

Three Poems, Or, If Clock Hands are the Hands, then the Body of Time is Love

I. Tea Life

I am as slow as a kettle.
As slow as a mule.
As the invisibly growing petals.

Bubbling liquid gathered in a pool.
As slow as molasses.
A tea kettle, dirtied flamed jewel.

At the door, please leave your opera glasses.
(The petals and leaves are already close.)
Fragile fall leaves falling soft like ashes.

Flames falling upward, fall's wind and rose,
The tea kettle slow, bubbles quivering;
Water nerves sloshed, human kettle body goes

from room to room, time for tea simmering,
a meaning, like a memory, like a song sung
and strung from bough to bough with birds alighting

above a bellow and orange and red leaves, the book lung
of a daddy long legs, its stomach breath
tasting air broken and built by bird's wings, among

the eternal image repeated: fall's dance of death—
but just another thing for truth to tremble through,
tuning fork legs of daddy long, among the baby's breath.

Among it all, subtle and quiet: the steam's debut:
spirals of steam strung and teasing and twirling,
What should we really, truly, in fact, in deed, attend to?

Thinking...Pulled beneath the belly button, legs curling.
Honey lavender tea, autumn, birds, bees, bare bones,
again repeated within and without the kettle's water swirling

festooning joyous thrust of steam and water. Stone
and wood and heat and gas and images again
arising like the ballooning tea bag, arising, truth's myriad tones.

It just takes a little bit of patience, then,
to get the kettle whistling, to get the songbird singing,
to get the pen writing, to get the human to begin,

to get the church bells really meaning and ringing,
 to feel the heart, finally, unhardening.
 Feel the peace of autumn and soon to be springing.

Ask of the birds, teas, trees, and steam your longed-for pardon
 (and nowhere else, at first, at least.) Start to finish,
 pluck a string, a flower, learn to play well the mouth organ.

Because the heart streaks its own varnish, a refinish
 of a thousand shades of teary-eyes and blue, beaten, bruised,
 and, yet, the world within and without you is not finished.

Lift slowly the heavy stone hands heavy with sorrow unimproved
 to make another cup after the sun's drop, because a friend,
 any other human heart might need it, to be renewed.

The tea bag touches the top of the water; it blends
 the no-color with lavender flower, myrtle, lemon grass,
 (and even more flowers, petals, rose hips, once stemmed

into the soil now into the tea, multiplied) cue the brass
 band and the caring hands! All these symphonic seasonal patterns
 say that like finds like, love finds love, hate should have no pass.

“A leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars.”
 Saturns and Saturns multiplied and multiplied are still not as big
 as Whitman's soul, nor yours, nor his, nor hers. (It matters.)

With your cup of tea, your friend, your soul, dance a jig,
 try not to forget the daddy long legs, the birds, the trees,
 that to grow upward, roots grow down, so first, slow: dig.

II. What Happens there at the Boundless Banks of Memory

Each answer and question and image again
 waiting to revive, in their turn, again, as if each were,
 without a flock nearby, a lone bird waiting to fly,
 waiting on a lone branch atop a tree,

with soft cries echoing from the last time,
 resounding together with this time,
 the way echoes echo.
 Driven inwards by my gathering thoughts

of birds and their sad perplexed echoes,
 all things chirp, tweet, flutter and flow.
 They call it stream of consciousness
 for an apt reason, flowing from one place

to another, to another, and yet another
 of water: I wonder what it shaped and how on its way.
 I wonder how now we can undo the falling
 when like Narcissus we stare into our reflections,

and how to continue to try to undo the forgetting and
 the forgetting of the forgetting
 swindled away by the streams of the Lethe.
 I remember the terrible process of trying to

remember my first memory, its shapes and
 what has happened to it since.
 Enter: the patience of a bird
 and how it knows when to move and to where

and even how the resting is part of the flying,
 how the wind will bear anything up on its back
 that touches everything, and how the way the wind whispers
 of eternity, how it is still all, there, up in the air.

