

## Star Journal

*Astronomy is for the soul—*

*the truth about what*

*and who we are*

and will be.

The universe grinding blithely away

and we, reflective grist, stellar pollen

cooling down enough to finally shine—

a caucus of dust and acids blown

over the warped table of space,

arriving on the shirttails of comets to lap down

on tundra, settle on palmetto leaves,

blinking above an isthmus white with sand. . . .

\*

And so unconsciously we take our breath

into orbit about the solar apparatus

of the heart—

star with its own fusion and collapse—each measure and molecule

vulnerable but

unaccountable in a code

comprising even the weightless freight

of thought

as we stand out each night exhaling

dim clouds from the ghosted

wing-span of our lungs. . . .

\*

We have built machines

that can see light burning

from the lost beginning—

faint quasars, a print-out just coming

through the hazed background buzz

after fifteen billion years.

\*

From our vantage point in the outer precincts,

we tune in radio from the first

broadcast, big downbeat still on every network

and starry frequency

as we go for a spin through the galactic plasma,  
the boulevards, a kind of Dynaflo along  
                    oxbows and sluice gates of time. . . .

\*

Telescopes *are* time machines,  
                    lanes for recovered light  
up to speed, pulling down the crystal spheres      bringing the past  
                    and broken symmetries,  
exposing our surroundings,  
                    our irrepressible, elemental histories  
we continue      with which  
                    to negotiate as if the wheel were firmly in our hands.

\*

Space itself is slipping away,  
                    expanding,  
                                    but into what?  
  Aristarchus of Samos,  
against Ptolemy and the popular astrophysics,  
                                    deduced that earth was a planet,  
that stars were very far away indeed!  
                                    A little over 2,000 years,  
was confirmed.      and his information

                    Still, there is the black frame of space,  
  stars untrue  
in our parallax view—their bent scintillations so many  
  curve balls breaking  
over the outside corner of the plate.  
                    And so our doubt about everything  
published above us in the dark,  
                    and then the blank and sweeping margins  
of the east each dawn  
                    after we've again tried to decipher the shorthand

in the night.

Sitting up at dawn, starlings appear across the lawn  
like black holes

in the mist-bright sheen.

Birds congregate, begin a capella—  
cavatinas and recitatives— without the least introspection,  
time management  
or stress . . . neither do they sew.

A steady disregard of the attrition of air,  
the ambiguous blue going of the world—  
something like a rose-colored nebula  
boiling in their breasts, moving them  
to praise to matter the implications,  
the copyright of the cold.

\*

The lawn sprinklers whirl out their silver  
and unerring loops . . . gravity keeping us  
here—the weak force and the strong,  
the invisible and the dissembled something  
in the unified field

even as light is fused and driven through  
charged tines of air,  
torching the tree, black Y against  
the mustard sky, wringing out the horizon,  
an ash of arms extending, funnel cloud  
taking farm house and Ford Galaxy sedan  
up the violet ascension of the sky,  
against gravity and half the Midwest  
on the TV A.M. News, particles accelerated,  
snowy dots of channels flipped through.

Out the window, the glitter  
in the night river washed away, discord of black  
sand rolling over some last bright bones,  
wing bones, let's say, holding it all up  
about us as we reel outward,  
carrying our blue and parochial atmosphere  
with us, our little argument advanced

against all the blind stuff of space,  
the dark matter now 95% of everything,  
denser than anthracite with time,  
dead energy so massed it will never shine  
nor harbor one mote of mica,  
one iced diamond-fleck not inked and unknowable.  
Only the fingerprints,  
the gravitational arcs hold  
the pearl-like and whirling Milky Way in thrall,  
keep the arms swirled,  
brilliantly together, rotating in sync with  
the yolky center, edges bright  
with the hum and singing of atoms swimming  
outward, burning away  
somewhere nothing ends.

## Prima Facie

I've always liked the story of Bertrand Russell giving a public lecture on astronomy, and a woman standing up afterwards to say it was all rubbish, that the earth was really flat and supported on the back of a giant tortoise! And when Russell asked just what the turtle was standing on, the woman was ready and replied, "Why, it's turtles all the way down."

Doesn't it add up this flawlessly while we take our short swim off these rocks—stunned in the immediate and febrile good will of the light as it replays every summer traveling home from the shore, green sea still sparkling in our veins, horizon's blue frame holding, crepuscular, one star only burning there and inside of us in continuous disputation of the dark. . . .

