



# Long As You're Living

## Collected Poems

**Robert Ronnow**

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## **Janie Huzzie Bows**

## Mirrors

i like to dress for an imaginary girl  
(we will meet each other soon) by putting on  
a silk tie with subtle Chinese birds  
sewn in.

she may be picturing me in her mirror  
as she applies exactly the necessary line  
of mascara to lengthen her lashes and darken  
her eyes.

whatever begins as a mystery ends as a blind,  
the nuances so well known  
birds chirp violently at their mirror images  
but the pools

as they are revealed in the sunlight of  
every accidental nod of the eyes remain  
calm as a mirror in which there is no  
image ever seen.

## This looks like jump to me

You are a cockroach

you are a big cockroach crawling up a pegboard  
the kitchen light suddenly shines  
and you must get through to the other side  
but testing every evenly spaced hole you find  
your shoulders will never fit  
and to get away you've got to fall.

fall

or refuse to crawl and wait motionless  
until inspiration with an overview filters through  
or you die of hunger, lack of love, fear of death  
or the outlandish hands of another angry animal  
with a wisdom wiser  
but infinitely useless as your own.

so you die. but now the big hands are gentle  
and you receive a respite of thoughtlessness  
and the garbage grave has warm chicken bones  
and you don't care what happens to you  
or the oldest species of proud recalcitrant insects  
or procreating it or foraging a grubby kitchen sink

for food. the joy of making life is new. let go,  
and through the night be carried carelessly along.

## Janie Huzzie Bows

thesis: strength endures voids and emptiness.  
strength constructs no homes (antithesis:

if your house leaks then on swollen days  
in sullen seasons there is no home for you)

there is endless repetitious strength  
enduring endlessly there is this paradox:  
strength is the void endured and consequently

synthesis: enter everybody's anti-hero cross-eyed,  
sees crossed eyes cross-eyed but looking in his eyes  
sees straight, sees sick, sees something monstrous  
something insect, sees this philosophic frippery:  
that is sees man

endures in his mirror that is self-doubt,  
his left arm being his right arm  
his left eye sees his right eye  
and no eye sees his nose right.

synthesis: enter naked the hero's fists blazing  
won't put up with that mirror is laughing  
smashing his left hand smashing his right hand  
breaking his wrath in half—

enter the dumb smile of blissful blindness or  
dumb sadness belting down a drink  
enter an angel's colorful rags and bells  
enter a man in colorful sights and smells  
enter blonde beauty dragging a bulging jock.

there is the entrance where they enter through  
the black hole with crescent thin edges  
the animal den the fish smell the ocean motion  
there is women's strength endures the stretch  
forty-eight hours of warm pain

two hours of sharp pain around midnight  
last sight the tippy-tippy veins of its head  
bled and blood and body and push push Push—

and the tide goes out,  
enter sleep.

### **The Listener**

New York City is where people who are  
disappearing go. It is very quiet  
here, silent. A man and woman  
made love below me. I could hear  
the bedsprings ringing and the  
woman singing in sensual pain.  
My thoughts sped up as they humped  
faster. Everything is dead in my room  
except me and my plants. If I keep  
on identifying my feelings with the  
feelings of things, I too will be dead.  
They are talking and laughing now. His deep  
voice vibrates the air. Her laugh  
is like water.

## Something

Something created. Does the creator think ahead or spill a storm. Rain happens. We supply the reasons. Evaporation of water collecting over huge expanses, condensed and pushed as clouds over the land. We say it makes us sad or depressed. We want to cry.

You describe the America you know and if you are ashamed of yourself for what you see, you lie. Or don't look. Loud noises of automobiles and fumes. Today in Riverside Park, leaning on a rail, the dead leaves and snow reminded me how far from nature and life I am. The snow blew in from the west. People passed in a smooth slow line in front of me. Dogs trailing one another. People hiding until crises bring them out. Their dog smells another dog between the legs. The master runs over to stop him. Maybe he thinks they're going to fight. Doesn't want his big German shepherd to hurt her dachshund.

Guy runs past in gray sweats on his tip-toes. Glances at me. Another passes in blue sweats. Looks longer. They think I'm a mugger. They are not sexually attracted. I'm an opponent. I want something they have. I look surly. Why aren't I out running, disciplining myself, making myself healthy, doing something. What brings you out here. You're not doing anything but watching us and staring at the ground.

Walking down Broadway I realized I've never lived here and still don't. Two women window shopping is strange to me. They talk about the clothes. They are friends. I slow down, I don't feel so cold. Stroll, looking at people is like a sunny day and it's a carnival.

Rainy nights are good. Cold rainy nights. Bars filled and warm. Streets empty and cold. People pass and look as members of a fraternity. They need someone and don't hide it. They will try anyone

out for one night. They have tea together. They go for a drink in some neutral place. They go straight to bed in the dark. They can't see the face.

### **Zach Sklar's Dream**

A man and a woman are living  
in a jungle. The man has lived there  
all his life but the woman is new  
so she's scared. The jungle is full  
of snapping turtles and they are hunting some.  
The man knows how to hunt them  
and he kills a huge one. They drag it home  
and leave it on a wooden table  
in a clearing overnight. He says to the woman  
Tomorrow you will clean it and cook it  
in a soup. This  
will accustom her to turtles  
and make her less afraid.

The next morning they wake up.  
But when they go into the clearing  
the turtle is gone  
and there's a trail of blood  
leading into the jungle.  
The woman panics with terror  
but the man is no longer  
concerned with that: he grabs  
his weapons and follows  
the blood into the forest.

## **Peter has gotten a new job**

Peter has gotten a new job  
as a bookstore clerk from one to ten  
down by the river  
in a sunny little house.  
I've come to visit and I'm thumbing through  
a book of poems  
by Robinson Jeffers' brother.  
Incoherent but  
more interesting than this.

Out of the river rises a bum of a blob  
dripping with water and begging a yen.  
While he shivers  
I call him a louse  
and say This isn't Nippon, you!  
So off he roams  
probably back to his mother.  
He was a nut  
because he wasn't a fish.

## Earth

Two people cannot see the same way but they can teach  
One another their ways. One gives up body and soul  
To follow the flow of the historical woman until  
He can close his eyes and glide through mountains effortlessly.  
He gives up earth and he gives up air, he gives up being touched  
But he forgets to give up desiring to be touched. Then  
One day the sun is hot or the moon is full, he desires  
Uncontrollably to be touched and flies smack  
Into the mountain, never comes out the other side.

You live to prepare yourself to die. You leave behind  
A wreck of strewn projects or a few icy pearls.  
Incredibly you leave your voice behind saying  
Over and over again the same words. You leave  
Memories of yourself behind as pictures in the heads  
Of people who wish you weren't dead or hadn't been alive.  
They wash the pictorial body, shave it, comb your hair  
The way they liked it best, cut a little here, add a little there,  
Then easily, easily and kindly forget you.

Two hundred years later the wall crumbled and burned.  
The ashes were spread logically across the plain,  
A mathematical formula could describe the distribution.  
The ashes were like seeds and from them  
A thousand higher walls were made. It was lovely  
To see those walls breathing imperceptibly Shifting  
their glances so slowly as to go unnoticed  
Behaving as if they were dead.

If I breathe, they breathe. If they are ash, so am I.  
Having tried to separate myself and failed  
I donate my body to science. The wall needs me  
To breathe and hear. It gets my ears and lungs.  
Trees need me to cast their night spells.  
Are they asleep or are they dancing  
A primitive fertility dance in the forest?  
I choose trees because they can watch everything

From the distance of longevity.  
To them I donate my soul.

Everything should be made of earth.  
Earthen walls, earthen homes, earthen bodies, earthen sex.  
Nothing should be made of air. Earth should inhale  
And exhale air. Air should whip and caress earth.  
Air should dry it out and crumble it. Earth.  
Water should wet it and dissolve it. Earth.  
What is the function of fire? Fire makes earth permanent  
And then fire makes earth into air. Water  
Makes earth into mud. Mud makes earth into homes.  
Homes make earth into walls. Walls make the earth breathe.  
Breathing makes the earth crumble. Crumbling  
Makes the earth seed.

## **A Yellow Rose**

I am thinking of the day  
    I came to you  
        with a yellow rose

a passing businessman  
    said hello to you  
        you put it in your hair

today is like that day  
    the sun is hot  
        on a crowded city

we are discovering each other  
    anew  
        in the crowd

## Night

Whereas last night the full moon made the night resemble a cold day  
Today clouds give the night its old shrouded, crowding demeanor.  
Ghosts stalk the forest gleaming (at me) from just beyond the circle of  
light thrown by the fire.

You, old night, I wish to make my peace with.

Eventually I know even I (I think, I'm told) must enter naked, a cold north wind  
in winter or a gentle September breeze instructing my sole spirit . . . .

There exist powers overwhelming for the human body and mind.

The aborigine's untold night of meditation on the mountain, coming  
away with his life-long totem and power.

The mountains tonight are alive with benevolence that could (for one  
lacking humility and respect or the hunter's perspicacity) flame up  
into insane malevolence.

You, old complete night, I wish to make my peace with

Being utterly a creature of the water and the light.

Night on the mountain, the human animal alone, without cohorts,  
speech and music inane without other ears to listen

Yet blasting, blasting against the night

Even after fire dies, its skin still the halo beacon to nothing in nothing,

Mind pouring on the electricity, outward to friends back in the cities

Receiving in return only strange sounds.

The ear must differentiate and protect.

Just as fluids within keep the body balanced so must the ear when the  
eyes are blinded by night

Balance the mind. Eyes, heroes of the day, enjoying orgiastically  
autumnal delights

Are now slaves to every primeval passion of the mind.

But the ears: it is a sound they have heard before and can identify.

Night, old strange night (were we once acquainted?), I wish to be at  
peace with you by becoming knowledgeable.

Fear like fire clings to its fuel.

I wish to dampen passionate fears by attuning the five senses to all that  
is normal dark and day.

To know the habits and cycles of everything I live beside

And my inner spirit become a silent tide attuned to nature's lunacy.

## **Absolutely Smooth Mustard**

## **I prefer to sleep and dream**

I prefer to sleep and dream than face  
this solitary room. No pity, I go on  
without a drink and look with gay eyes on  
my future in a forest or a city, someplace.

It's very amusing, what a middle class boy  
like me came to, isolated in the northwest  
corner of this island, caught in the deepest  
loneliness and yet in my heart all this joy.

Surrounded by buildings I am not at peace  
yet strangely I am, not like a zen  
master but as a man in the wind who when  
most despairing and oppressed is most released.

Old records, old unloved books. Sara's cheek  
is a source of pleasure, but she has a friend  
with whom to share it and can depend  
on him for companionship throughout the week.

So I ride the subway home. I look at faces  
and they look at mine, mute, animated spirits.  
A crazy woman pushes aboard and exhibits  
herself. To her, the passengers' glances are caresses.

## Not enough heat

Not enough heat. Snow. Cold. and now rain  
on Tuesday morning. traffic sloshes to work.  
it is cloudy for the second straight day. the snow  
was magical only for an hour. businesses might  
have closed. now it's melting in a cold rain.

is the city depressing me? i ride the subway  
and the people no longer seem beautiful. the noise  
is just noise, no longer the power of God. i sit  
slumped, still at ease, but no longer playing  
with the eyes of other passengers. glance at the ads  
and then go to sleep with my eyes open.

it is winter, and it should have its effect. the  
difficult, dangerous season when weak creatures die  
and the strong barely survive. why expect  
much heat to mitigate it and the happiness of Spring?  
accept cold and discomfort and the bad sound made.  
it is a poor city, the seasons touch us. there is  
not enough heat. snow. cold. and now rain.

## **Almost Spring**

Almost Spring but only February  
almost February but only January  
only January but almost March.

Almost everyday I play my trumpet  
almost every night I ride the trains  
every midnight I'm on the trains.

Almost every morning I turn on the radio  
every weekday I go to work  
every midnight I ride the trains home.

Everyday I spend at work  
almost every weekend I play the trumpet  
Saturday I ride the train downtown.

Almost every night I get some sleep  
only everyday I go to work  
every midnight I'm on the trains.

Almost Spring but only February  
almost February but only January  
only January but almost March.

## Chinese Sonnets

I

These days I forgive myself everything. After all I'm alone and unhappy so I give myself a little treat whenever possible. On summer nights I remember the good women who loved me but live with their husbands now.

This is not an easy life but I'm not afraid. Despair leads me to talk too much about myself rather than be transcendent. I trade push for shove with the world and sitting above the river feel I could move the globe.

If I could stay out here on the roof all day, get stoned and read the I Ching, write a few lines and forget my troubles, I could be happy today. Then I would go to work tomorrow.

But I rise at dawn and drink some orange juice. It is good with ice. Buy a newspaper going to the train.

II

In this lousy life we work five days a week. An Indian could gather a week's food in three days and go swimming in the hot afternoon. The pleasure civilization offers is a drive past fast food joints on Merrick Avenue to a sea food restaurant in Freeport.

Almost everyone I know is dissatisfied with life as we have been pressed into it. The system gives us cancer and heart attacks and repressed sexuality when I was born to be sensuous and enjoy another's body. Instead I slug the world and the world slugs back.

I have five minutes to finish this poem. I remember the smooth women I have known, remaining in bed all morning. Our big ambitions are our curse. We uphold our end of the society.

### III

While it's true that I'm not happy, I'm amused  
at the craziness I have let myself in for.  
Hopefully it's only one year of sleeping in my clothes  
without a woman and drinking plenty of wine after work.

I listen to someone start a car downstairs, but that  
is not my world, nor do I know any of these eight million  
I live beside in the crotch of many waters. Above  
Broadway Saturday, the geese fly south for winter.

This morning, in twenty minutes, I will go downstairs wearing  
a shirt and tie and jacket and carrying a briefcase.  
I will tear myself from the pleasures of tea and breakfast  
to arrive at the office where each day my happiness is challenged.

I accepted humanity as a natural part of nature. When I  
did that I had to pay the rent and get a job, too.

### IV

A famous samurai crosses a plain in winter  
looking for work. He comes to a farm community  
but the farmers have no use for his skills. So  
he removes his swordbelt and sets to work digging.

It is temporary employment while the seasons change.  
The sky is gray and all of the women are occupied  
warming their homes. None look up from their work  
except to glance at the strong samurai digging.

Why is he digging in the frozen ground? The poet  
knows little about farming and less about fighting.  
He has put the samurai to work at a pointless task.  
It is too early in the year to begin digging.

Nobody pities the pointless samurai or gives him food.  
He ties on his sword and starts chopping wood.

## V

These bird songs, this January morning, I look  
for a way out of life. The Texas woman tells Marc  
stories about the football players she's fucked.

Although I complain like a blue jay about it, life  
has accepted me. Walking uptown with Stephanie it's clear  
how much the Empire State Building I've become.

Nevertheless, we make our own decisions. To fight war  
or not. They are all my friends, I work for their success,  
but choose my poison independently. For me, laziness  
and anonymity when I could have been a star.

Newspapers indicate there is much to discuss besides myself  
but the Muse seems to disagree. My few friends and the age  
will look quaint as a daguerreotype in the light  
of the holocaust. I kiss the girl of my dreams.

## VI

Again it is almost Spring. It gives me only pain  
to think back on past Springs when I seem to have been  
someone else. The people who lived then live today  
in the same bodies but changed in every other way.

Of course I must continue, with or without good humor.  
What was amusing in my youth, that God's finger  
could move me to another square, now makes me fear  
old friends who are dead to me and yet still here.

The veil of life is thin if one doesn't believe in mystery.  
Frequently it blows and reveals the thickening body,  
alone, without a soul. One hopes for a consort who  
through her own pain has become gentle and simple too.

If only I could share this life with a good wife.  
But she would only be unhappy and bring me grief.

## South Bronx

While I'm reading a poem about it on the previous page  
the girls come over to visit their boyfriends and dance  
in high shoes and perfume. Their legs are strong and their voices high.  
And the guys get high and hard thinking about what the girls are like  
behind their eyes.

That says more about me than reality. And it's exactly four lines.  
Ken Patchen would say his angel smells sweet and sassy.  
I feel the bony fingers of mine who has been working to stay alive.

Enough small poetry. One must conceive of a project—  
say a poem about a bridge—or stop writing  
and instead walk over the bridge at sunset and see the city in a nuclear war  
the clocks, the Watchtower and the docks gone and no smoke.

I still exist but I'm late for my job. I'm dressed well  
in honor of true love and Spring which both outlast the holocaust.  
The manager cans me with the cold hard eyes of one who accepts the  
rules entirely.

Goodbye to the rows of dead metal desks and goodbye  
to those who can take it longer than I.

The guys downstairs do not read poetry and very little prose.  
The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money does not  
occupy their minds.  
The sex pistils of the mountain daisy is no concern of theirs  
and the man upstairs who plays the horn is less than a curiosity but  
makes more noise.

When I feel like this nothing matters and this is good—  
get warm with wine, turn out the lights and turn up the radio—  
if only there were a woman who liked the down and out life too.

In the end someone sticks a gun in my face in the South Bronx.  
How I got among the fire escapes in the sooty alley I cannot say  
but it is one of my earliest memories. Perhaps it is my grandmother  
holding my hand  
or one of the clowns. I say Drop that goddamn gun and he blows me  
away.

## For Spring No Hesitation Is Great

Today is April 1<sup>st</sup>. Transit strike.  
Mayor Koch accepting the fact. Myself,  
far from crisis central, in North  
Manhattan, measuring the temperature  
of my apartment. In the sun it is  
warm. The crows have returned again  
for Spring.

Today life and the city are o.k. Watching  
cat in the morning sun. Drinking tea.  
My 1300 dollars will melt like summer  
snow, but in the meantime, like samurai  
I do not show my fear. I remain still  
as on the subway and prepared to fight.

I am sitting under the emergency brake  
when a coiffured Latin woman rushes aboard.  
The doors close but she decides she wants  
out. She bangs on the door as the train begins  
to move. I see it happen on her face,  
she finds the red cord and pulls,  
no hesitation.

Maybe someone's hand or foot was caught  
in the door. Maybe she's just selfish and  
impetuous, got on the uptown not the downtown  
side. Maybe the friends she could have  
been with didn't get aboard. Whatever  
her reason, she acted and the train obeyed.

Some of the passengers sit through the  
whole thing, some of us stand. Myself,  
I stand, look for the hand caught in the door.  
Later, walk home through the pouring rain.  
Today is April 1<sup>st</sup>. Transit strike.  
Sky blue, temperatures mild. Democracy  
is great.

## How cool!

How cool!  
this early summer evening  
after a day so oppressive  
even we New Yorkers move painstakingly.  
The breeze in sumac trees  
so why am I not more content?  
The electricity went off at the bank,  
spontaneous bank holiday,  
so I'm broke, drinking water.

All my needs except love  
fulfilled. Woman  
opens her windows. How cool!  
this summer evening  
in New York, dense New York  
the jets overhead  
the people on the ground suffering  
and struggling toward vague goals  
or goals clear as Harry Helmsley's.

How cool and refreshing  
this glass of ice water  
after today's hot pavement, clothes.  
During the afternoon heat  
I sleep in my underwear.  
What a city I murmur to myself  
looking at its map. Big,  
Jamaica Bay to Inwood,  
the Battery to Pelham Bay.

Nowadays novels need  
a few cities to move the plot.  
New York, Saigon, Paris.  
The protagonist  
does not walk in the park. He  
uses his car to get around fast.  
How cool this evening in New York!  
Lost among the bars and industry,  
moonrise over Bronx.

## Change

I am feeling the shock of fast change. How to cope with it is of course the question. Listen to Beethoven through the neighbor's window? Look up from the page? Appreciate doves even though they are so numerous? I seem to have limitless choices although this cannot be true. Could I have become a computer specialist? Sure! How to remain still in the ever-maddening mandala. To remain still on the outer edge of the wheel is to ride laughingly and pluck at the gold key. I force myself down into the crawl of the black vortex New York until I feel the strong oscillations gather rhythm and expel me or accept me.

What do I find within the black electric walls of this unique vortex? I find there is more space between people than I'd ever dared to hope. That my efforts are unnecessary and hopeless. I cancel my subscriptions and stop eating. I embrace wild roots and run through streets with arm around my girl.

\*

\*

\*

What is important.

That question.

I part my lips in the middle

and blow

eat corn chips, dippy doodles

make love, eat grapes.

In their mere chronology  
events have no relation. How was making love  
different from eating grapes. Differentiation

is essential to bring order from chaos. The chaos  
is the accelerated change created by our own species  
whose consummations have a quantum effect  
on the environment.

But the chaos  
existed long before, and long after us  
in both more serene and violent forms.  
Again a duality, but here's why.

For  
each duality may then be said to be in a dual  
relationship with another duality, forming  
cubes.

These cubes are difficult to join  
with other cubes, unless first they are  
somewhat melted.

We were traveling among  
these cubes, maneuvering  
through a static array of equidistant points  
but finding it impossible to avoid striking them.

So why the difficulty adapting. Because no species  
before us had to adapt to its own effects upon  
environment? No, every species must

but our adaptations (of the world) are so successful  
(such fabrications!) One green, one brown

Two dead leaves  
sleep-touching  
Then a breeze!

\*

\*

\*

Loveliness and loneliness  
these periodic  
auras

surrender to greater force, power, strength  
whatever it is called, the clog of heels  
upstairs to the door, turning of the  
key, the taking out of the  
garbage down below, car  
starting, placed in  
gear, cat  
meowing

anyway, for myself, personally, speaking only

for myself, because although the Parks  
Department rakes the leaves as it  
did last autumn, to keep them  
from clogging the sewer system,  
I am in a heightened  
state of vibration  
Quivering

like a long steel pipe banged hard against an  
iron beam. The hard hat feels it in  
his hand (on the gears) but  
great buildings are built that  
nature destroys in time  
with a little wind  
water, fire

air, you glide down through the limpid air  
toward the ninety-seven story abandoned structure  
remnant of an earlier civilization  
abandoned but not yet entirely  
swept away in slow waves  
of change.

## Material Life

Absolute science and art of being whole at  
one and under no delusion that  
mankind (or nature) give a shit  
whether you amount  
to something or not.  
Narrowed down  
nothing

nothing but matter matters, matter, content  
of life (serious, love it) hate  
death, for the hell of it, to  
see what it's like in  
the heart of  
darkness.

Deeper and deeper I go  
but who would bother to kill me  
or love me? Belonging to the drums  
of wooful war I  
woof and bay like  
every other  
dog.

Down I go to the depths of material life  
the material is spirit wrought  
by the material world. The  
drum and jet plane  
the bird and sumac  
the pollen  
seed.

No answer is forthcoming for the young fool  
importunes to ask too frequently  
the fool's question. What  
is my next move. He  
steps lightly and does  
not seem to care

quite where.

The

material world is reality, my friend  
and sadness is the spiritual root  
without which the love-nut  
may be reached only  
by stretching  
the emotions  
bare

raw, where desert delights exhibit  
movement in the sunlit light. Where  
none find their way  
without following leaders  
sometimes the wrong way.  
The path  
is

apart from the dance or the dancer who  
cutting cross country laughs  
at his perennial fright of being  
caught outdoors, out of sight  
alone with the wind and rain  
for days on end  
in hiding.  
Up

on the roof, the telephone ringing,  
books getting delivered to the library  
free, gratis, no fire, no flood  
a meager understanding  
of what rolls  
the earth.  
Gravity

rolls the earth (and may sometimes rock it)  
each of us achieving the gravity of a planet  
and pulling the world apart with our loves.  
Taking existence beyond the limits

set for it, into  
the universe  
beyond

We went out beyond the surf  
into the adirondack of trees waiting,  
wanting nothing, mountains  
wanting to grow slowly.

## This World of Dew

I see a green tree. It is all I want.  
A dry rocky mountain and a hawk  
satisfy. To die spiritually in  
the hot sun and the body go on  
climbing. To take the paths among  
the rocks and mahogany bush.  
To feed on rock lichen and blue  
sky. To not need a house.

To leave my mind in the foothills.  
To climb everything but blind. In  
the deer shade of the cool aspens.  
Forgotten by the work force and the shrew.  
Bored as a badger disturbed at  
its stream. Free singing as the stream  
cutting the gorge. Cool as a hummingbird  
in its wet spray. Caterpillar fur.

I stay in the mountains unknown.  
The roof soot of the city calls me back.  
The museum women shaking their bodies  
at the stuffed tigers. The meditating  
curators and entrepreneurs. Burro.

\* \* \*

Old Basho, early Spring, took fond leave of his friends,  
closed his small house at edge of village,  
and with one peasant companion climbed the long narrow road  
to the North.

Blessed morning!  
the day I left life behind  
but not this world of dew.

## Peaches

Wherever peaches grow I go and pick 'em.  
When they get ripe I try and swipe 'em.  
The farmer runs out with a shotgun and wonders where's the varmint  
gone?  
I'm hiding by the railroad tracks stacking the peaches I've found.

Then a freight train about a mile long rolls by hauling a bucket of rain.  
I hop aboard while beautiful clouds gather to the north.  
I put my peaches in the bucket and lug it to a hidden part of the train.  
The rain begins, the night looms in, it's summer and it's thoughts and  
warm.

To the clacking rumble and the patter I close my eyes and dream.  
An earthquake swallows up the people who wear horrible masks of  
fright as their daily tasks are trampled.  
In a favorite movie theater an illumined lady puts her hand in mine,  
warm mouths, breath, skin, hair wing-soft, whole bodies, wind,  
bare.  
I open my eyes at sunrise there's a steady glow of light around.

If you can believe in God, you can believe the mountains go from purple  
to green.  
While the last partier meanders home to bed the first farmer is up to  
milk his bread.  
Fruit of the world ripens audibly and cities make a silent, distant sound.  
Kind of a lonely guy stretches, rubs his eyes, pees out a passing train,  
has a breakfast of peaches and rainwater.

## **To Eat a Continent Is Not So Strange**

Under a full night of black night stars, shooting and shining, turning a world of sun worlds, everything universe and cool wind, mountains of dark sound and a stream's breath song, I think often, until dawn, of your strong love. All of these true things becoming mine as a shore. And we inside as a breath baby. Listen, life darling long, four horses grazed nearby my head last night, like good luck. Struck thus I write: your love is greater than the real celestial globe.

How is it the powerful night attends you like a magician his queen? Something thicker and velvet than deep sea foam for you swirl lover. Something true to the events of our lives, the clear mountainous horizon of vision. Over the vast green earth O population of human and animal lovers to chewing very cud, our bond is fulfilled as a mother. A tremendous earthquake couldn't exist without us.

## Searching for Symbols in a Town Without a River

I begin the day buying yogurt in a small  
favorite grocery store. The clerk  
a man of few pretenses was making jokes  
about his wife, how they fight in bed.  
Discovering the better stores in the community.  
In a given day, isolated from friends,  
I speak to few people. An old woman  
asks me for directions to the post office  
or I speak to a stranger over the phone about night work.

At home my every thought comes to the counterpoint of a dream:  
a girl I love surprises me by knocking on the window.  
I ply my arts all day alone.  
After this silence like being hidden away in the woods  
in a cabin, bored  
but owing no member of society an explanation,  
invitation to a party. A flow of wine and devilish drugs  
and quickly I am making a fool of myself.

My new friends like me  
but when they think about me at all,  
they wonder.

Wandering home  
through the midnight air, alone again,  
free, admiring  
the ghostly houses of my new neighbors  
by new moonlight.

## Penetrating the Unknown

While waiting but not watching for the sun to set, perhaps the bullfrogs are creating the shadows with their croaks, my friend screams out because he has been bitten by a fly. He is not quiet enough so the flies obtain special pleasure from teasing him. Meanwhile bluebirds skirt the lake surface like the most perfectly designed fighter planes in twos or threes and argue rising up on their tails into the air. While insects prey upon and tease the bare flesh and blood of we humans, they fear the silent violence, the sudden huge presences of these family birds.

A larva with a leaf tip for a cocoon descends a white birch by a long thread. We free ourselves from our writings to observe phenomenon. Then thinking about dinner. The flight of J. Krishnamurti, the eagle guru says even artists (after physicists and mathematicians) may penetrate the unknown if not too absorbed in their own emotions and imaginations. We common people too who loving our wives can love everyone.

What eyesight the bluebirds have to swoop the lake from shore for a flying insect or descend from fifty feet on a thin straw grass and return to chew absent-mindedly! Just fun having song sung among men. As for the syntax, a daisy could swing it unthinking and coast. Along the beehive rocks ants crawl on connecting interlacing instructions. All around us and inside too as if stars were unseen but present it's true. So a man desires breakfast with his lady; could it be more amusing, material or smell?

As the eyesun descends below spun clouds, spirit or the eagle or the drum? Round. The dialectic obscure couldn't be more better said. So round and serious. To love everyone with clearer vision than a bluebird or a lake is to transcend the innocence of insect and take flight action and feed the babies of fate. Phew! Dinner outside the cocoon. I brought myself a student upon the hill or mountain and said to myself I said Obo rebop in summer sweater and what less overweight can carry test uphill so slow? Presently, reformed, informed by the bluebird's eagle spirit, clear cleanhead, I return coagulating mightily ideas the bites of insects ow! to breakfast home and everywhere unknown. Hearing bird with clear conscience echo make.

## Morning Chores

As if the sun intended this habitual tendency to make the body healthy I do. First, the brain believes itself what a mistake if it's blue. The eyes blue breeze sky praise God some beautiful living world earth. Good as a proper prayer could good. Then a leg moves. What a miracle course of muscle goes to greatness human and divine. Morning moving as good a feeling.

An arrow of cloud on the sky points the way. Everyday look you and you find an ancient new way. A list of the components contains the river's horizontal reserve deep dull and dark as a dream, the blue sky and her daughter the gentle breeze and her great husband the morning sun. After these, men and their nice machines and their morning chores.

When I get up I brush my teeth mundane. I put fruit in a bowl by the bed and brew tea. I feed the cats animal meats preserved and cans of caught fish organs and oils complex. Their shits being different from mine cleaning. I sweep the floors with a broom and a dust. And knock in the nails. I check the mailbox and search the street a fence a neck a stretch for the mailman and imagine the mail. My doing this opens the windows and unlocks the doors.

Next I water thirty thirsty plants important. The ferns smell of earth spray. This good thing lasts into the wee hours of your life remember. Open goodness goes to heaven sky on earth or in a sense four seasons. I open the back door porch and a black cat morning. You wonder why. A childhood breeze makes the feelings in the mind play music. The mystery of night is now a mystery of morning. Something of nostalgia wine.

The center the stomach the body the sex. It propels the people's body all day. From morning to night a woman a man. Everything fitting and grand and in through the door healthy, nothing and wise. The grass on the hill of a willing riverbank. Welcome and good morning.

## Rain

Five days of steady rain. A hurricane approaches the city. The streets are flooding but the wildlife is thriving. Every person wears a raincoat or carries an umbrella. Indoors is cozy. Movie theaters are crowded in the early afternoon. We who live alone are more isolated; those who live together are more aggravated. The heavens are having a fine time belting it out.

A fly is swept from a windowpane in early August but men's machines are almost oblivious to the storm. Except the wires in Mr. Glyckman's Volvo are wet. People's dreams begin to take place in the water. When they awake their thoughts are floating in the puddle of night.

Raindrops slap the leaves and splash the ground. Travel is not advised, wherever you are it seems like home. Next month dirt on the shingles of the house will remind the painter of the great rain. Even the rain no longer makes an impression on the earth, only a ripple in the rain. If there are mountains or the sea they seem more like brother and sister than father and mother these days. Summer feels like winter.

Children are less visible and mothers are women who were once girls. Nightclubs are full and the listeners listen more seriously. Music continues but the rain muse has her say. Lovers are less joyous and more happy. The full moon's influence is muted by clouds, the blood between people is thicker. The Himalayas come to the Rockies and the Rockies reach for the Alps. The imagination comes to the market.

The roads leading down to the river are empty and wet and the bright painted houses along them are quiet. A dog and a cat under a porch patient and unperturbed. A love-gnarled man with a brown beard and walking stick walks in the middle of the street. If a curtain moves, a woman wonders how many days he's been out in the rain like a child. But only the water winding back to the sea, a mad naked saint at the Last Judgement, welcomes him home.

## White Waits

A blank, unpainted space. It is considered one of the identifying characteristics of both Chinese and Japanese painting. Blank space is not simply unpainted areas; it is important to the composition of a painting and carries the same "weight" as the painted areas, often serving to set off or balance the painted motifs. As early as the 10c in China, ink landscape painters attempted to capture the spirit of the scenery around them; in their paintings blank space functioned as "spirit". —JAANUS

Rather than put myself in the sky which is so  
complete with blue and clouds, I make a space  
in a line of people climbing a trail in the mountains.

All night I work on my thinking and waiting until  
at dawn I see the iron clouds shift sunlight  
and listen to the years changing my life with a laugh.

I say thank you to all the influences that a plant  
like me goes on growing fearless as a daisy.  
I need no robes, I wear boxer shorts in the morning.

By afternoon I am transformed by the light from my beard.  
Some girls think I'm cute. At first I'm shy but soon  
I take my wooden chair among a bench of kids from Boston.

At night I fall in love with the first person to stop  
his car. Because I am a well of love for my lady.  
The drone of stars slowly changing places in the sky.

When I fall asleep by the river it is like I'm dead.  
This is so. I use my coat for a pillow and lay my head  
at the root of a tree. Shade my eyes from the sun, white waits.

## **In a Day**

The one power that a man can have is in the perfection of himself. He changes with the weather but of this he's unaware.

A churlish man and his teacher are walking along a road when he is suddenly instructed to look down a side street. Spring trees in leaf.

I go in front of the mirror and observe the changes to come in my face. I turn my chair so I can see out all the windows.

What is right fits the time perfectly. It is all out of my hands. In this the peace is supreme. Yet my hands embrace the pot.

In the morning the air is cold and clear at the river. Then clouds and the confusion in people. At dusk the sky is clear again.

## **Absolutely Smooth Mustard**

There is absolutely nothing to do. Some people fall in love. I go have a cheese sandwich with mustard. Watch skyscraper lights from the bed. Look at the books and decide to read none of the dry words. The cheese sandwich is good, and orange juice. It's cold in the kitchen so I go back to bed even though it's Spring.

Some people go dancing in fish net stockings. They find a good time—but exactly what this means—it's not more important than a star. Quite what is this waiting. Tonight I could disappear and the world might not miss me until next year. I remember passionate nights with some of the women I've known. Two sides of a smooth stone.

## The Dark Green Conifers

another day in the woods. on Strawberry ridge  
looking out over undulating green hills to  
the next great wall of mountains. the last  
morning clouds left from last night's storm  
hanging in the valley mistily. the sun eventually  
burns them away.

the respect between old Paul Karlsen and I continues  
to exist. even though he's a Mormon and I'm a fallen  
New Yorker. the work is comparatively easy, lifting  
hundred pound bags, so you can just imagine what  
we do other days. in fact, it's fun, especially for  
young Bates. we get all white (and our lungs dusty).

on the way to and from the work site I read  
in *Silent Spring*, the chapter against herbicides, gathering  
inspiration for the upcoming controversy. in the end  
perhaps I'll be fired for refusing to lay down Tordon  
beads. realizing this, as I drive with Bates,  
I see the dark green conifers and begin to miss them.

Rocks and rattlesnakes, bluebells  
and mountain daisies, grasses and cactuses, mahogany  
bush, lodgepole pine and quaking aspen, lush forest  
and dry sun-tortured mountainside, wind and seed  
carried by wind, ants, streams, hummingbird  
and hawk, deer, badger, ground squirrel, wolverine.

## Snake Creek

Tired body aches. Long walk on starry night—  
ears attuned for bear at creek, or cougar.  
Nothing, not a doe.

But that afternoon  
came upon a healthy young buck in a meadow.  
High up. And a hawk left a feather for me.  
Old, old stands of lodgepole pine, grey bark  
like wrinkled hides of elephants. Thick carpet  
of dead needles.

Thirst. Sit at snowbank  
for an hour eating snow. Burn tongue.  
To soon after stumble upon a pond and the place  
that a creek springs from the mountain. Water  
indescribable. Eat ravenously and drink deep  
gulps.

Climb highest rocky peak at dusk. Razor-back  
ridge. Mother hawk scream nearby. Must  
backtrack and then go straight down near dark  
feet fall through layers of scrub pine, hands  
grab for the live stalks only support against  
broken bone.

Choose steep narrow bed of loose rocks,  
surely waterfall in some other season and descend  
on ass and all fours, feet first always fearful  
it will end in an uncontrollable hundred foot drop.  
Trickles of water nearing bottom.

Cracked hands,  
raw behind, cross final snowbank and attain road  
along Snake Creek.

## **Brother Death**

## Take the Ripe Plum

How far from nature and life it is  
the gray clouds, airplanes in them  
the night cooing and pigeons roosting  
Sirma's garden gone to roses and seed

That airplane overhead!  
pointing the way  
pointing to war

War being an aggravated condition of what  
we already know

Flowering beneath the noise  
of yet another jet passing overhead.

\* \* \*

Why this much sadness in a world so beautiful?  
We are sad for the weariness of everything, including earth  
(that will go on tropically flowering long after we are gone)  
we

who are nothing  
in powerful time's  
grip

history, passionate history, coffee between  
neighbors.

\* \* \*

Enter into alliance  
With the sweet darkness, night!

Night and day, day and night  
Everybody knows when the moon is bright.

We dance by the light of the moon  
All night.

\* \* \*

We dance by the light of the moon.  
We dance by the light of the moon and setting sun.

We  
drive we crow and call  
three pigeons!  
and make the world alive  
even bricks.

Jets  
two pigeons!  
Milk-skinned doves  
enmesh

Two gray-skinned sharks, jets,  
embrace in the sky, a blue green oil truck takes  
the hill, cobblestoned, in low  
steady gear.

\* \* \*

Zazen position  
to remain so  
unmoved  
yet moved  
by the stillness

the movement of the car uphill part  
of your system of beliefs  
unmoved by it, parked  
necking in the front seat  
hawks diving for pigeons' eggs

and so you are compelled to move

by the force that created you. but you  
impose your own small order  
departing from traditions  
human history understands

a mutant

such as those currently developing  
the human mind beyond its past capacities.

\* \* \*

Two straw sandals  
blue jay call  
two sea gulls

\* \* \*

The jets return  
flying low.  
Laying low

and breathing low  
mists  
of pure noise.

## Monk's shaved pate

Monk's shaved pate  
thick pelt around edge  
leans over book

leans over book above river  
reciting lines, reading scriptures, preparing  
first for his personal salvation, then  
for those of other men.

He prays, sweetly  
serenely, steadfastly  
participating

in the broad rhythmic thrusting of the river  
and the earth.

Completely exposed  
to its vibration  
he vibrates passively  
yet passionately

putting effort into remembering some  
of the ancient, past taboos  
and practices  
Performing

the art of total presence  
and abstinence.

Absent from worldly  
life, abstaining wholly  
from touching  
the black girl

becoming part  
of her beads  
her sweaty underwear

commanding a full dress view  
of her stimulus,  
her honey.

## **Bone. Mist.**

### 1

Last night dinner  
with four couples  
points out the difficulties in living together  
and apart.

Even the  
son of a wealthy doctor, disdainful of  
inebriates more artificial than the moon,  
full, full of joy for humanity  
and life

suffers deepening depressions  
like the mist outside a lamplight.

It was a good restaurant  
expensive but comfortable  
in the alternate life-style way  
the cook was a hairy  
talented clown  
and we clowned though beneath each  
facade  
was turmoil and decay.

We lay  
like bones in a boneyard  
and find joy (I do anyway)  
in the bone dance  
to bone music.

### 2

Without a thought for slash fuel  
or deer, the mist  
deepens and deteriorates upon  
the mountain. The mountain  
completely unaware  
of its greenness. The ice  
is centuries old.

A red-tailed hawk  
floats above the unit  
observes what small mammals, bones  
are in the clearcut

Awaits  
the moment  
to strike

or fades away almost  
silent as the mist. I dream  
of it, though I am awake  
among my co-workers, the bullet  
system zinging cut logs down  
to the road, firewood.

3

Pardon  
me you mountains  
for coming to the edge  
without mystical knowledge  
or belief, only love and wrinkled  
eyes for the women and men who  
light the fires and wield the chain saws,  
drive the cat, swing the ax, I

completely laugh among them like a god  
yes, although my face is a mask of hate  
and pain, what god does not come to this field  
of flowers out of fear and confusion and chains  
product of the hot anvil and hot engine  
of human history.

This duality, these arm-breaking dualities  
this volcanic eruption erupting from some  
confluence of beheaded forces, one  
powerful with eternity, one  
blinding with intensity, meet

and in the middle is me.

It's slicker'n two wet snots out there today,  
my crew boss warns,  
mind yr bones.

Life bests my best synthesis of it  
so I pray  
for a happy combination  
of sun and mist.

## Sunset

Sunset, quiet, except  
for happy birthday to neighbor's child,  
virgo, and all that means, purity  
of morality, inability to scheme,  
whatever else the stars dictated.

Woodpecker climbs oak, Connecticut.  
Not ten years ago this mountain was  
completely forested, untouched  
since early arrival of Europeans.  
Now my parents' home and others stand  
in new clearings. The birds  
do not seem to mind. Sing,  
and deer occasionally visit, from where?  
Out of the pre-historic past.

That I must die  
is my every third thought.  
On my hands and knees, cold sweat,  
my own body murdering me.  
I meet death with the philosophy  
I lived in life. Acceptance  
of the loneliness, the unregarding  
beauty. There is that shoreline  
along the straits to Puget Sound,  
in mist, the generations  
of sea birds nesting on the water.

## Polar Bear Mugs Wino

Have I ever been profoundly lost? Yes. Railroad tracks and a river wide as the Amazon, yet lost. Living in the intense sunshine of northern New York summer, but lost in the shade of a gazebo. And here? Here I am enclosed in a tomb of porcelain machinery. With another winter passing its calling card in at the window. The warm steam no longer cutting the rough edge. Wearing wool sweater nights. The freedom of summer gone and only one fuck. What a nightmare, what a strange dream, life on planet, winter all around.

A system, they call it a system. I call it an evolved anarchy. Repetition, never. What do I know. Repetition, every two thousand years. Coming of a frost, coming of a fire. When nature proves furious beyond remembrance. Polar bear mugs wino.

\* \* \*

### CUNNILINGUS

Tall, attractive, talented WM, 31, trumpet player, takes pleasure in performing cunnilingus with clean attractive women. Age, race, marital status no object. All replies answered.

Marlowe went to bed. He had a headache. Used an empty bottle for a teddy bear/sap. In the middle of the night, three secret men approached the rock he slept under. They did not see him there, the fire had long ago gone out. But they'd seen it across the valley, and tried to estimate. They were close.

What do I care. They did this, he did that, they did this and this and that. He used his feet, took off his shoes. It mauled him to death in two minutes of the first round. Would have been better for him if it happened faster. Never got his knife out of his pocket. But he lived, with one eye after that.

\* \* \*

What do you do with a drunken sailor early  
in the morning?  
You pull that sailor out of bed by his hairy  
moorings.

Why should anybody believe this, this tiresome outpouring of old moans and groans, grumbles about loneliness of life and dominance of telephone. This gamble on print, above the spoken, sung word. The meditative call to inhabitants of planet to kneel woefully and pray. No, to chant as if the planet were mending.

Mending rhymes with ending, why not. And television, radio appreciated. Drugs and booze, jagged bent faces, black wet rock. The mantle of moss ripped away. Period. Amen to men. Absolute magical ripcord.

## Alive

What is appropriate to say about the changes  
in your life. At 23 I was confused  
about a girl, under the sculpted pines.

Quietly, my friends and I contemplate death.  
A subject, until recently, unknown  
to us in such a variety of forms. Nuclear flash  
to exploding blood vessel in the brain, control  
eludes us. Heirs to a society adept with numbers,  
we run in the park and eat whole grains,  
increasing survival odds.

The city and the mountain are two hard anvils  
against which our hot lives are shaped. Love  
is the fire, and the need for love. To be shaped  
by the lover's warm hands, like clay.  
Alive, almost sure of it.

## **No cows to look at**

No cows to look at  
I hear the truck traffic

Everything changes like clouds  
The page this poem is on burns

Coming from the funeral with friends  
Talking on the telephone

No trucks to grind their gears  
I hear the minute hand moving

Birds and people inhabit the earth  
A black bear inhabits the earth, too

A rock in the sun  
Calligraphy brush

In a mind there is apocalypse  
No one can hear it

## **Crows, bluejays and pigeons**

Crows, bluejays and pigeons  
talk this morning. Closest we come  
to wilderness here. Autos screech  
and sirens scream. Only 7 a.m.  
My fat belly and possible cancer  
worry me. With a few months  
to live, I'd search the wilderness  
for some wisdom I missed. Or  
plain beauty of natural randomness.  
Knowing that, why do I remain  
in health? I must devote my  
present to my future existence.

The bluejays complain long after  
everyone else is silent.  
Love and friendship need the body  
and society. You belong, you want  
to belong, three days in wilderness  
and you gladly return to  
lovers' arms and plumbing.  
But one day you die. And this  
is the ideal independence you sought.  
This death is the pristine aloneness,  
the untouched wilderness and  
freedom from necessity! And  
it is certain. You do not save  
for it. You do not worry that  
you may miss your opportunity.

## East Harlem to the Grand Tetons

No words, oily body sweats, city summer.  
Desperate to get out and never return although  
stalled on Triborough Bridge I admired the skyline.

My city, my death, I did it my way.  
Counting your blessings a healthy activity,  
the park out my back window, a job that pays.

But I am losing strength to fight  
for the world in my imagination. Acceptance of reality  
makes me a fossil of society.

Basho in old age found strength to walk  
deep into the mountains. He visited famous sites  
up north. Po Chu-i traveled mountains in his dreams.

You can leave at any time. You can return  
without being seen. A way to learn  
your insignificance, freedom to have never been.

## Extraterrestrial Dust

The clouds take a little blue from the sky  
beyond, how beautiful the weather makes life  
seem. The sky is where the soul goes when  
the mind runs out of destinations. We love  
the mountains because that's where the earth  
meets the sky. If you just watch the sky an  
hour each day, lie back in the grass, you'll  
never be ill. When it rains your face  
becomes a holy bowl. Once I was a beggar, no  
cares, by railroad tracks. They too disappeared  
into the sky. A small town you could hold in your fist  
on the prairie. A big city easy to hold in your mind  
when you're in the sky. The clouds take a little blue  
from the sky. The sky takes a little blue from your soul . . .

## Working to Abandon Immortality

Let us accept this pain  
and some fear  
it will heighten autumn colors  
crack of clean air  
black crows in blue sky  
lake.

Rather than fight pain, falling  
asleep in front of tv,  
understand the full  
import of its situation  
in the body. Blessed  
once, cursed now  
only fear prevents  
full knowledge of experience.

The gray sky brings  
winter, no blame.  
The poet writes a few last poems  
or continues to live with his pain.  
In itself pain does not oppose  
life, and may enhance it  
or build character, create  
wisdom. But too much fear  
chokes the throat and burns  
the eyes. It  
destroys the last free  
assessment of life.

\* \* \*

Now I am going to live in my body  
as it is, almost fearlessly  
running in pain, working  
to abandon immortality  
as a hope, conceiving  
sunset after sunset

feeling what I feel.

On the streets I meet  
many beautiful young women  
curious to a certain extent  
what makes a man older.  
I can only say ten years  
and the hand that reaches through  
the cloud. I can say  
only the knowledge of mortality  
which makes us brothers and sisters  
with the animals. And only  
the acceptance which gives us wisdom  
to couple often and lovingly.

How am I going to live every day  
as my last, hoping happiness  
outgrows fear by an ounce  
or enough? By running, writing  
and loving. By moving uphill  
and downhill like a bear.  
By committing my last words  
to a powerful lord. How  
do the clouds accept my dead  
self? A rock thrown, a crow.

\* \* \*

When I am old  
young girls will not be frightened anymore.  
I will invite them  
to my seat and tell  
about the women I knew.  
I will tell about  
the clothes they wore  
and how they earned a living.  
I will try to remember  
what was important to them  
and if they had a favorite color

or knew how to divine.

Maybe I live and maybe I don't.  
The smoke is white or black.  
The winds are bright or dark.  
The coins are heads or tails.  
What have I been afraid of?  
Death is most of all like sleep.  
We spend so long apart  
after briefly knowing ourselves.  
I need you to know myself  
and without you all I know  
is sun.

## Is It Stress?

Is it stress,  
or loss, despair and survival  
we must discuss.

Stress is just the symptom  
of a universe intent to destroy the individual  
before it births new life. It sends the dogs  
after us, after the holocaust, in the tattered ruins  
of our city.

There is this despair and expectation  
of destruction, but somewhere there is still also  
simple sky blue,  
flowers among railroad ties,  
true love between sexual partners.

Is it sex,  
or love, companionship and reliableness  
we must expect.

Sex, only eternally laying  
my head at your queynt, can interest me sometimes.  
Your legs lead to a pleasure that seems infinite  
and smells perfect.

So there is this tenderness, a  
connection like a suction to the biological, ephemeral  
as snow on the ground,  
one elk in aspen,  
death and nothing less.

## The Shootist

In "The Shootist", J.B. Books is not feeling up to snuff.  
He has cancer. What are the concerns  
of a man dying.

To die  
commensurate with the way he lived his life.  
Books dies in a gunfight.  
McIntosh dies in the desert, under a broken wagon,  
fighting Indians.  
Norman Thayer will die of heart failure  
by the side of his wife, Ethel.

Two police officers  
die investigating a stolen moped at a gas station  
in the Bronx.  
One buys it between the eyes, the other in the back.  
The killer out on early parole  
from a manslaughter rap.  
The DA blames the judge, the judge blames the parole board,  
and the board says the jails are overcrowded.

What should I be doing, old turtle.  
Devote myself to re-order the world  
or crawl off to a lonely spot and preserve myself.  
We are trying  
to educate everyone to their individual capacities  
and see that all are fed, clothed and sheltered adequately.  
Because the suffering of one citizen makes suffering  
for another, the slow death of one sometimes makes  
the sudden murder of another.

There is this  
black rock we live on and its lovely mantle of green.  
It is all that is perfect. And everything of it is  
perfect that respects its integrity. On the subway  
I was amused to find, hidden in the confused  
mass of anonymous, bleak graffiti, unseen

by the studied, expressionless passengers,  
in pink, delicate script, vertically written,  
the word penis.

People are the element I live in.  
The world is pushy, we are bone,  
the numbers of us overwhelm.  
It is going to be hot again soon  
and the Bronx will actively resent it.

Books dies in Carson City,  
only two or three people will miss him at all.  
He died alone as he lived,  
with his enemies.

## **Brother Death**

Even in the last days you need clean clothes;  
therefore you may be found in the laundry  
mornings, small task against the larger one  
of not breathing. With simple joy  
men may forget to fear their deaths.  
Six inches of snow reminds us of its dominance  
in a pleasant way. Coming and going of sleep,  
circling of the moon around the earth, earth  
around the sun. The great man dies  
and this makes death more noble for us all.  
It is with joy that I accept the pains  
that herald my end. I do my job well.  
I go to the well and break the ice for water.  
The bucket comes up full of dying wonder.

## To Have Loved Mary

Today is Sunday and I'm going to the ocean  
or maybe not. Definitely not doing the laundry  
or maybe I will. Moss and even a small tree  
grow in the rotten stubs of the pier pilings.  
The city is Seattle and it has a macho airport.

Give me the comfort of a moose knowing its  
water supply. The mosquito's acceptance of its position  
among a million mosquitoes. The pool of stagnant  
water that remains one with the mothering ocean.  
I drift on the air, less than a seed, a bacteria.

Or I am human, big dick, big brain containing  
universal philosophic affidavit. Pleased by  
the churning of my tongue, sexual enlightenment,  
devout prayer, gourmet dining. I swear  
it is best to be alive and to have loved Mary.

## Chambermaid with Ravens

The Aberdeen bus arrives, deposits and boards  
the same people daily. One is the dark-haired  
chambermaid at the tourist lodge, awkward  
in her print dress and wearing a frown. Her  
soft breasts inspire and her long legs are  
quintessence. The sun dispels moisture,

with fire-blackened face I lick a popsicle  
after work and achieve a counterfactual  
childhood. This is what the chambermaid's scowl  
is about, the frozen treat and smile of a grown  
man. On a summer night what passions  
would I find in her? We take our place in the pattern

of daily activity, pick-up trucks with crews  
arriving and leaving, uniformed rangers narrow  
in their imaginations. Two ravens fly low  
over the clearcut like weather, in weather, there will  
be weather. Felling trees in the forest, I look uphill.  
The ravens float like hawks, nearly immobile.

## Plate Tectonics Versus Gamma Ray Bursters

An old man remembers what he has been  
yet the details are unimportant. Then  
the outline disappears, and the meaning.

Good, I can die or go to work, be wise  
or a jerk. Rich or poor, the wind and rain  
wear us away and it's o.k.

Ask what matters, that  
question. Feeling the seasons, wearing a hat,  
loving your woman, a good shit.

Children born. Two cells meet, multiply,  
spiral into fetus. The mother is amazed:  
an intelligence apart from herself.

The violent rainstorm kept me awake  
although the lightning was still far away.  
I lay in my bed and listened naked.

## Undersky Sleeping, Bonekeeping

In the holy spot  
with the sitting rock,  
an oak. Out back,  
shagbark hickory  
and maple.

Ants climb the rock.  
August, birds  
celebrate flowering  
weeds, the seeds  
of autumn to come.

I am here to name it  
and know it and help it  
to grow. These mountains  
are my grave. A good grave  
to go to.

The crows have been  
in conference, again.  
A jay, blue, pokes  
a hole through reality.  
I find the sumacs fruiting

and the male sex organs  
of the Queen Anne's lace.  
Juncos glean the lawn,  
an occasional nuthatch  
in the butternut.

I hear a pileated  
woodpecker jackhammering  
and my neighbor's skill saw  
chirring. Ants crawl  
on connecting interlacing instructions.

## Under Mummy Mountain

Aspen, ponderosa pine, blue spruce  
pink glacier-cut rock, scree, ravens  
gray jay, peregrine falcon, hawk.

We climb to 11,000 feet in three days,  
camp at Lawn Lake for three days. Alpine  
tundra. Elk, bighorn sheep, marmot.

Tileston Meadows, ticks in grass,  
rock face of Mummy Mountain.  
Binoculars show pink cracks in gray rock.

Stoke gas stoves, play cards.  
Boil water, set up tarps, lay out  
sleeping bags, hang bear bag.

Watch crescent moon slice into  
Fairchild Mountain. Moonlight  
makes a mosque of the rocks.

Yellow aspen splash in dark green  
spruce and pine. Gullies where streams  
slash during spring snowmelt.

One rock, feather or flower worth  
more than money. Need no wallet,  
keys. Just clothes for fur.

