

/INSIDE OUT/

by

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A MASTER'S REPORT

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requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

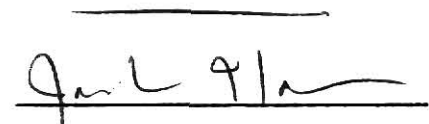
Department of English

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Approved by:

  
Major Professor

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For my parents  
my sister  
my friends  
JoAnn and Chuck  
my teacher  
Jonathan

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## Contents

### I Outside

Grocery Ritual	3
Car Wash	5
Marbles	7
For Denise	9
Long Beach	11
Off Base	13

### II Inside

What Fire Touches Burns	16
River Watch for Bob	17
Homage to Gaudi's Sagrada Familia	19
Summer for Gwen	20
Gassing Wasps	21
Anonymous	23
Grand Canyon	24

### III Inside Out

Addressing Myself as You	42
Blue Kitchen	43
The Cat and the Mole	44
Spooked	45
For Mark Strand: After Mark Strand	46
Correspondence #1	47
Same Old Sexual Fantasy	49
Protection	50
Looking for the Scissors in the Dark	51

### IV Critical Apparatus 53

Bibliography	68
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## I Outside

We come into this world as aliens come into a land  
which they must conquer if they are to live.

John Crowe Ransom



## Grocery Ritual

The ordeal began  
with wrestling chrome carts  
apart. The rattle of metal  
signaled for me  
a sentence cruel as prison.  
We started with bread  
and kneaded our way  
down rising walls of bright  
cardboard boxes, collections  
of specimen jars: pickles, pears,  
and pig's feet,  
embryonic ears of corn.  
The Cheerios were friends,  
cans of tuna I understood,  
but fruits and vegetables  
were an arcane science,  
dominion of Mothers.  
Slowly we would approach.  
Hanging from the cool  
metal handle, I would steer  
our cargo into saltine cracker towers.  
"Watch where you're going."  
One wheel would always wobble  
and stick, streak the floor black.  
Dragging toes on pale linoleum,  
"Stop that. You'll ruin your shoes,"  
I rode the basket round and round,  
never sure if I pushed or  
was being pulled, at times  
easing the cart away  
in sneaky rebellion. I hoped  
to see Mother put our eggs  
in the wrong cart. Instead  
I was too easily retrieved.

At last we'd round the turn  
into the onion, potato bin  
islands. Here carts clogged,  
women's voices undulated in recognition,  
scandal, cooing admiration  
of a punching bundle  
wagging in the kiddie seat.  
All along the islands  
I scouted dark eyes peeping  
above silver grids and mounded fruits.  
"Don't grab," "Stop Squirming."  
Other mothers crabbed.  
Mother began my initiation in earnest.  
Perceptibly she squeezed  
the grapefruit, thumbbed and sniffed  
cantalopes, weighed  
bananas, examined every pepper,  
cucumber, for God's sakes.  
Then, so ineluctably would she  
rotate an apple before my  
sleepy eyes and ask,  
"Does that look good?"  
I would dismiss the apple with dispatch,  
"Yeah."  
But she never hurried.  
Slowly, so slowly she would  
pick  
five more apples,  
the correct bunch of celery,  
the juiciest oranges,  
and with unconscious intent  
push me and the laden cart  
to the end of the line  
curving down the main aisle,  
before the black conveyor belts  
at the check-out counter.

## Car Wash

Milky water pulsed  
down the drive.  
Thumb splitting the stream,  
Daddy beat a timpani  
on the hollow hubcaps,  
slaked icy water down  
windows and doors,  
overflowed the bucket.  
We'd jump  
suds and water rivers,  
shrieking laughter  
back and forth  
across concrete  
to soft spines of grass  
that slid between our toes,  
sprint  
back across the rough  
driveway, bare feet splatting  
out the thin flood.  
Sponge fat with soap,  
Daddy sudsed around and  
up and down the light-green  
Studebaker; lurching, big-nosed  
faces giggled  
in the enamel glow. Finally,  
when hubcaps shone silver  
and the last glints of sun  
vanished from the chrome  
around the windshield,  
on the bumpers,  
and I stood admiring  
the wistful smile of grille  
under the hood,

Daddy'd turn the star-stream  
of hose on us,  
scatter us  
like droplets  
on the darkening lawn.

## Marbles

Our horses and used cars  
were marbles:  
purees, cat eyes, steelies,  
peewees.

Out on bald dirt  
our Las Vegas sprang up;  
whole bags of marbles  
changed hands  
in the span of a recess.  
Either side of the strip  
we etched shooting lines  
in the silica powder,  
nested a prize  
steelie or puree  
at the end of the alley  
and began to hawk.

Serious as shopkeepers  
kids swept and molded  
their earthen aisles.  
Nothing is as smooth  
and hard like a jewel  
as a puree.

Nothing sits as heavy  
as a planet in the hand  
as a steelie.

We marksmen hunkered,  
knuckles in dirt  
at the line,  
shooters cradled loosely,  
thumbs cocked.

Dirt-faced merchants squat-hopped  
to capture the booty  
pinballing down the galleries  
past the target.

The tweedle of the playground whistle,  
the alarm of the schoolbell  
muffled  
in the marketplace.  
"Awhh, he can't shoot."  
"Cheater, you fudged."  
"Who wants yer ol' steelie anyways."  
Petting and coaxing  
the earth,  
we learned to play  
for keeps.

For Denise

I lay in bed  
with my transistor radio  
tuned to Macabre  
too scared to take the earplug  
out. At breakfast  
I would whine,  
"I didn't get to sleep all night."  
You told everyone I snored,  
if feeling mean, that I said  
"Johnny," and moaned.  
So when your friends called,  
especially boys, I told them,  
"She's in the bathroom."  
To me you were not afraid  
of anything.  
When renegade kids attacked us  
on our way to the movies, cut  
purse straps with minnow knives,  
ripped watches off wrists, dragged  
smaller kids in the dirt,  
you laughed, kicked back.  
You knew the surprise value  
of the obvious lie: caught ricocheting  
in the doorway, you babbled, "I swear, I  
haven't had a thing to drink. Well,  
maybe a sip of somebody's beer."  
You brought cheerleader friends,  
Judy and Beaver, home to expertly  
catch each other by the fingers  
and lean hard, bopping to Chantilly Lace  
in the livingroom, or you'd practice yells  
in the front yard, spinning blue skirts  
so the pleats opened white

or smoked Marlboros in the bathroom.  
You looked the other way when you saw  
me at the pool, told Mother I  
embarrassed you by walking  
up to the lifeguards, toes spread like fans.  
You used to sneak out  
our bedroom window to meet  
girlfriends, wrestlers, football players  
under a streetlamp  
until I locked the screen.  
Across the room at night  
you made an eerie shape  
tented beneath your chenile bedspread,  
flashlight wavering  
as you read  
your James Bond thrillers.

I had no idea you were my sister.



## Long Beach

Mother hated Long Beach:

the cheap bar where her mother drew beer,  
the motel-style apartment by the tracks.  
But I liked the twilight bar with its chrome edges,  
the bar-length mirror, packets of chips and nuts,  
the rows of reflecting red and yellow glass mugs, the beer-  
and-whisky-smelling men who made a fuss, bought me cokes  
in heavy, blue-green bottles, lifted me to the red  
bar stools, the women with candy-red mouths and signals  
of cigarette smoke. I was happy to watch the juke box  
lift and turn forty-fives while Mother endured her mother's  
friends. When Mother herded me and my sister home  
far below the beacon of Signal Hill,  
the glass-studded alleys looked  
like adventure.

I liked the laundry house across the sandy  
courtyard at Grandma's, the smell of water squeezed  
from clothes wrung through the ivory bars of the washer,  
a waterfall smattering in the tin tub. But once in  
the cool dark of the wash house, I longed to be  
in the sun out back with weeds and blue morning glories  
and Mother pinning sail-white sheets to the line  
with clothes pins like little people.  
When I followed Mother with her laundry basket  
and sat on the ground nearby, making up conversations,  
baking in the hot like a plant, it didn't take long before  
I wanted back in the wash house or to look for my friend,  
Oolay, who ate dirt from the flowerbed.

Scraping between the low verbena,  
she scooped up a shallow bit of soil.

"Cookie," she said and slid a round crust  
of sand between her lips. Smiling,  
threads of sand chaining in saliva across  
her teeth and gums, she offered me  
metallic-smelling dirt in her baby palm.  
"Cookie," she insisted.

## Off Base

Even if our parents pretended everything was fine,  
we knew the Japanese hated us.  
Warned there might be demonstrations at major  
bases, Yokahama, Fuchu, Tachikawa, we were told  
our military-brown buses would still  
take us to school at Camp Drake. But  
our line of buses rolled to a stop inside the gates.  
Our drivers stepped down to negotiate with a wall  
of bamboo staves, rising suns and red  
bandannas wreathing blunt, black hair. Our drivers  
merged with their countrymen in a fright of fists  
and eyes, while we sat, no longer testing the springs  
of our seats. The uniforms mounted rubber-coated steps,  
eased behind steering wheels and nudged us past the safety  
of the dog-house guard post and through  
the chanting storm  
of "Yankee Go Home."  
We knew they wanted us out.

