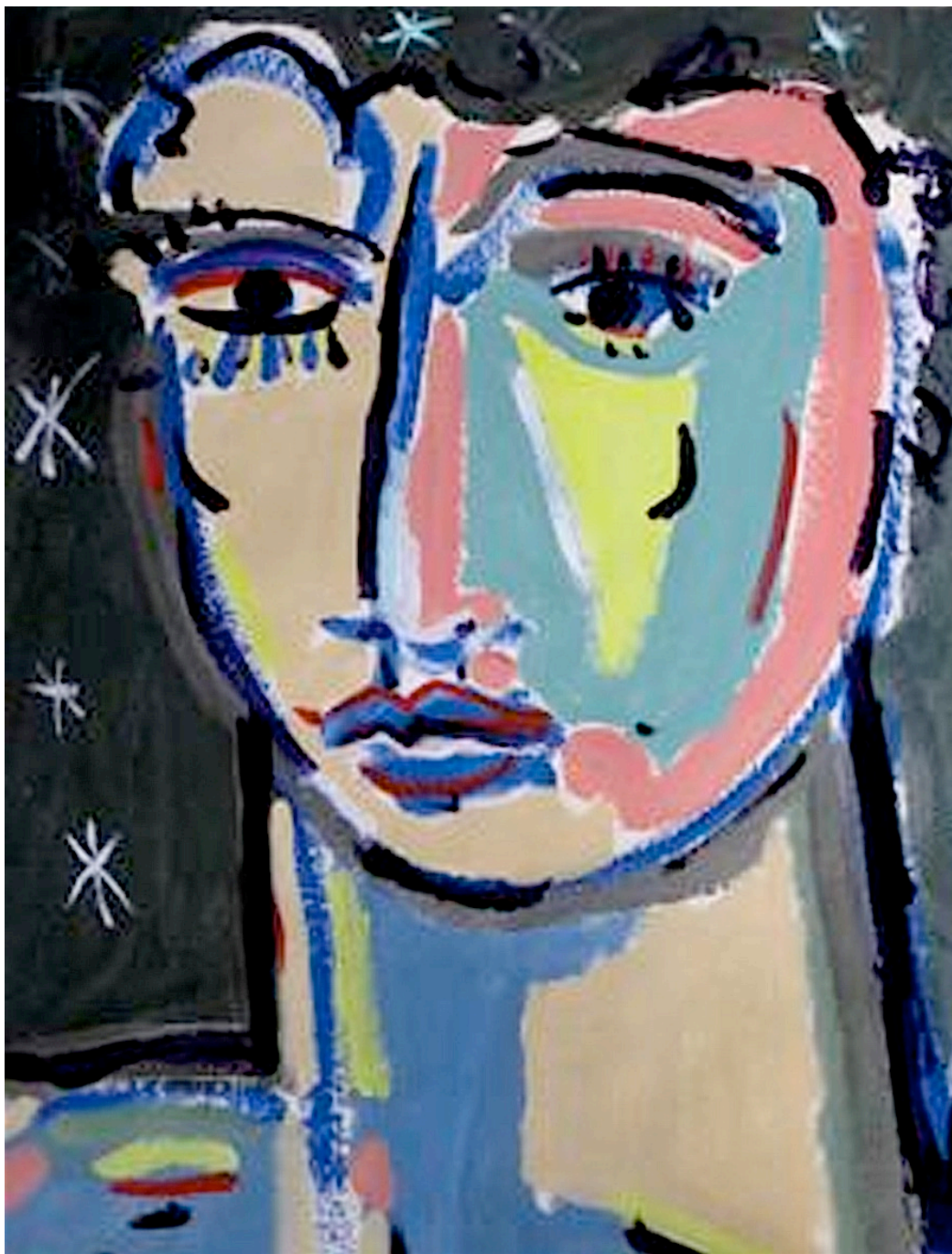


ONLY WORDS II



Gregory J. Furman

June 8 2002 to March 2 2003

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only a day

only a day
since i was in your arms
and you were in mine
only a day
since we were young
and love was new
only a day
since i first saw you
only a day

and still I hear the meadowlark sing

the children have ribs
like those of mexico city's dogs
the sight of their eyes
makes our hearts cry
and we cry in harmony

and still I hear the meadowlark sing
in the platinum light

the alzheimer patients
stand waiting in disheveled lines
trying to remember what they've forgot
their white robes filthy
their white pants wet

