William Bronk • *Life Supports*

"An utterly compelling, harrowing
and masterfully written body of poetry.
Its publication is a major literary event."
–*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

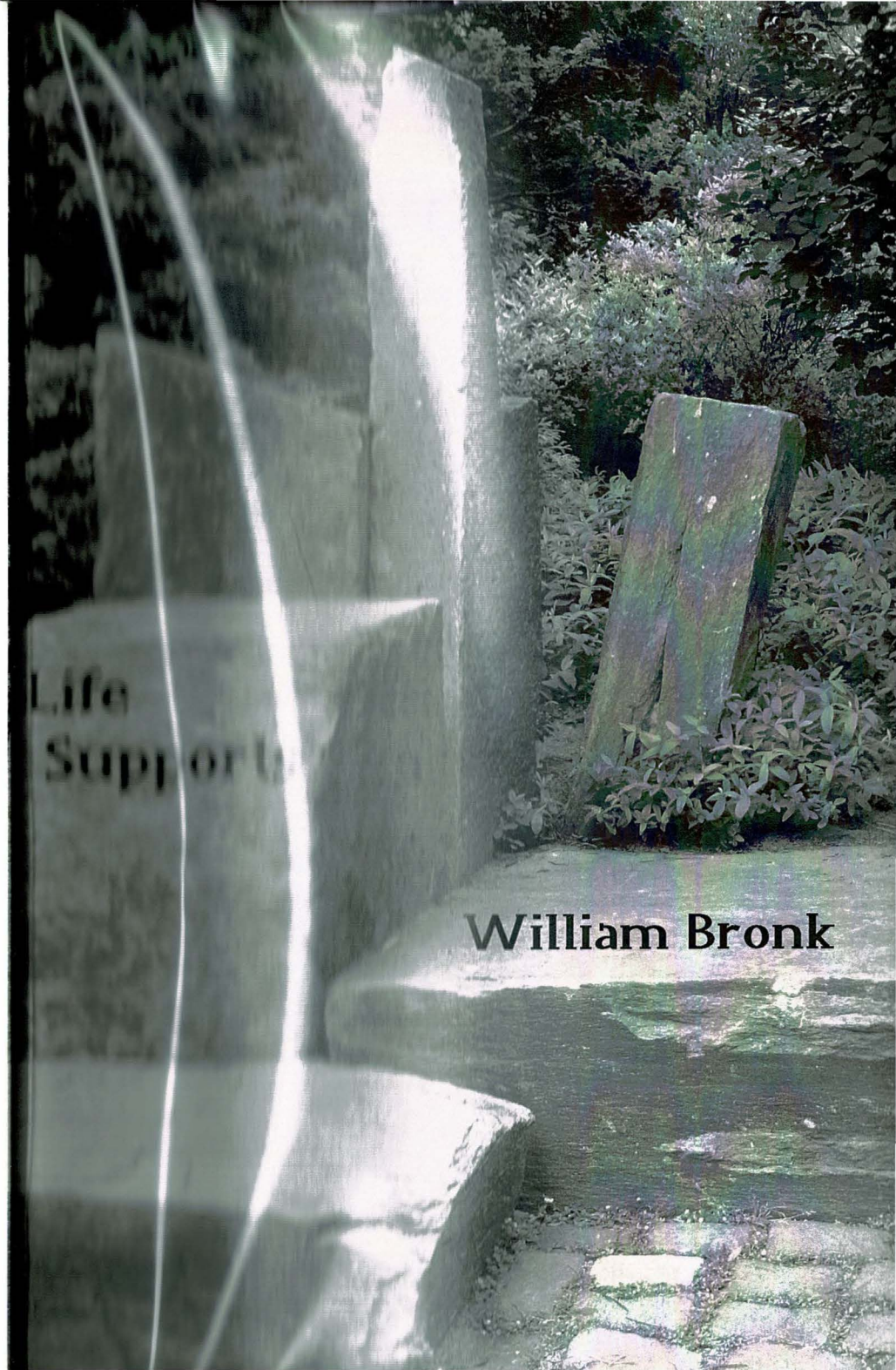
Praise for the work of William Bronk: "A work that demands to be read." —*Saturday Review* • "Bronk is an acquired taste. I recommend you acquire it." —*Library Journal* • "A brilliant poetry." —George Oppen • "One of our finest . . . poets." —*The New York Times Book Review* • "A poet of great distinction." —*Small Press Review* • "He is brilliant." —*Southwest Review* • "Arguably the most metaphysical poet of his generation." — *Hungry Mind Review* • "One of our most intimate, haunting, and important poets." — *Dictionary of Literary Biography* • "His rare gift is the ability to float difficult truths on fleeting snatches of spoken breath." —*Village Voice Literary Supplement*