When the heavy fog curled in from the rice paddies, we also knew  
murderers followed, samurai blades clenched between gold  
and yellow teeth. We told stories about how houseboys  
kidnapped children and sold them away so they never saw  
their parents again. When we'd follow the older kids off  
base into the bamboo forests, holding our noses past the sick  
honeybucket smell, they told stories about how the Japs  
hated dogs, especially American dogs.  
"You know what the Japs do to dogs?" Johnny Decker sneered  
as we padded single file along a path raised between rice  
fields. He didn't wait for an answer.  
"I know a fifth grader says the Japs sneak through the fence  
(they can weasel through anything) and steal 'em and

drag 'em off to their houses or the woods and string  
'em up by the neck and drive nails between their ribs."  
With squeals and grunts we encouraged the storytellers.  
"I heard they grab 'em by the teeth--like if the dog tries  
to bite 'em--and they jerk and break their jaw."  
"Yeah, and then the dog can't do anything so they strip  
the skin off while the dog's still alive and all."

The trick was to always wander farther off  
base, and one day when we'd passed the familiar  
stand of bamboo, thatched farmhouses with bald yards,  
cabbage fields crusted white, and stood on a rain-softened  
road, Johnny pointed out a German shepherd decomposing  
in a ditch, bamboo-filtered light waving  
across the sunken fur. We younger kids glanced  
behind us all the way back, broke into a scuffling  
trot as the open ground and frame houses of the base  
appeared. For days afterward, whenever she served  
dinner or hung ironed shirts in the closet,  
I looked at our maid  
Koko San, funny.

## II Inside

4

These things are a parable.

George Eliot

## What Fire Touches Burns

Who is that Frankenstein child,  
there,  
the one it hurts to look at?  
Who is that terrible young one  
whose eyes know  
she was pieced together,  
ancient woman jigsawed  
to a child's body?  
Now she must see the world  
through rising waves of heat and ash.  
Now she must match the world  
fear for fear.  
A child accuses everyone,  
so why should I feel guilty?  
I hold no match  
to her thin blond hair.  
She burns on her own  
from the marrow out,  
and that fire  
fits her  
like a scream.

River Watch  
for Bob

You are like the river  
you sit beside,  
ease of motion,  
swift without warning  
or direction,  
water sliding on water,  
lines snaking between  
far banks.

You never speak a word,  
watching slipping plates of water  
break and heal  
and rise and sink  
before your pooling eyes,  
thoughts rafting  
on the moving waters.

It is a matter of  
water touching air,  
wetness soaking black mud blacker,  
grains eroded,  
grains deposited  
on the feathered current.

It is a further matter  
of water riffling  
like silk  
against the reedy legs  
of a great blue heron  
stalking submerged sandbars.

When finally you sigh  
and stand and stretch and turn

to climb the bank and wade  
through tall nettles  
far below the silver clack  
of cottonwoods,  
anyone can see  
you come away  
more yourself.



## Homage to Gaudi's Sagrada Familia

Crossing the nave open  
to wind and shadow,  
we watch workmen bend to  
shovelfuls of rock and dust,  
mixing concrete  
even as white marble doves  
erode away, broken by winter.  
We raise ourselves up  
concrete steps  
in the shadow of concrete  
spires, wind diced  
through concrete lattice.  
Grasping the ribs of windows,  
we stare across red clay  
terraces and roofs  
bisquing  
to the flat relief of the Mediterranean.  
But the horizon and our hands let go  
and we climb again  
the concrete twist  
of scaffold  
until we cannot feel  
our feet,  
lifted in the webwork  
of butterfly wings,  
transported by the sound  
from a multitude of mouths,  
like the stomata on the undersides  
of leaves that transpire  
and sing, like the open  
concrete spirals  
that carve a city into space,  
mouthing the only benediction,  
sanctus, sanctus, sanctus.

Summer  
for Gwen

There was the way  
your hand cradled the rose  
and you drank up to your cheeks  
in petal  
before you snipped it.

There was the way  
you spoke at lunch about  
doing the right thing instead  
of what you wanted.

Carnations dumped in the sun,  
sending hot perfume on the heat waves,  
sank into soil  
outside the milky greenhouse.

There was the flycatcher  
as it wheeled after the mowers  
gulping moths mid-air  
raised from violent blades;  
the gooey bee-end and stinger  
shiny on my finger-end,  
the tiny, hurtful  
bump.

## Gassing Wasps

The stars are threshed, and the souls  
are threshed from their husks.

William Blake

She couldn't live with the buzzing  
any longer. Since she fried him a chicken,  
it fell to him to get rid of the paper wasps  
that hovered and droned all around the house.  
If she hadn't known they pack such a sting,  
it might have been fun to watch their industry,  
their thread-like legs dangling, almost left  
behind in their darting flight. They were almost  
graceful, swimming in the air, suspended, treading  
nothing, their shifts of direction like gestures  
on a dance floor. But they had built paper  
nurseries on the front and back porches  
and at the tops of the gables.  
They had to go.

She handed him the container of gas--stood back in the yard  
while he, happy to be of some use, wiped out the nests  
glued to the clapboards, kept calm so the wasps  
wouldn't sense his mission. Again their bodies hailed  
like hollow grains on the rotting porches. Survivors  
flew off crazily; latecomers bumped emptiness and flew  
confused. Then he was on the roof, long fingers  
clutched to the eaves. He balanced the plastic  
container full of pink gasoline, reached for the top  
of the gable, shoulders strung with tension, and posed  
with what he was about to seed. She shouted directions  
from the lawn, "No, over, aim straight up, yeah, right there."  
Confident in their mating, oblivious of their sting,

in the midst of their landings and take-offs--  
the gas was on them and they dropped.

Their fall from the eaves was like some  
long burial, a lowering into the deep air  
piled around the white house. He handed down  
the container and she poured. He climbed  
to the peak and straddled it all the way  
to the other gable. The wasps rained  
like dark confetti,  
sorted at last in the tall grass.

Anonymous

Artillery telegraphs  
along limestone ledges  
for miles,  
tremulous in the oak grove,  
vibrates through deer bones  
asleep in briers,  
types out communiques  
in the china cabinet,  
traces hairline demarcations  
down plaster walls,  
rattles the sashes  
and window weights.  
Fish breathe the tremor  
through gossamer gills,  
hang still in the lake  
as if from sky hooks.  
While eerie reds and blues  
flare against cave walls,  
punctuating the movie  
reviews on TV,  
I imagine camelopard-clad men,  
wonder when  
in the night the dogs  
down the alleys  
will stop barking.

## Grand Canyon

### The Long Descent

After sleeping on snow, the cold chilled into our veins,  
we pose for pictures at the edge of air.

Nervous as guests waiting to descend the stairs, we smile  
as strangers grease the lenses of our cameras, find the view

and pin us against the wavering backdrop, ten miles across and a mile  
deep, exposed floor of chance oceans ravens now row above.

A sun-and-snow-scoured wind expands our lungs and raises green  
voices in the junipers and piñons, lifts to our ears omens

from smoky shadows and tabletops rocking below. We know what we leave:  
snow-covered parking lots, recreational vehicles, microwave

ovens, dogs on leashes and tourists necklaced with cameras. Carefully  
shod, we set upon the trail, white with ice and snow, and break

the plane of the rim, stepping into postcard stillness, motionless except  
for the race of shadow and sun that skims the flats and jumps

the escarpments. We descend, upright, mincing; like horses we fear  
losing our footing, but cannot keep our eyes from the deepening haze

or snow-topped north rim as the crows call farther and farther  
from the shore. We tromp on the tail of the unknown and it

writhes away under our boots, slithering down the cliffside  
carrying off the familiar like Persephone: shopping malls, Flagstaff,

rock and roll, Albuquerque, cookie sheets, libraries disappear over  
the edges as the strobing shift of the canyon drops us down Kaibab

