

I.

*Removed from the Center*



# One

Pain is darkness.

You can tell when you close your eyes and it's still there.

The thing that really disappears is light.

Removed from the center of the world,

I am alone, but that's not the point.

There is no center as my life expands,

at least, not for more than an instant.

That is why time acts the way it does –

it knows the center is everywhere.

## Two

Removed from the center, I begin again,  
where someone in the crowd might be,  
those absolute strangers, in whose lives I am.

I can only look into the mind for five more seconds.  
The true mind, the one of thinking, is far too bright to see directly.  
I have to veil it to contain it.

I have to trick myself into believing I even can contain it.  
The way someone drowning swallows the ocean,  
I can take no more than a glass of river, and the rest consumes me.

## Three

The mind could be a very long poem.  
It could pick up where you left off, so many years ago,  
before you became so law abiding.

And yes, you could refer to yourself this way.  
You could go off on tangents in any direction,  
into nothingness and silence,

Metaphysically, like a reflex prepares to dot an I,  
in case one should ever enter  
with the impeccable timing required.

## Four

Let's predict the mind grows longer.  
I saw a newborn infant still in the nursery.  
I told him he had a crack in his butt but he didn't get it.

He didn't even have a name, and didn't really need one.  
In fact, it could have been risky just to give one.  
Pink or blue, he didn't care either way.

There is no hunger in the womb, it is paradise.  
You can say so sticking your nose out or with a scent on your hand.  
But inasmuch as hell survives, we grow attached to one another.

## Five

Love is one.  
Faith, desire, and truth are others.  
Where do we keep them?

Such words could all be given numbers,  
as were the numbers names. Pictures too, for that matter.  
Matter boils down to rules of a game that no one plays.

The mind could be a very large place indeed,  
or it could fit at the end of this sentence,  
depending on what we choose to believe.

## Six

But from where do the words come, he had to know.  
For the first she pointed to her stomach,  
the second, behind the neck – the poems had come from there.

I wondered. Still do. There must be something wrong with me.  
My fingers. Where do I put my fingers?  
They seem to want to stroke my eyelids,

which makes a whiteness I still can't see,  
like smoke in a fog, by its odor detected,  
the way a dog does it.



## Seven

I used to try and trick my dog.  
I'd sneak up the driveway, on the other side of the brick wall.  
There was no way he could see me, and I was quiet, catlike.

I could hear him sniffing, but he wouldn't bark.  
At first, I thought I won the game. Later, I figured it out.  
He not only knew someone was there, he knew it was me.

Hell, he knew what color socks I was wearing.  
He could smell bones through flesh.  
He could smell straight up your ass and into your soul.

## Eight

They say every animal can smell fear,  
although only the bigger meat eaters care.  
What is human nature to a tiger? Lunch, I'm afraid.

Its mouth will water a mile away.  
I actually emanate a smell, as a bakery does, at 4 A.M.  
Just generally, over in that direction. Even flies know that.

Removed from the center, animals were never kicked out of  
paradise.  
They must still be there, proving one thing, at least.  
Someone else will have to figure out what it is.

## Nine

They don't even notice they are there,  
that they exist,  
no words running through their heads.

The voice of god still an undecipherable whispering,  
a soothing, comforting voice, that loves them, and is pure.  
Rest now, have a drink, food is over there, asking nothing in return.

Each understands the voice as that of its mother.  
Did you think it was the driving voices of men moving cattle?  
Some are meat eaters, sensing fear, and fear is the difference.

# Ten

The eyes of animals are such that you can see  
how they understand the moment of death,  
the instant before the jaw breaks their neck.

They don't look afraid, and they don't look sad,  
they just know it has to be this way.  
You can see forgiveness in those eyes.

Regardless of anything anyone believes,  
they are the sacrifice, and they accept it.  
If I have seen it, they have saved me.

II.

*Fear*



## Eleven

When my father, then my uncle died,  
I became the eldest of an endangered breed.  
Myself, my brother, my two sons remain.

I once read of a wealthy woman who listed her 12 major fears.  
Twelve. Major fears. Think about that.  
Many of hers had to do with her wealth, and its retention.

Twelve major fears is one an hour during the day.  
They could repeat themselves at night.  
I have inhaled fear itself, and it is no air, but just more dust.

## Twelve

Fear begins as larva.  
Compare that to desire,  
which is born just a smaller version of what it always will be.

Fear transforms into other things, desires just get bigger.  
Some like to point out that the caterpillar transforms into a butterfly.  
Maggots become flies, but who pretends to notice?

Fears can become both flies and butterflies, given a choice.  
Fear predicts the future.  
That is how it knows where it is now.



## Thirteen

Fear has a face that disappears whenever I look into it.  
Removed from the center of the world,  
I am afraid, and that is the point.

Fear is a hole between two places.  
Some might call it a door.  
I have three fears that look like worms in a jar:

The first is writhing, gasping for breath but still alive,  
the second is just there, without knowing why,  
and the third is nothing to write about.

## Fourteen

The exterminator comes today, to pick up 4 fears in a jar.  
I've added another since last time,  
I've been surveilling.

Panic is half way in between pain and fear.  
It comes with the realization  
that no holes are cut in the lid.

At first, he cannot see them. I have to point them out.  
When he does he says he's never known the likes.  
He'll send them out to be identified.

## Fifteen

They have obsessed me now, like any fear will.  
Turns out fears are tiny worms jumping to their conclusions.  
They are much too small for their own identities.

Were an eyelash an inchworm, only faster.  
Fears appear to have heads at both ends,  
with I imagine no buzz, but spiked hair.

When I saw the first one folding and unfolding  
its way across a legal pad, I reacted like Doctor Frankenstein  
having just brought a line to life.

## Sixteen

If not for their direction, you could not tell which end to look into.  
I had to take a second glance to determine it was astray.  
When I find things astray, I test them for intelligence.

I put a post-it note in its path, but it stopped in its tracks and stood on end  
the way a steel sliver stands and quivers beneath a magnet,  
as if to mimic a blade of grass (a worm-trick, played on birds).

It apparently tested the intelligence of those gone astray as well.  
The note says the primary goal is expansion.  
How I'd love for the words to just walk off the page like that.

## Seventeen

Fears and I cannot coexist.  
Fears would eat out my insides,  
the way worms do a grave.

The fourth fear already happened to somebody else.  
In spite of the memories, and the editing,  
a shuffled and reshuffled deck is back in its original condition.

There is an order to be discovered. There is always later, or else.  
Madness is going back over every book I've ever read  
looking for that part about me and my thoughts.

## Eighteen

If there is a reflection of light in an otherwise dark pool of water,  
that's the part I want to drink.

But I get only typical wetness, and the light remains undisturbed.

I keep missing the point, and in the meantime,  
these are the events in my life.

Is any solace to be found in listening to the wind?

Not unless described as laughter. But it is hardness blowing,  
and I the object of penetration. Here's what I think of the wind:  
It is the mind, with an upside down "M."

## Nineteen

Something similar goes for unwinding, the mind again will be revealed.  
Attempts to take this in all at once are just insane,  
that's what I think the voices are saying.

Did you know each unraveled breath contains the history  
of every place it's ever strayed?  
This one, once, was last, which explains its filtered sort of gray.

Later, we can unravel a breath and see what it's made of.  
The way mist from the waves stretches into the wind, there is a place.  
What a huge fear the last poem always is.