

When we are old

for the Donnybrookers

Like crushed oil or a spread of dandelion
in a breeze, an ecstatic gathering, the reunion,
and we will then be laughing, walking with canes
or carrying oxygen because of our better years
“and oh,” we’ll say, “remember this poem?”
and we’ll learn to love our bourbon by the finger
when our bodies cannot sustain it by the glass
as we’ll stain our dentures with cigarettes
and our books with coffee with our shaking hands,
and “oh, those were the days”
and “but damn it, these are days too” we’ll say,
and when we meet again, now no longer children,
now with infants teathed with whisky,
our young ones laughing his laugh with her eyes,
we’ll sit and sip and smile,
oh, we’ll smile,
and we’ll remember the old home
and how it taught us ourselves and love and God.

From trees we'll learn to love

I do not want to do with you what autumn does to trees,
and when is now I never want this—or I am learning
not to want this—for I am learning to delight in when is
our first summer, and we fully clothed and happily so.
Like how the seeds learn from the saplings and the saplings
from the trees of few rings and the trees of few rings
from the tree of many rings just how necessary leaves are
and how lovely they are in their crude necessity.

When is then, when the earth has drunk deep enough of day
and the trees cast their greens aside for unnecessary colors,
when in this they are not proud but are preparing to undress.
When is then, when such covenants as can be made manifest
to the eyes of men are made, the signs of some deep offering
and the sound of some lofty voice. Adorned then with colors
so plain—so desperately plain—yet now, set just so and with
such suddenness, they are autumn. Like how the saplings learn
from the trees of few rings and the trees of a few rings
from the trees of many rings we will learn just how autumn is,
how it is the time of wintering, of gathering deep
what leaves are and holding it in the hidden places
and keeping it there. When is then will be our first autumn,
and then it will be that I will have wanted even now
to do what autumn does. But, dear, I am only learning
and now am but a seed and on a good day a sapling,
and I do not want to steal from us our autumn
while we are still in early summer.

I do not want to do to you what autumn does to trees
and I do not want to want to. I want first to learn
like a seed what water and earth and sky mean
and from these to learn the meaning of water
and sustenance and shelter, so I might maybe offer
these in what winters will arrive. But when is spring,
when is then and when what beauty the leaves
teach has been also learned, then when we have learned
deeply of their crude necessity and too their colorful absence,
then when the nearly sleep spoken “Have a good day at work”
means neither more nor less than our return to autumns,
this,
this is what I want,
only now is summer and I am still learning of the leaves.

So many solipsists along a way

With every dawn have I been born
and with every dusk I've died,
and however many of myselfs have tried
 have tried have tried
to be so altogether singular,
 a solipsistic sigh,
only to find along a way an impasse
and a passerby and call out
asking for directions.
What mood breaks what misery is,
shatters it like a plate from a table,
full still of the half-eaten bird.
Thanksgiving, a holiday for gluttons.
Thanksgiving, the dawns and dusks
for those who have not forgotten
the Incarnation. What roads are
and how traveling goes are
themselves the neighbor's eyes.
What walking is and how the ground
cradles each new step just so are
an invitation to see
that the sun does not devour a tree
with its light, nor a laurel
with the flame of itself.

With every dawn I have been reborn
and with every dusk I've slept
and however much myselfs have wept
 have wept have wept
and been so scattered, disengathered,
 an aching laugh,
only to find myself along a way
hearing a call for help, and there
another at an impasse pleading
only to not be alone:
 "Which way?" they say
 and "thank you,"
and somewhere Christ the dancing
beggar and elsewhere the solemn
priest, somedays the Samaritan
and somedays the traveler robbed
and wounded, but today, but now,
I am thinking less fondly of myselfs,
of how often I seek something

like baptism in the Lethe, forgetting
as though desperately
the clap of dawn and dusk,
the subtle joys of stars,
a tree tickled in a breeze.

With every dawn I've been awakened
and with every dusk been set to rest,
and however much I've been caressed
 caressed caressed
by how or what or who is comfort,
 a soft voice,
and hard I am and loud,
and I am the boulder of my Lord,
rolled up and away so many times.
The Cross appears more often
than the roads, and yet so often I forget
that waking is a prayer,
remembering only the sorry sound
of my own voice and voices,
the sight and seeing of my face
and faces, and not the least of these
of Christ. Too often I am only many
and too often I am only one.
Too often I am the die cast
for the cloak of my Lord
and the haughty hands that roll it,
and too rarely Elisha's waiting
for Elijah's fiery going up,
too often I forget all else,
 remembering only me,
 myself, and my own
 heavy-footed way.

A thing called happiness

A thing called happiness, said "Hello!"
and to a table happiness replied,
whispered: three pints filled and laughter,
whispered like gods and children whisper,
well heard by those nearby, and there
over drinks they spoke, their mouths
and their eyes and their eyes dancing
though the day had been long
and the funeral for a dear friend,
but he would have wanted it this way,
and "remember that time when..." one says.

A thing called happiness, said "How is it
with you these days?" and to a tree, sad
with nakedness, happiness replied,
laughed: a warm wind on a chill day,
trees gold and red and deep, arriving
at their yearly repose, sap sinking in,
and on the path there, a young couple, both caught
in other's eyes, still learning how it is
to live like spring at autumn,
caring more for fruit than nakedness,
and "your really are like a mouse," she says
and he smiles, not knowing what to say.

A thing called happiness, said "Where is it
you hide these days?" and to a smile
happiness replied, teased: a sudden downpour
in a parched land, the dancing of firemen
where a forest once was, and it is gone, but there
they look like shamans with their dance
and like children with their laughter,
and "This!" one says, "This right here!"
and he begins to cry and no one sees it
for the rain and "this" he says, and they begin to sing,
standing in like a circle and passing about a canteen
of water like whisky.

A thing called happiness, said "Farewell?"
and softly to a room, home to only a card table
happiness replied,
bellowed: "Hello, dear, how was work,"
she says, and "long," he says, sighing, sinking
into the couch, and "dear," she says,

“I have something to tell you,”
and he looks at her and as she smiles she cries,
and he smiles, and then cries, and he kisses her,
and “so that’s it for the poker room” he says,
wiping away her tear, “it’s been a good run,”
and he kisses her hand,
and “have you told our mothers?” he says.

That slow build of intimacy

That slow build of intimacy, the tuning
turning to melody, hitting crescendo,
continuing, timeless time, a return
to when we were young and only
heard and spoke, not yet knowing
the distance of page and glass.

The sands becoming pebbles becoming
boulders becoming cliffs against the sea.
Then the fear of the jump. The height is
not too high, probably, and the water is
deep enough, probably, and there is
something like a wrestling between
blessings, between a sleepless angel
and a wounded Jacob.

God needed his heir to behave,
to live and to sire, and Jacob
needed a life beyond
a dreamt latter and a pile of stones.

There are nights where a sunrise
should not have been,
should not have been seen or unseen,
when the midnight hours
should not have been dared awake.

The blessing of an embrace forgotten,
neglected for the hope of guilt
a few days later, or a week,
or a life. I've never quite learned
to read the heights and the depths
in a woman's eyes.