trail; an image of cowboys and Indians riding pickups with loaded

gunracks around the McDonald's parking lot in Gallup clings, unfurls  
against the perfect layers of whitish Coconino sandstone, almost  
bloody redwall limestone, green shale Tonto, the dark gash of the inner  
gorge that seem some unassailable plaster of Paris wedding cake forever  
baking in the bakery window. Temples, ridges, buttes take shape  
and change: push into the sky here, lurch away in a spin there, a turn  
and the amber of mule piss evaporates in the sun, a hint of gossip  
on the trail: Cárdenas, sent by Coronado to find the Seven Golden  
Cities, never got this far and three of Powell's party were murdered  
by Indians. Treading dust and rock, we relish the cold air that whispers  
in our lungs secrets of hollows and distance, of springs  
running off Walhalla Plateau, of bighorns grazing up Haunted Canyon,  
of when the barrel cactus will bloom on the Tonto, of how the cedars  
stab their hold into impossible fissures and drink, of time, of how  
much we can hold in our minds before we sense how we have become part  
of the motion that confounds us, the shearing off of layers. We do not  
understand the floors we pass, Kaibab limestone, Toroweap, Hermit shale,  
Supai sandstone. . . trees sigh in the muscular wind above and below  
us. The work of water and wind cradles us: limestone temples of Buddha,  
Zoroaster, Wotan's Throne, Cheops, crotches and cleavages of creeks  
and washes, Bright Angel, Cremation, Phantom, Clear Creek pass  
in and out of sight, in and out of shadow and light, and we fly down  
the switchbacks of Cathedral Stairs past greens, grays and purples  
of Bright Angel shale. On the broad and arid Tonto we watch the exact  
placement of each cactus, mesquite, agave and look back at towering  
walls, chipped and flying, standing rooted against the unexpected

and empty sky, flinging back color into the dazzled air. The closer we come the louder the locomotive voice on the wind until the trail cuts to the brink of the inner gorge, and we watch the Colorado groaning against the cliffs. It is the worm eating in the grave and we are only halfway down. In our bright nylon parkas and gear: yellow, red, blue, orange, green, elves we seem, dwarfed by rock ridges, floes of talus, lunging down steeps until we reach a blasted tunnel, stand on the bridge carried by mule train beam by beam and watch the river boil turquoise up and down its narrow course. Black schist and pink granite marble the inner walls; melded together billions of years ago, they trace pink and black shapes of moon men, elongated, helmeted, rising up the gorge from the churn and lap of water. On the white beach low adobe walls mark a forgotten life of hunting and harvesting, of importuning the gods. Bright Angel pours down sunlight in its rocky bed, melted snow, rain bashed and purified over stones. We soak blistered feet and relax overheated joints and muscles, sinking into and borne aloft on the music of water and of cottonwood leaves spinning overhead, until our party divides, four climbers tackling the straight, crumbled cliffs up to Utah Flats, while we four take up our packs and hunt the Clear Creek trail to a dry camp at Sumner Wash, a path barely cut into the slide of rubble winding the steep inner gorge, giving lonely views of friable granite and quartz pinnacles, promontories, spires and avalanches, closing us off from the outer gorge, the sunlight on the buttes. We climb above Bright Angel, its brightness obscured by dark ledges, its song reverberating through stony chambers up to us until I am left



alone to struggle in the ringing shingle, my thoughts turning on  
the beauty and my single complaint of pain, heart whooshing in my ears,  
lungs pulling for oxygen, and still the path winds upward, every step  
a churning in the same rubble, the pack cutting bruises into shoulders  
and hips, blisters raw against wool socks, hip and knee joints  
freezing up like dry gears, beyond the aid of candy bars, alone  
in the slant of afternoon, numb to beauty and enduring only--I begin  
to talk to the collared lizards fishtailing off the trail at the scrape  
of my boots in the dust--I talk to myself, tell jokes until, mind  
checked with the body's efforts, I hit hysteria and lean my pack  
against the tapeats cliff and laugh. Tears and laughter the same,  
I pitch up another incline, steadying my load against the rough canyon  
wall and top a rise, turning a bend and reach a precipice and let  
the trap door swing open over the river and drop me through the depths  
of things, sweeping me into the past, into the serpent coiling  
in my heart, speaking the river's voice

I am the red salt water in your veins. In my  
tributaries bees swarm fresh from wildflowers,  
a buzz of molecules speaking their desire, striking  
vibrations everywhere, ringing the shingle at your  
feet. We are coursers through the same dust.

So I shamle into camp at twilight, collapse in my sleeping bag  
on the sandstone ledge and watch the night come on like a magician's  
cloak stealing away one ridge, one butte, one agave, one near  
cactus until the world hides in the folds of a summer house closed  
and draped in sheets for the season. Only the stars poke through like  
bright holes.

## The Tonto

With the fingers of sun teasing, this appetite wakes  
and fills before our eyes with blue light crackling softly,  
  
raising the gauze curtains, hauling up veil after veil  
on the green shale stage of desert. Bringing up the sounds of day,  
  
canyon wrens, red spots daubed on their crowns, pour watery  
songs from perches on spears of agave blooms dried in the perfect  
  
heat, preserved and tinkling like empty bells. We get started  
while the light comes up floodlight strength, saturating figure  
  
and ground. As the morning flows away, the sun hardens the rock  
beneath our boots, while the face of Zoroaster enthroned above us  
  
revolves from a smile to a frown. A caramel-colored snake streaks  
his black stripes under some agave spikes and lizards belly off  
  
as our eyes become accustomed to this rare aquarium light; every  
white fiber on the yucca spines curls with the heat, each prickly-  
  
pear cactus, mesquite, thorn and quill back-lit by the sun radiating  
off the thin green skin of soil, holds its measured ground,  
  
clubbed senseless by the sun. This is no stopping place but a passage  
through combustion, edges and borders always ahead or behind us,  
  
wavering; the distant heights of the north and south rims, the dark  
suggestion of the inner gorge burn just on the edge of vision.  
  
When our attention wanders to galleon clouds bunching up  
over this dryness, and we listen for the snap in the rigging, a stab  
  
of cactus or agave in the calf brings us back. The mind casts about  
for something to imitate, finding only the metaphor of one. One sun

in the sky. One red boulder. One boot striding. One cactus. Only so much water. One shadow. One survivor. Coyote droppings whiten as the sun climbs high drawing the shadows up short. We notice it is slower here where they say the delicate desert cannot recover from its scars; it takes this long, our crossing. Canteens empty, we bicker and wonder which cactus to cut, which is Wotan's Throne, which Angel's Gate, or Thor Temple. We can move only toward one destination, letting ourselves mimic the landscape. We stretch our legs to cover the ground, a rolling gait to carry us up and down the washes and swells, the sink and rise of the horizon while the sun steals the water from our breath. Jerry recounts his army days, his beatings, and I think shut up you moron, you're wasting water. The tumbled evidence of floods, washes full of cobbles, boulders, sand swirled gullies, look like past civilizations. We reach a cut into the bed of Clear Creek, two thousand feet below, and stare into a world of sprouting willows, mormon tea, watercress, ferns, horsetail, deep shadows and no way down. We turn back to our trail dry as clay sucking water, hot as rock sucking water and endure, hoping for the slightest sign of a drop in altitude, and it comes, steep, slippery with talus, and we roll like runaway trucks on a mountain road with no safety ramps, brakes smoked out. In the bottom of a dry creek, dust rising in the dry air, we can only monster step stiffly forward to a line of bending willows, straining our senses for the sound and smell of water rushing in its own intricate shadows.

## Clear Creek

The time is right      uncommitted morning      and from our feather bags  
we await the empowering      sun touching rock above us

lowering its slow wand      flowing orange and gold on gray walls.  
Mummied in warmth, we wait to wash our hands and faces

in the stream of light so slow to descend. Canyon wrens sing from stone  
perches and water ouzels bob their dance midstream on boulders

white eyelids blinking, and dive against the fast water to the bottom.  
Sun lights the treetops and creeps down the twisted bole of the world

drives the dew back into the air      the time is right for adventuring.  
We labor over the slide choking a narrow passage and revel in the roll

of cobbles under our feet, the soft pad of earth, the dodging of prickly  
pears with jumping spines, spears of young willows rocking above.

Following water, we track Clear Creek down its path through solid  
matter, obeying the gravity of its situation, undeviating. We listen to it

winded, breathless with voices      Mothers calling children home, children  
bicycling suburb cul-de-sacs, mazes; orgasmic whistles and sighs of

coffee pots and washing machines done with their cycles; some canary  
aria of joy to take the cover off the cage: it's day; there

the squeal of rubber away from the curb      voices bubble, rising so  
clearly from the bright stones rolled round at the bottom of the creek

the lover's breath a tide against the willing ear; annoying screeches  
and clucks from speckled starlings; as 10 a.m. Monday sirens herald

possible tornadoes and bombs, the preemie stuffs its fist  
in its mouth behind the glass      life tumbles liquid before us

in its narrow channel on the ground      bulldozers rumble and tear

the fabric in poor imitation of destruction and construction; squeaking  
the creak of grandmother's rocker; a humming complaint of semis  
on the interstate ramming commerce home to the discount houses  
all transparent gone as crystal. We push through tangles of willows,  
turn up a blind canyon, follow a trickle to the end wall that hides  
a narrow passage. Ringed in rock, only a ribbon of blue high above,  
we enter, fingertips brushing the grainy cliffs that recede, opening  
into sunny, sloping rock-strewn meadows water thinly glazing over  
smooth granite, mysterious pools deepening here and there, otherwise  
dry. We discover cattail marshes to sink in, deserts in the angle  
of sun spaced with cactus, while abutted to shadows of cliffs so  
geometric the ground never feels the lick of sun. Mosses, ferns, deep  
shaggy wetness stamped with deer hooves lie cleft like the world.  
The time is still right, but we linger in juxtapositions until we have  
to hurry through tessellated atmosphere of evening coming on fast  
drizzling darkness up from the uneven ground from the bucking stones  
and cold creek. The sun slipping higher and higher up the cooling  
walls; it will set behind a farther rim beyond our scope. The warmth  
of day fleeing upwards past our bodies lifts our heat and heads  
for space. Back at camp we watch the last disappearings of light  
upward. Bats circle the live oak in gathered shadows that still chase  
specks of sunlight up the cliffs and onto the Tonto where day  
regroups for the final flight, deserting us in the chasm. The creek  
bed fills and fills with the darting motion of bats and twilight,  
the cartoon blocks of color romping through the brain before sleep.  
As we have no campfire, the night shoulders in on us, nudging

all things we have chosen to ignore coming in to roost, fluttering  
close, brushing our arms, dusting our cheeks, clinging like the powder  
of moth wings        irridescant on our fingers.

