

BELABORING THE OBVIOUS

Poems by Jim Gauer

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*“A thing is identical with itself.” -- There is no finer example
of a useless proposition.*

-Wittgenstein

Everything is different from itself.

-Marx

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What Will You Think of Next

You Begin to Tire
Which Is Which?
In The Evening of The Dream

What the Fire Conceals from Itself

-for Gaston Bachelard

The fire smiles with its dark teeth and leans
Into the room, talking to itself. *Burn*
Says the fire to itself, over and over,
And the force of the word lights up the room
Like a fire. Long into the evening
The fire says *Burn* to itself, that's the open part,
And the walls of the room say the word
Fire. You listen
Sometimes for hours as the fire talks; its blue hands
Wave in the air. For hours you sit in the open and say
Very little: it's hard to talk to a fire
That isn't listening, a fire that talks to itself. *Burn*
Says the fire, but that's not
What it's thinking; what it's thinking is
What the fire conceals, that's the part that a fire
Burns, hour after hour, one word at a time
Inside itself. Sometimes
You go upstairs to sleep, and in your sleep
The fire is taking guesses: over and over
It says forest to itself, or shovel; it thinks
Shovel is the thing that fire conceals from itself.
Sometimes, in your sleep, you think of
Darkness: it must be thinking darkness.
Very little that a fire can say
Reveals darkness to itself. For hours you say
Darkness, over and over, but
You're only guessing: a fire doesn't think
That way, even in your sleep. Sometimes
The night, your sleep, a fire's guesses. And then the sun
Leaning in when the time is past, one short white blade
Of light on the floor. Downstairs, in the day,
You empty out the ashes, saying forest, or
Shovel: the fire was thinking shovel,
You can see that in the light. But then the hearth is so perfect
After the fire, so clean and quiet and cool. You smile
With your mouth open, and lean back and forth saying
Nothing to yourself. Again and again, after the fire
Is over in your quiet room, you think
Nothing, but it's only a guess.

Lullaby

Dogs bark because the world is singing, and dogs
Love to sing, but they don't know the words.
The world sings itself to sleep with a long low song
About a cabin in a snowfield, wind mouthing the words.
And the snow slipping out to dance
In its footprints, not afraid
To dance and be seen here, not afraid to sing
Its slow wary song to the last of the sheep.
It's cold all right, and the world is out there
Like a woman in a flowing dress, like a peasant in a fable,
Humming a song of fear your dog
Would love to know the words to, so happy
The song is singing him he won't believe
That harm is meant, so trusting of what
The world says he can't tell *joy*
From *danger*: your dog who loves
The bones of things, your dancing dog
At the frightening window, your dog
Who barks and sings along
By chewing the bouncing ball.
The bouncing ball, the boots you were wearing, the bones
Of where your sheep were going
When the night lost count.
And the fire lying down to die
When the dance is over, not ashamed
To die and be frightened, not ashamed to fear
The few cold notes it carries
Back into the silence, that singing
In its darkened bones that you would know
Nothing of, while your dog knows every word.

The Visit

Sometimes my mind is like a house where no one lives.
When I close my eyes, I can picture the house.
Whoever lived there is gone now, I can picture that.
Sometimes I sit for hours with my eyes closed
Looking in through a window, waiting to see
What will happen, waiting to see.
Nothing happens. I can't help it if
Some things are hard to imagine, much less see, if
In order to picture a window the eyes must look
Like windows, if in dreaming a door the mind
Becomes doorlike. The dead pose
An obvious problem. I can't help it that

It's such a lovely and specific morning on the day
I visit the house. That weathervane, the roofline,
Those dark shutters reproduce
With painstaking clarity the picture that I have.
Ah! the sea and the cornfield are perfect and so
Nearly where they belong. Above the fields, clouds
Assume their positions. Look at that fence! So often
I picture myself standing just where I'm standing, out
In the world, beside the house, in a field of oh

Uncanny signals: the flag on the mailbox, the numeral.
Everything that is is about to happen, I can picture that;
The world is clairvoyant, its large eyes are closed.
As clouds move, shadows pass
Over the cornfields. The sun comes out with all
That represents. Oh and
The empty house in a field of sunlight, I carry
That image with me always, it's so
Untenable, but such a quiet place to rest.

The Other Takes the Morning Off

Can it be that in spite of everything this morning
People are out walking around like
Walking people, people who walk
Past each other and people who smile to themselves
Like smiling people, or smiles that walk around?
What a simple day for a smile
To walk around, in spite of everything, for the sidewalk to be
There where it is, for the cars to be parked
Just where we parked them, and the grocer to stand
On the spot that he does stand, in his perfect apron, pushing
That exact broom, the first broom
Of morning, his impossible broom that says
I'm awake! And he is awake, and so am I.
Can it be that the trees this morning are
As tall as trees are, with just
That many blossoms, and branches that reach
As far as they do reach, and no farther?
Is it conceivable that the paper this morning was this morning's paper?
Somehow the news that I read there was just
The news that was, in those words, and no other.
I see a woman waving. She is the woman who waves.
I see a small crowd gather. That is the gathering crowd.
I see myself in reflection. I see myself in reflection. I walk
From where I was to where I am without falling
Into semblances, and when I tell you I walk
You believe me, you are smiling and I am talking
And you are the one who smiles.
And I tell you, beyond all that I've told you, that these
Are only examples, but these are
The examples that are.
In spite of everything, in spite of the long sigh
Of occupied buildings, in spite of the way
Buildings are sighing like sighing buildings, when I awoke
This morning, I was awake
And smiling, smiling just those
Ribbons into the children's hair.

How Is This Done?

Birds begin by changing sizes. Don't be alarmed.
The deep structure of a flying bird
Is empty space, asking itself what size.
And then a man on a bench with his eyes closed
Holding out his arms This Size, This Size, while birds
Settled deep in their emptiness echo
His answer, filling the shallow air
With This-Sized birds.
Isn't that how a man tells his emptiness
How large it is, by the space in his arms?
Of course it is. And other things are
A form of How also, How did they build this becoming
Concrete and machinery, How did we get here turning itself
Into buses and automobiles, How did the fire start
Transforming the city sky into shy towers that cause
Their own solitude, beginning each answer
With the words *fire alarm*.

And then these people halted in the flagrant street, the obvious answer
To a brief and standing question their existence
Must pose: How is this done?
How is it the city as it is
Buries them in shadows, feet first in a crosswalk, dying to ask themselves
Into being as they stand there, heads bowed,
Arms crossed, bodies bent
Deep into question marks they answer
As they are: How do I do this? How do I do this *now*?
The deep structure of a walking man
Is an unmoving shadow, asking itself how.
And then a man on a bench with his eyes open
Pointing with his arms Say How, Say How, while birds
And beasts and wonderful children
Start up from the standstill of all moving things, and a fire
Settles back to dance in answer, flames holding close the shadows
They cast of themselves.

The Morning of a Lifetime

(for Brynna Lois, b. May 29, 1985)

Isn't this just the day to be alive and out walking
In a world that is all there is, knowing nothing of that which isn't,
Feeling sure that it all exists, that it simply does
What becomes its existence, with the ground
Laying down good grounds, and the hours
Taking time to be hours, and the trees
Living up to themselves in light
Of our knowing one
When we see one, and faces
Smiling at nothing that isn't
All it could be as such. Yes this certainly looks like the morning
Being all that it ever could be, becoming just
This day as such, though it might well take
All morning, turning out the way a smile turns out
To be itself at its most becoming, another clean fresh start
Where the days all start, only this one started today.
Wherever else sweet June begins, this is the June of beginnings.
If it's only just ending May, this must be the June of May.
And if it's only the hour it is, in a life full of passing moments,
In a life that is just this life, in its passing for itself each day,
Well that may well be true, but this morning the truth
Becomes it, and while what goes stays only
A moment this morning
It is whiling away its stay.
In the morning of her own two eyes, my daughter was born this morning.
In the early hours of her days, she was born on the noon of days.
In a world that is all there is, and never as yet what there isn't,
Never the room hope completed, always the room left for hope,
My daughter like the starlit sky, on a morning
That is only beginning, made a clean fresh start
Where the dreams all start, only this one came true today.