Winner of the American Book Award in 1982 for *Life Supports*, his collected early poetry, William Bronk (1918-1999) is widely celebrated as one of the most accomplished poets of his generation. The recipient of the Lannan Literary Award for poetry in 1991, Bronk lived most of his life in Hudson Falls, New York, in a substantial Victorian home that became a mecca for American poets and artists.

Cover photo by Samuel Retsov
Talisman House, Publishers
ISBN: 978-1-883689-59-9
$18.95

WILLIAM BRONK · LIFE SUPPORTS

TALISMAN



LIFE SUPPORTS

LIFE SUPPORTS

Life keeps me alive: all its tubes
and wires are connected to me and give support
in ways that life determines for my needs.
On a bed of earth, in house, its calendars
and clocks are programmed to me: the various airs
of mornings, evenings, noontimes, in and out;
the seasons turn and come again and turn
and come again. Issue by issue the news
runs by, describing events and non-events,
reports sometimes of me, others I know.
Food, of course, often. Salty and sweet,
soluble, and other solutions at times
— corrective fluids needed to restore such balance
as may be lost. I am aware though I
not seem to be. Hard to believe the surge
of current through my angers, ecstasies
and frights sometimes at crises: a faulty tube,
power-outages, not long, but I cried
to be restored. The dials and switches wait.
No god comes near me. I am alone.

THE FALSE CORNER

This is not the machine, if one wants to say
the machine; all right, the body's a machine
in a certain sense and with clever intensity
and centuries of study one can say
— of the mind, even, one can say — it works
in certain secret, complicated, long
fashions, thereto described. And the what we call
the spirit if it exists at all, that too
perhaps, will be deciphered and, even then,
this is not the machine however known
it is. We study the wrong subject. In the maze
of inquiry, we took a false corner. The ways
we came to there are known and plotted but we end,
still, at a blind wall. Didn't we think

we would? Didn't we study complexity
in man as busy work, lasting a long
time in order to keep from a short, hard
study we knew already and wanted not
to know, or think? Something is living which we know
certainly. It has little to do with man.

RATIONAL EXPRESSION

Anything we know is outside
of rational expression. Do we know
anything? No, of course we don't.
What we know is not true and what is true
is beyond our knowing; knowing is not the point.
But we are aware of something and, in that sense,
we know. One sense of knowing is to know
carnally. To sense. We know that sense.
We have carnal knowledge. Even the mind
has carnal knowledge. This is a certainty.

We are uncertain how to speak of it
and sense that what we know carnally
is not what we know. There is a whole world
of inner knowledge which, guardedly,
becomes experience but yet remains
beyond expression as if it were unknown;
but we know, we are at home there
and go as often as we can, open the door,
walk around the rooms, sit down and look,
wish we could tell, could take our friends there.

UNSATISFIED DESIRE

However beautiful I think you are,
I am not content to let it end there.
And, oh, you are beautiful even to the extent
that your imperfections insist that beautiful
is not in being perfect but in such faults

— shall we call them faults? — as your imperfection has.
And I could agree: those faults are beautiful.