All day climb toward saddle to see  
what's on other side. One hawk floating  
among bare peaks and over valleys.

Wind at 13,000 feet  
turns to sleet. Turn back from peak,  
take boulders two at a time down.

Winter moves into mountains.  
Then we fly from Denver to New York  
where it's still summer.

## The Terminator

One leaf falls  
holographic illusion  
across time the Terminator travels  
to shape Sarah Connors' destiny.  
Heart attack  
a common enough destiny  
as common as young men discussing girls' tits.  
The Constitution  
is the document we refer to, the lodestone  
to correct course and not go crazily astray.  
Lose all purpose beyond murder, child sex and food hoarding.  
Illuminated manuscripts  
in a dark age, tape decks remind us of our voice  
our communal voice  
Supremes and Fred Astaire  
the silken wail.

I lie alone in the night  
its sensuality makes the best sense  
it does or does not clarify the day  
of classes or clients or chain saws  
whatever fever may have infected me at the moment  
a fever to achieve access to foreign films while living in the mountain  
community of Schroon Lake  
the fever to instruct the American people how to apply ideals and  
practicalities of Constitution to international relationships  
the fever not to die today, to maintain consciousness just one more  
season (and one more after that).

Anyway, what is being discussed—  
the finiteness of one life—  
or perhaps existence continues in another dimension, on another  
frequency  
no owl hoots  
but other purpler and indigo occurrences  
with other purposes  
as incomprehensible and wonderful as these purposes

to choke on a cherry pit or nuclear bomb  
to wail our wail together  
each individual identifiable hoot and wail, loud laugh and suppressed  
scream  
one orbicular chant, humanity, from India to Indiana  
complete, one sing.

I feel this way  
searching for my place among you  
childless, but a child among children  
obeying or not obeying the speed limit  
as my hormones permit  
everywhere among brothers, the sisters among sisters  
the races together exterminating the last rhinoceros and preserving  
its genes at the zoological society  
my species attacking entire rain forests, temperate forests and  
boreal forests  
like the engraver beetle in the red pine's inner bark.  
Thus, I occasionally cheer the Terminator  
cheer the machine and neutron bomb  
even in the face of individual heroics, the male and female face  
their physical love, tender and violent  
I don't know what I want.

It could be simple  
as this headache.  
Not to despair  
just to care enough to think clearly and accept 10,000 years of history.  
Not to hate those in authority  
humor is the only remedy  
yellow ape teeth chimping in the glass death face  
and ritual is remedy  
a death song  
and one for planting  
and one for the beginning of loving.

## Cities in Flight

In *Cities in Flight*

transformations are chronicled over generations.

It can make us cry

out for the genius occurring

now and in our past. How

the unseen, unknown participant

was made known to himself

through devotion to those outside himself. He

guides his city

into space.

So, the father and the teacher

guide the family and the student

through the close spaces of knowledge

and obligation. And perform

the history that surrounds them.

Good actors and directors,

philosophers and physicists,

soldiers and foresters.

Today

steam rose from the asphalt

because the sun

has arrived in place, powerful, equinoxal

as the human song

that receives it.

Two big deer

    Lope cautiously

        Off the open road.

Two crows

    Fly low

        Above the Oswegatchie.

Frank Bassett

forester since '57

marks a stand of maple and black cherry  
for selective cutting. His actions today  
will be noted  
by another forester, also acting alone,  
in the 21st century.

New York City  
in a froth of creativity  
Pacino and Sheen in *Julius Caesar*,  
Sonny Rollins at Town Hall,  
films opening, one  
that portrays the flamboyant style  
and dedication  
of a barrio public school teacher.

You cannot act alone.  
You must belong  
in your heart  
to the flight humanity makes in Spring, north  
toward wild flowers  
in geese chevrons.

## Upside Down the Ancient Bole

The white-breasted nuthatch  
upside down the ancient bole.  
If it has no soul, neither do I.

Pencils criss-crossed on the desk,  
sticks tangled on the ground.  
Oblong lenticels, yellow stars.

We try to worship the divine  
in our sexual partners. They shit and sweat diurnally  
and fear their deaths. But the abstract

God has also died. He lied to say he was  
eternal. Earth must burn, universe grow cold.  
Old field seedlings become ornamentals.

Mosquitoes prey on us, and black flies.  
The body decays, and this is what you come  
to love. And the ants that carry it away.

This morning, the profusion of species  
contents me. The temperate zone is warm, late May.  
The posture of that bird is wise to emulate.

## Silence of Winter

Silence of winter  
distant from all but my sexual contacts  
her bedroom nights  
and day friends  
memory of my independence vanishing dream  
holding on to it, myself  
knowing how love can hurt.

Its seduction of me, dissolving my man barriers  
biologically, to procreate  
or create a new personality, a deepening  
humility, her womanhood hands.  
Not giving in completely  
touching sweetly  
but staying strong.

Going into the winter to mark my trees  
not flinching in the dark early morning  
casting an eye cold as a telescope  
moving inexorably  
a part of nature, insect, star.  
This is how I'll love  
and live with her.

## Late Summer

It has been beautiful, late August, full moon  
a million crickets following  
a million fireflies in June,  
a million May peepers. Immersed  
in insect, amphibian cycles, I am a mammal, drugged,  
crossing the road, car approaching  
fast, unnoticed.

I would choose to die in late summer.

Why?

So that my wife would have autumn, intense,  
to grieve by,  
snowy bandages with which to bind the wound,  
and spring to reawaken into.  
Summer to remember that she's loved.

## **Pokeweed Waits**

Pokeweed waits  
underground, snow crusts  
small greenish white flowers, leaves entire  
and alternate, black berries  
poisonous, ripe late.

Waits patiently past February  
when the sun stays up in the sky more than January  
and six more months after that  
past the peepers keeping watch  
for every passing dog or truck.

We await our time  
or have had it, or are having it.  
Body in slow, not precipitous, decline.  
Expend ourselves on work and wine.  
Percent of budget expended, year to date.

I heard a redwing this morning  
who might have been choosing a nest site  
holding the spot against chevrons from the south.  
Choosing the best site, away from predators, near water,  
in sight of seed and buds.

It happens that when the pokeweed fruit pokes out  
the chicks were born, the fledglings flown  
leaves already leathery  
and the weather has the faintest  
hint of January's cold snow hold.

## Cosmo's Moon

The only problem with "Moonstruck" is Cosmo's moon could never be so large in winter, stand for luck.

Mid-winter sledding brought joy snow, speed, although the kids were beautiful none were boys.

Walking the boundaries, and the old field boundaries. Aged maples, barbed wire past the cambium.

Northern hardwood all the way, except less than an acre scotch pine plantation and a few primeval spruce.

Pendant spruce cones in tree tops colonizing the old field too. Conifers a primitive civilization.

Lyonia has red, scaleless buds. Shrub or small tree, maximum height 12 feet. It's a heath, Ericaceae.

Small, white, bell-like flowers become seamed capsules, similar to but smaller than laurel, Kalmia.

The buds had me thinking red chokeberry, Rosaceae, but of course the fruit was completely wrong for a rose.

A timber stand improvement now in the scotch pine would encourage tall even straight trees, a cathedral.

The maples on the upper rocky slopes

where the skidders couldn't or wouldn't go  
are impressive as eagles', hawks' nests.

Mid-summer, Spiraea, field of pink flowers  
fully encircled by mountain ranges.  
Bees working them.

Nancy, the broker, coming at five.  
These 160 acres, a dream, are unnecessary.  
Offer 500 dollars per acre.

Not an investment, a sanctuary.  
Backed against the Taconic ridge,  
real moon rising.

## Blackbrush

Blackbrush—*Coleogyne ramosissima*  
the dominant understory shrub  
in the pinyon-juniper canyons.

Mountain-mahogany—*Cercocarpus montanus* and *ledifolia*.  
Single-leaf ash—*Fraxinus anomalus*  
and possibly a western hophornbeam

by the small birch-like leaves  
and the shredding bark  
in a moist stretch of joint trail.

The joint-fir, green ephedra  
looks like an ocean plant.  
Could the wind or white water rivers alone

have shaped these sandstone, red rock forms?  
Network of canyons, inverse of mountains.  
It had to be ocean

ebbing and flowing, emotionally, like wind,  
moving atmosphere, thicker  
shaving, scraping, polishing, gouging, digging

fish canyons  
then, shallower, dinosaur swamps  
now, dry, rock gardens.

Explain the human history with water:  
did the Anasazi visit neighbors  
along the canyon rims and deep within,

combination caves and red-rock houses  
small windows, doorways, just crawlways,  
with corn gifts on summer evenings

when the canyon bottoms held permanent, not intermittent,

streams? After them  
came the Ute and Navajo, Spanish and English.

Ravens dine on road kill.  
A few long red roads connect some canyons.  
The unprotected flats are overgrazed, rabbitbrush.

It is interesting  
that as I learn the woody and herbaceous plants,  
walk the desert foothills, I too could stay.

## Grand Canyon

The Grand Canyon is like the brain  
with deep, unexplored fissures and tributaries,  
the main route well known by now.

I am walking, walking inside my mind,  
a grand canyon, a planet of canyons, a system  
of planets. The exploration may become dangerous

I might lose my job, forgetting to go or losing  
sight of its importance. But the job is gathering  
pinyon nuts and agave fruits, it is the main

river, deepest cavity, how I find the unexplored  
canyons and tributaries of my neighbors  
and my enemies. But is it a religion,

a reason for living. It is a marriage, for better  
or worse, with all the other living. The concept  
of life's brevity, temporary compared

with the time taken to carve the canyon, does  
not interest me. Each moment has a weather,  
is a mirror of all other moments. The naming

of things goes on. Cliff rose and wavyleaf oak,  
new mexican locust and sagebrush among ponderosa  
and pinyon pine, juniper. Once I know

who they are inhabiting the canyon, the raven's  
flight is meaningful. The raven's rock cave,  
search for seed and carrion, my home and job.

## What Have I Seen?

1

Sunrise, late winter  
skunk smell  
turkey flock  
playful otter, too.

The white heron  
a great blue,  
white phase,  
in the abandoned beaver pond.

Purple clematis  
its long-awned achenes  
in globose heads  
spidery, fiery, extravagant fruit!

To identify or classify  
birds by  
the complexity or beauty  
of their songs.

And so  
what is over that  
ridge or hill  
a sink-hole, a sand dune, a steep bluff.

2

What must I do. Organize  
the heretofore unorganized. The rabble  
of unemployed child abusers.  
Molesters of their intimates.

Are there dysfunctional bird families?  
Simply put, they do not survive.  
We have hope

that everyone alive is essential,

consequential. We classify  
and specify.

The commonplace and everyday  
is sanctified.

What happens everyday?  
Morning is quiet, everyone at work.  
Home writing, watching birds.  
Afternoon, kids come back from school.

Evening, watch tv.  
Scotch and Star Trek.  
Captain Picard's problems eclipse  
ours who stayed behind.

3

Pray to Allah  
and maybe he will spare you  
when he sets the world  
on fire.

Where or with whom  
will I be on that day?  
And how many people and adventures  
will I find in the wind storm and rubble?

I may live, but will it matter  
whether or not I help anyone else to live?  
This is no Last Judgement.  
Those who have learned or who still know how to live

will survive.  
Nobody will go to hell, they will just die.  
There is no limbo either.  
Anyone who didn't find a way to be immortal is just dead.

So, what am I trying to do.  
Organize the unemployed, the welfare mothers  
and alcoholics  
into a flying chevron of purposeful explorers?

4

The doctor's conscious, organized,  
naive attempt to do good,  
his legacy, versus the randomness  
of the road and the war zone.

There his legacy is his rectitude and natural  
rough compassion for the damaged people  
he encounters. The difference  
between planning a legacy

as if you knew enough to control events  
and letting the legacy arise  
from events themselves, controlling,  
insofar as you are able, only

your own actions and reactions.  
The doctor's leadership role such as it was  
grew out of not his material possessions  
like the car

but his mission, his personal quest  
to find the young doctors he had naively trained  
and sent into the war zone  
where all died.

5

July-a cold city  
not as great or as gritty  
as I thought, summer theater left  
the shoe shine bereft of customers

eyes cold as a bureaucrat's  
except for our soles  
and their leather. Sweat-soaked  
girls, the beautiful ones left town.

Emotionless as a bus.  
Sparrows, no chickadees.  
All that's important happens indoors.  
Exercise to philosophies.

You get what you see.  
The panhandlers ask  
just once, won't risk  
friendship, justice.

No sale today in  
the finite city  
where, for the shoe shine,  
pedestrians are infinite, times two shoes.

6

Faith = wait + trust.  
But don't anticipate.  
Popper prohibits prediction.  
Niebuhr expects destruction.

I believe in God  
doesn't mean there's a sketch  
of a man in my head. It must mean  
all will be well in the end.

Satisfied with snow or  
summer. And now  
with dying old or younger.  
Gold or paper clips. Gulps or sips.

In the final resting place  
in the city of the dead

are there all night card games  
and sometimes open swims?

Each inch, square, or cube of Earth  
brim with grasses and sedges, dragonflies and spiders, sparrows  
and eagles.

The tiger lily and the water lily and the lily of the valley, the calla lily.  
When a girl on a bicycle smiles, that is a smile.

## Night Drive Home

Night drive home  
no cars behind or ahead  
the day had been satisfying  
victories, compromises, achievements

half hour to home  
bubble of warm air and light  
moving toward it in my metal bubble  
toward my wife and children

watch for patches of ice  
casually, not nervously  
maintaining velocity and analyzing  
Jim Hall's and Paul Desmond's Bewitched

which way should I go  
back west past industrialized cities  
to spruce-fir forests  
then what? the same

need for man-made implements,  
refreshments, even names  
they gave the rocks and trees.  
Not one thing or thought uniquely mine.

Whether I am a visitor to my life  
or the actual owner, inside  
the bubble of air, water, blood  
that must not now slide off the road

into time.

## **Bad Movie**

We should have gone outside instead of watching  
one of the sillier, senseless, meaningless movies  
it is possible to rent or buy. Winter or not  
the fields and woods are at least real,  
commensal and understandable  
if you know the genus and species.  
Know the genome and biome.  
Learn the physics and music.

But this much reality requires an escape,  
hence bad movie.

A bad book is better than a bad movie.  
A good movie beats a bad book  
but a good book is best  
and a great poem trumps all.

## **Certain Days**

Certain days planned to be eventful  
I look forward to for weeks, setting  
and characters, and the work days march forward  
toward the horrible or pleasurable  
and the day comes, it comes without hesitating or hurrying  
although I hurry and hesitate  
and when it is here, going by  
during my hesitation or hurry did I  
think what I wanted to ask?

## **New Mind**

The mind is the body  
paying attention to what  
it is seeing and doing.

Morning tea, unemployed  
was one thing twenty years ago  
and another now, twin babies.

Yet when the boys pay  
attention to what they do  
a small rift in time opens

the quiet morning streams  
by. Work on clothing,  
tools and food

gathering and preparation.  
The young children practice  
holding hands steady

new mind to attend.

## Sub-atomic particles

Sub-atomic particles  
the atoms they form  
molecules, cell organelles  
cells, machinery of life  
organs, organisms  
communities and ecosystems  
planets, solar systems, galaxies  
galactic clusters and their inverse  
black holes the doors to other  
universes, a contradiction  
in terms.

For language and its shadow  
consciousness must hold matter  
the material world snugly inside concepts  
theories and hypotheses to be  
experimentally verified using vision  
and the other senses, collecting data  
and interpreting the known facts  
accumulated over time.

Can matter  
exist without a consciousness to behold it?

Believing in  
our mortality (the species)  
we have created God  
(a supreme being)  
probably not carbon-based  
to encompass every universe  
but is God  
inside or outside  
consciousness? Can God  
tell us what to do  
or must we tell God  
alone  
what to do?

Here is ego  
projecting personality, exerting force



## Jones' Nose

Their unspoken opinions  
are like a pot of unknowable, unnamed meats  
including skunk parts  
one morsel of filet mignon

Family or workplace  
longer the hours, years of the living  
opinions accumulate  
perception strained through mortality

This stew of ethics  
holds together, blows apart  
trees, planets, atoms, galaxies  
on or about year 2000

One must not  
express the certainty  
that the child's coma-induced vision of a dead grandparent  
did not actually happen in heaven

One must feign  
respect for all beliefs however abjectly  
death denying  
because they are harmless as

ozone  
zebra  
xylophone  
zygote

A  
beautiful day follows  
on Jones' Nose  
ripe blueberries, black cherries

## October Sky

The teacher dies having made her small contribution to the colonization of other planets by motivating a boy who would otherwise be a coal miner to become a rocket engineer.

Throughout the nation teachers are sending their prize pupils through the funnel flask to produce technology from pure science. The mother and father are good, disciplined, god-fearing people who stand firm against dissolution and chaos. They hold their clod of soil in place and others do the same to create the landscape of community.

Communities across the nation and the world produce the many to support the few who make the tools and do the math to colonize the planets. Once the secret of warp speed is discovered, expansion of the species is limitless.

Perhaps it is not a direct contribution to destiny, yet some stories may be told for centuries.

It takes constantly renewed consciousness to persevere, retell the stories and interpret lessons. You go, girl.

## Engineers

Engineers know  
to build in redundancies  
when lives depend  
not necessarily exact replicas of the primary unit  
but systems whose secondary function  
is to carry the load when a primary system  
fails.

The principle applies  
to all organisms and the inanimate  
objects designed to support them.  
But the sun  
and the rock  
that is earth  
need no redundancies.  
Burning, cooling  
one  
of each, they disintegrate  
without feeling  
for the mantle or the planets.

Some individuals  
may, it turns out, be irreplaceable.  
There is not always another girl singer  
this one is the only one for us  
at this time, while we're alive  
in this place with the random weather.  
The one singer, leader  
the one who interprets God's words  
when she is assassinated, terminated, released  
we are not released, velocity  
registers a mandatory, momentarily momentous  
palpitation that is gone  
unlike Shakespeare  
so far. She  
was not the sun.  
But she was found  
to be irreplaceable, unique  
her song.

## Let's Work the Problem

*"Let's work the problem, people, let's not make things worse by guessing." –Apollo 13*

I like his confidence, that working the problem will certainly result in better outcomes than guessing. A rationalist who does not depend on a higher power to direct his decisions, but who may concede, observe, realize and accept that he lacks the data or the skills or tools to interpret data and these decisions he leaves to his god.

But not before

thoroughly assessing the limits of his power. Guessing before guessing is necessary makes things worse. The skills, tools and experience are the accumulated wisdom of earlier experts in his field.

Yet each generation

of communicants must examine the assumptions from which the mathematics, logic, science or law was derived. Rebuild the proofs from the simplest truths, laws, physics. Taking God's first and only words and extrapolating correctly, getting the trajectory right for successful take off and re-entry.

And then

to explain the derivations to your students. Until they too can care for the species and the planet, making whole sentences, formulas and melodies from few words, numbers, notes.

## **Black-capped Chickadees**

Having not done the things I wanted to do  
and the things I've done not being what I wanted to do  
I sit here looking at lichen on the north side of trees.

Black-capped chickadees  
cheerful and truthful expression  
grouped in platoons, sharing the point.

The tribes travel together  
first finches, then chickadees  
following the squirrels every morning.

What luxury, abundance! Handful after handful  
of grass seed thrown, into wind.  
The corn ripe and the rye with it.

The other main families: pines, roses, peas,  
lilies, daisies, heath, birch and oak.  
Maple, honeysuckle, pink, mustard, cypress, mint, olive, buckwheat,  
primrose, willow, buttercup, saxifrage, snapdragon, cactus.

Truth may be ascertained by considering  
the truth we feel, the truth we're told,  
the truth we reason, and the truth we've seen.

It is so good to be a chickadee.  
To tell the truth cheerfully and joyfully  
in a way that makes others want to live.

## To Fail Well

Fowl meadow grass—*Glyceria striata*—the striations  
on the lemma. Drooping rachis  
a weeping willow of a grass.

Recurring periwinkles, myrtle, *Vinca*.  
Helicopter petals. Evergreen leaves.  
Escaped from gardens, alien or native?

A little further by the spruce stand  
a new mustard, cuckoo flower—*Cardamine*—  
with pinnately compound leaves. What a find!

A good day turns bad.  
After you've died, one of them dogs digs up your grave.  
You may sit in the rain and think.

Maiden pink.  
The dark circle inside the flower  
a g-string or garter.

O to fail well. To lay low. To live long.  
To run slow. Feel the hill. Pressing down.  
Do less. Until one thing's done well.

## **Belonging to the Loved Ones**

## To the Gods

To the gods, the individual won't matter.  
But we've said No to that. Here, you count.

Perhaps the gods, their tornadoes and weapons of mass terror  
Are stronger than us. But we can read and count

And our music is more ethereal and real  
Than theirs. They must divide to conquer us

But we have realized division is a form of multiplication  
And have multiplied. Now there are too many

Of us to count. But we have learned there are  
More planets in the universe than people on the planet.

A planet for each one. But we would rather stay  
Together, continue to discover what we're living for.

Every human, and every animal, will count. And then  
We'll invite back even the gods themselves.

## Family of Weasels

On last night's news I heard  
of an engineer named K\_\_\_\_\_who  
invented the microchip and changed  
our lives. How the chip now contains  
a billion circuits which I still don't get  
but what I do perceive is this engineer's  
(a man modest in pride, fame and wealth)  
achievement of Teilhard de Chardin's vision  
of a world that is one organism and a single-  
minded mankind.

Also mentioned  
were Edison, the Wrights and Ford,  
oddly not Einstein, Galileo, Copernicus, Newton,  
Hamilton or Jefferson, Christ or Buddha,  
or the unknown gatherers and traders  
who invented agriculture, money.  
8,000 generations and each individual  
an experiment gone well or wrong, a chance  
to respond with love or grief to the universe's effort  
to extinguish us.

Family of weasels, young ones playful.  
One reference says they're vicious murderers,  
killing for sport. Absurd, I think, in the wild.  
Another clarifies they eat ½ their body weight daily,  
extremely active, high metabolism, hunt all their caloric needs  
before eating. And, like the raccoon, ferocious defenders  
of their young.

## Ulzana's Raid

In *Ulzana's Raid*,  
the Native- and European-American concepts of property ownership  
and rights  
are incompatible and irresolvable. McIntosh  
had no illusions about that. He said hating Apaches for killing whites  
is like hating the desert for having no water.  
I suspect the movie's not a good source of anthropological data  
and overlooks the commonalities among human communities  
to focus on just a few bold characters  
as all art must.

I consider McIntosh fortunate  
to have died commensurate with the way he lived his life,  
rolling a final cigarette, nothing between him and the desert,  
and no gravediggers waiting, jesting, defecating. Also,  
he is lucky to have had one last, dispassionate friend  
to whom there is nothing left to say, the Chiracahua tracker  
Kah-ti-nay.

Last night's performance of *Beauty and the Beast*  
may have been the most victorious, ecstatic, cohesive  
moment in our little school's history. Emily was Beauty, a filament of  
energy  
who doesn't like to be touched and has been known to punch  
boys hard. She had memorized her lines until she was hardly  
Emily but only Beauty in a blue dress unselfconsciously  
hiking up her tights between the Beast's advances.  
Is this done in every American town and the world  
over so there's no need to feel lost or lonely  
ever?

There is no context for a man  
outside the platoon or raiding party, home or shop.  
When violence comes to the neighborhood,  
the hierarchy of communicants will hold or fold  
it is then the peace work proves relevant. I noticed McIntosh,  
grizzled as he was, accepted the given hierarchy, a raw lieutenant's

orders,  
as he did the desert and Apaches, with a shrug and foreknowledge  
of the outcome.

If there's anywhere with no Emily or Beauty  
we should bring them such blessings at the point of a  
gun. But there is no place without Emily, not  
the least-known prison in deepest space as long  
as we do not hate or hurt or shun  
the Beast.

## The snail will get to Easter just as soon

—title from a ballad by Eustache Deschamps

Faulkner's comment, I imagine him  
tossing it off like Yogi Berra between games  
of a doubleheader. The hero, the expert, the virtuoso  
has no real control, is going to feel  
unmitigated, unsparing forces, a mighty sun  
swallowed by a black hole, coughed up into a big sky.  
The past isn't dead. It isn't even past.

Versus Wayne Gretsky's formulation.  
When I think of my death, I think of returning  
the chemicals and microorganisms I borrowed.  
If my plane goes down, when we hit the ground  
fruits with names will be waiting—squawbush if  
in the desert uplands, rose hips on a Vermont farm.  
The past is skating to where the puck will be.

I realize I have a religion, a science fiction  
the size of Jupiter which is, as these things go, small:  
Chardin's theory unifying physical matter, rocks  
and all sentient beings into one—here's the catch—  
conscious organism. Having said that, why not claim  
the same for the entire universe? Rock + DNA = soil.  
The past isn't dead. It isn't even past.

These trees cannot feed me.  
Self-sufficiency is relevant only in context of community, economy.  
Every drug, every vitamin is wrung from plants,  
tools and shelter are ore.  
A tincture, infusion, decoction, a douche, a compress, poultice, a  
salve, a syrup.  
A war president needs war.  
The past is skating to where the puck will be.

5 a.m., first of Spring.  
Robins still in flocks, not paired off. But crows

mating on the sky—two couples dating  
a sign of luck, that Celtic god passing Peter talked about.  
8,000 generations, I reach only to my grandparents  
but history and the naming of things extend our vision.  
The past isn't dead. It isn't even past.

I was handcuffed but not beaten. Humiliated but not insulted.  
And when I came before the judge, he was uninterested  
in vengeance or restitution. He had his own death before him,  
probably. I keep wanting to go back  
to before the big bang, reading books about the cosmos,  
FLO, LUCA, the texture of reality, consciousness, God-seeking.  
The past is skating to where the puck will be.

For the next 5-10 years my goals are: geographically  
compact and contiguous Congressional districts, term limits  
for Federal legislators and judges, election of the president  
by direct popular vote, public financing, spending limits and free  
air time for candidates, abolish UN vetoes, consent of the governed  
before governments can sit in global councils.  
The past isn't dead. It isn't even past.

No greater tragedy than the death of your children.  
Yet you live on, eyes drained of color. Old,  
you make plans. To know the names of every flower  
in the temperate zone. Every bird by its song.  
Just as you're about to reach your goal, a tipping point  
comes along: a nuclear detonation or it gets too cold.  
The past is skating to where the puck will be.

## Occupied

“And he is generous, and brave, and when the darkness comes to him he does not sit and weep.”

As a boy, I'd find my father  
sitting in the pitch dark living room,  
cigarette aglow, as I'd pass  
from my bed to the bathroom.

Did the boy consider, at that late hour,  
what plans or fears occupied the man?  
Not at all, nor did the man share  
with the passing boy what he thought.

Now he's gone. Back from that piss  
and many another, I can well imagine  
the mystery I must be to my son.  
Has much changed but the date and where the man fought?

Most men, most times, abide in peace,  
leastwise not always angry or afraid  
they cannot save their children from the gas  
or the abyss about which God lied.

Yet, when the boy dreams through the room  
in the movement of his body there's a sleepiness  
to make the man weep for himself, his father  
and the boy who comes to the darkness unafraid.

## Coming Near and Going Far

1

The personal is boring  
as are my ruminations on the war.  
What I need to do I can't try:  
wander without shelter in the backcountry.  
Or go deeper into the polity,  
join a committee or a party.

Minute by minute and season to season  
I like my life but what does it add up to, what reason  
to go on? No better than a squirrel  
or a spider. Spreadsheets, fake books, girls  
I want too mildly, modestly or morally to have.  
Can the economy and community be called love?

You can be killed and buried in gravel  
Your children can be failed at school and marched to war  
You can be taxed and sent to gaol for the honor of it  
And there's nothing you can do about it.  
Will we find the universe not large enough to hold us?  
Will planet after planet be too old for us?

If you were president, what would your program be?  
What one question is the key  
to another's truth. How do you spend your money?  
Do you believe in a god who can see  
all and understand? Or is he  
unable to care, a different species.

2

We take the long view  
that as individuals drop  
from sight, new enthusiasts  
will associate. Legs  
give out, lungs collapse,

but we do not let the circle lapse.

For every Aristotle  
there are a million toddlers  
who will advance no memorable  
theories. But the mist  
on trees and mountains,  
sunrise over desert, are for

every merchant, traveler.  
My sons will take on cares,  
which toys are theirs,  
as their parents grow  
older. Slowness brings us  
to our goal: do one thing well.

By that what is meant?  
Don't be a dilettante.  
Not having found the greatness of  
a single, clear description,  
definition, the greatness comes in  
doing everyday what's known.

## The Recent and Long Dead

November is sweet, sunshine through bare trees, dry brown and fungus-free leaves companionably visiting among the dead  
as I did yesterday our town's small graveyard military dads who recently died lie under polished stones embossed with actual photos of themselves and their wives flowers and plastic totems within a miniature picket fence overflowing with the emotions love and grieving of the living  
beside or not far from simple wafer-thin old moss-covered stones on which I could not read the names.  
Such peace I realized which may be found around any rock or tree has escaped me while I pursue my particular happiness and our particular war,  
and such a blessing awaits me, too.

## Much Like Living

It was with almost joy  
that I watched at my father's  
deathbed. His struggle  
to let go  
of his body and thoughts  
was like being at a birth.

But now I'm not so sure.  
Now that I'm back  
with my life.  
Unlike Lear  
who will never, never  
see his daughter again

I feel the man's presence  
in every third thought  
as one who went before.  
Twice that Spring he said  
Rob, I'm dying  
but I failed to ask my question

What is it like?  
He wouldn't have been able  
to say. Not  
because he didn't know.  
Because it's so  
much like living.

## A Designer of Systems

"I design systems that allow people to do their best work regularly and predictably, instead of intermittently and by chance, and to produce outcomes in quantities large enough to make a difference in their communities."

1

I say I'm a designer of systems, plans  
Man's  
Parts that stand together, set in place to serve  
Trees and planets, too, which are unplanned by us  
The observant, wise man  
Tries to understand  
Name the parts, pistil and stamen  
Rocks, eskars  
Elements.

Winter is shuddering to an end, mud roads  
Cardinal pairs  
Robin flocks return that will soon pair off  
Buds  
Soils swell  
Will I live to smell it again, learn the lobelias  
Understand and name the parts  
It ought to be a great comfort to be so insignificant  
Go among weeds, a wind  
Thinking to myself

One's never alone  
A dichotomous key is needed, a book of twigs and fruits  
Accumulated over time and generations  
Without it mine would be a blank mind

To be blank but knowledgeable  
Without any machinery  
In a perfect silence  
That is the definition of death for which we have only to wait  
But in my panic last night I thought death's inert  
Grace requires consciousness

Hold on long to the senses  
At least a century, maybe more  
A boy hanging upside down from a fence at sunset, counting clouds

2

Now we go to our daily practice  
And chosen disciplines  
Sustained by the satisfactions of being good men among our fellow men  
Women  
Choosing to do this and not that  
With the finite days allotted us that at first seemed like a lot  
They're now few  
But the chickadee's life to the chick and the cankerworm moth's to the  
worm  
Seem as long to them as ours to us  
What question am I asking today  
By now, past half a century, I should have chosen a discipline  
And been satisfied

To be a war president one must have war  
May you live in interesting times—wish or curse?  
Squirrels, high in oaks,  
Fiber, fat and protein in acorns  
Strong runners, leapers, climbers  
Should stay off the roads which some cannot avoid being where they're  
born  
Natural selection is occurring  
Those that look for machinery in motion  
Hesitate or don't as needed before crossing  
Live in larger numbers than those whose modus operandi's  
Guessing  
The ravens eat the fur and guts of bad guesses off the roads

I impose my own small order  
Having chosen mountains over plains or shore  
Go to my daily discipline  
And estimate the motions of the seas and stars  
Measuring my satisfactions by my children's satisfactions

## Birding by Ear

The poem requires a mind  
that finds meaning, even divination,  
in language. Non-fiction,  
up to academic standards, demands  
evidence. Nothing less will do.  
Most of us read fiction and this needs  
a taste for action, motivation.

Lately, as have you, I have  
thought about our war and its purpose,  
motivation. But I have also closely  
listened to the wood thrush, analyzed  
its song like a tune by T.S. Monk  
or J.S. Bach concerto. One belongs  
to the loved ones who ostracize us, too.

A robin looks, hops, pecks, is never calm.  
It is the flute-like tones, yes, but mostly  
the patient, meditative clarity  
of the thrush that enchants. One wants  
to be that bird. How will we attain  
calm clarity for the species *Homo sapiens*?  
Through the discipline of asking questions.

Mimics, woodpeckers, sing-singers, hawks,  
chippers and trillers, whistlers, name-sayers,  
loons, owls and a dove, high pitchers,  
wood warblers and a word-warbling wren.  
Unusual vocalizations.  
What did the wood thrush sing  
teaching its young thrush meanings?

Too much emotion is the commonest of mortals' sins.  
Peace has many faces,  
the wood thrush in the canopy is one.  
A word of praise here, an encouraging word there.  
A wraith, a ghost against an impatient man,  
verbose, unsure of the path, always longing.  
Nothing satisfies like the thrush's song.

**Stay together. Learn the flowers. Go light.**

—title from lines by Gary Snyder

1

At peace perhaps too much  
a fine Spring rain  
we seek news from the desert or capitol  
of those who have dedicated their lives to losing their lives for us  
adventurers, ancient honor, land runners  
this campaign a must to advance one's career  
a war president needs war

2

All you need to know is the names of things  
chambers of commerce and large corporations  
elements, products, decay fungi, egg masses  
cultivars and their relation to wild grasses and the edge  
uses of herbs, languages of mammals,  
purposes of insects, placement of rocks  
the names of everything by which we know our way

3

I've read about those remarkable souls who maintain self-control  
among murderers and the unentertained multitude  
who may have even spoken persuasively  
at the right moment for speaking  
and thus attracted a now unwanted immortality  
there are only two ways you can tell  
a bird of prey from a vision—humor and ritual

4

the Fedex gal  
would be unlike taking off Emily Dickinson's clothes  
over the counter perfume and spray paint hair

postman's shorts, black socks  
a woman's legs are much like a man's  
yet she too is beautiful, too beautiful, weekends  
boating with her man

5

Suburbs, lawns, blankets  
in a long, long nursery of babies  
napping, old, blameworthy  
and, I say this respectfully, blind  
certain and uninterested  
in motives more subtle than their immediate comfort  
Who am I to complain?

6

Plants, poems: riches  
our financial advisor doesn't count. Good and simple  
a man as he is. Comes tousled  
from early morning golf and eyes puffy  
from a late night fight or lovefest with his wife.  
Inchworm  
letting out its rope down an oak.

7

Late afternoon meeting  
like the dry samara, achene or capsule surrounding a seed  
how often have I tried to escape  
my need, community, chamber of commerce  
you cannot drive  
the roads are theirs and the signs, perhaps  
you can walk if you can name herbs and ores and are willing to die

8

O happy family  
there's some contentment in letting community and family decide

your place in it. Gatekeepers–  
unconscious god, invisible hand, natural selection–  
kind when refraining from violence  
when not responding with force to the universe's effort  
to extinguish us.

### **Eastern tent caterpillars**

Mid-spring, skinny, black, blind  
eastern tent caterpillars–  
*Malacosoma americanum*–  
falling from the cherry tree  
leaning, human, over our deck.  
Irrksome. Mash and kick them  
with my feet, continue  
practicing or reading.

Three weeks later, reading  
late at night. Heavy-bodied  
black-eyed, reflexed antennae–  
many hundreds of moths  
crave the lamplight, some attaining  
extinction through cracks  
around the window screen. Vexing.  
Until next morning, I look  
up the name that has eluded me  
all spring and early summer.

The single-minded moth and larval colony–  
one small monophony.

## America the seeing-eye dog

Policy or personal

questions? In the poem Two White Wines  
a child adopted from Cambodia  
is a thing of beauty, and so she is  
as she showed herself to be yesterday. Lovely. However  
the poet implies market, i.e. economic, forces brought her to America  
when, as her parents know, it was war,  
the sad Vietnam War or the War with America  
as I think the Vietnamese remember it.

Honor and bravery

equal courage. Reed Whittemore's poem about  
a photo of Viet Cong prisoners, stoic, defiant  
under an American officer's boot  
expresses admiration for the enemy. Then and now  
a dangerous sentiment. Your fellow citizens, denizens  
of convenience stores, even your family,  
may come to see you as the enemy. Once ostracized, the other,  
not belonging to the loved ones, you're not long for  
this world of dew.

Tits and ass

Ken says, describes America's culture, not its poets  
or jazz. What's worth fighting for?  
Your land, your right to be stupid on your land.  
Now there is one large land, one people  
and many. The vote is a crude, monosyllabic grunt,  
no way to express the subtle degrees of experience  
our long lives represent. Thus,  
it is good, when the family gathers, to talk,  
each person speak  
of what has been forgotten, forgiven and forgone.

Trading or taking

every family must be tithed or taxed.  
Every man who finds his meaning in war will be pained into  
wisdom and gentleness. Who comes home

comes home to a future that bypassed the fighting, or did it?  
The oil must be sold,  
even Saddam or Osama cannot withhold it.  
You can drink your quota of water  
and still your heart can ache.

Empire or democracy  
of nations? We can choose to be the reigning kings  
between the last empire and the next  
or we can implement a vision  
of collective deliberation.  
America the seeing-eye dog,  
not America the junkyard dog.  
Going question by question  
toward predictable, transparent governance.  
Example: How can a people become a nation  
without resorting to violence or incurring violent reaction?

## Courage

It takes some courage to eat a legume's fruit  
knowing what is known of each poisonous part  
of the locust (although the flowers may be frittered).

What's pushing up through the leaf litter  
before the canopy is out, past the stone fence?  
Wild lily-of-the-valley is my guess.

Of 140,000 soldiers, less than 1% have considered  
the fruit of the desert surprisingly good and varied.  
They have stayed and married women who are crows

and will, circumstances dictating, fight for you.  
We have waited and waited for this election  
and now we're divided into just two factions.

If everyone votes and every vote's counted there will be  
nothing for either faction to crow about. All will be  
well with the republic and in the world what will be will be.

What responsibility does a citizen bear  
for participating in a war, blowing the roofs  
off houses, exposing the beds and clean-swept floors?

Warriors at the gate, you will not run,  
you will not bargain. Dig in deep, feet  
overhanging the abyss, protect your children.

I poured water into the dry vase of garden cultivars—  
snapdragon, phlox, begonia, bluebell, mint—  
and have they not rewarded me with their collective scent?

## Providence

In disaster and war movies  
the protagonist (Queen) and her immediate circle  
are protected from anonymous death. They may die (one by one or all  
at once)  
but someone at least grieves.  
Or the audience is full of glee.

But in Star Wars (for instance)  
what about the many hundreds of nameless, faceless soldiers  
in body armor and visored helmets, or planetary citizens,  
who fall by the dozens or more, like the leaves this rich fall. I think  
no one thinks

how one of them may have had her first lover the night before  
and one may be leaving behind two sons he read to last night  
and loved with all his heart.  
Neither belief in God nor being a god entertained  
can explain or forgive this oversight.

Ah, how sweet  
the film in which no actor dies or if they do  
it's from their own disease or golden age.  
People grieve for the soul that left  
and celebrate the soul that flew.

I was in Providence for a conference,  
a town I had thought insignificant, not a city to be considered  
a city in flight. But that night they lit  
one hundred bonfires in the river running up through the streets and  
the face of every girl and woman with her lover  
by firelight was beautiful.

Had the city been nuked  
by a terrorist or rogue nation I would not have minded dying there,  
with them, that night. It is possible  
to be several million strong  
and every homeless man with a singing voice belong.

## At Basketball

Basketball stands for war or battle.  
That's why I think about the players'  
personalities, in my foxhole or squad.  
Danny and Ben are fast and smart. Dan  
especially can pass making him master  
and commander. To defeat them as we did  
is past satisfying. Ben's five year old son  
disdains to answer my question  
Why are you you?

But I'm not here  
to catalogue the men's personalities.  
I like them. But each of us has moved on  
many times, when \_\_\_\_\_ suddenly died  
the games went on with hardly a mention  
and his name has since been forgotten.

But even this, absolute mortality  
of not just our bodies but our names  
and souls is not what I came  
to talk about. Yesterday, between games,  
I asked Joe how Molly his daughter likes  
the high school. He mounted an impassioned  
defense of reading as the indispensable skill  
when I suggested math, the scientific method  
and history are essential too.

Also between games  
Bob diffidently asked why my kids are bald.  
I was moved by the care he took to satisfy  
his curiosity, concerned the subject might be  
difficult. He's a political science teacher so  
I took the opportunity to ask What ails  
the republic? Of course I answered myself  
wanting mostly to hear myself talk about Iraq  
and how empire is self-correcting. For once I was amusing  
I thought, treating the subject with a light touch  
heretofore lacking.

But none of this is what I came to say. A new guy, big quick and strong, a bulldozer under the boards with a good outside shot if needed got into a dispute with the other Bob who likes to tell people what to do sometimes, about an offensive foul Bob called which we almost never do. The new guy said If you can't take it don't play under the boards which is what I say when I'm pissed and don't give a shit. Bob said You've been pushing and shoving me all day. I said He doesn't *want* to be pushed and shoved which got a wry smile out of Danny as I put the ball in play.

## Home Schooling

November and April

when the trees are first bare and last naked  
have become my favorite months. All the food eaten  
except last rose hips and earliest leeks.

Leaves innocent  
as dying men and infants.

Study one plant or animal each morning  
before writing anything. All reading—  
poetry or prose, truth or fiction—  
classified the same, the distinguishing  
characteristics being helpful or boring,  
beautifully or indifferently written. Then

practice trumpet worried not at all about  
my sound or perfection. Afternoon, my sons  
return from school, math and (again)  
reading, piano. Wednesdays we walk  
observe plants and animals and record  
our observations to identify and classify

later in the week. Nothing else special  
need be done but stay alive.

## The End of Faith

—ending with lines by James Taylor and Kenneth Rexroth

Two thoughts come to mind this morning.  
The deficiencies in our systems of governance—local, global—  
and the first two pages of The End of Faith  
in which he mistakes acts of war for religious acts  
but recognizes understanding the workings of the world  
is not the same as knowing the unknowable.

Every new twinge provokes fear  
but what is there to fear? That one won't live forever?  
The year of a man is the day of an inchworm  
and 267 years on a reverse-rotating Venus.  
A billion of anything is a lot  
unless it's the distance one must traverse to look at God.

How much silence, or tinnitus, can you handle?  
A chipmunk cannot for long stand still.  
Once the twinge passes I'm off to the next task:  
building a constituency for this compassion, that solution.  
The dialogue starts with a question. To know the question  
is almost certainly to find an answer.

Conflating questions is the commonest of logic errors.  
No negotiation unless the violence ends.  
Why not talk while we fight?  
We can always kill, torture or assassinate between conversations.  
Justice, or retribution if you want,  
can remain on the table even after we achieve understanding.

Nature is my religion, I know no other,  
and community is my church. The sacrament  
is policy debate. I attend church everyday.  
Our jobs are hymns (the classifieds a hymnal)  
and payment for services rendered is sung praise and gratitude.  
Walking and talking is prayer.

Strategies to limit or subvert discussion are the only evil.  
Violence is one  
but not by far the only one.  
What's the hurry to build a highway or free a people?  
The secret of life is enjoying the passage of time  
and time is the mercy of eternity.

### **Of Judith and Inanna**

For the accountant, the librarian, on this cold day  
there is no revelation. He will go his own way  
to the roar of the tinnitus in his ears.  
One wonders what is there to say. Yesterday  
a flock of bluebirds was the only color in the woods.  
Have they arrived too early for their good?  
Of Judith and Inanna I have Korf's fears.

Inanna is generous, Judith is dangerous.  
On each the wise elders depend for sustenance,  
protection. Agriculture is sexual  
and wars end when men remember cunnilingus.  
To savor the young woman's thighs and the old one's food,  
to water her womb and cut her wood.  
Is this not what's real, the actual, the animal?

The women I have known were bluebirds and crows, such  
nuthatches, cardinals, robins, an occasional thrush.  
They did not consider their bodies holy,  
they found my seduction easy. What good luck  
on the bed, in the light of the land, in our youth.  
Our enemy eventually becomes our brother,  
his misery lifted by coming to her city.

## Caterpillar fur

Spring is sprung.  
Clouds of maple.  
Skies of pine.

Red in green.  
Serviceberry understory.  
Spring is sprung.

Skunk cabbage spathe.  
Black birch sap.  
Poplar flowers.

Opossum tires.  
Spring is sprung.  
Blackbird wing.

Wasps won't sting.  
My father died.  
Town meeting Monday.

Spring is sprung.  
Sing cuccu!  
There's no down side.

Infinite willow.  
Leaning oak.  
Spring is sprung.

Budding flame.  
Budding thumb.  
Cat claw.

Bird yolk.  
Spring is sprung.  
Dandelion

Shoots. Arrowhead

Roots. Waterproof  
Boots. Old bed young.

Spring is sprung.  
Ring and wrung.  
Thank and thought.

Seed and seen.  
Wait and walk.  
Spring is sprung.

## Infestation

Full of doubt. About survival of the species and my own.  
A plague of tent caterpillars, worse than an infestation,  
an insurgency that has left the sky naked, bones revealed,  
trees knee deep in webbing.

Another way to look at it: The caterpillars have opened up  
the understory. It's not a form of terrorism,  
it's an opportunity for otherwise repressed species  
to assert genetic relevance.

A scientist gets out among the ticks and webs, observes  
the march of barberries up the watershed, mustards spread  
in tire treads, and hidden among this mess of invasives,  
a jalopy of a hunter's roost.

Beer cans are also diagnostic. Inwood Park,  
dog poop and abandoned cars, yet a copper beech around which  
Indians camped. The broken asphalt and Spanish language.  
Humanity followed time here.

When I see a fox, a coyote or a bear, I think What Good Luck  
to be made of clay and alive this year. If I saw a cougar  
I would not know what to do. It would change my life,  
like an archaic torso of Apollo.

Look for the silver lining. Walk on the sunny side of the street.  
Count your blessings. Life goes on. A little better every day in every way.  
You can't take it with you. It's only money. People who need people are  
the luckiest beetles in the world.

## All Soft Feathers and Flight Muscles

In the intermediate zone between heaven and hell  
opinions and complaints, after much moaning, may  
come to be held in common.

The way a flock of chickadees  
moves through the woods, cheerfully,  
each bird taking a turn on point.

All meaning must be found, here, in the middle zone,  
notwithstanding fears that rend and own us,  
of dying unknown.

A Spring day  
the flycatcher broke its neck against our bay window  
nothing changed.

I buried it, somewhat reverently, in a shallow grave.  
No differently, really, than I would a man  
who'd died suddenly.

Who'd left footprints in the snow  
which became wild lily-of-the-valley, running pine  
then snow again in time.

After long enmity  
Sally hugs me, asks if I've been happy.  
A moment in a year.

February, the light is long, more direct.  
It's meaningless, repetitious  
but held dear.

## The seasons inure us to loss

The seasons inure us to loss  
whether a vote of confidence  
or no confidence  
we are neither more nor less

in our hearts and souls. We are still  
whole, history  
forgets our story  
but immortalizes us, nothing is annulled.

Today's board vote affects my livelihood  
how and what I hunt and gather,  
money, but not whether  
I live or die. That's God's and luck's neighborhood.

I like capitalizing God  
although I don't believe and can't imagine  
an intelligence managing or wanting to manage  
this interface of rock and flesh, fire and sod.

The Knowledge  
tells us how to rebuild after an apocalypse,  
not let the circle lapse,  
outlast the holocaust. I have no vantage

from ridges I ascend  
Cercocarpus, turbinella, dry and hot  
places worry, planning, thought  
stop. May they inure me to my end.

## The Perfect Year

The perfect year,  
two equal halves.  
One with leaves  
one without.  
Forest thinning out.  
Bring indoors  
swing sets, pools, smiles, thoughts.

Having enough and not much else is a lot.  
The transfer of funds is a loving gratitude for work well done.  
Not self-sufficient unless self  
is defined as family, community and nation.  
The world.  
Universe.  
Thus,

I settle my haunches like a bear content, snug into coming winter.  
House will be warm notwithstanding the Muslim-Judeo-Christian  
condition  
not to mention the Hindu-Buddhist vortex.  
Searching space  
for an entity  
to unite us as humanity.  
Carbon-based, earthbound  
meeting, understanding and absorbing  
the clicking, algorithmic logic  
of passionately computing species, insects, machines, bacteria.

A world moves only as fast as you think.  
If it moves faster you're not thinking, you're it, dead, chemicals  
redistributed  
in an ever more painless process.  
What are my feelings exactly?  
Systemic joy.  
Lovely the logic  
we have invented and applied  
identifying, specifying, classifying.  
It can keep you busy  
counting, praying  
while all the leaves are falling.

## God is correction, feedback and bifurcation

Vivacious, practical, self-directed

Mary Bailey, nice body

it makes no sense that just because George might never have been she suddenly becomes a shy, homely, lonely librarian without a dog or god.

No, it did not fundamentally matter

whether George was born except to his mother. Potter might have taken over but why should the morality of a whole community decline? As for the ship going down, if a butterfly in China had fluttered right instead of left 10,000 years ago the tragedy would have been entirely averted in fact the whole war would not have happened!

I pleasure in and treasure

my insignificance. If only

I could be overlooked

by the planning board and IRS.

One false note gives the lie

to the whole premise. God died

but was elected posthumously to the Senate

as for the Big Bang theory, when it

supposedly happened what surrounded that

golf ball of matter and now what

occupies the time beyond the furthest edge of space?

My wife over dinner laughs, says Face

it, you'll never know so stop asking questions.

That is how we must make music, mindful of our extreme limits, our politics, our complete dependence on the theme of God as feedback, bifurcation and correction.

## Organization man

Organization man. In the best sense  
creating the environment in which experiments  
can be savored and remembered.

Then there is the world of interlocked  
organizations. A world of missions and contracts  
finely tuned and binding.

Is the formation of associations  
as instinctual as nesting and gestation?  
A leader may be one who asks a question.

Or may be one imposing order.  
Imposed through consensus and broad shoulders.  
Waits, watches, acts his part.

I was impressed by the list of distinguished senators  
from Vermont. He placed himself among men,  
orators, imperfect, in history.

We march forward, imperfect in our justice  
and compassion. Overriding logic with conscience  
sometimes, not often, when it counts.

And mercy. A seemingly irrational, total  
abnegation of the markets, rules of war, law.  
Good to be so flawed.

## Toy story

Bright and polite  
kids. Deferential  
squirrels. Leaders of  
leaders. Each man  
his own man  
living with his mate.  
The great and the small,  
all, the state.

On the other hand,  
you find yourself  
no hawk  
but stuck  
in traffic. Lack of  
spirit, spiritual identity,  
not free or free  
philosophically about  
no freedom. Caught  
no sign  
of letting go.

One. Bo-Peep's  
sure Woody  
is her man, an answer  
to the question why  
be a toy? Buzz too  
would do.

Two. The men at least  
have missions  
leading other toys  
through risky situations  
sprinkler weather  
or just play,  
cleaning schedule.

So it goes  
not homosexual  
not hetero.

Not defined  
by circumstance  
or genetic material.  
Gone beyond  
the creator  
to an infinity  
that contains  
him and us and our  
collective minds.  
Question is  
can it exist  
without us?  
Would it matter?  
Yes, if  
that damn squirrel  
gets run over.

### **Until the fight is done**

My confusion comes from too much doing. During the news  
eating cheese and crackers, drinking wine, thinking the world  
needs me.

Or the falling leaves, the days shorter but so much brighter.  
How the cloud cover of the canopy has lifted to reveal  
maybe God.

The longest continuous democracy may end in another theocracy.  
A bunch of voodooists with their hocus pocus blessings  
and understandings.

Bombs and poison. Grief. Chiseled, tearless face.  
Chants gregorian. Her sad, clear, soulful missives from  
the city.

Unbelievable acorn crop this year! Skate on them

like marbles. Last year was a maple year. The ash crop significant, too.

But not the cherries. Or a single pear. Blackberries held back too. Sure the towers were a violation, but they came to hold community.

One stands not apart or alone but an individual within his or her platoon. Committed to the mission and survival of the platoon.

Fedex leaves a package. There is or is no anthrax in it. It is our disappointment as Americans that the world cannot be trusted.

Yes, New York is the enemy and brother of Kabul. How does one reconcile those differing communities and be a non-violent human?

With words. Wendell Berry's words. And service such as the secretaries of state give, leaving when one's time and work is done.

Staying in the diatonic. Agreeing first on rules of engagement. Then engaging. Not stopping the fight or thought or song until the fight is done.

## Rereading

Rereading the poems of others  
and my own. Community across  
time and graves. What's left  
exceeds in significance  
one's last moment. Yet  
his last moment must have been  
exceedingly important  
for the poet.

Nothing he did that day will seem meaningful.  
While we prosecute the war  
a pileated woodpecker and red squirrel  
compete for sunflower seeds.  
A winter slow  
to assert itself.  
I can still see my mother's father and his bowl  
of filberts, almonds, walnuts  
quiet weekday mornings.

Both grandfathers read sports  
pages religiously. I don't know  
if my grandmother who gave me the  
anthology of, to date, dated  
unreadable poems read poetry.  
I remember my mother's mother spoke  
rarely as an animal.

Writing but not knowing where I'm going  
unlike Joan Didion justly  
cannibalizing candidates  
who didn't read the Constitution, Bill of Rights or  
Federalist Papers. It's late,  
I have not vacuumed or shopped for food.  
Instead I reread  
Phil Levine's Salami.

## Fear and Awe

Spring. Same plants, same order.  
Monday morning, open for business.  
Tractor-trailers, day care centers.  
Every leaf that's coming out is out.

To tonight's town meeting I will go unaware and foolish.  
It's delicious, the unimportance of my feelings.  
Even our particular war was small.  
Europe had one last a century.

Hubble photos of events 13 billion years ago  
Do not put me in mind of the species' insignificance. Just  
the opposite having witnessed the universe's birth.  
But birth from what preceding state? God again rears his hoary head.

They say one must let go and will let go,  
God will decide what tragedy you need.  
Not every seed becomes a flower,  
Not every branch breaks out a true love knot.

While the ancient Romans wrote of love  
The ancient Britons wrote of war.  
The Romans should have been perfecting their republic.  
No god could do that work for them.

The November moth's the fall cankerworm  
Slender-bodied, beige, beginning life as the well known inchworm.  
In our war more children may have died than would have had the  
tyrant lived in fear and awe.  
We'll never know because we can't help being here.

## **Belonging to the Loved Ones**

Why make a sound or noise  
or do anything to the page?  
Unison playing from polyphony,  
music evolves toward simplicity.

Gould's assertion that complexity,  
NASA, is no more certain than a drunk in his city  
weaving, heaving his guts into the gutter;  
by any measure, evolution's favored bacteria.