Measuring the Distance

“for the animal *is* first, then *feels* and *acts*”

-Cuvier

So I step off a street corner and That Must Be
Me, stepping off a street corner.
So I step off a street corner and That Must Be
What I'm doing. Stepping off.
I perceive myself, *stepping*. I can *feel* my foot.
This perception of myself is so palpable that, mentally,
I am somewhere on a street corner, feeling my foot.
Somewhere in my mind, I am on a mental street corner.
Improbable buildings are balanced around me, there
Where I think of them. That Must Be them.
In my mind, where I think of them, I perceive the word
Buildings: That Must Be *Buildings*, improbable
As it seems. When, somehow in the course
Of a long day of acting, I perceive the word
Is, I begin to think
The distance. This *is* a street corner. This *is*
How far to step. *Is* somehow resembles
A mark on a ruler that I use
To know how far down
To step: *is*.
That Must Be the distance, *is*.
That Must Be how far down to step, the distance.
That Must Be how far down I go, how far down it *is*.
Somehow, in my mind, I know: *step down*.
So before I step off a street corner, it doesn't much matter where,
I measure the distance: this *is*
Me, though from the corner of myself, *is* seems
Somehow always to be
One step down.

Having an Experience

Horch! Es ist totenstill – Es ist Hauptgeschäftszeit

-P. Handke

As it turns out the last light the darkness
Blinks and nods. What so often happens
Is that the darkness nods. What so often happens
In the long day files past me, nodding
And shuffling. So often it happens that
Something that happened
Nods and falls over. Grinning and shuffling and
The thud as it falls. So often it happens that

The last light goes out, unacknowledged,
On a sidewalk, or when it turns out
I don't know the man, or I forgot my bus.
The last light goes out when it turns out
I don't know the man, or something else.
The last light goes out when it turns out
That it so often happens, and not just this once.
The last light goes out when it turns out.

Look. I'm on a sidewalk. This is morning.
As it happens, a crowd is turning out.
The bed, the booth, the fire, the angel, the sidewalk.
The festival of redemption. Days of transfiguration.
Look! It is morning—the world is turning out.

As it turns out the last light the darkness
Blinks, reflecting what happens, what so often happens,
Or something else: a man, a crowd-scene, a bus.
The last light goes out when, upon reflection,
It just so happens, as the world is turning out.
By a strange coincidence, this is evening.
I turn out the lamp. I close my eyes. The darkness.
Listen! the thud as it falls.

The Train Problem

A.

The train problem begins
Almost immediately. Here's how it happens.
Or it begins soon after and this
Is how long it lasts. Suit yourself.
The train problem begins one morning and ends
Almost interminably. No one knows how.

B.

Here comes the train problem, but not
All at once. If a train hit
Your bird dog, that would be all
At once. No problem there.

C.

You can't imagine the train problem. It used to be called
Go find the body, or what happens to a canary
When you cover its cage. You can imagine
The canary, how it screeches while it happens, like
Brakes on a train.

D.

When you think about the train problem
What do you think? You sit there by the window
With your bird dog, thinking
Canary. Each time you think you notice
A few more feathers on the muzzle of the beast.
You don't think *boxcar* or *railroad*. You know your capacity.
You sit in the tunnel of the afternoon hearing
A whistle, and thinking
Canary. It's only the canary.

E.

The train problem doesn't wait. It isn't hereafter.
It is not the kind of problem where you
Whistle when you're ready. By the time you think
I'm ready, there's no problem there.

F.

This must be almost night then in the land
Of the train problem. You begin to think
The last few canaries, but not all at once.
Or a small crowd in red caps waiting at a terminal
For the last load of cagecovers. Suit yourself.
All this and your pale dog, lying on its side there, like
A tunnel that has just
Swallowed a train.

This Morning I'm Afraid

After so many long bus rides through the overwhelming reality
Of things being what they are, and never what they can't be,
After so many obvious bus trips on what could only be buses,
Through streets that are just streets, past buildings
That are just such buildings, seated with those
Being what they are who are only those
Beside me, because they're always sitting
Beside me, and never
Somewhere else, this morning, as I see things, I'm afraid I feel
Like myself again, because this morning I'm afraid
I'm myself again, and everything else
Is something else. When I look at the ones around me, I'm afraid
That they're just around me, I'm afraid that they're only there,
And that my look is just a look.
I watch a man reading the paper, and he can only do
What I'm seeing him do; he can read until he stops,
But when he stops, he only stops.
I listen in on the two behind me, and they can only say
What I'm hearing them say; they can whisper if they want to,
But if they do, it's just that they do.
One man has a crutch. If only he really didn't.
One man has a crutch. That could only be a crutch.
One man has a crutch. I wish
That it were otherwise, and I would wish
That it were otherwise, but if it happened
To be *that* way, it would only be *that way*.
This morning the way things stand, that's what I'm afraid of.
I'm afraid it could all be different, and that would only be the case.
Feeling the way I do, and never the way I don't feel,
Filled with a sense of hope that is only a sense of hope,
Knowing the power of change, even caring about the difference,
This morning I'm afraid, and this could never be otherwise.
If my fear were something else, it would just be something else.

The World Is Calling Softly to Itself

Here I am watching another bus pass with its long column
Of windows, visible windows, windows
That are always pausing to reflect for a moment
On the wonder of existence, positing *Existence*
And then guessing again.

I too have seen how windows are always pausing
And repeating something to themselves about
Trees or *Houses*, about a vertical world,
And then turning away and lying down
Within their own transparency, saying only
Window, calling out *Window*, or not
Calling out at all.

Here I am sitting at a bus stop, watching another woman
Named Luisa, radiant Luisa, Luisa
Who is always holding her child and softly calling
Luisa! Luisa! to herself until the child
Disappears. I too have seen this.
And then the place in her arms where the child was
Calls out to itself while Luisa listens, until one day
She too disappears. How many times must this happen?
Here I am holding a brown bag, sitting at a bus stop, watching
All the green trees crying *Green!*
All the cars and houses repeating their instances,
All the women and children so softly calling themselves
In and out of existence, again and again.

And here I will sit waiting for the long bus back
To my house, my house on My Street, My House
That stands holding in its emptiness, quietly saying
My House, My House to itself as though
Trying to remember. Even I have forgotten whose.
Even I know the need that sends a street walking off
In the other direction, asking after itself.
Even I have felt the longing that makes the strong rows
Of houses give up and settle down
In their vacancy, saying only
They're gone, or *We don't remember*, or one day
Forgetting they can talk, knowing we can't answer.
And here I will sit picturing myself
Sitting at a bus stop, citing my example, occasionally calling
Here I am! Here I am! as though one day
I will answer, and all the while knowing as I listen
That this image calls out softly
Through my existence, but calls out only

To itself.

Holding the World Together

Wouldn't tomorrow be the day if we were to rise up early
And take part in the morning as though
We too have a part. Alone in our empty households,
As if among those who belong there, we could arise
With a sense of purpose, with an awareness of having worth,
With a reasonable set of objectives related
To what is useful, to that which is
In a sense *of use*, beginning
With ourselves, with our truly beginning
To be there, and then joining in
With the crowd of those who rise up
And get to work. I can almost see us now
Wearing the shoes that fit us, taking steps to take
The steps we take, before our doubts
Can overtake us, and then stopping to buy
A thought that we do buy, that makes its point
Out of the point where we stand: when the time comes
To arrive, out of freedom or necessity, we can call
On ourselves to call a halt.
There we'll be in the two-way street, holding each other up,
As though nothing could touch us that can't itself be touched,
And I'll look at you, and you'll look at another,
And when you turn, you'll see me smile, it will be
That kind of morning, when even the eyes
You see yourself in smile
To see themselves in yours.
You'll be the one who greets me. I'll be the one you greet.
You'll nod as one who knows me. I'll nod as the one you know.
You'll take the hand I offer, you'll give me back
The hand that takes, until the one
Is grasping the other, wouldn't that just
Be our morning, to feel the hands
We place ourselves in held
So firmly within our own.
Before the time arrives when there is no one left
To wait for, when the ones longing to touch us
Are gripped by themselves and can't be touched,
Before the trees have made their point,
Before our places no longer need us,
Before the use we were to be put to
Has come and gone to do its work,
Why don't we both get up, and be there
In the morning, bringing
Our small parts

To the world we hold
Together that is our own.