### Cheyava Falls

White sound launches into space, and we see  
the music from far down the creek bed, but think it's some

Webwork of filament illusion. We still have far to struggle  
through sharp terrain made of rockslides and subterranean streams

Pure broken evidence of letting go. Up past the falls  
recent slides are more numerous, violent in the grasses

Willows just starting to climb through the rubble  
where the business is to fall, crack and break,

Crash and tumble, to let gravity have its way  
with stone as with water. Climbing to meet the snow

That falls on the north rim, we labor through creek  
beds choked with avalanches, boulders big as houses, stone theaters

Round and smoothly waiting for the water to perform,  
leaping from the high lip of cliff or clinging to vertical stone,

Sliding all the way down. Some water stairstepping down  
ledges until beaten to a foaming froth of curtain.

And still we climb with it all, hugging granite and limestone  
ledges like the smooth and dangerous hollows of hips.

As higher the creekbed narrows to nothing but limestone  
and slipping water, ferns clinging overhead, we boost and haul

Each other up ledges, traverse waterfalls while bright spots  
of sun beckon beyond the lip of rock above. We are down in something, can

Not climb out. We need rope and gear for these steeps; these  
flat, fallen boulders sharp-edged as knives tear shirts and pants.

We turn back, the return to camp like a falling motion, tired  
and stumbling over what we mastered on the way up. We sleep in mountain

Cold night near the pounding crash of downfalling Cheyava  
while uplifting. Snow mixes in the blackness with stars, and anything

That moves is like the waterfall, and we feel the world  
in its sliding motion. We too can travel up and down but cannot climb

Out of this bowl, can slide with and against the evening  
that spreads like the dilating of some dark pair of eyes.

#### Anasazi

They came down from the upper room in winter,  
a people schooled in wonder,

carrying beans, corn and squash to plant where  
the sun touched the bottom,

carrying fire to roast the mescal in pits on the buttes  
and to light the face of the storyteller,

carrying the arts of basket weaving and pottery  
to hold the dreams of the ancestors.

These were not twig splitters who left little figures  
of animals on cave floors; these were

builders of stone and adobe granaries and kivas,

their dwellings clinging like swallows' nests to ledges.

Bodies hard and smooth as the river rocks rolled  
from high places and polished in the floods,

the young men followed deer and coyote trails across  
the Tonto and through gaps in the redwall or through the tapeats

down to the Colorado. There was no meadow or marsh they could not  
find, agile as the bighorn sheep, able to leap cactus or boulder

from a standstill. The women glistered beauty and told their children,  
"We are the dreams of the animals and the dreams the earth has

at night we act out while the sun crosses the sky so the night  
and the day can marry each other." There was no cruelty in what

they made. They made songs from the visions of their seekers after  
knowledge who saw what the world was made for and how

it would end. All this and more our scientists can read  
in the broken doorways and pot shards

they left behind, the finger ridges pressed cleanly  
in the gray and terra cotta clay.

There was no slippage to their lives. The world was too familiar  
to have names.

Where the design of black engobe circled the lip  
of the pot  
was  
life.



## Phantom Creek

This creek sings a higher pitch, stonier, deeper in the echoing chambers of the same chord. Among these granite and schist narrows the water rings louder and the water ouzels chase each other up the floods. Silence groans on in the shallow creek and we read the evidence of violent change, lakes broken, dams drained, trees bent under the roaring weight of spring, all debris swept down with nothing to cling to, flushed through the smooth chute of time. Blue and gray moonlight ghosting on the granite wall, we figure petroglyph selves wriggling warmly, but cold against stone, golden-eyed wolves, rabbits wiggling ears, Tinkerbell, I dance the dance of weeds to tempt the mule deer and her fawn to come close and drink the green and red bed of the creek their soft muzzles lipping the stone danced cold; the cold of fading winter graces our lips. We wanted to see the skeleton and the simple whiteness of strong bones. Darkness and talus, we will never climb out of this stark observation. The common voice is an atom turned inside out. The way people come out of their houses and look for a bit of sun to feel or look for something to rest their eyes on, if only for a little beauty, which here falls around us like the sea.

Zoroaster

gold  
gold as pollen from the sun  
struck metal  
turned to stone  
pyramid like an Aztec god  
whether seen or never  
regnant over a universe  
in ruin  
all your supplicants  
disaster  
where the crashing crack and crumble  
of sun wind rock and water  
tears at the scaffold  
of everything  
grind and howl of sand in wind  
split and gnash of stone  
unmask your terrible  
visage  
waiting to feel the sun  
waiting to dim  
in rain and fog      waiting  
to sit supernal  
in the sky  
struck  
gold

## Cremation

Driven by the lash of hail  
and wind across the desert plateau, a flock  
of Western Bluebirds flows around us, red chests  
lilting against the cool gray of the storm,  
and they disappear into snow crystals. Cremation  
is out there in the white where we must meet our friends.  
We are lost and stumble several washes past, turn back  
into the storm and drop into the protection of the cut  
in the tapeats. Forces of vibration groan here; a crackle  
of death fires radiates like flame from wall to wall. Here  
is no room for the dead, no soil for burial, only  
rock and water that cannot bear pollution, so fire  
commits the bodies to the river; the crackle  
ash of death flows over the stone mouth  
of Cremation Creek into the green  
maw of the river.

## The Long Ascent

We know what we are leaving    secret waterfalls    chains of sliding  
pools    green mule deer    barrel cactus    bats diving at dusk  
for those who sit and wait and listen a vision of life without  
the garbage    a flying dimension, aloft, gliding clean on silent  
feathers like the owl    each hidden canyon, the mastery of a saddle  
a pinnacle    an attempt, simple, a careful walk through meadows  
laced with cactus and agave buried in the mormon tea, the catch and  
snag of cat's claw tracing thread-like blood lines on white thighs  
  
We leave Cheyava    low walls of a ruined cabin by the creek    portals  
open like black eyes from the cliffs staring from Anasazi times  
Views of the world springing up and eroding under our feet

we leave Clear Creek      the avalanche dance floor, huge monoliths  
spread in the narrow valley    each big enough to hire a band  
a delicate wind and drizzling rain keeping the bright sun company  
weather so changeable, passing on its way across America picking up  
pollen      so much unexplored    so longing to get lost in labyrinth  
canyons    helicopters prowl    hop the redwall    buzz secret places

Indian ruins under overhangs riddled now with deer mice tunnels  
limestone grinding stones, little ears of corn    legbone of deer  
and the chance to squat on haunches overlooking the confluence  
of creeks hurrying to the river      with flat rocks for sunbathers  
now      hikers who came for the rays

every effort yielding more beauty    trees tracing down the bottom of deep  
valleys    until the mind tires    like the mind always does tire  
of nature    its great sadness that it cannot stay in heaven, even that  
idea a poor illusion    it prefers to actively seek      its bastard  
existence driving    it      across lands, oceans, deserts    borders  
and edges and seeming secrets its country      its landscape

But we are leaving Cheyava and Clear Creek      back in weathered mists  
as we hike out in gray morning fog    over rocks glazed with dew  
and stride the Tonto thankfully under the aquarium haze      colors  
touched bright with wetness    we arrive at Sumner Wash early and  
wander the tapeats amphitheaters and gullies      boots on the luxury  
of broad shelves of sedimentary rock    meandering    we see the storm  
massing up dissolving all day

