

## Still Life

I keep returning to the unfinished painting  
dry on the easel, a still life  
of yellow apples and a blue pitcher.  
In the quiet of my sunny room  
I'm free to walk around,  
to observe the canvas from near and far  
in differing aspects of light.  
I close my eyes for a time,  
trying to clear my vision.  
I stand to the left, the "gospel side,"  
as the hour passes and the room grows dim.  
In the flickering light of candles,  
the painting grows more mysterious than ever,  
and I more shadowed and unseeing.  
Many days I work like this,  
never once mixing paints, never lifting a brush.

## Devotion

“Poetry not rest” is trouble’s answer,  
rising before the sun, setting out  
in a gray light to the dull grumble  
of thunder to balance the words  
*bottle* or *old wooden chair* or *bluebird*  
on a line’s life-or-death tightrope,  
struggling to add color to the canvas,  
purple or burnt umber, transcribing  
seven violins crying in the willows,  
or simply cutting a stem of rosemary,  
the deep smell of earth for inspiration,  
the earth and the grave, never resting,  
working from sheer will and memory,  
working with quill and ink if need be,  
knowing trouble and rest won’t last,  
that no one has the cure for this life  
though we honor the day with words,  
name the plow and extol the hammer,  
knowing that even the poorest poet,  
if a poet, is at a desk in a corner  
of eternity, already long dead,  
laboring to transform *death* to *praise*,  
never wearying, never once losing faith.

## The Blizzard

The B and B in Indianapolis was charming.  
I didn't want to leave. I liked the desk  
in the parlor, and the good coffee recalled  
quiet days in Rome. I stayed upstairs—  
a sitting room, a rocker, a comforter.  
On Sunday I was the only guest, the others  
having left to beat the coming storm.  
I could call and cancel my week, I thought,  
as I had yet another coffee and opened  
my notebook to write an hour longer.  
When I finally got on the road,  
the first flakes were tumbling down,  
and I reprimanded myself for lingering,  
for giving in to the frazzled wish  
that a cozy room might calm my nerves.  
On the highway, snow swirled and raged  
and my fantasy came back to rebuke me.  
The blizzard had been predicted for days;  
the innkeeper had warned me repeatedly.  
It wasn't long before the road disappeared  
under a white blanket. I couldn't see  
any other cars, and suddenly  
there were no tracks to follow, no lines—  
just the unwritten page before me.  
Making my way home like a pilgrim,  
I crawled down the road to classical music,  
something Romantic, then something  
Baroque. Going slow, then slower still,  
cellos and oboes my only companions,  
I suffered a renaissance of mind.

Then a blessing came from the fields  
or the sky—it was all the same now—  
and I gave myself over to the blizzard,  
driving unhurriedly, listening to Vivaldi,  
one hand on the wheel, relaxed, calm,  
looking ahead and seeing nothing at all.