

*ARS POETICA WRITTEN DURING SLEEP
DEPRIVATION*

I should begin by saying, over dinner last night, over swirling wine
in which trees reflected like jade daggers, a friend asked me

whom I write about. I should begin by saying I deflected the question,
by asking her the same. To which she replied, "My lovers."

I'd forgotten about mine, and I should begin by saying some loves I've left,
and some have died. Some lovers dying since birth; dying

to find out what their lives are worth. One lover I've left: Joliet, Illinois, the
prison town. Its bars shook so hard they burst

open like a spider lily. Out skitter its children: I write for Jimmy Jameson,
lower lip permanently swollen

with cherry tobacco. Jimmy who hears voices of the divine I call poetry,
which I need to make sing. He never returned from those acid trips.

Whatever the reasons I did—certainly not common sense, or strength—I do
reverence to each day. Somewhere he's still bowing

over the pool table. His eternal clock, the click of the cue ball against the
eight. I write for Helen Storrow, who staggered

into our hormonal parties with a satin ribbon of blood seeping from her
nostril. The other kids said "slut," said "junkie."

They laid her to rest, but her body resurfaced on the cover of men's
magazines, her legs strewn with silver lamé.

I write for Korbin (who loved those country roads so much, he'd do ninety to feel his insides rise). His body, then spirit rose up from the car.

I write for Sherry Niles, who, after her fourth abortion hung herself like a robe on her bathroom door.

Of course, how dare I forget, I write for the humpbacks off the Cape, the whale-watch boat I worked on, for its rum-pummeling captains,

and for the man, also from the heart of the land, who worked with me.
The one who took off, into his mother's basement.

When I asked him where he would go next, he said, "I want to live in the clouds." I didn't understand him until now, as I write this for all of us

who live on the clouds; for the wild sweet place we've put ourselves, for the sky that never parts, for the lovers who do.

And what makes you think
we'd ever want
to leave this place?