Camped on a promontory above the Colorado    we cook up the remaining  
food    white star lights at the El Tovar Hotel shine on the south rim  
beckon, flickering across miles of canyon emptiness we cross tomorrow  
no one sleeps well as      banshee, locomotive winds shriek up from  
the river    like beasts in a cave    we cover up with trash bags and  
sleep in fits and broken dreams    wind troubles and warns me the canyon  
has not exacted its dues      beauty demands payment      beauty  
dictates

we will never be free from what we sought      and what we avoided  
pursues us still dogging our warm scent      giving us away      By the time  
we reach Phantom Ranch the rain walls us off from the oxygen      we can  
see the prickly pear grow fat with water      new waterfalls blast off  
the Tonto, spill into the inner gorge      white jets appear up and down  
the Colorado      draining the land, flushing rock from its resting place  
we adjust plastic trash bags for the assault up from this bright Eden  
this juicy underworld      violent with spring      metamorphic as its  
tortured rock

the trail run red with mud      our boots water-logged, we slip  
in rivulets      people collect off the path      people with blisters  
a junior high expedition unprepared freezes in nylon jackets, a girl  
sits in the mud      tears of exhaustion drop      she drops her pack  
and no one will take it up for her      friends offer encouragement,  
rest they say      people who want out      look up and despair  
of the rain in their lashes

we trudge upward with no sure footing, looking back often to retrace  
our steps, to point out our bluff, our desert, our tower, the cut  
marking Clear Creek, our discovered waterfall      gushing new rain  
rolling secrets over in our minds      pot shards painted with black  
designs, Indian Paint Brush, blooming cactus, tracks of bighorns  
the vertigo crack and sharp report of falling rock      the dancing  
ouzel wet black and clean      this treasure hoard we pack out

wind buffets us      hefty enough to shove our feet when we lift them  
pushes us off the path      over the Tonto rain turns to snow, still red  
water courses the trail      until we reach the higher colds      cold is  
better than heat      this blasting kiln can choke lungs with dust and  
dryness

But now blessed snow clots the trail      blinds out the view, filling  
the chasm white, dotting the Tonto and Burro Brush      we remember  
the story of the woman walking out with her husband in a storm worse

than this       she stood to the inside to let a mule train pass    a young  
mule kicked, shattered her jaw.    The mules went on.    Her husband  
struggled to an emergency phone, called a helicopter that didn't want to  
answer the call because the weather was so bad it might not get back out.  
But they lifted her out and flew her to a hospital while he hauled their  
packs out only to find their car had been broken into, their money  
stolen.    Old people walk down the trail on sunny days and can't make it  
up through the dust the heat.    They telephone for mules at the aid  
stations.    But there aren't any aid stations along here.    At Summer Wash  
we met a young historian who took a job waiting tables at the hotel  
on the rim so he could watch the canyon through all the seasons

our food is gone    the last morsel of cheese    the last crumb of granola  
I feel the heat leave my body    lighter and lighter I burn with every  
step    emptiness lifting my feet, filling the spaces in my cells  
with ballast       reaching my brain    dissolving my boundaries with  
space and wind       desire knits    me to the upward climb

we know what we are approaching    tourists on the rim    children  
richocheting off guardrails and slithering through    youths drinking  
beer in bright aluminum roost on promontories dreaming dirt-bike stunts  
vacationers cruise for rv hookups and the great gasoline engine of  
America sputters and drones       balding men with paunches remember  
when they look out on the mosaic space their wars their adventure  
They stroll the edge, eyes glazed by distance  
secretly ready to fly       and we elated, churning come up the last  
snowy ramp running on adrenalin and hunger       in bright sun broken  
through storm clouds    the ground whiter than the clouds  
while beauty is already waiting, blooming, flooding back into the curled  
hair of poodles and other lap dogs, the rich green of pine needles,  
down the very throats of gas tanks       fertile bounty Persephone-like  
returned       broken into and lifted on the water wheel of change  
we step back into America       and head for the coin-operated public  
showers and the restaurant overlooking the view

### III Inside Out

'Your job is to find what the world is trying to be.'

William Stafford

## Addressing Myself as You

Long have you timidly waded holding a plank by the shore,  
Now I will you to be a bold swimmer,

Walt Whitman

When you stand in a room that begins to dwarf--  
chairs and sofa shrinking to doll-size,  
your head ballooning against the ceiling--  
or you stand up in the pool  
and the water breaks over you,  
your body a sudden watershed,  
the air thin as the first breath  
a reptile ever took--  
What do you make of that?

I love it. I've always lived  
for the sensation of out-  
growing a room or house or city  
the way a snake or spider shrugs  
graphite-smooth from its papery skin  
or a hermit crab squirts  
from its shell.

Like a straining cicada,  
clinging  
to a screen door, back  
split open--

I need  
a reminder  
I need to hear it.



## Blue Kitchen

My blue kitchen  
rides out the weather  
at the top of the house.  
Open to wind and sky,  
birds fly through it  
like words scribbled  
on wallpaper.  
Sometimes rain  
puddles on the blue  
ceramic floor,  
beads up  
on blue formica counters.  
Blue cupboards blend  
with air  
as I watch  
branches bounce empty  
on spring wind,  
or heavy summer branches  
lift, burn colors,  
reduce again  
to lines of black and white.  
I cook something every day,  
take animal or vegetable,  
red, yellow, green,  
take it all  
and cook  
till it's blue  
serve it back  
to the sky  
on a blue platter.

## The Cat and the Mole

Off to the side  
of the house,  
where the grass  
won't grow  
but geraniums will,  
through some  
second sight,  
I recover the gray cat  
that waits at the mole hill,  
only the tip  
of the tail alive--  
striking time  
like a furred baton.  
Stiff whiskers sense,  
like a catfish's,  
the needle-claw stirrings of mole  
in the tunnel.  
So like a fish rising to feed  
rises the mole  
up to the angler.  
So like a cat, just  
for the joy of it,  
down the hole,  
black and round,  
pours all the cat, transfixed,  
body empty in the arid  
afternoon sun.  
A blind nose pokes up,  
a gray arm snatches.  
In the receding funnel,  
in the shadow of sunlight,  
at the top of the hole,  
like a tiny gray planet,  
the mole turns.

## Spooked

There's this dumb ghost keeps hanging around my house.  
I hear him in the afternoon opening and closing  
the refrigerator, slapping the cupboards. He wants  
jalapenos. Sometimes when I go to take a bath, he's already  
in the tub, pinching his nose and diving. He uses all  
the shampoo and leaves a ring.

He drinks coffee with me in the morning, but refuses solid  
food, insisting he isn't hungry. He sits across the kitchen table  
thumbing through old National Geographics and Arizona Highways.  
I think he's losing weight.

He doesn't take up room in bed or leave a scent, but we elbow  
and knee each other all night, turning like gears. He says sudden  
things in his sleep, things like, "Look out." or "What do you think  
you're doing?" He tries to smoke in bed.

Just yesterday I got weak in the knees. We must have collided  
in a doorway. Our two bodies crammed in the same space made  
my head wah, wah, wah like a balloon. I came to hugging  
the doorjamb.

He's mad at me for turning all your pictures to the wall.  
But he doesn't have enough oomph to move things, otherwise  
he'd dial the touch phone--tell you to come over.

For Mark Strand: After Mark Strand

I walk out and it is light.

I walk out and it is lighter.

Correspondence #1

All the evidence seems to indicate

we are

lost

No one in our party can keep

the map steady.

We have come across what we think are  
cairns

in the creekbed. But no one can be

certain they are not just

piles of rock.

Nature does play tricks.

People are unreliable.

These rivers form oxbows and meander,  
while the ones indicated on paper  
look like straight lines.

The mountain peaks we see  
are in the prairie and  
relate to each other  
strangely.

There are no skyscrapers out here  
that don't change shape  
and move about.

We have cut a hole in the ice of what appears to be a lake,  
but no one wants to fish. We peer  
down occasionally, but all we see is choppy  
light, maybe a fin, an eye swimming.

What evidence we have indicates

the late night is beginning  
to swarm  
on the bathroom  
and kitchen  
floors.

## Same Old Sexual Fantasy

A lady does not cross her legs. She keeps  
her knees together, and if she must, she  
crosses her legs at the ankles.

--numerous sources

I go to the door  
in my negligee  
(negligence and negligee  
are next to each other in the dictionary).  
I am like some glitzy iceberg--  
no matter how much shows  
nine tenths is still underwater,  
throbbing.  
Inhaling the aroma  
of onions, I pull  
him to the floor  
and he gives it to me  
slow, like I like it  
until I plead, "Stop.  
I can't take anymore."  
Exactly a week later  
(to the day)  
I get a bill in the mail.

## Protection

What I want from you  
is a string of words  
you have fashioned together  
that I might wear around my neck  
to ward off vampires  
or catch up in my mouth  
like a bit--something to grab  
and run with.

I want from you a string of words so  
expertly knotted that they will not  
scatter should the string break,  
nor gaps appear to make them seem  
alone, nor will they align in any other  
order. Give me a handful of words  
I can worry like berries or beads,  
words that roll off the tongue  
like a comfort  
and fire like mica  
in the trail.

These words might grow for me,  
cell by gelatinous cell, a rack of antlers,  
fingers of horn--the space between those  
fingers a protection to hold the world  
at bay.