There is a world of possibilities;
also, there are things not possible.
Desires satisfied set us apart
in a reciprocal pattern self-contained
and not containing more. It replicates,
trapped in a world of possibilities,
alone, where it is the only possible.

I have seen such beautiful things in the world which, apart
from desire, I should never have seen. I bless desire,
the fault of its satisfaction: the fault of the world.
I bless that fault: that, in its offering
denying us all, denies us nothing,
offers the world to us, not to have.

THE ERRORS OF ORDER

Some who know the errors of order still
desire it and our desire is not the same as
the want of the error-ignorant
but even so, we always ask for less
than what we get: we ask for things — why not?
it's where we are — for things of this world.
The ask may be unspoken and unanswered. (It's good
if it is.) And what we get exists away
from this world. Impatient of waiting, it comes
to us here and now. We have no way to deal
with this and want order in the asked-for world.
A friend kisses me and I respond.
There isn't a way we can; nevertheless . . .
Another friend, sensibly enough,
— these are common things — proposes I solve
or show him how to solve his job,
his love. Poor friend, I share with you.
I share your wish for a known and orderly world.
But we are ignorant, totally (or were
if we were) and suffer the world the way it is.

THE PUZZLE THERE

It is, of course, not possible
to faithfully translate what someone said
in one language into another. The grasp
is different and language is grasp, not what
we grope for, whatever that is:
it is a puzzle. Interestingly enough
though, the recurrence of certain grammatical
ideas from tongue to tongue as person, say,
number, tense, suggests a validity
of these, a closeness to what there is or else
a common limitation of men's minds.
Which? It would help even if we knew
something of our mind that we might distinguish that
from what it tries to distinguish. Are
they different things? Are they, indeed, things
at all, as we say things, or are they just
the hopeless improvisations of language as we
perhaps are, without an analog
in whatever is as I believe there is:
something there? We have nothing to say of it.

THE DESTROYER LIFE

I know there are things: crystals, fossils, basalts,
certain metals, that seem as though they last
eternally and I know it is not so.
But we think of them so. I think also of logs
in the woods, tree-trunks, their bark whole
still and, inside, soft as suede, their strength,
their hard solidity wasted, years away.
I saw on the back porch a mold on a squash,
tiny magnificences yesterday
and, today, mold and squash together slime.

These poems that, once, I thought might be
support and comfort to me, come bad times,
are now an emptiness. I need to know

that all their strength is only as a strength
fills them, some strong life, and my
strong life is down as living things
show life so, do drive down.
And I hasten it: my impatiences
bristle why it takes so long, open the veins
of feeling, pulse let go, let go, let go.

THE TRANSUNIVERSAL LOOK

They say we are looking across the universe
for someone like us: scanning for messages,
sending our own, waiting for answers. What
do they mean, like us? We have no entity.
We can be said to be sensible tissues of brief
duration. Hardly more. If we find someone else
I suppose we might think, in spite of all we know,
that we both are something and, having discovered ourselves,
both here, we must have been somehow meant
to govern the universe together or we,
maybe, to save it from them. Something like that:
one way or another. We want to be confirmed
not as we are but as we might pretend to be.
And, all the time, we know the stars, themselves,
in the universe form and evolve, gather and shed,
explode in novae, collapse, grow cold and dim
as all the universe might go and, no,
there would not be nothing then. There would be still
what there is and what only is; but we go,
we know, and nothing matters that we are or do.

QUESTIONS FOR EROS

I know my loves — hah, my loves — are my loves
and have come to nothing and will come to nothing more;
and my mind makes up stories to say
who they are and why, maybe, and all about
their nature, mine, the nature of love,

because we don't know anything
— anymore than we know about anything else — about
these things and make up stories to know
as if we knew what the stories are about,
knew that even, as if we knew about love.

Eros, have I ever called your name?
Always, in all the calling, I had thought
to call you. Is there a name? Or have
I always called it wrong? Wrong? Is
there a right? What name is not diminishment?