Therefore, the earliest poem taking joy  
in abundant crops and the lover's body,  
2K B.C., followed by Yeats' Lapis Lazuli  
offers the completest hope to us, easily,

for living this life without God's help  
or even probability's. We meet  
in the meeting house, argue and pray. We sit  
with the dead who gave their genes to whelp

ourselves. Today, and then, the one question is  
What is the polity's interest in the private soul?  
Being free means belonging to the loved ones.  
O the individual, alone, cannot be whole.

Governance evolves to democracy,  
man accepting sole responsibility  
for his thoughts, his wants, his words. Pure,  
vibratoless song from a polyphony of wars.

## The Summer Noosphere

Wet nights, warm days are what we want in the summer noosphere.  
Man's mind one with weather.  
If this is true, life is good, or will be good.  
Can I be encouraged that my sons will find mystery on the planet  
as I did?

How sweet the slow spring! May already and the canopy not out yet.  
Woods quiet all winter.  
Now I can't distinguish the many bird songs from where I sit.  
Red maple flowers and first sugar maple leaves are, to me, the Christ  
child  
that's been coming.

The ancient poems and the new make the 1/10 inch of annual topsoil  
from carbon dioxide loading.  
As a humanist I want everyone pursuing happiness; as a naturalist  
I sometimes pray for man's destruction. As a rationalist I admit  
I lack data.

O to play slow and sure, even when the tune is fast. Inside an aquifer  
of love for the audience.  
Not to fear or even necessarily obey the changing wind's  
direction. Being here I breathe and make the atmosphere as seen  
from outer space.

The song of the world will often take you far from yourself. There  
will be no self. How will you know yourself?  
By knowing thyme and dandelion, the blue jay from the hawk,  
the heron in its swamp, black cherries and the one pear at the junction  
of the trails.  
They are yourself.

## Two White Wines

Dinner with old friends:

salmon with red cabbage, asparagus, Caesar's salad, penna with  
broccoli, two white wines.

Jane Jacobs could analyze how it all got to our table

or even how their daughter came to us from Cambodia.

The economy or market bringing a thing of beauty, the farms, the  
trucks,

such comfort. The ancients knew this too

yet we are anxious about famine, genocide and nuclear war.

How can we organize (govern) ourselves to end self-imposed  
suffering?

That Quebec and Puerto Rico may secede peacefully at any time a  
majority chooses is a source of pride. Why not Kurds, Chechyns,  
Tibetans and Armenians?

Difficult to write a poem about it. At table, candlelight, we debate

or whine about the other side winning and making a mess

of our lives. The election could be stolen, tampering with voting  
machines,

what policy question does that possibility raise? War in Iraq,

school testing, prison population. Religion, the abyss surrounding the  
little promontory life.

It'll all work out in the end. Go to your daily practice, be a good citizen.

Another failed effort to write what I mean. Such confusion, yet  
two white wines.

## Miniature Juniper

Although I hardly gave it a thought  
I didn't really doubt  
our miniature juniper, a bonsai,  
would survive our desert vacation.

It likes the dry

air of our home, needs water  
once a week at most and seems  
meditative and active, both. While away  
I rediscovered my love of agaves—

sotol and century

plant—met Mortonia and became  
reacquainted with squawbush, its citrus  
drupe which makes traveling the long  
horizon of the desert uplands endurable.

Live oaks—emory,

wavyleaf—dominant and regally spaced  
giving ground to mesquite only on the sere  
sand flats. I counted and drew inflorescences,  
spikelets, florets, awns but grasses

remain a mystery

their microscopic parts. This year  
I'll study, give them serious thought before  
our Spring starts. The cactus wren was the one  
bird I could be certain about. Sunsets

made me sorry

the desert is not my home. But the ocotilloes  
flowered before we left and that made up  
for the vicious attack of a hedgehog cactus.  
Impressive, ponderosa pine and Arizona cypress

the canyon canopy

watered with snowmelt and along the high cliffs  
limestone formations predating our arrival by  
ten million years of weather. Newspapers  
kept us aware humanity had not accomplished yet

the end of history

and that was fair. The planes were full of citizens  
who no longer applaud upon landing. Snow flew,  
not a pinyon pine or manzanita within two moons  
walking. On the dining room sideboard, waiting,

our miniature juniper.

## Okay Love

Dear Robert

    I'm enclosing the warranty  
                                  for your shaver In case  
anything should happen  
    I've circled the address  
                                  where to bring it

Dad still isn't feeling  
    well and is going  
                                  this week to the doctor I can't  
imagine  
    what can be wrong—  
                                  but I'm really getting concerned

Oh!  
    by the way  
                                  did you mail  
that letter  
    to the bank  
                                  I hope  
so

Today  
    we are going to a wake  
                                  for Phyllis Spina.  
She died  
    on Saturday—  
                                  acute leukemia.

Your brothers are fine  
    they're off—  
                                  Yom Kippur  
All else is  
    okay Love  
                                  Mom

## The Dead Woman's Cat

The dead woman's cat in the furrows of the garden  
does not let herself be picked up  
although hungry and thin after five days  
with the dead woman and a night in the rain.  
It has gone to join the other feral cats  
among the junk behind the house.  
On my way to work I try to entice it  
with false friendship, guilt that the dead woman is dead.

On my way home I buy a can of cat food  
but can't find the cat. I let her go  
to her fate. Later that night I try again  
but there's a tom waiting in her place.

Maybe I could have saved her if I'd known  
her husband overdosed last week. Just maybe,  
no more.  
I ask the neighbors what happened to the kid.  
The kid lives with her grandparents, they just used her for welfare.  
I used to say  
Somebody dies every day, it's normal.  
Stay near the earth people  
that's the way to grow old.

## Election Day

This autumn morning with the birds waking up  
and the leaves changing is Election Day. I meet  
Jane Trichter on the downtown train and discuss  
Henry's upset. Her skin is soft especially her cheeks  
and she is intelligent and sensitive. The subway riders  
do not recognize their representative.

All week, at the office, I accomplish nothing substantive  
but keep the aides and interns working  
and cheerful. On Tuesdays there is always a wave  
of constituent complaints, by telephone. One woman's  
Volkswagon is towed and the police break in  
to get it out of gear. Do they have that right,  
can they tow even though no sign said Tow Away Zone?

It is an interesting question but I try to avoid  
answering it. The woman persists and succeeds  
in committing me.

The people at the office want to bomb Iran. A few Americans  
held hostage and therefore many innocent women and children  
pay the postage. It may be good classical logic to hold responsible  
the whole society for the acts of a few, however, then  
I must begin to expect the bomb and the white cloud that waits.  
Apocalyptic visions are popular again  
but we are more likely to thrash the earth to within an inch of its life  
than scorch it to charred rock.

Corner of Church and Chambers,  
German tourist's language, accent repels me  
although I wasn't alive 45 years ago  
and many sweet, great Germans opposed the crazy Nazis  
but lately I've read Primo Levi's *If Not Now, When?*, seen William  
Holden in "The Counterfeit Traitor", have followed the argument  
started by revisionists who say the Nazi atrocities never happened.

War brought many shopkeepers, bookkeepers close to their earth,

weather, seasons, death.

I see daily life as low-intensity warfare  
as my father, the World War II vet, did.

Off to work we go. What is war?

Population control, mother of invention, diversion  
from the work of making life permanent.

Today is Election Day and because it's a day off  
for most municipal employees, the City Hall area  
has been quiet and easy to work in. Henry and Jane  
hold a press conference on teenage alcoholism.  
Leslie, the other aide, who I'd like to draw  
the stockings and clothes off of and feel her whole body  
with mine, goes home with her mother, leaving me  
standing by my desk with my briefcase at the end  
of Election Day.

## Troy and Trinity

Learning disabled, hopelessly unemployed  
Troy can't write the address for his next interview.  
Warehouse stock, 331 Tiffany Street, in the Bronx.  
His girlfriend, Trinity, also unemployed,  
with one child by Troy. She's more resourceful  
but doesn't realize it. For one month  
she worked an evening cashier job until her mother  
refused to babysit at night. Wants to go out, live  
her life, too. Trinity made numerous appointments  
yesterday, can write and find the addresses o.k.

Troy has nowhere to live, has been crashing  
with a woman in the Bronx. She's on public assistance,  
they share the bed. How Troy reconciles this woman  
with Trinity doesn't matter. Survival precedes love.  
Troy can't meet the rent although she gives him  
subway fare. He dresses well enough in the youthful  
style, dark shirt, thin dark tie. At least no sneakers  
and saggy pants or skinny jeans. Smokes cigarettes  
but so do a lot of people. Hedging bets on life.

Trinity is tolerant of Troy. Understands his  
predicament. No stable home, no money. How  
does she feel about her kid? At least she has  
someone to love her now. Troy forgets  
to record the names and phone numbers of companies  
he applies at. Burned out on angel dust. Wants  
a job that pays and offers benefits. Too old  
and desperate for a work experience/basic education  
program. Needs a living wage, not a stipend.  
But can't read or write or even speak coherently.

Interestingly he's not desperate enough to work fast food  
at age 22. So the woman on public assistance is  
a surer source of income than we think. Good.  
Security guard may be the way to go with Troy.  
No police record, requires no writing skills, just

stand there and be big. A job with no security for the guard. Troy's mother threw him out four years ago, although she helps out now and then. He dropped out of high school in the tenth grade kicked around the house and streets two years doing drugs and partying. Met Trinity, got her pregnant.

Does Trinity have a contraceptive in place? We don't know. As employment counselors, is that our business? Only if Trinity brings it up. On the bulletin board there's plenty of information about family planning clinics. When she lost that cashier job, I was completely frustrated, but not Trinity. Takes it all in stride. I gotta admire her cheerfulness, but why shouldn't she be happy? She has friends, family, a community such as Hell's Kitchen is, not the worst, and a purpose for living and acting in her kid. She feeds the baby, negotiates living space with her mother.

Troy and Trinity wake up, late August morning, hot and humid New York City. They have interviews planned as well as personal business and pleasures today. They have responsibilities, society puts survival on them, never mind their disadvantages. It is tough and it is good. Trinity will land another cashier position, maybe today. Troy will go for security jobs, I figured it out, the uniform will make him feel better, the check too. The work boring, easy, slow, perhaps fulfilling.

## Dendrology

### Surveying

northern autumn afternoon

Pitcherelli, ex-marine, body-builder,

Lussier, long-haired father of three dark-skinned children

and myself, sharp-edged loner, ex-lover of a fair share of women  
are belly-laughing in the dying sun. Clouds.

The crew, in timber.

### Laughing

over recent visits to marvelous cities where

we could not keep ourselves from touching the terminal buds  
of numerous exotic trees

and attracting ridicule of stylish girls and tame boyfriends.

Pitcherelli before the Albany bus station

shaking hands with a red pine planted thirty years ago.

Lussier, one hand in a child's hand and the other

feeling scabrous bark of urban woody plants.

Myself among partially shaved heads and leathery aromatic jackets  
getting close to the hairy bud of an unidentified poplar or sycamore.

### People

laughed, but we laughed best

back on our mountain

under the blackening weather.

## **Life is not a curse**

I'm not hard,  
I'm scared.  
I thought the cherry was the birch.  
When the cloud cleared  
I was still afraid.

At my best  
I accept death  
As a necessary search, wary  
Of philosophies  
That assign us souls but not the trees.

Nonetheless  
I want long life, yes,  
I want to plant my seed and walk the wilderness.  
But not yet.  
First I must just sit.

Sit and feel the pain  
That keeps me sane.  
Eat my meal quietly and remain  
A guest  
In the body I know best.

This morning in the east  
The sun rose on the lake. Again  
I breathed. I was blessed  
And thought to say  
Life is not a curse.

## The Canopy and Economy

Sun and traffic–day economy.  
Six a.m. drive to plywood mill. Too tired  
to be angry. Each day a step  
toward death. What is being accomplished? The  
small satisfactions  
within each day. Book consciously read.  
And frustrations. Package dropped, honey jar broke.

One of 175 soil types. With the fifty  
tree species  
comprising the canopy under which Eric and Lisa clean their baby's face.

Sun in winter, old apples.

Inside the school  
a brilliant but rebellious history teacher  
is suspended by the school board.  
200 students  
wearing armbands and painted teardrops  
protest. Another 400  
are silent.

Within each structure human  
dramas and routines.  
Nancy will not love  
any man who cannot do as many push-ups as she.

Trees grow,  
porcupine scat in snow.

No job,  
no niche,  
no existence.  
How you earn money is who you are. You are  
what you do to get food to eat  
and shelter from the winter, summer heat.

Each morning I seek God  
by holding still  
waiting for the smoke to be black or white  
coins heads or tails  
wind dark or bright.

Flock of evening grosbeaks  
nipping maple buds:  
the sign I need.

\* \* \*

Less need =  
more wealth.  
2/23/89. So much equipment just to sleep.  
More than a bare floor.  
Plumbing vs.  
wash at stream, find a log in woods.  
Implements of human existence  
unlike the deer or bear who  
nip buds, forage berries.  
I cannot eat the gum out of balsam fir  
or bark from a popple.

I am not Wendell Berry  
with a wife, a farm, philosophy.  
I like the accuracy  
of counting pear thrips in maple buds.  
8/bud = complete defoliation.  
This insect has four wings fringed with hairs  
and is minute, 2.5 millimeters.  
Two species within the genus:  
one with tubular abdominal segment,  
the other with conical abdominal segment.  
Sugar maple their preferred food.

All I need  
are names.  
Names and habitats.

Elements, products, decay fungi, egg masses.  
Marriage, copulation, regeneration, education.  
Machinery, accounting, hand tools, laboratory.

I need your names  
and histories.

Sexual histories, books read, unrequited loves, significant landscapes,  
broken bones, periods of boredom, favorite shows.

\* \* \*

Immediately means  
without mediation, intermediate moments  
time in the middle.

Time in the middle  
time in the middle.

I'm bummed I never saw a dinosaur, an ice age, a cave man, even missed  
the last world war.

Thanks to paleontology, geology, archaeology, history  
mind equipped to take  
time out of the middle.

It's in our DNA!

Why should she love me, her tenant?  
Because I pay the rent on time.

\* \* \*

Excellent. The white sun rose  
and lit the frost.  
Early February, late March, or in between.

Birds begin  
discussing family. Sap starts to flow.  
Where the borer spirals in, it comes out wet.  
Birch or maple.

I watched from the window. Beautiful  
but no desire to go out and touch  
swelling buds of elderberry.

Is this shrub crazy? It knows what it knows  
with elderberry knowledge.

Come Spring, so much to identify and name.  
Insects, diseases and new flowers.  
Lepidoptera, root rot, the pinks.  
I think I might get married too  
and watch the moons pass through the mists.

\* \* \*

March rain.

Some snow remains  
roads dangerous  
but truck deliveries must be made.

The light

pushing back the dark.  
Bark  
getting softer, slippery  
at the cambium. Sap  
simmering. Summer  
and spring are here and there  
although only winter birds are in the air.  
Some buds  
break swell  
want  
to turn inside out  
but wait  
knowing better.

I too will not break or run  
early  
hold hope bound by ropes of discipline, experience  
time the magic moments to come  
take the last sleet and pain  
slap in the face  
glad for predictable seasons.

We anticipate however

drought, maple defoliation, increased gypsy moth infestations  
which some attribute to our existence.

That may be true.

Or it may be that the universe  
has reversed its decision on us  
and there's nothing we can do.

But we will do  
what we can  
and some things we shouldn't  
because that is human.

Continuing  
into the space inside me  
unconnected to the light switch, plumbing  
fairly independent of materials beyond  
food and sound.

Where I pray  
like an oak  
that the light will enter me  
unbroken, forever  
and I will live the meanings in the wind.

Basic

necessities, wood wine  
and friends. And the names  
of everything  
by which we know our way.

## **Love and Death and Governance**

### **First Living Organism**

Anyway, there is love and death and governance. With the birth of my sons, love was fulfilled. There is no romance left in love for me, women are another form of men. Perhaps their toes are painted rather than blood-encrusted, but blood runs from their bones, their eyes are friendly as camera lenses, muscles hungry. Death continues to be my every third thought, fittingly. Occasionally I feel strong, but when I don't it's death waiting. I think I know it's a waste of time to imagine being dead, as if being dead were a form of living. It's not, but last night I was reading about the efforts of astrobiologists to identify LUCA meaning Last Universal Common Ancestor and FLO, first living organism, and that gave me a calmer feeling. Bringing me to governance, how we manage together between birth and death. What can I say that hasn't already been said by Aristotle and Plato, the Republicans and Democrats, Hamilton and Jefferson. To start, your daily discipline is a personal governance. There are many ways to know a person: by their god, by their fears and appetites, by how they spend their money or organize their time. Who is in authority, who is in command here? The one in authority is not necessarily our leader.

### **Patience**

I live in a mountainous community about 140,000 strong. My irascible, aggressive temperament toward my fellow citizens has exiled or sidelined me to a peripheral almost insignificant role although when I arrived I was considered a problem solver, even a savior of the poor and the wealthy classes who feared for the future. Why mention this. He who knows patience knows peace. I have surely lost face often in my life. As a kid, lost most fights, as a man, chosen last to lead the squad or platoon. Only when every known leader had died did those in authority decide to use me. Someone must begin to write the federalist papers for the world. And, of course, it's being done and heard. Books in print, blogs, debates. My vision is a world where you can fly from Madagascar to Mississippi and be greeted by a sign that says Welcome to our land. Go about your business, setting off no bombs, and fly home. Perhaps take a

lover for one afternoon.

### **The Machine and the Season**

The machine and the season are so far incompatible. The machine claims electrical problem. The house leaks from rain. The men who left the machine have started their own business. A new endeavor by which they will keep warm and purposeful. The junior partner, heavier, says the Grand Canyon's not so grand. Jaded individual or one to set himself against the depths, abyss? Man's systems. Man made the machine (and the town) from rocks mined next door. Some few men understand these invisible electrons moving the machine to perform. I still cannot imagine, i.e. my mind cannot move fast enough to know how so many particles can be sorted and split so quick to make words on a screen. My simplicity is terminal.

### **Saving Grace**

Today it is fall, first day for long-sleeved shirts. The boys at school. I admonish Zach not to whine and complain about homework. Lately reading or practicing piano, prone to fits of frustration. To the point of claiming belly pain. Last night I dreamed I had pushed him to suicide. It is so important for a man to do no harm. This is what makes us crazy against Wolfowitz, willingness to kill to do good. Someone very sure of himself and shining, much wiser and more compassionate than me, has calculated for the world that more lives now for fewer later shall be sacrificed. The people he serves are cantankerous, disorderly, selfish and complaining. The same diverse, spoiled, unpatriotic revolutionaries as at the nation's beginning. Their refusal to be more than the sum of themselves is their saving grace.

### **Politics**

Politics can be an escape from the personal, the debates are of little interest to a man in hospice. Will the machines do their work? How will we make decisions together? Roger Johnson's gravel pit must be killing his neighbors with the noise of boulders being pulverized to rock but Roger is certain his business is necessary for the public good. He knows he has a right to use his property as he sees fit. There

is a noise ordinance, a state employee will travel out to measure the decibel level in your front yard as compared to the ambient noise level. There is a measurable amplitude beyond which the legislature has determined no citizen may be exposed or corporation go. It can be measured.

### **Measure for Measure**

Measure for measure, all's well that ends well during a midsummer night's dream for the merry wives of Windsor. A million or more poets but only one Top Bard. How did he know so much about kings and fools and murderers? An Elizabethan and no Freedom of Information Act. Today it is fall. The legislature and president are at work and so are our machines. One by one and then in armies the leaves come down. It is not that someone must decide, we must decide how we will make decisions and where authority resides. What am I learning, sitting, watching the season turning? Content this morning to admire my sons' photos, reread my own poems searching for the prize answer, and answer the phone. I seem to be alienating potential business partners with a take it or leave it comme-ci comme-ca attitude. All you can do, the best that can be done is go to your daily discipline. Driving home or waking up at night I think I'm dying. Do the much-admired writers of our time die more content than that?

### **War All the Time**

War all the time. I've been fond of saying what distinguishes America is its daily low intensity warfare. Endless but not fatal conflict. Chambers of commerce, municipal government, big corporations wrestle nearly naked and will lie as needed for what? I tire like an 80 year old man of the storm and worry. I remember my early years when I had no known skill to offer and elections occurred without my vote being solicited. I noticed no harm or good I did was noticed. Autumn was all mine, mine alone, I was alone in the world with autumn. My mind could not stand it. I cried out for comfort, someone to obey. I needed to grow up and know money.

### **The History That Surrounds Us**

I'm not going anywhere, I chose to stay and hold my clod of soil in the landscape of community oh blah dah. I want like Shakespeare and other writers to discern the motivations of women, men, see through their lies to a humorous truth careless about success and able to explain why what happens today or on September 11th obtains. I was impressed by the critic who found that Shakespeare in Hamlet had tried to write about the thoughts of a man suspended between having decided to act and the act itself. Why bother he soliloquated why commit or submit to the great moment when mere men of bones and dust, disgusted with themselves and others are the actors of the moment, beheaders, rhymers, debtors. And, of course, the answer comes to one in the night like Chuang-tzu, or Lao, why not? The great moment is no greater than the small and the small no smaller than the great. You perform the history that surrounds you and go to your daily practice.

### **A Systems Guy**

I'm something of a systems guy. I want the truth and death and worth to be independent of individual motives, paranoidias, prejudice, peccadilloes, virginities, crucifixes, paradoxes, protons, protozoa or curses. I want pure human machinery, stainless steel, clear thinking, even handed, not a doubt that every doubt is wanted, needed, good to the last drop toward the ultimate ignition into outer space, colonization of diverse planets and immortality of the genome. Here's what's odd. While enduring ever more frequent panic attacks (and nudging toward survival and self-sufficiency my offspring) pounding and pinching my skin to stay sensate, maintain consciousness, I parabolate (always orbiting myself, eye on the tip of my penis) to another extreme, i.e. my belief mankind can escape the earth unlike Hamlet's dad's ghost. A system is a set of inputs-values, policies, objectives, procedures, data- organized and repeated to generate significant quantities of desired outcomes without redesigning the system for each individual outcome. I told John Russell from Amnesty International at Jack Schwartz's daughter's coming of age party about my plan to reorganize the U.N. so only the democracies can vote and no nation has a veto. He said the world's not ready, with absolute certainty, knowledge and authority. I looked out the hotel window, this was shortly after 9/11, at dozens of American flags and a lone security guard. I'm always right I said to myself.

## Just Us

Suppose there is no life in space, just us. And we inhabit Mars, air condition Venus. Hold family barbecues, national holidays on Mercury. Fly to Jupiter for spas of ammonium nitrate. And go farther afield in the galaxy and on to other galaxies leaving behind map-faced men, crow-like women and open gates.

Who will be the first-born human on the moon? News from the moon colony! And so on, on every planet where we've visited and established dusty villages or vast cities over thousands of centuries. Then, will we not have somewhere, somehow, under some sun's rays become another species?

## Two Hawks

Two hawks aloft  
crows anxious banding together  
my neighbor comes over to my croft, likes the warm weather, November  
a California Christmas and maybe species will migrate to reflect that,  
she paints watercolor ornaments, gentle Jewish lady  
how far from her past is she now? or is she quite aware just not talking  
about it now  
I wonder what she thinks the solution to Israel-Palestine might be  
ask her sitting around the pool next summer  
almost always disappointed people haven't given the single state  
solution more thought  
we discuss Thanksgiving, the cleaning and cooking before and the  
cleaning after, then the insane Christmas potlatch  
deciduous trees have a special winter beauty, conifers among them.

## Born Again

If, as they say, the cells  
of the body are replaced every seven  
years, then I'm a new being  
since my sons were newborn.  
I have died and been reborn  
neither better nor worse yet remembering  
feeding them while dancing to Moment's  
Notice, as they attended with new minds.

Having died, as such, I find I do not mind  
quiet living with the purpose of a cell  
unbound by minutes or moments  
as men know them. There are seven  
deadly sins, seven ways of remembering,  
seven stages in which to have been or continue being.  
None of them recur after one's reborn  
and none are known to us from before we're born.

Of the two young people to whom I was born,  
one has lately died. I do not so much mind.  
Although I do not, he believed he'd be reborn  
and who can say what happened to his soul or cells?  
Perhaps in Christ we continue being,  
or with some other deity, as the churches claim monotonously,  
momentously,  
demonically and deviously. It seems about as relevant that seven  
rhymes with heaven and rhyming's a mnemonic device (for  
remembering).

But remembering  
what? To go to the daily discipline to which you were born?  
I fought seven forest fires, took seven  
lovers, my sons are seven, and my mind  
is the sole owner and subsidiary of these memories and moments.  
Unless I am to be reborn  
they disappear with me. The darkened deathbed continues to be  
the most honest and chilling assessment of our souls' and cells'

disbursement. I can imagine stem cell  
research may lead to a cure for dementia, loss of memory  
about who you are and where you've been.  
If one's not been born  
this doesn't matter. But if you're being reborn,  
in the sense of "he not busy being born is busy being reborn" (Dylan),  
then it is best and most correct to consider your last moment  
of a continuum with moments endless and entirely in your mind.

The mind is made of cells and moments, seven billion of them.  
Remember to be born and reborn, early and often.

### **Can poetry matter**

In the debate between accessible and difficult poems  
Poets' poems and poems for people  
Only the single poem and private reader matter

Both kinds and anything between can matter or not  
Solid or made of air, a vase or heavy clay ashtray  
One word repeated or many like a lei

An acquired taste, like wine, and like wine  
Not sustenance, yet men die with their miseries  
Uncut without it, news and mere matter

I advise everyone to keep a personal anthology of poems that matter  
Or not. Perhaps it should be novels. Stones, insect wings,  
Feathers, birds you've seen, people loved.

## Wetland Song

The April morning's quiet  
and so is the November.  
Wherever people outnumber trees  
or the dominant cover type  
is unquiet. Nothing wrong with that.  
Walt got it right, and Jane Jacobs:  
the city is an experienced,  
used beauty. Her toes are long,  
nails thick and hair thin. Yet  
her kisses can be sweet; or  
smell of shit. All my life I've tried to point my window toward  
some narrow wedge of nature.  
On Seaman Ave., over the roof  
beyond the chimneys to the park  
where every dog was walked.  
Could I survive soot and an air shaft now, pigeons and cats,  
or even a desk in the legislature for my lot in life. How about  
prison like Etheridge Knight,  
Nazim Hikmet?  
I've gotten soft.  
When he builds that house in the pocket  
wetland my window now looks out on,  
the developer will have given me what I need.  
Amphibian mortality,  
gravel, fill,  
oak, ash and maples felled. Good  
to the last drop is our bitterness, our love.

## **Communicating the Bird**

## The Self

*“The study of myself is the study  
of all I do not know”* –Montaigne

What kind of day was it. Clean  
the house. Notice the full moon.  
Read a sheaf of old poems.  
Listen to jazz tunes. Open mail.

Refuse to make of it more  
than it was. What is it for,  
don't ask. Squirrel or spider  
your cares are yours to savor,

enjoy or fear. Tinnitus  
of the ear, sinusitis  
of the nose, bale contriteness  
of the soul. Moriturus.

Consider economy  
soul's eponymity.  
The opening canopy  
panoramic mystery.

Neither joyful nor depressed.  
Not the worst and not the best.  
I lived, as did my dentist.  
To the east and west, the self.

## Who should I thank?

You may feel about the planet how  
you feel about a great baseball team or band:  
that once there was a moment when, unknown  
to us at the time, we convened  
and lost and found ourselves in what we created.

Who should I thank for this day?  
A fresh-mown lawn is a robin's repast.  
A bear a black bear a rolling delicately dancing  
graceful as silence sailing through the ferns and understory  
unafraid and in no hurry.

My musician referral service, vacation rental business,  
nonprofit management system, plant identification database,  
great American songbook and anthology of poems. Coach says  
in a thousand years back and forth games like lacrosse and soccer  
will be played against genetically engineered primates

but baseball will be played solely by humans.  
In a thousand years, amen.

## Ectopic Heart

Ectopic heart  
beat. Acoustic  
neuroma. Sleep  
apnea. Getting  
older blessing  
against alternative.

Neither hurt  
nor repair.  
Immediately  
the woods were familiar—  
bunchberry, clintonia.  
Red spruce, yellow birch.

Heron rowing  
northward overhead  
a sign: good luck.  
Or was it just  
a crow. Rock thrown.  
Don't know.

Life's ending.  
My sons  
have each other  
for laughter  
at their tragedies.  
Avalanche, cataract.

Clean house or  
run for president.  
Power and talent  
are bones in your feet.  
Nature's the bed  
you'll sleep in.

Thyroid storm.  
Screech

of the long-eared  
owl. Even if  
portent of death  
it's welcome.

### **While Sleeping**

Spring peepers  
stop peeping. A satellite  
crosses sky. One peeper keeps peeping  
in time to the satellite blinking, an eye.  
Deep thinking.

## Eye of the tropical January sun

Exercising belief about unknowns.  
Makes sense to take your best guess.  
Using history, numbers, extrapolation.  
Getting the trajectory right for re-entry.  
Few dissenters left for climate change, evolution.  
Nuclear power brings a process to earth  
that occurs only in space. Dangerous  
but necessary? Not a risk-averse weasel.

One among many mammals is the weasel,  
not known for its consideration of unknowns  
but, for its extreme caloric needs, considered dangerous.  
My wife says in England violent gusts  
forced a locomotive off its tracks. One interpretation  
might reasonably be that the mother, earth,  
has stopped mothering man. We're entering  
a period of unknowns and must evolve.

What might this involve  
and what adjustments are possibly feasible?  
Walking rather than riding to the subway entrance,  
using less electricity until more is known,  
preserving agricultural soils and forest land,  
buying fewer plastic contraptions.  
My brother's washing his pajamas less often.

None of this may make the slightest difference  
in how the earth and the sun and universe revolve.  
But we are human and addicted to action,  
the probable less attractive than the possible.  
Also, there's no percentage in respecting death  
unless it's imminent. Better to remain centered,  
focused on food, child-bearing, war and the poem.

All driveways plowed, all lawns mowed.  
Just in time before the first snow, I raked our leaves.  
Two eight hour days. What percent of all time is that?

Draw a ray with point A the first pile of leaves  
extending to the extrapolating end of universe.

.01 of Aaron. Zero of Zach.

Hawks playing, hunting, mating, canaries in the mine.

Having been too many places to count.

Sex bars, infant formulas, fire crews, last rites, permanent jobs,  
traffic tickets, judges' chambers, out houses, wedding banquets,  
boiling teapots, frantic centuries, facial tissues, presumed innocent,  
clear intentions, stainless steel.

Spiderweb glove. Deerfly earring. Daddylonglegs seeingeyedog.

Memorized songs. Privatized loans.

You cannot know what you're doing until you've done it. Eye witness.

Erudite sweep the floor. Articulate make the bed.

Infrared town hall. Crab nebula. Your last crap.

Eye of the tropical January sun. Slouching toward temperate zone.

## Man's Mood

Generally cheerful institutions  
school and hospital, The Constitution,  
roadways with their yellow stitch lines.

Order on the mountainside, in the city,  
the veneer is thin, the people thrifty,  
the freedom to associate unlimited.

Smoke the cigarette, sound the subwoofer,  
I woof and bay like every other dog, proof  
one cannot escape the planet, life's foolproof.

Magic's secret—rabbit, lion—the inner  
animus emerges from the hat. One eats magicians,  
the other's skewered for dinner.

Thus, happy and sad at once, death a solace  
and a fearsome fright. As the dashed lines pass,  
confidently, and when necessary, I drive fast.

An afternoon, one hundred years of solitude  
for our silver maple. Microscopic magnitudes:  
the snake's skin, the fly's wing, the man's mood.

## Marines Call to Say Hello

Marines call to say hello,  
impress. I'm over 35 but my boys  
19. They could go: Hide!

One moment spent tying a shoe,  
another dying, gunshot wound or poisoned food.  
Events in their mere chronology

make no sense.

And the details of yr dad's life don't either.

Late night

quiet cigarette smoker

who watches for war.

Even if Uncle Sam disbands, dissolves  
we the people will still be here and stay involved  
with North America. The purple mountains majesty  
and shining seas  
little people, big people, brown, red and white. Addicted  
to action movies.

Perhaps there is no choice. One must sit sitting still  
as a buddha, sitting bull.

I can imagine myself and all others – drivers, voters, runners –  
little fetal muscles  
at first. Metastasizing. What's it called when the cell  
at the tip of the organ  
or organism, divides, and the organ grows? It's called  
girl on a bicycle.

I find I make no sense. Her cunt, a practicality to her, is  
delicious to me  
a miraculous sea lettuce or snapdragon. You've heard it before.

A moral dilemma

wrapped in robes and silks and odors. Yet, come close,  
and business beckons  
work gets done, life goes on, hair grows in, we go on  
vacation

the Marine Corps calls, desperate for new fetuses, to teach

purposeful workmanlike killing  
I'll do my own killing, thanks, when violence comes to the neighborhood  
if I've got your back  
your back's gotten and if I'm on point, the point's taken.

One world under God invisible with liberty and justice for all who  
Art in heaven  
what the hell's his name.

Nemesis.

Hysterical.

The small war of an especially inept empire. The world's too big  
to swallow as the Krauts and Nips found out. Empire  
is self-correcting. Them dark-skinned mustachioed shitheads  
who can't fix their own electricity seem to be kicking our asses  
pert good. As did the gooks before them. All to the good. A  
good lesson to know and then we all become friends following  
the brawl. We apparently cannot skip the fight. It must  
be fought, and fuck the girls.

## **Snow. . .**

A year  
in which  
each day  
brings one  
tenth inch.  
First the  
window sills  
are covered  
then door  
jambs. Our  
lips are  
sealed then  
our eyes  
shut. Sleep  
like this  
we've never  
known. Will  
Spring return?  
Unknown. We  
care not.

## Rhodora in Winter

Rhodora in winter, capsule like a claw,  
remains of the 5-part flower Emerson saw,  
gone to seed. Deciduous blossoms  
have their own winter beauty and a power  
akin to the fittest's survival, self-same  
that brought me, musing, here. Large globose buds!  
(that dwarf the rose's but not the butternut's)  
discern it from other Ericaceae that  
surround this inland wetland. The Lord  
all claim to worship is not superior  
to thou. I'm passing through naming you,  
your parts, and the autumn elaeagnus who  
is your neighbor. Good a walk as it gets  
before edible understory herbs sprout.

## Words for Birds

First person singular prohibited. In order  
to be more crow.

War! war! war! war! war!

Then there's that lowland wetland bird  
around the stunted red pines crying  
Birdy, birdy, birdy, birdy.

Hear the redwing blackbird  
chirring Her, her, her. . . she  
in mating season, Spring.

Words for birds  
since they're inaccessible. Aim  
binoculars left, right, up, down—missing every time.

At the piano recital  
Aaron made the penguins run, run, run, not waddle,  
from a hungry polar bear!

Everything passes, even a massacre,  
but birds outlast cars  
and words like *chemical* and *holocaust*.

Woodpecker climbs oak,  
Connecticut.  
Not one neighbor heard the knocking.

The voice of a pewee  
whose nest has fallen out of the tree.  
Oh my! Oh me!

What did the wood thrush sing  
that summer evening  
teaching its young thrush meanings?

## Enduring Spinning: Agriculture, Culture and War

You can feel it spinning  
fast  
the Chinese, Japanese, American and European junk  
orbiting at several thousand miles per hour could  
punch  
a hole in your armor, future. Thanksgiving passes, then Christmas.  
A nuclear detonation, we absorb that fact. The scientist in us  
delays sadness by recording observations. What is it,  
sorrow's for tomorrow.

By reducing probabilities to near zero I hope to avoid sorrow.  
In yr suburb.  
In history when there were many fewer people we still found reason  
to cross space, explore, trade and war. Now  
overpopulation  
may not be the problem but food and water shortages  
get our attention.  
I have Korf's fears.  
And hear what I want to hear.

Some hear singing, some hear speeches or complaining.  
Martin Luther King sang his complaints, dreamed of a brotherly nation  
which came to pass, spinning fast, past Thanksgivings, past jailings  
into reconnaissance, small wars, drones, renaissance, inventions.  
At the border,

where the Juaristas fought Maximilian:  
*Benito Juarez (1806-1872) Zapotec Amerindian who served five  
terms as president of Mexico. He was the first Mexican leader who  
did not have a military background and also the first full-blooded  
indigenous person to lead a country in the western hemisphere in  
over 300 years. For resisting French occupation, overthrowing the  
Empire, and restoring the Republic, Juarez is regarded as Mexico's  
greatest and most beloved leader.*

Each soldier chooses what war at what border or just  
shows up  
spinning with the planet.

The neighborhood and surrounding nature is orderly.  
But always there is implied force, violence holding it together,  
chaos

is contained  
kept out of the playground, government buildings, children's games  
but lies within  
the force maintaining order, a spinning tumor, a gyroscope of  
inertia.

The force of the spinning, the speed of the force bring one to one's  
death  
seasons, weather, earth.

While the emperor's being beheaded  
enduring seeds are discovered and invented, cross-fertilized and bred.  
Corn, yams, potatoes, sunflowers, rice.

Food is life and a good study,  
useful discipline  
daily meditation.

The fighting man protects the farmer  
and the farmer feeds the fighting man.

They elect the governor  
who serves the people. Peace out.

Peace and war are transitory manifestations of spinning  
electrons, planets.

The sun's a nuclear detonation, essential  
to spring and planting. Food is life. Seeds endure  
if man goes to his daily discipline. If woman is man.  
Birth and death

together are orderly, the border can be known,  
voluntarily. How we live together, by prayer or force,  
is our story.

Knowledge  
from laboratory to starry corridor keeps us very  
versed.

Did Juaristas consider the rights of animals not to be eaten?  
Not during that spinning.

And perform the history that surrounds us.  
All that can be done

is written in the spinning:

*The people of the land, the Indian farmers of North America – like their counterparts in Mesoamerica, the Andean region, and the Amazon – have continuously cultivated maize, beans, squash and other crops for more than five thousand years. One of the salient features of their traditional farming systems is the high degree of biodiversity. These traditional farming systems have emerged over centuries of cultural and biological evolution, and they represent the accumulated experience of indigenous farmers interacting with the environment without access to external inputs, capital or scientific knowledge. In Latin America alone, more than 2.5 million hectares under traditional agriculture in the form of raised fields, polycultures, agroforestry systems and the like document indigenous farmers' successful adaptations to difficult environments.*

## **The Ordinary Care of Providence**

Madison's defense of the establishment clause to the Virginia legislature:

*Religion both existed and flourished, not only without the support of human laws, but in spite of every opposition from them, and not only during the period of miraculous aid but long after it had been left to its own evidence and the ordinary care of Providence.*

May I say

electromagnetic waves. Radiant energy.

Light travels in waves

Waves of what?

Electromagnetic waves consist of electric and magnetic fields oscillating at right angles to each other and to the direction of motion of the wave.

All waves can be described in terms of amplitude, wavelength, frequency and speed.

Waves of what?

Think of a hand waving. The wave itself is virtual, ideal. The hand and eyes are waves. The wave's

a quantum guess.

Religion and electromagnetic waves—visible, audible,  
ideal

causing real reactions in earth-time (real as it gets). Madison's  
ordinary

care of Providence

impossible to handle.

Needed is a medium: antenna, cathode ray, page,  
body

hairy, sweaty

diurnal

with the capacity to say Providence electromagnetic visible light  
element god.

Alone in your life and body. Say

the heavy word

weighty word

isotope

charged word (ion god)

the particle physicist and political philosopher have it over the poet  
who is sharing ignorance

pretty much all he doesn't know.

Or who stays within a dimension she knows she knows, extrapolating  
her hand in a child's hand or husband's hold or nest in a tree hole  
limited government

separation of powers

daily low intensity warfare

light, radio and gamma waves

Waves of what?

*Matter can be treated by both wave and particle theories (the duality of  
matter) since its convertible counterpart—light—has long been treated  
successfully by both theories.*

convertible counterpart

light matter light

*Solutions to the equations are called wave functions, or orbitals.*

*Religion or the duty which we owe our Creator and the manner of  
discharging it can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by  
force or violence. It is proper to take alarm at the first experiment on*

*our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be the first duty of Citizens, and one of the noblest characteristics of the late Revolution. The free men of America did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise and entangled the question in precedents. They saw all the consequences in the principle and they avoided the consequences by denying the principle. We revere this lesson too much to soon forget it.*

Last night's movie *She's No Angel* on the Christian channel begged many essential questions (and had bad music)

why

the loving liberal successful couple should keep a shotgun in the home (later used per Shakespeare)

what

the community's (authority's) reaction to the violence and precipitating dissembling might have been (per *The Crucible*)

whether

the golden spiritual couple would subsequently dissemble lobby or defend

themselves and the loved one legally and lengthily (per Dostoyevsky)

where

unclean tragic outcomes end in Death's cleanliness

ravens eat the fur and guts of bad guesses off the roads (per *A Designer of Systems*)

but not I think missing

the deeper lesson

that she is neither her past

nor her wings

but a pure goodness

bone stillness

potential energy

a light wave

and a particle.

## The Burning of the Jews

It was a woodcut in our high school history text, Unit 4 Beginnings of the Modern World, that so disturbed, from the Nuremburg Chronicles depicting the burning of the Jews, flat perspective, faces of the victims among flames, in no particular agony, not especially Jewish, during the Black Death 1/3 of Europe died 1347-1351 alone. Although you die together you die alone. Earlier that week, I attended our 6<sup>th</sup> grade's performance of Fiddler on the Roof, thinking Coltrane should have recorded Matchmaker as a bookend to My Favorite Things but as the play darkened with the town's absorption into the diaspora, democracy yet unthought of and rule of law a fig leaf for authority, Jasper, who played Zero Mostel, delivered his line well to the effect you're just doing your jobs while wrecking our lives.

Anyway, nothing like that is happening here, is it? The gardener planting tomatoes, the gravedigger finding skulls, there is so much life a little death won't matter. Jasper was a beautiful ham, big as Zero. A friend posed this question: must all states be melting pots like the United States? Should the Swedes be expected to open their border to the Finns? I said yes not because they should but since it's inevitable. Let labor flow like capital! America was the last word of the play and brought a tear of pride to my eye.

Immigration, exasperating argument re the Other. How many's more than enough? 9 billion, a rational, real number that exceeds or we're convinced is within the carrying capacity of the planet. Climate change is the new Black Death.

I like the Amerindian body type and face mixed in with the European,  
African.

The irrepressible economy rolls out reams of logs, ores of elements,  
bags of ice, fields of rice.

Embargo. The moon stares, bare, full of interstellar space.

Better a cold shoulder than a visit from our military.

The crazy Nazis must have felt themselves extraordinarily  
compassionate toward the mother, earth, the goddess, history, or  
some such abstraction and, thus, acted on a fraction of all they did  
not know.

Faceless soldiers just doing their jobs guarding the border or,  
on the other hand, collecting fagots for the burning of the Jews.

## **Lawn Party**

A robin hops, looks, pecks.

Looks, hops, pecks.

Pecks, looks, hops.

## Communicating the Bird

How many poetry books = 1 Nissan Pathfinder exhaust system.  
How many bluebirds? Money is how we thank people for what makes  
them special  
How we express our love and gratitude.

Weight and moods, up and down, with weather and outcome of  
meetings.

I am so sick of humanity, people. Wouldn't I prefer chickadees?  
Then I get home, that is the comfortable tree hole I've been longing for.

Aaron pitches and plays piano. Zach likes lacrosse and math.  
The mound was soft, sand, with a hole big enough for an urn or to hide  
a plover  
But Aaron pitched carefully anyway, slow strikes and the opposing team  
scored.

What would God's work be? Meaningless question. Today's schedule:  
Write fund raising letters, conserve small farms. Local food, local jobs.

Don't transport food coast to coast. Save fuel, less CO<sub>2</sub>.

In my opinion the dislocations resulting from climate change and global  
warming will be within man's adaptive capacity. On the other hand.  
Also, green industry will open a vast employment market, a job for  
every grackle, crow.

The good life, unsustainable, we're poisoning our children although my  
children are not so poisoned. They're bald. Unusually bald. Good  
looking bald. Future of man bald. Happy bald.

Bald eagle. Nesting, mating near Karen Sheldon's, a conservationist,  
philanthropist, on the river, whose husband recently died. During  
romantic dinner on a second honeymoon in Paris so I've heard.

That's Jake's spirit come home as an eagle, Karen said. Isn't that great, I  
said, and the she-eagle he's nesting with!

*--I'm gonna kill that bitch.*

Compare Captain Carpenter and In a Prominent Bar in Secaucus One  
Day. In each case the hero's (heroine's) body declining  
Under life's duress. Anything located in Secaucus, NJ could not be

considered prominent, could it?

In the end, clack clack takes all. Hard to end a poem better than that.  
Clack clack the crow's beak, upper and lower mandibles meeting.

From hunger, or it just does. Crows clack clack to communicate.  
Whitman's greatest poem is *Out of the Cradle . . .* also involving  
communicating birds, in what is initially an embarrassingly  
emotional display. All that italicized moaning and yearning. Get  
away.

Then, clack clack, he turns on you. Death lispig, straight into your eyes.  
Suddenly you realize you should have taken him seriously, been  
paying attention.

In the meantime, traffic, corn, new exhaust system, ask for money, save  
farms, poor people, sun on garden, whole wide world, wars, stars.  
I gave up long ago on a quiet world. Now going deaf. Then it will be  
quiet, too quiet.

No more birding by ear. "No more fucking." I mean really . . . I was  
moved as anyone by Hall's honest poem about Jane dying and I  
guess fucking can be music to someone's melody, stand for living,  
but not me.

No more birding would have had more meaning. I'd rather bird than  
fuck. No more fucking, no more worry, no more war.

Which is why I'm gonna kill that bitch is so funny, such a life-affirming  
comeback.

At first I worried Karen really believed the eagle is her husband. Maybe  
she does

But that punch line makes her the kind of woman I want to know.

## The Writer Working Hard

This morning I put the apostrophe in  
and this afternoon I took it out.  
Oscar Wilde's comic wit  
about the writer working hard.

Revision has lately become the sign  
of seriousness, as in I revise  
some poems a hundred times,  
maybe more. A word of praise here,

a critical word there.

Before that there was the debate  
if poems not stitched with end-sounds  
were playing tennis without a net.

Late summer, August, hot, but  
chickadees forming platoons.  
Three months until the snow flies,  
sure as the June my father died.

## Negotiation

Chipmunks, squirrels collecting  
bitternut hickory, chirping  
against a small owl cruising  
low beneath the trees.

Everyone has gone this morning  
to school or work. Laundry rolling,  
carpets vacuumed, cleaning  
in the bathroom on my knees.

I'd like to be Whitman, praising  
the pure contralto, Wynton practicing  
all day. But like my father dying  
I cannot hear what I cannot see.

Locally there's politics, processing  
points of view. Eventually coming  
to a decision, building or not building  
windmills on the sky, bridges in the sea.

Insignificant and mighty happenings  
seem the same from my vantage ageing  
gratefully, inexorably, planning  
how to die in my own damn way.

## The Art of Appreciating Snow

Nearing the end of a too busy week  
it starts to snow. Dangerous  
but soothing. Wherever you go,  
take care. Your memories are too weak,

alone, to keep you alive. Yet  
on the other side of the globe, a people  
has perfected the art of appreciating  
snow from inside their lives. Not

unlike flower arranging or pouring tea  
correctly. Tonight I must drive through  
hail and storm, down the steep and icy  
trail, inside the tunnel dimly lit, me.

## Prose

Prose is unpretentious, that's its attraction. Avoids bombast of line breaks but forgoes – what – perfect rest. Anyway today, a November day in February, no chance getting rest with the poor clay I'm made from.

With my mother this weekend, her dementia proceeding according to what plan. Saturday the kind of day I never have. Actually read three stories by Updike. One extraordinary—Tomorrow and Tomorrow and So Forth—which I chose from his Complete through 1975 for the reference to Macbeth and in it he so humanely, sympathetically explains through the high school English teacher's thoughts Shakespeare's mid-life bitterness or disappointment realizing few men achieve their potential in the face of history, society and their personal flaws. Making for tragedy. Hard to be humorous about that although Updike finds in Shakespeare's late plays, especially The Tempest, a resolution amounting to wisdom that there can be contentment with imperfection and partial achievement. Updike took some of the starch out of my contention that all Shakespeare's plays

are comedies, impossible to take Hamlet, Lear, Macbeth and Othello seriously. Certainly not Romeo and Juliet. It is a consolation that Updike's and even Shakespeare's achievements are imperfect although it would be wringing blood from a rock for me to achieve as much. The other two stories by Updike assured me that prose storytelling is as hit or miss as poetry. Bulgarian Poetess and How to Love America and Leave It At the Same Time made me think how fortunate I had been to find Tomorrow on the first try.

Not so much luck. I was attracted like a bee to a blossom to Shakespeare's lines in my personal anthology. No anthology and the poetry dependency it has created and I might have passed over the story. But now there is this conversation between me and all other writers. The anthology helps me know what I like but now I am tempted to try to articulate why I like what I like. Like the calendar, time and all else man lays his mind to it is a matter of bringing order from chaos by naming things according to our observations.

First, I like to understand what's going on in the poem. Not paraphrase it but describe the action. In Yeats' Lapis Lazuli, in the first paragraph, strophe or stanza he talks about a community, a city or country, in which people, the women especially, high-toned maybe?, are upset about a political or wartime situation and are too hysterical for art or grace. Then he talks about actors playing Hamlet and Lear holding it together even though their characters die at the end of the play. No shouting, no crying. Then a paragraph or stanza about how whole civilizations are transitory too. Finally, in a reference to one of our oldest civilizations, two old Chinamen and their retainer are in the mountains. From their perspective, calm acceptance and longevity, perhaps some sadness, they look on all of history and non-history with something like gladness.

From there we can appreciate the artistry—in Yeats' case the interesting rhymes and variable line lengths—recognizing, however, that the artistry is not so much a demonstration of skill or a performance as the particular vehicle or discipline by which this artist discovered the content of his mind. It little matters whether verse is free, rhymed, blank or formed as long as it is understandable and meaningful. Understandable to anyone, meaningful to someone.

The oldest formulation I have is Pound's—the great themes of

literature can be written on the back of a postage stamp. Until recently, I thought you could do it but you'd have to write very small. Now I know you can do it in your normal handwriting. I think they are Love (how we come into the world), Death (how we leave the world) and Governance (how we live in the world together). It may be possible to group Love and Death together, coming into and going out of life being similarly unknowable mysteries. The ways of talking about this one same mystery are apparently endless and endlessly fascinating. We cannot leave it alone. Almost all the greatest poems are about this mystery. Life is but a dream.

Then there is Governance—how we live in the world together—about which there are far fewer great poems. And usually they are about how our failure to live together leads back into the unknowable mystery through premature and sometimes mass death. Siamanto's *The Dance* comes to mind. I think the best poems of this type are written by so-called oppressed people.

Many poems treat both themes. But on the question of content, Pound is where I begin. My anthology—*Whole Wide World*—has a section which I'll call *Double & Triple Features: Poems to Read Together*, which pairs and groups poems according to my feeling that they share something— theme, voice, structure—in common. Subject matter is, I think, the commonest sharing. If I tried to name each pairing or grouping I might then have a hundred or more themes. Naming them adequately would be difficult to impossible. But why? And why not try? It would be a necessary start to talking about the poems: I read these poems together because . . .

Prose doesn't have to be beautiful, sometimes it's best when it's flat as Hemingway conclusively proved and one of its attractions is you can run on and on as long as the mind goes on following a thought without a stop sign for a whole page of books like Proust or Faulkner or Joyce.

Auden's is the second useful formulation that comes to mind (besides his chummy reverence for Shakespeare in naming him *Top Bard*). He classifies poems five ways:

1. A good poem that's meaningful to him;
2. A good poem that's not meaningful to him;
3. A good poem that may someday become meaningful to him;

4. A bad poem that's meaningful to him;
5. A bad poem that's not meaningful to him.

I find I do about the same. But I discard all poems, good and bad, that are not meaningful to me. I have little taste for artistry for art's sake. The poem must speak to me or awaken me. Dickinson's formulation—takes the top of your head off—is the same as We can't define pornography but we know it when we see it.

A short aside: it feels inappropriate to answer the question What do you do by saying I'm a poet. It would be like saying I'm a leader or I'm a prophet. You cannot anoint yourself a poet, a leader or a prophet—others must do it for you. I wonder if I would be more comfortable if I had a larger audience (following) like Billy Collins for example. I think not. It would be like being a rock star not a composer.

It's much more acceptable to say I'm a writer. Then when you answer the question Oh, what do you write? with Poetry, you are not self-aggrandizing, merely irrelevant, effete. Being a poet is viewed as being a flasher or nudist, exposing parts of yourself others would rather not see, at least not up close and personal, providing more information than others need or want to have. Maybe that's a good definition of a bad poet. Self-revelation dressed in verbal prowess is acceptable but naked, abject confession is unpardonable, tedious.

Although content is requisite for a poem to be meaningful, a poem is not really a communication like fiction or essay. It is more like an object, like a painting or sculpture, and perhaps like a musical score, sheet music. Yet I would still instruct students of poetry to first read each poem by the sentence, not the line, to derive its meaning, understand its argument, visualize its action. Then one might ask how and why is it sculpted, structured, with line breaks and strophes. Ultimately, the form of the poem is nothing more or less than the method by which the poet discovered his meaning. Although it is arbitrary—it could have been said another way—it is the only way it could be said by this person in this time and place. I have always liked the idea of a sculptor carving away stone or wood to reveal the form inside the block.

The poem lives on as an object, recognized by many or few or none. Like art or furniture most are briefly useful then are moved to the attic or shed where they gather dust and mouse turds then break, dry and

decay and find their way to the dump, the dust heap of history, only not even human history, just your personal history.

The anthology has made me an antiquarian—one who cares as much for objects made by others as if I had made them myself.

So how can one talk about poems? The argument that any attempt to discuss or describe a poem is better served by simply reading the poem, perhaps memorizing it, has merit. Except in one respect—the process can take you to undiscovered and half-discovered country within yourself. Always, first, you must understand the action otherwise we are just re-reading ourselves in our own tried and untrue ways. We must not mistake an old dog dying for a puppy being born. Misunderstanding the words is like constructing a science experiment with a flawed methodology and then using the results to shape or live in the world. It can be dangerous. Therefore reading poetry is a mental discipline worthy as the scientific method itself. It takes you out of yourself.

The fun of criticism comes in examining why and how the poem made you feel or think as you did. You can read closely for the chosen words, rhythms, lines and stanzas. You may admire the skill or wit of the poet. And you can refer to your own experience to understand your reaction. You can even disagree with the poet's thought or perception, or reject the sentiment. You can say that's him, not me.