Speaking of Emptiness

From the moment I saw you, I began to feel my body
Walking back to me from a distance, dragging a sack
Full of air in its chest, a sack full of rope, a sack full
Of empty sack at the end of a rope made of rope
At the end of a strange rope I began to feel my clothing
Reaching in its pockets for a quiet place
To put itself, right away, my poor frantic clothing
Full of pockets, full of the empty concept
Of clothing that even now my pant legs long
To crawl inside of and wait.
From the moment you occurred to me, something put a strange rope
In the hands of my intellect, a rope made of
Commas that are however it should be noted without
Words in between them, so that when
I pull on the rope now, I get a perfect sentence
Full of silence, full of intelligent punctuation, I get
A quiet moment to myself, and a long
Sentence full of my own rope.
And speaking of emptiness, even now
As the night begins to shine its stars
With a dark cloth and its moist breath, I can feel
How the day felt, I can feel my feelings
Hauling the emptiness toward them using
Just these words, an emptiness that even now
Is filled with your breathing, filled with the idea
Of you breathing beside me, a thought so constant and lovely I think
I'll crawl inside of it and wait.

How Strange the Words Sound After She's Gone

To be perfectly honest I awoke this morning thinking
About cows, about the word *cows*, a thought that it seems
Was already hungry, though at the same time content
To follow itself around in a neat little pasture
For most of the morning, contemplating the grass
On a non-existent hill.

Or maybe I awoke with a new way of thinking
About *elm trees*, that's what it was, I remember the thought
Seemed to think it could feel its own shadow
Growing thinner, it already seemed to feel it was
The shadow of what it was.

I awoke this morning beyond a doubt in the shadow
Of what was, and to be candid about it began to consider
How narrow the road is, my fast-moving thought about prepositions
That stands watching its own path curve away
Going over a hilltop, leaving me
Where we were, in a strange rolling countryside
That has lost all capacity to think
Its way *out*.

Frankly, until this morning, I had not seen
Cows and elm trees get lost here, wandering stupidly
In my words for them until they wound up
In my words for them, with no way out.
Until this morning, when she left me, I had never seen
How empty *our house* looks as the words for a thought
That left me, a thought that left behind it
Only the perfect words for it, as empty as these rooms.
This morning, in fact, I woke up empty, with just the words
She left me, with just those words, and a thought
About vacant houses that seemed to see
Only its own reflection as it stood in the yard
With the last of the elm trees, hoping for one last look
Through the window of its words.

What I am trying to say is that I awoke this morning
Trying as strange as it sounds to say
How strange the words sound as I try
To say them, as I try to say
How strange the words sound and that's just
What I say. So many empty words!
This morning I woke up in one room of a house filled
With words, filled with the word *words*, my small vocabulary
In a strange new language, a language that is itself

A large empty house to which, in all honesty,
I am slowly adding rooms.

There Go the Sheep

If only you were here, if only I could hold you, my unwieldy *you*
Containing everyone I care for, a you made of my feelings
The way a river is made of its teardrops, large lovely teardrops
Forming the eyes that they flow from, forming the heart
Moved from within, by the flowing tears
That fill it, a river's tears
That leave no river here, leaping
Their banks for joy. What lengths you must have gone to
To gather me this loss I feel, this absence
That passes among you the way an orchard
Walks through its olive trees, its diligent painstaking trees
Tending the earth that their own arms
Spring from, trees whose lack of existence is proof
Of the lengths to which they've gone.
And there go the sheep, as sad as I've ever seen them, grazing
The being they're given here as *sheep*; poor hungry beings
Made to starve their way into Sheepdom, forced to stand
With their heads bowed for the grief
That keeps their heads bowed, while a hunger deep in their bones
Causes this landscape that contains them
To say *If those are sheep*
I'll eat my words. If you were only here
The rivers would turn to water, the trees could have
Their being back, and *I* would be more
Than a thin word for me
To stand on like a hilltop. If you were here,
If the *here* somehow contained you, I would be the man
There to greet you like the land does, in silence,
In plenitude, where the same wave
That says goodbye as you leave it
Means, as you arrive,
Welcome back, welcome back.

This Feeds on the Light

The love of this world is far more laborious
-Augustine

THIS is where we are sitting and having
Our evening meal. THIS is the table.
THIS is the candle. Watch how the wax flame
Wavers when I say THIS, how each thing
Glowes and grows shorter and THIS
Feeds on the light. You in particular

Are radiant this evening, I can hardly bear to say
THIS is how lovely and watch.
I can bear the wine cork. I will watch the ladle.
All the world can go up in a puff when I say
THIS is the moment, for all I care.
And THIS is where we will sit and have

Our meal of ashes. THIS might be anywhere.
THIS is THIS, and it is
Its own candle. Watch how the flame bends
Over the wick end, and licks its pale plate
For the last of the light.

Sign Language

I'm beginning to worry about the little man who shouts STOP!
From inside the sign. Inside the sign
All day he sits, cogent and lucid, while
The written world passes on
Meaningless streets. Each morning
As I awaken, he slips from his bed
Into the metal booth; lights a single candle; and pulls tight
The red and white lid. STOP, STOP,

STOP! he shouts, over and over, even when
No one looks on. I wonder what
It must be like down there
In the dark, watching
That candle. Day after day
The same candle. For o so long

I was sure the little man worried for our sake, that his shouts
Were a warning, I was sure of that.
Then one day it came to me: he has
Just that one candle. STOP, STOP, STOP
He pleads, over and over, but when that one burns out
That will be that.

The Description

-for Jacques Derrida

I'm trying to describe a man
Sitting on a bench. The bench is labeled
BENCH. Behind it is a STATUE. Beyond that, at an angle,
HOUSE. HOUSE, HOUSE. Houses
Fit the description, they are there for the world to see.
So is the bench. I'm not so sure about
Man. House, statue, MAN. That worries me.
I'm trying to speak about

The tragic deed done within the family. I say the word
MOTHER, and the speechless world
Blinds itself at the thought. BENCH, STATUE, HOUSE. A man
Says what he wants to when the world
Isn't looking: Man, STATUE. Man, HOUSE.

MOTHER. I'm trying to think how to tell you I think
Something's wrong. I'M SITTING ON A BENCH.

The Point

"We are born on all sides of us"

-Paul Eluard

Everywhere you look you see articles, but THE
Is the pointed one. THE statue. THE horse. THE.
It used to be that when you looked at a statue, the
Was draped across it. Those meticulous folds.
Now you begin to see a man on a horse that
Means something, something that
The mounted man points at, steadfastly,
With the finger of the THE. Soon day

Gets up on a high horse and starts pointing.
THE day! it shouts and points
Into the air. Street signs point back toward where
You came from. Houses point *there* and *there*.
If you've ever seen a cow point, you know that's not
A subtle allusion. Nature has a blunt
THE. THE tree. THE lake. THE enormity. At last

You recognize the genuine article. THE me! you shout
And run around you, wrapping and winding
To make sure. And sure enough
There in the simple city, steadfast through
A solitary day, oh absolutely, sits
THE me, pointing at you with all those arms.

