

Ode on Love

What he has taken of me
I don't even want back,
I don't want to want back.
This new happiness holds up
a novel mischief that waits in the near.
Why so indispensable?
Before I knew him I did not need him:
if he goes I must replace him,
as if I could. And that circling body-mashing doubt.
How he throws me
into dark and retrieves me!
And with gazes like little rifting flames inhabits me.

What does the bottom-most soul know of this –
that basin of us
concerned only with survival,
collecting residual passion
and washing clean,
shining up that bit of us
that cares nothing?

He is coasting along his own midnight.
The trapping of his breath, the only outward sign,
I devour it like meat,
as if it were him,
tenderly and watchfully in all love's creepiness.

That idea that every lover is the same,
that there's a template, a type,
that what I orbit
is an all-man man
likely to be just like my father,
many desires folded into one bright
bouquet of obsession that springs from the heart like Spring.

Love is a thing, the self's
undoing that it begs for.
He twitches out hot shivers of love he shifts away from,
exalts and voids me
with the economy of a waiter emptying a whole table with one hand.

Power to love draws the long breath from me.
Petrarch made this a joy, an Other queening distance,
love never shaken by reality, never
whittled by exchange.
I fear whatever we have will puff like a thistle.
And if not?
Mutuality, mutability, love nuanced and grappled, hard.
This seam of encounters can't peg itself down,
it is or isn't, it is high or low, a scythe swinging in, or out.

The self tries to locate him, and itself
in all the moving signifiers of love,
lover and love, meaning and feeling,
thing that says, love this one, not another.
I lie in bed scratching at the night.
Absent, his beauty
evaporates. He flickers before me,
knowable-unknowable, central lover, man-figure
skating so sweetly at the edge of a beauty.
How I hope against. How I want to know if he.
And love dares the self.
To risk what there is in hope of havocking more to risk.
Trying not to try to purloin him whole
but keep him near – to tell my heart so stupid!
The drawbridge clatters up.

Pilbara

In a dream there is a veil of water between us,
your face green with algae:
my mirror image, separate, waterlogged
in a world you trail within you.

The Aztec water goddess is you, who grew
the hearts that were thrown to her
into a prickly pear tree, each fruit
unpickable, embroiled with the spines of love.

How we climb
halfway out of ourselves to be together,
having only each other to throw to each other.
There is only the world to crack
the shell of self, the shell of us tight
and alive.

In the Pilbara,
humpy spinifex stiffens in silver light,
a silence carries us as we walk,
balanced on the thread of what binds us,
you stopping to photograph every wildflower,
your sharp crouching focus
joining up the landscape like the echo
of changed and absent spirits we can barely sense, something
charging the earth that bows up to the sky.
Of this place we know little, it holds us
as you hold me in the night, distinctly as the red kangaroo
that uninjured touched our speeding van,
the smudge of its fur on the white paint.

The Evening Depression Group

Depression is a river, flooding like a carpet
through and through a great hall.
Our bright pills don't stop it.
Vexatious not to be cured.
The beaming politician on TV, Zoloft-healed,
no longer needs to look into the sun
to slice its gold into his brain.

We gather here at night, each with
embarrassment of sorrow, a day all trod,
the looks of openness – so sorry, yes,
I'm still not well. The brooding retiree
who quaffs his brilliant reds
despite the meds; the fatalistic teacher
allergic to exercise who is told
For homework examine your life,
as if a life can be examined like a cloth
and that loose thread, the fatal flaw, pulled out.
We hope for the miracle,
the luminous ordinary that sings
beyond our reach.
Say there is a point in
such dark, when living should be light,
our suffering true.
Perhaps we're heroes of existence,
crawling with hope and dope.
The darkness in its tunnel makes it hard
to turn the ship of mind around,
and so the mind sludges, starless,
battling its own destroying thoughts
in a battle without will or end.

What consoles is fleeting: the elegant blue wren
just-glimpsed, soon plunges into oil, the kindly voice
cannot cut through the self's own evil.
The darkness speaks our own tongue,
truer than a music learned in infancy,
cold and safe and always home.
The world is out the window, in the white
ecstatic flowers of the magnolia,
but these are messengers
of a night that never falls, a day that never starts,
a certain way to be, that is a way to be.

The unanxious mind

can spread as far as a sea in a world it owns, a paddock
bright in the skinkling sun, free of voices and the downward-
bearing brain. Do not envy it, for the light that shines
around its eyes is balanced upon a pinpoint; amnesia
sweetens away the menaces, the worries direct from god.
It floats like a buoy, miles from ship and shark,
it drifts like some drowned body, here to there, life to happy life,
able to smell the oatfields, hear the Delta
of Bangladesh, the minute cries of children.
What is it, this mind in the halo of its hardly thought thoughts?
But perhaps the mind can rest like a nodding daffodil.
Sailing serene as a stalk on a creek,
in a bright untroubled moment that passes without a scar.

Girl

The same solitudes and books
plundered secretly into the night and then flung
from the window when they scared.
And the child you were, there she is
in the family video, with her twisted legs,
walking into her darkened bedroom,
her back to us, always her back to us.
She is deep in your childhood,
full of secrets, swarming with the germs
of memories, the few you might just keep.

When she walks into your adulthood, she tries
to move things around. And still believes
a little bit in God, that handiworker,
and expects you to be shocked to heaven upon death,
if not before, and she can't understand
why you haven't yet had six children,
three boys and three girls, with matching bunk-beds.
Were you going to have a career, or get married?
One thing she got right – you turned out to be an author,
though not like Enid Blyton, and that is a disappointment.

What does she want from you? Only to become you, fast,
to grapple your freedom and power. What do you want from her?
Roughly the same.