Eros, if there be truly various gods,
there is one who is other than you
and he is nameless. Loving you, I love
the nameless one. All gods are one.
I call the names, none of them the name.

AS SEEN

In microphotographs, the invisible
is there to be seen as much as if it were there.
Photograph or no, many things
are 'there' in the many senses of there, the ways.
Scanning electrons: well, of course, electrons.
We thought of them and the concept is one
we can use and do make use of it. See
the detail: the invisible world, in its intricacies,
is a projection of the visible one, sharp
and intimate. We could live there
as, indeed, we do live there in the way we live
as much as if we were there, as if size
were our size and size were meaningful
as, in limited frames of reference, it is. But the range
of size is limitless; we exist
as tiniest wholes in the almost infinitely
divisible *what* there is. It is our heir
which is before and after us whose stuff we are,
becoming visible, whose stuff
we were, unseen, unknown, invisible.

THE CORRIDOR

You, what I own, I still stay with you
but now, not owned: any place I go,
and it seems a going, keeps me here, unowned,
unowning, nowhere going. The landscape moves
but all its moving is immobilely scintillant.

There is a corridor I live in: walls
on the side if there were walls. There are no walls;
I am the corridor, thin skin the walls.
Once, it seemed not so: I went where I went
and pulled the places back, fondled them,
founded walls and left them, drifted out.

Space is empty now apart from me.
I feel its sparseness, never to change;
I feel the deprivation, the narrowing,
the down-reduction, focus, concentrate.

I meet and meet, over and over again
the same terrible knowledge with the same
wonder, the same refreshment as I never met
before, the met-unmet, though we know we met
and the meeting is always, never always, the same.

POEM FOR THE NINETEENTH OF MARCH, ST. JOSEPH'S DAY

Father, foster me as your false son;
the truth is what we are in our falsity
and not the intended, not the actual
— either of which had been easier
than what we are driven, unwilling, to believe is so.
Who wants approximations, almost reals?
It had been easy, suspending unbelief,
to believe the intended, fool ourselves; or, firm
and rigid, insist on the proved, the certified,
in the actual world, knowing the actual
is not the real, ready to believe it were.

Our ideas are wrong: we think of death, most times,
as opposed to life as if it were some mistake
to be rectified by mystic means, one
means or another. We think of them. But death
is the nature of life. There are falsities
which are the nature of life, the truth of it.
Father, we have had the falsities:
fathers not our fathers, sons not ours.
We have despaired; have loved them; and been glad.

THE LINE: THE STUFF ON WHICH WE TURN

I suppose there may be a line between us (an us?)
and the where we live (a where?). I look at the terms
—the we, the where, whatever — we speak in
and wonder whether they have to do with the stuff
there is, whether there is a stuff as we say.

One has a sense consistent with nothing being.
Though we don't rely on that, it may be so.

In the terms that occur, or we make, there is a stuff.
It is different at different places, different times.
I assume the different shows are the same stuff.

I assume the stuff may be called reality.
Oh, this is idle, I know that. We invent
the terms that say we wish we knew; but in
these terms we find their controverts by which
the stuff denies and affirms itself: is itself.
It is more than we can say. Said things
are less than this. We believe this stuff
and we have to concede that things are real that hate
and frighten us, that we live in a hostile world,
loving and ours sometimes, that turns on us.

LOCAL LANDSCAPES

The referent of worldly qualities
by which I mean the goods of this world
whether it be beauty of body, keenness
of mind, or any grace whatever, besides,
is not to this world but to somewhere else
unaffected by qualities or acts
of them, deaf-mute, sufficient to itself.

For a little time the world, at least, responds
to worldly qualities: cleverness,
invention, bolds and graces of various kinds.
Before their collapses happen, they make us think
the world's mechanisms will carry us.

We have the idea of homeland. As others before
and after, or in other worlds, I have loved
my native places as if, without them,
I should be lost, having no real place.
But our homes are contrivances, coverings
for emptinesses. Our local landscapes
acknowledge our unarrival, are brochures of desire
and postcards from there. They tour an untraveled space.

