauty, am stuffed with knowing I'll never—
will not have time to—know them fully.
I have come to know the world without you,
Lord, with all her consequences and wolves,
her tooth, her claw, her ruin, her renew.
Against these absolutes I find I'm still able
to forgive myself. You might be noticing
a contradiction. This, Lord, I've come to accept as a given.
So when I call out my little weaknesses at night or midday,
my little thanks or praise—Lord, when I pray—
I am grateful You, too, keep the moment quietly.
Can’t think straight with flu,
much less with maybe leukoplakia,
it means you have a hairy-white-tongue
like an almost-dead person,
can be symptomatic of cancer or HIV,
translates to: reduce
alcohol and tobacco and sex
to zero. Impossible.
I go homeopathic:
honey and whiskey, drinking
a lot of water,
all kinds of roughage,
not thinking about it,
Motown, oversleeping,
Echinacea goldenseal,
brushing tongue, tea,
lying very still.
I try everything too much
until I remember mother,
who infects me with all the diseases
she thought she had
(except for the one that left her
face down and drooling
in the dark of her bedroom
for six months after having sex
with Ralph. Her sheets smelled.
Her hair fell out in clumps
that were hard to get
into the bathroom trashcan)
I call Dr. Wagner.
Spend month looking too closely
at my tongue in the mirror.
Where’s the clinic? There’s the clinic.
Waiting for Dr. Wagner,
filling this out, please,
checking boxes for family history of:
heart disease, anxiety, diabetes,
preemptively checking boxes for:
cirrhosis, lung cancer,
surrounded by: periodicals,
little bald girls, oblivious
toddlers, demonic
sneezing, an old man
peeling, quiet parents,
Richard Smith?
185 lbs. 6’ 1”
No drug allergies.
Waiting for Dr. Wagner.
Knock, knock. Paralysis.
Hello, Richard.
Hello Dr. Wagner.
Dr. Wagner peering:
could be Geographic Tongue.
Which, what?
No biggie, anything else?
Geographic Tongue?
Yes, some people have it.
I think that’s all.
Co-pay, pocket Saf-T sucker.
Light up right after
revolving doors.
Projections

I remember thinking that one day I would buy the most expensive thing on the ice cream truck.

I remember thinking I’d never conquer the dark of a childhood bedroom, but now it’s the only light I’ll make love in.

I remember thinking I think I’ll remember every kiss and can only recall maybe five,

and every insult, accusation and embarrassment pulse in-between. I thought I’d think a lot of a love once lost, and do. I thought I’d probably never see you again, and I do still, but I won’t soon. I remember thinking I’d marry Jennifer Love Hewitt, and then dump her for my high school girlfriend, my true love. I remember thinking of but never having a high school girlfriend and long still for Jennifer Love.

I remember thinking nothing much of mortgages or taxes or loans or oil changes, but the pile on my nightstand has grown to the point of addressing, and keeping up with old friends is becoming like that, too.

My old friends! I remember promises I broke immediately, and remember thinking I would remember those breaches forever, but I don’t, thank god, there were thousands. I remember thinking about how we would all get famous, but secretly thinking I was going to be the one that led us out of the mind fuck of hick-peppered suburbia into the electric and fragrant cities of artists, and still think so. I remember thinking I would never be scared to travel by plane, but then I met you and remember being scared for the first time to die without you spooning soup through my lips thinned over the years by your kisses.

I remember thinking of the multitudinous ways in which
I could die: flogged by grunting bigots,

creamed by molten marshmallow fluff, split in half
by an orgasm, de-veined by an Italian-American chef,

but I am sure I will be cut down by heart
failure, or some general sickness, or lack of spirit.
Death Wish

I want to die with my shirt on
after a night of lust unrusted
under the lone, incandescent light bulb
of a wood-paneled apartment
before the Jets lose a regular season game
next to an un-dog-eared novel
in the loyal company of snacks
(these Doritos, this Mexican Cola)
on a futon mattress above my downstairs
neighbors watching a rerun of Roseanne
wherein Roseanne resists her daughter's
desire for contraceptive pills
as the first pre-dreams outline the dark
ghost of a woman's face compiled
from real-life passersby, those imagined,
and you, in a moment where I recognize
my power over breathing
having shed the doldrums of entertaining
the unattainable for the evening,
leaving behind a few hundred thousand
cigarette butts flicked into the medians
of a dozen countries, some papers
(this bag, this bottle) you can toss
with the body, my take-a-penny-leave-a-penny cup
overflowing, so long as I'm assured
a restrained, public smile surprising
your afternoon walk into laughter,
and when asked what's so funny—
if you could say nothing—
yes, I would vanish right then—
Since I had no real pet
you were the only one
to feed. Now you feed
the fake grass in space.