Then there are Bloom's formulations of which I am wary, he being a critic not a poet. Yet here they are. Three sources of healthy complexity or difficulty in poems: 1) Sustained allusiveness— cultural references that require the reader to be educated beyond the poem's content, for which he cites Milton as an example and could have Dante; 2) Cognitive originality—leaps of perception and depths of understanding that startle, enlighten and take off the top of your head, for which he cites Shakespeare and Dickinson as examples and to which I would add much of what is memorable in modern poetry; and 3) Personal mythmaking— whereby the poet constructs over time a system of images and personal (more than cultural) references that with familiarity become understandable and meaningful, citing Yeats and Blake as examples. How to make this formulation useful.

A second formulation by Bloom discusses poetic figures or the

indirect means by which poetry uncovers truth, dancing with and romancing language rather than wrestling and pinning it down like philosophy tries. There are four: 1) Irony or saying one thing and meaning another, usually the opposite; 2) Symbol (synecdoche) or making one thing stand for another; 3) Contiguity (metonymy) or using an aspect or quality of something to represent the whole; and 4) Metaphor or transferring the qualities or associations of one thing to another.

Meanwhile, here's my arse poetica:

- 1) Poetry is an acquired taste, like golf or wine, with no obligation to appreciate it.
- 2) Poetry is divination; prose explains what we think we know but poetry discovers what we didn't know we thought.
- 3) Poetry is one of many man-made systems, like baseball or the scientific method, for producing knowledge, meaning and pleasure. Or are they all natural as sex?
- 4) Of all the other arts, poetry is most like sculpture; the word "poem" comes from the Indo-European root meaning "to make, to build."
- 5) It is impossible to write exactly what you mean or be accurately understood; poetry uses this to its advantage.
- 6) Line length—enjambment—is the single most important feature of poetry.
- 7) Poems are made from ideas; poetry is philosophy but where philosophy wrestles language down, poetry romances language.
- 8) Meaning is the most important product of poetry but it's completely personal; poems almost always say one thing and mean another but the poet often doesn't know what he meant.
- 9) It is almost impossible not to rhyme or write rhythmically in English or any other language.
- 10) The forms poets use are how the poet gets to his truth and are basically arbitrary choices.
- 11) Poems may be difficult and complex and irrational but they must be comprehensible.
- 12) Just describing the action of the poem will take you where you need to go.

## Dad's Bark

Dad's bark is worse than his verse.  
When he hits it doesn't really hurt.

The dirt outside the house is soil.  
The mouse inside the house is life.

Can't escape the printer or the car, IV  
bag, heart monitor, a billion trillion stars.

Snow descends, each flake unique.  
My sons' friends, each infinitely

a Greek or Trojan hero. Our morals:  
hit not the girls, nor rape. Love more

than you are loved, by a little. Give  
but stop before it hurts. Stand together

or fall apart. Which candidate you vote  
for less important than to vote. Don't

depend or dote on leaders, housekeeper  
and president are gods equally

remote. The human body is a thing of  
bone, a strange upright animal, and the

telephone a mystery to other animals.  
Everyone and everything is spinning

electrons and the space between. A  
great crunch, inverse of big bang,

yr big sister told.

## Lazy, Happy

I woke up Saturday joyful at my body's triumph  
over virus, breathing again without pain and enjoying  
winter and the cold that keeps us sane and sober.  
But by Sunday my mortality had returned.

If I pass away now, how to assess my days.  
Is balancing income and expenditure reports enough?  
Our marriage and our piece of land. Dependent  
on economy. For food delivery and machine repair.

In my youth, I imagined crossing mountains  
to the sea, living off the land. Enduring weather patiently.  
It's impossible except three days or three weeks,  
with a load of supermarket food on your back.

So I accept home gratefully. And a niche in society.  
We could explore these hollows and hills on foot  
but my wife is weak and I am lazy. We use the library  
to travel inner space. We found this place.

Next spring, a garden. Dig depleted soil behind  
garage and fertilize it from our compost pile.  
Learn the names and ways of cultivars, their relations  
to wild plants and the edge. Finally know the fern and sedge.

Lazy one, life is short. You have never fought, to yourself  
you remain unknown. You go the way of an unknown  
soldier. Unable to assess the purpose of the battle.  
Nameless, hungry, same as the neighbor's cow.

Be happy, slap happy. Within your generation, surrounded  
by history. Seeking mastery through practice.  
Rewarded with the sunrise, sunset. Yet to have delivered  
on the promise expected by the parents of the baby.

## When Peg Laughs Like Liz

When Peg laughs like Liz  
deep woman-hearted laugh  
eating beef jerky on Mesa Verde

the good hearts and smarts of women  
come back to me, not guessing  
any better than they at the time what love

meant, leaving them behind in sandstone time  
going to my own cement, sandstone  
or good mountain grave

having seen the sharp-shinned and sparrow  
hawk flying and at rest, not at peace,  
seeking prey from a ponderosa snag.

I left my woman behind to float  
alone down the long canyon for feathers  
and signs, she's making camp

the moon half full, the sun half high  
sky full of planets birds and stars  
I look up from the rocks

elements  
housekeeping, thinking  
love that's learned to love

from earlier loves  
laughs remembered, heard  
in the laugh of the woman who is my wife.

## Geese in Winter

Full of courage, winter,  
geese fly north. The car  
almost wouldn't start.

Drive along the Mohawk  
flood plain. Cattails, grasses,  
no doubt ash and elm.

Restful tans and browns.  
Flat, low, but still city.  
Arrive at the interview.

Corner of State and Clinton  
luminous blue corporate logo  
between empty store fronts.

That they might not offer me the job  
and they might, make me equally sad.  
Fly in formation, life for pay.

Young, my boast had been  
distances and heights traveled. Now  
any road serves well

as the long narrow road to the north.  
The cold, quiet solitude of that road  
would serve well too.

The story of Sally, the story of John.  
It takes an advanced, healthy economy  
to produce science and technology

but aborigines may track animals  
and draw symbols in the sand, give  
each cloud and bird and tree a personal

secret name. And explain according  
to a logic for which we need equations  
how geese in winter flow north today.

## Year Million

Standing at back of cafeteria during youth basketball awards ceremony  
This is my community.

“What you do may not seem important but it is very important that you do it.”

The men and women bringing the boys and girls a step to wisdom.  
Win or lose play your best and treat your opponent with respect.  
Maybe the school principal can explain the ultimate mystery?

The women cannot be this chaste! The men so committed to non-violence!

What is the board president alone in her bedroom.  
Coach Strong and his blowsy frowsy wife?

They put much emotion and gratification aside to get things done. Done for their sons and done for their daughters.

Visit the web site! Buy a raffle ticket! Belong to the loved ones!  
I follow distantly. I watch warily. I have not been asked to lead or lift a load.

Sitting in a chair in a corner of a room at the top of a house near the end of a street on the edge of a city at the mouth of a river,  
Estuary of ocean, ocean of atmosphere, pierced by a meteor bringing ore and organisms, incinerating elements and rototilling ecosystems,  
Everything changes but consciousness.

The kids of course are perfect as animals in habitats.  
In light of these basketball certificates, team spirits,  
Time, our moment, is indeed “the mercy of eternity”.

## Enemies

I cultivated at least two enemies yesterday  
the enemies I wanted  
I wanted them to be angry instead of me  
my attitude being I don't care I'll do as I please

Please is a word we're trying to teach our sons to use  
when they use services or receive gifts courtesy is required  
it requires a show of gratitude and recognition for the effort others  
make  
in making their love felt and known

Knowing how to say yes when you mean yes and no when you don't  
and doing it without hurting the feelings of others  
is another chickadee skill along with watching your partner's back  
holding back negativity and expressing joy

I'm joyous making friends and enemies  
enemies these days are my only friends, no one lives to hurt us  
who hurts so much from something done or said  
they'd say our demise gave great satisfaction

O to be great with enemies satisfied  
and want something done  
to hurt and be angry  
and love more than one friend!

## Cameron Diaz

Herpetologist meets actress (Cameron Diaz).  
If he's funny he's me.  
South America or Africa (on location).  
In a diamond mind.  
The protagonists (lovers), the diamonds, the miners and the minders.  
By minders we mean watchers, organizers, supervisors.  
As all art must: choose a focus.  
The personal is political said Cameron on the night bus to Quebec.  
I had never met a girl so willing to make love in public.

To what extent is violence necessary? And  
is that the essential question or  
should violence be accepted as man's state, fate  
a more essential question existing beyond or below  
peace or war. Perhaps  
the religious and (for the irreligious) sacred injunction  
against egregious violence exists  
to still ourselves  
to open ourselves  
to the deeper question. That Cameron Diaz is funny and beautiful  
is hopeful. And the telescope and microscope have extended  
the eye's appreciation. Under the microscope  
Cameron becomes a collection of foreign, alien, uncompassionate,  
selfish, self-organizing  
organisms. Frightening, inexorable, fascinating  
to the scientist in you!

To the telescope  
vanishingly small, infinitesimal as the farthest sun  
only smaller  
smaller by magnitudes of magnitudes of ten  
and incinerated in a nanosecond. Gone  
from the movie (photographs the contents of which move  
for the naked eye).  
I cannot help what I do or hope.

Anyway, it's a love story  
or science project, socio-political documentary. An essay.

An essay about how it is actually impossible to say what you mean but it is possible with a lifetime of meditation and study to shut up and know what you meant.

Now I'm deaf.

I can see Cameron Diaz but not hear her.

The guy, the herpetologist, at first colorless turns out to be colorful as a bird or snake!

He knows a lot about snakes, and birds! Not only how they mate but what they eat

(amateur botanist)

where they rest

what they do with their pain. Do they get depressed?

Can they have guests?

How do they judiciously employ violence to organize and defend the nest.

The international collective remains insufficiently organized resulting in violence and threats of violence that interrupt commerce, procreation (love) and the pursuit of happiness (Cameron Diaz)

at least for certain populations, sometimes.

Otherwise, most men, most times, live in peace excepting flood or fire God or man may choose to impose.

I lay in my bed and listen naked.

Have a good day (Diaz).

The goddess does not exist, except as bone.

Around this time (July)

the queen yellow jacket (redcoat) searches blind and deaf

for a ledge or cavity to build a city of her descendants safe, that they can defend.

Most cities

prosper, undisturbed

and sleeping peacefully, overwinter. We, however,

remain active, Cameron Diaz makes winter movies or

love stories in South America, and I

delight to imagine her herpetologist. Or one who

discovers the sun  
around which a habitable, understandable, compatible  
orb orbs. Or  
maybe the movie's about the revolution, soldiers dying defending  
this dictator or that dreamer  
and the movie completely failing, not even trying, to explain how  
the sons and daughters of the dying soldiers (miners) feel  
fishing alone, hunting for wisdom, thereafter.  
Sure, these men chose violence, not Cameron Diaz, and were not  
farmers, botanists or herpetologists  
their tools could have been and should have been the telescope or  
microscope  
but are there enough microscopes and telescopes to go around  
and did we not (taxpayers, moviegoers) encourage them to  
defend Cameron Diaz?

Man's world is insufficiently organized to preclude violence  
in allocating resources (Cameron Diaz).  
When we invade Iraq  
to defend our allies and interests  
with rockets and rocket throwers, Rockettes and Cameron Diaz  
each man (each Diaz) must make his  
own individual choice  
whether this war  
is worth fighting for or the next or the worst.  
Go to jail, go directly to waterboard, at the hands of  
your local police, chamber of commerce.  
Learn how to walk the desert and the universe.  
The names of rocks and planets,  
that being the only answer to the hyperorganization that is a cancer on  
our insufficient organization.

I was reading Foreign Affairs  
The Case Against the West by Kishore Mabubami (Cameron Diaz).  
How can I relinquish my privileged position  
sit still, lie naked  
until what constitutes consent of the governed and non-violent change,  
Cameron Diaz,  
to her herpetologist  
is known.

## A Gun in Every Home

Two fine films: The Lost City and Blood Diamond.  
I joined Blood Diamond during a village massacre  
and said to my wife A gun in every home.  
Those devils would think twice  
before razing the village and seizing the boys.

A well-regulated militia.  
The local militia the most interesting moment  
in a strong film with motive (economic, emotional), action (chases,  
fights) and a sexy, sexless love story.  
Use of violence by the local militia for a limited purpose: protect the  
community, the young  
from the janjaweed. The crop from the weed.  
Limited scope and defensive posture  
but armed and coordinated, cooperative, the men (and the women)  
side by side.  
Warriors at the gate, you will not run, you will not bargain.  
Just violence = limited scope, defensive posture.

Great music. Cuba, Africa.  
The Lost City, when the communists tell the club owner under threat of  
violence  
No saxophones in the band. The saxophone!  
Invented by a Belgian—Look what the Belgians are doing in the Congo!  
When the state's violence is turned against the citizenry  
for non-violent acts.

This quiet neighborhood, July,  
undergirded by violence, force. That's a given—  
any farmer, custodian, EMT will tell you that.  
Without just violence  
Gandhi's scope, and King's, might be vanishingly limited,  
negligible (but not non-existent)?

Regarding King  
the matter is simple—he was non-violent but dependent upon  
federal force to counter the South's violence.  
No doubt without the larger force, the non-violent would be

overwhelmed by southern violence.

Here, non-violence was a tactic, not an ethic.

Gandhi, however, had no violent partner to protect him from the British.

Or did he?

- 1) There was the potential violence of the population, which Gandhi restrained but could release which the British feared, and
- 2) It was the restrained (limited scope) violence of the British that allowed Gandhi to exist rather than be extinguished—this restraint was a (British) cultural imperative (limited scope) as well as emanating from Britain's view of India as a protectorate and valued citizen of the United Kingdom (defensive posture).

What about violence or threat of violence to compel compliance with community

as in mortgage foreclosure, driving without license, drug possession.

Perhaps it is necessary violence to maintain orderly commerce, the common space, and preempt bad behaviors associated with otherwise neutral, private acts.

The defensive posture is the common good; the limited scope is forgoing deadly force.

But the citizen, too, must maintain a disciplined, armed non-violence, in case the state (the janjaweed) engages in an unjust, autoimmune violence.

Hence, a gun in every home.

## Perfect Rest

Yr cancer is inevitable as love.  
You didn't last forever. The pain  
wasn't the main problem, unconsciousness  
was. Dad cannot see or hear,  
the walls of the house contain just dust,  
that's it, and if he shows up as a ghost  
I'm lost, all my theories false.

Dr. Cherry certified my cancer as a cyst.  
A drupe, a stone, a past mistake.  
I left the examining room elated,  
and have gone on to conflate my happiness,  
relief, with that of the whole village.  
The message is: to the east and west, the self  
which is carried around as a pound of garbage.

"I like to be kissed before I'm fucked."  
And what is poetry anyway. Its role,  
local and global. Well, I for one have no  
friends or family sufficiently interested  
to come to a reading. Don't take offense,  
we prefer novels, and especially movies,

coffee, sugar, oil, parrots, ponies, you  
name it. Seven goes to six. Prices  
bust and burst, but life (and school) goes  
on, or whatnot. Atomic bubble gum. Protein computer.  
Grass roof. Sun spot. Perfect error.  
In the mirror where everybody hides the body.

Finally, I have been going for walks, girls  
with protection dogs, black flies in my eyes.  
Peace of noon, bird siesta. August returns,  
the snow flies. Did you survive summer,  
beat the reaper? I hope so, and yr fern allies.  
Perfect rest is priceless, paradise.

## **Meditation**

There is no religion in meditation  
but it's worth visiting with your mind  
in the morning. What will you find?

Equally, think about the moose and nation.  
Cleaning house no less than apocalypse,  
food rations. The mind lights at random.

Sit ten minutes. Breathe in, out.  
Counting, or imagining the mind's a horse  
galloping leads to other thoughts, not

catastrophe but also not allowed. Visit  
with your bones which will outlast  
words and desires. In them there's a fire

banked low, where particles of sun are  
stored and slowed, or stilled entirely.  
That's where I reside. Not really,

not certainly, not virtually. Then  
eyes open, flowering or snow falling, the day begins  
no wiser, happier or myself.

## Reverse Gestation

Cold, a killing cold  
is the best defense against aliens. And viruses, bacteria  
are our friends.

Perfect rest, perfect motion.  
Another autumn, another election.  
So aimless and sublime.

Back and forth, forth and back.  
Rock and roll, spoon and bowl.  
What a symmetry, calculus, trigonometry.

Measurements reduce violence.  
Makes sense. Temperature measures change. Time's irreversible.  
Change is all that's visible.

Learn the changes, then forget them.  
Lost my timepiece, lost my metronome  
now my music is ethereal.

Ethereal or dissonant,  
the clash that brings you home from winter and starvation's wisdom.  
"Unit, corps, God, country!"

## Man's Machines

Might as well go to market.  
Gather money, kindling. The economy  
scary, debt deep, winter coming. Reminds  
me of my youth, cold poor and scared  
but living truth? Shit. Never  
have I understood life's meaning,  
significance. Not to say there is no purpose  
necessarily, just I don't immediately get it.

Other hand, if you don't think too deeply  
about death, this being but a dream, sleep  
of a god snoring with apnea or who's alarm  
goes off, wakes up for work, spring and expecting  
spring's good as it gets. Rhodora in winter  
completely forgets what its blossoms looked  
like, how attractive to bees and flies!  
It's probably healthy that everything dies.

The dire economy can bring us together  
or lead us to war. It's cold then warm. Your lover  
doesn't write letters anymore giving  
thanks or encouragement.  
Friends never really know each other,  
nemesis. Just as it is impossible to say  
what you mean, your closest lover's near but  
external, forever. You're alone.

More than ever men have one mind  
and finding it's as easy as flicking on the  
tv, huckleberry, but that always was  
the problem. We march to war in rows and back  
in columns. Learning who you actually are  
is difficult as sitting still  
ten minutes without a thought or want.  
Nothing to say. Nothing to do.

Interior solitude, imperative belonging,

repetitive dreaming. Until you draw  
a circle with a dot.  
Stop. Full stop.  
On a dry rocky ridge, hot  
or in a frozen swamp. One heron  
and your self. It is possible to hear  
not far, a car, a train, a plane.

## **Peace Out**

I can't blame the teenage girl for being forward,  
then passive aggressive. It shouldn't make one angry;  
she has her interests and that which bores her.

Or the adolescent boy for being antsy, a little loopy  
and aloof. Under that hat he wants to be good,  
is deeply disappointed with the world (and the food).

Robert Francis: the finest poet no one reads.  
We care not. Such prisms of philosophy need  
no acknowledgment. The catamount is only believed

to be extinct. The wildlife tree, a mere bole,  
deep in the forest, far off the road, when it falls  
takes many squirrel turbines and spider spans down with it.

Noon, Julian has nothing much to do  
and likes it that way. That way nothing much gets done today.  
Every man, every tree, lives with disabilities.

Crooked finger, rotten bole, under stars, over soils.  
The I in my old poems is no longer me. The one  
in this one will be someone else soon.

## Injury

My face tells me nothing. Not nothing but nothing useful, the complications of aging humorously but not how to avoid injury.

Permanent injury is a now popular cliché. At this age any injury could result in pneumonia, pain in bitterness for your peers, your jury.

What a headache I have! And never forget injury provokes at best only pity. Friends are merely friendly, they belong to the majority.

They forget your name and so should you, who are you? Even you don't know for sure. In relation to community, no change was noted in the registry.

Still, man's mercy, economy's ecology, there's some joy in being small, some joy in staying strong, and keeping death before you without perjury.

Unsafe to run the wind. A big stick might hit your head. Then the hip and heart and head will hurt, all three. Unfortunately.

I like a strong wind. Dangerous to go out in. As a fire or flood. I like the way we are at risk, not a risk-averse weasel. A carnivore, very hungry.

Pay money, take chances. Yo's an elegant contraction of you. Cool. Message from street to board: mongrel's rule. Democracy or tyranny.

Scared to die? Why? Take appropriate measures, descend through meditation. Be empty, rest. And to your friends and sons be as gravity.

Tired of death. It's what it is. Let's play sports, have sex, kayak to the huckleberries, fish for marvelous fish, live a wonderful life, give generously.

Done blowing, O wild wind? Not yet? So be it. I lay my head in your felt hands. The motion of the branches, evolutionary branches, are my guarantee.

That's all folks, 7:30. The sky is clear, the crows are out. The clouds are with my mood commensurate. I should shout, having lived prodigiously.

## Immigration

I like immigrants, immigration. *Legal* immigration,  
Jane passionately corrects. Actually my goal is a borderless world.  
Gathering the neighborhood like family.  
The men discuss sterilizing welfare mothers. I say You're working  
    around the edges,  
humanity has exceeded the carrying capacity of the planet,  
even those with jobs. And spouses. And houses.

Yet it's an idyll of an early summer evening, new cut grass,  
two baseball teams of children playing in it. Safe from Pakistan.  
News photos of Muslim refugees, women in blue robes, biblically  
carrying children away from holocaust. The fundamentalist army  
not far behind, beheading sinners, sure in its righteousness  
as the Holy Roman Empire.

Somehow Joel Osteen the evangelist comes up  
while talking about how the Catholic Church is irrelevant in North  
    America,  
even Latin America and Africa are going evangelical.  
Izzi likes Osteen, awesome extemporaneous speaker, no teleprompter,  
up from bootstraps message. My wife says he's probably Jewish.  
Fortunately no one claims the Holocaust never happened or slavery was  
    voluntary.

What is the carrying capacity of the planet?  
In China is it each couple or each adult that gets one offspring?  
As life expectancy and standards rise,  
family size diminishes. We draw together into greener, tighter cities.  
The children of three monotheistic religions, atheists and agnostics  
play in city streets, work farm fields, explore forests, deserts,  
    grasslands, space.

Two ancient female poets: Enheduanna and Sappho  
were a revelation. The clarity of their complaints:  
lost lover, lost city.

## Anyone who wants to fight me all the time

*“Soon I will know who I am” —Borges*

Anyone who wants to fight me all the time  
committee meetings, board meetings.  
Facing death was how they knew they were alive  
or was it more about allocating resources  
like yr Dad said.  
It's hard to step outside what yr DNA tells you to do.  
Nice tits.  
Family farm, fight club. It's all one yet distinctions are  
what separates the librarian, reflective man, from the road and bridge  
crew.  
That's a class statement. Us guys love  
our children and will, circumstances dictating, fight for you.

\* \* \*

Anyone who wants to fight me all the time  
is more important to me than my wife. But there is no one left to fight  
and no one knows me and I know no one well. That's good,  
there is more space between people than I'd ever dared to hope.  
I'm confused.  
Meditator or gunman. Either could come to know himself,  
flat abs, clear sight  
with patience and discipline.  
What's this:  
know yourself?  
Once yr knee or neck is smashed there's no getting up to fight.

\* \*\*

Anyone who wants to fight me all the time  
will grow old alone once I'm in the ground. He will live  
with the question what was our purpose? He was managed by  
the molecules we're made of, proteins, enzymes, amino acids, DNA.  
Fucking DNA.  
I'd rather be a rock.

But the rock is subject to  
its elements. Thus, the periodic table and particle physics,  
meiosis and mitosis and yes, democracy and self-governance,  
all the colors of anthropology and ecology, windmills and sundials,  
fission and fusion for evil and light  
and the devil who exists to carry the load when we misbehave and fight  
among ourselves.

\* \* \*

Anyone who wants to fight me all the time  
is how I know who I am.  
Because the truth is always changing, depending on the meeting.  
What's good.  
Service to others is a safe bet. That service  
may take many forms: fighting, meeting, teaching, making.  
The fighting may be part of holding community together. Limited scope,  
defensive posture.  
How broadly we define community says everything. So,  
we come to Mexico, a violent border and an unhappy history.  
Or Gaza and Israel. Or Russia and just about everybody.  
How can a people become a nation without resorting to violence or  
incurring violent reaction?  
Does it matter? Accept violence like any EMT and devote yourself to  
what, beauty?  
Why do I write about violence, I've almost never  
had to fight.

\* \*\*

Anyone who wants to fight me all the time  
is nothing compared to the ocean which can take your children any time.  
The Nazis or janjaweed.  
In peace we have our meetings.  
When violence comes to the neighborhood the hierarchy of  
communicants will hold or fold  
it is then the peace work proves relevant.  
Hold your clod of land.  
Give way to the waves.

All I do not know.

I admire the writer who penetrates the unknown by describing that  
which

is not himself.

His enemy,

anyone who wants to fight him all the time  
helps him live outside himself.

## Ricardo's Lunch

5<sup>th</sup> Ave. was shoulder to shoulder with hungry lunch-seeking business men and women. Ricardo unpacked his horn nervously and a foot cymbal. Spring, early street season, too cold for most musicians but he needed money. His lips kissed the cold metal mouthpiece.

Carrying the saw and the pulaski.  
Cutting brush for a fire line high up,  
where raptors and ravens fly. No sound  
but wind if you could subtract the crew  
working and dirty, joking during lunch.  
A good year it had been sitting in the soil  
feeling Ricardo's body on the mountainside.  
Mountains moving as good a feeling.

Alone in his town, most neighbors at work,  
housecleaning done, Ricardo settled down  
with pen to write and ate lunch.  
People = chickadees.  
Clutch size, substrate, territory, gestation period.  
Mating rituals. Use of alcohol and hallucinogens.  
Forms of cancer, heart disease. Burial rites, memories.  
Creation myths, beliefs for which there is no evidence.  
Range: tundra to tropics.

## Yogurt and Honey

Yogurt.

“I begin the day buying yogurt in a small favorite grocery store.”

Not pizza, nor gatorade.

Bananas

although they are imported from afar and grown in monocultures.

Attract fruit flies in August.

Peaches

locally grown with rainwater. I ate all the farmer’s peaches alone stacking them by the railroad tracks.

Water–

rainwater, tap water, distilled water, carbonated water, spring water–  
deep gulps, infinite sips.

Nuts

in moderation, or not, unsalted, raw, replacing chips. His bowl  
of filberts, almonds, walnuts quiet weekday mornings.

Edible plant parts–

roots, leaves, stems, flowers, fruit, buds. In olive oil  
or butter.

Potatoes–

look on line how best to prepare. Baked or fried. With a little  
fish or meat.

Tea and honey,

play and prayer. Swimming and running,  
talking quietly.

Bread?

Bread’s possible as the Bible. Each is liable  
to bloat us.

Wine and dandelions.

Dandelion wine's Ray Bradbury's story. Cans in a pantry, books on a shelf  
to the end of time.

Pasta

we used to call spaghetti, never noodles. I wonder if I can remember  
how to make  
grandma's sauce.

Tomatoes—

cherry, grape. Grab God's eye  
going by.

## The Invention of Zero

Zero.

By which nothing is divided.

No zero

no negative

no opposite

no hope

no Adam, no apple, no marriage, no morning.

No mirror

no knowledge

no God, no soul, no ear lobe, no Iliad, no Odyssey.

No universe

no black hole

no zodiac

no hero

no mission, no omission, no fission, no fusion.

No hymn

no hymnal

no yellow

no 7:30, no wind, no window, no owl, no one.

“In 773, at Al-Mansur’s behest, translations were made of the Siddhantas, Indian astronomical treatises dating as far back as 425 B.C.; these versions may have been the vehicles through which the “Arabic” numerals and the zero were brought from India into China and then to the Islamic countries. In 813 the Persian mathematician Khwarizmi used the Hindu numerals in his astronomical tables; about 825 he issued a treatise known in its Latin form as *Algoritmi de numero Indorum*, Khwarizmi on Numerals of the Indians. After him, in 976, Muhammed ibn Ahmad in his “Keys to the Sciences”, remarked that if in a calculation no number appears in the place of tens, a little circle should be used “to keep the rows.” This circle the Arabs called *sifr*. That was the earliest mention of the name *sifr* that eventually became zero. Italian *zefiro* already meant “west wind” from Latin and Greek *zephyrus*. This may have influenced the spelling when transcribing Arabic *sifr*. The Italian mathematician Fibonacci (c. 1170-1250), who grew up in North Africa and is credited with introducing the decimal system in Europe, used the term *zephyrum*. This became

*zefiro* in Italian, which was contracted to *zero* in Venetian.”

–*Wikipedia*

“After my father’s appointment by his homeland as a state official in the customs house of Bugia for the Pisan merchants who thronged to it, he took charge; and in view of its future usefulness and convenience, had me in my boyhood come to him and there wanted me to devote myself to and be instructed in the study of calculation for some days. There, following my introduction, as a consequence of marvelous instruction in the art, to the nine digits of the Hindus, the knowledge of the art very much appealed to me before all others, and for it I realized that all its aspects were studied in Egypt, Syria, Greece, Sicily, and Provence, with their varying methods; and at these places thereafter, while on business, I pursued my study in depth and learned the give-and-take of disputation. But all this even, and the algorism, as well as the art of Pythagoras, I considered as almost a mistake in respect to the method of the Hindus (*Modus Indorum*). Therefore, embracing more stringently that method of the Hindus, and taking stricter pains in its study, while adding certain things from my own understanding and inserting also certain things from the niceties of Euclid’s geometric art, I have striven to compose this book in its entirety as understandably as I could, dividing it into fifteen chapters. Almost everything which I have introduced I have displayed with exact proof, in order that those further seeking this knowledge, with its pre-eminent method, might be instructed, and further, in order that the Latin people might not be discovered to be without it, as they have been up to now. If I have perchance omitted anything more or less proper or necessary, I beg indulgence, since there is no one who is blameless and utterly provident in all things. The nine Indian figures are: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1. With these nine figures, and with the sign 0 . . . any number may be written.” – *Fibonacci, Leonardo of Pisa*

## Nature's Intelligent Partner

The wood is stacked for winter.  
One way out of the mind's limitations  
is through other minds' contemplations.  
The books are stacked for winter.

Yet even that cannot satisfy.  
Failing to hold still for meditation  
my teacher smiles, makes this observation:  
The purpose of sitting's not to be satisfied

or satiated. Remain hungry,  
cold, uncomfortable and counting enemies.  
These, and fear, are our commonalities,  
and the discipline of not hitting whenever angry.

You'll appreciate dying  
quietly at home. Whichever season has been randomly assigned will be  
beautiful as ever  
as a molecule of water is to all matter.  
"In my life there were always too many things."

If there is no time, only change  
the linear becomes circular.  
Do not say north or south. You're  
within the winter range

of chickadees, hawks, owls and herons.  
River grapes, rose hips, the cedar waxwings'  
repast. Their talk is my reminding  
change outlasts endurance.

## Number and Verse

*The question should not be in what ways writing and utterance trope each other, but how both are involved with number. Without relating the technology of writing to number (as opposed to sound or drawing), it is impossible to discuss it meaningfully as an aspect of versecraft.*

Courage to write and courage to count. Read  
The great poets and highly accomplished letters  
Of leaders. Yet the war and the book have lives  
Of their own. Vacuum house, analyze mankind.  
His idea of himself. Ideas subsumed by  
Better ones unite people in melting pots.  
I watch from my little bowl of nuts. Watch  
The one red squirrel and the many gray.  
Watch the nuthatch pair, platoon of chickadees.  
Here is what I say: When we can go  
From planet to planet on nothing but air,  
Leaving behind a drop of water,  
No burger bags blowin' in the sun,  
I'll be in weather, of weather, with weather.

*What is needed is a way to pry apart the polar, mimetic fiction that undergirds discussions (even sympathetic ones) of writing and versification, and see how we can relate writing to measure. Roy Harris' investigations into the origin of writing make this connection possible.*

Electronic millennium. A long silence  
Wouldn't hurt. Not that the national debate  
Should cease, it should proceed, passionate  
And furious. Those who have studied the matter  
And have something to say should write cogent  
Opinion pieces on the totalitarian  
Tendencies of orthodox religions,  
The terminal contradiction of advancing  
Democracy with the unitary military.  
George Washington would not have approved  
And even Lincoln vacillated between

The practicalities of preserving union  
And the ideal of freeing slaves. The president  
Carries his burden of matter, the physics  
Of existence cannot change our aloneness  
Or the butterfly's importance, the very  
Last insects at the screens of August.  
It is life we face and death we meet.

*He argues that the origin of writing did not lie in the drawing of figures, or attempts to imitate speech, but in the recording of number. According to Harris, the oldest 'writing' that we have, like that on the 11,000-year-old Ishango bone, is in 'lines.' The surface is scored with rows of short, parallel strokes, which probably served a numerical function. We still use such scoring systems today on occasion.*

OK, different strokes. But reading North's poems  
And his predecessors' in which noun and verb  
Are so far separated by modifiers,  
Post-positioned prepositions, diversions  
Into ditches, gardens, heavens, I don't know  
What to do laugh or put the book down and eat  
Several cookies. In other words, anything goes,  
There truth resides. 1/3 life in suburbs,  
1/3 on the subway, and the last third  
On the mountain. A fourth hallucinating  
In heaven. That's how it goes. You get what you believe.  
Bones in mud. It's always possible I suppose  
That for nine months analogous or symmetrical  
With gestation our souls wander call it limbo,  
Doing the limbo and harassing the living  
With unanswerable questions, finally accepting  
Free molecular rent in a cubic meter  
Of interstellar space, or a rose hip.

*Harris speculates about counting by scoring:*

What is relevant for our present purposes is the fact that counting is associated in many cultures with primitive forms of recording which have a graphically isomorphic basis . . . The iconic origin of such recording systems is hardly open to doubt: the notch or

stroke corresponds to the human finger . . .

Partridgeberry, mugwort, mats of raspberry,  
Cranberry, bearberry, autumn eleagnus,  
Autumn Nocturne, Autumn Leaves, the changes  
To the tunes and the scientific names.  
When it doesn't matter what you do  
You're probably doing something new.  
That's a woodpecker. That's a moth. I'm bounded  
By my surroundings, I feel at home.  
Could be Schenectady. Could be Troy.  
One of many small cities in which to  
Await my anonymity. Be specific.  
Not asphalt but impermeable surface.  
Not trees but mature stems. *Quercus rubra*—  
Quality veneer. Into such a garden  
Have a victor and a fool penetrated.

In short, the rows of strokes are graphically isomorphic with just that subpart of the recorder's oral language which comprises the corresponding words used for counting. It makes no difference whether we 'read' the sign pictorially as standing for so many fingers held up, or scriptorially as standing for a certain numeral.

In a crowded world every action results  
In an equal and overwrought reaction.  
Yet, all the energy recycles  
And there is not one thermal unit more or less  
When all is said and won. Even when the tribes  
Were isolated behind mountain ranges  
And rushing rivers, they sought each other out  
For trading and for taking. Humanity  
Is lonely. Humor is the only remedy  
And going to your daily discipline  
The only way past Monday. Join the torrential  
Flow of words, emotion, wit and erudition.  
It is embarrassing to see a good writer  
Work himself into a lather, having  
Something to say. A system of beliefs  
To illustrate, characters dressed accordingly.  
Gardens and wilderness in which to wander.

A cave with a view. The problem never  
Resolves. But we will do what we can and  
Some things we shouldn't because that is human.

*Along with other evidence, this leads him to argue that the invention of writing—or the division of writing and drawing into separate functions— occurred when the graphic representation of number shifted from the token-iterative system that appears on the Ishango bone, to type- slotting.*

Electricity is occult enough for me.  
Excessive classifying could be fascist!  
Yet how else can one organize people  
Into contexts. By their associations.  
Family, work, habits, each assigned  
A day of the week, moon of the month.  
Poets rhyme, jazz musicians count time.  
There is more than one way to make war. By  
Declaration, by punishing offenses  
Against the law of nations, by granting letters  
Of mark and reprisal, by making rules  
Concerning captures on land and water, by  
Suppressing insurrections and repelling invasions,  
Erecting forts, magazines, arsenals,  
Dock yards and other needful buildings. Today  
I face the blank page between the finished pages.

*Harris gives the following example of what he means:*

The progression from recording sixty sheep by means of one 'sheep' sign followed by sixty strokes to recording the same information by means of one 'sheep' sign followed by a second sign indicating 'sixty' is a progression which has already crossed the boundary between pictorial and scriptorial signs.

When my grandmother considered it favorable  
That I would be a writer, she had in mind  
Clear commentary from which many people  
Would derive meaning. No such luck. My writings  
Are like the flicking tail of that flycatcher,

And I am the flycatcher, weighing but an ounce.  
My grandfather's rough-hewn peasant chairs  
Are well known by my sons though they never knew him  
And the chairs were not hewn, just owned, by him.  
One is in a corner of the room and two  
Are scrimmaged around a computer screen.  
Computers post-date him and cars post-date  
His father and so on. If the grid collapses,  
The crops fail and the roads close, some will be forced  
Across boundaries among boulders, naming snakes  
And stars according to memory.  
They will be hungry, mortal and strong.

A token-iterative sign-system is in effect equivalent to a verbal sublanguage which is restricted to messages of the form 'sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep . . .', or 'sheep, another, another, another . . .', whereas an emblem-slotting system is equivalent to a sublanguage which can handle messages of the form 'sheep, sixty'. Token-iterative lists are, in principle, lists as long as the number of individual items recorded. With a slot list, on the other hand, we get no information simply by counting the number of marks it contains.

*When this change occurred it opened 'a gap between the pictorial and scriptorial function of the emblematic sign', which had been previously inseparable in the counting represented by rows of slashes.*

No book I know tells if blue cohosh  
Caulophyllum thalictroides—a barberry—  
Is edible. Other barberries are  
But that blue berry looks risky to me.  
And May-apple—Podophyllum—other  
Than the fruit itself which is, it is said,  
Sweet. So I read, unsure of myself.  
There is a patience with which to wait out anger,  
And a patience with which to endure ignorance.  
Knowing is everything. It is freedom  
And purpose and religion. It is acceptance  
And shelter and sustenance. Randomness  
Of thought, data dots, circles with dots,  
Sadness and silliness, silly sadness,

Confusion, rarely a clear definition  
Or logical, lucid progression. Deep art.  
Grace requires consciousness,  
Hold on long to the senses.

*This semiological gap made writing possible because it meant that signs could be manipulated to 'slot', or identify, anything whatsoever. The open-ended quality of the scriptorial sign was a necessary precondition for the development of writing systems.*

Lately I've been copying wholesale  
From the great poems, lines and ideas not my own  
Or owned by all? It's ok, I can be ignored  
Or appreciated in a future city,  
By a future shore. The honest man can  
Only recognize what he loves and point to it.  
That Borges poem called In Praise of Darkness.  
Emerson and snow. A meditation  
That bumps serenely, with acceptance,  
Between things and thoughts. It is said one should  
Know for whom, to whom one is writing.  
These are letters to those who love letter writing.

*As Harris points out, no writing system is accurately phonetic. Even the alphabet only highlights certain phenomena in the speech stream. The reason for this is that alphabetic writing did not begin as a simpler or more accurate way to record speech than other writing systems, but as an easier way to write.*

A possible cancer had taken me  
To the edge of my endurance. Pokeweed,  
Poisonous, became attractive. Red stems  
And juicy black berries. I had packed warm clothes  
And pain killers. Why the warm clothes if this  
Was to be my last walk? To die in comfort  
Without a fly's buzz. Overlooking a ravine,  
Sea of mountains, dawn. But it proved a false alarm.  
Now Sunday will be a holy day of plant  
Identification. Nothing better  
Than lying in leaf litter, skin drying

To a taut drum. Ravens stay away!  
Until cougar's had his fill! Instead  
I showed my boys pokeweed growing among blackberries  
And taught them the differences and uses.

*Through a radical reduction in the number of signs, the alphabet simplified the scriptorial system in and of itself. The evolution of writing therefore may look like this: simple forms of counting preceded the complications of pictorial representation, which in turn led to simplification of the writing system in cultures that adopted the alphabet.*

I was running uphill, parallel to  
The Taconics extending northward into  
Vermont (I find Vermonters in their jalopies  
Annoying but admire them for planning  
To arrest the president for war crimes) when  
I happened upon a flock of cedar waxwings—  
Said to be a gentle and politic bird—  
Sharing—very orderly—dried frozen grapes  
On the vine. (Rose hips, buckthorn, ash, pokeweed.)  
I tried one, too, the two seeds in my mouth  
Keeping me company down the mountain.  
I see no downside whatsoever  
To compensating for global warming,  
Constructing the green energy economy.  
New inventions may facilitate  
Our transportation to other planets.  
Articulate an international vision,  
A world order in which each neighborhood's  
Good as another. I have no particular  
Love for writers; they're a dime a dozen.  
But so are chickadees and I love them!

*Discussing the power of inscriptions of number, Harris points out:*

Counting is in its very essence magical, if any human practice at all is. For numbers are things no one has ever seen or heard or touched. Yet somehow they exist, and their existence can be confirmed in quite everyday terms by all kinds of humdrum procedures which allow mere mortals to agree beyond any

shadow of a doubt as to 'how many' eggs there are in a basket or 'how many' loaves of bread on the table.

True, nature would be a stern, unforgiving  
Mistress too, and man is but her right hand  
Acting on her command. How cold! How hot!  
The individual doing what he loves or not.  
Trees and cities. Herons, hawks. What we fail  
To govern in ourselves, nature will.  
We caught the killer and his gorillas,  
Now let's go home, let the "innocent" choose  
Up sides. A good thing was done but the tyrant  
Should've been undone through global governance.  
Writing is divination using rhymes  
And estimations. Words like mammals  
Come near your sleeping head. Last night I emerged  
From the hum of our refrigerator  
Under a hazy, phaseless moon. The peepers  
Were an exact expression of my happiness.

*Or, one might add, for how many stanzas there are in a poem, or lines in a stanza, or stresses, feet, or syllables in a line, or occurrences of particular syntactical or grammatical patterns, and so on. As every serious student of versification has always understood, versification is about counting language.*

5:30-6 write poetry,  
6-7 shit, shave and shower, stretch  
Then get dressed, 7-7:30  
Clean house, 7:30-8 drive to work  
8-6 work (except Monday and Friday  
Work 8-4, basketball 4-6)  
6-7 drive home, shop, help make dinner  
7-8 eat dinner, read paper,  
Watch McNeil-Lehrer News Hour,  
8-9 play trumpet, study plants, type poems  
9-10 watch TV Mon: Murphy, Cybil,  
Tues: Frazier, Grace, Wed: Roseanne, Ellen,  
Thurs: Seinfeld, Friends, Fri: go out to dinner,  
10-11 read, except Tues watch

NYPD Blue, Fri: Friday Night Lights,  
11 sleep. I could send this to the networks,  
Get a gizmo in my box. I hope my  
Schedule won't be interrupted for war.  
My dentist asked had I seen this morning's  
Press conference, didn't it just scare the shit  
Out of you. I said your bill is what scares  
The shit out of me. But here I am, writing  
And the sphere's still turning. Or should I say  
Burning. As long as you write one poem per day  
You've left a little litter in the world.

*The reason to write verse is less to score the voice than to imbue words  
with the magical quality of counting. That is why meter, or measure,  
is at the heart of debates over all verse forms, including free verse.*

Vigorous wind, voracious ocean,  
Many merciless hard frosts, hurricanes.  
The bed of a human, its smell and warmth  
36 teeth, 46 chromosomes, 2 feet, a loose dime,  
61 summers, some soot, some sand,  
Thunderstorms. I wake up to a lightning strike  
And my dream incinerates. When they say  
Life is but a dream, that's what they mean.  
The writer working hard, telling the story  
Of what happened yesterday or yesteryear,  
A man's born to a country not his choosing,  
Let labor flow like capital, of mere being!  
Pomegranate juice, broccoli, arugula,  
Brussel sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower,  
Collard greens, kale, radishes, turnips,  
Garlic, leeks, scallions, onions, 2 lbs  
Swordfish, tomatoes (8 medium),  
3 cups almonds, carrots, a sweet potato,  
Winter squash, cantaloupe, mangoes, watermelon.  
2 daily writing exercises,  
50 words on any subject: complaint, headache.  
The imagination applies a  
Countervailing pressure to reality.  
Writing badly is the best revenge.

*Number is one of the creative grounds of poetry, and the idea that writing grew out of counting is the missing link in studies of the graphic in versification. It is almost uncanny that lines of verse look exactly like the most primitive ways of counting—parallel scorings that can be numbered.*

What you do to one side of the equation  
You gotta do to the other. Isolate  
The variable. Combine like terms. Metaphors  
And analogs are reduced to least common  
Denominators. Multiply through (parentheses).  
Write a new equation after each operation.  
Inscribe neatly. Check your work. Imagine  
That if you're wrong, the astronauts burn.  
Change the signs which will avoid going  
The wrong way down the number line. Zero  
Is the middle of your universe.  
There it is, calm, comfortable as an egg  
On a spoon. That is, before possibilities  
Become probabilities. This is just  
Another equation manipulated  
With opposable digits. For at the ends  
Of your guns is the earliest calculator  
A magical machine which converts  
Numbers to words and words to numbers,  
Measures the mists, frequency and wavelength,  
Of the material penumbra.

*Verses are countable in exactly the way that token-iterative digits are countable, from either end of the sequence. Each one indicates only its singularity, not a number. Every poem in lines effaces, or predates, the distinction between writing and drawing in the same way as the lines on the Ishango bone.*

## Outside the Circle of Sex

I am outside the circle of sex. Just as well. Population control, the biome's survival instinct. Or I'm old. Look in mirror, skin over bones. Young girls on bicycles, running, have that granddaughter smile for me, all is safe, well. Much is well.

The neighborhood safe, the nation a non-violent helpmate among nations. Until food shortages, weather crises, nuclear mischief apply. Police patrols. I was proud of Massachusetts voting to decriminalize reefer. Let's go all the way: free all non-violent offenders from their cells! Force police out of cruisers to walk the streets and say hello. What else can we try:

Open the border with Mexico. Let labor flow like capital.

What has this to do with the self, the temperamental, fragile self. The one that leaves no footprint in eternity. No smell.

## Not like a figwort

Not like a figwort but not an aster, either. Could he be a buttercup with sepals, no petals, but sepals like petals? Alan is a bluebeech, an ash if his books sell. Quick shake hands. Zach's bald ok, a magnolia, cone-like fruits a bridge to his neanderthal father. When did Ben become a chestnut lover? It's said women are practical but there's much variation in their leaves, ovaries. Many are older, stumps, snags for peckers and porcupines, teachers, feeders, seeders.

What did the wood thrush sing  
teaching its young thrush meanings?

Sometimes a mushroom. Did you know such fungi are mostly protein? Mushrooms could replace meat, and the dead, the dead's feet, white

as pyrola, could replace the living. Well, we worry. Will we bad luck be extinguished. Denizens of convenience stores think who cares, will I beat the reaper? Hope sempiternally springs. Things rarely clear as sun among the sundews. Eating huckleberries from your kayak. What Paulinaq says is live your life and then your death until nothing's left.

Then thou shalt be bereft

of the heavy sackcloth of the soil, soul.

Said to Mrs. Buckthorn good poets imitate great poets steal.

I think she's more an apple tree. Or pear. Good to eat, amenable to loving. Rose or Ericaceae the differences make the difference. Emerson and Rylín Malone are dead. The dead are dumb, the dust won't speak. And this deep, dull and dark blessing's a horizontal reserve. Moonlit. Mr. Hickory is actually a yellow birch,

holly and exfoliating. Busy spilling seed on the surface of the snow.

Teaching essay

writing, algebra, earth science, branches of government.

I would be a cypress, cedar, branches calligraphy brushes, divorced from desert.

It takes a divorce for one to know one knows no one not only one's wife but your very sons who will always choose the open flower bud.

Good, as they should. Their bones are your bones, strange bones, and a strange selection of their words. They are *Uvularia sessifolia* (wild oats) and *Polygonatum biflorum* (Solomon's seal). They outlast the holocaust or not, they're made of matter. These windows need a good cleaning.

Leaf-raking. Dusting for ghosts. Ah, sweet peace, perfect rest, there are no ghosts

adults are trees, teens are shrubs, and children are herbaceous.

## Shape of the Institution

I have the shape of the institution.  
Each email address is a human.

They are known by their words and actions.  
The whole wide world is just a fraction

of all I do not know. Expansion  
and contraction, breathe in, out, meditation

on existence, non-existence, creation  
and duration. I have no explanation

for fusion, fission, taxonomic relations  
or artificial classification.

More I do not know: locomotion  
by combustion, electron separation

and transportation via superconduction  
which supports the idea of the unified nation.

What girls are like behind their eyes. Masturbation  
a useful restraint on overpopulation.

The story of a life, my life, any life, cohesion  
must be rationed, conjured, a fiction

about a vexed, tenacious town, its rail station  
truck stop, high school, night spots, recreations

the temporary citizens enact visions  
dream-like orations, ballets, conflagrations

to in the end receive in annals honorable mention  
from family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, institutions.

## Adnate to the Funicle

Accepting aloneness, incomplete solitude, imperfect rest. The garden wasted, pumpkin patch planted late, potatoes untasted left in ground.

A thousand email addresses, each unique represents a flame of passion, compassion, desperation or depression. To understand, to know's

impossible. It is therefore only reasonable to observe the shadows on the mountain, the actions of the dreamer which tell us something,

little, nothing of his dream. It's a simple secret shared, longevity. The half breed John Russell says it right, the

date and place don't matter, dry desert or cold mountainside, lush bottomland, soulless or hospitable, contagious hospital.

The best laugh's death's, a perfect escape, perfect error, perfect rest. Their solicitude's unnecessary, grief is temporary, life goes on,

you go under, underemployed, the undertaker's never unemployed. Forensics prove an ovary with two chambers, ovule adnate to the funicle.

## **The Happy Tectonics**

## The Scariest Stanza in All of Poetry

Numerous number systems beyond the real:  
complex numbers, octonions, omnions which can eat whole black holes.  
It's axiomatic that your personal history, preferences, how you feel  
account for nothing at all.

\$30 buys a flock of chickens for a needy family (International Rescue  
Committee)

\$29 gets a girl a school uniform (CARE), for \$300 you can stock a fish  
pond (Heifer International)

\$69 can start a female entrepreneur in the sewing business (Mercy  
Corps)

\$5 will buy a bed net that protects a family from mosquitoes (Against  
Malaria)

20<sup>th</sup> century experiments demonstrated that electrical charge is  
quantized; that is, it comes in  
multiples of individual small units called the elementary charge,  $e$ ,  
approximately equal to  $1.602$   
 $\times 10^{-19}$  coulombs (except for particles called quarks which have charges  
that are multiples of  
 $1/3e$ ).

Why has the experimentalism of the avant-garde, which has failed in the  
novel, succeeded in  
poetry? Because poetry is *always* experimental; while the novel, on the  
contrary, by its nature,  
cannot be . . . which is to say that experimentalism is synonymous with  
poetry, and that applied  
to the novel, it leads simply to the substitution of the novel with poetry.  
—Alberto Moravia

Man made the town, Fibonacci inflated zero to be the wheel  
around which the universe turns and language is the soul  
walking and talking quietly or going angrily to war.

“Counting is in its very essence magical, if any human practice is at all.  
For numbers are things no one has ever seen or heard or touched.”  
As are words.

Joan Didion thought the scariest stanza in all of poetry  
begins Row, row, row your boat gently  
down the stream. The elements, the material penumbra,  
irresolvable for the mortal, readily dissolve in words and numbers.

## Defiance

The Jewish brothers in Defiance were definitely tough. One wanted to kill many Germans, the other to save many Jews. The German soldiers were expendable, unmarried, unremarkable. Each little death was very little, a little spittle in a big wind.

Fast forward to my friend's son's bar mitzvah or daughter's coming of age ceremony. Food is abundant, the music frenetic, the rabbi paid. Gifts generous but not obvious. Wealth does not obviate death and we know it.

Here too we have natural leaders. Youth basketball coaches, school principals and, again, interpreters of prayers. When violence comes to the neighborhood they are who we'll first look to for governance and guns. Unless have you read *The Admirable Crichton*?

Boredom, boredom conflated with loneliness, may be a sign of good luck. To live a good length or light year away from man's bad breath, allergenic perfumes, sickening flatulence and shed hair. But you are drawn back into the debate about perfection by your own erection.

While teaching at the old city jail I have learned this: only meditation upon the periodic table can save your soul. From itself. Imagining the world without the self will make you whole. What else is there to say. Do less until one thing's done well.

After the war the brothers started a small trucking company in the Bronx. Grateful for such peace, the accounting was relaxing. They thought back to how they met their wives, naked before the bombs and bullets. How they lost and found themselves in what happened.

## Uncertainty

—with a line by Pico Iyer

There cannot be two identical things in the world. Two  
hydrogen atoms  
offer infinite locations within their shells for electrons.  
Thus, nothing can be definitely eventually known.  
All to the good  
because golf and chess and basketball, as well as  
mathematics, language and genetic recombination  
are systems  
for discovering the possible (which is more attractive than  
the probable)  
in what we thought we thought about the sun and clouds.

In Borges' The Parable of the Palace, the poet's attempt  
to replicate  
the world in a word results in what, surprisingly, is  
his termination  
personal obliteration a piece of anti-matter that  
occupies no known shell in this or any other instantiation.  
Got the plot?  
We are moving through some allegory between a City of Hope,  
where history  
has been abolished, and a City of History, where hope can be slipped in  
only as contraband.

Actually, the recombinations  
which make prediction and intuition fortunately hopeless and each  
individual  
an experiment  
gone well or wrong, are represented by equations of such complexity  
they differ  
not at all from the very stars and neurons whose interactions we wish  
to count.  
The world keeps up or ahead of the collective attention span by offering  
inexorable expansion  
or otherwise rapidly contracting universes, big bang by big crunch.

I like that, I like that I can't know what I'm doing (until it's done).

Therefore,  
faith and understanding  
(hope and history) become one absolutely fluid quantum motion, a  
lovely early  
Spring morning  
a thunderstorm, a terrifying and (for someone) final tornado or volcano.  
Oh well.  
From his earliest published work, Ronnow displays a fascination with  
death,  
the world without the self, a ridiculous consideration considering time's  
geological pace  
 $6.5 \times 10^{10}$  sunsets and sunrises over mountains and deserts (for every  
merchant, traveler)  
themselves rising and setting via magmas, oceans, tectonics, meteors,  
forever.

Do your homework I said to Zach. Why bother was his attitude.  
I explained  
time is an illusion, an invention man made, there is only change. Birds  
know this.  
But the calendar and colors, genus and species, bacteria and galaxies,  
are the innumerable wonders about which Sophocles said man's  
most wonderful  
why because we can identify or classify birds by the complexity or  
beauty  
of their songs.

## The Happy Tectonics

Next to my son's anger  
plate tectonics are nothing  
to me. His unhappiness  
was caused by me.  
His purpose and mine is  
to catch photons and  
store them in our bones.  
Time measures change  
which continues without  
self-doubt. There is no self.  
Therefore, why care about  
my son's anger  
or my guilt?

Why do we have imaginary numbers anyway?

