

Homage to Williams in Old Age

After multiple strokes, it seems,
the thing itself became
the loss of time's impress,
where "descent beckons
as the ascent beckoned," where
a mountain's rise attempted left
the failure to reach that peak
and scaling Parnassus' heights
made absent memories become
"a kind of accomplishment"
a descent into the deep,
the darkest ocean depths

Where winter's cold retreats
from surfaces of sunlight
to darkness deeper than night,
the depths beneath all light,
where mudflats squirm
with the evolution of worms,
and cold-blooded fish compete,
as predators for prey,
becoming prey themselves
as we are also prey
to sharks of ancient lineage
attacking from the depths,

Where what was known is forgotten
and light no longer reaches,
however hard we strive for youth
for the sunlight high above us
beckoning toward the beach,
where lust and love defined
what once enriched our life,
touch transcending the times
as we joined our lives together,
Like Bill and Flossie did,
beginning lives together
in a century of pain.

We faced this threat ourselves,
when the Vietnam War intervened,
on our hope for peace together,
making memories of days
when the crash of surf against rocks,

broke spray into salty tears
that soaked our youthful cheeks,
 crystalizing disenchantments
 reinforced by a dream's defeat--
by the return of ancestral prejudice
 the end of our trust in governments
 the end of our hopes for peace
A turn toward damaged victories lost
 like the sting of blowflies distracting us
 from a poem's implied conceit.

Ode to My Body--Swimming

The water's cool when I enter it.
It streams like silk along skin.
As I pull my arms down and through,
propelling my weight down the pool,
I am swimming through the bubbles
of breath escaping my lungs.

My heart beats strongly as I move.
I'm pushed by the rhythmic
metronome of feet beating time--
time stretching back toward years,
when muscles of youth and strength
propelled me between blue walls,
tucked me into a quick flip-turn and away,
back to that memory lost in fat and age,
lost to years of stasis, writing and editing,
managing--making a living for my family.

As I grew older, weaker, and years slipped by,
experience wore those supple joints
into arthritic pains, tired legs, and hands
that can no longer be trusted not to slip
from tools or cups or even from
my favorite pen tonight as I try to write
this ode to the fat carcass in which I live.

I am slowly dying--from diabetes, or
heart disease, COPD, or coronavirus now
as others have died before me, but I will
not go easily into that light at the end
of all that is for me, that light on the wall
like a train coming on, beamed into breath,
rattling and shaking like a fearful thing,
no longer bubbling out to slip on past
the end of me, the end of time, spent.

Christmas Day Between Rains After 50 Years

For Diana

Blue skies between clouds drifting by.
Tomorrow's rain begins tonight,
with the steady call of raindrops striking the roof.
We are protected by our history, preserved,
as in glass walls, by years together—
by the perseverance of marriage—
begun two days before Christmas, 50 years ago,
in California, in the middle of a war—
in an era of cold and hot wars,
of assassinations, one after another,
when important people, people beloved by many,
but hated enough, died in America—
land of freedom and justice, we believed,
but also hatred's home—protected by guns
and bullets in the hands of lovers and haters,
sanctioned or not, who enforced the will
of white, race-baiting crowds
protecting their right to feel superior—
or of young people forced to follow
the paths of their elders, into civil wars
in places far from home—
away from the sunshine of this wedding day—
this happy day, a teacher's and a soldier's day,
with vows becoming 50 years together.
Joined by our faith in each other,
by our faith in the institutions we believed in—
the promises of family and children,
Christmases celebrating a child born
to Mary and Joseph, 2,000 years ago,
a child come to brighten our skies on cloudy nights,
when the cold of winter comes creeping in.
As we grew old, we persevered.
Having passed our time on to the children
who follow us into cloudy days and rain ahead—
we question the promise of all our years together,
hope for a future in which our child prospers,
where winter birds continue to scratch rich earth
and fallen leaves beneath the trees for sustenance,
and a future stretching far beyond the dark,
our end, into the glory of green years ahead.

Remembering My First Look at Michelangelo's *Pieta*

I remember that first shiver
of recognition.
“He’s dead,”
I said to my mother
as we stopped in that hall in St. Peter’s.
I was ten years old at the time
visiting Italy with my family
traveling home
from four-years
with my father and
the Air Force
in Libya.

The artist’s muscular *Moses*,
with its bulging veins
and patriarchal stare,
was still in my brain
when I stepped into the light
of Christ’s death.
He was lying there
in Mary’s lap
as limp and full of lost humanity
as marble can be.

The memory is indelible--
not erased by the brutality
of wars, or the attack
that damaged it in 1972.
I mourn this desecration today,
just as, at 10,
I caressed
the toe of Christ’s left foot.

It was worn and stained
by the touch of thousands
of previous worshipers.