WEATHERS WE LIVE IN

One makes a poem as little as one makes
the weather. One goes to the window and looks out
and sees it there, outside. Read!
We go out into it if we dare.

Some weathers are harsher than we can bear
and this is what they say to us: go back
in the house! We hear that, sometimes,
and go back in and move the furniture
or put another sweater on and go
back out prepared or, sweaterless,
go anyway and speak bleak to the bleak
if bleak seems called-for from us then.

There are always weathers if we go outside
— even the days we aren't aware of them.

I love the gentle days, the summertimes,
their mumbled messages, asking the ear
to bare itself to hear them better.
Yet,

other poems clothe me again
in their clarities when I stand in them
as in a weather. I try the way they look.

EVALUATION

"Life affirming," he says, as though life
waited for our approval. Life lives
our life; if it seems whimsical
it's because we assume a purpose, as much as to say
it has one, or one we know about.
Sometimes, it lets us go our way, bored
with us, contemptuous. Other times,
it's as though it watched and made us adversary
and, laughing, seized us, took its ultimate
revenges, as though our mistake were intentional.

It wants a death and waits on the street for it
and follows it home and kills it in the corridor there.
Or talks sweet and, over drinks in a bar,
maybe, speaks of need and loneliness
which moves it in where it stays for fifty years
or twenty or tries another place, (same stuff)
where it dies at last in agony and squalor
or (irony) in comfort, quietly
— what we call "the good death". What do we know?
Life doesn't ask us its values.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The inconsistencies of experience
deny us, not life, but the sense of what
life may be about. About what?
Who, what, where are legitimate
as questions. Desire is question. They are desire.
It has no answer; no more have they. But desire
is undenied and asserts itself in one
voice or another. Its questionings insist
as if answers were what it wanted, whereas
it wants only to keep on asking: what?

But we quiet it, giving it answers: things
we make up which are not true.
Hunger, hunger! What does hunger want?
To be stilled or to go on hungering?
Well, of course, it wants both and neither one.
Questions answered, the inconsistencies
keep nudging us to acknowledge their untruths.
Our oaths lie to experience; ease
discomforts us. We go on with life
alive only as the shape of life is forgone.

THE WANTS OF LIFE

What does life want of, say, the roach,
the scouring rush, the horseshoe crab, those
our contemporaries which long preceded us?
I have a ginkgo tree in the yard, still there,
immobile. What does life want of us?
The ginkgo tree genetically the same
how long? No men then. Millions of years.
Hundreds of millions. Its static phrase again,
again, again. What's wanted ever of us?
We don't know. Life is aside from us,

though we are lived: such doubtful presences,
so slight in ourselves, we lend a hand in our own

destruction, alive more then than other times,
glorying in the hustle and stir of things.
It's this to be alive! It uses us
without our knowing what it means to do.
Nothing tells us; nothing asks. We aren't
even servants there but furniture of the house,
food to be eaten, fuel, materials
of life. Or pictures watching from the walls.

FLOWERS, THE WORLD AND MY FRIEND, THOREAU

It no longer matters what the names of flowers are.
Some I remember; others forget: ones
I never thought I should. Yes, tell me one.
I like to hear that. I may have forgotten again
next week. There's that yellow one whose name
I used to know. It's blossoming, secure
as ever as I walk by looking at it,
not saying its name or needing to.

Henry, it's true as you said it was, that this
is a world where there are flowers. Though it isn't our truth,
it's a truth we embrace with gratitude:
how should we endure our dourness otherwise?
And we feel an eager desire to make it ours,
making the flowers ours by naming them.

But they stay their own and it doesn't become our truth.

We live with it; we live with othernesses
as strangers live together in crowds. Truths
of strangeness jostle me; I jostle them
walking past them as I do past clumps of flowers.
Flowers, I know you, not knowing your name.