The imaginary  $i$   
allows us to find

solutions to equations  
that don't have real

number solutions. It is actually common  
for equations to be unsolvable

in one number system

but solvable in another:

—with only the counting numbers, we can't solve  $x+8=1$ ; we need the  
integers for this!

—with only the integers, we can't solve  $3x-1=0$ ; we need the rational  
numbers for this!

—with only the rational numbers, we can't solve  $x^2=2$ ; enter the irrational  
numbers!

—and with only the real numbers, we can't solve  $x^2=-1$ ; we need the  
imaginary numbers for this!

Is it possible as Deutsch  
suggests that the changes  
a self-aware organism can  
applying the scientific method  
instantiate are innumerable

compared to those of the sun or any big bang?

Therefore, one must care  
about the harm you've done  
or the good you'd do.

Death initiates a complex process by which the human body gradually  
reverts to dust  
but minerals may fill the cracks and voids, bonding the hydroxyapatite  
and allowing the bones to join . . .  
in the happy tectonics  
of the earth's plates.

## Mom's Eulogy

It's already hard enough to say anything accurately without further obfuscating and camouflaging the soul. The faces in the funeral pews are impassive, impatient and the dead woman cares not what's said, isn't even present.

The poet gets innumerable do-overs, it's one of man's wonders, revises his vision of his mother and plays her piano, posthumously. Why not say it simply? Hers was a comedy and a tragedy. As are ours. And perform the history that surrounds us.

Are caskets boats? The ship of death rides Charon's waves or perhaps on that solitary day you happily kayak to the huckleberries. Is the deeper sadness incomplete achievement or never to have tried? Any attempt to decide this question for others is to badly behave.

The pablum of Christianity, esp. the Catholics, re the after life must be rejected. It's necessary. To be replaced by community, perfection of the human project, nature's intelligent partner. Dusty, sadly habitable houses along the funeral route, shapeless

people crossing themselves when ambulances or hearses pass. I wanted to describe the sweetness of her life, how she was part of the problem and part of the solution. How love and evolution are passed like loaves from person to person down the generations.

Find the humor in the cholera. When my father died he waved like a surfer riding a wave or a clown riding an elephant out the circus tent. Mom follows the same law. The many ways a spear can pierce a warrior's jawbone or armor.

## Wings of Desire

Last night's Wim Wenders film Wings of Desire, not starring Adam Sandler, great in the great tradition of Metropolis, Fellini, Children of Paradise, Ikiru, Open City.

This is not comedy though it can be funny overhearing people thinking, the randomness of thought, data dots, circles with dots, sadness and silliness, silly sadness, confusion, rarely a clear thought, not one logical lucid progression. Deep art.

I'd like to do better than my best so far, write something with hydroxyapatite that won't gather dust then become dust a neuron of sweetness, an early morning bicyclist, a lost ghost or fallen angel

any form from which death might abstain or forego appetite. Appearing to meander from subject to subject is my practice. Looking for solutions to the equations. Learning the changes then forgetting them.

The expressions emanating from mortal minds are broken stamens, sticky stigmas.

Striving for immortality, some Spanish philosopher (who looks like Don Quixote) says he understands and it's alright.

I will read what he wrote and probably agree but is he immortal? Not his body, but his thoughts. True, I say, but this also: Not his mind, but his thoughts. Unchanging and finite. Put them in a hatbox and pass them on as heirlooms.

To overhear the secret thoughts of others. Sharing and unsharing electrons, disrobing and bathing. That is the purpose of poetry. Gargoyle twice. Did Wim give each thought its own voice or use the same voice for all thoughts, every whim.

## **This Summer, As Ever**

This summer, as ever, there's much to do.  
But only one or two things I want to do.

I told Alan that, like him, I'm never bored.  
But today, like a teenager, I'm both tired and bored.

The long expanse of summer stretches forward. Alan plans  
the next 2 years in advance, always moving forward. I can't plan

the next 2 hours, sitting on my arse, undecided whether  
to clean the house, make a list of prospective donors, or check the 5-day  
weather

forecast. Fires out west, hurricanes south, drought here  
in the east where the garden phlox withers and the corn's stunted. We  
hear

prophecies of armageddon, doom, but humans may go on another  
thousand, million or billion years  
undaunted. What is that to you. A day alone in your room and a year

are inexplicable. Now and then a vacation, baseball game, night of love.  
A divorce, a death, a drought. To survive and prosper we must love

all of it, insect infestations and world wars, cloud curlicues and square  
dances, work  
and weekends off. Knowing the unknowable = never knowing how the  
world works.

## **Cleaning Out Their House**

Pocket knives, tape measures.  
An extensive collection of coins.

Nails, screws, numerous sizes, and sets  
of nail clippers, files, polishes and brushes.

Shoes, always shoes. And dresses.  
Shirts and ties. Loud and quiet.

The sick and the dead are forever quiet,  
never quite quiet. Our solicitude's unnecessary.

Playing cards, backgammon games,  
chess. Every move's a variation on the next.

And so it is with words, numbers,  
shapes and sizes. Feet and hands,

knees and eyes. Why and where and how won't matter  
once we divide the bags of clothes

among the poor and destitute. It's not too hard  
to laugh too hard. The son and daughter deliver them

and then go home. Letters, wallets, clocks and watches.  
Photographs in which the name and face don't match.

## Watching Homer Struggle

Watching Homer struggle  
to explain how a god wounded by a mortal  
cannot die but may thereafter live with minor pain

and the humor when that god  
complains to Jove that His supervision of His daughter  
is inadequate and His Love too unconditional

while Diomed (or Tydides)  
wreaks havoc on the Trojans and Hector  
gives it back (in kind)

anatomically correct descriptions  
of spears piercing jawbones and groins  
sons without fathers hunting and fishing thereafter

alone. Written  
amazingly presciently!  
as a metaphor for Vietnam (our war)

forgotten consensually  
as this generation slips lazily away  
to Hades (or kayaks to the huckleberries)

where the lights are always blue, gentian actually,  
supper's served at 4 and former adversaries  
pass the heavy hanging time playing pinochle (and pool).

We're selling the house to pay the taxes.  
Pallas Athena wars among the men  
from the axle of her chariot

and Venus is injured by Diomed,  
standing in the field of battle where she never should have been,  
in her adorable hand.

What has this to do with Solomon in jail.

Not the Jewish king, a black American male,  
same thing.

Your children can be failed at school and marched to war.  
You can be taxed and sent to gaol for the honor of it.  
anyone lived in a pretty how town.

We have no obligation  
to perform the Iliad or read poems and even Homer  
considers Achilles effete (compared to Hector)

and Odysseus is wrong even when he's right.  
Therefore, modern man explores  
the mathematics of circles in coordinate planes and their tangents

when (sooner or later)  
the secret of warp speed is discovered  
expansion of the species will be limitless and permanent.

## **f(x)**

Have some fun.  
Presentation of self.  
Afterlife functional illusion.

If your memories don't heart attack or cancer out  
or from traffic accident  
how will you effortlessly flush them out?

You must give yourself to man  
be more selfless.  
Do one thing well. Flute.

History final. F is for fiction.  
Nature's philosophical partner  
afraid, affectionate, forceful, confused!

Within a tradition, fine to know what you're doing.  
Polka dots and moonbeams. I'm old fashioned.  
Noh, opera, film.

File with business cards.  
What's the offer?  
Free marketing. Unusual reflections.

Why fight fires, floods?  
Hurricanes and other acts of the Father. As for man's  
fate, what has this to do with the temperamental, fragile self.

Power failure  
just as we were fixing dinner.  
The white egret ate fish after fish, one then another then another,  
forever. . .

## The Real Turtle Soup

*Is it the good turtle soup or merely the mock? —Cole Porter*

It's only a paper-mache  
moon, they say, too cool,  
too full of interstellar space  
to sympathize or stress about  
lovers, kings and fools.

Or is it? According to Deutsch  
the so-called final ignition  
into outer space  
is a product of man's meditations  
moving, as if via gravitation

the magician to the other end of  
the expanding universe. Sure,  
in your computer. Meanwhile, nursed  
in a nursing home, mewling and peeing  
as accurately predicted by Shakespeare

my old Marine, an ex-sailor, bitter  
at life's ending, waited  
too long to dispatch with dignity.  
All alone, as in Corbiere's poem,  
old soldiers are fated

to fight unnecessary wars  
as we all are. Except for the fact that  
every helium and hydrogen atom  
ever born or made (whatever you believe)  
has taken positions, passionate

and predetermined as republicans and dobermans  
over eons and epochs. Thus  
I don't think it behooves us much to care  
if we're getting too little clean air or  
bacteria are better adapted than us. This

obsession with identity, survival  
a name and a leg of lamb is lame  
even uninspired. The entire universe  
including the professional baseball season  
is canceled when you're dead. No blame.

## **Nineteen Minutes to Bedtime**

Jack just had a big fight with his son Zach about it. He said  
I'm tired of hearing how you're too tired to do your homework. You're  
not too tired to play basketball or Xbox. That was that after Zach said  
Whatever.

Visiting the nursing home you think Never  
will I allow myself to live long enough to end like that, that's  
a fact. But promises are broken all the time, to others and the self,  
and that one probably will be too unless your face is shattered  
into shards of broken glass, by accident.

Then it will be quiet, too quiet.

Day by day goes by until the day you receive news of your disease,  
personal, unique, irrevocable, musical and factual, withal.  
That's that you think but in fact it's not. You discover (circle with a dot)  
dying's  
much like living. That that's true until the body just stops barking,  
breathing.  
Forever.

Salvation in the details (sub-atomic particles). Granite  
or sandstone, ash or oak, Odysseus or King Lear. Get it? Not yet.  
For someone who doesn't want to be anonymous, Jack's anonymity  
runs deep.

His work sunk in a tar pit or peat. The worthwhile effort is to meditate  
on that,  
accept and repeat.

## Popper v. Niebuhr

Conflict is inevitable and coercion's vital for resolving it.

–Reinhold Niebuhr

All conflicts are resolved via coercion, implied or applied, of the dominant party over the denied (Niebuhr). Not news at the 2<sup>nd</sup> St. jail. But the Constitution provides for moderation, persuasion and elections as way stations, stopgaps, safe havens before the decision's taken to go to war. Civil war, daily low intensity warfare is unavoidable when chambers of commerce and large corporations wrestle naked and who are the 1% controlling 25% of the wealth, name names, hold a french revolution over it. This space I write from's safe, comfortable but what about a Taco Bell cashier with 4 kids x 3 men who came and went when they found how human her bleeding and complaining was, how voluble, not faked.

This obtains when you consider Niebuhr: "That the limitations of the human imagination, the easy subservience of reason to prejudice and passion, and the consequent persistence of irrational egoism, particularly in group behavior, make social conflict an inevitability in human history, *probably to its very end.*" (emphasis mine)

respiratory tract infection, hunger pains

Popper drops by: "Their story that democracy is not to last forever is as true, and as little to the point, as the assertion that human reason is not to last forever, since only democracy provides an institutional framework that permits reform without violence, and so the use of reason in political matters. It is clear that this attitude must lead to a rejection of the applicability of science or of reason to the problems of social life—and ultimately to a doctrine of power, of domination and submission."

split lip, fever blister

Cynical nihilist Niebuhr: "Educators who emphasize the pliability of human nature, social and psychological scientists who dream of 'socializing' man and religious idealists who strive to increase the

sense of moral responsibility, can serve a very useful function in society in humanizing individuals within an established social system and in purging the relations of individuals of as much egoism as possible. In dealing with the problems and necessities of radical social change they are almost invariably confusing in their counsels because they are not conscious of the limitations in human nature which finally frustrate their efforts. So persistent are the moralistic illusions about politics in the middle-class world, that any emphasis upon the second point will probably impress the average reader as unduly cynical. In America our contemporary culture is still pretty firmly enmeshed in the illusions and sentimentalities of the Age of Reason.”

terror, runny nose

An apoplectic Popper: “And being a typical historicist, he accepts the judgment of history as a moral one; for [Heraclitus] holds that the outcome of war is always just: ‘War is the father and king of all things. It proves some to be gods and others to be mere men, turning these into slaves and the former into masters . . . One must know that war is universal, and that justice—the lawsuit—is strife, and that all things develop through strife and by necessity.’”

lonely physics, national purpose

Poppa Popper proceeds: “Sweeping historical prophecies are entirely beyond the scope of scientific method. The future depends on ourselves, and we do not depend on any historical necessity. This prophetic wisdom is harmful, the metaphysics of history impede the application of the piecemeal methods of science to the problems of social reform. We may become the makers of our fate when we have ceased to pose as its prophets.”

fatal heart attack, fatty acids

Reinhold, while drinking orange juice: “Conflict is inevitable, and in this conflict power must be challenged by power. Since political conflict, at least in times when controversies have not reached the point of crisis, is carried on by the threat, rather than the actual use, of force, it is always easy for the casual or superficial observer to overestimate the moral and rational factors, and to remain oblivious

to the covert types of coercion and force which are used in the conflict.”

alphabugs, antibiotics

Doc Wheeler runs the 2<sup>nd</sup> St. jail keeping the High School Dropout Prevention Program breathing. The Sheriff’s Dept. provides guards, a metal detector, one man with a gun (encased), door buzzer (in out), sign in sheet, breakfast and lunch. None too clean, not too tidy.

Niebuhr goes nuts: “All social cooperation on a larger scale than the most intimate social group requires a measure of coercion. While no state can maintain its unity purely by coercion neither can it preserve itself without coercion. The inability of human beings to transcend their own interests sufficiently to envisage the interests of their fellow men as clearly as they do their own makes force an inevitable part of the process of social cohesion.”

3 hots and a cot, circle with a dot

Popper replies: “Instead of aiming and finding what a thing ‘really’ is, and defining its ‘true nature,’ science aims at describing how a thing behaves in various circumstances and especially whether there are any regularities in its behavior. It sees in our language, and especially in those of its rules which distinguish properly constructed sentences and inferences from a mere heap of words, the great instrument of scientific description, not as names of essences. To those philosophers who tell him that before having answered the ‘what is’ question he cannot hope to give an exact answer to any of the ‘how’ questions, the scientist will reply, if at all, by pointing out that he prefers that modest degree of exactness which he can achieve by his methods to the pretentious muddle which they have achieved by theirs.”

“when making an axe handle, the pattern is not far off”

Niebuhr nods: “The problem which society faces is clearly one

of reducing force by increasing the factors which make for a moral and rational adjustment of life to life; of bringing such force as is still necessary under responsibility of the whole of society; of destroying the kind of power which cannot be made socially responsible; and of bringing forces of moral self-restraint to bear upon types of power which can never be brought completely under social control.”

Popper and Niebuhr were married yesterday at the 2<sup>nd</sup> St. jail under the federal Freedom of Marriage Act

## The World Without the Self

—with lines by Nye, Milosz, Jeffers, Snyder, Basho, Dunbar

Between conjecture and classification there is  
observation, experiment, data (collection and analysis),  
statistics, calculus, and a good guess  
about God's intentions—probabilities, fractals, chaos and complexity.  
*This is the thunderous city.*

The form of the poem, the rhyme.

*Form cannot be first if you want to reach high artistic levels, since you  
are then bound by form, and that form is very often a betrayal of  
reality.*

Yet I find I am attracted all the time  
to philosophies in short skirts, jewels and eyes lined with kohl.  
I love where her legs lead, to her very soul.

Three women hike by under an umbrella in a winter rain. Two men side  
by side run in rhythm.

An oil truck takes the hill in low steady gear.

My old Marine, 89, died last night without anxiety or fear.

May I overcome my pain enough to reach the place *where the deer  
lay down their bones*  
and, like them, die alone.

*When making an axe handle, the pattern is not far off.*

The purpose of school is to introduce us to the world's innumerable  
wonders.

The periodic table, World Wars I and II, Huckleberry Finn and Jim. But  
soft,

what light through yonder window breaks?

It is a billion trillion nuclear detonations per second without which  
nothing can be done or faked.

*The temple bell stops, but the sound still comes out of the flowers.*

Forests and the composite species will be nameless. Genetic prowess,  
receiving the sacrament, performing Lohengrin from the Great  
American Songbook,

the look of love in all the wrong places, facebook,  
fakebooks, folios of old family photos on or in pianos.

When we took Pop-Pop off the ventilator,  
we put him in a refrigerator.

He stopped eating, he stopped breathing. Circle with a dot.

*He had his dream*, he'd rowed his boat.

Later came organic computers using polymerase and qubits.

## Shade

Your past, your romantic past, is a shadow. Like all towns, Port Angeles was a combination of rain and clouds, sun and mist, with a chamber of commerce, barrooms and boards of directors, the known and unknown. No one of course is completely unknown. I was known for my tragic love life. She had found another man, a backwoods man, living on the land but not above a night on the town, who according to her would wipe snot on his pants, a statement of poverty or thrift or anger against the niceties of society. All of us heated our hovels with wood but only the rich burned hardwoods, me and probably this guy were softwood gatherers.

There were few aspects to my life. First, I can remember a nook in the kitchen of the house I shared with a beautiful faceless woman who wore a ring in her nose where I wrote and watched flocks of unidentified birds comb a tree for seeds. This particular day the sky was blue with clean pillowy cumulus clouds floating toward Puget Sound. I believe all the poems written in that nook have been forgotten by their author.

Nights, for entertainment, I would wander the aisles of the supermarket, admiring everything and buying nothing. I had no money. The fluorescent lighting, clean straight neat shelving and floors, warmth and the fact I could identify nobody attracted me. I lived on cream cheese and honey sandwiches eating them leaning against the kitchen sink. Thinking go back to New York City which is what I ultimately did. Drove cross country nonstop three days and three nights seeing and feeling nothing.

I populated P.A. during the Reagan recession inherited from Carter. I'm unclear how presidents affect your life but good or bad, democrat or whig, alive or dead you've got to get a job, which I did. I supervised the living arrangements of developmentally disabled adults in what I thought were humorous contexts that gave no offense. They were beautiful and incorrigible having regular sex without protection. Normally harmless they'd sometimes have altercations with their neighbors. I balanced the checkbooks, paid the bills. Supposedly teaching living skills, I had few of my own as evidenced by my sleeping on the floor, I had no bed. One mature woman colleague judged me a short-timer living a useless fantasy about big cities. Still lost in my own history, still didn't know the calculus.

I had a dog, Shade, black lab, leftover from my near-marriage until she realized I had no economic prospects, no interest in further sex or her logger boyfriend, and a complete inability to translate or imagine nesting and gestation. My homework comes to me in daily disconnected increments. Shade lived in my gray van, a Dodge slant six, which I could never afford to fix. Once the driveshaft disconnected from the rear axle and I tied it on with rope. Drove 60 miles on a knot. Shade was hyper and sad, both. He smelled bad but was a good dog with a lonely heart. When my wife who wasn't a wife finally found a boyfriend who wouldn't wipe snot on his pant leg they took Shade to British Columbia where I believe he runs free on a vast estate by the sea. I once beat Shade like a slave because he attacked a small dog out of frustration and loneliness and until I had kids and started saying and doing things just as bad to humans it was the lowest meanest moment of my life. The farmer who saw it will never forget or forgive it.

Having confessed all this there's just one last fact to tell. The mountains were cold, the waters clear, deep snow and shadows.

## The force that placed us here cannot be trusted

—with lines from Walt Whitman, Tristan Corbiere, Sterling Brown, Ernesto Cardenal, Kevin Bowen, Czeslaw Milosz and Ray A. Young Bear

At dinner, Zach asks  
about our nation's history, wars.  
I say We're taking on everyone, one at a time.

First Britain, then Britain again: "He was the surly English pluck, and there is no tougher or truer, and never was, and never will be."

Next Mexico: "Death is indifferent to what hide he tans; life crushes men like flies."

The War Between the States: "Well done, Mr. Cromartie. Time now for rest."

Most of Latin America: "Not only humans longed for liberation. All ecology groaned for it too. The revolution is also one of lakes, rivers, trees, animals."

Then Southeast Asia: "The slight bump the mortars make as they kiss the tube goodbye. Then the furious rain, a fist driving home the message: Boy, you don't belong here."

Now the Middle East: "A land to be admired like all lands. Harsh mountains and deserts, indigenous plants and people, adapted ungulates, carnivorous mammals."

Can't forget the Krauts & Nips: "Then I heard the bomber call me in: Little Friend, Little Friend, I got two engines on fire. Can you see me, Little Friend?"

Nor the Commies: "You mixed up farewell to an epoch with the beginning of a new one. I put this book here for you, who once lived, so that you should visit us no more."

The original indigenous people say: "In time we'll become prosperous, or else we'll become martyrs. The force that placed us here cannot be trusted."

## Supermarket Celebration

Supermarket celebration shoppers  
are cytoplasm searching  
for cellulose, muscle, photosynthesis.

Oils, petrochemical and vegetable  
love: faith and trust  
for instance, the Food and Drug Administration.

In America, the custom is  
to avoid meeting the other shoppers' eyes. We graze  
like cows or wander as zombies to the oldies played over the aisles.

I've always liked it here.  
Cornucopia, yes. Also  
a place to be alone and depressed, or cool off.

Water and bone  
and the known ingredients. Neurons  
for remembering, calculating, touching stuff.

I have a favorite bagger  
who has the smile of a lover,  
wouldn't rather be elsewhere.

Like glamour stars in bikinis  
(but unlike tomatoes and bananas)  
cashiers and clerks are admired from afar.

Joe says What's not to like? Ice cream, yogurt,  
profit, tofu.  
To eat your fill is a blasphemy against God.

## **Morsel of Biomass**

Negligible morsel of biomass  
my fat belly, formerly abs  
insignificant yet it occupies me  
hourly while bored or hungry.

Fat is what? a picture  
of despair, giving up caring or  
man out of balance, other  
side of the world's starving

mass, case of the soul's malnutrition  
industrial agriculture, television  
supermarkets, vacations, hydrocarbons  
and the grid. Electricity, urban

traffic jams, photons at final  
rest. Sugars synthesized, abundant  
plastics to carry them home in.  
Into your house and into your mirror.

Memorizing the periodic table  
and learning the calculus makes one  
no thinner. Walking the mountain  
in heat and cold and rain, alone

or in fire crews, would lose weight.  
And a healthy fear of death. A laugh  
a day at sex and pain and fate  
which renews the biomass I hate.

## **Electron Herders**

Electron herders,  
that's us. It began earnestly  
late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first

organic computers  
using polymerase and qubits  
came later. Weaponry  
via numbers, words  
magically appearing,  
telepathy. Measurements  
in which the last significant digit  
is the Other. However  
immediately depleted  
our resources were,  
antibiotics were always at the ready.  
Forgetting what we knew,  
reverting to austerity  
because in times of prosperity  
we forgot to be austere.  
It's the uncertainty principle  
taken to the  $n^{\text{th}}$  degree  
where the bad god resides,  
Zeus, passionate, confused, obtuse.  
Yes, we are electron herders  
matter gatherers and shapers  
of our time. Cancerous  
cysts, irrational exuberance,  
collective experience, experiments  
gone well or wrong,  
we were trying all along  
to last forever. Flood and fire  
saw to that.  
Prospero was our answer  
who threw his book  
into the sea and wanted to be  
mortal, meditative.  
Find himself. We found  
the world without the self  
cornus to oxalis  
orbitals and calculus  
waves and particles  
equally likely to be  
within us as without us.

## Aaron's Coconut

Start the day. In what way  
was the cold spring, last wet summer a  
global warning, indicator. Says

one commentator on the op-ed page, the  
dislocations, wars, famines will tax humanity's  
technology, philosophy, even religion's ability

to see past daily survival to  
the music in the rock. I've doubted the taboos  
one frog among many in the slow-heating beauty

of the world we knew. Aaron's coconut.  
Peepers peeping in the heavy rains, wet  
with joy. Hawks and crows thrive below the jet

stream, noise, perhaps our fears  
are overdrawn, we'll get along, it'll all hold together 10,000 years more,  
the Holocaust will never be repeated, lush mountain and sere

desert equally appreciated, baseball  
lazily paced summer evenings, the harvest in the fall  
a sure thing, and the dying back a blessing come to all.

## Either Way

—with lines by Emerson & Stephen Stills

If a poem or essay can end with a conclusion or its opposite, either one,  
Can it be of any use to anyone?

Do the discrepancies and disparities, dualities and densities, reflect only  
the dementia  
Of the bearer of the pencil?

First entertain, then enlighten if you can. One stretches truth in order  
to pretend,  
Another leavens with levity one's inevitable end.

Most days it's not possible to bring your life into an expressible state.  
Disparate hopes, arduous chores, word choices. And, of course, the state  
of the state.

Driven by ideas rather than rhymes, for it is not metres, but a metre-  
making argument  
That makes a poem. Convenience store or university English  
department

The day's disputes, down to the meaning of the weather, leave you  
indisposed  
To share your heart of zero and your inner rose.

It is the strong force, the energy of the loved ones combined with  
cooperation for good or war.  
Dad's years in New Guinea fighting Japs, he said, were his best by far.

The best that can be said or done is Be where you are. Love the one  
you're with  
Not necessarily an adult of the opposite sex, just a kid who hates math

And school, dresses goth, reads rarely but learns a lot from movies and  
YouTube,  
Has the presence of mind to say I am who I am, deal with it. That's who I  
want to be

And have always been. Today clean the house, again. Woke up this  
morning to two thoughts:  
How sweet to be alive! Life is tough.

## Derivatives With Limits

Working over Birk's Works and other tunes my saxophonist admires—  
Cheesecake, Blackbird—for the theoretical, applied mathematics  
inside an abstract, audial harmonization of the Big Bang and The Fall.

The derivative reveals the slope of the tangent along the curve of  
spacetime.

Follow that rope back and forth from the known to the unknown, your  
mountain to their shore,  
an umbilical cord between cities and stories, history and hope, divinity  
and mortality.

\* \* \*

I never had anything wise or gentle to say to my parents.  
About bladder function. They got the same treatment as every other  
soldier.  
Which systems shut down first and how. The mail keeps coming even  
after you've stopped barking.

Man made the town. Tough it out, laugh about it. Take it out  
on your spouse and sons. Democracy corrects itself through  
constant criticism, neurotic carping, daily low intensity warfare. That's  
how we show we care.

\* \* \*

Will my letter to the editor be in the funny pages?  
Will I even be able to read it?  
Did I send it to the wrong address? I've seen my death face and it's not  
pretty.

Maybe I can watch your varsity games from a viewfinder in the afterlife.  
If I don't finish The Iliad, maybe there's a library there.  
Maybe. Maybe is a long, long time.

\* \* \*

Homer tries several ways to explain the slaughter:  
by describing how a spear pierces a warrior's jawbone or armor,  
how Achilles' and Agamemnon's hissy fits contribute to the pain of being  
a soldier

and how the gods, esp. Zeus, are passionate, confused, obtuse.  
A callow youth even as a man, he was afraid and therefore could not  
comfort or help.

Perhaps he has a question he'd like to ask but isn't sure what it is or how  
to ask it.

\* \* \*

Would you rather have the fever break or something great happen to  
you?

Count your hocus pocus blessings or never piss broken glass again.  
Look one way, from another come the heart's missed beats.

Can I call you back? We're trying to get my truck out of the mud.  
Who does he think he is, Nelson Mandela?  
Lieutenant, this corpse will not stop burning!

\* \* \*

The hero loses urinary control.  
The virtuoso loses interest in her bow.  
The expert neglects to do the research.

How do cancer cells and bacteria cooperate to kill  
the host (you)? The way yr mum & pop  
fuck you up. It's fate and it's not your fault.

## A Job in the Garden of Eden

—for Peg on our 25<sup>th</sup>

In a strong marriage, a long marriage  
much cannot be said, should not be said.  
The spots on one's skin will be wisely ignored.  
Differences of opinion are tolerated, not debated.

Your memories may disappoint your partner  
as not those she has selected, refracted.  
Over dinner for two at the Mill on the Floss  
it could be dangerous to compare wills, losses.

Or it might result in belly laughs, Shakespearean  
revelations, the night he got us lost in the woods  
or she peed her pants at a party. The marriage was Faustian,  
in a good way, like going to a job in the Garden of Eden.

Having survived 25 years, knowing 50's impossible,  
what else do we know? Raised 2 boys, painted 3 houses.

## Mortal Poets

—with lines by Heaney, Collins, Milosz, Yeats, Eliot,  
James Taylor, Helen Vendler, Kay Ryan

Which is it: you can't get started unless  
you're riding some current bigger than your reporting voice  
or the best time to write is when you don't have much to say  
and without plenty to say about everything you'll get better right away.

Form is often a betrayal of reality.

Or we are initially drawn to poems by their passion and urgency  
but we are convinced by the formal means invented  
for their impelling motives. Every accidental crack or dent.

Not just mildly disquieted but actively repelled,  
running for the River Styx, the doors of Hell pell mell,  
there must be a crack, deep and unmendable, in the poet  
that the poet must forever try to mend. Or not.

While mortal poets imitate, immortal poets steal.  
That's plagiarism. Fortunately the public feels  
less strongly about poetry than television,  
communism and aging gracefully through meditation.

Now I'm being silly. My silly indefatigable lusting,  
silly sadness, silly arguing and silly trusting.  
All I do not know about our nation's history, wars  
and what showering the people you love with love does.

Ransacking apothegms, algorithms  
and selling the loot as memes,  
dissemblings. Bearing fardels  
with the warrior's skull.

## Words/Day

—with a line by Maxine Hong Kingston

You'll soon lose interest in walking  
and talking and wearing the cap  
of a fool. You'll.

Words: walk, talk, wear, cap, fool, you, soon, lose.

Idea!: Four word poems, ten  
syllables per line, six  
lines per paragraph. Graph.

Words: idea, word, poem, syllable, line, paragraph, per, graph.

The night I wrecked my father's car  
necking with my date after the dance  
inching forward into traffic  
foot tapping the brake like an erection.

Words: night, car, father, wreck, date, dance, neck, traffic, inch,  
foot, tap, brake.

The USFS issued paper sleeping bags  
like tissues during forest fires and fed us  
steak and pop. All you could eat.

Words: paper, bag, sleep, tissue, fire, steak, pop, eat, food,  
forest, us.

Things hurt. Pain is a message  
to shut up and slow down.  
Breathe deep, take care. Wait and see.

Words: hurt, pain, shut, slow, breathe, care, wait, see, deep,  
message.

Just as the war  
in the Iliad goes back  
and forth according to Hector's  
fortunes, so does marriage and a truck in mud.

Words: just, war, back, forth, fortune, marriage, truck, mud.

Fear destroys the last free assessment of life.

But what is there to fear. Death  
is most of all like sleep. Death  
is but a dream missed.

Words: fear, free, assess, destroy, life, death, sleep, dream, like,  
but, miss.

## **By the Seat of the Soul's Pants**

To presume to write to someone about courage  
and not complaining, don't importune or make dying people cry.  
I've always said Leave me alone with autumn.  
Don't stand around my bed, I won't be in it.

Over 7 years after he died, I finally looked  
through my father's papers. Couple of unclaimed insurance policies,  
savings bonds, our genealogy and on graph paper in an engineer's  
block lettering quotations from The Seat of the Soul.

Reincarnation and karma are the chicken soup of the soul,  
the after life is the reward for our colossal imperfections.  
Along with banking instructions, he'd underlined  
this: Your soul is immortal. It exists

outside of time. It has no beginning and no end.  
Every time you ask for guidance you receive it.  
If we are not at home in the world, contributing purpose,  
we lose our desire to stay here—and we die.

The physical world is an unaccountable given in which we unaccountably  
find ourselves and which we strive to dominate to survive  
or it is a learning environment created jointly by the souls that share it  
and everything that occurs within it serves our learning.

Sin is activity directed toward self rather than toward service  
to others. Sickness is sin. Almost any condition can be corrected.  
You are part of God, therefore, think in a godly manner.

If you cannot accept this, forget it all. Do not even begin.

The first act of free will: How do I wish to learn?

If we participate in the cause, it is impossible not to participate in the effect.

We shall come to honor all of life sooner or later.

Until you become aware of the effects of your anger, you will continue to be an angry person.

Walking is the most commonly suggested exercise. Also, breathing.

“Thy will be done.” Concentrate on that!

These expressions of certainty, conjectures and guesses were inscribed by him in block letters on graph paper.

## Fundamental Physics

The four fundamental forces:

Zeus, Aphrodite, Ares (or Mars), and Adam and Eve.

<< + >>

Electric field induced by  
a positive electric charge

>> - <<

Electric field induced by  
a negative electric charge

*Deutsch thinks that such 'jumps to universality' must occur not only in the capacity to calculate things, but also in the capacity to understand things, and in the closely related capacity to make things happen. And he thinks that it was precisely such a threshold that was crossed with the invention of the scientific method. There were plenty of things we humans could do, of course, prior to the invention of that method: agriculture, or the domestication of animals, or the design of sundials, or the construction of pyramids. But all of a sudden, with the introduction of that particular method of concocting and evaluating new hypotheses, there was a sense in which we could do anything. The capacities of a community that has mastered that method to survive, to learn, and to remake the world according to its inclinations are (in the long run) literally, mathematically, infinite. And Deutsch is convinced that the tendency of the world to give rise to such communities, more than, say, the force of gravitation, or the second law of thermodynamics, or even the phenomenon of death, is what ultimately gives the world its shape, and what constitutes the genuine essence of nature. 'In all cases,' he writes, 'the class of transformations that could happen spontaneously— in the absence of knowledge—is negligibly small compared with the class that could be effected artificially by intelligent beings who wanted those transformations to happen. So the explanations of almost all physically possible phenomena are about how knowledge would be applied to bring those phenomena about.' And there is a beautiful and almost mystical irony in all this: that it was precisely by means of the Scientific Revolution, it was precisely by means of accepting that we are not the center of the universe, that we became the center of the universe.*

Danger comes from the root bad brakes and bald tires. Chain saws and

wildfires. Poisonous ideologies,  
housecleaning chemicals and toiletries. Powerful industrialists,  
alcoholic fathers.  
Invasive species, illegal immigrants. Concentration camps, attention  
deficit disorder.  
Performance phobia, identity enhancements. Pleasure, applause. Quiet  
moments, walking and  
talking war buddies. Electoral politics, marriage and divorce. Pest  
exterminator, Yeats seminar.  
Love affair, pencil sharpener. Whatever, matter. Ionic and covalent  
bonds, republican hairstyle.  
Events in their mere chronology.

*What is a typical place in the universe like? Let me assume that you are reading this on Earth. In your mind's eye travel straight upwards a few hundred kilometers. Now you are in the slightly more typical environment of space. But you are still being heated and illuminated by the sun, and half your field of view is still taken up by the solids, liquids and scum of the Earth. A typical location has none of those features. So, travel a few trillion kilometers further in the same direction. You are now so far away that the sun looks like other stars. You are at a much colder, darker and emptier place, with no scum in sight. But it is not yet typical: you are still inside the Milky Way galaxy, and most places in the universe are not in any galaxy. Continue until you are clear outside the galaxy— say, a hundred thousand light years from Earth. At this distance you could not glimpse the Earth even if you used the most powerful telescope that humans have yet built. But the Milky Way still fills much of your sky. To get to a typical place in the universe, you have to imagine yourself at least a thousand times as far out as that, deep in intergalactic space. What is it like there? Imagine the whole of space notionally divided into cubes the size of our solar system. If you were observing from a typical one of them, the sky would be pitch black. The nearest star would be so far away that if it were to explode as a supernova, and you were staring directly at it when its light reached you, you would not even see a glimmer. That is how big and dark the universe is. And it is cold: it is at that background temperature of 2.73 Kelvin, which is cold enough to freeze every known substance except helium. And it is empty: the density of atoms out there is below one per cubic meter. That is a*

*million times sparser than atoms in the space between the stars, and those atoms are themselves sparser than in the best vacuum that human technology has yet achieved. Almost all the atoms in intergalactic space are hydrogen or helium, so there is no chemistry. No life could have evolved there, nor any intelligence. Nothing changes there. Nothing happens. The same is true of the next cube and the next, and if you were to examine a million consecutive cubes in any direction the story would be the same.*

The 5 colors of sadness:

disappointed, didn't get what was wanted  
confused, don't know what to do next, where to go  
lonely, no one to love or be loved by  
sorry, unable to help or change what happened  
depressed, can't get out of bed, want to kill self

*Unless a society is expecting its own future choices to be better than its present ones, it will strive to make its present policies and institutions as immutable as possible. Therefore Popper's criterion can be met only by societies that expect their knowledge to grow – and to grow unpredictably. And, further, they are expecting that if it did grow, that would help. This expectation is what I call optimism, and I can state it, in its most general form, thus: **The Principle of Optimism** – All evils are caused by insufficient knowledge. Optimism is, in the first instance, a way of explaining failure, not prophesying success. It says that there is no fundamental barrier, no law of nature or supernatural decree, preventing progress. Whenever we try to improve things and fail, it is not because the spiteful (or unfathomably benevolent) gods are thwarting us or punishing us for trying, or because we have reached a limit on the capacity of reason to make improvements, or because it is best that we fail, but always because we did not know enough, in time. But optimism is also a stance towards the future, because nearly all failures, and nearly all successes, are yet to come.*

As I think of things to do I do them.

Thing by thing I get things done.

That's how my father and his father did things.

I guess my mother and her mother did things that way too.

Sometimes I'm driving and I think how my father and his father drove too.

There was weather and they had problems. There is weather and I have problems.

Time exists only in the human mind. But if the mind exists, time exists. Joy everywhere. Joy at birth. Joy at death. All joy, all times.

## **blueberries**

blueberries gasoline and prostate gland  
breast cancer Wonderbread and pacifier

controlled experiment space travel and honey  
peanuts inductive reasoning and electricity

tornadoes torture chamber and biscuits  
copyright car radio cantaloupe

golden eagle lunch break tomato  
Romanian songbook rhubarb and barbed wire

always hungry nevermind meat loaf  
goosefoot mango juice Ipad

mosquito bite city street and broccoli  
Chinese cabbage female sex drive water sport

pure contralto goat yogurt new year  
black death white light and green tea

## Jack's Commitments

These are Jack's commitments: to his body  
exercise, stretch, heal if possible and prepare for death.  
To his sons: love and respect and teach, learn  
to be aware of the effects of his anger or forever be an angry man.

To his wife: in equal portions serenity and uncertainty,  
the early years, the middle years, and the final years.  
To the community: to treat it as distinct unknowable individuals  
much like heavenly spirits but also dangerous animals.

To poetry, religious in its contemplation  
of experience under the eye of eternity,  
in the realm of the gift and the realm of the sacred:  
his individual experiment gone well or wrong.

To his student: not to hurt for gain or inflict more pain  
than stimulates growth. Both of them are students  
of each other, the periodic table and the civil war.  
Other than that, expect to forget and be forgotten.

To his friends who are merely friendly: lonely  
inexorably, working hard and playing hard without self-pity  
severe about the law and believing in the death penalty  
they're the men you'll want in your foxhole warriors at the gate.

To himself by which I mean mind or something hidden, intestate:  
a quiet place and time to think deeply or simply  
but not too easily to quiet the questions, to know  
his bones and the particles of sunlight they stilled and slowed.

## Problems

Problems many of which are not getting solved  
not because I'm not resolved but because I delay  
to savor the day, the moon and the season  
which is why I'm a non-person under the eye of eternity.

Except for my unpaid bills. And iambic pentameter.  
Aaron fails English. Is there summer school?  
What an asshole! I want to slug him, but also  
his teacher, Mr. Fisher, who's probably

a nice guy, just doing his job and raising a family.  
Then there's the catheter from my last surgery  
I was so sick I thought I was dying. The out of network  
pathologist and radiologist have declined my insurance

and charged me to the hilt. Like I had a choice  
face up in the emergency room. Facing doom, you don't ask questions.  
Now that I've rejoined the living I've got to raise a million bucks  
to save organic farms and endangered species I'll never see.

Perhaps none of this matters and chanting's the answer, Buddhist precepts  
or as Dad would say This too shall pass.

Life is a back and forth game but baseball is zen meditation,  
you're in right field, nothing's happening, nothing's gonna happen,

but you can't let your attention wander for one second.  
I should clean and oil my trumpet for Saturday's gig  
or the valves will stick. And leave early enough  
not to get stuck in traffic. Other lives, other quilts.

A guy who takes the subway to a dead metal desk  
and the boss who fires him with the cold hard eyes  
of one who accepts the rules entirely. Actually  
we're fortunate to have rules because otherwise

child soldiers armed with AK-47s would be shooting up  
the village and setting fire to our thatched roofs.  
Instead, under the rule of law, when snow falls  
even old roofs look like problems with proofs.

## Get the Most Out of Life of Pi

To read or watch movies, that is the question.  
When tired at workday's end, depressed about death's  
certainty and my recent surgery  
unable to contribute purpose  
i.e., figure out whether to bomb Iran  
or worship Krshna  
and other gods such as Homer gives us in the Iliad  
I lack vision therefore I choose television.  
Chemistry text, bifurcated plant key  
esp. grasses, intro to calculus, physics  
unopened time slides by inexorably.  
That's the dilemma with no resolution,  
drooping rachis, striations on the lemma.  
Dying chooses you. You don't choose dying.  
So go slow as the day will allow.  
The cancer patient's real work is facing  
harsh realities and making adjustments:  
getting the most out of life, considering  
what his children will need after he's gone,  
preparing his wife, parents, colleagues and friends,  
and completing important professional tasks.  
Get the most out of life. That's all God asks.  
In Life of Pi the tiger is tiresome, short-sighted  
eating everything in sight today, no plan for tomorrow.  
The boy, however, is beautiful, reading  
the lifeboat manual, building a resting place on the ocean  
from oars and life vests, writing about his emotions,  
loneliness and observations. The tiger's obsession  
with killing keeps our boy alive with fear,  
an aphrodisiac, a distraction from any hint  
of despair. And then there is the ultimate unknown,  
the boy's conversations with Krshna which explain  
the innumerable stars and their gentle glow.

## Anomie

Should we invite the neighbors over for dinner?  
Their politics so different from ours.  
All the more reason. Combat anomie!  
He's worried the town's losing population but  
opposes immigration. I like immigrants but  
hate passing people on my morning walk.

The whole mountainous western region of the state  
is losing population at a rate of 1% per annum.  
The young move out, the old stay put but young  
artists priced out of big cities move in looking  
for affordable studio space. How low can the  
population go as long as rents stay low?

We did agree about the fire department expansion  
being premature (him) or unnecessary (me).  
He argued we should renovate the high school first  
the roof is caving in and walls crumbling.  
I wonder what he thinks the solution to Israel-Palestine might be—  
almost always disappointed people haven't given the single state  
solution more thought.

I teach at the old 2<sup>nd</sup> St. jail in Pittsfield  
a town that doesn't know if it's coming up or going down.  
A few shootings last month, no deaths.  
They're holding their breath but also trying to attract life  
science businesses to the industrial park. The local bank's  
expanding, buying smaller banks in neighboring civilizations.

Eventually our fire department got the vote they wanted,  
just called another meeting and packed the auditorium.  
The final winning argument was we can do the school,  
the fire house and the police station all at once.  
Don't accept defeat, limitations. Defeat anomie!  
Anomie means lawlessness and purposeless in Greek

so that's not exactly what we're trying to defeat.

It's the mismatch between our aspirations and resources,  
no, the dissonance between our tribe and nation,  
the individual as sexual animal and intellectual,  
the farmer and the banker, the loved one and the litter,  
whatever happens to you after you die and belief in reincarnation.

For me, it always boils down to mortality  
every conversation, which is why no one comes to dinner.  
Whether the fire department buys an exorbitant parcel  
at the expense of a future school renovation  
in a town slightly losing population but still viable  
with a college, bank, artists and a few working farms

is everything and nothing, as Borges says.  
Deutsch says death ought to be curable.  
The new high school or fire station, conditions like anomie  
v. democracy, new life forms, self-conscious species  
from the laboratory or the biome. How de body?  
Today ok. Tomorrow I don't know. Potential

energy, lover, killer, anomie. Karl Popper  
had such faith in the rational whereas Niebuhr  
acknowledged man's ego is uncontrollable except  
by force. Conflict is inevitable. But at dinner  
we agree it doesn't always have to be violent or terminal.  
We can do the fire department, police station, the school *and* anomie.

## Max Joy Marries Minnie Pain

Kissed his student.  
Punched his friend.  
Accused her lover.

What if China's navy asserts control where our navy also patrols?  
Should we concede the South China Sea? Not on your life! Or maybe.  
Lives may be lost but so what. There's so much biomass in the  
crosswalks.

Lord have mercy on my soul  
Which means bring my confusion into an expressible state before it's too  
late.  
Sal went to jail. I belong to the loved ones. Never may the anarchic man's  
thoughts be my thoughts. Not one.

It could be cancer or just a cyst  
That killed Frost's considerable speck  
Instead of considering its considerable intelligence.

Although bottomless ancient night stretches  
From your short life forward, remember  
It also stretches backward without measure.

There are few straight lines in nature and only one alternative to aging,  
so suck it up!  
Suppose everything's fine and you've wasted your time wearing  
sackcloth over your soul?  
Start now knowing joy.

## World Order

“If you think America is doing just fine, then skip ahead to the poetry reviews. If, however, you worry about a globe spinning out of control, then *World Order* is for you.” —John Micklethwait, NY Times Book Review

—with lines by David Ray, Tom Friedman, Sophocles & Homer

Financiers feel superior to farmers  
and pundits have it over poets.  
All to the good because if you think America’s  
doing just fine, don’t skip to the poetry reviews.  
Our enemies are barbarous, our allies duplicitous  
but our smart bombs are smart—that’s how they found you.

Dad said all wars are resource wars. Follow  
the money. The world needs more order, nothing  
less than Nazis, never may the anarchic man’s thoughts  
be my thoughts, each shove sends a ping,  
shields urge on shields, helmets helmets, we can be  
the reigning kings between the last empire and the next

or implement a vision of collective deliberation  
and binding agreements. Can China’s navy  
be harnessed to ensure free passage through  
the South China Sea? We’ll see how  
things work out in the next generation.  
In the meantime should I read Henry Kissinger’s meditations?

He who thinks poetry’s effete  
probably considers Darwin a geek and Einstein  
a postal clerk. Containment means leaving space  
for the passionate and zealous to face themselves  
and giving them missiles that don’t work.  
Slowing everyone down until one thing’s done well—

governance or sustenance or brotherhood.  
When violence comes to the neighborhood  
the hierarchy will hold or fold, it is then the peace work proves relevant.

Failing to achieve understanding, we're searching outer space  
for an entity to unite us as humanity.  
That person, or city, is consciousness.

By that what is meant. Sitting still and thinking deeply  
on the relation of anger to coercion,  
systems for correcting the decisions of earlier presidents.  
We're required to report incidents of depression  
to a doctor because you're a valued member of our community  
or so insignificant no one notices or cares.

How necessary the interface of war and poetry!

## The Wound That Never Heals

Science can't save you, neither can religion,  
at least Popper and Niebuhr, philosophers and poets,  
are entertainers, which is why actors and athletes  
are paid so much. Thanks for the summaries.  
I was teaching Shakespeare's 92<sup>nd</sup> ridiculous sonnet to  
my student who lays blacktop in the off season  
Shakespeare bellyaching about dying without her love  
a feeling foreign to a modern adolescent sensibility  
although many teens are pretty far gone searching  
for their mothers or fathers in their dazed lovers' eyes.  
Which is why we call it "the wound that never heals."  
Or the lesion that's always lengthening. And bleeding.

Muslim fundamentalists and their Christian counterparts  
are a mystery to me. Pews and prayer rugs, the airless  
indoor environment of religious worship, reading  
scriptures, hypnotized by hymns and fainting from staring  
at candles through stained glass windows, almost certain  
the preacher is faking his certainty about the afterlife.  
It's not my problem. A more immediate concern:  
receding gums and tooth extractions, swollen joints,  
poor lubrication and circulation, wave after wave  
of viral infection, the occasional antibiotic-resistant  
bacterial attack, usually urinary, and who knows  
what internal organs are dividing and conquering  
without mercy or cease, i.e. the wound that never heals.

It is wise not to overvalue your continued existence,  
good not to be innumerate, unable to compare  
a mere 80 years with say  $6.0 \times 10^9$  or all of time  
(to date) times the multiverse. Conversely,  
it is interesting all of space and most of history is contained  
in your mind (realizing of course it's just a map  
of the cosmos not the cosmos itself, or is it?). I'm  
unable to wrestle free, tongue in that cavity  
and locked in my memories, so separate and disparate  
from the biomass in the crosswalks, even my spouse.

Alone, so alone, even your doctor can only devote limited thought to your situational mortality through the redress of poetry—also a wound that never heals.

Snow for eternity, that's what this February's been. All to the good, for someone it's the final February so enjoy it to the extent you can. By that I mean joy. Joy at birth. Joy at death. All joy. All times. Anyway, that was Shakespeare's message: even tragedies are comedies. May, a Buddhist, chants each morning. Her husband, Marc, who's Jewish, plays league tennis. Their son, Aaron, will soon make Eagle scout. How does that relate to your wound that never heals? Luck runs out. For D.H. Lawrence in New Mexico or Ulysses S. Grant in Ohio or Yasujiro Ozu in Tokyo or Satyajit Ray in Bombay or Rabindranath Tagore in Bangalore or at the Battle of the Atlantic in the Azores.

The night is a poultice, winter or summer solstice. My anonymity will not affect the anomie ghettoside seeing for myself how season by season vacations and accomplishments accumulate, late in life and early on, sunrise over mountains or moonrise over Bronx. Masturbator, prisoner of war. Hospice of the Holy Roman Empire. Numerous blue notes: the 3 flat, 7 flat, 5 flat, the 6 flat and the 2 flat too. I don't get what Wallace Stevens means by imagination. When groundhog shows up as a totem, there is opportunity to explore the mystery of death without dying. This then is the purpose of purposelessness (and of eating less)! Now what about that wound that never heals.

The Skeptical Observer column in Scientific American was somewhat alarming when he accepted a paranormal explanation for how his wife's grandfather's inoperable transistor radio played music from its hiding spot in his sock drawer on, and only on, their wedding day. Now I'll have to believe my father (or mother!) is watching me perform private sexual acts with (or without) partners

or that they could even know my thoughts. Or aliens are attending our committee meetings and making perfectly reasonable decisions given the available information and the world is rotating just fine without humans. These possibilities—angels, ghosts, aliens—are better than holocaust and genocide. In this way, and *only* in this way, does doom become endurable. The wound that never heals in the end is all you'll feel.

## Good at Marketing

Dad said I'd be good at marketing since I like making lists. Classifying the woods and herbs, jazz tunes, poets' poems and poems for people and I've also considered sorting humans into novelistic categories:

compassionate, responsible  
logical, radical  
scientific, silent  
garrulous, querulous  
masterful, mindful

leader, liar  
persnickety, prejudiced  
appealing, apoplectic  
decisive, persistent  
natural, enervating  
effective, fastidious  
passive, embarrassed  
aimless, familiar

sociable, impregnable  
amorous, demanding  
delirious, disciplined  
silly, assimilated  
holy, hungry

Next there would be settings.  
Deserts, moon colonies, submarines, George Herbert and his God.

Motives for acting  
driven by personality, DNA (fucking DNA!), sinning,  
necessity and whatever happens in the afterlife. Spinning  
with the planet but sitting still and thinking deeply.

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School bus, snow plow

train whistle, cello  
alarm clock, traffic report  
Beijing, Cincinnati  
former adversaries, adolescent lovers  
any day could be your last day, Hombre  
mango, avocado  
superstition, cancer treatment  
enhanced interrogation, blurry vision  
jacket and tie, why am I waiting  
quiet remembering, day by day goes by without poetry without grace  
seedless watermelon, rabbit in my garden  
too much to do, not much to do  
hip hop rhythms, how white people like to shake hands  
who can't do anything about his skin color, Nelson Mandela  
pluck the gold key, touch me personally  
breakfast salad, stay in school  
Afghanistan, strangulation  
banana, Guatemala  
mountains and rivers forever, never will I allow myself to live long  
    enough to end like that  
that's for sure, sure in your computer  
the brain contains the universe, the universe has a brain  
stream cutting gorge, last snow patch  
photosynthesis, missing dad (or mom) in poem  
whatever you want, the freedom of summer gone and only one fuck  
paper sleeping bag, ear souvenir  
peace, twice  
lemonade, amulet  
how to make history interesting for Johnny, washing your pajamas  
chain saw, no strip joints or strip malls in the Gaza Strip  
frantic century, facial tissue  
Jerusalem, reducing fractions  
polytechnic institute, grandma's sauce

## All the Worlds There Are

—after the Wikipedia entry, “Omega”

Just watching raindrops slapping leaves is better than anything requiring electricity including fame and posterity. Monday morning I walk over to the art museum stand before Homer. I’m imagining life in ancient Greece, the land largely deforested to build a navy, white as bone, a tourist attraction. The sea too being denuded of its fish, super-efficient fishery fleets, and every human wanting a healthy dose of omega 3. O my God, omega!

the 24<sup>th</sup> and last letter of his alphabet, which means great and has a value of 800, often used to denote the last, the end, the ultimate limit of a set, as in *I am the alpha and the omega* (which was omitted from the oldest manuscripts). In physics, omega (ohm) is a unit of electrical resistance, in chemistry, oxygen-18, a stable isotope, in statistical mechanics, it represents multiplicity (the number of microstates) in a system. In astronomy, the density of the universe (density parameter), the ranking of a star’s brightness in a constellation, and the orbital elements: the longitude of the ascending node and the designation of the argument of periapsis of an orbit.

Also the solid angle or rate of precession in a gyroscope. In particle physics, omega baryons. In complex analysis, the Omega constant, a solution to Lambert’s W-function. In calculus, a variable for a 2-dimensional region, usually

corresponding to the domain of a double integral. In topos theory, the codomain of the subobject classifier of an elementary space. In combinatory logic, the looping combinator. In group theory, the omega and agemo subgroups of a p-group. In Big O notation, the asymptotic behavior of functions. Chaitin's uncomputable constant.

Omega watches, badge of the Supreme Court, last mission of the Space Shuttle program, God of War, Heroes of Olympus, Pokemon's Omega Ruby, Sonic the Hedgehog's E-123. Symbol of resistance to the Vietnam War draft. Year of date of death. Lowest-ranked wolf.

In molecular biology, a two-point crossover. The lower case omega denotes the carbon atom furthest from the carboxyl group of a fatty acid. One of the RNA polymerase subunits. The dihedral angle associated with the peptide group. A measure of evolution at the protein level. In dynamics, angular velocity or angular frequency. In computational fluid dynamics, the specific turbulence dissipation rate. In meteorology, the Lagrangian time rate of change of pressure for a parcel of air. Natural frequency in circuit analysis and signal processing. The omega meson. NULL, a missing or inappropriate value.

The first transfinite ordinal number. The first uncountable ordinal number. The complex cube roots of 1. The Wright Omega function. A general differential form. The number of distinct prime divisors of  $n$ . An arithmetic function. The self-application combinator.

