On my First Sonne

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;

 My sinne was too much hope of thee, lov’d boy,

Seven yeeres tho’wert lent to me, and I thee pay,

 Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.

O, could I loose all father, now! For why

 Will man lament the state he should envie?

To have so soon scap’d world’s, and flesh’s rage,

 And, if no other miserie, yet age?

Rest in soft peace, and, ask’d, say, here doth lye

 Ben Jonson his best piece of *poetrie*.

For whose sake, hence-forth, all his vowes be such,

 As what he loves may never like too much.

 —Ben Jonson

 For a Fatherless Son

You will be aware of an absence, presently,

Growing beside you, like a tree,

A death tree, color gone, an Australian gum tree—

Balding, gelded by lightning—an illusion,

And a sky like a pig’s backside, an utter lack of attention.

But right now you are dumb.

And I love your stupidity,

The blind mirror of it. I look in

And find no face but my own, and you think that’s funny.

It is good for me

To have you grab my nose, a ladder rung.

One day you may touch what’s wrong—

The small skulls, the smashed blue hills, the godawful hush.

Till then your smiles are found money.

 —Sylvia Plath

 From ‘Firstborn’, 3

You lie here beside me now,

Ineffable, elsewhere still.

What should one say to a son?

Emotions and points of view, the large

Abstractions we like to think

We live by—or would live by if things

Were other than what they are;

Or we were; or others were;

If all were altered and more distinct?

Or something immediate,

Descriptive, the virtuous use of words?

What can one say to a son?

—Charles Wright

My Son

My son

my only son,

the one I never had,

would be a man today.

He moves

in the wind,

fleshless, nameless.

Sometimes

he comes

and leans his head,

lighter than air

against my shoulder

and I ask him,

Son,

where do you stay,

where do you hide?

And he answers me

with a cold breath,

You never noticed

though I called

and called

and keep on calling

from a place

beyond,

beyond love,

where nothing,

everything,

wants to be born.

 —Mark Strand

Veracruz

In Veracruz, city of breezes & sailors & loud birds,

an old man, I walked the Malecón by the sea,

and I thought of my father, who when a young man

had walked the Malecón in Havana, dreaming of Brazil,

and I wished he had gone to Brazil

& learned magic,

and I wished my father had come back to San Francisco

armed with Brazilian magic, & that he had married

not my mother, but her brother, whom he truly loved.

I wish my father had, like Tiresias, changed himself into a woman,

& that he had been impregnated by my uncle, & given birth to me as a girl.

I wish that I had grown up in San Francisco as a girl,

a tall, serious girl,

& that eventually I had come to Veracruz,

& walking on the Malecón, I had met a sailor,

a Mexican sailor or a sailor from some other country—

 maybe a Brazilian sailor,

& that he had married me, & I had become pregnant

 by him,

so that I could give birth at last to my son—the boy

 I love.

 —George Stanley

 Waking with Russell

Whatever the difference is, it all began

the day we woke up face-to-face like lovers

and his four-day-old smile dawned on him again,

possessed him, till it would not fall or waver;

and I pitched back not my old hard-pressed grin

but his own smile, or one I’d rediscovered.

Dear son, I was *mezzo del cammin*

and the true path was as lost to me as ever

when you cut in front and lit it as you ran.

See how the true gift never leaves the giver:

returned and redelivered, it rolled on

until the smile poured through us like a river.

How fine, I thought, this waking amongst men!

I kissed your mouth and pledged myself forever.

 —Don Paterson