And the child now still
trying to attach wings
to you, even as you
become fake worm food,

must finally pause,
to throw shattered plastic
on your big coffin. Once
coated, you will enjoy

the shimmer of ever after
glitter for once without
having to shake your mane
and show your horn and
claim you’re eternal.
Josh says the word cow
does not mean cow
the way we saw the cow.

But we did. It was a cow,
a cow in the pasture.

He says, Rich, when you saw the cow,
were you touched by the elegance in its low?
Repulsed by its shoulders: a ghastly Adirondack chair
draped in a theatre curtain?
Did the bulging udder reek of soccer practice?
Did you think, “Mother?”
You see how suggestive cow
can be? How suggestive cow
is not?

I said, but, even if Roy Orbison
rode the cow to the Dutch market for pasties,
 isn’t it just Roy Orbison and the Dutch and the pasties
we care about, and doesn’t the cow
still just chomp grass and leave pies all over?
Personally, I think it’s nice that the c and the o and the w
got together to make cow.
Josh, are you afraid to say cow
because you are not the authority on cow?
Or, if you are simply frustrated by possibility,
we should just get off this farm and go have a
drink,
or play some
poker.
Mucus and apricots was the stuff of the morning.  
Reprimanding light all over the damn place.  
Coffee was a mistake. Ibuprofen will not be a mistake,  
and then might. Where art thou, nutrients?  
A sprawled out USA Today too old—  
China already invested in New Zealand, *Oil and Gold Found Beneath Failed States*, wasn’t that Tuesday?  
At least reading the USA Today feels like doing.  
So does searching for particular cereal spoons.  

A suit taps on the kitchen window,  
lets himself in.  
Wingtip by wingtip he approaches me.  
I guess I crossed my legs out of embarrassment.  
He bent down and kissed me.  
His scruff left my right cheek pink, red.  
Then he skipped out the kitchen door,  
like a cat with a mouth full of baby rabbit.  

And then I realized he was just a metaphor for day!  
And then, yes, water, delicious and cold.
Daylight, before you saunter off the patio
to say the word missive in front of drunk people in England,
you better get your hyacinth and forsythia straight.
No, I didn’t know the elections in Turkey have been contested
yet the majority of the people blaze on for democracy
in the face of fraudulence and cynicism. I think it’s unfair
of you to ask—I’ve been sleeping. If you’re such an expert
on consistency and progress, why when the bell bongs at lunch
like a troubled teenager do I variously think of the Ukrainian Village,
or father, and then salt, even whilst routinely walking my little bricked path
gilt with your light grown slutty and hot at noon in Ohio?
What happened to your crisp-of-morning, your teary-eyed youth?
With each up-tick and fall of the sun you demand your possibilities be,
but watch what happens to your significance
when I say the word year, say love, say Georgia.
There is no such thing as consistency in my life, save frazzled desire
so don’t you think it is rude to be disappointed in me at 5 o’clock
when you’re all grown up, condescending and pink?
Oh daylight, I see you have a moon too.
It is rubbed out a little on one side
like the way I feel only when I look at the moon,
or when I look at the idea of you head on
in the alarm clock radio without having so much
as pushed off a sheet.
Why I Don't Write Fiction

If this were a novel I would be steamrolling down Kismet Avenue with Tracy Deaton, and you would know how she tackles mussels with red sauce, and in that dress, and with chopsticks, and there would be some description of the piquant sun illuminating heretofore unnoticed specks on the awnings icicling nefariously, and you might spend seven pages inferring from my inner-monologue that only the excessive winter wear mitigates the pure sexual tension radiating off everything lonely and walking in Bedford, which is sad, and of course I have to fall on the ice right as Tracy Deaton takes a bite from the snowball she has been destined to throw at me as revenge for my embarrassing her brother back on page 2, because how else do you suggest the climax of unrequited love? But since this is a poem, there is only the slip and fall, and then the thought to look up at Tracy and say, "I am just trying my best!" overridden by the reflex to laugh, and gladly.
Thoughts During A Fiction Reading

“There's no love in this ham sandwich.”

