

After Marvin Bell's Dead Man poems.

Live as if you are already dead.

-Zen admonition

About the Dead Woman and the Visible Man

One morning, the Dead Woman notices his jaw.

The skin is gone, and the soft tissue that formed his cheeks and his lips.

She can see straight into his head:

the springs and levers that work his jaw, the moving ramp that is his tongue, the reef of teeth.

She watches the uvular mechanism at the back of his throat where the electricity of his thoughts changes into sound.

The Dead Woman thinks to herself, "He *has* been looking a little Edisonian these days. A little filamentary in the eyebrows."

Then, as if to extend the metaphor, she notices light shining from his head.

No, not from his head, but through his head where an entire section has been bored out.

She can see clean through him.

And still, he continues to talk.

More About the Dead Woman and the Visible Man

"He speaks," she marvels, "with such authority.

And yet, as I can see, his head is full of holes."

The Past

Startling to come upon it like that,
a house not only overgrown but ingrown
with vines that surge up and through the roof,
shoes and boots all scattered to hell and back,
and that heavy belt hanging from the iron bedstead
with the chewed mattress where mice have nested,
and the sense that some god-awful turmoil
has blown the windows out and the doors open
just so that we can have this glimpse
of the dresses hanging in the closet -
one grey, one white, one pink -
mildew creeping up their hems
while outside the grass is freshly mowed
as if tea is about to be served.

This Gate

This gate closes
with a counterweight,
 the iron treadle wheel
 from a sewing machine,
that tethers the gate
by the rope of gravity

so the gate opens
and closes like ribs
around the soft tissue
of memories kept alive
by a soft swoosh... swoosh...
and it is the occasional clack
 of an old cow bell
 now tied to its latch

that awakens me to
 the scent of *chamisa*,
 the stillness of the cat,
things that might otherwise
fly away.

The Owl

Anything that I could say
about the owl has already
been said somewhere else
by someone else.

Nonetheless, an owl
accompanies us tonight
as we climb the hill
through the fog.

The woods are damp
and rich with decay.
Snail shells litter the path,
and an owl accompanies us.

It skims past us,
lights in a tree just ahead
and swivels its head -
huge dark eyes, pale moon face -
to watch as we catch up,
and when we have,
it flies to the next tree
and the next
leading us upward
and beyond.

To make a good photograph, you have to believe.

Believe in the low winter sun.
Believe that sheaves of light will glide
through breaks in the storm.

Believe in framing the light
with winter trees, bare, brown, crooked.
Stone gates. Bent sign posts.
A stranger's open hand.

Believe in rhythm and repetition.
A line of parking barriers,
a row of handcarts,
three dogs playing in snow.
Yellow boots on a yellow crosswalk;
then the yellow taxi.
The woman whose stance mirrors
mannikins in a store window.
The man who pulls the cart
and the man who pushes.
The swell and release
of canvas tarps in the wind.

Believe in the things that don't belong.
The men who sell lingerie. The children
who are not in school. The woman
with no shoes. The makeshift fires for tea.
The screw in the lips of a hat mannikin.
A city goat. Chickens in the graveyard.
Purple tissues among tangerines.

Believe in the indistinct background;
monochromatic; slightly blurred.

Believe there is no middle ground.
Everything happens now.
Everything happens here.