

In the morning, the waitress asked me if I was a plumber.  
You don't look like one, she said,  
but that's what I'm looking for.  
So I said, That's like dropping your keys near the door  
and looking for them near the window  
because that's where the light is, right?  
And she said, I don't think so;  
keys and plumbers are too different.

In the afternoon, the prostitute asked me if I was a professor.  
Of what subject? I asked and she said that made no difference.  
You're kidding, I said, makes all the difference in the world.  
Not for what we're talking about, she said,  
but if you were smart enough to be a professor, you'd know that  
just as sure as you'd know that cops don't leave a tip.

In the evening, some cab driver asked me what I do for a living.  
I'm a detective, I said.  
He asked me whether I can arrest people.  
No, I said, but I can make sure they get arrested.  
Same difference, he said. Nuance, I said,  
matter of perspective.

After a long pause, he said that the previous night  
some guy told him he made his living by being a poet.  
Well, that guy, I said, is probably a liar but maybe just a fool.  
Maybe, maybe not, the cabbie said.  
That was about it for my day,  
I did leave that cabbie a pretty respectable tip.

Breaks

nuance, p. 2

The dark morning splits open.  
The chick of daylight pecks away from within  
revealing thicket on thicket of tall grass in the stream's valley.  
Conscious once more, people awaken,  
perceive their imprisonment, plan their escapes.  
Fueled by coffee, by visions of days slowed by lunches,  
by blooms of pestilence closing in,  
no wonder the nervous refusal to engage,  
then to run for it, hide, to lie down exhausted,  
to seek restoration, to gamble on catching a fortunate turn,  
to hope it is not all too late and the armor not failing,  
not falling away from a saddened and sundering heart.

Cleave

nuance, p. 3

My favorite word also means its opposite.  
Hold me so close that we bind together  
and I would need a sword to sever us,  
which I might in fact employ  
and then again might not,  
preferring so penetratingly sensual a union.  
Leaves emerge from their branches  
and then they turn from green  
to red and yellow, dry in the wind  
that had nourished them with rain, and fly away.  
Over and over the satanic god impregnates  
the meek and modest wife who learns  
to love her demon seed, its vulnerability,  
how it depends on her, and, all in all, the honor  
of being selected to mother new disruption.  
Can there really be an alternate universe,  
original home to my favorite word,  
that has given birth to this singular double,  
this equation of eternal simultaneous strife?  
When you enter the living room,  
gleaming with confidence, coifed and perfumed,  
I desire to place my hands around your neck  
and love you to death.

Last

nuance, p. 4

The shoemaker knows the artifact –  
whether Oxford or Brogue, slipper or sandal –  
is incomplete until the sculpted element  
fills its cavity with shape and destination.  
The sensuous surface of all separate things,  
all the bodies and animals, plants, fruit, divinities  
bursting forth on Hindu temple exteriors  
connects seamlessly just underneath all the action.  
That unity wants to be discovered. Its carving is calling.  
That is why so much in myth endures so long and ends  
in spite of everything the gods and heroes do,  
their labors and their sacrifice,  
surprising us with lack of closure.  
We ask at what point before the finish  
of a story are we now,  
sometimes for how long pleasure will sustain,  
sometimes to provide an opportunity of victory,  
sometimes to discover our legacy,  
sometimes to get it over with.

Chinese Poetry

nuance, p.5

So much land, so many people farming.  
The purpose of the poem is to establish  
any single image as vivid enough and dense enough  
to anchor its surroundings:

the flower's thread-like roots testing the water,  
the shroud-like cloud as it crosses the gleaming moon,  
the sturdy cart a horse pulls up the road,  
the road itself.