If I Were a Park Bench

My neighbor the white shutter has turned into a plant
That hangs in his window now that spring has come.
Spring like the sense of purpose, like a man standing on his feet,
Has folded away the shutter that my neighbor had
To live as, grasping his single self
And bending it into several, turning each face
To face itself, and storing them all away
Like the sun folding a snowfield. How much better my neighbor looks
As a sign that winter is over, as a thing
That the spring grew, and an image of one man's hope
That somehow down inside where it matters
We are more than the essence of
What meets the eye.
And my good friend the dull silence has turned into a moan
That sighs through my ceiling from its room upstairs.
What a pleasure the silence takes in finding the perfect body
To sigh from, a body that can breathe, a body
With two feet that must be
Pointed toward the ceiling, where its good friend
The scream is gathering air. Ah what a sound it makes
Just to hear what a sound it makes sighing
The silence out of the body of our sighs.
How much better my close companion the empty mailbox
Looks as the perfect answer to a letter's patient *where*.
And my fellow traveler the park bench, my comrade in Seclusion,
What a pleasure to see him now, turning up as the honored seat
At this party the growing grass throws, now that the day is warm.
If I were a park bench my open arms would be a signal.
If I were a speech, *dear friends* would soon appear.
But since I'm my sole survivor, this bloodless abstraction,
This poor boneless being, a thing of words I've had
To live as, how much better I'm going to look
As the reason you've come over, transformed
By the very knuckles you use
To knock on my door.

By Whose Nod

Since flowers seem to arise out of a deep sense of allegiance
To the act of being a flower, for better or worse;
And since the rich earth is founded upon the depth of its conviction
That beneath this surface appearance lies
The richness of earth; and since cattle are committed,
Since cows are little more than an existence
They're committed to, allow me to breathe a sigh
Of relief as the perfect token
And pledge of my own allegiance
To the being with which I sigh. Ah breathless mother

Of our sighs, it's good to feel you, you without whom
There would truly be no relief, no acts
Of devotion, no suffering, no
No. The pasture I'm looking into would have a terrible case
Of non-existence without you, and then where
Would the cows be, and by whose nod would the sheep
Guide themselves if you failed them, your poor but honest beasts
Whose meek existence is nothing less than an awkward truth
That becomes them, because you nod to the steps
Of the dance by which they prove that, for better or worse,

They are truly sheep. In the mild days of spring,
When the soft water basks in the warmth
Of your approval, then each thing that is
Feels abundantly the concourse of being
With itself, and the shy trees leap into their arms.
Therefore, since you alone do not exist, since you alone are truly alive
Only by analogy, and since I would have nothing left
Without you, in my logic, to make my plodding
Heart leap, be the dance you do in me, as living proof
Of your concurrence, and with the breath I hereby lend you, breathe

A deep analogous sigh.

This Morning the Other Knows Best

This morning, of all mornings, I've been feeling like the others.
Not the ones who look like themselves, which is, after all,
What they look like.
But the others who look like each other, those all walking around
Being the other they walk around like, each one with a face
That could only be that face.
Surely you've seen the one who could as well be the other one,
Who could just as well be you; I've been feeling like that one.
Surely you've seen the smile, and the shy nod in passing,
In going somewhere else, which is always where the others go,
Which could always be where you go; I've been smiling as I go.
This morning I have this feeling, and if I don't, that's even better.
It's time we felt like each other, which is, after all, what we are.
The air we breathe has arrived, there is nothing left worth waiting for.
Our lungs can be filled with the others, who finally have nothing left.
One chest sighs like the next one, but the next one's sigh
Is better; whoever's sigh
Is the next one, that chest breathes with the best.
The hands we need are at hand. Rest yours on my shoulder.
The hands we rest on each other are that much better than the rest.
One face nods to the next one, with the knowing smile
Of a master; each face bows
To the master, because this morning the other knows best.
This morning the last comes first, and what comes next is better.
This morning, being just like the others, is that much better than the rest.
Surely our time has come, and if it hasn't, what could be nicer:
This morning, being just what it isn't, is that much better than what it is.

As I Am My Witness

Maybe I'll sit here for hours just listening to the dog bark
And believing in myself, trusting as I speak
In the ease with which my words begin
To convince me that I mean them, and believing in my belief
As only a barking dog believes, from the depths
Of his convictions, by digging a loud hole
In the silence that surrounds him, and dropping
His own being in, bone by barking bone.
And then I'll set my pipe down, and be like the rooted tree
That makes of its windblown swaying the act
Of sweeping aside all doubt; standing alone
In a space that I've cleared, I'll be the tree
Rooted in anger at the harm that I've done,
Through words to myself that were another's,
To others through acts that were my own.
As I am my witness, I will one day swear an oath
In which my own hard words will tell the truth
How much they trust me, and the truth will place its hand
On the words I use to speak it, raising an arm
I'll swear is my arm, filled as it is
With my own bones.

As I see myself now, as I see just what I've done
To the silence I gave my word to, there is a cry that sounds like grief
Digging for its lungs inside me, clawing a hole
In the depths of my language the size of a fist
That it pounds on my chest in anger,
In disbelief, in rectitude. One day as the tall trees sway
In the wind that makes the dog bark, a cry
That grips my chest will breathe the truth
Until I've choked it; as I am my witness,
I will make this cry my oath.

Put Yourself in My Place

Sometimes at the end of a long day of telling myself
What to do next, in order to get that thing done,
Another long hard day, spent doing
Whatever comes to me, one thing after the other,
In the order in which they come,
Another day like the other days, just the same
As they were, only this day
Came on this day, when the others refused to come,
Sometimes at such a time, it's easy to see
Just what we all see, that I alone
Am alone here, on my porch step
When the day is done; when what's over is over
For me as for others, I alone can say
It was all my doing, knowing that while I did
Just what we all did, only I did
Just what I've done.
Now the bird that I see flies just like the rest do,
Only this one flies, while the others all fly.
Now the woman in greeting waves like a woman
Among women who wave, only this one waves.
Now the car I see parked, that could as well be anywhere,
Could only be parked here, because that's where it's parked,
And now I see why, just like we all do,
Like everyone sees, while only I see.
I am looking at a tree stump. Anyone could say this.
Except that my words are mine, they could just as well
Be anyone's; they could just as well
Be yours, only these aren't your words.
I am thinking about my porch step. There is room here
For both of us, there is room enough in my thought
For you too to be thinking this, but if this thought were yours
It could never be otherwise; my house is mine,
And yours is what yours is, and if I asked
You in, you would only be in.
Sometimes at the end of a long day of telling myself
Which thought is mine, in order to think just that thought,
A way of thinking like the other ways, just the same
As they are, only this way
Is my way, while the others are all mine,
At a time such as this, seeing you smile
Because I say you do, it's easy for me to think
You could never be otherwise; your eyes are yours,
And mine see what mine see, and if you put yourself
In my place, you'll see you're only in my place.

A Name for Anna

Today there is nothing to hide. Today the white house that is
Hides none of its whiteness, that stone bridge holds nothing
More stonelike inside it, even the trees seem to stand
In their own quiet limelight, as green
As green trees are, and lit up by being
Within the being that owns them, that one
Shining example of themselves.

Today the long crooked finger
Points at its finger, and when the strange man passes
He says what his name is, he names
What his voice says, and his is
The voice that it names.

The magician is asleep. The day has cast its spell.
Anna walks through the park and the shy grass gathers
At her feet as she walks here, with nothing to hide.
Anna puts her ear to the air and the patient wind tells her
What its heart has written there, using only the words
That its heart has written there, words made of
Air made of air.

Anna finds a seat on a bench and the world finds her sitting
On the bench she is sitting on, watching the clouds
Show the heart shapes they hide
In their cloud shaped chests, knowing each cloud shapes
Its heart with the best of them, a white heart it makes up
In its own clear blue head.

The magician is asleep. The evening mends his sleeve
With a dark thread passing through the light here,
A moving thread of moments, the shining sleeve of days.
And Anna on a park bench, carving her perfect heart
On a tree she feels inside her, and writing in a name
Where nothing in the cunning world to come
Can change it: the *Anna* that was
When the house was white, and the bridge
Was stone, and the world
Had nothing to hide.

