

From
Portuguese Beach

Skip Robinson

c 2017

From Portuguese Beach

Table of Contents

The cow beckons	3
Portuguese Beach	4
Driving home	6
Some mornings, as the light	7
the gods are in the deer	8
Please answer me quickly	9
Mobius	11
Ten moments and mayflies	13
After the Great Fire	17
It is my heart	19

Portuguese Beach is a California State Beach, not far North of Bodega Bay at the very edge of the Pacific Ocean.

The cow beckons

The cow beckons.
Here's the way
I love this field,
he moos.

Come closer.
See the lamb up on the hill.
She glows at night.
We gather around.

She is our campfire,
we cows and sheep,
we calves and lambs.
In her glow, we sing the songs

we learned from our mothers -
Songs of such olden times
before this world, beautiful times, times when the Lamb God
reined.

Portuguese Beach

"Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny"
*Before our spine grows, during the second month
of pregnancy life, our fetus grows a
cartilagenous spine called a notocord,*

*just like the cartilagenous spines in all fish;
we human fetuses then also have gills.*

Above Portuguese Beach on the Pacific Ocean
just North of Bodega Bay

the sun is down we are in afterlight; white water foams up
around eighteen black rocks just off the coast here at Portuguese Beach, the sound of their
meetings a continuous soft rising and falling roar; a pickup truck goes by on Highway 1 wind
along the cliffs above the water; the

trailer the pickup is towing is empty; truck motor hums level, tires a soft hiss. Bodega sailed
the bay

sometime around 1775 and invested in two-acre plots which have retired him, so he's writing
modern novels above the San Jose, Costa Rica

countryside, green all around, above San Jose, Costa Rica, sky all blue. Here the blue waves
sky, white foam out from this beach,
ancient gray cliffs forty feet high, the beach sand a dark gray as if basalt had been pulverized
long before Bodega and his crew came slicing

sails full and billowing around this tossing emerald green turn; we swim we swim we swim; w
slide through the water. We see it all from the point of view of an air-breathing fish on land w
swim we swim. Bodega stares out across the moving waters, the leaping white foam, writes d
first word.

The ocean says it is all a kind of swimming

Driving home

I remember last night: I am listening to the radio driving back home from the airport; turn it off; turn it on again, turn it off:

bosniahaitinorthern-ireland blood and kill totals; in the silent dark, going north on 101, lights slide by on either side of me, lighted

ghosts, tires hissing. I reach the Petaluma-East Washington turnoff, exit right, then left at the end-of-exit T onto East Washington headed

West. I settle onto a quiet two-lane drive all the way out to the ocean. City scales fall away as I leave Petaluma behind, as I drive, the

countryside in full darkness; I settle in, the radio silent. At times, full white fog surrounds the car; The road becomes obscure. I slow way

down knowing deer could wander onto the road in this and, hearts beating in all of us, I couldn't see them. The road out to the ocean

becomes very long. It is late now. I'm growing sleepy. I'm going in and out of thick fog, going slow then fast then slow. Sometimes my

headlights fill with floating whiteness as insubstantial as a dream. All evening and waking through the night I keep seeing the

same face. Waves and whitecaps roll in one after another without ceasing. All night, the falling whitecaps hit the sand with a boom.

Some mornings, as the light

Some mornings, as the light rises in the sky, as the fog fades,
the trees grow full of singing birds. Beyond the knoll, the
white foam colors

the precise place where the ocean meets the sand, then long
rolling blue out to the
horizon, then the blues of the sky going all the

way up from there. This morning is calm.
The white foam rises as it nears shore. The water undulates
without end. We meet by the

water. The wild rabbits and we. The wild rabbits and the
deer. The deer and we.

I stand by the door of the deck. They stand in

the side yard. We meet by the water. Wild rabbits more often
appear alone. The wild rabbit comes up on his haunches,
cocks his

head a little to one side, and, without moving, looks out at the
water. The deer, usually in small silent families, come slowly
along. One

will look up from the grass, look out at the
ocean, as the white whitecaps roll nearer the beach, as the
whitecaps pause at the top and fall.

The gods are in the deer

The gods are in the deer because at nights they walk silently to the end of the grass at the edge of the promontory over the ocean and stare, in their own ways, at the ocean. The gods are in

the deer because they have never sneered, because they live and run in silence. The gods are in the deer because when a deer child is out walking happily, silently through the grass

with the family, three family members walk beside the child, one on each side and one behind, keeping eyes in all directions and

listening to the call of the waves.
The gods in silence
are in the deer.

Please answer me quickly

I think it is noontime here,
bright sun directly overhead,

light blue the whole sky,
small white clouds floating

by. I sit on this green carpet of grass. What I think is me
watches as, up in the trees

nearby, small blossoms begin to undulate and turn into white
flowers right before my

eyes. I will sit here till midnight. It will be silent. I will look
up again at the sky.

It will be all black as the bottom of a tunnel, except, across it,
tiny white twinkling

lights. What is the truth about the sky? Is it light blue or
pitch black? Does it have small

white clouds or pinpoints of light in the black? What is the
truth? Please answer me quickly.

