

of light,
are giving off the rich
fragrance of cinnamon
and fulfillment, 5

the long tapers
of cattails
are bursting and floating away over
the blue shoulders 10

of the ponds,
and every pond,
no matter what its
name is, is 15

nameless now.
Every year
everything
I have ever learned 20

in my lifetime
leads back to this: the fires
and the black river of loss
whose other side

is salvation,
whose meaning
none of us will ever know.
To live in this world 25

you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it 30

against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it go,
to let it go. 35

1983

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves. 5
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.
 Meanwhile the sun and the dear pebbles of the rain
 are moving across the landscapes,
 over the prairies and the deep trees, 10
 the mountains and the rivers.
 Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
 are heading home again.
 Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
 the world offers itself to your imagination, 15
 calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
 over and over announcing your place
 in the family of things.

1986

Poppies

The poppies send up their
 orange flares; swaying
 in the wind, their congregations
 are a levitation

of bright dust, of thin 5
 and lacy leaves.
 There isn't a place
 in this world that doesn't

sooner or later drown
 in the indigos of darkness, 10
 but now, for a while,
 the roughage

shines like a miracle
 as it floats above everything
 with its yellow hair. 15
 Of course nothing stops the cold,

black, curved blade
 from hooking forward—
 of course
 loss is the great lesson. 20

But also I say this: that light
 is an invitation
 to happiness,
 and that happiness,

when it's done right, 25
 is a kind of holiness,
 palpable and redemptive.
 Inside the bright fields,