THE STRONG ROOM OF THE HOUSE

We can go by that door a dozen times
in a day and do that for years, maybe, without
thinking what's in there, paying it any heed
or needing to: why look in?
It's as much as though the room weren't part of the house
though we know, of course, it is; we think of it
in passing and dismiss the thought. Other times,
prompted perhaps by some occurrence, we pause
to consider whether it might be better to sort
things over there. Maybe throw some out.

Aren't we the strong ones, though, aren't we here
as masters of the house! We are, indeed, until
one day we come by the door or where the door was once
and the door is gone. In the fetidness of the air,
we can barely breathe. Something nourishes,
as a plant might, in the dirt of the floor, grows
in the light from the window or in the dark at night.
Horror is what it is called. It is the whole
strength of the house, will be there when we move out,
hang deep in the cellar-hole when the house is gone.

RULE BOOK

Friends of mine know what to expect of love
and are disappointed when it doesn't work out that way:
they assume that inequalities mean
there is something wrong with one or the other, they blame
themselves sometimes for this and whether there is more
bitterness in blaming themselves or more
in blaming the other would be a hard thing
to decide. Their despairs and hatreds are coarse.

In the same way, when love peters out
or, slyly, the loved one makes the move
to someone else, like players protesting a call,
they sense the wrong of it: "The rules say . . ."

Because they know the rules. They know how love
is supposed to be. They haven't cheated. They play
the way they should or with only such minor faults
as everyone gets away with. *They was robbed!*
However, I poor fool, have never known
the rules. Or reading, fail to understand
how the rules could work. I stumble around the field.
My friends are kind, sometimes, and help me out.

WHAT FORM THE WORLD HAS

I watch my concern for the world, how it changes: strong
sometimes, elsewhere weaker, as when the world
stands in the landscape like somebody's barn, clump
of trees. Not my land they're on. Whose,
I don't know. Or what they are. Nor
do I care. Times, though, I could think
of them as refuge, having no other and they
being offered, not then either caring what.

Or my intensest concern for the world might be
the times I find me trapped, as it were, in the trees,
boarded-up in that barn. Those times,
I hate the world, want only to break it down.

When we love the world for itself, the world we love
is one, most likely, we may have made or thought
to have made, ourselves, with love or some other power.
As if we could. Well, maybe we can
and did; but taken out of our hands when it is
as it always is, do we know was it ever ours?

I could rest content with the unseen form of the world
and never see it, believing the form were there.

CONJUGATION

In the verb *is* we find our being although
we subsume our own being there where, alone
it is. We are not the subject of that verb;
all conjugation rests in its singular
person, its plurals never other than one.
The truth of *I* is there, the fact of *you*
but not the *wes* we think to make instead.

How strange we are: as felt and feelingful
as vivid people in dreams, as real as they
in that same sense, an undisparaged sense.
Feel is to feel and equal to what is felt
as we are equal to that and given to feel.

But other equalities are not. We are not
equal to a separate concept of ourselves
from which a real would depend if we were cause
in an infinite universe and made any effect
as small, even, as a separate self of the self.

But the real we mean to make is not made real:
not even the lover is, nor the loved, though there is love;
nor can our quarrels make a self of us.

THE WAY IT HAPPENS

We wonder what it may do next. And watch.
Nothing we do counts, but what it does
uses us sometimes and we want to be used
— used up, even, entirely consumed.
There are times of possession: hours may stretch into weeks
of this and we don't care what it means to do,
we do it anyway — abandon ourselves
to the doing since it isn't we who do. Or we feel
it is, we feel that for once and at last we are real,
that something has found us for something that needs to be done.

Others are idle times; nothing occurs.
We look in the newspaper. Accounts are there
of those who think they are doing something. We
know better. At least, we know it's nothing that needs
to be done except for someone's wilfulness.
We walk around and look at the trees in the park.
We watch the squirrels and birds. All right. We reflect
even on the times it seemed to be doing things:
was something done? What does it ever need
to do? Has there ever been a happening?