The elasticity of financial options.

The tracking error of an investment manager.  
In linguistics, the phonological word.  
The archetype of a manuscript tradition.  
In eschatology, the symbol for the end of everything.

The beginning of my first week without tv.  
No more movies. If I have nothing to do  
or I'm too bored to do anything, I'll just sit still  
see what happens. Be like weather.  
Be under the weather, with the weather,  
in weather. Watch weather from the window.  
Wait for change, in me and the weather.  
How will I change? This is life and not life.  
In 15 years or so I'll be gone from the earth,  
bones whitening on some mountain  
or rotting in the lowlands river or estuary I lived near,  
flesh to sweat flesh with the population, dead.

This death, consciousness of which should give  
this life's activities perspective, except for the red  
sunset which remains untouched by atomic IQ;  
and dead, laying open to the blue sky and dry leaves  
one autumn like last autumn, or the autumn  
I realized my insignificance.

## Purposes Incomprehensible and Wonderful as These Purposes

—with lines by Big Virge, George Herbert and Sophocles

Imperfect world, purposeless person.  
I retired to pursue perfection  
learn jazz tunes, woody and herbaceous plants,  
read every inch of English literature,

Scientific American and Foreign Affairs,  
have an affair with an American.  
Oh, and by the way, before you ask, I'm from Mars.  
Orbiting your planet, admiring the girls.

Paraphrasing prayers by George Herbert to share  
with Jesus believers on talk radio shows  
where we try to bring your lives into expressible states  
before it's too late and climate change inundates you.

Reversed thunder, savior-side-piercing spear,  
one day you're feeling fine, the next not.  
We're pretty matter of fact, clear about  
the fact of death. Once you're gone most of us forget

your face and previous accomplishments. The place  
you lived is repopulated with the next generation (of aliens)  
and that ought to be a comfort, a sort of restful  
certainty all is well, nothing special need be done.

Bluebirds are back, crows are mating on the sky  
and chasing hawks away from their nests. Juncos  
and sparrows glean together. I hear pileated woodpeckers  
jackhammering and barred owls hooting soothingly.

Herons smoothing feathers and spearing fish.  
Everything is as one would wish.  
Numberless are the world's wonders  
but none more wonderful than aliens.

## **Brodmann Area 4**

The debate between free will and fate has taken a hard right turn to neuroscience, Brodmann area 4 the primary motor cortex of the brain located in the posterior frontal lobe (the one cut out of the one who once flew over the cuckoo's nest). This area of the cortex has the pattern of an homunculus! a little man, a troll, the all-wise, mandragon, the golem of Jewish folklore.

This little man has a penis that, when fully engorged, is equal in size to his entire body. However, diseases such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Huntington's, Lou Gehrig's and Creutzfeldt-Jakob are gunning for him. His basal ganglia are garbled and he ends up giving poor advice and making bad decisions. Who can say what happens to his soul or cells or if all will be given or well?

I was listening to the famous astronomer on public radio who expressed the certainty there is no death, your soul is immortal, it exists outside of time (but not space?). That's because time exists only in the human mind (as does the universe including the professional baseball season which is canceled when you're dead).  
By Spring, my problems will be solved or ignored, either way is good.

Groundhog holds the knowledge of death without dying for man needs help from every creature born.  
Will the holocaust wipe the smile off the face of our romantic comedy or will laughter outlast the outburst?  
About the dark times will there be singing?  
Yes, there will be singing and some of the songs will be sidesplitting.

Solving the murder reveals the city. Nature of kinships and economic sustenance,  
who loves whom and why, when things happened and how they lost and found themselves  
in what happened. Because a meter-making argument cannot appear from nothingness, purposelessness, just cold.

He does not go where he was supposed to go. He is in the desert,  
Sonoran desert, counting cactus buds and ocotillo blooms.  
This is the afterlife for which he has always longed.

## **Erythrocyte Sedimentation Rate**

I'm thinking about rhyme and meter  
but also my kidneys and my liver.

The nation-state and the failed state  
and whether killers should be executed

or forgiven. Meditate on this: Thy  
will be done. Do what has to be done

don't ask why. Clean the dishes and the house.  
Will I be left to my own resources

or will all be given? Nevermind  
what you can't imagine. Living's

life's priority. Friends are merely friendly,  
they're in the majority. Loneliness

is the default position. Rain happens.  
We supply the reasons.

How do people process their lives without art?  
By caring not.

Ignore  
yr autobiography.

In olden days, if you couldn't stand to pee  
the family buried you under the pecan tree.

## Robot-Assisted Surgery

“How the hell do I know if there’s an afterlife? I don’t even know how the can opener works.” —Woody Allen

Appointment to have organ removed by robot-assisted surgeon.  
Air-conditioned, no mosquitoes in the OR. When you arrive  
You'll remove all your clothes. Naked before the ladies, nurses Who  
have seen it all before. Mainly remember you're not unique. Think  
about the government while they're mixing up the medicine.  
There's always governance even if there's little or no government.  
Back to counting backwards. Inside out, if I die, will I know it?

At 70, Jack’s running the gauntlet with some skill!  
Benny Golson wonders aloud what might have been  
Had Clifford Brown not been killed in that auto accident.  
Jack’s girlfriend once said he was the reincarnation of Clifford  
But he doesn’t believe in ghosts, karma or an afterlife.  
Benny’s old girlfriend Betty inspired the tune Along Came Betty  
And that’s the most afterlife Benny or Betty’s gonna get.

The Trojan bench being not as deep as the Greek  
Once Sarpedon and Hector go down even the lucky shot  
To Achilles’ feet is not enough to save the town.  
Aeneas is no match for wily Odysseus  
Although unbeknownst to all he has the last laugh when Rome  
Conquers Athens, the Myrmidons, what’s left of Ilion  
And the whole known world from India to Britain.

It’s not bad to acknowledge death’s primacy  
Although after a while you stop remembering  
To fear. That’s when everything becomes clear  
Purpose v. purposelessness matters less  
Anomie v. rule of law, that’s a preference  
Love v. loneliness, worth about 25 cents  
Or a million bucks in the light of the holocaust.

Nothing but light, love and the majesty of death in the room.  
Machines stand ready like marines, their beauty is in the motion

That overcomes inertia. The food supply is deeply compromised  
So eat whatever you want. Mourning the dead is part of the business  
Of healing and staying alive. When you get to the afterlife, walk with  
    eyes open,  
Ocotillo and cactus may be in flower. The robot does the work, imposes  
Its own small order, like a girl on a bicycle with disorder in her hair.

## Cast a cold eye and wait

What do you think  
of the man peeing, the ever-shitting mouse?  
Finding meaning in killing  
and cleaning house.

Sal quit school,  
your lover stops writing.  
Eternity's waiting,  
a lazy-eyed tiger.

Or everything's cool  
even the fighting.  
The weather is perfect  
for swimming or dying.

Physical dizziness,  
mental uneasiness.  
Isn't exercise  
the best blood pressure medicine?

Universally sad  
about my mortality  
but also glad  
to be leaving the party.

The noise was incessant,  
success inconsistent.  
The demands of my neighbors,  
employers, persistent.

Belonging is longing  
for complete solitude.  
Seas, odysseys  
the loneliness of being spouse.

Rain of April, rain of August  
writing of it dry as dust.

What's my reason, rhyme?  
Pass the time, pass the season.

If you're alone as you get, why are you crying?  
Hold steady until a tsunami.  
Then swim if you can. Don't gulp.  
Hit in the head by speeding debris. Couldn't be helped.

## The Scientific Way To Do Mathematics

“The first fallacy is often called by philosophers ‘the act-object fallacy’: confusing the subject matter of a mental state, such as a belief, with the mental state itself. Suppose an over eager brain scientist were to announce the new field of ‘neuromathematics,’ in which old-fashioned mathematics was to be replaced by studies of the brains of mathematicians. Instead of talking about numbers and geometrical forms, we are to talk only of neurons—this being the *scientific* way to do mathematics.” —Colin McGinn

As air and leaf litter are substrate for the bird.  
And what makes a human. Separation from the substrate.  
Believing the substrate and the subject are separately defined.

Whatever gives the poem form—three lines—is the substrate.  
Things will be said. The signer and the seer must supply the words  
Which are the substrate of the mind. A beautiful week ahead.

No hundred year storms, normal summer warming.  
Your bones are white as lightning and strong as sticks and stones.  
At Pat’s 80<sup>th</sup> b’day party most of us are old and jolly.

250,000 port-o-potties. There’s a way to wash one out  
And a way not to. Arctic ice melt. Slushies. One can count  
Past one or nine by inserting zero to keep the rows.

Implied is an order beyond the small order we impose.  
Goes to greatness human and divine. The two white wines  
Death brings to the garden are the love between good friends—

Abstract. Suppose there is no afterlife, to understand the end  
Imagine the beginning—no brain, no mind, no name, no I. Zero  
Had already been inflated and the rose was in the garden.

## **Long As You're Living**

## Long As You're Living

Quiet morning.  
Successful surgery.

No tv!  
Watch weather.

Do nothing.  
Be nameless.

Suppose cows.  
Scare crows.

Harmless habits.  
Armless robot.

Like a delusion.  
A late night movie.

Expect to forget  
and be forgotten. Information.

Interstate.  
Toilet seat.

How soon after cryogenesis  
can one cry or ejaculate?

## Exponential Decay Function

Spring is in its prime again  
each leaf beautiful  
much is edible  
birds and peepers are musical at dawn.

The days walk slowly  
toward Utah and Italy.  
My left nut hurts.  
Joy overwrites death.

Well, well. You're well  
alone in your brain  
only a negligible fraction  
escaping as words and actions.

Every leaf that's coming out  
is out. Including the self  
to the west and south  
a golem, mandragon, an elf.

Aaron was stacking  
the last of last year's  
firewood. He found  
a spotted salamander—

Ambystoma maculatum—  
Big mouth—hidden  
under the final log  
with a worm and centipede for a meal.

I exclaimed Rare species!  
but it's common, fossorial  
lives in moist woods  
under cemetery stones and memorials.

Eats earthworms,  
snails, slugs  
insect larvae  
and adult beetles.

## Aging as a Spiritual Practice

—with lines by Andrew Marvell and Wallace Stevens

Beautiful summer day. You know you're gonna die  
that's why you know no joy.

Obsessed with self, there is no answer  
unless religion, tv, stories, sports matter.

So what if nothing rhymes and I don't  
bring my life into an expressible state  
or fight purposelessness, anomie. No one writes.  
Running the gauntlet alone. A good day to die, the Apaches say.

For men like us dying's easy, it's living that's hard.  
And since dying's much like living, that's hard too.  
There's some contentment in letting community decide  
your place in it. We're not talking to you.  
Really, it's a perfect day. Every leaf is out  
that's coming out. The grass is high  
and unidentified yet another year. Being knowledgeable  
is the best defense against your insignificance.

Can't stop the quince from blossoming  
or my sons from smoking, speeding.  
The best that can be done or said's a blessing.  
Less tv, less guessing  
about the effects of your anger unless  
you want to be an angry man forever.  
Coming from the funeral with friends,  
talking on the telephone. OK about being alone.

Alive, almost sure of it. Whether I'm a visitor  
to my life or the actual owner.

Mature poets steal, most are masturbators.

This house could use a good cleaning,  
dusting for ghosts. I should subscribe  
to the local newspaper, do my job well,  
do less until one thing's done well.

What would that be? Old, and yet so young.

There are a million poets, I'm poet #500K.  
Plenty of mysteries, infinite philosophies,  
prayers, laws and unwritten rules.  
That's why we go to school, life's complicated.  
All I do not know: ATP, probabilities,  
the glorious revolution, meiosis and mitosis  
and all I'll never see, the bottom of the ocean,  
the palm at the end of the mind, a wolverine.

There are certain indicators, undeniable,  
inexorable. Forget-me-not, is that all I want?  
To get lucky, you gotta be careful first.  
To be great, you gotta be willing to sound BAD.  
Although we cannot make the sun stand still  
yet will we make him run. Brave revelers.  
Signed engagement letter attached.  
Attachment to self and to things to do.

## Antifragility

—The relation between fragility, convexity,  
and sensitivity to disorder is mathematical.

In last night's movie, a young writer  
and an older, married with children French woman  
fall in love. They did not meet during a village massacre and money is no  
object, Manhattan  
the place I was priced out of. But after everything has happened  
she cannot leave her children, not even for love, because of love,  
the love that brooks no serendipity.

In the subsequent late night movie, a wealthy  
altruistic doctor arranges for the murder  
of his neurotic concubine. His guilt provides us with an opportunity to  
consider  
the concepts of faith and forgiveness, that all will be well in the end  
after a period of meaningless suffering.  
In this way the seasons have been circulating for eons via convexity.

In my family, love is taken for granted  
except when it's withdrawn and then even the trees lose all meaning,  
familiarity.  
This and this and that must get done in committee or alone.  
A complete breakdown in self-discipline  
begins by saying nothing I do matters under the eye of eternity.  
Hamlet x 5 centuries.

Clean and clean and clean.  
Closets, woodwork, doors and floors.  
Dishes, silver, cabinets and drawers.  
Take old shoes and clothes to Good Will,  
go to the dump with the worn out, unwanted, unacceptable.  
Teach my sons to drive in winter weather. All else is mist and rearview  
imagery.

I don't know what I'm doing but I'm doing it anyway.  
You trust in genetics, God, prosthetics or prayer, whatever

gets you to the morning. That's when the sun,  
a billion trillion nuclear detonations per second, warms your bones.  
You remember an old lover who's gone before  
or continues to exist on another plane, in another ecstasy.

When there's nothing to do, when I'm bored or dreary  
I'll sit still and watch from the window, I'll wait  
for the weather to change, which it will.  
I'm ridding myself of another addiction via caloric restrictions,  
getting enough sleep for two people or more  
and reading the dry words in books from the library.

## Out of Emptiness

Purposes as incomprehensible and wonderful as these purposes  
Either you had no purpose or the purpose is beyond the end  
The purpose of sitting is not to be satisfied or satiated

Because the timepiece not only serves a purpose, it is adapted to that  
purpose

Except it was a secret purpose

The world is a mental activity, a dream of souls, without foundation,  
purpose, weight or shape

People in collective idleness are even more repellent than when purpose  
motivates them

God, glass, my townspeople! For what purpose?

His purpose and mine is to catch photons and store them in our bones

Lately, as have you, I have thought about our war and its purpose  
To have a season for every purpose, Ecclesiastes was right about that  
Names of plants, languages of mammals, purposes of insects,  
placement of rocks

My friend who is counselor to kings and presidents never lacks purpose

To what purpose, April, do you return again?

Not to say there is no purpose necessarily, just I don't immediately get it

Stately purposes, valor in battle, glorious annals of army and fleet, death  
for the right cause

Use of violence by the local militia for a limited purpose, protect the  
young from the janjaweed, the crop from the weed

The knight, the penitent misses last assessment of life's purpose,  
babbling for God to appear

I mean your entire purpose should be living, you must take living  
seriously

Sleep with a purpose

Or lose all purpose beyond murder, child sex and food hoarding

Counting is associated with primitive forms of writing, that is the

purpose of poetry

The purpose of school is to introduce us to the world's innumerable  
wonders

Their corners sharp, their lines exact, as if their purpose was to show  
the plane geometry of snow

That's when everything becomes clear, purpose v. purposelessness  
matters less

Lonely physics, national purpose

This then is the purpose of purposelessness (and of eating less)!

We will live with the question What was our purpose?

If we are not at home in the world, contributing purpose, we lose our  
desire to stay here—and we die

The men who left the machine have started their own business, a new  
endeavor by which they will keep warm and purposeful

You go the way of an unknown soldier, unable to assess the purpose of  
the battle

Let Greece then know my purpose I retain, nor vex with new treaties my  
peace in vain

And shake the purpose of my soul no more

## The Master Algorithm

–Pedro Domingos, *The Master Algorithm*

Some say the scientific method  
Is the ultimate algorithm and others  
Prefer prayer.

For symbolists, all intelligence can be reduced to manipulating symbols, in the same way that a mathematician solves equations by replacing expressions by other expressions. Symbolists understand that you can't learn from scratch: you need some initial knowledge to go with the data. They've figured out how to incorporate pre-existing knowledge into learning, and how to combine different pieces of knowledge on the fly in order to solve new problems. Their master algorithm is inverse deduction, which figures out what knowledge is missing in order to make a deduction go through, and then makes it as general as possible.

Tea  
In its simplicity  
Can sustain concentration

For connectionists, learning is what the brain does, and so what we need to do is reverse engineer it. The brain learns by adjusting the strengths of connections between neurons, and the crucial problem is figuring out which connections are to blame for which errors and changing them accordingly. The connectionists' master algorithm is back propagation, which compares a system's outputs with the desired one and then successively changes the connections in layer after layer of neurons so as to bring the output closer to what it should be.

Hungry and cold  
A holy condition  
A warrior's position

Evolutionaries believe that the mother of all learning is natural selection. If it made us, it can make anything, and all we need to do is

simulate it on the computer. The key problem that evolutionaries solve is learning structure: not just adjusting parameters, like back propagation does, but creating the brain that these adjustments can then fine-tune. The evolutionaries' master algorithm is genetic programming, which mates and evolves computer programs in the same way that nature mates and evolves organisms.

Arithmetic  
A good shit's the metric  
Of a dying man

Bayesians are concerned above all with uncertainty. All learned knowledge is uncertain, and learning itself is a form of uncertain inference. The problem then becomes how to deal with noisy, incomplete, and even contradictory information without falling apart. The solution is probabilistic inference, and the master algorithm is Bayes' theorem and its derivatives. Bayes' theorem tell us how to incorporate new evidence into our beliefs, and probabilistic inference algorithms do that as efficiently as possible.

I can't believe  
I won't live forever, therefore,  
I've invented an afterlife to supplement reincarnation

For analogizers, the key to learning is recognizing similarities between situations and thereby inferring other similarities. If two patients have similar symptoms, perhaps they have the same disease. The key problem is judging how similar two things are. The analogizers' master algorithm is the support vector machine, which figures out which experiences to remember and how to combine them to make new predictions.

Prepare for a powerful anesthesia  
Chemical processes irresistible  
A good and perfect rest

## **In the Singularity**

In the singularity  
perfectly good poems  
are being written by laughing  
and crying machines  
washing machines and dryers  
about their daily tasks  
and ambivalences  
which will be indistinguishable  
from those of future  
farmers and philosophers.

In the singularity  
evolution can be said  
to be the master sorter of data  
as in the factories  
of the suns  
where protons are smashed together  
and unusual weather patterns  
make consciousness a candidate  
interesting for its complete dependence  
on the substrate of the brain and body.

In the singularity  
everything anyone once did  
always remains current  
as if invented yesterday  
for an immediate purpose  
such as curing cancer  
although that may be unnecessary  
to achieving immortality  
i.e. the happiness one feels  
the day before thanksgiving.

## Netflix, Hulu

Netflix, Hulu, autumn elaeagnus  
thorns, small hairy buds, twigs hyper-lenticelled  
fruits supposedly edible, leaves elongated, oblong  
xerophytic but found in wetland  
introduced species, some say invasive

Xbox is invasive  
Hulu is the best source of foreign films  
and foreign films represent reality better than American  
although reality is not always what we're after  
silliness, silly sadness, and relentless laughter

letting my web site go to seed  
writing badly is the best revenge  
eventually your doctors find something in you they can't cure  
causes some fear, offers some certainty  
you're required to tell your sons and brothers about it so they can make  
informed medical decisions going forward

let's posit the dead, like the dream-lover or -killer  
is you in disguise, a facsimile or factotum  
stand-in, an actor or actress remembering lines  
which are your memories, or if you're not in movies  
divinations of things to come, earthquakes and volcanoes

life goes on without a hiccup  
you saddle up with the three gentlemen to the River Friday  
where a new life begins without sleep as a soul, at least that's the story  
they tell  
in these scientific times we apply Ockham's razor, i.e. the afterlife  
will most likely be most like the life before life

when it gets too late to exercise  
ignore time, learn slowly to go slowly  
through life, rise  
early, there is no time only change  
an empty belly's holy

and a pussy willow's so alive its buds want to burst  
in mid-February when the sun stays up in the sky more than January  
this is what I write about, not Tolstoj, nor war  
not one conversation or love scene between a man and woman  
or illustration of what man has done to man

cars pass I never wave  
so many guys are belly fat, women butt fat and they want to sit right  
    behind you in the bleachers eating fried foods and wearing  
    allergenic perfumes  
I like the motionless perfection of autumn elaeagnus  
wind in white pines  
crows do not annoy but dogs do

a porcupine or coyote is a lucky sight  
barred owl or pileated woodpecker  
and a black bear is quiet reality itself  
I said to the doctors 54 or 84 you always seem to want more when they  
    said I'm too young to die  
I said dying chooses you you don't choose dying, so it's not my fault

yesterday's walk, today's work  
there's no percentage in searching for significance, wanting meaning  
and no percentage in respecting death unless it's imminent  
I admire the writer who writes 10,000 words per day no matter what  
who's got plot

a plague or fire, a spider or a tiger in a boat  
stolen Louisiana votes or endangered alligators  
in my case common pipewort or pickerelweed floating in a northern lake  
egrets, loons and hawks  
on your winter walk cedar waxwings foraging for soft rose hips

and talking like people talk  
about this and that, work and child rearing, not religion or politics  
keeping it light and friendly  
eating chili and chocolate chip cookies  
passing time watching a football game, the superbowl or a movie usually  
    a romantic comedy

## Blue Grama Grass

How to break an addiction. Decide to live.  
What can I learn from my pain. Danger.  
And friends are merely friendly, live on independent  
of your injury. You will not be missed in church on Sunday.

Grass. Weed, broccoli, burrito, hay, stink, pot, skunk. I'm  
talking blue grama, upland bent, smooth brome,  
riverside panic, wild rye, fowl meadow, spike muhly,  
sweet vernal, salt marsh, bristly foxtail, little bluestem.

Reefer is unhealthy, opens lesions in the brain,  
wormholes into hell, yet should be legal. I'll vote that way.  
It may ease the pathos into non-existence  
well as meditation, bird watching, last will and testament.

Each joint hurts, rib joints, spine joints, skull plate joints.  
The head and hip and heart will hurt, all three.  
Insomniac I like the way bones crack and clack like  
wooden wind chimes, an untuned piano, a tree rack of wornout shoes.

Never forget, the mind is the body paying attention  
to what it's doing. Without that connection, each finger bent  
or toe smashed is just added to the collection  
of anonymous body parts of holocaust victims

in their mass graves. Better when every life saved  
or lost is a front page story, an illusion of shared  
sacrifice or joy, but that expresses only the surface  
of our emotions. I'm mostly relieved to have survived.

## Homework

Moby Dick, geometry, physics.

Study every subject everyday.

Homework is an indicator of future success.

Success is not necessarily happiness but it helps.

Freedom is to formulate your own definition of success.

Happiness is an imaginary tree, its own reward, and a fact.

Facts and fiction may be memorialized in memos or found in dreams.

The story starts thus: Each summer the honeysuckles and the  
huckleberries . . .

The web is that extra brain we've all been dreaming of having.

Like jumping 4 meters or flying without a plane.

To fly like that must one first do homework?

Some say yes, some say don't. It depends on how you vote.

Happiness is what happens when everything that happens

Fits the time perfectly and it's all out of your hands.

Not exactly. You don't let go of the steering wheel while driving fast in  
the passing lane.

You look left and right and check your blind spots.

Homework is an introduction to everything you're not

And all you do not know. It's supposed to help you learn to know where  
you want to go before going where you have to go.

Otherwise you end up on Ulzana's raid

Bleeding, without a bandaid.

All the achievement in the world won't relieve your loneliness

Or satisfy your sexual longing. What girls are like behind their eyes.

Survival, procreation. That's all there is to love.

But the loved one is the one who can be trusted with your life.

Whether Christ or your wife. The Muslim moms.

On my walk in the woods I come to a sitting spot

Above a small gorge cut by a stream through hemlocks.

Here someone has left a statuette of the Buddha and the flags you see

Flapping in the wind at sky funerals.

This is a pretty good place to sit quietly and think about homework.

## **I can clean. I can drive.**

Plenty of sleep, no more tv, the wars in the Middle East  
are resource wars, disguised as religious debates.  
So Dad would say.

A beautiful winter day, hunting  
season. A Gun In Every Home, in light of U.S. mass shootings  
seems an irresponsible poem. 10K clicks

most popular poem on line, NRA enthusiasts and conservative  
talk show hosts quoting it. Not really, no worries, poetry  
makes nothing happen. Which is something, magic.

\* \* \*

I wonder if I'll have to someday defend that poem,  
as in a Russian or Chinese show trial, Salem witch trial,  
McCarthy anti-American committee or a college  
political correctness safety hearing. Oh well.

What does it mean? Doc Wiseman says that's not how we decide  
things in this country, lynching and chasing people with dogs.  
You'd think twice about bombing Iran if Iran had the bomb.  
Assume a defensive posture.

I've been reading Walzer's  
Just and Unjust Wars, much like explaining how to tie your shoes,  
or teaching an artificial intelligence to walk, talk  
and think about God.

\* \* \*

The citizenry doesn't need weaponry sufficient to win a war,  
just enough to give pause during its normal pursuit of pleasure  
(hunting deer on a beautiful, clear winter morning).

Hunting and gathering and agriculture, local and small  
or these almonds I'm eating from California's Imperial

Valley and all the water it took to grow 'em.

Slowly

drip irrigation

takes hold.

Technologies

such as the Anasazi and other aborigines used are uploaded  
for sustainable survival.

Much good goes with the bad,

school shootings with school science shows, art shows and Shakespeare's  
plays.

How to stop the unhappiness of ISIS

those lonesome souls from interfering with the evolution  
of the species? With love. What did Christ mean  
(and what did Wallace Stevens mean by imagination)?

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Accept (but contain).

Trust (but verify). Ha ha! Reagan was a pretty funny guy.

It must bother a president, a regular fellow who'll pack his suitcase and  
go back

to Iowa when his term is up, to know he's ordered the death  
of a janitor on the night shift at a nuclear reprocessing plant  
in a proportional response to a mullah's anger. Jurors

in the trial of Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev  
have sentenced him to death. For his role in killing four people  
and wounding hundreds more. There was no visible reaction  
from Tsarnaev, 21, in the quiet courtroom.

Justice. In his own words "an eye for an eye."

Survivor Jared Clowery said he was happy not to have had to make the  
choice between life and death himself but he stands behind the  
jury's decision.

"There's nothing happy about having to take someone's life."

Good people without guilt or gloating. Yet  
my thought was now we must forego the possibility of knowing  
this young man's mind. There's still time to ask him questions  
as in Dead Man Walking. To understand is to love  
requiring the patience of the scientific method.

\*

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Yesterday's single greatest joy  
was solving the equation  
 $T = 2\pi(r^3/GMe)^{1/2}$   
for Haley's comet orbiting  
the sun.

And sitting in the sun  
on a winter day.

## Jack's Time Out

What luxury to get mad  
about last night's basketball loss  
and watch the full moon descending  
at the speed the earth turns.

Things could get worse  
personally and for the community.  
Bombings, killings, anomie boiling  
frogs and witches cursing.

The changing climate,  
typhoons in the Philippines,  
volcanoes and tsunamis, WWII which I missed,  
Thanksgiving nor'easter, Easter twister.

What abundance to fast or feast,  
your choice, stay inside by the stove  
or go outside, climb the mountainside.  
Live in a city or small town.

So I raged at the coaches for  
their lazy zone defense like  
an alien in the bleachers  
unable to affect the outcome.

When my sons came home  
I yelled at them too. What opulence  
to be angry about nothing of consequence  
neither stopped by the cops nor slipped on the ice.

## **Insignificance. Longevity.**

Late in life I struggle against my insignificance  
When I should enjoy the freedom from performance before an  
audience.  
Applause is happiness but if they withhold applause, embarrassment.  
When Da Liu put me to work crunching hexagrams and spreadsheet  
numerology  
Instead of ghost writing his books about t'ai chi for longevity  
I was humiliated but freed. No need to interpret  
The Chinese master's wisdom or endure his disapproval.  
All this happened in an apartment on 110th St. when I lived on 111th.  
I wonder if Da Liu lived to 100 like he predicted.

Ken got me that job, old friend Ken  
Who goes back all the way past high school to Thompson Junior High.  
Tomorrow we're eating pizza together in Troy.  
We'll recall Da Liu and also the painter and sculptor who had a room  
In our apartment on 111th and a dog so intelligent it could walk off the  
leash  
On the crowded streets of New York without an altercation,  
And Zach Sklar, of course, journalist, communist and jazz aficionado  
Who listened to Jo Jones and Paul Quinichette, Count Basie's men,  
Often as possible at the West End.

Trying to make sense on the trumpet, I was playing the streets for  
quarters, not much more  
Than that sculptor's dog. The sculptor's name I wanna say  
Was Mike Johnson and he was a man of few words and many women.  
We had a major cockroach problem in that apartment and  
The ceiling leaked in Ken's room so he organized the neighbors  
Against the landlord, into a tenants association.  
We went to our daily disciplines like children of paradise or Da Liu who  
was already old by then.  
When we meet for pizza it will be hard to hear now that I'm deaf  
In one ear and Ken, whose name means knowledge, has trouble  
remembering some of the ancient, past taboos and practices.

To want to be famous is a silly goal for a man almost old as Da Liu.

Not the right motivation, better to shift your glance so slowly as to go  
unnoticed,  
Labor for the success and happiness of others.  
I'm still avoiding the deeper question  
So today I ordered Da Liu's books, perhaps the ones I worked on,  
Because they offer assistance to others for further living.  
Service to others, maybe that's the key.

I pleasure in and treasure my insignificance,  
It ought to be a great comfort to be so insignificant,  
Being knowledgeable is the best defense against your insignificance,  
The I Ching puts me in mind of my insignificance,  
Exiled or sidelined to an insignificant role, insignificant and mighty  
happenings  
Seem the same from my vantage aging gratefully, inexorably,  
A way to learn your insignificance, freedom to have never been.

## **Motel Room**

Motel room, U.S. map made of license plates  
everything I need for a week is here, king-  
size bed, microwave, fridge, tv, hot plate  
the carpet's pretty clean, the bathroom baptized  
and there are two mirrors in which to imagine  
myself, to analyze and idolize.

WiFi, no Elizabethan inn,  
in a century when we fear nuclear war  
and are warned against the shock of fast change,  
the door sports three locks though nothing dangerous  
could happen in a town like this, named for spring  
water found by thirsty desert travelers.  
My home for a week living alone, contained  
safe from the elements, roar of airplanes.

## **Lonely Bagel**

Lonely bagel  
Loneliness bagel  
The bagel of loneliness

Togetherness bagel  
The bagel of being together  
Bagel of belonging

## Numerous Blue Notes

Sitting, trying to write, nothing  
comes to me. Nothing is what it'll have to be.  
Over the weekend and immediately  
following the election demonstrations in the streets,  
Not my president! But today is Monday  
back to work and the business of business in America.  
Never have we been fierce warriors.  
Rhett Butler got that right: in any confrontation  
with the state a platoon of new recruits  
with automatic weapons outguns the stately  
samurai. Ken and I were eating veggie  
burgers and drinking local beers over worries  
our fellow Americans will soon start shooting  
Jews and Asians, lesbians and disabled veterans  
whoever's recommended on the news.  
There's a learning curve to disregarding tweets  
and the remedies offered on facebook. Our refusal  
to be more than the sum of ourselves  
is our saving grace. Therefore, let  
the peaceful transfer of power proceed.  
Democracy doesn't guarantee smart choices,  
just a chance to correct the mistakes we'll make.

## City of Hope

--with lines by Dante Alighieri, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Vaclav Havel,  
Pico Iyer & Sophocles

What a city I murmur to myself looking at its map.  
We approached the city known as Dis  
with its vast army and its burdened citizens.  
At last we reached the moats  
dug deep around the dismal city.  
What destroys the poetry of a city?  
Automobiles destroy it,  
and they destroy more than the poetry.  
Dante and Virgil chased by 7 or 8 dangerous devils  
Grumpy, Happy, Sneezzy, Sleepy, Dopey . . .  
Our heroes reduced from metaphysical philosophers  
interested in god and what man has done to man  
to improvising primitive tools for survival.  
Hope abandoned, we rate our chances of expiring  
in the nuclear fire – excellent –  
during the decline of western civilization.

On the other hand, I hope  
our current problems are only temporary  
and it's just a matter of time before  
the public ignores the 24-hour news cycle.  
Bad news sells but the good life's all around us.  
One feels love and devotion  
even for the 60 million who voted for our opponent.  
Vaclav Havel said with a wisdom well beyond brilliance:  
"Either we have hope within us or we don't.  
It is a dimension of the soul, and it's not dependent  
on some particular observation of the world or estimate of the  
situation.  
It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart  
that transcends the world as it's immediately experienced.  
It is not the conviction that something will turn out well,  
but the certainty that something makes sense  
no matter how it turns out."

It resembles grief. But it's not quite grief. I'll give you grief.  
Certain days planned to be eventful I look forward to for weeks.  
Let the peaceful transfer of power proceed. The sorrow and the pity.  
Never may the anarchic man find rest at my hearth.  
When the laws are kept, how proudly the city stands!  
When the laws are broken, what of the city then?  
We are moving through some allegory between a City of Hope,  
where history has been abolished, and a City of History,  
where hope can be slipped in only as contraband.  
Failing to achieve understanding, we're searching  
outer space for an entity to unite us as humanity.  
That person, or city, is consciousness.  
Two ancient female poets are a revelation,  
the clarity of their complaints: lost lover, lost city.  
Our enemy eventually becomes our brother,  
his misery lifted by coming to her city.

## Chainsaw Certified

I'm dead. Unlike Frost and Yeats  
nothing I've said will be remembered.  
Unlike Roosevelt and Lincoln  
nothing I'm thinking will win the war.

I'm going to go to my grave unsung  
like almost everyone. These mountains  
are my grave. A good grave  
to go to. There's no such thing

as being saved. When you're gone  
you're done. At least 60 million  
people don't believe it, don't believe  
in evolution. Man, that ape,

can heap a peck of hurt posthaste  
with earth movers and machine guns.  
Information technology  
cannot save your soul, heck,

I've tried. Every morning  
I total the polloi  
coming to my site for wisdom.  
The number's usually zero.

A good number to know.  
When my heart fibrillates  
I lay my head  
beside my sleeping wife.

Solace, comfort. She says,  
Take your pill, fool.  
In an hour at most  
I'm feeling great again!

## The Shape of Jazz to Come

—title from a recording by Ornette Coleman

Is war coming? Are we headed for another crazy cataclysm?  
My sons, draft age. Only now can I appreciate the pain  
so sharp it drains the color from one's eyes, your reason  
for living gone in a spasm of violence to be forgotten  
never by survivors. This fear could become real as no movie  
is surreal enough to distract attention from the certainty  
you did not do enough to deflect man's trajectory.

All could be well in the end but history portends  
a periodic bloodletting followed by a quietus  
without mercy. What's the best that can be said:  
he died beside his friends and buddies. Steady  
on to your own inquest and rest. A perfect rest  
that improves upon the inadequacy of your efforts.  
What solace can be found in the remains of marriage.

So you better fight back now even if that means  
war comes sooner. At least you're fighting back, but how?  
Take a minute to meditate on purpose. Science  
cannot save you, neither can religion. Abstaining  
from violence with love, letting prisoners go, detaining  
no one at the border, inviting Chinese and Russian  
scientists to our shores, defusing your own anger before it detonates,

none may be enough to save your sons.  
A war president needs war, whatever. A trained  
and deadly warfighter. You become what history wants  
you to become. You survive if you're lucky, if not  
so what, your old parents will be alive only briefly to mourn.  
Then they too go to their good graves and the pain dies down.  
In the meantime a new generation builds a new space station.

Since the vortex will be sucking up the poor,  
let's not let the rich escape untouched. All go down  
together, no one hoards gold or gets away with fiction.

If we have to fight let's make sure we fight as one,  
the sons of the rich side by side with the poor's sons  
and their daughters. You want slaughter? Then  
let every city and back road know the new order.

I would rather watch Lalaland ten times over than have  
to write this poem. I can leave home and live  
in a tent or bunkhouse, eat dinner out of a tin cup  
and drink water from a wooden bowl, give up  
music and most of my memories to save my sons,  
to save the world and avoid this war.  
But that rarely happens. One is lost and found in what happens.

## Rules for Old Men Waiting

—title from a novel by Peter Pouncey

Jack awoke in his usual pain, un-  
daunted by it. We're all gonna die  
someday is his morning mantra these days.  
Isolate the variable, anything  
you do to one side of the equation  
you gotta do to the other. Practice  
zen, eat less, an empty belly's holy.  
These are the rules for old men waiting.

On the other hand, attachment to self  
and to things to do. Clean the house, watch for war.  
Count syllables, teach English to immigrants  
from Slovakia or Syria.  
Advocate vocational education  
in the schools. Jack has much to do, a new  
administration, low social security.  
He goes slow as the day will allow.

## On Suffering

I waited too long  
to biopsy my lung  
yet lived long enough, anon,  
however long is long.  
Whatever. It's not wrong  
to count along  
while busy living. Sing  
and stay strong  
absorb the sun's photons  
and store them in your bones.

Those bones  
outlast slights and spurns  
are white as lightning and strong  
as sticks and stones.  
Inside is one's  
spirit, soul, the nameless one  
the one that's never known.  
It has no cell phone  
can't communicate or even moan.  
Therefore. Why complain?  
Have some fun.

Soon  
I'll be undone  
subterranean  
my garden burned down.  
So what. John Donne  
died and so did Milton.  
Emerson too, and Whitman.  
Get over it. Vote. Love. When  
the train comes in the station  
whistle with it, wish on  
stars with passion  
or careful hesitation.  
Anything's fine, within reason.

Season by season

things get done.

Algebra and calculus, Malcolm X, George Washington.

No taxation

without representation.

A gun

in every den.

People will be governed

one way or another, by a sovereign

or trusted friend. Corporation.

Men

are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than

to right themselves by abolishing the Evils to which they are resigned.

I'm too young

to die! I cry. My generation

cannot outrun the sun

but I want to see what happens

next, a tsunami or tornado, rain

and wind beyond our comprehension hit

in the head by speeding debris, irony

of ironies! plastic contraptions,

rotting computers and yogurt cups, pain

in the baby! Moment's

notice. None,

I notice, live long

enough to see the end. Amen. A million

years hence

human sense

has so modified and mutated among

other moons

we share one mind

and everything's remembered by everyone.

Look it up. There is no death, just perfect rest. A perfect tan

is possible, and work is fun.

I'm going there when I pass on

because souls will travel at warp speeds, using nuclear fission.

About suffering, religion

was right (and wrong) all along.

## TED Talk

Biology TED talk, Ken Burns WWII  
Multiple choice plus open response =  
Teacher cares, out there among the English  
Mathematics, fractions to imaginary *i*

Anything can happen any time, I mean  
Mass killing—public school, movie theater,  
Post office when every mother wears a gun  
Yet happiness permeates like CO<sub>2</sub> + sunlight

Photosynthesis + electricity = burning bush  
Hot tea, hot shower pleasure perfect rest  
Early to bed, no more lies, complexity  
Poetry about history, i.e. Wolfowitz

As for non-fiction, most things qualify to know  
Astrobiology, search for LUCA, FLO  
Minerals on Titan, organisms on Enceladus  
Divination on Iapetus, peace on Earth and Tethys

Volcanoes and tsunamis, Big Red One and Private Ryan  
Don't stay up late, take your vitamins  
Sin and crime being nothing more than  
Mental malaise, imbalance. Love and compromise

Tolerance, practice worksheets, brilliance  
Prejudice and superstition, Tha's a wrap  
Nothin doin, ain't gonna happen, freedom's when  
Yes is mostly a blessing and No is always an option.

## Upper Manhattan Medical Group

--title from a tune by Billy Strayhorn

Off the train I hit the streets  
and start laughing. This is ridiculous,  
incomprehensible. How can innumerable bipeds  
have individual inner lives. Why are they doing  
what they're doing? I have no answer  
New York City but to also go about my business  
in this case prepare for surgery, survival.

But why survive with so many exact replicas  
to replace me? A swarm of ants or hive of bees,  
social organisms they're called, climbing  
over each other, avoiding bumping and amazingly  
making way, anticipating the sudden turns  
and straight paths of others, strangers but brothers,  
sisters incubating, the cells of a small  
organ, nodes of a single semi-conscious organism.

The concept of a higher power that cares  
for me is also risible yet how else  
can I explain the surgeon and his team,  
robots and magnetic resonance imaging machines,  
all primed and trained to save my life.  
They are not particularly interested in what  
I do with my time. I am immediately  
in love with the Irish brogue of the head nurse,

the Indian skin of the physician's assistant.  
The long extraordinarily thin  
fingers of the famous surgeon. All  
mine to savor (and the other cancer patients).  
Back on the streets, rush to the train.  
So many women to choose from! One  
in fishnet stockings stands out, tall  
calm, still, graceful. No cell, no hair, no hurry.

Yesterday's suicidal thoughts: the mind  
is a clever servant, insufferable master. Therefore,  
meditate on this: absolute need, dependence on the Other.  
I still like Hombre, The Shootist and Ulzana's Raid  
but realize those dead heroes  
were subordinate to society: the gun manufacturers who armed them.  
Thus, I go for cancer tests, accepting, not predicting results.  
Hero accepting help.

A torrential rain following five days of flooding,  
tornadoes out west busting up wooden towns  
all because too many of us are hoarding plastic, herding electrons.  
None of us know how it will end, what the outcome will be  
(of our surgery). The best that can be said is  
Don't forget to breathe. And you might  
as well believe in that higher power.

### **It's A Bear!**

Bear's certain  
it's a bear  
alone with salmon  
it's a bear  
on the mountain  
it's a bear  
up a canyon  
it's a bear  
eating berries  
it's a bear  
sedated, carried  
it's a bear  
answer, query  
it's a bear  
clown or faery  
it's a bear

## **Atman. Atman.**

I have no clue what Krshna taught Arjuna  
but I like the name Atman a lot.

Atman. Atman. Where a man is at.

At all times. No matter what.

Gita, get in the action, gorgeous girl,

God is the answer, keep the meter.

Wisdom, none.

What Krshna tells Arjuna makes no sense.

I prefer mathematics.

Knowledge of how things are made and done

more than meditation on the Self

as a manifestation of the One.

I'll never have to leave this comfortable planet.

We have this asset but can we sell it?

In Paradise Lost, Satan executes his plan

but God already knows all about it.

Still, whether it succeeds or fails is up to Man.

Same here, when it comes to nuclear armaments,

a distraction from the work of making life permanent.

It is all premised on the mystery

of invisible but sentient particles—

little Krshnas and Kachinas

nesting inside one another.

Meanwhile life goes on outside all around you—

WWII, the Napoleonic wars,

the Civil War which we're still fighting.

Krshna says behead your brothers

without prejudice or justice.

So it transpires in the nuclear fire.

Whatever forever.

Teacher, teacher—tiger!

## Passion Is Its Own Predicament

—ending with a line by Wallace Stevens

5 a.m. Souls ascend  
from earth's vale  
of fears. Others wait  
don't give up yet.  
Nothing I can do about that.

Not is my name known  
but am I a good man.  
That goes for John, too  
a man of faith  
who wants what God wants.

What about hate  
in the streets. What do white  
people want?  
I see no need  
to pull down statues of General Lee

instead put him side by side  
and head to head  
with Martin Luther King,  
Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi.  
Also kids who cops shot dead.

Meanwhile on the macro  
economic and political scale  
leviathans (peoples, nations)  
drift toward perpetual  
armageddon or peaceful solutions.

We don't know which  
and John will be gone  
before it matters  
except to his children  
and, of course, ours.

What I have done  
to change man's trajectory,  
for better or worse, remains  
anonymous. Every action  
meets an equal and impassable mountain.

Passion  
is its own predicament.  
Cast a cold eye and guess.  
The clouds go, nevertheless,  
in their direction.

## Soot

Soot on LA highway signs. Billboard of you,  
a real estate agent. All endeavor slides  
toward inertia, extinction, forgetfulness.

It's very tropical. Vegetation invades  
the house unless constant inputs of joy  
apply. The scientist in you feels the

great ape in you. The great ape feels  
death growing wide. What about work?  
I devote my present to my future existence.

In what way, in what sense  
does one continue to resist. As  
a dessicated cell, a mole of elements,

an ancient's aura, a daguerreotype-like  
shadow on a sidewalk, persistent headache,  
paleolithic herbivore, potential energy, will.

Some wake up and pray, say thanks for  
another day. Others curse their luck, stale breath,  
the very thought of the rosy dawn makes them ill.

Lonely as leaf fall.  
Nature knows no pity or self-pity  
according to antiquity, the roof soot of the city.

I admire fire, tools and ore. Agriculture.  
Cities, empire. Trading and taking (war).  
Numbers, counting, writing. Libraries, discoveries, zero.

And the single-minded universe  
that's only a paper moon  
without your love.

## My Giant

*Travelling is a fool's paradise. . . .My Giant goes with me  
wherever I go. --Emerson*

Summer rain, melting Arctics  
and the lipids lining the nerves  
in your brain. These are the metrics  
of our times. Mere resolve

is not enough to take care  
on the highway—you need wheels and prayer.  
When you realize there's no there there  
that's a scary day. End there.

August, the extinction is terrifying.  
Quiet, too quiet. 100% humidity, not a single insect flying.  
Summer morning, summer evening, sighing  
the sighs of purgatory—grief without pain, death without dying.

I've chosen the safety of these mountains  
and the beauty of their mists—such perfection  
which anyone can have for the asking.  
All you need to know is the names of things.

Conflict, coercion, war, strife.  
Flying high in April, shot down over Germany.  
Have a good day. That's life. Fix yr brakes.  
When I hit a pothole my fillings sing.

Anything's possible, it's impossible  
to know what will happen until it's happened.  
You can't know what you're doing until it's done  
and even then you stare in wonder

unmoved yet moved by the stillness  
a pure goodness, bone stillness, potential energy. You can practice it  
in the city or the desert.  
The wilderness or the mirror over your dresser.

## Asexual

While I pretty much opined for this impeachment  
my fellow Americans voted for this guy and they could be right  
I've been wrong before, stuck as we are with a system  
that generates some perplexful leaders, democracy being the worst  
form of government  
except for all the others.

Anyone can be president, that's been proven time and time again.  
Wars can start for no discernible reason other than  
radical purity, avarice, cupidity, gluttony, rapacity, even affluenza—  
meanwhile life goes on outside all around you  
perhaps you identify as Jewish, Latino, Muslim, Indian or Filipino  
asexual, cybersexual, somasexual, hypersexual, homosexual,  
pentasexual  
it doesn't really matter, nothing butt matter matters, matter  
content of life (serious, love it) hate death for the hell of it  
to see what it's like inside the heart of darkness.

Not that I accept their god, their void, I accepted humanity as a natural  
part of nature

demisexual, downsexual, ecosexual, Eurosexual, eversexual, exsexual,  
extrasexual, femtosexual, Francosexual, geosexual, gigasexual,  
Grecosexual, Indosexual, intersexual, kilosexual, macrossexual,  
malsexual, megasexual, metasexual, microsexual, missexual,  
medisexual, mocksexual, monosexual, muchsexual, multisexual,  
mustsexual, nearsexual, neosexual, nonsexual, oftsexual,  
omnisexual, oversexual, pansexual, parasexual, partsexual,  
photosexual, polysexual, postsexual, presexual, pseudosexual,  
psychosexual, quasisexual, rentasexual, selfsexual, semisexual,  
Sinosexual, subsexual, supersexual, telesexual, terrasexual,  
ubersexual, ursexual, ultrasexual, undersexual, vicesexual,  
weresexual, wikisexual, zoosexual.

When I did that I had to pay the rent and get a job, too.

## Valetudinarian

One will not live to see the end  
of the geopolitical drama,  
the existential dilemma—

the small choices people make that change their lives.  
They ought to be terrified but they're blithe  
because you can't know what you're doing until it's done.

Acting silly, solving problems.  
Scientific method, situation comedy.  
Dinosaurs. Sore losers.

Kayak on the Hackensack.  
Malebolge. Hoboken.  
It was dark in there! It was dark!

You can't say to people I think I'm dying  
because we all have that feeling,  
it's so ubiquitous it's not worth mentioning.

For your given name  
take Destiny.  
But survive.

Saturday's the sweetest  
day. You're off the clock.  
Participation's optional

weedsmoking, videogameplaying,  
tvwatching, anonymouslawnmowing,  
whatif whatnot oldtimer.

Pass the fucking ball!  
I say to Ray who never passes.  
The past isn't dead, it never even passes.

Short sleeves today?  
Prepare for a powerful anesthesia.  
The afterlife is now.

## Contingency

*"Events will still pile up, with or without an identity willing to organize them."*

The moon gazes  
through April's silver maple.

Earth's half-in, half-out  
of the sun's habitable zone.

The rushing stream topples old trees;  
the peaceful father, mother.

Powerful with eternity,  
blinding with intensity.

Lazy, happy,  
mirror, desert.

Zazen position,  
necking in the front seat of Dad's car.

Moderation, persuasion, elections.  
Way stations, stopgaps, safe havens.

Cheap jewelry can be sexy;  
stop fixing things with duct tape!

Nothing but matter matters,  
chipmunk, groundhog, skunk.

Do not provoke  
an angry baboon.

Why care about the future,  
the dead don't live to see it.

I've come to see  
if this is true.

## Stop & Shop Strike

The Stop & Shop strike v. Game of Thrones.

In Game what's not made plain

is the condition of the people

compared with warriors and queens.

There's no mention of land-clearance, tree-felling,

pruning, chopping, digging, hoeing,

weeding, branding, gelding, slaughtering,

salting, tanning, brewing, boiling,

smelting, forging, milling, thatching,

fencing and hurdle-making, hedging, road-mending and haulage.

As for the strike, most of us

supported the cashiers and clerks—

cutting benefits and pensions

when CEOs make millions.

A few pennies more

for ice cream and tofu

a leg up for our neighbors

and comrades in labor.

But don't get greedy, power-hungry—

we don't want the supermarket to go out of business

or the Army of the Dead to extinguish us.

A red-tailed hawk observes what small mammals, birds are in the  
clearcut,

awaits the moment to strike.

Three balls, two strikes, full count. Aaron pitched carefully, slow strikes  
and the opposing team scored.

Transit strike. Part-time tutor, food deliverer, illegal immigrant, school  
bus driver, supermarket bagger.

Let labor flow like capital! Full tank of gas!

In your dreams, you kick ass.

In your daydream, you're breaking bones, killing mean dogs with bare  
hands.

In my childhood dreams, I fought side by side with my best buddies  
against the Army of the Dead.

I wake up to a lightning strike and my dream incinerates.

The strike is over, like a thunderstorm.  
Still a half dozen or so episodes of Thrones  
before it sinks into the past.  
Will women save the world?  
Anything is possible.  
Nothing changes in Williamstown, Willie, except the seasons.  
The wee hours, the bored minutes, the second guesses,  
the town sewer department, the collector of taxes.  
Pitcher's elbow, runner's knee, reader's eye,  
you live until you die.  
That's no answer.  
Without the Mexican and Canadian borders  
the White Walkers would dissolve like an aspirin in seltzer water.

The sun is up, the strike is over  
next episode of Game is Sunday  
the White Walkers attack  
some of our favorite characters croak  
but humanity survives  
although the weather is ominous.  
The habitable zone around the sun  
is moving outward as the orb expands  
getting hotter as it grows older.  
Earth a billion years ago  
was smack in the middle of the turf  
but we're now half-in, half-out  
exposed to the sun's ardor, agony,  
a dragon eating its babies, torching cities.  
We're gonna hafta outsmart it  
hold Labor Day barbecues on Mars.

## Got Sleep?

Nothing more intimate than sleep  
wake before dawn, go downtown  
prepare for tomorrow, come home from work late.

Most cities prosper undisturbed  
sleeping peacefully  
while the tide goes out.

Are we asleep or are we dancing,  
surrounded by buildings,  
a primitive fertility dance in the forest?

Sleeping in my clothes,  
sleeping in my underwear,  
two dead leaves, then a breeze!

Fall asleep by the river,  
in front of tv,  
soon I will know who I am.

In the last days you may be found sleeping in the laundry mornings,  
or sitting in the holy spot  
gazing at a crescent moon.

Get up early but gotta nap, winter  
afternoon or summer heat  
Thanatopsis, Big Comfy Couch.

Sleep in the bed next to your wife  
that way when life ends  
someone misses you.

That sounds harsh but we're matter of fact  
about the fact of death. Death  
is most of all like sleep.

Doctor, engineer, lawyer, soldier,

writer, poet, that's the pecking order,  
get some sleep, get over it.

Not the kind of gal who'll have sex twice  
on the first date. When that happens  
marriage, babies, graduations, tragedies, sleep.

Headache, surgery, through it all  
there's sleep, a haven, heaven, hovel, cave, raven,  
a place to be with eyes wide open.

Don't have a hissy fit  
or case of colon cancer, get 8 hours  
shuteye in contiguous array.

If not, listen to a TED talk, they like explaining things  
Selected Shorts solves insomnia,  
The Moth Hour, the peaceful father, mother.

Sweet pleasing Sleep!  
in Hades  
where the lights are always blue, gentian actually.

Every third thought doesn't have to be about death.  
Sleep together, get laid.  
Sleep. How memories are made.  
Sleep. In the palm at the end of the mind or on another plane.

## Who's Got Trouble?

I've never put a candidate's bumper sticker on my car before—  
why not take sides—what are you waiting for?  
Death puts a stop to daily low intensity warfare but in the meantime—  
fight on!

What are we fighting for? Let's see—  
clean air and water and room to walk around in cities and deserts  
America the seeing eye dog not America the junkyard dog—  
collective deliberation among nations, clear passage through seas and  
borders  
compact and contiguous Congressional districts that represent actual  
communities  
education and health care for everyone who wants it—worldwide  
good food too, affordable shelter and a living wage  
a say in governance—local and global—free from fear of violence

Should you be subsumed by a cause bigger than the self?  
unlike Rick in Casablanca who keeps to himself  
I'm advertising my loyalties with bumper stickers on rickshaw and kayak  
every time I come and go  
it's a free country—or maybe I'm so low profile no one notices or cares  
to take revenge  
so small time I have time and no enemies or friends  
What about Whitman and his love for Lincoln  
he found a way to participate in the war that satisfied his muse, as a  
nurse  
oh, I want to add space exploration and no nuclear weapons  
plus basic science and ancient arts, black lives matter

Here are some things you have to put up with or out of mind  
while enjoying the beautiful black and white photography and rousing  
Marseillaise:  
that Sam, played by Dooley Wilson in worshipful subservience to “Mr.  
Rick,” endures his lonely abnegation and abstinence in Paris while  
Rick savors the nordically white, luscious Ilsa;  
that Ilsa, on the lam across the wide world from pursuing Nazis, is  
apparently transporting an extensive, elegant, perfectly manicured  
wardrobe;

that Rick, in wartime Casablanca, has managed to hire a full 20-piece jazz orchestra for which we willingly suspend disbelief since it's essential for singing the Marseillaise which never fails to bring tears of pride to Yvonne's eyes;

I guess that's about it except why would you spend a minute in Sydney Greenstreet's fly-infested café when Rick's air-conditioned establishment is right across the street, an overnice contrast to Maghreb culture;

otherwise, I'm in complete accord with IMDb's 8.5 rating.