And those two fish in the sea making love: It is twenty
million years ago; do you remember us

being utterly tiny inside them? Can you still hear the caress
of their scales? Do you

remember, when they birthed us later, our coming out into
ice-cold water. We stayed

close together as our parent fish, mouths open, eyes blank,
began falling down toward

the bottom of the sea. I cried. You cried. You and I swam
for our lives, tiny, side by side –

blue-green everywhere, our shoulders moving as fins. And
now we are here. It's twenty

million years later. Our fish-parents' remains are gray sea-
bottom mud. But are they,

somehow, still alive in us? What are we now? Are we fish
still? Is the white flower a tree? Is

the sky blue or black? Please answer me quickly! What is
really your name?

Mobius

The sphere of the earth must, must turn. A Mobius in the shape of a paradox floats by and honks; a toy wooden boat crosses the sun-sparkling tub. The ducks float by in luxury. Telegraph Avenue graffiti: "Kill the Clock While U Still Have Time"

We are driving down a country road, blooms all around, mid-morning, sun after rain. We come around a turn and there before us and to my left are four black-spotted white cows standing grazing in the green field ahead. The cows are facing one another close

together, basically nose to nose, in the growing grass -- and between the standing cows, black and white on green, a rainbow ends on the grass right between them, in their midst, and arcs up to the west from that start up into the sky, multicolored, sparkling. What's most

important to you? Are you heading there, in spite of it all? Each and every living creature inside has Buddha-nature, has Jesus-nature, has Mohammed-nature, has Ganesh nature, has Hindu Ram-Sita-Hanuman nature, has Gaia-nature, has original face and must

survive. Synaptic bridges, neural impressions, mythic and constant interior committee - talks, debates, sulks, cajoles, orders, grabs, sits silent, the body outside sitting without motion, the breath rises falls rises each life in the history of the universe has been and is unique,

through time without end - an infinity of noble paths. it's simple: Not - then Here – then Not again. Hundreds of little waterfalls run down this country hill - wet, green, forest trees, tiny white clusters of foam.

I am floating in a mountain forest pool, midsummers noon.
A long bright blue dragonfly flies over the pool and floats
down to rest on my outstretched left index finger.
The dragonfly sits and looks at me for some time. I look
back. We eye each other, both

still. Time goes on. The dragonfly hums its thin blue wings,
rises slowly into the air, heads overhead toward the stream. Is
gone.

Sitting high on Mt. Tamalpais looking East into the East Bay
across the Bay water, I see a great glistening, as the sun sets
down onto the great sea, like a flaming hen of god.

The windows in the East Bay reflect tiny flashes of light up
to this meadow on Mt. Tam; from the twilight hills across the
darkening Bay, toward us shoot moments of shimmering
light. My breath goes out, now here, now there, now gone,
now I see memories:

across the distance, tiny white sparkling flashes of light as
pure as snow.

Ten moments and mayflies

1.

It is a summer night. I am a small child in Chicago, walking
with my mother along Sheridan Road, just up from our
apartment at the Lake. We are passing a huge billboard by
the side of the road. All around the rim are the brightest
electric bulbs lighting the billboard's advertising. Fluttering
all around each bright light are tiny creatures flapping tiny
wings, swooping up and down, circling the gleaming lights
over and over and over, like miniature butterflies. My
mother tells me that these are mayflies, that they only live
one day and this is the night of that day. I can't understand.
How could something live only one day. How could this be?
They flutter.

2.

I am ten years old, walking one cold winter afternoon by our church. I had almost died at 6. Suddenly, I am struck by the idea that life only lasts 30, 40, 60, 70, 80 years, so short.... And I am suddenly convinced that there is no life after death, that when I die I'm gone. I feel so brief. I feel so sad. Just as suddenly, I look around and see that everything I look at is transformed, so beautiful, beautiful. Life is brief, so every sight, every moment so vivid, so exquisite. I look around and find myself in joy.

3.

Last Monday morning, as I'm waking up, the telephone rings by my bed. Hello? It is my sister, Pat, from the Midwest. "Curtis' lung cancer is worse. I just saw him. He is asking to see you." I am on the phone with the airline. My birthday is this Friday. I can get ready and get a flight out then.

4.

Years ago, I'm driving down Grand Avenue in Oakland, early evening dusk, my new wife and I are on the way home from buying the provisions for our wedding celebration for family and friends. Suddenly, without warning, we and our car are hurtling through the air, smashing into a car ahead of us, my wife and I thrown forward and backward in our seatbelts like rag dolls. No control. (A car racing down Grand at 70 has hit us from behind.) Our gas tank ruptures and throws all the gas into the air. I notice out the front windshield that it is suddenly raining, heavily, on the front hood. Strange, the sky has been clear. Then it ignites; the red and yellow flickers, then roars. I reach around and try both doors. Jammed shut; no give at all. I guess I have only seconds to live. My wife is knocked unconscious. I'm trying what I can. I look out the front windshield. I feel very quiet inside. The colors, somehow, are beautiful.

5.