Enter: the birds in my heart and their thirst,
 and those swirling winds of change. Yet, memory
 does not permit all things to pass by unnoticed—
 there is a tug and a pull on the banner of the heart,

splayed open this way and that,
 all the better on which to read the ancient script,
 each hieroglyph of yesterday, yesteryear, and—don't forget—
 the one that touches it all, all at once: the future.

Out of the magic hat memory wears and offers,

my hands of time grasp at my first memory:
 The bird beak of memory honing into the bark of time
 and its roots and sharp canopy of soft pencil tips,

Slowly, half-extinguished, the magic act of memory
 still traces its old contours and presents a dim and
 faint recollection of a fence behind my childhood house.
 This silver fence enclosed my mother's garden,

our above-ground pool, the skyscraper my dad
 built all by himself, (a jungle gym to adults.)
 The hammer, to this day, still resounds in my head,
 The smell of the plastic slide, my father's sweat, profuse, undeniable.

Memory now maintains this stark fence,
 patches up all its holes and waters the grass
 in the summertime and rakes away the leaves,
 forever leaves the original image of that silver fence

and I feel, again, my father's hand holding mine.
 It was autumn and we were walking the schoolyard
 on the other side of our fence, away from home,
 a flash-bulb memory that memory proffers

no such friendly hand as context of before or after:
 instead, complete in itself, a father and a son, dawdling around
 and walking. It is the only time I remember
 holding my father's hand, this one remembered and remembered day.

The silence in the sky, in the mind, and it revives again—
 it never fades, the human heart unafraid to keep beating,
 and new old and old new images revive again;
 call it thinking, call it dreaming, call it wandering,

call it remembering, call it planning, call it what
 you will, and all the while we discuss this,
 it all keeps on echoing. It is enough, in a sense, that remembered day.
 There, the dim half-extinguished light fed by the fence, my own half-remembered

memory, a half-image of a lone bird raises,
 with ruffled feathers and beady eyes,
 the question of how memory works
 and for what and what is it? Who? Who?

A mind, so well-likened to a stream, must remember
 the land running through it, too,
 the trees that grow out of it and drink it too,
 the birds that land on the trees and fly

still lower to sip from the stream, to dip their wings
 in it and flick water into the rays of the sun,
 and on and on like rings of trees,
 memory beating its wings, resting near the stream

that we channel through our everyday.
 This is my everyday: lost, wandering through
 that front of the foyer of a universe inside
 my head and heart and memories, hoping with hope.

This is my everyday: lost, intently lost on looking back
 to find what I feel I lose in the present
 from always looking back, like I'm expecting
 a shooting star to crash across the sky twice in a row.

Yet, every now and then, it does, against all odds.
 This is my everyday: the sad perplexity of memory
 and how it lies its hands on me, some strange
 benediction, the daily bread of the forgotten yesterday.

The strange everyday ritual: this searching,
 this thumbing through the annals of time,
 like the gathering thought pattern of birds' flight,
 the way they all fly together and form a mass,

a veritable religious sort of experience:
 a mass of gathering birds, a mass of memories,
 gathered always among the ruts and grooves of my brain,
 among the grooves of all the trees bound into the soil

of my head and heart, here inside my bird brain,
 thoughts gather in that same manner:
 an amorphous living breathing shape untraceable by the eye,
 the way a swelling mass of birds has its own symphony, its own geometry.

and all these flying pictures of my mind,
 they gather in that sad perplex manner,
 a lone dove seeking a high branch or building
 from which to survey curiously, wonderingly,

slowly and forlornly, revive again, with sad perplexity,
 like the cocked head dim and faint, like dark crows against
 a graying inverted crucible of a sky, many recollections
 (bundles of nerves, memories, winds passing the past,

blowing still, ceaselessly under memory stretched across the sky—
 bags of bones, felt things like the creases of a hand,

deadwood drifting, drywood dried on crests of waves,
all and every picture of the mind with that sad perplexity

heightened by memory's hands tick-tocking
and molding into the ridges of the brain new
recollections remembered out of the original experience,
the acute awareness of flesh and bone and fence and father and hand)

In my mind slowly, it unfolds from underneath
its dreamy-cloud-like billowing flowing shirt
hands that, slowly, in due time, with all
the new clouds mounting to form a thunderhead

of slowly remembered recollections, everything feeling collected,
like evaporation of water out of the soil,
the leaves and the trees and the tops of roofs,
all puddles of strange rain:

the outpouring of how memory shapes,
the way this evening's rain stays in the trees,
on top of the sagging leaves,
nature's recounting, nature's reckoning,

of all these ways to water and to grow and to love.