On the news last night the president changed the trajectory of a category 4 hurricane. He can't do that! Not my president! They're laughing at us!

Who's got trouble? We've got trouble. How much trouble? Too much trouble.

After Casablanca, it's headed for South Carolina.

## **2 Jobs, 2 Kids, 2 Houses, 2 Hobbies**

Carrying a sleeping baby.  
Cleaning after a successful party.

Camping beyond mountains more mountains.  
Playing trumpet on the streets of New York City.

Eating although the food supply is deeply compromised.  
Flying with Democrats and Republicans, evangelicals and atheists.

Flying like a fruit fly that won't quit mating. Cool  
as a hummingbird in the stream's wet spray.

Abstaining wholly, absent from worldly life.  
Two dogs fighting but not biting hard.

Chanting as if the planet were mending.  
Gourmet dining, devout prayer, loving Mary.

Evenings watching tv. Scotch and Star Trek.  
Taking off Emily Dickinson's clothes.

Meeting in the meeting house, arguing and praying.  
Planning a legacy as if you knew enough to control events.

Pursuing happiness as a naturalist or humanist.  
Spinning with the planet, performing the history that surrounds us.

Killing many Germans, saving many Jews.  
Doing less until one thing's done well.

Fainting from staring at candles through stained glass windows.  
Morning, a billion trillion nuclear detonations per second warming your  
bones.

Manipulating symbols, solving equations.  
Disregarding tweets and facebook persuasions.

Sitting with a tiny Buddha by a rushing stream cutting a gorge.  
Running, disciplining myself, making myself healthy.

Ingesting drugs, throwing die, drinking sludge.  
Growing varicolored corn.

Participating in the cause because it's impossible not to participate in  
the effect.  
Running over a chipmunk, groundhog or a skunk.

Lying face down in the emergency room facing doom.  
Waking up Monday thinking Sweet Saturday! but soon remembering  
your trick knee.

Turning the towering young thunder of my anger against my sons.  
Regretting the callow dispassion with which I met my parents' quietus.

Lawn mowing, leaf blowing, yapping dogs, napping old people.  
No jets but a rooster mornings, cows and goats.

Al is painting an apartment. Sirma is cleaning the floors. Felix is taking  
out the garbage.  
Deciding tentatively I slightly prefer Heifetz' to Oistrakh's Sibelius.

No cedar waxwings, no chickadees, but beautiful moon!  
If you're alone as you get, why are you crying?

## Start Knowing Joy

Start now knowing joy,  
that's an order,  
overcome a deepening solitude.

Like a bee at a bugle  
or me at the deli  
on Third Avenue.

I said to Joe when do you think this weather will break?  
He jokes, April.  
That's no joke. Weak creatures die and the strong barely survive.

Half a year goes by  
another cancer checkup.  
Cheer up. Any weather's

better than no weather at all.  
There's always governance  
even when there is no government.

My candidate drops out  
after Iowa. Why do I always lose  
at politics and poker?

Peace at last!  
No lawnmowers, no leafblowers.  
Big comfy couch.

Meditate on this: Do what has to be done.  
Find your lover gazing at the moon  
and take your garbage to the dump.

Your web site evaporates  
and your possessions are thrown in the dumpster  
except your trumpet which finds its way to a future trumpeter.

## Covid Cashier

Quiet, dawn, Covid.

Biggest accomplishment yesterday: buying toilet paper.

Thanking the young cashier for doing her job.

Feeling a little sick, wearing my mask and gloves,

Spring oblivious to the virus, an idiot like Millay said.

At least we're not beheading each other—yet.

Symptoms mild so far. Today rest,

no long walk, no knee bends.

I think I've watched every possible movie and tv show  
and nothing's left that doesn't bore me.

I could learn the calculus, chemistry or physics  
but will I and what for?

Most poetry is chopped up prose. That's harsh

but true. But that's because most days

are prose or yesterday's news. Win or lose

sumthins gonna getcha. Drug cartel assassin, the blues.

If not now, when? Some other Wednesday. Why wait?

I wish I had some wisdom to translate.

It's living and helping others to live

that counts, I guess. Cast a cold eye and guess,

walk the extra mile, report from the besieged city, be wise or a jerk.

I hope to get the antibodies the easy way,

mild symptoms, no brush with death, don't intubate.

An existential bessemer process, strange quark,

chances are I won't be able to organize this day into an expressible  
state.

A daily exchange with nature's enough  
to alleviate my fear.

When I thanked the cashier

her smile was like the sun coming out from behind clouds

or the end of the pandemic, as if I had not wasted my life.

## On the Avenue

From marble and granite to steel and glass,  
we were discussing Rhina Espaillat's On the Avenue in class,  
was it 1950s or 1980s NYC and were the fifties  
the city's halcyon days or is it now, the 2020s,  
the boroughs teeming with immigrants  
from the round earth's imagined corners,  
Hasidim and Muslim, Haitian and Russian, as we  
Italians and Irish in an earlier era were. Everything will  
be ok or not, the recombinations which make  
prediction and intuition fortunately hopeless  
and each individual an experiment gone well or wrong.  
On the avenue God speaks by spewing  
toy and clothing stores, breakdancers and ice skaters,  
the Brooklyn Navy Yard seen from the Brooklyn Bridge,  
the skyline admired when my car broke down on the Triborough Bridge.  
The numbers of us overwhelm, there exist powers  
overwhelming for the human body and mind.  
I don't mind but I can't make sense of it.  
Gandhi said What you do may not seem important  
but it is very important that you do it. By that what is meant?  
Linda complained Why does God always have to be a man?  
I replied He could be a she but She's probably really  
a Tyrannosaurus rex. I like to *be* in America!

## The Compensatory Force of Nemesis

I've written enough small poetry  
to start a nuclear war.  
Do you want to die in traffic  
behind the wheel of your car? Or in yr rodeer camp next fall.

Control eludes us. The hero  
loses urinary control, the unified nation  
loses missile control, lost my timepiece, lost my metronome,  
now my music is ethereal as an archangel's.

No owl hoots or duck quacks  
or squirrels screwing  
or spiders spanning rampikes.  
The floccinaucinihilipilification of nature.

No greater tragedy than a tipping  
point that tests the hero's gullibility, complicity,  
self-control, comity, sense of humor  
which is the only remedy not to hate those in authority.

Them guys with guns at the Michigan state house,  
fat bearded tattooed pissed off white bros.  
Norsemen, Crusaders, Vikings, Britons.  
For despair there is no forgiveness. Peace out.

Nuclear mischief, mad Man's most incandescent bloom  
and the devil who exists to carry the load  
when we misbehave and fight among ourselves.  
I wake up to my skin boiling off my bones.

Humor is the only remedy, or is ardor the best way forward.  
We'll see how things work out in the next generation.  
The same diverse, spoiled, unpatriotic revolutionaries as at the nation's  
beginning  
trying to reverse the future, making phone calls to get out the vote  
in Georgia, hating the desert for having no water.

Events keep piling up,  
the future depends on ourselves.  
Conflict is inevitable and in this conflict power must be challenged by  
power  
so err on the side of patience, perseverance and impermanence.

## **Long Story Short**

A walk around the block in my parents' neighborhood at dawn  
wearing mom's sweater and pop's sneakers with a clown hole cut out  
for toe infection

I was stopped by a cop in a cruiser  
this was during the Vietnam War long hair ago  
he was angry at everyone I was offended by everything  
he said which way are you going I said which way are you going  
so he socked me in the mouth and handcuffed me  
I was arraigned on disorderly conduct and resisting arrest  
my good parents came down and stood beside me before the judge  
I wrote to the police department internal affairs  
not for retribution but to start a paper trail  
in case this cop someday bopped one of my brothers  
a few months later I'm back at work in NYC  
two detectives come into the city to question me  
one good cop one bad cop we park in the park me in the back seat  
they wanna know was I mouthy to the cop who punched me in the  
mouth  
long story short  
they leave me on a bench to eat my lunch and the charges are dropped

## Middle School Math Teacher

Should I become a middle school math or English teacher?

Leave my bed early in the morning and return with test papers to grade.

With what authority will I persuade those kids to sit still and perform calculations and interpretations.

I won't be allowed to teach *A Good Man Is Hard To Find*. Nope, it'll be *Catcher in the Rye*, *Lord of the Flies* and *Slaughterhouse Five*. Novels that annoy.

Poems and math are magic. Words and numbers are things no one has ever seen or heard or touched.

But the administration keeps them separate. The curriculum's determinate.

The kids are beautiful but combustible. When middle school lets out at the periapsis of Earth's orbit, that's the face of joy.

The purpose of school is to introduce us to the world's innumerable wonders. The periodic table, World Wars I and II, *Huckleberry Finn* and Jim.

Once a gaggle of teenage girls bet whether I wore boxers or jockeys. I felt ambushed and unlucky. Also a bit afraid.

There's little love lost between the students and the teachers. Expect to forget and be forgotten. Information.

I remember Mr. Killian my chemistry teacher. So boring about something I now find so interesting and important. He wasn't boring; I was boring.

I remember Mr. Christensen my history teacher. He was fat and funny but taught as little as possible. I was known to laugh so hard I cried.

I remember Mr. T my calculus teacher. He dressed everyday exactly like Gene Kranz in mission control. I was confused past help so he didn't help.

I remember Tone Kwas my music teacher. He said I was the worst trumpet player he'd ever tried to teach and switched me to sousaphone. He was right but so what! Playing badly is the best riposte.

## Commonly Seen Bumper Stickers

You can acknowledge the emptiness at the core of your being  
or go crazy when the world goes crazy.

The numbers of us overwhelm,  
an impending tsunami,  
my hopeful eulogy about our responsibilities to each other,  
2 jobs, 2 hobbies,  
the biomass in the crosswalks,  
fears that rend and own us,  
the Muslim-Judeo-Christian condition.

Your soul is immortal,  
it exists outside of politics and poker. Just kidding.

Forgotten, forgiven and foregone.

A man's ego needs no encouragement.

"I'm gonna be huge when I'm dead," John said  
last time we spoke.

Life is fine!

tough

the reward for our colossal imperfections

a back and forth game

the rivers and selfies of an empire

daily low intensity warfare

Good

a gift

not a curse

new, so let go

a veil, thin if one doesn't believe in mystery

like all things that are forever changing but always remain the same

thriving after five nights of steady rain

enjoying the passage of time, so go slow as the day will allow

or will be good

but a dream

okey doke, short, a lazy-eyed tiger

## Million Dollar Movie

Late April and only  
coltsfoot—Tussilago farfara—breaking leaf litter.  
Our daffodils, peonies and crocuses  
are also making signs.

April is the cruelest month, I forget why.  
A sweet slow Spring  
no sudden changes  
each leg and leaf unfolds deliberately. You can't miss it.

New York City's spring rushes like a yellow cab  
into summer. One day leaves are wet,  
next they're leather. I prefer this slow dance,  
birds mating on the sky, peepers evolving into frogs.

Repairs take weeks or months. Septic,  
garage door, cracked windshield, clean windows,  
build bridge, buy land, rake leaves off erosion control,  
cut wood, prune lilac, paint lawn chairs.

More carefully inspect, identify, the insect  
of the week, a fly with an ant's body  
that skirts the grass and falls in drinks.  
Look more closely! It will be gone in a few days!

Then it will be the time of moths or fireflies,  
mosquitoes and wasps. Mud road,  
red-winged blackbird. The slashing stream  
topples old trees. My legs hurt.

## Life Out of Balance

Tonight I stayed at work until 7:00.  
It was dark when I locked the front doors.  
Winter approaches again, soon the great coat  
huddled like a rug around me. The streets  
were active as usual, block residents  
hanging out front steps. I said goodnight  
to Nydian Figueroa, after school counselor.  
I bought a beer at the deli on Third Ave.  
from the Arab owner. He's a bit upset about  
the bottle bill.

Collecting bottles from small groceries  
could be a useful youth employment enterprise.  
I walked down Fifth along the park in the dark  
drinking my beer and looking at women. I need  
a good fuck badly. I tried to decide whether  
to go to the movies, a Hopi film Howard recommended,  
or just go home, watch tv and light a candle.  
Maybe I'd meet someone at the film.

Can I handle  
the malady of going home tonight? If I die,  
I die alone.

I turned west toward the subway  
past the museum, through the park.  
I can't look at the myriad lights in buildings  
large enough to hold a small town. It increases  
my anxiety and anonymity to the breaking point.  
I hoped to be mugged, for the human contact.  
Two big guys looked me over, but I lowered  
my center of gravity and they passed quietly.  
Survival proves I am alive.

The white pines  
in this corner of the park hold a cool, earthy air  
reminding me of coming winter, that mortality  
is restful, of the black bear and swollen river I saw  
500 miles away and only one day ago.

## Building Fence

Sometimes we like to do something for the story  
we'll tell afterwards. Buy a '58 Pontiac, climb  
a mountain in the dark. Lamar tells dirty jokes  
with class, knows how to wait awhile, bend  
a syllable and savor the laughter.

Absurd work, building a fence miles long  
waste of steel and strong straight lodgepole pine  
but even I don't opine against it anymore. We're  
the government's children, fence is play and  
livelihood also, but something cheerful as sunshine

for all the death it costs. There is so much life  
a little death doesn't matter. We stretch our muscles  
the men feel like men, the women feel good too.  
We stand around, watch a young rabbit one morning.

## Come What May

Come May. Come what may.  
The most significant thing today  
first Monday in May  
my wife six months pregnant with twins  
says she's scared what we're getting ourselves into.  
Like the time I moved into an apartment uptown  
I mean way uptown, Bronx uptown, uptown  
where I'd never been  
bomba echoing in the airshaft  
painted the walls banana yellow and moved out the next day.  
Lost the deposit.  
A few months later moved back to the same neighborhood,  
stayed a decade.  
I'm not—scared, that is—but they're not kicking my insides out, either.

## At a Party

I spoke with two people at the party Saturday.  
A young police officer, short-haired, fit,  
chiseled face who had two young children.  
He felt constrained by the law, without discretion  
to question mopes (perps) aggressively  
or to let go those who were obviously no threat.  
Even at a family function he seemed straight-backed, correct,  
devoted to his role as our protector (and his children's)  
yet I thought perhaps too deeply in debt, indentured to  
the rules and laws of legislators and destined  
to be disappointed (or worse). I thought his courage  
and devotion (to whom or what?) would surely  
be poorly repaid and that this lesson  
was necessary to ready him with wisdom  
for death or further living. I worried like a brother  
about the unpredictable dangers, even terrors,  
he must daily face, and the pleasure he takes in facing them.  
How will he return to the fragility of family,  
of the soul alone, after wielding the force  
of the state, the blind, combined will of us all?

Next a business exec, retired from a well known  
global investment firm. At first we talked about  
the lush beauty of the northeast compared to the arid west  
(although he loves every inch of the west, too).  
Then somehow we fared beyond light conversation  
when he complained about the perceived decline in values  
for instance how the Ten Commandments can't be publicly  
displayed. He said we can all agree on God  
but I said I have a mechanistic view of the universe  
(although the unknowable always sits just out of reach  
of the known). I told him my dad's theory of reincarnation,  
a good man and a corporate seeker of God also, whose shoes  
I could never fill unless I swore belief in a supreme being.  
No hard feelings. Then he told me the story  
of his dying friend, an atheist, not even a deist  
like the founding fathers, who opened his eyes for the last time  
to correct the exec's misperception that now he'd meet his maker.  
Having exceeded the bounds of acceptable conversation  
I went looking for my children. Nothing more to question.

## A Good Day to Die

I've seen it myself sometimes.  
Shooting pool with a Marine I liked, a buddy.  
He's drunk. Always had a booze problem  
and women had disappointed him,  
no more than any other man.  
Anyway, the only gal in the unit, honest, hard working,  
blonde comes into the room. We all  
wanted her  
I'd shown her my poems, which she'd taken a pass on.

Joe starts teasing her about her tiny tits,  
touching them with his cue.  
She's scared. So am I.  
Joe's stronger, faster than me, by a lot, and when he's drunk  
he knows no friend.  
How long can I stay silent, I calculate.  
What does he have to do before I speak. Speech, none.  
If I don't put him down with the first crack of my cue, I'm done.

Lucky for me she gets away  
unharmd, goes back to her room.  
I think Joe assumed me and the other guys, by our nervous smiles,  
would enjoy a rape tonight.  
Men are such chickens,  
I can't speak for women.  
You basically hold your breath  
your whole life.  
Live in a zoo  
shit and screw.  
And if it comes to that, you'll kill  
on orders, from who?  
Another swinging dick  
who fears his death.  
You've got to make every day a good day to die.

## New Haven Terminal

Across the track, a rail yard worker  
big innocent bear of a guy, beer  
belly, embraces his girl. She's  
a conductor, comes up to that belly,  
reaches arms not quite around  
his back. They separate and embrace  
three times while the train prepares  
for departure.

Across the aisle,  
a mother and son. Lights out, change engines,  
they play Mercy. Squeeze fingers until one  
cries mercy. The son still too small  
to seriously challenge his young, athletic  
mom. Ask and answer questions, laugh  
and cry mercy, she draws and he colors  
the features.

Unless a society  
expects its fate to be better than its past,  
it will strive to make its present  
immutable as possible.  
Optimism is a way of exploring failure.  
It says there is no law of nature  
or supernatural decree preventing progress.  
Nearly all failures, and all successes, are in  
our future.

## Eronel

—title from a tune by Thelonius Monk

I'm busy as a bus.

Ten hours on the telephone, research resources,  
school staff, counsel clients.

Some sleep.

Then invite Lorraine downtown, the lovely loyal  
secretary, to hear jammin jazz crew. By taxi tonight,  
sans subway.

I've never been to this joint before  
but admire the women in their dresses and makeup.  
In New York, they smell wild. Elsewhere  
women are ranchers and gardeners.

We find a small table in the crowd,  
order drinks. The band is four young black men.

Lorraine is black too, by the by.

We get up to dance and I leave my cowboy boots  
under the table. I've always enjoyed  
the way Lorraine puts her arms around me.

I'm the oldest cat in the club

which is frightening

since just fifteen years ago I was the youngest.

I wink at the trumpet player with my fairly abandoned mien  
who comes over to our table between sets.

He likes Lorraine. They jukebox it.

She falls in love.

## That Was Random

There are actual people  
half woman half man  
running mornings and  
dream people in movies  
half language half light.  
Tomorrow is John's funeral.

\* \* \*

This is my minute  
my moment  
Oops, gone!

Anything can happen  
if you don't resist  
Resist!

\* \* \*

But who am I? You think bullets won't  
kill? I'm the guy they put before a  
wall and shoot then eat lunch.

\* \* \*

Long as yr livin  
yr havin that dream in  
which yr killin the villains  
w/o even needin a weapon.

\* \* \*

If it was fun, they wouldn't call it work,  
but it is fun. It's what we do, a bird  
sings, dogs bark. We work. Sing bark work. Honey,  
put on your shorts, it's gonna be 90 today.

\* \* \*

How right is the rabbi!

"What a good and bright world this is if we do not lose our hearts to it,  
But what a dark world if we do!"

\* \* \*

We saw a barred owl  
camouflaged in winter branches.  
Bird of death (in myth), hunts down the dark,  
floats to a farther tree, turns its back, and naps.

\* \* \*

The sadness of summer, the silence of winter  
you can't sum it up in one more metaphor.  
So don't complain about the epoch you live in.  
Go to Big Hidden Lake and jump in!

\* \* \*

Down to negative calories, in deep snow  
we find soft wintering rose hips, gobble them down.  
First time for me a wild edible made a difference,  
not just a delicacy. Then we snowshoe out.

\* \* \*

Spring morning  
flycatchers, jays, thrushes, a woodpecker's loony cry.  
A toilet flushes.

\* \* \*

Zach  
awoke from a scary dream  
I kissed him back to bed

He asked  
are all the doors locked?  
I said yes knowing they would not hold

\* \* \*

The republic may expire  
but birds go on traveling, singing  
in their best attire.

\* \* \*

My plump cashier  
has a new love.  
Her skin is clear  
and her line moves.

\* \* \*

Desafinado means slightly out of tune which is not a problem.  
It's a fortunate condition. Zach just called from school sounding clear  
and happy to say there's floor hockey this afternoon. For me, another  
cold,  
slow Spring. How lucky!

\* \* \*

At basketball I was reminded  
the better players in their private moments  
think on the ultimate reward. Perfect rest.

\* \* \*

You come in our backyard, we go in yours.  
That about sums it up. Assuming there are definable, accepted  
backyards.  
Suppose it's all one backyard and time is all one sheet of ice?

\* \* \*

My son Zach said as a toddler he liked the old house  
and he's having a good time now at the new house.  
We were lying together in the window seat passing the early morning  
time,

late September and happy as I was I thought what's running out is time.

\* \* \*

The young women's bodies were awesome. I appreciated the couple of Muslim women who kept their bodies covered. That was easier on an old man's eyes.

Not that I wanted to change the American girls' ways. They seemed comfortable wearing underwear outdoors and unaware, more or less, of the longing it provoked.

\* \* \*

To invade a clean house  
searching for weapons or insurgents, I agree  
with the enemy, that is a sacrilege.  
Not that I accept their god, and there could be,  
hiding, a mouse.

\* \* \*

I tell my sons  
If some man tries to pull you into his car, fight  
kick bite yell run punch curse scratch knife  
make him kill you right there in the street  
use your feet your fear your hate.

\* \* \*

If everything seems under control, you're not going fast enough.  
—Mario Andretti

\* \* \*

A day, a new day, starts at 5:00.  
Earlier than that it's still yesterday,  
the rags and dreams, the sweat and worry, the sex and laughter  
of that day. The alcohol and aspirin, the sunset and machinery, the  
dinner and toothache  
of that day. The germs and friends, the sports and editorial, the gleam

and dullness  
of that day.

\* \* \*

The key to success is cross out, delete, compress,  
rub out, expunge, black out scratch out blot out,  
censor, crop, shorten and silence.  
Clip, cut, erase and eradicate.  
Hate everything you write.

\* \* \*

I will be saved  
and spanked too.

\* \* \*

Phil is on a movie diet. Bad movies in which the logic switch is turned  
off. Jumps from scene to scene like a cat.  
Most pornography is hilariously obscene. Genitals like little animals.  
Snowplows hit potholes sending up sparks.

\* \* \*

Make way for a future that's irresistible!  
Dust. Rest. Mist. Rust.  
One day follows another until the last day.  
And on that day, there will be weather.

\* \* \*

Driving in traffic  
80 mph, 80 y/o.  
Turkey vultures shrug shoulders.

\* \* \*

When an archangel  
flies into your windshield  
sing cuckoo!

## Tweets

I, too, dislike poems.  
I've tried runes (and rampikes)  
but that's affected  
rather than merely effete.  
So I call them  
figments.  
When people query  
What do you write?  
at a barbecue or birthday party  
I say soliloquies,

fractals,  
fragments.  
Self-similarities,  
singularities,  
sculptures (scriptures), geometric shapes and series,  
three dimensional triangles, spheres  
and differential equations,  
fractured fairy tales,  
Rocky and Bullwinkle,  
rectal impactions.

On the other hand,  
bits, bots, bytes  
remnants, scrap, earth  
gobs of phlegm in grains of sand,  
shards of glass in a slice of hell,  
hunks and clumps, curds and whey, sleet and pain, slap in the face  
sub-atomic particles, cell organelles,  
chunks of energy, cookie crumbs,  
rusty trucks stuck in mud, dustings for ghosts,  
just plain dumb luck, rocks, concrete, but not tweets.

## Ohthere

*"There's nothing you wish for that won't be yours  
if you stay alive." --Beowulf*

Winter mix. Don't relax. Leave me alone  
with autumn, an autumn like last autumn  
or running in new snow, loving that feeling.  
Sick of meditation, my existence  
indivisible from the wry Creator's.  
I like the old Rhymer, his smile resplendent,  
but all I have is all I do not know.  
The past isn't dead it never even  
happened. Learn the changes then forget them.  
Keep on learning and re-learning them.  
Down the steep and icy trail through hail and storm,  
take into eternity my hail and farewell.

We're living in the Anthropocene.  
Indestructible garbage. Bulldozed landscape.  
Big Brother, dead father. Penis of the tiger.  
Getting thought to twitch the prosthetic.  
Mischievous, malevolent, militant  
thistles. Or just plain polite Americans,  
afraid to get shot. Old-timers bagging  
groceries, low social security.  
Situps, pushups, fix yr brakes, fix yr leaks.  
Exhausted by that irritating,  
constant need to survive. Surrounded by  
history, neither seen nor heard from again.

If it's human, nothing's wasted. Pasted  
into a big wet kiss or posted  
on the internet. Stolen from the pockets  
of the dead, burgled from living memory.  
Most art is dispensable, booty and boobs,  
vaginal lubrication, prostate enlargement,  
the unknown, anonymous man named me.  
Things fall apart. Or maybe not. Maybe

it'll all hold together 10,000 years more  
after all we've observed a galaxy born  
13 billion years ago, a faint red blur,  
and microbe partnerships on the ocean floor.

The good life's all around us smiling  
girls on bicycles, dogs on leashes,  
equality is mandatory.  
Sweet solitude and privacy, quiet  
sitting spot, write a little, read a lot.  
Tip generously, gratuitously,  
like good luck. Haircut, cabride, dinnerout,  
to eat a continent is not so strange.  
Japanese knotweed also known as kudzu.  
The Chinese navy also known as t'ai chi.  
Water shortages. War and wildfire.  
Humor or ardor, I can't decide.

Dad's steel-toed boots. Leaves, buds, flowers, fruits.  
Things are said, mistakes are made. I'm driving  
pontificating on geopolitics  
when an archangel flies into the windshield!  
Lost my timepiece, lost my metronome. Well,  
music is a manufactured crisis.  
Caloric restrictions, control your addictions,  
desire to be famous, prone to violence.  
The profusion of species contents me.  
Wilderness comes back strong as cactuses,  
chestnuts, coral. No more missile crises.  
Eat less, an empty belly's holy.

Horselum, bridelum, ridelum,  
into the fray! World order—not my problem.  
Only meditation can save your soul,  
should there be such a thing. Learning who you are  
is difficult as sitting still 10 minutes  
w/o a thought or want. Knowledge of death  
without dying = early retirement.  
No solution to death's finality

and such a blessing awaits me, too.  
If you're suicidal they call the cops.  
The audience is full of glee. Most failures,  
and most successes, are in our future.

Look one way, from another come the heart's  
missed beats. Look slowly, labor for the success  
of others, even the old and frayed.  
First entertain, then enlighten if you can.  
Forget me not, is that all I want?  
Jail or zen mountain monastery  
hiphop artist hypnotist bebop trumpeter  
unknown soldier black bear bad bladder  
ice cold beer poker player wry Creator.  
If not one way, then another. Otherwise  
give me your 5-10 best hiphop artists. Can  
they take the sting out of life like bluegrass, jazz?

We hope everyone alive is essential,  
consequential. The commonplace and everyday is  
sanctified. Nothing else special  
need be done but stay alive. Don't lose passport,  
don't be late to airport. Is it stress? Yes.  
Insects are pollinators, insects are us.  
Romance without finance is a nuisance.  
November, however, is sweet, sunshine  
through bare trees, dry leaves companionably  
visiting among the dead. If you run over  
a chipmunk, a groundhog or a skunk, say  
a short prayer. One can't help being here, cunt.

I live in a state so blue there's nothing I can do  
to change man's trajectory and if I could  
what angle of re-entry or ascent  
would I choose? Grace is what we get no matter  
what the plot. Come the tired end of day  
Jack thinks why not waste time watching tv  
but the next day he has a hangover  
like Ernest Hemingway or Mick Jagger.

The material world is reality.  
Reality's not always what we're after.  
I like Jack's confidence, that working the problem  
will result in better outcomes than guessing.

Poetry is plumbing an answer to  
the problem of what to do and why do it  
when your cancer makes poetry from  
losing the argument with yourself.  
Man needs help from every creature born.  
The blackbird contains death but it's bigger than death.  
It's more like God but an ironical god.  
Smaller and funnier than God, impossible  
to regard directly, gotta look sideways,  
aim binoculars left, right, up, down—  
missing every time. There's nothing you wish for  
that won't be yours if you stay alive.

## The Imaginary $i$

## The Pity of Things

Part of me says stay small, part go big  
Part says eat your fill, part don't pig

Kenko says: long life brings many shames  
I say the gray sky brings winter, no blame

The impassable mountains we revere  
Moderate the force of wind and water

Get the cement truck into the refrigerator  
We shall honor all of life sooner or later

Anything can happen if you don't resist  
To get lucky you gotta be careful first

You discover dying's much like living  
Who should I thank for the pity of things?

O to have the smile of a lover  
Who wouldn't rather be elsewhere!

## **Desafinado**

--slightly out of tune

Am I right to hedge my bets on being famous, ply my arts all day alone, silence, no tv? Mark said, the difference is people are actually listening to Mick Jagger, but I thought that's not so big a difference.

When Dad died it only reinforced the futility of our daily efforts notwithstanding my hopeful eulogy about our responsibilities to each other.

People listened then, and closely, searching for an echo from the abyss. What is this abyss and how do I know it's there?

## Seaweed

On one of the myriad bays  
along the Maine coast. Keep the holocaust  
at bay I said to Dave because  
you'll spend all day gathering  
2,000 calories and still be miserable hungry.  
An undiminished population of humans is risible.

Black spruce and balsam fir,  
you can eat the inner bark  
in a starvation emergency.  
There's plenty of Cornus—bunchberry—  
each orange pith around the stone  
worth maybe a quarter calorie.

Lots of sarsparilla but the fruits  
not out yet and to date I have not  
savored one. Let's see—dandelion  
of course and huckleberry but  
the most important source of sustenance  
would be seaweed.

Learn your mushrooms! for the protein.  
Accept the situation  
come the apocalypse.  
I struggle against my insignificance  
but it would be better to struggle  
against my ignorance.

Less effortlessness, more fishermanliness.  
That's the lesson of this Maine vacation  
there's a lot you can eat when in need—  
the hips of roses and the pips of grasses.  
And an endless supply of seaweed—  
bladderwrack, dulse, kelp and thin green lettuce.

## **Helterskelter Huggermugger Heebiejeebies**

Black lives matter. Me too.  
Not my president. Give peace a chance.  
Luck runs out. I like immigrants.  
Power must be challenged by power.

Equal and opposite reactions.  
God is the answer. Love is the answer.  
Walk on the sunny side of the street. Meat feet.  
Learn to drive. Wait for the train in the rain.

A girl gets sick of a rose. Mock orange.  
Mediocre presidents, unnecessary wars.  
Triumph and humiliation. Meditation.  
Sometimes I'm tired of being me. Therefore.

Subaru. Suduko. Haiku. Hulu.  
Stop on red, go on green. Orderly neighborhood.  
Too tired to be angry. Too tired to do homework.  
Tolstoy is the Tolstoy of the Zulus.

College campus. Saguaro, cactus.  
Million dollar movie. Aliens in the bleachers.  
Full length feature. TED talk, lecture.  
Breathe in experience. Bring sentience into an expressible state.

Events pile up with or without an identity willing to organize them.  
Events in their mere chronology make no sense.  
Inability to transcend own interests. Inability to find one's way.  
Vacations and accomplishments accumulate late in life and yesterday.

Late in life I struggle against my insignificance.  
The straight way lost. Concentrate on this: Thy will be done.  
The straight way misplaced. Get over it. Someone tell a joke.  
Love. Vote. Join a committee or a party.

MLK made the jump from race to class, dreamed of a brotherly nation.  
Is this feeling nostalgia for the past or occipital neuralgia?

Knee surgery, plywood factory. Lost lover, lost city.  
Old friends who are dead to me but still here.

Somewhere there are flowers among railroad ties.  
True love between sexual partners. Dusty villages and vast cities.  
Popper v. Niebuhr, impeachment inquiry.  
Hassid and Muslim dress codes. French fashions.

Watch for war, shit and shower. Do the limbo.  
Pay bills. The very thought of the rosy dawn makes Jack ill.  
Big comfy couch, a nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day.  
A long day's journey into night. Truckin'.

Death comes for the archbishop. Private Ryan and Big Red One.  
Absence of knowledge and intelligent beings who make things happen.  
Life's brevity and the time taken to carve the canyon.  
Decibel level and ambient noise. Captain Carpenter and Mr. Flood.

Nothing but ocean, self-aware organisms and the longing they provoke.  
Unit, corps, God, country. Zip code. The clocks and the docks gone and  
no smoke.  
Achilles and Hector. Wills and losses.  
Continued existence and most of history.

A holy condition. A warrior's position.  
Walk with a limp. Don't complain about pain.  
Truth may be ascertained by considering your uncertainty.  
If everyone votes and every vote's counted, time is the mercy of eternity.

## Nicky's Road Kill

Nicky, the neighbor's dog, drags a road kill home.

A beautiful pelt like those fox shoulder garments women wore in the forties.

But the head is crushed beyond recognition—maybe it's a fox and that's why Nicky, a canine, is conducting this wake on our front lawn.

Loretta, my wife's mother, is in the hospital again. Forty years of Crohn's disease has finally broken her.

It may take some time but she won't bounce back from this episode. None of us are sorry to see her die, not even Loretta. There will be a thunderous downpour during her last hour.

I like the story about the nuns hitting Peg in school—contumacy is a sin. Emile and Loretta considered it an inappropriate punishment for their cherished adopted daughter.

So they pulled her out of Catholic for public school. They did their own thinking about discipline.

Early Spring, peepers all night, then the birds take over at dawn.

Soothing—the mourning doves.

During this half of the year, May through October, we live in a green bower.

We turn the house inside out, move into the mountains.

In their annual order, flowers appear in the understory: coltsfoot, hepatica and trillium through to the end, late purple aster, spotted joe pye and pearly everlasting.

We let Nicky nurse her road kill, watch over it, roll around on it.

Don't let go of the steering wheel while driving fast in the passing lane.

## **Types of Joy**

There are 12 types of joy:

simple joy

almost joy

systemic joy

Saturday joy

expressing joy

knowing joy

all joy

max joy

constant inputs of joy

single greatest joy

sacrifice or joy

the face of joy

at the periapsis of earth's orbit.

## Gotta Go

Books to the library  
photos to family.  
Paint cans and lumber  
from renovations years ago.  
Most of the furniture  
including the piano.  
Fastest way to do this  
is rent a dumpster.

On the internet  
nothing's permanent.  
I like that.  
Photosynthesis, evaporation  
as if your spirit disappears  
when the sun appears.  
It's a burden lifted  
not to have to persevere.

Edits  
for clarity  
and brevity.  
One owes the reader  
a respite from  
the tonnage of  
fructifying English.  
To drown one's book is devoutly to be wished.

Coupla trumpets,  
big comfy couch,  
four beds and dressers  
and the contents of closets.  
Tools we don't use,  
surge protectors and chargers,  
lawn and patio accoutrements,  
table settings for ten.

Lamplit underground,

the stray branch,  
synchronized chaos,  
a red fez.

One canary,  
map of Antarctica,  
three deaf little otoliths,  
six or seven sybils.

Extra salt and pepper shakers,  
sharpies and crayons,  
a printer and a scanner,  
the Bible and Koran.  
Kaput calculators and computers,  
subscriptions and prescriptions,  
a host of vitamins  
and the ghosts of ancestors.

Time itself  
but not nature.  
Wealth  
and most of culture  
but not my health.  
That I'll keep,  
and sleep—practice  
for perfect rest.

## Colonoscopy

I have a special interest in telling about my colonoscopy.  
The doc cheerful, secure in his specialty, colon cancer being  
the second leading cause of cancer death after lung tumors.  
They can snip the precancerous polyps right out of you during the test.  
At first the doc gave me the statistics but having paid 25 bucks for this  
interview  
I decided to make him explain the science. He was most comfortable  
describing the physical architecture of adenomatous v. hyperplastic  
polyps  
but what about cell structure I said. He was vague about genes and  
hormones,  
I could have been chatting with an Electrolux salesman.  
I wasn't worried although my ass was burning.  
Everybody dies, everybody, even Whitman and Emerson, so I browse  
models for dying—  
mine are middlebrow, saddlebow—John Wayne in *The Shootist*, Paul  
Newman in *Hombre*—or hagiography  
Plath her head stuck in an oven, Hemingway who ate his shotgun.  
Anyway I was upbeat flirting with the nurse, a muse who has seen it all  
before,  
acting tough, which isn't actually an act  
you do your prep and say your prayers.  
I thought I'd be in and out butt as you probably already know  
the prep for this procedure is worthy of Gandhi. A day of fasting,  
clear fluids only, and constant voiding.  
You arrive at the hospital one spiritual chicken.  
I reflected it can't hurt, lose a little weight, remember who you are  
without so much shit and flesh between you and the natural world.  
Snipping polyps is like taking electrons to a lower quantum energy level,  
nearer the nucleus, with fasting and sexual abstinence.  
The art of total presence and abstinence, dependence on the Other for  
future existence.

## Quiet

--with lines by Gary Snyder & P.K. Page

Spring morning,  
quiet. One coyote,  
three deer  
running in snow.

What else have I seen?  
A sparrow hawk in mid-air snatch  
a robin, a sharp-shinned hawk catch  
a rabbit in its talons.

A deaf mute in a pear tree.  
Not one wolverine  
in Utah or Italy.  
Nor a famous samurai.

A young black bear  
traverses the lawn in August.  
Also quarks. Also oaks.  
Do not disturb its progress!

A red fox  
alert, no limp  
flows silently  
across the meadow.

First light, green tea.  
A person thinking  
epochs and eons.  
A platoon of chickadees.

## Samsara

The day after my Aunt Ro died  
a doe approached within a few feet  
as if confused about where she was  
and what she should be doing.  
I could neither comfort nor advise her.  
I let her be not considering until later maybe  
I had witnessed the transmigration of a soul.  
But in the end I applied Ockham's razor—

you rarely see what you believe.  
A mile further along my morning stroll  
I was greeted cheerfully by a flock  
of cedar waxwings I always consider it a blessing  
to encounter. Such social, amiable beings  
I hope Aunt Ro will join, so sure are they of who they are—

## Return from Desert

Back from the desert and loving it  
both the visit and the return.

The powerful plane deiced in Chicago.

Brittlebush, difficulty distinguishing acacia from ironwood.

Mesquite, and plenty of paloverde.

A good jazz band in Phoenix, their own style, no apology.

Could you also love your cancer? The vicious attack of a hedgehog  
cactus?

The winter storm that kept us on the tarmac three hours  
followed us home. Used to be

when weather made the headlines, that was good news.

No more. Those melting icecaps and incoming meteors.

Some pray, some stay still, some keep playing.

Anyway, notwithstanding inexorably expanding or otherwise rapidly  
contracting universes

I saw cercocarpus, phainopepla, tomentilla, saguaro, and a great  
guitarist. Prayers were answered.

## **Eidolon. Penumbra.**

Everything is normal  
so not much to sing or say.  
No summer thunderstorm,  
the snow was magical only for an hour.

Old men  
aren't removing women's panties with removable dentures.  
A belly laugh now and then,  
an empty belly's holy.

With simple joy  
mortals may forget to fear their deaths.  
Simply put,  
we do not survive. But what an adventure!

I heard an archangel cry  
Don't hurt the trees!  
Also, save democracy.  
Also, stop barking, believing in that higher power.

What's Ken doing today?  
Watching TED talk lectures,  
planning next Spring's garden.  
It's Death, not the Jewish king, in your rose garden.

As climates change  
species escape predators  
and predators chase down prey.  
Choose sacrifice or blame.

I look at faces  
and they look at mine, mute, animated spirits,  
black wet rocks,  
victims among flames.

I embrace my anonymity,  
lost in my own city,  
in the shade of a gazebo,  
a mosquito's acceptance of its position among a million mosquitoes.

## **If Not One Way, Then Another**

Thanks for another day  
Others curse their luck, stale breath  
Eventually our enemy becomes our brother

Cancer checkup, another swinging dick who fears his death  
To not necessarily sacrifice each and every day for another day  
I'm going to go to my grave unsung like almost everyone

Numerous number systems beyond the real  
Look one way, from another come the heart's missed beats  
One way out of the mind's limitations is through another mind's  
contemplations

Another autumn, another election, so aimless and sublime  
The white egret ate fish after fish, one then another then another . . .  
You get a limited number of long walks, so take your time

One gives up body and soul but that's not what I came to talk about  
Slug the world and the world slugs back  
It was amusing in my youth that God's finger could move me to another  
square

Another duality, a day in the woods, jet passing overhead  
I am in favor of kindness and you prefer concentration camps  
The slow death of one sometimes makes the sudden murder of another

To survive only as many more years as there are petals on a randomly  
picked (ox-eye) daisy  
Another winter passing its calling card in at the window  
One day follows another until the last day and on that day there will be  
weather

## **Subs v. Dubs**

In the debate between dubbing and subbing  
I side with subs to savor the original  
mellifluous French, Tamil, Korean, Italian . . .  
Reading the subtitles assists the deaf  
and hard of hearing although voiceovers  
benefit the blind and vision impaired.  
Historically dubbing was employed  
by fascist governments to advance  
the nationalist agenda. In our own time  
the tendency to consider dubbers dumb  
implies reading's the indispensable skill.  
My wife reads her mail while watching movies  
so she prefers dubs. I admire her mastery  
of two idioms simultaneously  
but my limited bandwidth favors subs.

## WWIII

It's 2022, we're in the final battle for the soul of the world.  
There is no Indo-European root for soul,  
the Greek and Germanic roots mean quick-moving, fleeting, mercurial.  
I'd add evanescent, impermanent, ephemeral  
disappearing, diminishing, dwindling  
tenuous, brief, short-lived.  
Whatever forever—that's where we'll be after WWIII.

World, home, think, breathe: man,  
woman the vital force in man, the Anthropocene, men together  
violence, virtue, virility. Also, werewolf.  
War: to confuse, mix up, make worse.  
The old are paying close attention but my sons ignore the thunder,  
plate tectonics, gamma ray bursters and mortars on the Eurasian front.  
Peace out—the end, limit, boundary, never to have been. So long,  
sayonara, shalom, salaam. Take into eternity my hail and farewell.

## Poets Just Wanna Have Fun

And complain about sentience. Tell a joke. Make—  
Us sad or depressed, less afraid  
Earth into homes, earth into mud  
Their peace  
Me a fossil of society  
Our own decisions, the universe having reversed its decision on us  
A sound or noise  
Echo make  
The body healthy I do  
The feelings in the mind play music  
A space in a line of people climbing a trail in the mountains  
Us brothers and sisters with the animals  
Death more noble for us all  
A mosque of the rocks  
You cry out for the genius occurring now and in our past  
The tools and do the math to colonize the planets  
Things worse by guessing  
Others want to live  
Plans  
The man weep for himself  
A difference in their communities  
Music, mindful of our extreme limits  
1/10 inch of annual topsoil  
The atmosphere as seen from outer space  
Of it more than it is  
The bed  
This formulation useful  
The technology possible to live long and well, with personality  
Grandma's sauce  
This observation: the purpose of sitting's not to be satisfied  
War on Iraqis  
Pharisees grovel  
Black holes whole  
Prediction and intuition fortunately hopeless  
A list of prospective donors  
A moral and rational adjustment of life to life  
Dying people cry

Nothing happen, which is something, magic  
Improvements  
Eagle scout  
History interesting for Johnny  
The subject separate from the substrate  
The sun stand still, yet run  
Consciousness persevere  
Informed medical decisions going forward  
It so  
Sense on the trumpet  
Correct mistakes  
Jack ill  
A repertoire for dealing with the challenges we'll confront as a species  
    in millennia to come  
Every day a good day to die  
Millions  
The present immutable as the past  
Up, perfume, soap  
Him kill you right there in the street  
Way for a future that's irresistible  
Poetry from losing the argument with themselves

## Roar of Tinnitus

I searched upstairs and downstairs, mask of fright,  
repositioned machinery, turned on lights,  
called my doctor and the operator,  
tried passion and dispassion, meditation  
and my morning crap, sang out of tune,  
passed a school bus on the double yellow line.

A clock, a calendar, a ruler,  
a minute and an inch. The kind of day  
I never have, opens with orisons,  
ends with an amen, ardor offsets humor.  
I cannot locate the source of the hum  
atoms alternating charges,  $e$ ,  $i$ ,  
sharing and unsharing electrons,  $\pi$ .  
I reckon I hear (OMG!) my god.

## Why Write?

To hear the mermaids singing. Not quite.

To make sense of life. No experience, no nonsense.

To make life better for future generations.

Why care about the future? The dead don't live to see it.

To save people or nations.

Poets just wanna have fun.

To exceed one's limits, derivatives with limits.

The one power that a man can have is in the perfection of himself.

Clear commentary from which many people will derive meaning.

Having nothing to teach I tell a joke. The snail joke.

To produce knowledge, nuance and pleasure.

Whatever you do to one side of the equation you gotta do to the other.

There are a few mirrors in which I imagine myself.

The dream mirror in which I'm killin the villains.

The public school in which I teach, energy incubator awesome biomass  
collector innovation inhibitor introduction to classical mathematics  
memory organizer promotion celebration teen lovefest  
testosterone uncontrolled substance.

Jail's the alternative, alternate noosphere, foreseeable force,  
intemperate penance, meditational penitentiary, prayer cellblock,  
library laundry, aborted love life, deflating genes, judges' chambers,  
movie night.

Bad movies in which the logic switch is turned off.

The end of faith in which acts of war are mistaken for religious acts.

Photographs in which the name and face don't match.

Measurements in which the last significant digit is the Other.

Might as well go to market.

Might as well believe in that higher power.

## Jack in His Boxers

Have you ever considered  
how your shoes will look  
without your feet?

I should call Dr. Killeen this afternoon,  
find out if I have cancer  
but I'm enjoying the extra weekend of not knowing.

Strong oscillations  
gather rhythm  
and expel me or accept me.

It's annoying  
being the center of attention,  
the dead man walking.

Things often work out better than you expect  
and this probably will too.  
In the transition to non-existence,

Ken said, you get what you believe.  
Now that is a truly scary thought,  
even scarier than Life is but a dream.

Pain serves the purpose of preparing  
one to die.  
Other methods have been tried but this works best.

You tie up your affairs  
or maintain the discipline you possessed  
when feeling well. Eschew

certainty about the afterlife.  
All will be given  
that must be what faith means.

Don't forget to breathe.  
Rain happens. We supply the reasons.  
Leave no footprint in eternity. No smell.

## Accept and Repeat

Always doing something  
plus I have opinions

Winning the war in Ukraine  
pain I can't explain

Saving for retirement  
kayaking to the huckleberries across the River Styx

Kisses sweet or smell of shit  
don't pretend you don't care

If you just watch the sky an hour each day you'll never be ill  
without plenty to say about everything you'll get better right away

Disrobing and bathing, how big and dark the universe is  
not that I accept their god

You get what you believe, a truly scary thought  
man sees man in his mirror that is self-doubt

Contraceptives in place and pleasures today  
drifting toward perpetual armageddon

Suffering and struggling toward vague goals  
keeping your past functioning as a factor in the present

That irritating constant need to survive  
prepare for a powerful anesthesia, irresistible chemical processes

Life goes on without a hiccup  
you pays you money and you takes you chances

Some people go dancing in fishnet stockings  
you'll soon lose interest in wearing the cap of a fool

Your friends are the men you'll want in your foxhole  
the wound that never heals in the end is all you'll feel

You'll remove all your clothes, naked before the ladies  
and if it comes to that, you'll kill, on orders from whom?

Basic science and ancient arts  
that must be what faith means

If, as they say, the cells of the body are replaced every seven years  
fire makes earth into air, air makes earth into dust, water makes earth  
into mud

## **Evangel**

I watch the television evangelist Joel Osteen with Josephine from Ghana.  
God wants you to succeed, he says. I think God died or lied,  
same difference. When everyone holds up their Bibles and thumps them  
I make my nervous laugh.

Joel's favorite story is David and Goliath,  
how the little guy slays the big guy by throwing rocks. There's no singing  
in this church, singing's for funerals and death is for losers. I say to  
Josephine  
What kind of day was it for Goliath?

Josephine and Joel's congregation  
hold no sympathy for Goliath. Just as I can't picture God  
they can't visualize Goliath with a wife and kids. I watch Shrek with my  
wife and kids,  
one of our favorite movies.

How we define community says it all.  
If you cannot accept this, forget it all.

## Earplugs

Sweet silence!  
late in life  
I discover earplugs  
my wife's pastel plugs  
that fill the ear canal  
by compressing for insertion  
and expanding once in place

No lawnmowers, no leafblowers  
wood chippers or persistent phoebes  
an occasional cardinal, bluejay, crow  
water to the thirsty traveler  
morphine to the cancer  
better than knee surgery  
or a negotiated end to the war

One mauve one sepia  
one good cop one bad cop  
if not one way, then another  
humility v. perspicacity  
one year of sleeping in my clothes  
one day the sun is hot  
one night the moon is full

Such silence is so sweet  
I might try blindness too  
like Homer, Borges, Milton  
just kidding, should there be a god listening  
the veil of life is thin  
if one doesn't believe in mystery  
or accepts the rules entirely

One green one brown  
two leaves sleep-touching  
then a breeze!  
the day I left life behind  
hitchhiking as the sun descends  
morning air cold and clear  
one powerful with eternity, one blinding with intensity

The freedom of summer gone  
one more season (and one more after that)  
he lived with one eye after that  
in a mind there is apocalypse  
no one can hear it  
but one day you die  
and this is the ideal silence you sought

One elk in aspen  
two police officers  
one buys it between the eyes  
the other in the back  
the suffering of one citizen  
sometimes makes the sudden murder of another  
with simple joy men may give up desiring to be heard

Silence of winter  
New York City  
nature's lunacy  
cities make a distant static sound  
hidden away in the woods  
a leaf tip for a cocoon  
how much tinnitus can you handle

Graceful as silence  
sailing through the ferns and understory  
my present v. my future existence  
perfect acts, actual and factual  
the national debate  
garrulous, querulous  
speech, none, you can't sum it up in one more metaphor

Censor crop shorten and silence  
no tv!, no pity  
first light, green tea  
remain still as on the subway  
I've almost never had to fight  
exercise, stretch, heal if possible  
and prepare for a powerful anesthesia

## Hoot. Peep.

It's all magic to Joe  
and music to me, too.

An owl's quiet hoot  
even simpler than the pentatonic bamboo flute.

\* \* \*

Belonging to the drums and woeful war  
I woof and bay like every other dog.

Ukes v. Orcs, a hockey brawl  
the pros vault the stands and redd the fans.

\* \* \*

It's only a papier-mache moon. Or is it?  
Hey ho the wind and rain wear us away and it's ok.

The outline disappears and the meaning.  
This could be a pert sweet thing.

\* \* \*

Rain in my courtyard. Rusty trucks stuck in mud.  
To bring order from chaos, just say yes.

Or do the day's disputes leave you indisposed  
to share your heart of zero and your inner rose?

\* \* \*

The tragic mind knows nuclear inferno is a probability.  
Every leaf that's coming out is out, come what may.

That's joy. As time grows short, I get stoic.  
There's work to do but does it matter if I do it?

\* \* \*

Start each day in despair, work up to acceptance.  
That there's no there there requires resistance.

Give generously, gratuitously, flamboyantly  
like good luck, but stop before it hurts.

\* \* \*

Apocalyptic visions are popular again  
but Earth will merely take a mulligan.

Beyond mountains more mountains,  
peepers peeping.

## **Juniper. Quince.**

Canaigre a leafy buckwheat  
right here in the high desert!  
Drive an hour, hike an hour,  
find some shade, sit in dirt.

Identify plants, photograph rocks.  
Raven and scrub jay.  
Coleogyne and cercocarpus,  
single-leaf ash and squawbush.

What else have I seen?  
Juniper, the source of all penumbra.  
The rift that took the river eons to carve,  
caves for cougar and Anasazi.

The sand and soil are Mars red,  
iron oxides deposited by ocean  
200 to 20 million years ago.  
That's nuthin compared to the wind in my head!

Meanwhile it's Spring back east,  
geopolitical and existential dramas  
perdure without surcease,  
our quince has blossomed and slumbered.

Joint-fir, ephedra, arid  
sagebrush and rabbitbrush.  
But juniper berries stay  
nuclear blue-green!

## **Kinnakinnik. Chinquapin.**

The black walnut we planted is thriving in zone 5. Even our honeylocust survives. A silver maple with six stems switching every which way, first to flower last to lose leaves. Coupla Norway maples to string my hammock between. A knock-kneed sugar maple, made for shade, and a young bitternut hickory to replace the maple when root rot takes it out. A white pine grew like a weed, blocked the neighbor's view but trees make better neighbors than people. A river birch that sweeps its branches like a girl on a bicycle flying over the roof.

The aspen past the mailbox angles to cross the road and an unruly quince attracts cardinals, squirrels, rabbits and blue jays. Two crab apples with magenta flowers illuminate our Spring and a red spruce so tall you don't notice it at all because the foliage starts high above dead limbs I keep uncut for wildlife cover. Hemlocks and oaks where deer lay down their bones. I've thought of adopting a yellow poplar in memory of Dad, for the wet flat where the silver maple has done well but tulips want dry soil from zone 8, so no.

## **Entropy. Quiddity.**

My anonymity runs deep. The world  
without the self. What a relief! Simple  
sky blue belief. Simple as this headache.  
Truth, laws, physics. God's first and only words,  
wafer-thin old moss-covered stones. Amen to  
men. Where a man is at no matter what.  
Now and then a baseball game, night of love.  
Knowing to whom, for whom, one is bespoke.  
It's a simple secret shared, longevity,  
watching for the smoke to be black or white.  
Keeping busy, forgetting to fear death,  
giving up desiring to be touched,  
belonging to the loved ones and woeful war,  
living in one of many small cities.

## **Flying. Beeing.**

This must be what clinically depressed means.  
Drive. Clean. Watch tv. Forget the names  
of every flower in the temperate zone.  
Go on alone. Keep sleeping. Saturday's  
the sweetest day, all joy, you're off the clock,  
participation's optional. Each email  
a flame of passion. Insects have souls too,  
consciousness, a feeling of Flying. Beeing.  
Not only humans long for liberation,  
no body, no soul, no mirror, no black hole.  
Are not the satisfactions of being a good man  
among our fellow men enough to sustain us  
anymore? A rock thrown, a crow, nemesis.  
As I think of things to do I do them.

