

## Claude Wilkinson

## A Life

After the man wakes  
and envisions the two  
bridal-white swans gliding  
through their morning  
baths in a little pond  
off McIngvale Road,  
the need for reading glasses  
and concerns over which  
of his four humors  
might now be swelling  
his ankles and feet  
soon seem less terminal  
in the brightened  
and brightening light.

He looks out his window  
at twirling bronzed  
and golden leaves  
and wonders whether  
and how one's muse may  
adapt in an ever troubled world,  
till he thinks of a spring  
when, while in the wood  
listening to the distant whistles  
of quail, he found a dropped  
but unbroken, angel-blue egg  
lying on a pillow of violets  
a few feet beneath its nest,  
where he remembered  
that poem of Larkin's  
about an explosion,  
and then, for the first time,  
dreamt of eternal rest.



**Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh**

Could we blame the magi  
in their unbridled adoration  
for starting all this: even  
unbelievers with light displays  
that rival the pyramids  
in spectacle and ingenuity;  
the multitudinous shopping  
channels stocked with bubbly,  
antlered hostesses raving over  
so many useless trinkets per  
minute, such as illuminated  
gingerbread birdhouses,  
January through December—  
shared with a few seasonal  
breaks to appease Cupid  
by pushing roses, pendants,  
and precious stones; or when  
things get green, advising us  
to chug more ale and take  
advantage of leprechauns'  
reasonable charms; around April,  
offering milk-chocolate rabbits  
for Astarte; then paying homage  
to hobgoblins in autumn?  
Whom does this remind  
of the star-struck shepherds  
forsaking their flocks, ignoring  
glorious Cassiopea and Eridanus  
for a prophecy mysteriously lit?  
Is there no room left for any  
thought of Giotto's assemblage  
of jubilant angels, his reverent  
camels, and astonished lambs,  
nor even his haloed babe who  
would cause the world to split?

## October

Beginning its panoply  
of melancholia, everything  
is called to session by  
the cacophonous caucus  
of crows and a chattering shower  
of iridescent starlings  
descending from linden trees,  
while maples and oaks  
are dying the rich  
mahogany of wine.

On one of the month's days  
in ancient Roman myth,  
the gate of their underworld  
was ceremonially opened  
for the blessed dead  
to escape and again  
commune with the living.

Here, for now, only  
sunbursts shimmer through  
our high kaleidoscope of leaves  
and down to the macabre,  
gossamer-sparkled window  
from which a frantic candlefly  
has all but gotten one wing free.



### The Imperative of Non Sequiturs

Atop tides  
of sea-green leaves,  
a crow surfs high  
on its breezy limb.

Some robins  
and blue-gray  
gnatcatchers hop  
and prod through  
the grass below.

Above us all,  
the sky is roiling  
an ashen mass.

If our storm has  
passed by twilight,  
an owl will hoot  
the moon out

so crepe myrtle  
and dogwood  
and red cedar  
shadows highlight

a strobe of fireflies,  
trash pandas mooching  
around garbage cans,  
flashes of rabbit play.

And a neighbor's  
jingling wind chimes  
will become that soft  
rattle of skeletons  
in the closet  
of one's mind.