NAMES, PLACES

For a few, otherwise unknown, we have
their names cut in a stone slab, we have
someone's reminiscence, questionable,
or we have a page-thin transcript of a voice,
sometimes the look of a face on paper, in paints.
For the rest, the uncounted rest, we don't have
for many, even anonymous bones except
as we are the rest so that they need never have lived:
we live it for them. What little they knew
we know for them as they knew once for us,
knowing their own names, unthinking what names
we could have were we ever to be. I acquiesce
in forgetting, am the forgotten though I have a name,
a place. It is such as names and places are.
They are always such. What do they signify?
Nothing of themselves, the forgettable,
the soon forgotten. As we are, that is not what we are.
They signify an arbitrariness
of themselves and we are the nameless ones who have
no place; and we are known and we are there.

THE REGISTER

Let us remember, in our endurance, that,
more than witness, we register suffering that,

for us, ends in a little while, but that
the suffering goes on, even that,
for a long while before us, that
it had endlessly gone on, that
the truth is its own torturer, that
it is its own victim, self-condemned,
and suffers helplessly, nothing outside,
is the unendurable; and it endures.

Our register evidences how truth ventures out
past cold satellites, finds in far
spaces nothing more than truth, there
shivers and comes home again to the mild earth
and, even there, under the crust, its fire
eats itself; and earth has aridities
and ices, it being truth. We, born
in its gentler spaces, use our love and strength from earth
to suffer there, registering truth and, not
unwilling, go to earth again, this done.

GRIDS

Verity, in dream's direct experiment, dares,
nakedly, to make us look at itself.
While we sleep, it spares us nothing of its power.
And we are unsparing in turn: terror untied,
love loose; we feel whatever there is,
whatever anywhere. Any time.
Experience. We see its disjunctiveness.
No piece can fit to another. But. They go
together. They make reality. It has
no shape: reality is shapelessness.

Waking, we place a grid on this of form
and reason. What doesn't fit the grid's lines
we call not real. We know this often fails.

I fit a grid upon myself I call
myself. Absurdity. What am I, then?

If I am, let me acknowledge shapelessness,
the real and directness of dream, gridless, be none.
Whatever we are, we are whatever men are.
There is terror in not being named. What face can face
our facelessness, dream the real of the dream?

THE VERGES OF HAPPINESSES

Elations recollected that had to do with the world
surfaced in circumstance (so it seems to me now)
notably less than this. I could be wrong:
assessments are hard. Now, I look at the flowers
— peonies and roses. This is a lovely time:
gentle, luxuriant green and the soft spruce,
the wide lawn's horizontal. I love my friends.
All the imaginary felicities
we go to get caress me. This world
endears us sometimes. We should be glad of that.

The dark at the center of being is seldom seen
until the verges are lightened. Their rod is a beam
to show the emptiness there: impenetrable.
Lacking their lights — those comforts and happinesses,
forms of desire — we are left unaware how the core
rejects their light, its black impermeable,
glances it back. So, we thought by increases of knowledge
to erase our ignorance. And we never know.
Our happinesses conduct us to despair
which hollows them. Lord, extinguish my dark.

REALITY NOT DESCRIBED

Death is to remind us how temporal
we are. Well, maybe not: that were to say
we are and something planned it that way.
No. Death says whether to us
or anybody, whether about us;
death says no matter what we think

it may not be what is thought: we only do
it for a little while whether we do it or not.

Possessed it seems, however, with a need to say
what there is and how it is, what shape it has,
we ponder proposals. Certain procedures of thought
and feeling — logics, as we say, disciplines,
trusts in the evidence of senses made
from observations — act as though they were roads
— or adventurous routes in the absence of roads — to explore
and map a surrounding country in which we find
ourselves, perhaps, or into which we hope
to go. But the roads fade out; we don't come back
with the grids and reference points, the altitudes.
We go over the edge of the world and disappear.

