

This World

Prologue

Quaking at the thought of death,
aching for a flake of love, clinging
to the surface of this space-rock,
we shape this world as we can,
and set ourselves apart from it,
encased in our rags and our shelters,
proud of our fire and our thoughts.
Yet we are of this world: the salt ocean
courses thickly through our veins;
the very air in which we swim, we draw
into our bodies in desperation, alive
only from moment to possible moment;
our nourishment we scratch from whatever
will root within the humble crumbs of soil
on the surface of this spinning rock,
now facing the life-giving sun,
now the cold eternity of moon and space
and worlds beyond our reach,
beyond our thought, beyond
this little life we cherish so.

Moon and Stars

That ocean coursing through our very veins
pulses to the pull of its brother sun, its sister moon;
beneath the threshold of our notice, the siren whispers
of these ancient siblings urge reunion:
the cosmic tug of heaven's bodies on our own.
Starlight from centuries past enters the eye,
becomes electric, conjures response:
we look, we see, we think we understand,
we contemplate, we marvel, are anxious, write poems.
From point to point of long-ago light
we trace the fate of worlds, and beyond,
a face of God; and from the blue light of the moon
we weave our tales of love and sorrow.

Sun

A half-spin of the rock, and we face the face
we dare not look upon, our dear brother sun:
a face of God not traced from point to point
but burnt into the sky, into our minds, image
without image, radiance, splendor.
A packet of sun-stuff escaping our brother
bathes us in starlight a few moments on,
awakens the earth and calls forth her colors,
powers the tiny green factories of food,
and causes the oceans of water and wind to rise
and to gather, to explode in their fury,
transforming the star-stuff to thunder and flash.

Wind and Air

The song that we sing would die in our throats
were it not for our dear brother air, who pulses
and vibrates and dances and shakes to our sound,
his body becoming our songs, our prayers,
our curses and cries, our whispers and sighs.
Leaving our thoughts to tremble the air,
we stop to—breathe!—gulping down fuel
for the tiny red factories producing our song,
our thoughts, our notion of God, our very selves.
We swim through this ocean of air, renewing
our life every moment, feeding our factories,
preparing to sing; and then the exhalation: of
song, of waste, of thought, of self.

Water

Each of our bodies is twinned with another: our
better half, water, flows through our veins,
transforming this husk, brittle and dry,
into a thing supple and shaped, a creature which
dances and sings! Coursing into and from us,
our sister moves through our fissures and tubes,
delivering food and removing all waste, forever
re-freshing and cleansing. She tumbles from sky
and springs from the earth, delighting our senses
and welcoming play: we float on her surface,
we surf in her foam, we bathe in her shape-shifting self
as we swam in her sweet caress before birth.

Fire

The sun's younger brother is fire, a wizard who
whispers and roars as he brightens our darkness,
entrancing our eyes with his dance,
embracing our bodies with warmth. At his touch,
things seemingly solid and shaped surrender
their form and their mass, explode into ashes and gas,
releasing their light and their heat in alchemical
ecstasy, free at last of the burden of being.
Fire transforms whatever he touches:
forging iron into steel, steel into structure—
anvil and hammer, sword and spear—
etching our cities onto this rock,
coursing through cables to carry our thoughts;
shrinking our space, shortening time,
and glowing on screens with our fears and dreams.

Earth

Earth! Mother, sister, lover, friend,
our blanket on this jagged rock,
warmed by the sun and stirred by the wind,
kissed by the rain and softened by our touch,
she bursts forth—oh!—and oh! again,
with grain and fruit and leaf and stem,
herb and flower, vine and bush, grass and tree,
in every color, shape, and fragrance,
every taste: sour and bitter and salty and sweet.
Earth! You channel the water, becalm the wind;
you nourish our bodies, heal us of illness,
provide us with shelter, a workshop, a playground, a stage.

Love

On that thin skin of soil on this whirling rock,
we bake with the sun and chafe with the wind,
are swept by the water, are burned out by fire,
are maddened by moonlight and star-time,
are brought low by earth's darker wonders.
But then there is love: we too are miracles
of love, by love, for love; we too are miracles
when, baked and chafed, swept away and brought low,
burnt out and maddened with grief and desire,
we find joy in our work and peace in our mind,
God in our heart, love on our lips, and pardon
and mercy for those who have harmed us.

Death

And then there is death, silent and patient, neither present
nor absent, always arriving, shadow only glimpsed,
promise never broken, grace never withheld.
She makes all else sweeter: awaiting her arrival,
the sun burns more brightly; the moonlight is bluer;
the wind and the water feel cooler, refresh us more fully;
the fire's dance is wilder, earth's bounty more luscious,
the love that we share more tender and true, more *love*
for the knowledge of you, Sister Death. We cherish so
our little life because we know its sweetness ends: we must
return our borrowed bits of star-stuff, our measure of
water and air, return our husk to the earth, rejoin the
God whose face we traced in the stars.

Epilogue

We are of this world:
on this whirling rock,
we spin around the sun
and tumble through the stars;
we till the earth and plow the wave,
pulsing with the power of the moon.
We are of this world:
fragile bits of clay and code,
baked and chafed, swept away,
burnt out, brought low,
awaiting death and suffering life.
We are of this world; yet
we look, we see, we think we understand,
we contemplate, we marvel, we trace
the fate of worlds, and send our
little thoughts, our cherished dreams
dancing on the air, singing on a wire,
glowing on a screen.
We are of this world of miracles,
yet we are miracles too, able
to find joy in our work,
peace in our minds, love on our lips,
God in our hearts, the God whose face
we traced in the stars.