Eyes

The common buckeye has six,
three on each wing, the lower pairs
scanning to the side, the upper
straight behind. If I had wings
I’d add a fourth set, to watch
for Alice as I make my way
toward the horizon.
She has been evasive, her essential
strategy. She doesn’t believe
in having. Alice says you never wind up
with what you thought you wanted.
The lover returns damaged,
needy. The cake in the window
tastes of dust. Once the book
is bound, it begins to die.
For happiness, she says, look at clouds,
and so I do. I take comfort
in their moods and colors
and how they let you forget for a while
the damned horizon.
En Garde

It falls to me then to slip
the spider’s silk around my finger
like a ring or snare
and to keep my chin
down. Nothing but platitudes
occur to me when I am sad.
I mix them up to foil
myself: what doesn’t kill you
lasts forever; nothing
makes you stronger. This, too,
shall perish; she who lives
by the sword shall pass.

Alice lives by the sword.
I pass my time imagining splendor
where there is none
and the spider swings through air,
diligent as God
but more dangerous.
Practicing Nowhere

For the tanager, for the ground rose to bloom, for the grapes to ripen. I wait for these. Meanwhile, clouds, today a carnival, tents billowing blue and gray and a shy green, midway ghosts leaning out to spill secrets. Who are these wanderers? The pewter edge of the future flashes, and laurel leaves clap slender hands. Who am I?

Early June, scaffold of regret collapsing—boom! Splintered, such beauty.

The great transformations are yet to come. There is most joy when the outcome is least certain. Blood carries this knowledge, leaps in the presence of splendor. I was once magnetized by splendor but feared it and numbed myself so as to tolerate its presence. It had no choice but to leave.

I carve a bamboo flute. The madness of the wind sings within me now.

What bird here in my hands? Fuzzy and crying, awake for the first time. Later, a darkening, the mother returned to feed, to warm and shelter. To silence. Home as chafing dish.

In the mirror, who is this aimless prodigal? Then fog, more clouding.
mirage

toward the end
   a sort of baptism
cloud of road dust
barely recalled yellow summer hills
   a boy’s glance a flame a hand a jaw
   bone in the draw
cathedral of dust following father’s car
   through depression towns
i could block out the rest
   angry words
   rotten fruit
   heat its own law
through haze sometimes the mountain
   i was thirsty i needed something to drink
   maybe a mountain
   cool with snow
   a river    yes some water a cool plum
   a sunny apricot would do
   wasps drifting long-legged
   over the windfall
car towing its church through the shadows
   then light a shaft a black hole
   sometimes a whole wing
   santos de polvo rising again
   an arm swept across a brow
   men in rows bent
to short hoes
   a hundred suns through straw
i felt what i saw
   open mouths of birds in blue twilight
   their great wheeling flight
sometimes i dream of the eye
of the bull which of course i couldn’t see
from where i sat but no matter
there was a glint in the night of it
when he faced the cape
red not to anger him
but to mask the blood
when the matador plunges his blade
between the heaving shoulders
i preferred the veronicas
man and beast sizing each other up
the man holding the cape like a curtain
like the piece of cloth saint veronica handed
to christ on his way to golgotha
that he might wipe his bloody brow
below the weight of his cross

the beast trots past it
the languorous sweep it makes
before the man pivots and who doesn’t think then
of the death to come
and the severed ear of the bull in hemingway
that romero gives lady brett

i was trying with my palette knife
to capture the flourish of the cape
that loveliness and grace
and its opposite the eye going dark
the cry unanswered
You know you can't discount jazz the clubs were hopping one night I caught Basie's eye he asked me backstage to run away with him one o'clock jump I made my own Paris had a soft light a blueness about the atmosphere—oh & the crumbling walls I came into my own as an abstract expressionist there paris had a portal or eye into the very tissue of falling columns I formed a circle to go into to see through a rose window if you will containing everything I ever made a portal had a soft light into the very tissue of falling columns I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have drawn a thousand wheels trying endlessly to get the shape just right impossible! I must have draw...
the wise & foolish virgins

if there is something i resist
it’s sentiment it ruins art
i’m not talking about tenderness
or love that makes work possible but a mawkish
attachment to symbols that leaves a hangover
a sluggishness as from a sugar crash
please don’t go on about the soul to me
unless you admit its entire gamut
gamete to maggot

in the parable the wise virgins
kept their lamps trimmed and burning
but their foolish sisters ran out of oil
the lord swept in while they were looking to resupply
point being they missed their holy bridegroom
but could a case not be made for what they learned
from their broken hopes how grief sharpened
their senses imagine marriage to god give me
a little serpent any day i thought as i painted
rose after rose after rose i threw all of them out but two
i guess that was somewhat lordish of me
but they reeked of tearstain an addiction to sorrow

i wanted something more
las rosas mysticas
i wanted you to enter them like a bee
become lost in their scent and textures
not be able to say
which one is foolish
which one wise