

## *The Tree at Tigertail*

Just off Route One  
before Tigertail Corner, there's a gargantuan banyan  
with limbs like Gothic buttresses.

I step in, genuflect, walk the labyrinth of shadow,  
and I am once again at Chartres.

No cars come by. The bells of birdsong cease  
and all is pagan subtext. I am at worship, welling  
at the root with the woivre underground. Leaves

of blue shoulder the spires, light sculpts itself into gates  
as if the Madonna deep in the crypt, in sync with me,

rejuvenates. And I don't know if I have penance or license  
here in Miami's medieval groves where centuries  
flow and coalesce. Early in adolescence, safe

behind the hedge of our suburb's borders,  
I wandered with him to find a place to lie

and kiss. There was no canopy like this  
but we erected pleasure  
in the hammock of a willow. I would have sworn

vows to the tree's virgin goddesses, but for the body's  
coveting touch, soft branching skirts that rush

and juncture, here and here . . . though I have as much  
these years after lust—summoning rapture  
below and above. It took generations

and scaffolds and fires, great wheels, Black  
Madonnas and Templar monks—lifetimes  
to raise that cathedral to its finish. And while

clouds burn off, the tree at Tigertail

reaches morphogenetic hallways  
while the tablet of my hand glows, alchemical,

cobalt to emerald. His name was Jim—  
We were so very young, domed  
beneath the natural burgeoning,

past the pillars into the nave.

## *He Drove Faster*

Much faster than he could think.

He drove as if his IQ was one hundred and eighty.

He drove like a gangster with twenty-one carat lug nuts,  
like a bandit stashing his sock of slugs in the glove  
compartment. He drove with one hand on the wheel  
at two o'clock, one arm out the window, palm  
on the side-view mirror he never checked.

He drove like Monty, like Jimmy Dean, like Bond  
in his Aston Martin or Cary Grant in *North by Northwest*—  
And she sat shotgun without a seatbelt—not  
mandated yet—She sat composed like Grace Kelly,  
like Eva Marie Saint looking down at the yawning canyons,  
felt herself like the road, foreign and flat.  
Fuel-ingesting, never-ending.

## *Perish the Thought*

Perishing to the right of us, perishing to the left, as we walk among the six billion.  
And there, but for the grace of the Gods, we go . . . Our pets chomp the dust,  
Our jazziest cars, our glamour-girl actresses, all the Hollywood studs. We've been  
hanged and beheaded, poisoned and stoned, disemboweled and tied to the  
stake—At the mercy of dictators, soldiers, spouses and popes. The Cemetery  
of Perishables runs miles and miles, overseen by stone angels whose chipped  
fingers coil like snakes. The Sphinx even ages. Like Ozymandias, she passes  
slowly, watching the rest of us lepers from eon to eon rapidly rot. No one is not  
perishing. No republic, no empire, no island nation . . . Even Rome was shredded  
by Saxons and Goths. The pagan gods are breathless now. As mortal as rock stars.  
Only they're real stars, burnt out and ashen, thumb-tacked onto the night.

## *Qumran*

Mary of Bethany asked him, "Will the thirst for knowledge ever be quenched?"

—*The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas*

In the scriptorium ruin, I set foot in a life I knew  
as a recluse draped in a bone-white robe, sequestered  
from the city's first century sects. I remembered  
we hadn't fled to stone caves, we withdrew—  
like a wave pulls from sand. And we entered an ocean

of desert, not far from the Dead Sea where everything  
floats and even the salt breathes—so remote—  
the only sounds were the quills scratching on parchment,  
recording Yeshua's alternate journey, the one with Magdalene  
as companion. We were so certain—the Kingdom

was on its way, that each new day in our cursed world  
might be the last. That apocryphal light was rising  
behind the beveling sky's glass, where the future lapped  
at the edges of clouds. As I fingered stones in my pockets,  
I sensed the earth's hertz and walked up limestone steps

leading to nothing but the remains of one wall.  
Under the spell of a scorching sun, an archway opened  
to a corridor with columns, where the ghosts of the Essenes—  
busy with bread and olives, busy with cisterns and clay cups—  
floated as if they could pull me with their touch

through the frequency of twenty centuries passing.  
I closed my eyes and swayed my body  
in time with what I'd forgotten  
as it held me in lustration so hot it mated  
with darkness, then transmuted, the way black

contains the whole spectrum of color. I stilled myself there,  
starlings squawked overhead and when I heard  
Romans horses stop dead, I rushed into the present,  
came to myself blinking—as the sky drew closer.  
And I knew in the way of gnosis—watched

the translucent past swim into the sea—  
basking my face in the glow of what had dissolved,  
I was suddenly called with the other tourists  
to board the bus back to Jerusalem.

x. *After* (from the Sequence *The World's Veil*)

the first beautiful blitz of death, rain  
and a tenderness he forgave  
in every breathing thing.

Hyacinths. Marshes. Garlic.  
He could see that the world  
continued in its ignorant mirage,  
its traffic and horns—limousines  
disguising death

as something wrong  
instead of different, the world  
with its games and time,  
holidays and baths.

He circled the similar towns, somnambulant  
spirit unable to speak or to alter any outcome,  
in sympathy with martyrs, the folly  
of war, the dwindling forests . . .

Only his various isolation pursued him:  
a carcass in a butcher shop,  
pink streetlights after hours,  
a spatter of water rounding a corner, then gone.

The weather of death was not a place,  
not even a planet—yet the world kept on  
turning its collar, rubbing its  
damp hands as if ruin were certain.

There was no death after his death,  
just a vibration, unfamiliar—still  
his voice would not go back; he could not  
reappear to tell them he felt the old

Sunday desires, that he was unprepared  
to cross—Nor could he tarry forever entangled  
with matter in earth's circumscription  
where ruin was futile, finality, nowhere.

ii. *Being*

He thought he could cut the cord to his regrets  
by curing the world of its wounded.

He didn't know what he railed against  
was its unfit heart. The lie it had sworn by—  
this wormy marriage of life to death. He wanted

to dissect the body's burden, explore its incarcerated  
god, *Spirit* draped in the body's grace. To wrap sun  
beneath skin like a beacon and pivot each muscle,

distilling a glow deep in the veins. He thanked the body  
for its blood, delicate cartilage like squid, wedged  
appendages, nodes of marrow . . .

Dispensing medicine to carry the body's cargo  
would not delay aging, but like anyone,

he wanted to prolong the music of youth.

Playing the staff of his wife's neck  
as she sat in the freshly cut grass  
lifting an infant to her shoulder.

He'd have willingly taken the toddler's steps  
from beach to ocean, believing the waves' illusion  
of movement, his feet wedged in damp sand,

not knowing earth's borders from water's,  
not knowing his own, knowing nothing at all—  
*being.*