

## Grace after sex

The only sign that lovers had been there  
was a clean set of sheets and two towels in the dryer.  
Two mugs in the dish drainer  
could have been her and her husband's from their last visit.  
Anything new in the air did not have a scent  
separable from the scent of this place:  
gulls' middens, tides' expositions,  
and wind-sprayed salt spritz.  
The wastebaskets were empty.  
Yet she knew, just below awareness,  
for her friends' prayer loitered in the place:

“Glorious goddess: creator of these spirited bodies  
and their lovemaking—  
creator of forces as gentle and powerful  
as snowflakes and earthquakes—  
thank you.

“And thank you for the rubber tree,  
who enables us to love many this way.”

## Dough

Our mother baked fresh bread  
to the scorn of our classmates  
while we knew the secret of its taste,  
of its aroma filling the house at the beginning of the afternoon,  
of having to wait for the loaves to cool  
while temptation pervaded the house—  
seethed under doors, distilled in our noses, condensed in our throats,  
dripped to our ready tongues.

"You can't make bread; you have to buy it,"  
said one boy, shaking coins of many lands in his pockets.

He would go on to taste  
baguette and biscotti,  
focaccia, chapatti,  
pita, tortilla, and nan,  
and plenty of fine wines.

And still today  
he doesn't know the feel of dough in his hands,  
how it gathers itself to itself,  
how it rises and falls and rises again,

how it tastes to wait for it.

## Let down reflex

The baby cries, the mother's milk lets down,  
said Rumi, reducing mutual causality, reinforcing  
feedback loops, and desire's embedded fulfillment  
into the simplest image.

Imagine how whole within he must have been  
to have lost one like Shams and  
still not curse the yearning!

But know it: even while at work at her desk  
milk beads at the tip of the mother's breast  
when the baby cries, miles from earshot,  
the pair cities apart. A phone call  
will confirm and heartache sear  
for life.

For life, perhaps.  
For life is so much loss, even heartaches get lost.  
For life is so much separation (cell walls,  
organisms), so much reproduction (cell division,  
fledglings), and war. Yes life  
is war,

for war has never been more than a blip  
on population's trajectory, or cause for a boomlet. As yet.  
And life is abhorrence  
of vacuum,

and boundless beauty.

Even now, past menopause, one wonders  
when a little bit of moisture lets down, not even a whole drop,  
who is crying, and where the children are.

## **Locus of control**

My mother and I stepped over trash  
on a sidewalk, and she taught me  
to judge the litterers.

My father taught me  
to pick it up: the glee of superiority.

My priest and our youth group  
stepped around a drunk face down  
on a sidewalk, and he taught us  
selective ministry.

My government and my peace group  
debated the war and then  
how to leave, what is our  
duty,  
who is it  
who has the moral authority to  
take  
responsibility  
for the mess we've made.

Who do we think we are?

## Rocks

I.

alive

buzzing molecules  
crystals growing slowly  
edges dying, crumbling into soil

rocks

becoming again  
from the pressure between  
gravity, pulling down  
earth, swelling outward

II.

Maybe rocks are running the whole show.  
Maybe they have us running around for them  
gathering ingredients; mining and grinding quarries,  
building foundries to melt metals,  
mixing plastics from distillations, concentrations  
of elements, from all over this world, gathering  
them into what we call landfills;  
wombs of new kinds of rocks.  
A new oil, the amniotic sac,  
releases as consciousness begins to reside  
in a new stone, here to develop for millennia,  
here to watch the surface change.  
Soil clings and is swept away  
by the wind, which does little more to the rock  
than speed its shedding.

III.

When rocks laugh  
we have earthquakes.  
It's not that they have anything against us.  
They appreciate what we do to them,  
it's just that chisels and 'dozers tickle.  
They love what we've done with marble,  
gravel, graves, like a good jackhammering once in a while.  
Don't mind being shaped into Stonehenge, Newgrange,  
Machu Pichu, Notre Dame,  
sphinxes, pyramids, and pietas,  
The Thinker, the David, and many Moore.  
If they have no quarrel with the tickling people,  
why should we cry when they laugh?

IV.

Who did the rocks have melt down the honey-colored goo  
to pour over flies and fossilize in amber?

Who petrified the wood of a whole forest  
and froze sand over the fallen logs?

V.

Rocks have places they belong.

Be careful which you choose to move.

Some rocks won't stand for not being returned where they came from.

Their mountains will move,

burst up, burning spew.

VI.

You don't want to get in the way of a rock.

They aren't forgiving. They don't have to be.

They move of a force that is not their own:

No will, no blame.