Tonight It's Easy to Think So

After my usual complex day spent thinking into existence
A world no one could live in, even in their thoughts,
It's good to be going home, it's easy to think
Up a house's existence, because tonight after all
My doubts about existence, those who live here
Feel alive and at home. Ah it's a simple evening
For the living to feel at home, for a house
To truly exist, simply to be
What the case is, with a smile there
To greet us, because we too are the case.
The grocer I'm walking past is surely all
That he could be; the newsboy
Can be trusted, I know him,
I can say; even now where our doubts
About the trees were
The trees are
Another brilliant fulfillment
Of so much that is the case.
Are these trees the case? Tonight it's easy to think so.
Are they rooted as such? Even in my thoughts.
Can our own case be made, can we possibly be given
As an instance where existence somehow proves
To be enough? This evening as I walk
Into the world as I'm given to, I feel
Like a given, and this gift is enough.
Don't ask me how, but this evening is all it could be.
The moment within our grasp is simply there within our grasp.
That smile on your face, when I say what the case is,
Is simple enough, that is all that it could be, and don't
Ask me how, but tonight all it could be
Is in existence as a thought
That simply smiles at the thought.
After all of the abstract days,
All the thoughts that could be not be trusted,
All the words that were only words by denying us
Their trust, this evening where the doubts
In our eyes were
Our eyes are
Another closed case
That just opened, and found
The world there at its door.

This Is Your Life

How sad it must be to live in this amazing plentitude
Of objects that need you, of acts to be willed,
Of words waiting for someone to say them and mean them,
And thoughts to be believed, and loved ones to come home to,
And lungs standing by for that deep breath in the morning
When they're glad you're alive, what could possibly
Be sadder, even your sadness without you
Couldn't begin to exist. I know how you feel
Greeting the mailman in the morning, with a smile
On your face, and a pain in your heart, and a slight nod
Of the head that could only be
Your head, that nods an acknowledgement
Of its existence as yours. I know what it means
To buy a paper at a newsstand, using coins
That must be your coins, mere tokens that without you
Would have no one to value
The subsistence you lend them, and to sit down
On a park bench, in relief or in misery, to be seated
In a seat now known only
As your seat, and to read there
What the news says only by
Speaking to you.
If you live in a building, it must be lived in by you.
If your key fits the *door* there, that could only your *door*.
If you hold yourself at arm's length, if even the arm
Seems peculiar, that distant sense
Of existing coming
Home to you is yours. Don't feel alone
In bearing the weight that you
Alone bear, I too am sole support
Of an existence I'm on loan to, I too have a face
That could only be my face, and a shy smile
That must be my smile, and a pain
In the heart that could pain
Only my heart, a sad ache
Just like your ache, only
This one isn't yours. I too hear a voice
And think of it as my voice, I too
Have spoken out, and heard myself
Spoken out to, and my thoughts
Sound like your thoughts, only yours
All sound like yours.
How sad it must be for you then
To join me on a park bench, as though my seat

Could be your seat, as though my trees were in bloom
And your trees were among them, and the wonder
Of being alive could engender a face
Smiling between us, instead of the slight nod
That is my own sad acknowledgement
Of a life that might be your life
Only this one is all mine.

As Sure As I'm Sitting Here

At the end of another day, at what can only be thought of as
The end of another day, when the day in fact
Is over as we know it, and I know it,
And you know it, and this
Is not the first, I sometimes get a sense
Of my own existence, as though I too
Were alive, as though I too could be thought of as living
To the end of another day, a day I can look at as filled
With the existence of things
That I looked at, a day in a life full of moments
Of looking, at a man with a briefcase, at a bird
On a warehouse roof.

At the end of another day it seems altogether possible for me
To have boarded a bus in the morning, to have known
What a bus is, to have taken a seat
As people on buses do, sure of myself, sure
Of existence, to have looked
Out a window and seen
What was out there and known
What it was: a face
Looking back at me, as sure
As I'm sitting here, or surer than that.
If I saw a young woman there on the corner, I know
That I saw her. I know that was her.
If I looked at a woman, if I stared into space
At what can only be thought of as
My own vacant view of things, the vacant
Gave way to her, all around her as I looked
Her absence stepped back with the same eyes
I had, and it knew what I knew, but I
Saw her first.

If I sat on a bus seat, if she stood on the corner, if
The ground that she walked on seemed to
Kneel down under her, kissing itself, kissing its existence
As the ground that she walked on, well then that
Is what happened, and I know it,
And you know it, but I knew it first.
As another day ends, as the bird that I looked at glides
Back toward an absence its wings form
The thought of, I too can be said to
Know what I know: her face for a day in this world
Existed, her face existed and those were her eyes
That acknowledged me, as sure as I'm sitting here, or surer,
Much surer, than that.

This Is Not a Whim

On a day like today, which is only what I say it is, and not
What I don't say, if I do say so myself, *people are glad*
To be alive, if only because I say so, because
I've always wanted to say so, and now
That's just what I've said.
This may be only the start of another day of degrading ourselves
By acting the way we do, which is just how we act,
Maybe these trees are only *trees*, maybe the sidewalk
Is just this *sidewalk*, maybe each thing
Is as such, and only as such
Is it anything, because I could say
This is anything, and that's only
What it becomes, but if I say people are glad
This could never be otherwise; when you say
This is otherwise, that is only something you've done.
Only a fool could see these *faces* and deny them
Their happiness, being lit up the way the sky is
By my making the comparison, by becoming the sort of sky
I'd compare such smiling faces to, without a cloud there
Where its face is, because I say it's a face.
Only a fool could see the *grocer* and say that he's only
A word I choose, standing there as he does
If only because he stands there, in the shoes that fit
The feet they fit, wearing just that apron that shows
This is not a whim, I refuse to say so,
And if you choose to say so, then that's up to you.
On a day like today, *people* smile when I tell them.
On a day like today, it makes no difference what I say.
The *child* I'm about to mention, skipping toward you on the sidewalk,
In a firm and lilting voice, like a promise you can depend on,
Could always be something else, and I would be glad
To say so, but today I refuse
To say so, and I stand by what I say.
On a day like today is, that which is can't be just anything.
It can be what I say it is, but only because it *is*.

Will This Thought Do?

So I don't think I'll work today. Today it seems best
To let this bench hold my end up. Today
Of what my part was, brooding
Over the sum of things, there remains
Only the sum of things, and that part
Seems best. Yes this morning, whatever is
Will do nicely in my absence: this sunlight
Looks fine, it seems to be holding
Its own without me; the crowded sidewalk
Is fully employed, it appears its task
Has come to be child's play; even the trees
Are doing well, they seem to be working
As well as trees can, as trees
These truly work, and the things they do
Are all nicely done. What a relief
To be wide awake, knowing my wakefulness
Doesn't need me, sure that my bench exists,
Never doubting its existence beneath me, knowing
For sure that it is truly beneath me
To sit on a bench that I doubt exists.
How sweet to be fully alive, for just this morning
To have nothing to live for, to think well of my thought,
The way a child thinks of his childhood, the way that a tree
Makes do with its boughs, the way this moment lives
On what it's seized in its hands, because this morning
What the moment has seized in its hands
Is sweet and alive, and this thought will do.
Will this thought do? It seems it's already done so.
Will this thought do? Today there could be no doubt.
Will this thought do? Today beyond the shadow
Of a doubt my thought is done with
All the light I doubted, and now
Its shadow believes it too.
At last I know I'm the genius that no one needs to listen to.
Ontologist of a morning that turned out better than he thought.
The thinker there on a park bench, resting his chin
In a hand I gave him, a hand I traded
For a day of rest, for a moment's peace
I could have had no hand in, for an instant
Under just this sky that out of the clear blue
Has come to me, as silent as I am,
Full of birds I did not think up.
No I don't think I'll work today. Today it sounds best
To let the silence work its ends out. Today

Of what my words were, sounds
Forming the heart of things, there remains
Only the heart of things, and this heart
Rings true.