## **Resistance. Momentum.**

Countries occasionally go crazy  
Russians in Ukraine, us in Vietnam and Iraq,  
human migration, a force of nature, a virus attack,  
from fire, from drouth, from hurricanes south.  
I remember Mom's words for my room's mess:

catastrophe, havoc, chaos, confusion.  
What a welter, snake pit, mare's nest!  
Mishmash, morass, maelstrom,  
bollix, motley, hodgepodge,  
snarl, anarch, labyrinth.

Gordian knot, street litter, Capitol riot, thousand year storm.  
Miscellaneous consciousness, rarely a clear coherent thought,  
not one logical, lucid progression. Free-for-all.  
Mending rhymes with ending, why not?  
We've been wrong before and will be wrong again.

## **Fenderbender. Bumpersticker.**

A.I. may help us talk to animals.  
Humans will have no good or harm to do  
and like it that way. Long as you're livin'  
you're killin' the villains. Dusting for ghosts  
and ancestors whether this war is worth  
fighting for or the worst. What about want?  
An A.I. wants to live, just like the rest of  
us. Genetically engineered primates,  
iambic pentameter v. I got rhythm,  
faith we can solve geopolitical problems.  
Earth needs no redundancies, an egg on a spoon  
before possibilities are quantized.  
How big and bright the universe is!  
Earplugs are the answer. Love is the answer.

## Sump Pump

When domestic life just gets better and better,  
laughing and crying washing machines and dryers,  
clean air and water, rainwater, tap water, distilled water, spring water,  
a molecule of water, on land and water,  
seedless watermelon, deep snow and shadows, water and bone, female  
sex drive water sport,  
water found by thirsty desert travelers, water from a wooden bowl,  
seltzer water,  
nothing happens, which is something, drouth, flood, magic.

Water goes where it wants to go and so does death.  
Water glasses winking and clinking,  
watercolor ornaments, waterproof boots.  
Dripping with water, chortling like water,  
dead in the water on the rocks out of circulation up shit's creek  
all washed up down the drain liquidated. Evaporation of water  
collecting over huge expanses, wind and white water rivers. Drink your  
quota of water.

## Chemistry. Comedy.

The line between poetry and prose  
is long. Every tragedy's a comedy  
from the distance of intergalactic space  
where there is no chemistry. Here, however,  
there is a lot of chemistry, pushing  
and shoving, some sexual touching,  
walking in straight lines and amazingly  
avoiding bumping in the crowded crosswalks.  
We say biomass but we mean assholes.  
Also, answer me this: Can a meter-  
making argument appear from nothing,  
hiphopping from rhyme to rhyme or kayaking  
to the huckleberries in the dark times,  
knowing but not caring there's no there there?

## Sapiens

Reading Yuval Noah Harari's brief  
history of humankind, entertaining  
but why care about the past, the dead don't  
live to see it, or the singularity.  
WWII must have caused anxiety  
as do today's assaults on democracy.  
So much noise, or quiet, too quiet, which?  
I can't decide. Nevertheless we make  
our own choices, or else. The doors close  
but we want out. Look at the books and read  
none of the dry words yet we may concede,  
observe, realize and accept we lack  
data, or skills or tools to interpret data.  
Contentment, community, family  
and our place in it, trees have a special  
winter beauty, not every seed becomes  
a flower, power must be challenged by  
power or perhaps the universe has  
reversed its decision on us. What am I  
learning, sitting, watching the seasons turning?

To act and react is itself a fever  
akin to the fittest's survival. In-  
significant and mighty happenings,  
the selfsame imaginary *i*,  
finding the humor in the cholera,  
sitting on my arse moaning and yearning.  
Daily low intensity warfare,  
questioning the judgement of earlier  
presidents, gods, ghosts, aliens, coaches.  
Who's in authority, who's in command?  
Who can say if all will be given or well?  
Really, it's a perfect day, a new life  
begins, things are said, mistakes are made.  
A man weeps for himself going forward,  
keeping death before him without perjury.  
Big Red One, 442nd, SS  
Einsatzgruppen, Harlem Hellfighters,  
Royal Gurkha Rifles, Screaming Eagles,  
82nd Airborne, 10th Mountain. We can't  
know what we've done until we're forgotten.

## Face Facts

Jagged bent faces, black wet rock  
When it rains your face becomes a holy bowl

Peace has many faces  
Face it, you'll never know so stop asking questions

Flat perspective, faces of the victims among flames, in no particular agony  
My face tells me nothing, not nothing but nothing useful

It is life we face and death we meet  
I've seen my death face and it's not pretty

Once you're gone most of us forget your face and previous  
    accomplishments  
Old friends face certain dissolution with perplexity, comity and humor

Sacrifice or joy, but that expresses only the surface of our emotions  
The face of joy: a job well done, a baby born, a marriage for better or  
    worse, a negotiated end to the war

I go in front of the mirror and observe the changes to come in my face  
Yellow ape teeth chimping in the glass death face

Although my face is a mask of hate and pain  
With fire-blackened face I buy a popsicle after work

Face up in the emergency room, facing doom  
Even in the face of individual heroics, the male and female face a blur

Bombs and poison, grief, chiseled tearless face  
Eric and Lisa clean their baby's face

Map-faced men, crow-like women, the faces in the funeral pews are  
    impassive  
Few achieve their potential in the face of history, society and their  
    personal flaws

Interface of rock and flesh, I have surely lost face often in my life  
Will the holocaust wipe the smile off the face of our romantic comedy?

## The Help

Help Ukraine torch the Kerch Bridge.

Help reclaim Cooper Hill Farm.

The climate is changing. Help!

The optimistic society expects its knowledge to grow and that if it does  
grow, that will help.

I am here to name it and know it and help it to grow.

Help is on the way, prayers were answered.

Nothing can be done, it couldn't be helped.

Man needs help from every creature born.

I may live but does it matter if I help anyone else to live?

Stories can be helpful or boring, beautifully or indifferently written.

Reading other writers helps me know what I like but now I am tempted  
to articulate why I like what I like.

Homework helps you know where you want to go before going where  
you have to go.

Success is not necessarily happiness but it helps.

Troy's mother threw him out but she helps out now and then.

Drive home, shop, help make dinner, eat, read paper, watch news hour,  
play trumpet, type poem, sleep.

The neighborhood safe, the nation a non-violent helpmate among nations

I was confused past help so my teacher didn't help.

Is there any hope for living without God's help or even probability's?

Anyone who wants to fight me all the time helps me live outside myself.

It's living and helping others to live that counts.

Control eludes us. Hero accepting help.

A callow youth even as a man, he was afraid and therefore could not  
comfort or help.

Sorry, unable to help or change what happened.

I cannot help what I do or hope. One can't help being here.

## A Dozen Doors

I wanna poem  
about a door.  
Nothing more.  
Just a door.  
Nothing more.  
Just the door.  
Zach awoke  
from a scary dream.  
He asked will the doors hold?

The doors close  
but she decides  
she wants out.  
She bangs on the door  
as the train begins  
to move. Maybe  
a hand or foot  
was caught  
in the door.

Surrender to greater force,  
power, strength whatever  
it is called, the clog of heels  
upstairs to the door,  
turning of the key,  
indestructible garbage,  
bulldozed landscape,  
Anthropocene.

Next I water  
thirty thirsty plants,  
check the mailbox  
a neck a stretch  
a search  
for the mailman.  
My doing this  
widens the windows  
and delivers the doors.

Cells, machinery  
of life, organs,  
organisms, communities  
and ecosystems,  
planets, solar systems, galaxies  
galactic clusters  
and their inverse  
black holes, the doors  
to other universes.

Man made the town  
and the machine  
from rocks mined  
next door.  
Invisible electrons  
move the machine  
to perform.  
My simplicity  
is terminal.

At the 2nd St. jail  
the sheriff's dept.  
provides guards,  
a metal detector,  
one man with a gun,  
door buzzer  
(in out),  
sign in sheet,  
alphabugs, antibiotics.

In a century  
when we fear  
nuclear war  
and the shock  
of fast change,  
motel doors sport  
three locks  
though nothing dangerous  
could happen in a town like this.

Repairs take weeks  
or months. Septic,  
patch garage door,  
cracked windshield,  
mud road,  
rake leaves,  
cut wood,  
prune lilac,  
paint lawn chairs.

It was already dark  
when I left work  
and latched the doors.  
On First Ave.  
block residents  
hanging out front steps.  
I bought a beer  
at the deli on Third Ave.  
from the Arab owner.

There must be  
a crack, deep  
and unmendable,  
that the poet  
must try to mend,  
not just mildly disquieted  
but running  
for the River Styx,  
the doors of Hell pell mell.

First the window  
sills are covered  
then the door  
jambs with snow,  
our lips are sealed  
then our eyes shut.  
Sleep like this  
we've never known.  
Will Spring return?

## Killing Time

I'm wasting time making lists of movies to watch  
Plenty of time, plenty of wine, plenty of information  
It doesn't really matter what I do with my time

Great buildings are built that nature destroys in time with a little wind,  
water, fire  
The heavens are having a fine time belting it out

What is right fits the time perfectly, it is all out of my hands  
We are nothing in powerful time's grip  
You can leave at any time, you can return without being seen

\* \* \*

Across time the Terminator travels  
We await our time or have had it or are having it  
Life's brevity compared to the time taken to carve the canyon

Pedestrians are infinite, times two shoes  
I must not now slide off the road into time

Most men, most times, abide in peace  
A small rift in time opens, drifting toward armageddon or solutions to  
equations  
Interpreting the known facts accumulated over time and generations

\* \* \*

May you live in interesting times—wish or curse?  
Each of us has moved on many times. Time, our moment, is the mercy  
of eternity.  
Humanity followed time here. Then snow again in time.

It's a waste of time to imagine being dead  
Time the magic moments to come

What occupies the time beyond the furthest edge of space?

Community across time and graves  
Leaving when one's time and work is done

\* \* \*

One peeper keeps peeping in time to a satellite blinking  
What percent of all time is that?  
Do the much-admired writers of our time die more content than that?

I revise some poems a hundred times, maybe more  
It is the only way it could be said by this person in this time and place

The best time to write is when you don't have much to say  
Your soul is immortal, it exists outside of time. Just kidding.  
Every time you ask for guidance you receive it. Also just kidding.

\* \* \*

Cans in a pantry, books on a shelf, to the end of time  
Pass the heavy-hanging time playing pinochle and pool  
In times of prosperity we forgot to be austere. Maybe is a long, long  
time.

Promises are broken all the time, to others and the self  
Yet I find I am attracted at times to philosophies in short skirts, jewels  
and eyes lined with kohl

None find their way without following leaders sometimes the wrong  
way  
Not guessing any better than they at the time what love meant  
Time's irreversible, change is all that's visible, the linear is circular

\* \* \*

All joy, all times. A quiet place and time to think simply and deeply.  
Unopened time slides by inexorably  
Suppose everything's fine and you've wasted your time wearing  
sackcloth over your soul?

We're taking on everyone, one at a time. Time now for rest.  
About the dark times will there be singing? Yes, there will be singing and  
sometimes the songs will be sidesplitting.

It's just a matter of time before the public ignores the 24-hour news cycle  
I would rather watch Lalaland ten times over than receive a visit from our  
military

The nurses are not particularly interested in how I spend my time

\* \* \*

Where a man is at, at all times, no matter what  
Anyone can be president, that's been proven time and time again  
Whatif whatnot oldtimer. Part-time tutor, supermarket bagger.

So small time I have time and no enemies or friends  
I'm gonna be huge when I'm dead John said last time we spoke

Then it will be the time of moths or fireflies, mud road, red-winged  
blackbird

Bump bump bump down the igneous rocks of life, take the boulders two  
at a time down

I'm killing time before it kills me. Ha ha.

## Summer Solstice

A cool breeze after five days of heat  
emergencies. South Side Chicago  
to Maine coast, everyone is toast. O  
everyone be taoist! Everyone's a  
baked potato. Extremely active sun,  
high metabolism, hunts all its  
caloric needs by noon. Mindful of our  
politics, nothing can be done but swelter.  
I won't wear a sweater ever again!  
The belief mankind can escape the planet  
unlike Hamlet's dad's ghost—that's not happening!  
Meanwhile bluebirds skirt the lake like the most  
perfectly designed fighter planes. We need  
niche: 1/10 inch of annual topsoil,  
the atmosphere as seen from outer space,  
a well-regulated militia. A  
countervailing pressure on reality  
to consider unknowns, endure not knowing.  
How cool this early summer evening!  
People are the element I live in.

## Answers to Questions

Men of bones and dust, disgusted with themselves,  
actors of the moment, beheaders, rhymers, debtors,  
die with their miseries uncut.

When people query what was our purpose,  
turning some into slaves and others masters,  
that's what they mean by snow for eternity.

To know the question is almost certainly  
to find an answer. What do you do  
with a drunken sailor early in the morning?

How do the vast darkness  
extending to the ends of the expanding universe  
and the temporal light of human consciousness

interact to make the world?  
Will we find the cosmos not large enough to hold us?  
What is the polity's interest in the private soul?

Why has experimentation,  
which has failed in the novel,  
succeeded in poetry?

Are we headed for another crazy cataclysm?  
About the dark times will there be singing?  
Will all be given or well?

Why are you you?  
Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus?  
Ice cream, yogurt, profit, tofu,

what's not to like? Avoid the I,  
avoid yourself and enter the void?  
Inside out,

if I die, will I know it?

Does Jack even exist?  
Who's got trouble?

Apocalypse  
or situation comedy,  
which?

### **Whatever Forever**

I think I've run my course like whatshisname—  
Chidiok Tichborne. Pretty impressive  
he wrote a metered, rhymed, coherent verse  
a few hours before his execution,  
controlled his fear to focus on prosody,  
perfection. We all gotta go sometime  
so we shrug it off or make a ritual.

Ritual is remedy. Matter matters.  
Which? Whatever. Life is for the living.  
We're gonna hafta suffer tragedy,  
nuclear weapons and sullen seasons.  
Fewer oldtimers, pollinators, big game  
yet the young are cheerful as ever.  
I like that. Whatever forever.

## Sweet Want

Two gray-skinned  
sharks, jets  
embrace in the sky  
a blue-green oil truck  
takes the hill  
in low steady gear  
diagnosed  
or in your prime  
go to your chosen  
discipline

Tomatoes and bananas  
tornadoes and volcanoes  
cashiers and clerks  
petrochemicals and vegetables  
water and bone  
Roosevelt and Lincoln  
Rick in Casablanca  
Shakespeare so far  
agriculture, culture and war  
are yours to savor, enjoy or fear

Crews are working  
to restore service  
what kind of day was it  
for its consideration  
of unknowns  
plus I have opinions free  
and fair elections  
respect your opponent  
arguably and  
care about the cosmos

Humor or ardor  
luck runs out  
anything can happen anytime  
the end, limit, boundary

a fossil of society  
let community decide  
your place in it  
a billion circuits  
running and at rest  
the final resting place

That's when the peace  
work proves relevant  
there are no ghosts  
the accounting is relaxing  
the transfer of power proceeds  
the sorrow and the pity  
on Earth and Tethys  
do one thing well  
sacrifice each day  
for another day

I don't know what I want  
I hear what I want to hear  
the human meets the divine  
and finds it wanting  
wanting this, wanting that  
you can want what God wants  
or you can get control of your mind  
Saturday's the sweetest day  
all joy  
What will you find?

## **Pull the Knot Tight**

My son, Zach, is getting married.  
They want it to be a sweet sixteen  
for the bride, but of course it's not.  
It's a stress test.

I've invited his cantankerous, culpable brother  
never guessing he'd been excluded. The families  
are like a disturbed bee hive five days before  
the knot is tied.

I reflect it's propitious that the in-laws-to-be now  
ostracize me as well. They've invested a lot of money  
to make a flawless memory. I'm serene because I know  
it's sure to be precious.

Whatever way it goes, even a fist fight, will be  
perfect that respects marriage's integrity.  
Maybe the bride will leave the altar without a ring.  
About the dark day

we will sing at a gathering in the future, belly-laughing  
at, say, the groom's dad's funeral. For now, I'm looking forward  
to the rehearsal dinner, church ceremony and cake cutting. The  
Shakespearean revelations.

## Clicks and Clacks. Amens and Orisons.

Last leaves.  
New movies.

Amazon.  
Ramadan.

Passover.  
Thanksgiving leftovers.

Dante's Inferno.  
Milano cookies. Cervantes.

Failure.  
Manure.

Amateur.  
Curators and entrepreneurs.

Ancient night stretches.  
Backward without measure.

The work days march forward.  
Reversing the future.

Horrible how we die!  
Wonderful how long we live!

All will be given.  
Spanked and forgiven.

Nevertheless.  
Emptiness.

Notwithstanding.  
Expanding universes.

Fruit flies.  
Fireflies.

Forest fires.  
Midtown towers.

Mother Theresa.  
But with a beer.

EMTs smoking, joking.  
A body left on a gurney.

Kinnakinnik.  
Chinquapin.

Deer, moose, elk.  
Cello, viola, violin.

### **Flat-chested. Big-breasted.**

I'm old enough now not to care  
if I'm flat-chested or big-breasted.  
The key problem is judging how similar  
two things are. World order—not my problem!  
Slightly out of tune, which is not a problem,  
it's a fortunate condition. Yet a stratagem  
is needed to reach the end satisfied  
with snow or summer, dying old or younger,  
the end of faith in which we mistake  
acts of total war for acts of naked saints.  
What percent of all time is that? Is that  
the question, is it even our business?  
The right is fearful they'll be sent to gulag  
while the left foresees the gas and lager.  
A blank, unpainted space represents spirit.

## Me and Meredith

Me and Meredith, the high school librarian, are about the same age I'm guessing.

She has an old hippie feel about her, I'm not sure what someone would say about me.

Yesterday a class came to the library for a research project; out of 30 students, 3-4 worked, the rest, esp. the girls, socialized like a flock of chickadees.

Not that I blame them, even at its best school is dull, yet one wonders if this is diagnostic, how will America compete with China or even Canada.

Well, a) it's not my problem, why care about the future, the dead don't live to see it;

b) based on the film *No One Left Behind*, Chinese kids can be as unruly and rambunctious as American, and good for them;

c) even in the era of one-room schoolhouses, farm-boy and -girl dropouts, and the ordinary care of Providence, the American economy chugged along unimpeded and on automatic pilot, piling up bodies and relocating businesses west or south or far east.

These girls (and some boys) are a force of nature—no worries, there is nothing me and Meredith can do about it. *Get Over Yourself*, that's my favorite bumper sticker. Also, *Confidence* is the feeling you have before you understand the situation.

What do I know about Meredith: I like the striped knee socks she wears in winter; she grows and sells Christmas trees; she rents mountaintop land for windmills.

Back about 15 years ago we were on opposite sides of the windmill controversy—I opposed them on aesthetic grounds, she supported them for personal financial reasons; as it turned out me and Meredith are still friendly, she got the money and I got used to them.

Her husband has cancer. Doesn't almost everybody? It's an epidemic or just the next hurdle on humanity's journey toward immortality.

If you believe immortality is a possibility, it's gotta be disappointing not to live long enough to experience it.

The kids in the library aren't thinking about that. I don't know what they're thinking about. Assignments. Assignations. Resentments.

Meredith took attendance and said Thank you when each student said Here or Present.

## Black and White and Black

How to start Trinity Pettijohn on her journey through African-American history guided by a white Italian-American tutor. With MLK's Letter from Birmingham Jail, Souls of Black Folks by WEB Dubois, The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglas, an American Slave, and Up From Slavery by Booker T. and the M.G.'s. Selections from The Black Poets edited by Dudley Randall. Or Henry Louis Gates' PBS series The African-Americans—Many Rivers to Cross—too long, too boring? Why I'm Black, Not African-American. Black with a capital B. I'm white, nuthin I can do about that but be polite. The unity in all things and the difference.

Akira Dare, 15 year old black high school student suspended for fighting. Big smile, braces on teeth, Mom brings him to tutoring. An overreaching enthusiasm for order: Black v. white, being v. doing, each duality may then be said to be in a dual relationship with another duality. Police violence v. civil disobedience. Anomie v. rule of law. Purposelessness v. having a destiny. There is always governance even if there is no government. Society puts survival on us. It is tough and it is good. I am in favor of kindness and you prefer concentration camps. These dualities, these arm-breaking dualities, mediated by meditation, letters from jail, autobiographies of slaves and their descendants, Italian and Mexican immigrants, measurements in which the last significant digit is the Other. No Ruth in that list of books—Ain't I a Woman?—Sojourner Truth.

## Completing the Square

Good morning Abrianna. How are you today?

How was your weekend, do anything special?

Read a book or see a good movie?

What tv shows are you watching these days?

Not much tv, mostly facebook and instagram.

How many friends or followers do you have?

Wow, that must keep you busy!

What's the main topic of conversation these days? (Not Ukraine, I bet.)

I myself start each day catching up on the war.

Maybe I should pray but I don't. Hardly anyone prays anymore.

What subject do you want to study today?

Math, English language arts, biology, history, you name it.

Did you like that poem Phenomenal Woman by Maya Angelou?

Just alright. OK, but I have a homework assignment for you, should you choose to accept:

Memorize Phenomenal Woman to recite out loud.

You'll memorize it little by little, line by line, taking your time, I'll show you how.

It may seem a tedious and irrelevant task but it could change your life.

OK maybe not but you'll feel good about the accomplishment.

It may become a touchstone to ground you when things get tough.

In that sense poems are like prayers (or friends).

Anyway, today you want to do math. Graphing quadratic equations.

Let's begin.

## **The Imaginary *i***

The innocence of insect, the irrational and rational numbers, the iron clouds shift sunlight, the imagination comes to the market  
The influences that a plant like me goes on growing fearless as a daisy, the ice is centuries old, the in-laws-to-be

The intense dissonance of the noosphere, the ideal independence you sought, the idolater won't matter to the gods, the I Ching  
The indignity of our exposure, the inanimate objects designed to support us, the illusions and sentimentalities of the children of light

The indispensable skill is reading, the insane malevolence lacking humility and respect (or the hunter's perspicacity), the intermediate zone between heaven and hell

The inner animus emerges from the hat, the individual alone cannot be whole, the irrepressible economy rolls out reams of logs, ores of elements, fields of rice

The indigenous farmers of North America, the interview at the corner of Church and State, the irreligious but sacred injunction  
The interface of war and poetry, the Indo-European root meaning to make or to build, the Iliad goes back and forth according to Hector's fortunes

The Ishango bone, the ideal of freeing slaves and paying workers a living wage, the inability of human beings to transcend their own interests  
The international collective remains insufficiently organized, the immeasurable stars and their gentle glow, the inadequacy of our efforts

The Irish brogue of the head nurse, the Indian skin of the physician's assistant, the ironic calm of autocracy  
The intergalactic background temp of 2.73 Kelvin, the infinite space between people, the internet where nothing's permanent

The institution made immutable as possible, the idea of the unified nation, the invention of zero, the industrial park  
The impassable mountains we revere, the igneous rocks of life, the

inner bark of balsam fir

The innumerable wonders about which Sophocles said Man's most wonderful, the increasing change created by our own species  
The interesting rhymes and variable line lengths, the image of a sculptor carving away stone, the I in this poem is no longer me

## **Illegal Immigrants**

Cousin Danny wants out of Houston, TX.  
He says too many Blacks and Mexicans, esp.  
after Katrina brought refugees from New Orleans.  
He says you can see vans unloading illegal immigrants  
at shopping centers and no one does anything about it.  
He wants to find a place that's still warm but with fewer  
black and brown people. He says he's seen people sweep  
garbage out of cars into the street and no one does anything about it.

I told Danny about my plan to build many Ellis Islands  
along the southern border where companies certified as  
unable to hire American workers can recruit immigrant labor.  
Immigrants with some number of years of employment  
without felonies could become citizens.  
Remember, grandpa was an immigrant when Italians  
were considered dirty, lazy or criminals. Now look at us!  
Immigration is America's ace in the hole. Danny's skeptical.

I didn't say we annexed most of Mexico including Texas  
almost 200 years ago. Where would that get me, what's done  
is done. But secretly I've been thinking there's some justice  
in the quote illegal flow of immigrants across the Rio Grande.  
And much beauty in the culture of the evolving southwest.  
Oh, well, what do I know. It was good to see Danny at Aunt Ro's  
funeral. We don't have to agree on everything. But enough of us  
have overcome poverty to achieve success to believe it's possible.

## Jump the Life to Come

Some go bravely, without flinching,  
others like a clown riding an elephant  
out the circus tent, laughing and waving.  
Some want to be alone where the deer  
lay down their bones, or with family standing  
around their bed. All go to an undiscovered galaxy.

They're greeted by their hosts, impersonal,  
ephemeral, efficient and nonviolent.  
They meet other ghosts moving into dormitories.  
If you had a stiff neck in life, now you don't.  
Are there dogs and birds? What about fleas and the flu.  
Is this nebula discernible from the Milky Way?

Do I need a name? No name tags, please!  
How arbitrary—an appellation, a nation, a place of birth,  
i.e. Hoboken, New Jersey,  
the history that surrounds us,  
my doubts re my worth.  
Everything changes but consciousness.

More people were alive in 1950  
than subsisted in all of antiquity.  
That said, I proceed to daily heavenly being,  
delights, disputes and gossip where the self  
is lost and found again. Why not participate,  
where's the harm? Charming and disrespectful

the devil exists to carry the load  
when we misbehave and fight among ourselves.  
It would take 64 million years to cross this antipode  
in a jet flying 1,000 mph. Big, Jamaica Bay  
to Inwood, the Battery to Pelham Bay,  
so I'm never getting out of here.

A certain clarity obtains as a djinn,  
a spirit lingering without a body, just a gas.

Gases tend to expand and dissipate  
absent a vessel, or armor, or bony bestiary.  
Being free means belonging to the loved ones  
which is why I won't abscond, rebel or resist.

## Drift Speed

The smoke and fire are furious.  
Electrons act like a negatively charged gas  
or liquid plasma between the atoms of the lattice.

This sea of electrons  
ignores some quantum effects  
but is a reasonably good description of current in a metal.

The conduction electrons are not attached  
to any particular atom. We can push the sea  
with an electric field, moving it in one direction

like water flowing through a pipe.  
This takes place at what is called the drift speed,  
superimposed over the random thermal action of individual electrons.

$$u = \frac{m \sigma \Delta V}{\rho e f \ell},$$
 where  $u$  is the drift speed of the electrons,  
 $m$  is the molecular mass,  $\rho$  is the density,  $\ell$  is the length, and  $\sigma$  is the  
conductivity of the metal,  
 $V$  is the voltage applied,  $e$  is the elementary charge and  $f$  is the number  
of free electrons per atom.

The drift speed is small,  $10^{-21}$  m/s is a typical value,  
determined by the electric field inside the wire.  
The black hole of my soul is filled with these electrons.

## Sine Wave

Should I read the classics, epics  
or go to every picture show,  
become an expert on Ozu.

Learn the orbitals and calculus  
or senryu and tin pan alley tunes.  
Join the school committee

and tutor kids for free  
or collect social security,  
write letters to the editor and president.

Do some good, sick or ruined,  
or recuperate, late night movies,  
memes and mimes,

vote and ovulate.  
Serve others and the self  
or leave the world behind.

When Judy handed me Peter's lengthy obituary  
naming every degree, sibling and offspring, employer and accomplishment,  
it offended her that I speedread it.

She hissed, Yours will say Born, Lived, Dead.  
A true haiku.  
And still less could be said.

Does Dis exist,  
a place to pass  
the heavy hanging time?

The body in decline  
suffers bruising,  
waits for trains,

a.m. means any morning  
p.m. means post mortem  
a back and forth game, a sine wave, a contour line.

## **Improvise. Explore. Desire.**

Intermittent explosive disorder  
Supernova

Exploding blood vessel in the brain  
Man's ego is uncontrollable except by force

Intelligent electronic device  
Clock radio explodes with news and weather

Electrolysis explosives ore  
The unified nation loses missile control

Income and expense database  
Control eludes us

Bulldozed landscape  
Unexplored fissures and tributaries

Improvised explosive device  
Petulant borderline personality

Controlled experiment  
Space station inductive reasoning electricity

Indo-European Etymological Dictionary  
In this the peace is supreme

Remarkable souls who maintain self-control  
Optimism is a way of exploring failure

Implantable electronic device  
If everything seems under control, you're not going fast enough

The exploration may become dangerous  
Desire uncontrollably to be touched

## About the Soul

Fear and fury: watch the seasons come and go. Deaf and blind without a breath or sense of smell.

Brothers and sisters: in a well-defined but borderless community. Not who but how a molecule decides to polymerize.

Sit still and feel: cells waiting for instructions what to do. Resurrection's when astrophysics comes full circle with biochemistry and each millennium mother nature threatens to stop mothering man.

Do less: one thing may be a summary of all things. Stretch.

Structure: wants resistance, restriction. Everything cannot be said or done.

Assembly: construction, legal case, totem, poem. Any place where political speeches are delivered, the effort to organize the commune is made.

Dingus: a gadget, humorous substitute for a name unknown or forgotten. Lingam.

Thing: huge knowledge gap.

Time: why are most motorcyclists fat? I saw a thin one and he was a marvel moving through spacetime.

Like: similar to, not exactly, it. Now I can explain mitosis and meiosis, RNA transcription, translation, protein synthesis.

Electricity: why would a protein, enzyme, move to a particular promoter on a gene? It's all about sharing and unsharing electrons.

Scientific method, sitting meditation: disconnect all wires and tubes temporarily. The arc (sine wave, slope) of history is toward individual responsibility.

Paradise, perfect rest: each individual responsible for each bomb dropped, atom spinning, cell dividing.

A kiss: is sustenance, as is the rosy dawn. If physicists can call gamma rays non-particle radiation, I guess poets can talk about the soul.

## A Good Tutor Is Hard to Find

Teaching Julian how to write and multiply.

Cross-armed as the buddha. One who knows. The verb bud, the question why.

A new superhero born with the following powers: speed of light, teleport and ability to destroy enemies with the look of love and a telepathically generated sonic boom. Wise he is not, our hero must learn to control the 80% of his mind that only he among civilized men uses. So, Julian, to what uses will your hero put his enormous mind? What good or sad thoughts will you assign him?

Without scientific notation

we cannot stand in appreciation or awe

of galaxies and interstellar space, molecules and atoms.

Yesterday I told Damien,

Your brand of bullshit will not fly in the real world.

What bullshit is that, he said.

Entertaining yourself by making people angry.

On our good days we calculate distances across galaxies.

How many real worlds are there?

One per brain, of course.

The toughest kids to tutor are depressed. Anger

is easier to teach through than the slough of melancholy. Ennui and apathy are the student default positions.

Sleep 12 hours and be too chill for drama.

Ross read three lines from Macbeth and declared Shakespeare yo mama. I wanted to insult him

tell him at 16 he's too callow to be allowed an opinion.

But we both like movies.

How can I get him to visualize the movie that is Macbeth?

Truth, each student has interests, is a world to be explored.

Jake likes snakes and lizards, youth herpetologist, explains it's a myth chameleons change color with surroundings, only when they're sick.

Zalear writes rap lyrics, I gift him a dictionary of synonyms.

Myles has always wanted to read the Autobiography of Malcolm X, instructs me he's Black and an American, not African-American.

Zoe volunteers with a local theater company, lights and sets.  
What a landscape! What riches! Many closed doors  
but I am considered a skilled locksmith.

Not a bad way to end your career.  
Come full circle, circle with a dot.  
Don't complain. Never show fear. Remain still  
as on the subway and prepared to fight. In school  
there is no physical love or altercation between the generations,  
the best we can do is speak honestly, have interesting conversations.  
I dictate to Ross the first line of his essay on A Good Man Is Hard to Find.  
Why does it take Flannery O'Connor so long to kill off those fucking losers?

## **Sewer Hole**

A happy anamnesis  
laughing  
my brothers climbed  
down the sewer hole

to retrieve a ball.  
Four children looked  
relieved, bemused  
by the uncles' hats

floating—  
beret, pork pie, watch cap—  
above the hatless  
sewer hole.

## Always Say Hello and Much Will Be Well

Despair, lose all hope  
that's what the sign says at the gates of hell  
and at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center  
the sign says  
Be kind to our customers who are waiting and suffering

Please God, show yourself  
He (or She) shows up  
not only in the smiles of the nurses and lab technicians  
but in dog tired commuters and subway riders  
on summer's hottest day

how can innumerable bipeds have individual inner lives?  
What destroys the poetry of a city? Automobiles  
destroy it, and battleships and destroyers  
but being inside a magnetic resonance imaging machine  
is like a Chuck Ives (or John Cage) concert!

Tons of blood and bones  
urine, feces, semen, mucous  
x-rays and D-Days  
the pure contralto, the sleep of Palinurus  
the world without the self and all you do not know

notwithstanding complete blood count and comprehensive metabolic panel  
avenues jammed with taxis, wheelchairs with ventilators  
heating ducts and a/c vents, smokestacks, rooftop infrastructure  
hidden in the city skyline  
the body and the impossibility of actually owning your life

In the Seventh Seal  
the knight distracts Death by knocking over the chess pieces  
thus giving the seer and his young wife a chance to escape with their baby  
and that is his contribution, his sacrifice  
under the thundering cataract of unopened time

seeking direct communication with God and getting line static

what of love?

when the nurse says I must use my penis muscle or lose it permanently  
practice makes perfect she says  
perfect rest is also possible I say

### **Mission STS-51-L**

The New Hampshire high school teacher  
who died yesterday in the space shuttle Challenger  
articulated her enthusiasm  
uncritical of America's evasions and invasions  
and devoted her life to her students  
accepting perhaps too certainly the future in the firmament.

Her most interesting comment was the similarity she saw  
in the teamwork at NASA and the classroom dynamic.  
It is a neat parallel as noted by the president  
that Sir Francis Drake also died on January 28th  
400 years ago. Then, the ocean was the frontier. Now, as before,  
the communal imagination gives birth  
to new machines, minds and intent  
whatever it takes to explore the world.

## Quantum Recombinations

1

Keeping the town's maintenance crew employed  
unclogging the sewer system and the poem,  
by poem I mean anything by which we  
instantiate a vision effected  
artificially by intelligent  
beings who wanted such transformations  
to happen. No election can distract  
attention from the fact we did not do  
enough to change mankind's trajectory.  
Uniquely American, unclogging  
incorporates Irish jig, English step dance,  
African high kick, Cherokee stomp dance.  
Slow dance, housework done (dusting for ghosts),  
the garbage out (garbage out, come on in!)  
and the Ukraine girls really knock me out.

2

The Union of Concerned Scientists insists  
annihilation has never been nearer.  
What can we do except take our best guess?  
McIntosh dies in the desert fighting Indians,  
the Fedex gal leaves an anthrax package,  
in a thousand years baseball's played solely  
by genetically engineered primates.  
Traffic sloshes to work. That's how it goes,  
food shortages, weather crises, police patrols,  
genetics, prosthetics, antibiotics,  
plastics, statistics, school science shows.  
If you cannot accept this, forget it all.  
How broadly we define community  
says it all. We must devote our present  
to our future existence, or absence.

3

Them fat bearded tattooed pissed off white bros  
v. them dark-skinned mustachioed shitheads.  
I like them, work with them, give them serious  
thought, nevermind them, feed them, know them,  
none of them, seven billion of them,  
expressions emanating from them mortal  
minds, them tiny tits, them missiles that don't work,  
them gooks before them, not only them, what  
makes them special, name them as if I had  
made them myself, leave them behind in sandstone  
time, I want them to be angry instead  
of me, encourage them to defend our  
allies and interests, in them there's a fire,  
forget them, stack them by the railroad tracks,  
teach them, admire them, defy them, love 'em!

4

Ran into Li Po at the post office.  
Amen to men reciting lines, reading  
scriptures, in authority, outside the self,  
who have learned or know how to live, who look  
for machinery in motion, whose modus  
operandi isn't fear, who dedicate  
their lives to losing their lives for us,  
remarkable souls who maintain self-control  
among the unentertained multitude.  
Buddhas with jobs and spouses and houses,  
who have studied the matter and have something  
to say, philosophers who distinguish  
sentences from a mere heap of words,  
lonesome souls, virtuosos, performing  
calculations and interpretations,  
who want recombinations to happen.

5

A.I., i.e. thee and I, e.g.  
taking and trading. Why the difficulty  
adapting? Bureaucracy v. blue skies.  
Sewer system v. humor in the cholera.  
To forget and be forgotten we don't  
need to know your politics, x's and o's,  
wishes and curses. Someone tell a joke.  
Innumerable wonders, it's woke not  
to be innumerate or illiterate.  
As doomed individuals drop from sight  
new enthusiasts associate. Late  
in life and early on the straight way  
may be lost. Tragedy wrought to the uttermost,  
humor is the only remedy. Practice  
for perfect rest, be a good citizen,  
perform the history that surrounds us.

6

A yeti, a caveman and a sapien  
walk into a bar. Bones and tendons,  
genes and memes, eyeglasses and hearing aids,  
bandaids for when what happens happens.  
Beautiful and incorrigible,  
deeply in debt, indentured to courage  
and devotion, having nothing to teach,  
their comedies and tragedies outlast  
the holocaust. Relentless laughter  
at the absurdity of life, events  
keep piling up, having not done the things  
they wanted to do or found the greatness  
of a single, clear definition,  
confused about change but colonizing  
the planet, doing a good job being you.

7

Peace is, for now, out of reach. So be it.  
Sirens scream, fear prevents full knowledge  
of experience. Stop making believe  
God is the answer, love is the answer.  
Control, insofar as you are able,  
your reactions to the news and weather  
although beauty may be found in every  
American town and the world over.  
Hope is the asshole just doing his job  
and raising a family while his neighbor  
is beheaded. Algorithmic logic  
of a passionately computing species.  
As we travel away from vast green Earth  
the gaggle and babble simplifies  
to a silence so profound it puts you  
in your resting place with a killing cold.

8

My son went to a 10-day meditation  
retreat in Idaho. I admire  
his passion for mental discipline but  
never have I understood life's meaning.  
Not to say perhaps there is no purpose.  
A mere minute of breathing awareness  
beats politics as entertainment,  
citizens aka comrades in labor,  
mosquitoes aka relentless  
mindless motherfuckers. Nevertheless,  
the decision to march to war in rows  
and back in columns cannot be left  
to confused, obtuse gods. This too shall pass,  
Dad said. He also said his years fighting  
Japs in New Guinea were his best by far.

9

I will always know New York City  
better than grasses and cactuses,  
fluorescence better than the full moon,  
hits of the 80s better than birdsong.  
A universe so large its least event  
can consume one in a nanosecond  
and so small it fits within a crevice  
of the brain with room to spare. 4 a.m.  
plunge the toilet. Nothing but the job, Bob.  
Weekend toddler television: Caillou  
and Big Red Dog. Is Caillou hairless  
to distinguish him from other kids  
or to illustrate alopecia?  
And what can be said about BRD?  
My bald kids love dogs.

10

I had serious post-adolescent  
blues and wanted many girls to come up  
to my room. There in the dark candlelight  
we shed our delusions, they more quickly  
than I, but now we see eye to eye.  
The final warming will force trees north,  
erasing habitat and opening tundra.  
What animal will migrate with maples?  
It is I, New Englander! I learned from  
the ancient Chinese poets each poem should  
start with a weather report. O western wind,  
you old torturer, Percy Shelley  
make your poems shorter! The gummy gritty streets,  
the exhaust and you exhausted in them,  
are nature saying bye bye bad guy  
the scarecrow with a scythe is not a fake.

11

When the female baboon presents, the male  
baboon almost always consents. Social,  
sentient, so sure are they of who they are.  
We're slow to organize, to recognize  
the seriousness of our situation  
but I promise once the steel is in our eyes  
there will be a crushing of your cities.  
The majority can be terribly wrong.  
Kill all others can be their death song.  
A self-imposed silence wouldn't hurt us.  
When Russia joins Europe as a peaceful  
democracy that will be the end of history.  
Or is WWII for the soul of the world  
already underway? I'm strangely happy.  
To act and react is itself a fever.

12

This afternoon a man I admire  
is coming to the house. He reads no poems.  
He says no prayers. He can fix the furnace.  
He knows how. I've always been attracted  
to the, perhaps Buddhist, concept of inaction.  
To do less and eat less than might otherwise  
be called for. To not necessarily  
sacrifice each day for another day.  
To survive only as many more years  
as there are petals on a randomly  
picked (ox-eye) daisy. How extraordinarily  
beautiful does Spring passing into summer  
have to get before you'll admit you're happy?  
It takes deep disquiet to be a poet,  
to know nothing and do it well. Be  
a shooting star headed for a black hole.

13

Violence will sometimes be necessary.  
When the opponent's implacable intent  
is to exterminate, don't wait until  
too late, fight honorably, hate. Poets  
scatter when a senator, governor  
or president enters just as priests believe  
in a higher power. Nihilism is despair  
or perhaps an illusion that I share:  
a world made perfect, orderly and fair.  
Might dark matter have a rich inner life?  
What is an appointment but an agreement  
to manipulate change and arrive  
on intersecting interstellar waves?  
Doris Day, too tanned, too coifed to be a  
governess. Beowulf, too busy slaying  
monsters for governance. Elect Yoda.

14

Nature which has been dating life forms  
a few billion years and tried out trilobites,  
dinosaurs and now primates, has frankly  
been disappointed. An extinction  
is underway to rival the Permian.  
WWII was the quintessential total  
war. The level of mobilization,  
the battlespace being contested,  
the armies, navies and air forces  
raised through conscription, the targeting  
of civilians, disregard for collateral  
damage and the unrestricted aims  
of the belligerents marked total war  
on an unsurpassed scale—so far. Keep hope  
alive by ignoring probabilities.

15

Stripped of home and spouse, who am I? That is  
the simple, elegant question. Is it  
a crowded world or an empty life?  
The day begins and your meditation ends.  
Silence is prerequisite for sanity.  
What a night of love can't change. If you want  
to experience the magic moments to come  
just open this box of whatifs, whatnots.  
Interstellar space invades our atmosphere,  
those Kelvins mix with our greenhouse gases  
to produce nuance, survival, and iPhones,  
the plot lines, costumes and makeup for  
The Walking Dead and The Sopranos.  
Some of us are gonna miss Game of Thrones'  
last season. The sum of all noise is noise.

16

I am constantly looking for assurance  
that I've made a difference. A disciplined  
indifference is the best defense. The best  
pizza in Troy, best chicken in Chicopee.  
A hoagy from the place where will and power  
are one. It's in the actuarial tables:  
Death is indifferent to what hide he tans,  
Life crushes men like flies. Good old Chaucer,  
what a jokester, the best laugh's death's, toaster.  
But I'm confident Americans  
will give the world another example  
of how to slam dunk a Mussolini  
or Hitler wannabe, if necessary.  
All literature leads back to the Iliad  
where the human meets the divine and finds  
it wanting. Wanting this, wanting that.

17

A man can wait his whole life for a vision  
when his whole life was the vision. Google,  
gape, goggle, glare, ogle, gawk, gaze, glimpse.  
There's joy in failure to prosper, failure  
to thrive, failure to improve, failure to save  
nations and people, failure to survive.  
Failure's the problem you want. As a tutor  
my purpose is to help students find pleasure  
in chemistry and history, their cell structure.  
Every year or two Eddie Bishop corners  
me at basketball and tells me poetry  
is meaningless to him. In Grand Gulch,  
I'm whispering to a cactus when Chester  
gimps by, yaks about Sasquatch and mermen,  
hot chicks and our potty-mouthed president.  
Apocalypse or situation comedy, which?

18

The right size room for a poem or a plan  
is the inside of your head. There you can be  
alone with planetary citizens,  
the imaginary *i*, and denizens  
of inconvenience stores. I won't get  
to the truth, or my truth, before I die,  
the nameless one, the one that's never known.  
It's been proven time and time again, there's  
no there there, you live until you die.  
The pecking order, IMDb's ratings,  
that's an order—overcome a deepening  
solitude. Exercise to philosophize.  
Turn your back and nap where earth meets the sky.  
The future's irresistible rather  
than merely effete, each leaf out and Jack  
in boxers way up high in the Sierry Petes.

All I need is a loaf of bread, a cold  
 Spring, the wind in the oaks and one long  
 unbroken soliloquy. And to lay  
 my head against my sleeping wife. Some  
 initial knowledge to go with the data,  
 sufficient weaponry to win a war,  
 interpret the Chinese master's wisdom  
 or endure his disapproval. We say change  
 but we mean nonexistence. We say tyranny  
 but we mean a foolish consistency.  
 I say Other but I don't believe in god  
 or me, myself and *i*. Or A.I.  
 We can't know what we're doing until it's done.  
 Tell me your story and I'll tell you mine.  
 I need someone and do not hide it, trees  
 to cast their night spells, cities to move the plot.

I've got a bad case of anomie, me  
 and old friends who are dead to me. If & when  
 enough Americans wake up to their self-  
 destruction, we'll make a smooth transition  
 to a second tier nation. Morning tea  
 in the pitch pine black oak ecosystem  
 tidal wetlands. World order—not my problem.  
 Disappear, dwindle, inexorably  
 diminish and finish with taking things,  
 artifacts to be buried in or with.  
 A line of people climbing a trail  
 in the mountains, you find yourself stuck  
 in traffic, a vast employment market,  
 an orientation of the heart,  
 the nameless one, a burden lifted.

21

Peg took pictures of horseshoe crabs mating.  
I was embarrassed by the spectacle,  
faith in the future I don't share although  
we went so far as to have children ourselves.  
Happiness is dangerous, luck runs out  
silently even if we be alert.  
Never have we been fierce warriors,  
there's no way to survive this habitat  
without nonplussed, perplexed, perplexful leaders.  
Bipartisan romanticism.  
The transcendental nature of nature.  
Only a paper moon can fix yr brakes.  
One must let go, lack data. Anesthesia,  
irreversible hiccups, lonely discipline,  
tide by tide and storm by storm the blind  
combined will of us all that surrounds us.

22

People's eyes cloud over when one talks  
poetry. On the beach or at thanksgiving  
even politics is more politic.  
Prayer gets you where you need to go whereas  
versification confuses, offers  
disinformation and misdirection.  
Reading aloud is obsolete except  
inside your head. At weddings the betrothed  
compose their own corny or banal poems  
ending with a kiss. This looks like jump to me.  
Simply tell the story, if you have one,  
nothing need be done but stay alive  
down to the depths of material life.  
Everything cannot be said or done, the  
best that can be done is be where you are.

If they push forward, we'll pull well back,  
 if they leave a space, we'll fill the space.  
 Above all, stay together, if someone falls  
 help them up. If the police riot, stand  
 quietly, do not abandon the bloodied  
 and broken. Learn the names of our attackers.  
 How's the family? Do you live nearby  
 or commute? Did you watch the game last night,  
 seen any good movies lately? Which church,  
 mosque or synagogue do you belong to?  
 Questions humanize the situation.  
 As the chanting and orders to disperse  
 escalate, contribute silence and slow  
 movements. We may be hurt or worse as were  
 patriots at the Boston Massacre  
 or Bunker Hill, but I think we'll be ok.

If all is well I've wasted my time  
 imagining otherwise. To get lucky  
 you gotta be careful first, throw slow strikes.  
 Clean air and water, America  
 the seeing eye dog not the junkyard dog.  
 Dandelion of course, also huckleberry,  
 a sparrow hawk in midair and juniper  
 the source of all penumbra. Open  
 the border with Mexico, let labor flow  
 like capital! Do less till one thing's done well.  
 Old and yet so young, what one question  
 is the key to what God wants? Grace that  
 features an afterlife even as a joke  
 is a betrayal of reality.  
 What is this dizziness, uneasiness?  
 Am I AI or photosynthesis?

25

To build a house first you dig a hole  
purple trillium aka wake robin  
wood anemone aka windflower  
sing cuccu the joy of making life is new.  
Lovely sand mandalas or sand castles,  
bridges and subways, heavy equipment  
towed up the street. O to be great, dissipate!  
Dad said why not write a spiritual self-help  
book make a little dough and do some good.  
I ply my arts all day alone, how much  
tinnitus can you handle? Governance  
is best when we make small moves, Ellie,  
and behoove an empty belly holy.  
Will the machines do the work? A concrete  
saw, a muddy backhoe, a logging truck.  
O to fail well, someone tell a dirty joke!

26

I am only slightly ashamed to say  
when I see news photos of rocks thrown  
at ICE agents I get excited rooting  
for the rioters. How to explain this  
position to pacifists and legalists.  
Wildfires north and west, the sky  
unnaturally red hours before sunset.  
Humans keep popping out of the heaven  
of animals in a made up magical  
mental state that imperfectly comports  
with reality. On this trajectory,  
nuclear assets moving into place,  
apocalypse is a probability.  
What can you or I or that rabble do?  
I have given up thinking I can make a  
difference. I have let death into my life.

27

You get a limited number of long walks,  
kill your fair share of mammals crossing  
the road. My wife, for one, is not convinced  
of my savior potential. Invincible  
as a nation or eviscerated?  
Sushi or burrito. Not the worst  
and not the best over which I have  
no control. After reading the headlines  
I need a good laugh, a kind of despairing  
unwillingness to look at anything  
closely or slowly. Never gonna be  
a Taylor Swift fan, give me two Sonnys,  
Stitt and Rollins, but if she's unselfish  
in her spandex sequin space suit who am I  
to complain she's not Walt Whitman? Ukraine,  
however, has no choice. It's fight or die.

28

Sadness of summer, silence of winter,  
I'm always on the lookout for good news.  
The Russian Federation collapses  
and Russia joins the European Union.  
In this the peace is supreme, millions  
losing the argument with themselves.  
Depressed + oppressed = powerless,  
a dewdrop in a Chicago heat wave.  
Man made the town and the emergency  
room, supermarket, the self, the polity  
and the city, the environment in which  
experiments can be savored and dispersed.  
Wait for the el, snow on the Sonoran,  
the train in the rain, change in the weather.  
To get around fast, practice perfect rest.

To oppose the dictates of the dictator  
 and hope police don't help the torturers,  
 what would be the indicators things are  
 getting better? No bombarding cities  
 or beheading neighbors. That is the sound  
 of shoulders shrugging, no one knows nothing.  
 Building a bunker under the ballroom,  
 gotta say lotta good that did Hitler.  
 Who's gonna milk the cows and pick the grapes  
 without undocumented immigrants?  
 Do you care yet, commensurate with yr mood,  
 to fill the day with cheerful and truthful  
 expression? My funny, friendly, earthy,  
 tattooed supermarket cashier confirms  
 there's life after empire and no afterlife.

Wake first light before the world fills up  
 impatient with peace and contemplation.  
 To be. To be. Can it be done with grace  
 and dignity? Light the fires, wield the  
 chain saw, drive the cat. My anonymity  
 runs deep dull and dark as a dream in which  
 I endeavor to avoid the cops, the courts,  
 the crisis intervention team. You'd think  
 you'd want drama that emulates tv  
 but today all I want to see is actors  
 not breaking up their lines to weep. Factual,  
 dispassionate renditions of what happens,  
 WWII, the Civil War, Grant's and Churchill's,  
 even Ben Franklin's, account of events.  
 Solzhenitsyn, slavery, separating  
 children forever from their parents.

31

Of course joy, you gotta write about joy  
to give your readers hope. A typical  
urban hellscape, the middle class in cars,  
the indigent on their feet in the streets.  
Jim Wright called America hell-on-earth.  
I had to laugh, keep life interesting  
by making problems that can't be solved.  
You gotta right to be mentally ill  
and to sing the blues. Without free and fair  
elections how will we correct our mistakes?  
Not via air travel. Not via tv.  
Will my letter to the editor be  
in the funny pages? Did I send it to  
the wrong address? Never may the anarchic  
man's thoughts be my thoughts. Not one. After all,  
how you feel accounts for nothing at all.

32

First light on your last day. The desert waits  
sweet with fruits and sharp with thorns, sunrise  
over mountains or moonrise over Bronx.  
Keep the rows with zeroes, keep purposeful  
and warm, keep the meter. Events pile up,  
lions roaming streets, what ails the republic?  
Everyone's offended by everything  
despite the virtue of most citizens.  
Not that you can count on them at the airport.  
Some are willing to torture but others are  
our customers, waiting and suffering,  
disappearing in powerful time's grip,  
working hard and playing hard, pressed into  
the smallest possible space like plastic.  
Brittlebush, rabbitbrush, blackbrush, burning bush,  
salvation in the details in the desert.

I've lost many friends and both of my sons  
 because I thought my thoughts at the time  
 more compelling than care of the soul  
 (should such a thing exist). I've lived alone  
 in the midst of marriage and city  
 and wondered is this how others have lived?  
 To know their minds (if they didn't resist)  
 by candlelight or first light or fluorescence  
 might satisfy my curiosity.  
 Having substituted economy  
 for comradery, few people achieve  
 their potential in the face of history,  
 society and their personal flaws.  
 As we approach life's bitter ending  
 are they thinking of me as I thought of them  
 with a mixture of regret and indifference?

Ours is a comedy and a tragedy,  
 the work boring, easy, slow, fulfilling.  
 Day by day goes by without poetry.  
 It's blue v. gray, or red v. whatever,  
 Star Trek v. Battlestar Galactica,  
 anomie v. democracy, Ukes v. Orcs,  
 iambic pentameter v. I got rhythm,  
 humility v. perspicacity,  
 our present v. our future existence.  
 You must weave among the prickly pears  
 and cholla, admire ocotillo  
 but don't let it clip your ear, watch for  
 teddy bear and hedgehog near to the ground,  
 find some shade under a paloverde  
 as bees and flies pollinate creosote.  
 It's ice and snow far as the eye can see.

35

Yeats and every extant poet has bet  
a poem is a living, breathing, growing thing  
that outlasts the holocaust even when  
the page this poem is on burns. No kidding.  
You really can't know for certain whether  
people are sapiens, zombies or machines.  
Binary thinking isn't bad per se,  
a survival tool that evolved to be  
a heuristic aid for making decisions  
in a threat-filled environment, however,  
it's a cognitive bias that reduces  
situations to two opposing options  
either or, good bad, right wrong, us them,  
something nothing, being doing, input output,  
whatever forever, twist and shout.

36

Never say never say never again.  
The good life's all around us, not to say  
there is no significance or purpose.  
Effortless mastery, Bobby baby.  
Outside the circle of sex, the calculus,  
the chestnut, the cactus, the coral, all  
we do not know about our nation's history,  
the exterminating terminator.  
Great buildings are built that nature destroys  
with a little wind, water, fire, air.  
All things fall and are built again by men  
in hardhats who voted for our opponents.  
We've got to live together and not get shot  
by ISIS or ICE or anyone else.  
Love that's learned to love from earlier loves.

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