

I know these four walls, then, of the room  
which is corporeal life: a kitten, a son,  
another Son, an African animal without soul,  
and I know, too, that another wall stands,  
its door open, and something beyond beckons  
to me to pass through. Finally, I know  
that the pentagram is the devil's sign.

So I have made my beginning, will relate  
my parable, and give benediction  
in the name of the Holy Family: the blood  
of the Son, the pure, passionless Mother,  
the Father in whose fist is clenched our fate.

#### A COOL EVENING IN SEPTEMBER

I close the kitchen door on the chill  
breeze and sit back down at the table.  
Her ear is a punctured half-moon.  
From the lobe dangles a silver star.  
My eye aches down the long curve  
of her neck and shoulder, the snowflake  
purity of the blouse's white sleeve,  
rests on the cast snake that circles her wrist.  
Her brown hand's around a sweating glass.  
The light glints off her nails like frost.  
Our conversation is as brittle as ice,  
as still as legal papers, and makes me  
formal in my faded jeans and flannel shirt.  
*Yes I've lost weight. OK I look good.*  
*No there's not much here for fall colors*  
*with the trees so few and the culture here*  
*is pretty much the bars and television.*  
At least, that's the part she'd recognize.

What is it in us that makes us want  
to preserve a dead marriage in this ice?

I move to the enameled sideboard. *Yes  
I've always been good at freshening drinks.  
Yes I may be the only man who keeps a  
pickle jar of margueritas in the fridge  
but I doubt it.* I answer with my back  
to her. I clasp her glass in a shivering  
left hand, fight the urge  
to lift the rim to my lips. Ice is  
January in my right hand, in her glass.  
Tequila is February thaw, a slow week  
of temperatures in the forties, the steady  
melt of accumulated frost and ice  
in the joints, layer after layer of snow  
coming to face the sun again,  
each with its history of tracks of animals,  
the shapes of the wind's velocity and direction,  
until, standing in the mud, above  
a soggy autumn leaf, I recognize

in its brittle veins the origins of love.  
I turn and finally, for once, meet her eyes.

#### SOMETHING FOR THE TELLING

*"An old cowpoke went riding out . . ."*

In each telling the madness of it  
comes on me again—the sledgehammer  
pulse, the crystalline night vision.  
Even now in my old age my nostrils  
flare to the smell of tequila  
at the thought, my throat thickens  
in each telling, and the piebald hand  
that rests on my stick steadies again.