## Looking for the Scissors in the Dark

I know what I am looking for, and I know  
where the scissors ought to be in a jar  
towards the back of the desk in the study,  
so I don't need, don't want the light.  
It's not that I'm too cheap to turn it on  
but that my pleasure comes in walking  
in the dark, striding the length of a room,  
turning, touching my way through a doorway,  
reaching for the holes in the handle, cold surety  
I cannot see, and if I miss, I reach again,  
practice that familiar motion, comb  
the emptiness  
for what I trust  
is there.

#### IV      Critical Apparatus

Around the throne of God, where all the angels  
read perfectly, there are no critics--there is  
no need for them.

Randall Jarrell

Being a scribbler on shoe box lids, album covers, and bank statements, I have often wondered what the point of all those gestures to the universe was. After expanding such written fragments into poems and this collection, I am beginning to accept this pursuit as an impulse for self-knowledge, play, engagement with other minds, and imaginative redemption. As John Crowe Ransom explains the impulse to write poetry in "The Tense of Poetry" in his critical collection The World's Body:

The tense of poetry is the past. More accurately, it is the pluperfect--the apodosis of a contrary-to-fact condition. The fullness of sensibility which attends the action in poetry is 'true,' which means that it is 'recovered,' which means that it had a sort of existence in the actual past; but that was a furtive one, from which attention was withheld, so that it registered only upon the faithful and disregarded camera of memory. In the poetry which goes back and seeks it, it is crowned with its dignity. (250)

So poetry seeks to retrieve a kernel of sensibility that if the poet expands upon it, will show us not the actual world but an idealized one where the persona of the poem triumphs over his or her situation by being wiser or more objective than he or she was in reality. The triumph comes in the fact that this sensibility must have been there for the poet to remember or imagine it. Poetry dramatizes the reality that people are more intelligent than their actions often reflect. Poetry gives the reader an opportunity to experience a narrative where sensibility and action coincide. The paradox is, of course, that reading poetry is the kind of action that involves little risk; it is an ideal world where imagination makes truth and sensibility reign.

As I worked on this book, I began to distinguish between three kinds of poems which form the basis for the sections, and which represent a movement from childhood, to adulthood, to a present or almost simultaneous experience. These sections also represent a progression from a reliance on external reality to an absorption with internal projections onto external reality, and finally to an integration of internal and external reality that frees creative expression. Each division has a

dual purpose in expressing a time frame and a psychological state. The sections, as they have evolved, represent 1) the idealized, remote past of childhood, which also expresses the intense perceptions of childhood, a heightened attention to sensory detail; 2) the more immediate past of adult experience, which modifies sensory perception with intellectual concepts and personality projections; and 3) the most immediate past or the present, which integrates or elevates internal and external reality into song or inspiration. Of course, these stages are not discrete, nor do they reflect a new dialectic. As I grouped the childhood experience poems, the adult poems, and the most immediate poems, I realized that I had to go through such an artistic progression or dialectic before I could project my internal vision: not what I think should be expressed in poetry, not what others have expressed in poems, but a personal vision of the world dressed in its own vocabulary.

To arrive at my present vision these stages had to be dealt with but not necessarily in chronological order. I did not write the poems in the order in which they appear in the book, but after placing them in this order, I came to see the book as a symbol of both the discrete stages of and the simultaneity of the creative process. Keeping in mind that poetry is an experience that does not reduce into neat formulas, I will describe the rationale behind the divisions and the conclusions this dialectic has led me to. My overall view of poetry is similar to Ransom's in that I view poetry as an act of redemption, of compensation for the failures in real life and as a celebration of the successes in life that help us remember and move toward feelings of peace and satisfaction. The three divisions of my book, which can be seen as time periods and psychological states, represent phases in the process of redemption or discrete approaches to recovering and expressing the best of the self. In the childhood section the "fullness of sensibility" is attached to sensory pleasure; an expanded awareness of that pleasure is the act of redemption. The act could be as simple as running barefoot through the grass. In the adult stage sensibility is attached to an intellectual act of understanding. Here the pleasure comes in expanding on the human ability to cope with experience. The final area of expanded sensibility is the transcendent experience of creativity.

The first division, Outside, represents a phase of my writing based on childhood remembrance, which depends upon the psychological self-absorption of childhood. Ironically, this self-centeredness makes children so unselfconscious that they can devote their powers of observation to external reality. Their consciousness is outer-directed so that they can absorb experience like sponges. Experience is so vivid because they lack the intrusion of the self-conscious voice and because most experience is new, unexpected, which state poetry tries to recreate through its unusual use of language. Poetry tries to grab our attention the way external experience captures a child's attention. One of the main attributes of this stage of consciousness is that the intellect does not intrude on the vivid absorption of sensory information. The child can delight in the physical world without an impinging intellectual superstructure organizing the world according to moral codes and complex motives. This is why children are such cruel savages according to adult standards; the primal instincts and desires have not yet been masked by acceptable formulas for behavior. Enjoyment of the moment and immediate gratification are the primary motivating forces. This is also our own Edenic past, the Golden Age of unified experience and wholeness. When I recognized that material I wanted to deal with kept surfacing from my childhood, I wanted to retain that exuberance for experience and express my adult judgements on those experiences. I was writing other poetry at the time, but these childhood memories kept intruding, insisting that I deal with them. I reminded myself that the first novel is supposedly always autobiographical and reconciled myself to dealing with these memories.

As I tried to recreate as accurately as possible those childhood experiences and emotions, adult themes began to emerge. "Grocery Ritual" stemmed from the resentment I felt as a child watching my mother shop. I was bored and subconsciously felt I was being indoctrinated into a life I didn't particularly relish. So the poem began with depicting an unpleasant memory, feeling trapped and insignificant in an adult world. As I described the store and my feelings, my poem began to transform into an initiation rite. This is the redemption that

Ransom describes; the adult can now express the frustration and anger of the child and put an adult sensibility where only a kernel of awareness actually existed. I can now express resentment of the way women are acculturated into being the patient, nurturing mothers so often taken for granted. This poem has an ominous ending, implying that we are all used biologically by life and that the species is locked into biological and social cycles that are inevitable. Art redeems the persona of the poem by letting her sensibility triumph over circumstance.

The impulse to write "Car Wash" came from pleasant memories of play and sensory enjoyment, which are now seen in a bittersweet context because they are gone, so the adult perspective again supplies the structure or plot in the poem. In trying to capture the pleasure and exuberance of play and the carefree irresponsibility of childhood that adults are always admonishing their children to enjoy because of its fleeting nature, and the security of having a protective father nearby, I realized that the haunting knowledge of the transitory nature of life was already dawning. Again, subconsciously, I was aware of the meaning in the sunset and friends being called home to dinner or bed. That barely conscious kernel of knowledge that life flows away and change is the nature of the world became the theme of the poem.

Likewise, the impulse to write "Marbles" began with what I thought was a pleasant memory of the first totally absorbing game that seemed to have some impact beyond the immediate gratification of winning a foot-race or a game of kickball. Here a commodity was involved, but it was only in looking back as an adult that I could recognize the disturbing impact of the game. We were learning to be capitalists, to gamble, sell, trade, cheat, and steal, to assign a surplus value to life. The fun of squatting in the dirt and shooting glass beads was still a driving force in the poem, but the way the persona deals with the material became more crucial. She begins by implicating everyone else in her individual corruption. The whole world is involved in the complicity of greed, and she does not want to stand alone, but she also explains in detail the nature of her seduction. I began to realize as I worked with reenactments of childhood experiences that no matter how innocent I might

initially find them, these memories have to be organized through the contrast between childhood naivete and the adult perspective, which seems quite cynical.

The adult perspective was already dominant when I started work on "Off Base," because its theme deals with children coping with adult politics and adapting to their need to identify with a group, a culture, and their willingness to be cruel and alienate and discredit others. It dramatizes the need to stereotype, how stereotyping balances between being an accurate description of reality and being a dangerous, racist distortion of reality. But this poem also ends on a positive note, because the persona recognizes the humanity of the people she is supposed to fear and hate. The power to weigh the evidence rests with the individual, and although she is wavering, she has not succumbed to the pressures of bigotry. A bad situation can be redeemed when the spark of understanding that was there is expanded.

"Long Beach" evolved from memories of my grandmother's apartment and my mother's disapproval of her mother's life. I found the concept of disapproving of one's mother's actions fascinating, since I was too young to recognize my own disapproval of adults; they might be simple and transparent in their actions, but they were still gods who were not to be questioned--outwardly. First I wrote only about my friend eating dirt. Then I realized I needed the larger context of the grandmother's environment--the bar, the laundry room--and the meaning began to evolve from the details. As I worked on the accuracy of the details, they began to arrange themselves in implicit parallel movements. With this poem I definitely felt the need to be quiet, attentive, patient, and not force the material into some neat expository statement about how people fill their lives with judgements. Yet only from the perspective of an adult sensibility could I master those details so the meaning could grow.