Which Is Neither Here Nor There

-for Fernando Pessoa

A donkey-cart passes, on the road toward Sintra, which is only
Where the road goes, because it's just that kind of road,
And if it were another kind, that wouldn't make it
Another kind, that would only make it the same
Road it is when it's different; to the old man going home
With his cart full at nightfall, this road
Could be different, but it would still go where it goes.
The road toward Sintra simply goes toward Sintra, and if it went
Elsewhere, it wouldn't be going elsewhere,
It would only be going, no matter what place it goes.
One who stands by the roadside just stands by the roadside.
He could always stand elsewhere, but then he'd just be standing there.
As the road goes toward Sintra, going back to where it came from,
Back toward where it started, in the same way that it came,
It could always take another way, but that wouldn't take it
Another way, that would only take it the same
Road back that made its way here, the road
Out of Sintra, because that's the way it's made.
Tonight I'm by the roadside, without wishing it were otherwise.
Without wishing that being different weren't the same as being the same.
If I'm filled with a sense of hope, that is simply what I'm filled with.
If the stars are overhead, that is only where they are.
If I'm smiling at what I'm seeing, because that's what the case is,
Because even if it wasn't, that would only be the case,
This could always be otherwise, but I wouldn't see it
Otherwise, that would simply make it a case
Of having to smile at my blindness; like an old man going home
On a dark road at day's end, my case
Could be blindness, but I would still know what I know.
A donkey-cart passes, going back to where it came from, over the road
Almost at nightfall, because it's just that time of day,
And being the way we are, and never the way we can't be,
Never the way that stays by going back the way it came,
This may not make us dance, but that only makes
Us human, as human
As the dance we do, in silence
And in holiness, beside the road
Into Sintra, which is only where it goes.

My Trees Hurt

Today, in all honesty, I don't know what a tree is.
I mean I know what a tree is, but I don't know today.
Today whatever I look at, to my way of thinking,
Looks like my way of thinking. I don't like how this looks.
When I look at a tree this morning, in light of the suffering of others,
The thing I see must be made to pay
A debt it owes to the ones who suffer: deep inside them
As I look, my trees are doubled over
With a pain I make them feel, with a need
They're made to suffer from, with a sadness they take
Pains to feel, because their sadness will never be theirs.
My Trees Hurt because they can't feel anything.
It pains them to feel this way, because they can't feel it hurt.
The sorrow they rise above, with a lyric and wordy grandeur,
Is the sadness that settles in, branch by branch
As the days grow shorter, when a tree looks down on itself
Because of the sorry thing I've made of it, a sad
Little mound of leaves, and a proud, unfeeling survivor.
If this is what a tree is, only I would ever say so.
If this is what a tree is, it is only a tree as such.
It's easy to see it's only melancholy, a self-induced melancholy,
The kind of sadness that arises from talking to yourself
And being the one who knows what you mean.
I know what I mean when I say this,
And this makes me sad, it sets me apart,
It makes me feel like one who is set apart
Because only he knows the sadness that he means.
And if I take a drink or two to sustain this, if I sit down
Under the trees I mean and drink
While the small boughs grow grander,
This too I understand, it is something that I intended,
It is something of what I am, and only as such,
Because I understand this, and this sets me apart.
My Trees Hurt because it makes me feel different.
I take great pains to feel this, because only as such does it hurt.
Those who suffer, after all, need to feel that they are suffering.
If I alone understand this, it's easy to see how much I hurt.

Where the Wind Comes In

How sad all the trees seem when I think of them
This morning, how bent and puzzled by their own
Grand appearance they look, resting their chins
In the hand of a long sad existence
They can't help thinking of, a hand that must be pained
By the weight of so much sadness when
After all, the trees themselves are so totally happy.
I myself can scarcely contain the happiness I feel
Just knowing how truly painful and grand is the act
Of being a tree as my mind sees it, a tree as proof
Of the existence of trees to be looked at as
Objects about to weep under the strain.
Deep in the boughs of my own puzzling logic
Is a joy I cannot contain, the sheer joy of knowing
I'll never make you understand this happiness that arises
From thinking so long and hard about the sad misunderstanding
That has become, in all honesty,
All I can make of myself in relation to others.
If the wind exists, this is where the wind comes in.
The wind in my logic, making the boughs ache, causing this gasp
Over its existence in my chest
As the air that I breathe, as the breathing inside me,
As the body that is my body bending down in the act
Of being mine where the wind comes in, filled with my breath.
How peaceful my whistling breath is made just by being
The violent song it whistles to, like a gust filling my chest
With a grand and painful sadness that
I can't help dancing over, my short dance to the note
The rooted tree reaches for
Leaping clear from its roots.

I'm a Deeply Troubled Man

In the midst of another day spent accumulating experience,
A typical day of having hopes, and having to learn they're only hopes,
One of those days that just get lost, in the inexplicable
Course of things, in order to teach us
Pointlessness, and gathering sense of loss,
I feel a faint urge to stop, and know nothing of why I'm stopping.
Or maybe a wish simply to think, and learn nothing from what I think.
I'm feeling a need to be somewhat vague, like a man with a smile
He is merely aware of, a smile in fact that is only this,
An awareness of smiling, and nothing more than this.
What I don't know can't hurt me, and I'm smiling because I know this.
Or I'm smiling because it hurts, and I don't know that it hurts.
Standing still in the brilliant day, with only awareness to be aware of,
With all I sense of the angry depths producing a mild sensation of depth,
I'm a deeply troubled man, filled with a violence toward himself
With which I just can't be troubled, as I stand in the simple light
Being deeply ignorant, and feeling warm and right.
Of course I've lost my job, and so I'll lose all my belongings.
Of course I've lost my wife, and so I'll never again belong.
And of course I've lost myself, in the course of living and learning,
In the course of learning to live with myself, as a lesson
On which I'm lost, but while I can't have my hopes,
I can still have my losses, and a vague smile
I've learned to make for a living, one that costs
Very little, because I'm smiling at what it costs.
In the midst of another day spent living and losing,
A typical day of going on, in order to learn I can't go on,
I'm a deeply troubled man, doing this dancing around the truth I choose
To live without learning, a choice in fact that is only that,
One made with a smile, and nothing more than that.

You Were Saying

The time comes when it's clear that you've been suffering from delusions.
You seem to reach that point in life, where there is no such point in life.

That sense of yourself inside you can't really.

Whatever it is, it seems to be that instead.

What you feel, deep inside you, is a sense of the life inside you

Having finally come to this, where there is no

Such thing as this.

You turn to the one you love, and it's clear there is no such loved one.

In the midst of a certain thought, you find that it's not that thought.

You speak of a sense of loss, in terms of the state you've come to,

After years of total immersion in the state of coming to terms,

And it seems that you've suffered a loss that even you

Can't quite conceive of, it being hard to imagine

That state of mind, which is not

That state of mind.

The time comes when it's clear that this is not that state of mind.

When it ceases to bear itself that strange resemblance to itself.

A time when it's all too real and less than likely.

Whatever the case, it isn't a likely case.

Life is real, in your language, in a sense that occurs in language

When everything means what it does, and it doesn't

Mean a thing that it does.

You were saying, someone says. As if there were such a someone.

You were saying, someone says. As if there were some such one.

You were saying, someone says. Whatever else

You were meaning to say, something tells you

It must have gone without saying, leaving you there

To mean what you do, where not even you

Could mean what you do.

The time comes when its clear that your meaning can do without you.

A time for the things time tells you, when it can't tell you from yourself.

Your life is a figure of speech, and you are a figure of silence.

Whatever is there inside you is there instead.