[I guess there are worse ways to start, just so long as the story is actually about a ham sandwich maker and not—]

“‘Julia! This wild mayonnaise distribution is irresponsible and evidence of your contempt for me!’ [Ok. Julia=wife] She strolled in from the ‘abattoir,’ Franklin's word for the kitchen. She burned and slaughtered every scrap of meat that ever wiggled its way out of its saran wrap and Styrofoam tray sarcophagus. This was all before Katrina—the neighbor, not the disaster—and long before Julia found herself in the hands of Antonio, the sanctimonious baker from Hillsdale.”

[Just one slice of the eye and crash goes the chandelier upon the unsuspecting audience.]

“The punks in the corner of the library don't look threatening to Julia. She wasn't sure-footed, but she never feared anybody. Once she stopped in a bad neighborhood to ask for directions. ‘Everybody is people,’ she thought. ‘Yeah, they're not dangerous, those punks.’ And then the light changed.”

[Chaos in Galbreath Chapel, where novelist, Tom Eaton, unable to lift the great and glassy weight bearing down upon his loved ones—fulfilling the captain's divine dictum—fell upon an errant shard, thus killing himself in the name of courtesy—wait, is the reception in the basement? Of this church?]

“Sebastian blew off Julia for the last time.”

[I don't like Sebastian. I like Julia and her awful cooking.]

“And then the light changed.”

[Why is the light changing? Close eyes. No stimulus. Must have something specific to say later.]

“Julia eyed the martini with suspicion, and then with longing, and then, finally, she grabbed the glass, exclaiming, ‘To hell with Christmas, and to hell with this baby! We're going to the poor house! If you need anything, I'll be inside my own sadness!’ And then the light changed. Thanks.”
Still-Life in a Field

The pod cracked, it was time.
But the seeds clung
to the ribs of the thing
while the spine
held the halves in place.

And it stayed like that!
All winter long.
For months I felt like the boar with the mark on his tusk
sent to save the boar village from demons
and I could not be bent to darkness
because my innards were naturally bright and true.

I trotted along the river snapping up slumbering rosefinches.
Because the living must feed on the living or else they are scavengers,
because scavenging is tyrannous and unfortifying,
because I cannot sustain my Oneness on mangos,
I occasionally ate a whole nest of rosefinches.

I was bulking up. I was a sinuous bulk of muscle and potential.
I stood upon the bank of the black lake
and admired my flank and rump, my sharp hooves
and my handsome visage reflected in them.

Even at night when I snarffed and snuffled at the mites in my reed bed,
when I whimpered for a sweeter locust song or a sow to muss my tuft
I thought: “I am the beast in the trembling brush,” and fell to sleep.

I woke with the delightful pressure of potential,
knowing the demon would come, had come before like thunder,
like the threat of rain in thunder, and like a giant palm
I would shield the elders and farrows, the sows
and the reed beds, the flies and mites—I had been prepared.

Yet when I went searching I found no demon in the caldera.
No demon at the flamingo pond, just flamingos.
No demon even after rooting for days in snake holes.
I thought for a moment that perhaps—that of course!—
the demon was in the air. We breathed in the demon
and soon it would pop out from within us.
How foolish I had been to look for a singular demon!
I huffed in big so the most of him could face me.

The air was wet and condensed on my nostrils. I held it
in my lungs for a cruel number of minutes and exhaled.

But, the tulipwoods still looked whipped of their blossoms,
the brown water the flamingos clean their feathers in
dried, the lakebed cracked in large plates of dirt.

If I don’t find one. What if I don’t find one?
Perhaps I should build a demon? And gore it? And carry it through the village? No. They would know my fraud. They would know and they would break my tusks and pull my legs from their slots.

I feared to face the elder boars, but did. They said, “My son, there were demons, but we are done with them. The mark is a common mark.”

He showed me his on the inside of his calf.

“Some still look for the demon. Most start digging. They dig deep in the ground with snout and tusk and hoof, but always to bedrock. They get stuck and then they die. It takes days to dig them up and bury them again.”

Why have I not been privy to these burials?

“We bury them while you’re preparing to face the demon.”