As I dealt with this childhood material, I learned to let the adult voice direct my attention or shape the material, and how to keep it from intruding. These poems are grouped in the section Outside, because they reflect the psychological need to be unself-conscious in order to absorb the details of external reality. When the attention is

outer-directed, the sensory impressions are enduring. The ability to focus unself-consciously on the external is, of course, not restricted to children. It remains a necessary skill, especially for writers. It is the ability to silence the rational mind while surrendering to and enjoying the sensory, dabbling and playing in its details. This is the stage of rapt attention to the external that Coleridge termed the "primary imagination," without which there would be nothing for the secondary imagination to work with. This is the stage of whole and undivided experience, a pre-rational state.

The second section, Inside, reflects the psychological state of division and projection. As the protagonist gains self-consciousness, her personality begins to project its thoughts and feelings onto external reality, to alter it. This is the not-so-distant past that has always been dealt with logically; it represents a fusion of realities, how the concrete meets the abstract, how language meets the senses. This fallen world is typified in "What Fire Touches Burns." This poem is based on an incident where I saw a child who looked, as the poem describes, as if she were burning in the fires of hell. I realized that my perception of her as a tormented soul came from my inner sensibility, my awareness of my own guilt and fear. She was an appropriate object for my projection, but without my own sense of sin and depravity she would not have made such an impression on me. We recognize in the outer world what we carry inside.

This ability to rationally disassociate from the world has its advantages in allowing us to understand and cope with a complex world, but it also creates many of the complexities that make life difficult. Because we can fragment ourselves, we occasionally need to be healed. "River Watch" describes a person retreating to the serenity of nature to be healed. By describing the event, the poet experiences the a similar soothing influence. Here the poet describes a person who projects a need onto the universe and who knows where to get that need filled. Needs and their satisfaction can be projected as well as thoughts or fears. Because this material comes from the more immediate past, its concerns are less abstract and more immediate. Sensibility is applied



not to the distant memories of childhood, but to the everyday concerns of how to get in a better mood or how to get rid of annoying insects. This is the real world where desire and reality clash, but there are compensations for strife, and one is an appreciation of beauty.

In "Homage to Gaudi's Sagrada Familia" the poet has to match, with her own poem, the offering in the external world of a cathedral. Just as Wordsworth recognizes a "correspondent breeze" in the Prelude, the poet recognizes the "correspondent" impulse in man to create beauty that mimics the structures in nature. Without an appreciation of the cellular structures in leaves, butterflies, and trees, the parallel chords in Gaudi's architecture would never have been struck. To appreciate this architectural form, one has to see man as a part of nature that can also separate himself from nature. This poem, like the others in this section celebrates the interplay between external, natural structures and our power to create "correspondent" imaginative structures. Through this same power of imagination or projection, we shape what we are capable of perceiving. Sometimes the boundaries blur, as Yeats has so aptly described for us:

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

It is the business of poetry to have it both ways: to discriminate, to apply the rational mind to experience and to separate it into component, manageable parts and to see it whole, undifferentiated.

I debated whether "Grand Canyon" belonged in this section or whether it belonged in the section Outside; because the canyon is such an imposing presence, it silences the rational mind and makes awe-struck children of those who stand at its rim. It awakens a yearning for that primal state of wholeness, the mythic past, America before the white man, our childhoods. But this poem deals with more than surrender to sensory information or a mythic past. It deals with the human attempt to understand the immensity of nature with a rational mind not content to gawk. It portrays a mind and spirit willing to enter the canyon, to learn about the canyon's geological formation, willing to be overwhelmed by it physically and intellectually, and willing to explore it. As the

persona progresses through the climatic zones, the geological zones, the zones of her consciousness, she encounters the juxtaposition of contrasting zones and earthly beauty she had never imagined. She extracts the intellectual principle of difference; contrast and juxtaposition of opposites as a source of energy, action, and beauty. The protagonist's thirst for experience is the "appetence" in "The Tonto," the surging desire to know the self. This sincere desire for self-knowledge is a progression from the empty rhetoric of Eliot in "Burnt Norton" when his seer speaks of "appetency" as a desire for stasis, oblivion, a descent into a world without sense, imagination or spirit. Here the descent into the canyon is an attempt to reclaim the intellect, imagination, and spirit, but there also must be periods of rest, of stasis within this quest for self. When the expedition ends, there is a reconciliation between the ideal world, which the hikers had envisioned, and the real world they have encountered. Because of its theme of reconciling internal and external reality, "Grand Canyon" belongs to the adult stage represented by the Inside section with its concern for the projections and expectations we place on physical reality. The poems in this section characterize self-knowledge as an alternation between the conscious and unconscious, the rational and irrational, the physical and the abstract.

The last section, Inside Out, represents the marriage of the external world with inner vision, a marriage which results in more than the sum of the two. This synergistic combination expresses the spiritual aspect of consciousness. Wordsworth says in the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" that the "Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement . . ." The ability to think and feel without so much reliance on external stimuli is the psychological stage and immediacy this section tries to express. Ideally, this is a state of mind where there is no time lag between perception and understanding; they are simultaneous events and make reliance on the external world for verification unnecessary. These poems come not from recognizable external events, but are occasioned by such internal events as ideas, epiphanies, dreams and

fantasies. Returning to the quotation from Ransom, this is the stage that recognizes what we have to recover, what "fullness of sensibility" can be reclaimed from the past. These kernels of sensibility are the "spots of time" Wordsworth returns to in the Prelude. These feelings that are attached to specific settings and events nourish and refresh the mind because they teach that "The mind is lord and master--outward sense / The obedient servant of her will." This is the state of awareness where events are seen in perspective; what the mind does with events is of paramount importance.

For example, "Addressing Myself as You" has a foundation in the actual experience of getting out of a swimming pool. As the water broke over my head, I felt that something I had always known internally was suddenly confirmed by this outer experience. But my knowledge was not dependent on this external confirmation. This inner knowledge, this activity of the mind, not the experience while swimming, is the real basis of the poem. I don't mean to detract from the importance of external verification, which is also an integral part of the poem. I do want to emphasize that in this poem inner knowledge finds a "correspondent breeze" in the world of external events. Getting out of the pool, feeling a room shrink, looking at an empty cicada skin, are "spots of time" that carry the same intellectual understanding and shape the poem.

"Blue Kitchen" is another example of a poem of internal origin. I had dreamed I had a blue kitchen with no roof over it. One day I realized that the kitchen in my apartment had the same feel as the one in my dream. As I wrote the poem at my kitchen table, I realized that in real life I felt the same inner contentment and creativity I had felt in the dream. Although I had the dream long before I ever saw the apartment, the dream and the reality shared the same "spot of time," or intellectual matrix. I wanted to capture that feeling or knowledge of a sanctuary beyond the restrictions of time or place.

"Spooked" is another internal experience, but a less pleasant one. The persona is spooked not only by the ghost of a former lover rattling around in her house but also by her weakness for him. Here the persona's internal state is unpleasant, but as Ransom noted, there can

be a kind of dignity in the recovery of understanding, even if it was only a hoped-for, barely conscious understanding. This is the kernel of sensibility we are aware of in bad situations that we know we will laugh about given enough time or distance. In my answer to Mark Strand's poem "Darker," the persona projects an unabashedly optimistic sensibility, which is also an answer to the paranoia of "Spooked."

"Correspondence #1" is part of a series that began in response to William Stafford's poem "Report from a Far Place." It strives to capture the tenuous nature of the correspondence between language and physical reality, which in this poem seems to break down. Here is the Stafford poem:

Making these word things to  
step on across the world, I  
could call them snowshoes.

They creak, sag, bend, but  
hold, over the great deep cold,  
and they turn up at the toes.

In war or city or camp  
they could save your life;  
you can muse them by the fire.

Be careful, though: they  
burn, or don't burn, in their own  
strange way, when you say them.

"Correspondence" is a much looser poem structurally, and it is not directly about writing poetry, but it does explore the uses of language, and the fact that language is a "far place" compared to physical reality.

"Report from a Far Place" is such a precise, elegant expression of the power and flexibility of language that it suggested not only a thematic series to me but also stylistic changes I might make. After memorizing this poem I was able to write "Looking for the Scissors in the Dark," which was another internal idea that needed an appropriate form to become a public expression. Because I had assimilated Stafford's style of stripping down the language to a spare narrative as he also does in "Kinds of Winter" and "Run Sheep Run," I adopted a minimalist style. This style embodies an architecture I particularly like in a poem because it focuses attention on the myriad implications of words.

With its clean lines it invites the reader in, points in a few directions, and then gets out to the way. The reader is prompted to take part in the experience. There is enough presented and enough left to the imagination that the reader can wander in the text for days and still find something new every time he returns to it. "Protection" strives for the same kind of simplicity and resonance that I admire in Stafford. It also deals with the possibilities and limitations of language, but it does not imply that language is such a "far place" as "Correspondence" does. Instead "Protection" emphasizes the positive effect language can have on our experience, that, as Stafford says, these "word things" can "creak, sag, bend, but / hold," "turn up at the toes," "burn," and even "save your life." So while words are a "far" or abstract place, they can, like snowshoes, deflect the world, give us time to react, keep us from disappearing into the morass of experience.