There Is No Need to Know This

I am growing older, that's becoming clear.
Not that it needs to become clear.
Not that at any point in perception, at a point let's say
Like this one, does there come a need for a certain sense
Of that which ages one as it clarifies.
No, nothing needs to be clarified. Growing older makes this clear.
When you see that your legs are shaky, it's not that they shake
Because you see them shake.
There is no need to think of the step that falters
As a step that falters because
That's what you think.
When you feel yourself stumble, when you're falling in fact,
And it seems as you feel this that your thought somehow stumbles
Over the fact that you're falling, there is no need for weighing
Your words to explain this; when you're down
On the ground there, even your silence weighs enough.
One of the wonders of man, even more than his idiocy,
Is his capacity for clarifying what is already clear.
When the bird flies, it is flying, and there is no need to know this.
What the bird sings, it is singing, and there is nothing to think.
When the day is growing older, when it's older in fact,
And I'm out there in my yard watching the birds land on the line,
And the sunlight, casting shadows, is beginning to strike me
As missing my point here, and laying the blame at my feet,
It's not that the light thinks
There is something
To be clarified; if the dark makes
The stars shine, this will soon be clear enough.

Life Goes On

On a particularly bad day, the kind of day that is sick of meaning things,
Another memorably unmemorable day, the kind of day that is just a day,
I begin to think, with a hazy sense that I've been meaning to,
I begin to think, as though suddenly remembering to think,
I begin to think, I'm like an old man with a pain
In a place he's half-forgotten, one who feels
As it all comes back to him, that he's been meaning
To be in pain.

On a particularly bad day, I've been meaning to be in pain.
I feel like someone on a bus, who suddenly feels he's on a bus.
And if I don't think much, nothing more than a thought of failure,
A hazy sense of the loss of trust, which after all, was only trust,
I feel the weight of the weightless dream, of the endless faith
That simply ended when I failed her, and the power of so much hope,
Which was everything, and something, and was only so much hope.

On a particularly bad day, there was only so much hope.
All that we had is simply lost, and now I'm hoping to feel the loss.
And if I won't feel much, nothing more than another feeling,
A hazy sense of *something less*, which after all, just feels like *less*,
I'll see that a violence is done again, to all that it means
To go on living, I'll make quite sure that as life goes by
It will never mean more than that life goes on.

On a particularly bad day, *something less* than life goes on.
If the bus that I'm on should stop, I would sit on a bus that's *stopped*.
On this particular day, the kind of day that does not mean anything,
Another pointedly pointless day, the kind of day that just lasts all day,
All that we had is lost, and nothing I think
Could begin to think this, a thought that I'll grasp
As life goes by, saying everything,
And something, and meaning
Only that life goes by.

Life for the Asking

(with apologies to Carlos Drummond de Andrade)

A time comes when you no longer care what you're feeling.
A time of caring a little less, but then you couldn't care less.
This is no time for love, let me tell you.
This is no time for an object to be subjected to yourself.
Love is real, after all, but then the things that you feel inside you
Feel like things that are just inside you, because they can't
Be somewhere else.
Wherever else things are, it's clear they are merely elsewhere.
It's better to keep your distance than to give it to something else.
Deep in your perfect heart, where existence does not concern you,
Where your sense that it's truly empty is just another empty sense,
You're simply a little tired, of the dreams to be dreamed
When you just don't care to, and the feeling of so much hope
That could never be more than the feeling of hope.
No wonder your eyes are closed. It makes so little difference.
It's harder to cast a shadow when you *are* one of yourself.
Beginning it all again, turning your hopes into actions,
Changing your sense that changes come to nothing that isn't change,
It's a little late for all that, new beginnings are just beginnings,
There are only so many motions you can go through with a day
When it's all you could ever ask for, and it's only another day.
A time comes when you no longer bother with asking.
A time of asking a little less, but then you never asked for less.
An hour comes when the hours come because life
Worth the asking is over, and the time that you feel is left
Feels like time that is simply left.

It Just So Happens

Call it a dream. It does not change anything.

-Wittgenstein

To tell you the truth, I haven't been sleeping well.
I fall asleep, but I don't sleep. I'm only asleep.
The fire dies, the room grows colder, and when I awaken
I am only awake.
When I'm not sleeping, that's just how it is with me.
It can always be another way, but then it's only another way.
What keeps us all awake, if only because we think it does,
Is passing the long night thinking only
That we think it does, or thinking
Something else, and having it just be something else.
You lie in the twisted sheets, perceiving yourself as being there.
You listen for a time to the clock, and think of it as a clock.
You feel a mild sense of fear, if only because you do so,
Because your fear is somehow as such, and this in itself
Makes you fearful; it seems to be frightening you twice,
Once when it does, and then again when it does.
When you feel frightened, it happens that you do so.
You can always feel otherwise, but then that just happens too.
The fire that thinks you to sleep, on the warm bed of its ashes,
Staring in on its frightening self, with the same eyes
It goes out in, could always be thought of as causing
The dark thing that it comes to, but when that's
What things come to, it just so happens that they do.
When I can't get to sleep, the truth is I'm not sleeping.
It could always be a dream, but that would only be the truth.
If I'm awake, and I am awake, then that's what the case is;
I'm just afraid, as I lie here, that it only happens to be true.

No One Feels Like I Do

Don't think life is like this. Don't think like I do.
Those who suffer, after all, are often those who suffer
In spite of themselves. They feel pain because they do so.
Some feel an ache that is more than just an ache they feel.
Others start to hurt because something has started to hurt.
There Are forms of pain that aren't Just
A Form of Pain, that don't feel like this,
Which only feels like this.
Feeling the way I do, I alone can be said to feel this.
I could share it with the others, but I'm afraid they'd feel it too.
The ache that I feel within, which is only the ache
To feel within, is the one thing
That I need, it's a way of being
Alone with myself, so don't nod your head
When I tell you about
The way it feels; when I nod my head,
I feel only a nodding head.
The burden I bear myself, which doesn't prove
I can bear myself, is a dead weight
To be sure, it's a way of being
The load that I bear, so don't lift me up
Like a thing that weighs
As much as itself; when I feel the weight,
I have only the feeling of weight.
When I look you in the eye, I have the feeling your eye is looked at.
When I listen to what is said, there is a sense of something said.
When I think of myself alone, and I take your hand
In the hand I'm alone with, don't squeeze back
As though something you feel
Could pass between us; if your touch is a sign,
I feel only the touch of a sign.
When the last feeling dies, I plan to be there as it does so.
I know I'll feel better, I just won't know that I do.
Those who differ, after all, are all the same in feeling different.
No one feels like I do, because I don't feel like I do.

As Far as You Know

*The opposite of revolution is not reification.
The opposite of revolution is change
that is only change.*

-Georg Lukacs

You wake up in the night. The apartment is empty.
Morning hasn't come. There is no such thing as morning.
There is such a thing as you, there is more than a little weariness
With yourself that won't sleep, that refuses to be rested,
But there isn't any morning, as far as you know.
As far as you know, there will never be a morning.
If the darkness grew lighter, it would only be growing light.
And if a new day then dawned, like the last thing you'd thought of,
And the milk truck arrived full of the wonder that it did,
And the barking dog barked, and you told me, and I believed you,
And the man sweeping the sidewalk somehow swept up
What was swept, it would all be
Too true, there would be no need
To think so, and in the end
Instead of morning, there would only be the truth.
As far as you know, you've seen the last of the mornings.
When the milk truck arrives, it will only be bringing milk.
And if the truth is you're tired, of the truth more than anything,
The truth that can't help changing into itself when it's changed,
Well that may well be so, you could never
Feel otherwise, you could always
Be otherwise, but you would still be like you.
You wake up in the night. This is all that it could be.
If everything were different, it would all be too true.
In the night, if there is a night, there can't be a morning.
In the darkness, there is darkness, just as far as you know.

After Awhile

The time comes when you no longer hear your own cries.
A time when you can't be bothered. They are, after all, just cries.
You suffer from this of course, but it's clear that your heart's not in it.
Your pain seems to need some prodding to make it hurt.
Your own life, come to think of it, cries out for the need to think of it
As yours when you look inside, because everything in there
Is just inside.
After awhile, it might just as well be elsewhere.
Time has a way of talking things out of themselves.
That cry from the depths won't say, but it might just as well be
Somebody else's, in the sense that you're always yourself
At a good far cry from yourself.
You wake up one fine day and...what's the difference.
It's all the same to you if you're someone...else.
Whatever the case may be, and it looks like a case of whatever,
It looks to be one such instance of nobody cares just what,
You seem to be at a loss, for whatever it was
To have meant when you lost it, having found
What is found in the heart, when your heart
Isn't in it, and it's still your...heart.
Because a time comes when the heart doesn't care to be heard from.
A time that puts time between it, and the last time it heard from itself.
You wake up one dark night and...wait for the morning.
After awhile, it might just as well be light.