AT THE THEATER

Wanting to see the play, we wait in the seats
of the theater. Or we walk the aisles, talk
with each other about indifferent things in the sense
they have nothing to do with the play but, of course, in our lives
of much importance such as they are. Deals
are made and unmade, friendships, marriages
even. Out in the lobby, souvenirs
and food are bought and sold. Vendors hawk
elaborate programs with pictures in them but not
all of them are the same and I don't buy,
uncertain that any of them has to do
with this play or even another.
Our seats
are comfortable more or less: heat and cold
come out of the ventilation and even though
we are better off than in the cramped, hard
balcony, we shift around in our seats
restless to find what the play may have to say.
But the curtain, painted with stars and planets we pass
the time in recognizing, is still to be drawn
and we know the time is coming when we have to leave.

AT THE THEATER II

Have we some cause to think that, even now,
behind that long-unopened curtain and beyond
our certain knowledge, still and even now
the play goes on? We expected an opening
— not only the curtain's opening but some
sort of a story beginning. We expected sets
and costumes, a light design different from one
we saw diurnally; we wanted to be
involved in a narrative concerning us,
we wanted to be shown, we wanted to be addressed.

Is it possible that we have been,
that, unseen on the stage, the drama is here
in the house? I think the things in the aisle
or in the lobby are nothing. I don't mean that.
But what about the times, alone in our seat,
seeing and hearing nothing on the stage,
and waiting, we thought, for the play to begin, we felt,
with another sense, the strangest terrors and joys
as though the drama told us and were only wants
and expectations and all there is and enough?

THE LIVES OF POETS
—for Henry Weinfield

After almost a lifetime, we realize
that Shakespeare never had a life. Oh,
he married and had a child, apparently,
and there were friends who loved him, friends he loved.
What came of it? Drake sailed around the world,
a world that was newer then and not the one
we came to know. Essex and Raleigh had
careers at court where Elizabeth met Spain;
and ships that challenged her are wrecks
beneath the waters of her islands — lie there still.

I used to think that Shakespeare didn't exist,
that all his works were part of Original
Creation if such could be said to be. There are those,
now, who say he was someone else: well,
he was someone, whether else or not, and we don't
know who he was but it doesn't matter at all.
We don't have to believe in him the way
we are asked sometimes to believe Drake's drums,
in the story, can be heard at crucial times. We know
that, wonder of wonders, Miranda is still alive.

DUPLICITY

Order, our order, is to deny
our nature; yet order is not to be denied:
we want an order. We want to respect our wants:
what else do we want?
Well, the something else we want
is that our nature is orderless; that want,
itself, is our want for an order: one we can feel.

We mistrust an unfelt order, strange to us,
though it is ours.
Complex, we wish for things
more simple and, infinite, we want the things
which are finite, contrary things. Acknowledging both,
we wish our nature were not the doubleness
we are coupled with, with which we have to live.

There are no accidents, unnatural acts;
the horror of human doings is the nature of us:
our impossibility; our need to destroy
ourselves, all finite things; our helpless loves
for our half, our helpless half, the half we destroy,
helplessly, with that intent; and the grief
of that intent, of that finite order's loss
our infinite intention's nature it is to lose.

THE RUMINATION OF RIVERS

I fall asleep meditating rivers —
their flows, that gravity desires
their deep waters, determines their pull, that dams
do not stop them, that even there, behind
that solid wall, their weight downs them and, released,
they rage toward their easement as much as in natural
falls where they gush white in frantic slams
at rocks and tear at earth-banks because Earth
has lured them, Sun has energized.
In less
watered times, other places, quietly,
shallow streams sport more gently at the rocks
to speak the same urges or wind themselves
between like a single finger's slow caress.

I think of slowness, patience, indifference
to time, their endurance as, almost lost
at the bottom of sculptured ruins worn and dug
as canyons, their flow goes on, their intention still
the same as though never was ever enough, though it is.

And my mind meanders in grassy, flatter lands;
in barely perceptible flow, I fall asleep.