I am calling the airline to get a Friday ticket to St. Louis, near Centralia, Illinois, our family home. I live on a bluff above a

beach next to the Pacific Ocean in the Northern California countryside, north of a hamlet of 950. Out my window, as I talk with the airline, I notice that an ambulance has pulled into a little cutout, then another pulls in, then a little fire truck, then a police car; uniformed men disappear, climbing over the bluff's edge, evidently climbing down to the beach, apparently another swimmer gone under the strong blue waves.

6.

Victor Frankl survives the Nazi death camps, discovering current-moment meaning where everything, everything is gone.

7.

This one too.

8.

Two empty chairs in the middle of the room, one for me; one for Curtis. What do we have to say? I am getting back on the plane. "It's so brief," he says. "It seems like it's over in the snap of my fingers." Snap! He looks out the sunlit window, breathes in deeply from the oxygen tube in his nose. We talk. We sit silently together. I hold his hand, his arm. Then I rake leaves, move the air conditioner from the other house as he requests. I come back to sit with him. Then we talk and not talk.

9.

A zen story tells of a man running along a mountain cliff edge, chased by a big and ravenously hungry tiger. He sees a thick vine going over the edge and, grabbing it, climbs down well below the cliff's edge. Panting, holding on to the vine, he looks up. The tiger is waiting. The man looks down. Below him is another hungry tiger looking up at him from below, waiting, mouth wide open. Neither able to go forward or backward, he hangs there. He sees, out of reach above him, a mouse chewing slowly, strand by strand, through the vine he is hanging from. He looks to his left. He sees a wild red strawberry hanging. Holding on tight with one hand,

with the other he picks the strawberry and puts it in his mouth. It tastes sweet.

10.

We are mayflies.

And this is our day.

**After the Great
Berkeley-Oakland Hills
Fire**

Will the planet come closer? will we? what will come to pass in the night? we wake from dreams and see the shadowed ceiling and wonder what will it be what has it been (what we thought it was, wasn't after all) and what we think it is now is probably not as it seems -- except we know we are alive because we are breathing and if we are old enough and in those periods of time, we can reach out and put an arm around the warm one asleep next to us, or, if this is not that time, we can lie and wonder and know the stars are moving steadily forward in the heavens above and the night (all around us and our loved ones) has its own caresses too. And if we've spent time around the world and have loved ones on other parts of this planet, we know that they are up and moving through their day while we move through our night, each watching the cradle while the other sleeps. And what we know and what we knew and what we shall know is up in perfect spheres high in the lighted brain, dancing before us and in us and under us and behind us, the microbes, the biota, the meanings, the ghosts (those lies and specters that whisper without end), the fun-house mirrors, the words which spin upon their vowels and make wind and water to embarrass meaning which has gone out the window with the moon which is rising in the sky as we lie there, wondering how long life will last and why it has to end at all and why those we love do not necessarily love us back and if this is a dream, then what is waking? And that cloud of smoke rising endlessly into the sky, rolling up into the utter blackness beyond the stars, that smoke which has hungrily swallowed the trees and the houses and the flowers and some people and hundreds of thousands of beings and all their hopes and so much we all had clung to, our assumptions that these hills were forever. And now part of this forest neighborhood we love is gone, part of our hearts are white ash, like the past, like the very end.

It is my heart

1.

The world tears the heart from my chest and throws it
bloody, pumping into the night field, a field of swaying
wheat. The world tears out

my memory of the past and burns it on the leaping red and
yellow flaming pyre.

My eyes see my memories as white smoke rising into the
night sky – wrapping itself
around the crescent moon.

My hands wrench free of my body altogether and flap up like
wings into the sky
flapping up into the smoking, billowing

2.

Down from the foggy sky, rain begins to fall. Each drop is
itself weeping. My hair falls with it to the ground. Into the
now-soaking night

soil, my legs sink down to my hips, then to my waist – and I
sink and disappear – my last eye up sees last the smoking
sliver of the moon. No light. In the aeons of blackness, leaves
begin to

3.

extrude from my trunk. I can't see - but I know I'm green. A
thought tries to rise to my mind.

But it's no use. Nothing is there. Then how do I know I've become green? I sense time passing – ages – new dinosaurs rise up and fall.

4.

In the distance above me,
I hear a scratching through the endless days and nights.

God knows what time passes.
Then one day something happens. Fingers break down through to me through the dirt. Down through the hole, the cold air hits my head like a blast. The fingers seem somehow familiar. The dirt falls away. I look up. It is cold and so very dark. I see nothing but the edges of fingers scurrying above me; I feel them brushing the dirt away from my head and out of my eyes. The hands are all there is. Hands to the wrist. The dirt is out of my eyes.
The hands caress my forehead.

They are my hands. Way above me, I see a dark cloud moving aside. The tiny moon.

My hands reach down brushing dirt aside from my shoulders. They grip my shoulders and pull me up. I am out of the hole. I am green.

We are in a wheat field.
In the deep night shadows, a mountain is nearby to my left. It is thumping.
Thumping.
It is singing.
It is my heart.