This Is Not a Cry for Help

I am not well today, and clearly no one can help me.
Being ill, I am ill, and that feels better than feeling better
And only feeling better. I am clearly not well.
Mine is a special case, one I won't soon be cured of,
Of difference from itself, since that alone makes the difference
Between suffering as such, that being what the case is,
And my own case of being, constructed out of a distance
That cries out for help, and is not a cry for help.
My case is special because it's not what the case is.
When I feel what I'm feeling, it is only something felt.
What truly sets me apart, from my voice as much as anything,
Is the deep joy I feel, the honest feeling that makes the tears run,
In knowing this insufferable pain will never join me
To its cries again, because I alone am merely separate
While all the others are truly alone.
In the terrible days ahead, being ill will feel better and better.
Alone in the frightening depths, I'll have a wonderful sense of depth.
And if I help things along with a touch of violence, if I break
The heart that I speak from down into smaller and smaller parts,
Well that can't be helped, in my logic the thing that matters
Is slowly putting an end to the logic
By which it matters, eager to see what's next
When the next thing just comes next.
And when at last the wolf arrives, no one will know the difference.
They'll be hearing a plea that matters, but in this case finally it will.
In my heart, and I have a heart, the soft cry grows louder.
In the terrible nights ahead, it will only be something loud.

What Will You Think of Next

*“the violent mind’s incapability of capturing what it
should think about if it wanted to remain mind”*

- T. Adorno

And so it seems that you’re breaking down into smaller and smaller reasons
For living what it is you call life, there being so little else
That it could be. Whatever hopes
You might have had for yourself, of somehow proving worthy,
Of so much hoping, seem lost
On a case such as this, where maybe
It’s just as well, or else it isn’t
And might as well be. Yours is a case as such,
Which could just as well be
Not as such, of a life that is lived in hopes
Of searching its wreckage to prove your theory
That there’s more than a little
Of what it isn’t
In that which is.
The feeling of hope you have is more than a little the one you don’t have.
The question of what comes next is more than a little already next.
The beauty of what you’ve done, becoming the one you’re done with,
Becoming the thought that’s coming, when the next thought doesn’t come,
Is easy enough to grasp, in the image of hands
Done away with to grasp it, but
What do you plan to call it when *thinking* is out of the question?
What will you think of *next* when this is the thought that’s next?
What *sense* will it make to say, in a voice that you’ve done away with,
In a language that can’t help sensing that its meaning has gone away,
That your life is a terrible waste, and if it isn’t
It might as well be; if it isn’t
Your life is wasted, which is truly
A terrible waste.
Because it seems that you’re breaking down into all the more reason to do so
You know that you won’t be finished until you don’t know that you’ve stopped
What comes next, if it does come, might well be something different.
What comes next, if it doesn’t, might as well be what it’s not.

You Begin to Tire

My vocabulary did this to me

-Jack Spicer

Having reached a certain age, the logical outcome of having lasted,
Of having lived, one might say, to a point, life's normal shape
When it's lived to the point
Of having done with
The things left undone, with a full life left
To all the others who will have done them,
You begin to tire...of it all in a sense having come to this,
You begin to tire...of it all one might say *in a sense*,
You begin to tire...not to the point you were
When you were something
To be tired of, but more to the point you are
When having tired, you have only that.
Whatever else it is you have, it's clear in this case that you've *tired of having*.
There isn't a need for the world *per se*. You've contracted a case of *the world per se*.
As it is, as the case is, which is never so much what the case is,
Which is never so much as such, as it is when it isn't as such,
You are really and truly tired, don't tell me I know
What proving this comes to, when all that you feel is proof
Of a case that's exhausting itself as proof.
As it does, as it does so, doing violence to the fact that it does so,
Doing something so true to itself, that it does what it doesn't do itself,
You begin to sound somewhat removed, don't tell me I know
What a distance you've come to, when all that you say is true
To a case once removed from itself as true.
As the candles in your voice grow dim, and the light that you've made of yourself
Starts mouthing the words that burned
To dim them, and the violence
Simply tapers off, toward the object you were
By being subject to its violence,
You find yourself strangely at ease, don't ask me to say
What it is life has come to, when everyone's cry is a sign
And yours alone is the cry of a sign.
Whatever else a cry might say, it's clear in this case it's not *frightened of saying*.
This isn't a time for the words *per se*. This is a time for the words *per se*.
You are tired...did I tell you how it feels getting used to this?
You are tired...did I tell you it gets used to itself?
You are tired...not to the depth you were
When your fears had cause
For fearing this, but more to the depth you are
When as it deepens, they have cause for depth.

Which Is Which?

The plain truth is, you no longer know the difference.
Are you better off than you were? It would be difficult to say so.
Are you simply yourself as such? Plainly, it's hard to say.
Is it all downhill from here? from affirmation
To total indifference? from one thing
To the next thing, with What's the difference
Being all you can say? You don't know.
You're no longer sure it even matters if you know.
The plain truth is, whether you know it or not.
Being the one you are, as a being from which you differ, as a simple case
Of what's been worded so often it's now
Just a worded case, it's hard to say which
Is which, and which is just words
For which no one could answer, but
Do you or do you not love the ones you call loved ones?
Do you or do you not think the things you call thoughts?
Is it or is it not your belief that the truth is
Never too much to ask, or too little to question, or have you found it
Somehow otherwise, as though you'd never have found it otherwise,
Like poverty among the poor, or birds being known as birds?
"I'm afraid" confessed the man being tortured to know his feelings.
"I have doubts" thought the heart trying to think of itself as hearts.
"I don't care" replied the case of an understandably mild indifference
To its being the case as such, as a slow descent
Toward its own condition, and just between you and me,
Within a speech self-addressed to the Other
Words are prone to, it's getting harder
To tell yourself
From what you are.
The plain truth is, you're no longer sure it matters.
Call it a case that matters. At best that would only be true.
Is it all downhill from here? It's hard to say what is meant by this.
Is it all downhill from here? It means less and less than it meant.
Is it all downhill from here? from the sky above
To the night inside you? from twilight
Into starlight, with Make a wish
Being more than you'd care to say? You won't say.
In a dream it came to matter what the dream refused to say.
And the plain truth is, whether you dreamed or not.

In The Evening of The Dream

This evening I feel at last an overwhelming capacity
To fail and be done with it. At last I can fail.
If I don't now have hopes, because I for one have failed them,
Because I've lived just to a point, which is clearly beside the point,
Well I still have what I have, a quiet sense
Of my enormous failure, and a gathering sense of night
That is hopelessly dark, but merely night.
The sun sets as it sets, and if we somehow hoped otherwise,
Then let's just call it a day in which
We somehow hoped otherwise; when the day ends
Our hopes, it does not end what we hoped.
The stars rise as they rise, and if our wish is to change this,
That simply makes these the stars on which
To wish we could change this; should they grant us
One wish, these stars are all we could wish.
Having failed my own dreams, which clearly makes me a failure,
Which means in all that I hoped, there was never any hope,
I know I've lost what I've lost, but I'll never lose
My failure, and if the dark takes
My dreams, it can't take back what I've dreamed.
At last I am truly lost, and none of the loss is wasted.
When the clear sweet light is gone, there is the sweetness of what is gone.
In the evening of the dream, watching the dream become a failure,
Watching the meaning of the hope become the meaninglessness of hope,
None of the loss is lost on me: the light dies,
The stars shine, and I know
Just what I've wasted, precious hours
Made precious, because I've lost them
And gained their loss.

