

## Chorus

The cicadas came early this year, little castanets  
swaying from tree to tree, a canopy  
of longing and imminent death  
above the temperate lawn and garden.

The grandchildren and their parents  
left yesterday, a happy week, leaving us  
facing off at dinner, a dormant habit  
of stalemate reawaking.

A catbird in the spruce limb  
sounds his noon complaint. Beyond  
the wall of trees traffic seethes.  
A neighbor's radio muddles

forecast and report.

## Elliptic

Your kiss is like chocolate. What I mean  
to say is —  
your lips are peach soufflé.

That is,

let's take a walk down the furrows  
of your neckline.  
A fawn is standing there,  
wide-eyed and blinking in its newness  
to the world,  
unaware of danger —

what it is or what it means.

In the valley  
below your shoulder  
a calliope of equations,  
or rather,  
a bouquet of conflicting commands:  
Charge!  
Run away!  
Surrender!  
Dance crazy circles!

Come hither.

Down and down  
the moguls of your breasts —  
O wandering rocks  
you can have my ships  
any time you want them!

I'd linger here all day  
if your Bright Angel weren't so in need  
of my ministrations.

[stanza break]

Poor,  
sweet Thing.

Then my red petals for yours.

If only the trade could last!

But your tears,  
your laughter – they beg my charity.

Then,  
just when  
I'm ready to give away my every last cent,

so much gold  
pours  
from the sky

I can hardly count.

The only thing left to us then  
is to climb  
the ladder  
to the lights  
blinking  
over the waters.

See how they run.

Catch them.

Catch them!

We're falling.

Your body,  
my hammock.

And mine,  
perhaps,  
your  
distal bear,  
come home at last  
to its promised slumber.



## The Perfection of Love

It can be about as perfect  
as a ten-cent balloon.  
You blow it up, it's fun  
for a while, it serves  
its party purpose.  
Come back the next day  
and you've got a wrinkly sack  
knotted at the throat.

You want a better time,  
you're going to have to pay.  
Mylar, helium – progressive forms  
of flesh and spirit, vehicle and tenor  
of a better idea, glitzy  
and queer as they may be.

The brave among you  
parade your buoyant fortune  
for a time, then step to the lawn  
to release it, let it float high  
into the heat lightning  
flashing at dusk. Best  
when it's cloudy, light  
like a distant cipher of bees  
wagging down the troposphere.  
Though folks over yonder  
might not see those blazes as you do,

the actual forks of fiery spectacle  
flaming the trees, OD'ing the motors  
and fine circuitry of household appliances.  
Best seen when you look away, slightly,  
the wash of airborne juice painting the evening  
for a second or two. And your little balloon  
growing smaller as the sky swells  
with wonder.

Oh, love's perfect as a Saturday,  
pumping up the old inner tubes  
that your neighbor donated,  
running to the creek, side-stepping  
rattlers, saw-grass, reeling down the scree.

[stanza break]

So what if your ass bumps  
on the water-worn stones  
shadowing the surface –  
their prolix ripples  
gave warning enough.  
You were too busy laughing,  
spinning like a planetoid,  
a drink in one hand,  
lively current in the other.  
Keepsakes, those abrasions.

And just past the last bend,  
circling in an eddy, one of you  
studies the wobbly *ostinato*  
of your orbit, fractal,  
while the other idles  
in the shoal's slow lee.

And then that comes to an end, too.

## Fallen

good to see  
trunks lying still  
on a wood slope

what makes us different  
among other breathing bodies  
fallen away

no longer useful  
leafless, dark to light  
broken by sky or disuse

attenuated senses, excess ingenuity  
mastering space, but  
enslaved to time

persistent return to  
immortal earth  
relinquishing life for life

that first taste  
breeding everlasting hunger  
at too great a cost

## August

What we know  
is that here  
between the heel and earth  
is a space for leaving

and here  
beneath the bee's  
lead-glass wing  
we view a sky  
mapped and holy.

Cicadas strike flint  
in heavy August evenings  
setting transparent fires  
in shrouded oaks.

*Come to the window  
Look inside the house  
Someone is waking up*

What we know  
stirs like salamanders  
in mud tunnels  
beneath stones  
bathed in soft water.



## I Wish I Were the Dog

I wish I were the dog  
I don't have.

I wish the pounding  
in my head could pound  
me to sleep.

Seven pits of feeling lie baited between me and you and so far I've stepped in six of them: barbs and snakes and fire and nettles and broken glass and vinegar. Maybe the last will be a silken cradle and some cake.

I tear out one of my eyes  
hoping the past will follow.

Walking backwards only makes  
the future clearer.

I would make the song up as I go  
but I forget the tune.

Every time someone walks past the house I rush out to greet them, but they are so surprised that I look so much like them they run off, leaving me to go back inside alone and faceless.

The dream I was having was interrupted  
by the dream I was having.

I wish the dog I don't have  
would come back home.