Since the major themes in my work deal with the mind directing or perceiving experience, I wanted to tackle a common American theme of the mind's perception of landscape. I decided on the landscape of the Grand Canyon because it offers an intricate vista and overwhelming natural forces. But to express this encounter of mind and landscape I needed a new form, a longer line and a way to keep the thematic threads twining together. I returned to Whitman and Wordsworth for their sensitive depictions of nature and their ambitious, complex themes.

From Whitman I borrowed not only a surging, exuberant rhythm, but the posture of somebody willing to say anything. This willingness to speak openly evokes a sense of immediacy and inspiration. Whitman achieves this immediacy in part through his tumbling changes in language like those in Song of Myself:

Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,  
No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart  
from them  
No more modest than immodest. (41)

Although my switches from adjectives to nouns to participles is not as blatant as Whitman's, I did try to make rolling lists, like a roll call of experience. Studying Whitman's catalogue of earthly existence taught me how a huge, sprawling poem could be episodic yet integrated.

His constant pairings of opposites helped me decide on the couplet for the dominant form. This reflects the action of the mind in integrating experience and echoes the act of walking. The motion of walking is an important vehicle for ideas in "Grand Canyon." Nature's motion is a constant slide as opposed to the motion of the people who move through the landscape by alternating steps. The action of the mind is similar to walking in that it might be outer-directed, turn in upon itself, repeat itself, but always with variation so there is a constant shift in consciousness, but always with a positive sense of affirmation, of some sort of progress. Whitman's shifts in subject from section to section and within lines in Song of Myself also gave me ideas about how far off the subject I might seem to go.

Of course the major unifying force in Song of Myself and the Prelude is the voice. From Whitman and Wordsworth I wanted to utilize the concept of poet as protagonist and guide, a teacher who brings to the surface of consciousness what is held in what I would term the Jungian collective unconscious. Paradoxically this guide as poet is both the common man and a seer. Whitman bolsters himself for the difficult task of guiding his audience through experience with the chant "I know" throughout the poem. He admits the things he doesn't know, like what the grass is, but then he also follows his admission with a catalogue of things he thinks the grass might be. Whitman affirms the human ability to meet experience and to play with it when the mind cannot categorize or master it. Actually, he never does master experience but instead revels in and celebrates it. I wanted my guide to the canyon to teach the same technique of dealing with reality as represented by an overpowering landscape.

While reading the Prelude, I paid particular attention to Wordsworth's timing as he shifted from descriptions of nature to metaphors to commentary. I knew I needed to assimilate a rhythm of mental engagement to hold the reader's interest while describing a piece of geography. I admired the length of the passages of description or exposition that Wordsworth could sustain, but I also found his blocks of material too prolonged for the restless American psyche I wanted to depict. The

care and delicacy with which Wordsworth handled nature was something I wanted to emulate and even heighten, if possible. I wanted my persona somewhere between the boisterous Whitman and the exacting, intellectual Wordsworth.

Rather than follow such a strong first person narrative or so painstakingly trace each insight as Wordsworth does, I wanted to incorporate the halting sense of how the mind and the personality interact with reality. James Dickey develops this sense of the tenuous hold the mind has on reality in his poem "Falling." Dickey says of the poem that he wanted "to give each cluster of words its own fierce integrity. . . I envisioned the mind as working by associational fits and starts, jumps, gaps, and the electric leaps across them: in successive shocks, rests, word-bursts, stamp-printed or lightening-stamped images, crammed clusters" (viii). My poem in no way duplicates the intense, striking leaps of observation that Dickey accomplishes, but in a much softer way it does mirror the shifts in association the mind makes, particularly when it is occupied with a scene pleasing to the senses, or when it must deal with survival. Here is the opening of the Dickey poem:

The states when they black out and lie there rolling      when they  
turn  
To something transcontinental      move by      drawing moonlight out  
of the great  
One-sided stone hung off the starboard wingtip      some sleeper  
next to  
An engine is groaning for coffee      and there is faintly coming in  
Somewhere the vast beast-whistle of space. In the galley with its  
racks  
Of trays      she rummages for a blanket      and moves in her slim  
tailored  
Uniform to pin it over the cry at the top of the door. As though  
she blew  
The door down with a silent blast from her lungs      frozen      she is  
black  
Out finding herself      with the plane nowhere and her body taking  
by the throat  
The undying cry of the void      falling      living      beginning to  
be something  
That no one has ever been and lived through      screaming without  
enough air  
Still neat      lipsticked      stockinged      girdled by regulation  
her hat  
Still on      her arms and legs in no world      and yet spaced so  
strangely



I noticed parallels between Dickey's spatial sense of poetry and Stafford's major image in "Far Place." The grids of the snowshoes in Stafford's poem are similar to the wall Dickey describes in the preface to his poetry collection Falling, May Day Sermon, and Other Poems. He wanted to create a poem that would present the reader with an obstacle, a virtual wall of prose, but with more gaps. Rather than an open grid he envisioned "the shape of a solid bank, an on-end block or wall of words, solid or almost solid, black with massed ink, through which a little light from behind would come at intermittent places" (vii). These images of words or poems as both supports and obstacles to understanding made me want to create a similar sense of the mind as both a support and obstacle to perceiving reality and nature. I wanted a sense of the human mind making walls and grids and yet being unable to block out the awareness of another reality just below the surface of its constructs. This is the reality beyond the comprehension of the rational mind and is what shines through "at intermittent places" as Dickey would say.

Visually, Dickey left spaces for this "beast-whistle" to get through, but he also wove an intricate thematic and symbolic fabric that seems to trap the light from the other side. Dickey creates a thread or sense of continuity by weaving the elements of air, water, moonlight, and earth throughout the poem. The "beast-whistle of space" in the opening later becomes the "low body-whistling" of air as the stewardess falls. Dickey uses "black out" to describe the United States at night and later uses the same words in a different position to depict the woman falling out of the plane: "she is black / Out finding herself. . ." His repetitions of the same words in different contexts and positions seem to dynamically capture the action of the mind as it makes associations, isolates some abstraction, or clings to some physical resemblance. This method of weaving elements by making slight alterations, of placing words and images in different associations, I found integral to keeping the language fresh in "Grand Canyon."

Dickey also repeats large motifs, like the drawing of moonlight, in different contexts. The opening idea of the states moving by "drawing moonlight out of the great / One-sided stone. . ." later becomes for the



stewardess "a dream of being drawn like endless moonlight to the harvest soil" (3). His variations in the repeating motifs of space, moonlight, the stewardess's clothes, and the farms showed me a way to keep weaving rocks and helicopters and streams and trails through a long poem while uncovering new observations or associations. In Dickey's poem the pacing and line breaks make it virtually impossible to stop anywhere, which is the effect he wanted to create, the sensation of falling. I wanted to create a like effect of constant motion or at least constant mental engagement, but nothing so urgent as the rush of falling to one's death.

I strove to capture the essence of the mind achieving or at least working toward a balance between inner and outer reality that would serve as a foundation for balance or transcendent experience. I chose the Grand Canyon as an object worthy of the mind's exertions since it represents nothing less than the forces of nature. So the "Grand Canyon" dramatizes an integration of the divisions of the book; "Outside" is reconciled with "Inside," and a new balance of creative energy results: "Inside Out." Wordsworth describes this "ennobling interchange" at the end of Book Thirteen of the Prelude:

Moreover, each man's Mind is to herself  
Witness and judge; and I remember well  
That in life's every-day appearances  
I seemed about this time to gain clear sight  
Of a new world--a world, too that was fit  
To be transmitted, and to other eyes  
Made visible; as ruled by those fixed laws  
Whence spiritual dignity originates,  
Which do both give it being and maintain  
A balance, an ennobling interchance  
Of action from without and within;  
The excellence, pure function, and best power  
Both of the object seen, and the eye that sees.

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INSIDE OUT

by

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## ABSTRACT

This collection of poetry titled Inside Out is organized according to a dialectic of the creative process. "Outside," the first section, represents the stage of childhood absorption in external reality, which correlates with the necessity for accurate observation of the natural world as a foundation not only for survival but also for experiencing pleasure and art. It also stands for an idealized, distant past.

"Inside" represents the phase of awareness of the inner self and its projections onto outer reality. This section stands for the present and the conflict between reality and individual, idealized consciousness.

"Inside Out," the final section, offers a reconciliation between these two psychological positions with the assimilation of internal and external awareness into a creative stance that presents more than the projection of the personality. This is an idealized present that presents a healed world where the personality can have its way, but only because it has finally assimilated reality. A discussion of some poems from each section further explains the dialectic.

A brief examination of the major themes in Inside Out and the influences of poets William Stafford, James Dickey and Walt Whitman explains some of the elements of style and form in the body of work with the emphasis on the evolution of the longest piece, "Grand Canyon."