Now I’m the mayor of the boar village. I have weekends off. In the summers I wake up late and kill ants for twenty minutes, and underneath a stone I keep every kind of shining thing.
In A Hole He Did Not Dig

Against all good advice I sped to the gravesite
of the ancestors who had dug too deeply
to see if any of them perhaps dislodged a demon
in all their ambitious burrowing, and due to
exhaustion suddenly died in the hole before the demon fully woke—
a mere inch of mud and shell separating dying boar from ancient rival—
and so now in the caldera waits a lonely demon,
unbattled and thus unfulfilled and therefore broody,
and so, yes, I have a moral obligation to face the unvanquished
that supercedes the reticence good advice instills
and in fact I can dally no longer. Through the jungle thick
and the jungle screeching I trotted into gallops at the thought
of the valley glistening with a fresh demon! Wide battleground,
battle-ready valley, framed by dangerous-looking orchids
and rare violets! I paused before the clearing to sniff.

No smell of demon, but definitely a palpable air
of demonry. There was a brief consideration of approach:
if I run into battle I might start off too frazzled,
might make mistakes early.
If I walk, cowardice might rise to paralysis.
I broke through the clearing "at a good clip,"
and upon my surveying of the great field pocked
with deep, pig-sized holes I, initially, beheld
no demon. Perhaps the demon was still a little trapped?
I edged around one old hole and then another.
I snarled into them, squealed into them,
stomped and stomped and stomped and slipped
and fell and fell and scraped and scraped
and thunked and cracked and wiggled
and cried out one ultrasonic yelp
that slipped loose all the still
dew drops from their leaf tips.

And so it grew dark. And so it grew light.
And so, and so…until finally I felt only composed
of lukewarm water, of porous bone,
of the few remaining nerves left firing
from spine, to thinning flank, to aching fetlock, to stuck hoof,
to aching fetlock, to thinning flank, to spine, and back, and back—
wide-river paced—my body,
finally aware of the weight of air.
Bee Song

The Chaste Tree
kneels
  heavy with rain
Which is good
and why the bees
they suck
  come night,
  come day
Come here:
near the window,
  where they gather
they make
little hovels
  in the cracks
  out of pollen.
Some hang
from a web
  —happy spider
  out of silk
    makes hay—
Some dance
  with friends
to remember
  the way
    to the bush
and back again
Such grace
  how strange
The Possibility of Actual Happiness

The gaunt hipster girl belches
in late afternoon's sleepy courtyard.
One reflective man observed by two
other reflective men holds what
looks like an electronic briefcase
over the manhole cover on Second Ave.
A bourgeois relic of a grandmother, heavy
with silk scarves, anachronistic in this corner
of the rustbelt, hobbles toward Planned Parenthood.
A week earlier I might have despaired of the world's infinite
obscurities, but now it seems as if dying winter
shook them all out to bolster the color of this,
the most recent spring, the first day this year
I've set out to stroll for strolling's sake.
Yes, the first sweat portends a deluge,
and oh yeah taxes, and, daunting, the pressure
of enumerating each awakening daffodil,
but for now I am confident in my accidental ability
to calm manic Natalie with a word if I see her all aflutter
in the deli, or maybe I'll introduce the day-beer to somber Thomas
(just one, Tom, then some coffee),
and if Sarah returns last night's late night desperation phone call,
I'll recharm her when I stress the wrong syllable in hello,
and I will hear the possibility
that she didn't completely regret our time spent falling
asleep on each other's shoulders in her I'm doing quite well.
Natalie might scowl at my audacity. Thomas might balk
at my suggestion to regulate his emotions with liquids.
Sarah—well, I don't know how long Sarah will flicker in an out of my existence,
but I am thirsty for a glass of spiked sweet tea, and I am certain
at least, of that, and hopefully this feeling
has only a little bit to do with the sun, the sun, the sun!
Poem Hopeful for the 21st Century

We have refrigerators & restaurants
the French & Czechs it’s the lovers
we don’t have (we want those).
Two cats we have, three birds
and a frog—it’s the cage we’ve lost.
Virgins we’ve had & lost
and didn’t want either.
Orange juice & mornings
we’ve had those come daily
we love those, we don’t like
burnt toast. Or subways.
We secretly love subways
and openly we love tinsel,
also we love sleep the way
a farmer would & cows.
Six-packs we love, we want more,
too, we want bottles & bottles
until the blue shoots through
the Venetians and wakes us
up on our bellies which need
lunch. Houses we are
supposed to build for each other,
& playgrounds. We have
stamps & checks, it’s the envelopes
we don’t have & need.