And again this evening I'm watching a feckless delegation of clouds depart for home or perhaps the rain-emptied coast of Dieppe, I'm brooding on immortality where white sandwich wrappers lifted above those chalk-dull cliffs, where seagulls argued low along a flinty sea blown back along the quai as if there were another element to the light that we, stalled there and as simple as those wind-thinned trees, were letting slip away. . . .

A circus had cleared off overnight, and papers scuttled on the long green field, a red-and-yellow poster waving from a bench, were little to say time and space had been put to use there and then, and in that way—unremarkable now and shuffling off with the salt shifting of the air.

A wafer of sun cut across the clouds' grey scroll, the black edges of night bleeding in until bright specks floated up on the blank plate of space with all our unsupported paradigms for science and for art—the dark ocean

spattered with refracted light like the grainy surface  
of the soul—both perhaps expanding, still being etched  
with the lost music of the spheres—while we were only  
at sea again in our heart, pointing out first-hand the old  
shapes and overlappings, the sure and selfsame stars.

## Midlife

Because out of nowhere one day  
the grace disappeared  
from my body, rarely to be seen  
again except in that unconscious  
wrist-snap of a racket head as it kicks out  
the side-ways arc of an American twist,  
I went out for my birthday and, instead  
of a *Cos d'Estournel* '82, bought  
two Day-Glo green-and-yellow parakeets,  
some seed, cuttle bone, and cage,  
along with a flagon of something  
truly unremarkable from Czechoslovakia.

We carried them finger to cage,  
these frank dispositions, attended  
as an inflated chatter proclaimed  
their vibrant devotion to the air.  
We spoke to them much as if they were  
autistic children, capable somehow  
of one spectacular, clear feat—as if,  
being simple, they were simply loved—  
as if, perhaps, they might take the place  
of children, had one wanted children. . . .

\*

And this year, players in the Series  
looked younger than ever before, all of them—  
even stodgy catchers who hadn't shaved.  
And never have I been so attentive to weather—  
where the jet stream might drag down the clouds,  
road ice, airport delays as if there were something  
to be done. I especially enjoy the channel that shows  
temperatures in Barcelona or in Rome  
superimposed on postcard vistas  
so starched with sunlight that when  
I close my eyes I'm walking the *Ramblas*  
or the *Corso*, or off praising one tree or another  
in the *Jardin des Plantes*. Or I see the supple lace

of jacarandas, the deep-iris sky over Montecito—  
my legs were somehow then attached  
to the tireless direction of the breeze,  
as unconcerned as the itinerant clouds.

Now I notice most my friends  
have rowing machines or stationary bikes,  
and I have bought a fancy one on time,  
the kind with a dashboard of lights and beeps  
like a starship, one with a computer read-out  
for hills, levels, duration, intensity, RPMs.  
It's called a Life Cycle, and not a minute goes by  
that the irony is lost on me. It's the kind  
I used to warm up on in the mirrored gym  
before running or workouts on the weight machines—  
but lately I walk by refusing  
to even glance at it, hamstrung  
by a flagging affinity for pain.

Nonetheless, I have not taken to  
wearing a cardigan or bow tie,  
nor have I insisted students  
call me Dr. or Professor, this or that. . . .  
Because next year, when I get my grant,  
I'm heading for the coast and home—  
going to buy one of those old big boards and,  
without one thought for carcinoma,  
stay all day long in the surf, nose-riding,  
shooting the curl on shoulder-high sets  
like nobody's business. And on Fridays  
I'm going to hit an Italian restaurant  
I know and eat rigatoni like Tony Quinn  
in that old Fellini film, drink a few  
water glasses of red wine with friends  
and walk out late into starlight, into the blue  
and immutable sea sounds of the past.



And nowadays, more and more in dreams  
I'm flying—just taking off from the sidewalk  
mid-conversation, pushing the air back like water  
with my hands, the way I remember learning  
to dog paddle in the Pacific, bobbing then  
above the azure levels in the world.  
It's simple, something I always knew,  
but something larger, more elementary  
than all the images of parochial school,  
something hidden like the white and floating  
hearts of saints, something I had just forgotten  
all this time—a little transcendental muscle gone soft  
but coming back, some instant weight-loss plan.  
I rise then effortlessly above the cypress  
and eucalyptus trees, and there I am, suddenly  
once more gliding over that sea cliff and the coast  
for as long as I can remember. . . .