III. The Tales Among and through the Stars

You are truly one among
 those brightly burning
 steadfast forever seeing
 forever teeming with light
 upon light upon light upon
 (light, like poetry, like love
 only adds itself, adding)
 building and building like water
 over or under (everywhere)
 falling and falling and still.

Yes, the stars burn and yet,
 not only burn—they
 emit out of what they have
 to give, to give, to give
 bright and hot and true,
 babbling like water but
 (still giving more)
 conversing in a still more ancient
 tongue speaking silently of more

ancient truths, those sorts of
 truths about when to burn,
 about still giving more,
 pouring more into that deep
 inexhaustible cup of life,
 about the patience it takes
 for light to reach anywhere
 (the fourteen billion years
 sounding like an awful quiet)

like long fingers searching
 the spaces between the dark and
 the lambent dark, (like lovers
 do, lightly, lovingly, always)
 speaking of great big mythic drawings
 on the cathedral roof of the sky
Orion and Taurus and Ursa Major
 that can only be told through the timeless
 seething seeing streaming stars.

The stars, like you, shatter
 arithmetic and gravity and physics and
 common sense and all past experience and all
 past convention and all past.
 The stars, like you, contradict all

merely says that *the darkness is*
supposed to be dark,
and where there is to be dark,
there is to be no light
and only the dark.

The stars, like you, defy this notion
 that allots no room for light.
 The stars, like you, defy the notion
 that it ought to be an eye for an eye,
 as if that could possibly help the world to see,
 for if it really were an eye for an eye
 then we all as humans both individually and together
 would all owe the stars and the suns
 an indecipherable incalculable amount
 for the light they have unrelentingly
 unblinkingly lovingly poured over us
 and then maybe I could use that indecipherable incalculable amount
 as a baseline to measure the sort of total
 of all that you have given me in love.

And it is not about ticks and tallies
 so much as it is about being able to outline the broader picture
 (the constellation) and to make out of it meaning
 (the myth) and to make out of that meaning an action
 and out of the action and indication
 that “love is love, forever more”
 just as anything that is beautiful is.

Is. Is means an indecipherable sum from parts unadded and unnamed and unknown
 an existence of things that enigmatically exist
 not as though they do not belong together but rather
 that it is strange that they could ever do without.

It is strange that nature could have ever done without you—
 and then I begin to realize that maybe she hasn’t
 and, during this whole great long infinite while,
 it is has always been your face in the moon,
 your arms in the pine trees holding up
 the little finches and the nests and the owls,
 your hair the gleaming like the coats of all the
 sleekest wildest animals untethered running
 (across all time and all space
 a star with no fixed point in space)
 your hands churning the soil to plant the seed
 to grow the flower and see and smell the flower too--
 your eyes giving rise to the land around
 your sweet lips biting of the pomegranates

and the melons and the cocoa beans forever beforehand
and that it has always been you in the
elephant's mind of my human soul
and even still for all this backward leaning,
I do not mean to make a desert out of the sky,
as you are like the stars and are not dark nor simple
nor old, nor new, just as you are unlike the stars.

You, like the stars, unfurl a banner
of a blossoming brightly burning future
spelled and sprawled across the sky
and in it, (I read it above
the bowl of the sky above
my head where gulls fly and
my thoughts flap their wings
homebound to you, I read it there
where no wings beat an untrue tune)
in it there, up in the sky
I see hydrangeas unfolding into clouds
And clouds refolding into silver-
laced rain and in it up there I realize
as my neck cranes back and back and
back around to the other
side of the world, the galaxy,
that the light from fourteen billion years ago
is just pitterpattering here
now, trembling, among the dark,
like me, that it's just getting started,
all of this, all of this that is
spelled up in the stars.