

The Feel of Things

1

and what beauty is this
I came to ask myself

in what the eye decides
to look upon and see

in what the fingers discover
beneath the surface tension

2

There is a sense in which the stars don't seem
as far away as they did, now that I've come
on the other side of these of these sky islands
to miss the ones I never noticed then

rising too late or setting too early, the signs
for cardinal and ordinal fire for instance
on opposite horizons at sunrise and sunset
splitting the heavenly personality

the way they do this time of year in terrains
even flatter than this, whether or not
the marmot wakes up to see its own shadow,
whether or not the freeze has let up.

Venus and the crescent moon so bright
in Scorpio these mornings before the sun
it seems almost as if we didn't know better
we might if we tried touch them.

But there is something to be said
for the feeling attending these matters,
these moments, when the physical laws reason
has taught us shrink back from normal consciousness

leaving the field to less conceptual
realities celestial mechanics,
mathematics and physics can't pretend
to understand, let alone explain.

3

Willing to forego belief
in immortality (despite
the intimations and images
beamed out by media icons

as proof of some kind; and granted
it's hard to verify negatives

(how do you know for sure, for instance,
the one you love doesn't love you?)

— the evidence for is circumstantial,
skimpy and otherwise suspect
the indications against, legion);
and longing always to be convinced

that we — our individual
selves, our personalities — persist.
But short of that, still wanting
some sense of what this life

this world is: some understanding
before we die of what this
was all about — what might be taken
for something like meaning, content, the things
words purport to pertain to
without which: meaninglessness
except insofar as hands working
toward some goal keeping us
from going nuts is meaningful.

4

Coming of age on orange sunshine
in sunny southern California
looking into the promised land
it was clear I'd never be able to enter

and no idea until then
our commonplaces were pieties
believed as simply as one and one
evening out a road laid down

on a rough and tumble bed of rocks
held in place by pebbles and sand
pressed onto glinting crystals
of the hardest mineral clay

(hard as long as rain doesn't fall
or the creek don't rise), and under that
turtles all the way down
or as our post-moderns say

mud and slush under the footings
living proof that all we hold sacred —
all, that is, that we give
the honorific of belief

we hold only in the sense
we hold a thought or mood or feeling

the instant or less we do, investing
ourselves in one after another

to keep the flood from breaking through
again, swamping any hope
of anything like permanence,
coherence or continuity,

leaving us with little except
the will to keep afloat where all
our givens have turned into pumpkins and we
no longer able to kid ourselves

into believing there's anything to
the so-called real world when we
get down to it, are glad to forget
what we were so taken with

when the veil stretched thin,
the fabric, distressed, let everything
flow through unobstructed
by attempts to understand.

5

Who am I to say
sweetness and light are not the way?

that conversing with plants
elves sprites does not further?

that received wisdom
is not to be trusted, much less believed?

as if we could know for certain
there's any other kind; that ideas

are not real things,
but just in our heads; or that we should

refrain entirely from placing faith
maybe anywhere at all

but certainly less in manmade
products (contrived by head or hand

to suit a wish), and less yet
in what comes more from thought

than inspiration, more from maps
than accident, luck

sheer serendipity
synchronicity

or mysteries in general
the unknown being

first and final cause of faith.
Though history does suggest

that mysteries especially those
sacramentalized

do tend to end up
in the company

of generals almost by design
with malice aforethought

shades of original sin displacing
the intricate intermeshing

the delicate merging of emotions
those rituals of belief

refuted with a kicked stone
a quincunx formation

regimenting every foursquare option
into a twelve-bar line

of navy blues and irregular black and tans
interrupting the peace

of mind sweetness and light most need.
It's hard to ignore jets

carpet-bombing or spraying poison gas,
fire clinging to bodies

reluctantly giving up their human being,
combat boots climbing

the stairs to your room, hard to believe the light
is not going of the west

that the sweet ripe flesh of that purple fruit
we helped ourselves to

asking forgiveness after the fact
hasn't gone sour by now,

half-digested in our sluggish bowels

producing gas more foul

than the fumes from the omphalos
the Pythoness inhaled,

prompting her to utter cryptic truths
not all of which can be said

to be glad tidings or even coherent
however numinous

or otherwise meaningful they might be
to the initiated

6

And something to be said for not saying
what some say needs to be said,

telling it like it is from the inside out,
affirming what seems to be external.

Everything that is being itself
among everything else being itself.

The myth of sin for instance: a nasty story
not fit for bedtime, brought home to us

by brothers and sisters suffering great pain
from some neuronal disturbance in the brain

that sentences them to fear and guilt and shame;
or death ushered in with stricken colors

which may it's said accompany one even
(if one's head is on right, truly believing

what one believes at that fell juncture)
unto eternity. If one accepts

that is eternity as real,
or the compulsion of linear time

implied in narrative sequitors,
or that thinking makes it so,

or if one entertains the idea of death
absolute and irrevocable:

the individual kaput, forfeit,
no after, here there or forever

a dreamless blackout of the personal
from which the self never recovers.

If one respects what one's mind presents.
If one retains one's notion of one.

7

To the optic imagination
by way of the eye:
When we are focused
When vision itself is seen.

To the tactile imagination
by way of the skin:
When the heart is touched
When we are caught in the act.

To the moral imagination
by way of the ear:
When words ring true
When we are moved by them.

To the judicial intellect
by way of the frontal lobe:
When it feels just right
When none is to blame.

To the discerning intellect
by way of the blood:
When things make sense
When we think we understand.

To the ecstatic intellect
by way of the animal fluid:
When we lose ourselves
When two are one.

8

what would you have
 what would you have me do
 I asked myself

 as each must if any is
 to see what grows
 in these fields
 before the light goes

and said,

 first

discriminate

distinguish

that most beautiful

that in ourselves
which gives
of ourselves

from that

which in all

absence

of self
of self-possession

wants

as lust wants
more than desire desires

as jealousy wants
what nature nation
what having all the world
cannot satisfy

and then,

delineate

that most beautiful
in you

that

we give
one another

that very wishbone

pliant yet resilient, that stay
that held the breast together

as the prow holds the ship
as the plow holds the field

breaking into the future

in our two hands
held unbroken

the shape of a man
the shape of a woman
forkéd things

heart and mind

the two legged beast
in every honest

every virtuous
act

and then

dedicate

that we have come
to understand

as the earth
understands

the soles of our feet
by which we hang

heads

blown

in solar wind
lunar tides

what there is, is here

where up down
forward backward
in out
now then
dissipate

preoccupied with itself

as bodies
lovely in their instants
in, by, the feel of things

brought together as never
after or before, lovely
in our understanding

of death, absolute,
resolute

loving each other

as ourselves
while there is time