

## What the Lotus Said

It will hurt when the knife is pulled away,  
pain no longer my walking staff and candle,  
mist taking over where doctors and medication  
once were the compromise with being born,  
stuck down in the algae of a coral reef, mind  
more than what settles into the brain, mind  
lost, mind found in the summer palace, walking  
along, following a man painting the sidewalk  
for tourists, each stroke born in a center  
between his ears, rippling out from his fingers,  
the knife gone, my eyes pulled back, opened  
the way angels tip open the speck of a body  
to pour in the soul, and my soul sat up, afraid  
to believe it had been let loose in a place so far  
from where it began, set loose to walk backward,  
follow the lines of thought to where a blossom  
lifts its head and thrives where flowers die.

## Where We Are Born

Swallow, say the name of the place so softly  
our cheeks slip onto a creek's tongue where  
we sit and wonder how dumplings are made,  
the whisk of a hand tucking them into pockets

like tiny purses with surprises for taste buds,  
or the joy of fingers tickling babies, babies  
the word for birds born to sit and wait in nests  
that sing brightly like matches clicking fires

to live for a very short time, requiring mercy  
hanging in the air above them where worms  
fall from the mouths of mothers. Mother,  
come back from the dead and hold me now

where skies speak the truth of orphans to say  
that you gave birth to me, how that sounds  
like mounds of money on fire, or a chorus  
of brown calves crying in fields of wet grass.

## The Earthquakes in Taiwan

The life of the air melts, a film comes,  
a sleep covers our eyes, a god dismisses us

the way black women shake the skies  
to mark an angry place until the gods

in interiors of every speck of dust shake  
clouds so the tiniest thunderstones crack.

I split open this way, a world quaking  
from a split deep inside origins of hurt,

my throat full, tongue stuck, choking  
on the sick lust of men, memories

full of fractures, bent the wrong way until  
my life is undone inside me, forests

swaying, mountaintops struggling  
to come back to being straight, as if

straightness is what will save a mountain.  
The end has come, and it will come again

to show us it has broad dominion over what  
we call God or Nature, a fusion of what lives

inside the nerve that goes from what is pure  
joy to a fear of joy, the nerve that is the seat

of the peace that proves itself to be a lie  
so that I want nothing, no one, no knowing

except what I know is me, a man who melts,  
falls apart to be repaired in broken spaces.

## A Chinese Theory of Strings

The cattle moo and make a muck under their hoofs  
just over the fence from where I walk in the mornings,  
down to my office over a mile away, and I have not seen  
the cattle but must believe all sound is evidence of life.

The minor junctions in the crevices of what makes  
things real are spaces where I do not breathe, where  
I perch on my toes, suspended at the curb as motorcycles  
edge by, broken lines, snakes in Taipei's morning traffic.

Here I can suspend myself in a falling apart, the innards  
of everything letting themselves become information's bits,  
the unbecoming, invisible nothings making me pure light  
or a jazz run with license to be mysteries or vapors.

I avoid the one temple at the corner they say is evil,  
a too definite place, an assertion of a mind reveling in  
the way a mirror leads us to love the face it shows us,  
as we are tempted by our eyes to believe what we see.