and still I hear the meadowlark sing
in the platinum light

the remains of the trade center all gone
the ground sanitized swept clean
the multitudes of photo of the missing dead
tattoo construction sites
the sad subway of our past
and still I hear the meadowlark sing
in the platinum light

the birds are burning
falling like souls lost in flight
we are still breathing their bodies
as the charred Hudson forgets the sea

and flows into the night

and still I hear the meadowlark sing
in the platinum light

my mother your mother
mothers all children all
sit in dark rooms of their making
weeping for their beloveds
for all the echoes of their years

and still I hear the meadowlark sing
in the platinum light

children still laugh in the parks
dogs still leap for joy
our golden suns still rise and fall
and if our fluttering eyes were hearts
we'd all be bathed in tears of blood

and still I hear the meadowlark sing
in the platinum light

small red winged beetle

what is fame
against the blue and green horizon
the small red winged beetle flies
tiny interlude between tiny thoughts
saturday's clouds parked in the sky
like old campers
each day the winged sun sets
sunset shedding light on my ignorance
and still i wish i knew
the small red winged beetle's name

the farthest kill at little big horn

his silent obituary stone a paraphrase
of antoine de st. exupery's
"I fly because it releases my mind
from the tyranny of petty things."
and fly he did
the west point case study
calls it tactical disintegration
when firing at "target" ceases
men shoot or throw their weapons into the air
imagine their terror

seeing comrades scalped alive
how it would feed a skilled runner's gait
seeing skulls stove in
brains freed by stone tomahawks
to feed the yellow prairie grass
his soiled trousers
slowing his panicked race to the horizon
one sioux brave on a palomino rising
saw the far figure's flapping arms
and cut his rude flight
with a knife through the carotid
severing the sad genitals, eyes and ears
so this nameless enemy
would not reproduce see hear or ride
in his life after this his pale life
his marble ghost marker white on the rise
marks the one closest to escape
of all the 268 "tactically disintegrated"
the one who most wished for deliverance
from the relentless magnet of his fear

eight cormorants on a branch in the hudson

score by a composer
who understood
the unimportance of parallel lines
eight cormorants on a branch
placed like black hats on a wavy rack
watch the yellow bowler derby
of the sun tip its brim
to monday afternoon in june

table three train to rhinecliff

plastic glass
embossed amtrak logo
table three
train to rhinecliff
thank you for not smoking
seat check destination
amtrak date
keep in sight
coors bottles facing
the front of the car
a white napkin
new york times magazines
the shadow of my hand
holding a felt tip pen

the letters of my handwriting
appear in blue scroll
on the lined notebook
sun shining through train windows
view of bridge at poughkeepsie
train emerging from tunnel
taste of beer
air conditioned car
smoke blue river
yachts in the marina
white birds on a smoke blue page

people at work

children in baseball caps and shorts
put into cabs by their mothers
who have to get to work
fedex guys arranging parcels
ups doing same
seems everyone is working
or thinking of work
or on their way to work
i am on my way to work
everyone's at their tasks or desks
come rain sleet sun or snow
taxi drivers driving typists typing
the hive's buzz buzzing
here in new york city
the east river flows
working its way
under the gray span of the triboro
the bridge working
the trestle working
all blue like monet would have it
artists working colors working
like the blue lines of this notebook
printer working presses working
sun showing the shadow of my moving hand
sun working clouds working too
and the shadow of the felt tip pen moving on the page
the factories working
people caught up in what they do
are beautiful to watch
caught in the camera of our eyes
tourists working
putting one foot in front of the other
doing whatever tourist do

the towers of their collected energy
shining up through the smog to the sun
the sun smiling
like the mona lisa
the museums and galleries working
like your last photograph
the photographers working
or certain illuminated manuscripts
the calligraphers working
our golden age
the media working
people at work utterly consumed
utterly unconscious unaware
of how beautiful they truly are

red squirrel in the house 3:30 a.m.

chickaree
adirondack red
somehow gained entry
turned attention to inner door
you could hear the chewing
and in the cartoon hear the chewing
see the rusty robed four legged monk
inscribing letters in the door
like those of illuminated manuscripts of old
kabalistic letters in sawdust trails

permission to do nothing

the final legacy of art and religion
is permission to do nothing
but experience the present
by 50 i wanted nothing
but was unable to afford it
it's time to clean all closets
open overstuffed and blocked spaces
to spend nothing
to breath in and out
the not quite eternal now

i am the little man

i am the little man
not unlike a gnat
in a cloud of gnats
or a flea on the back of a cat
a breath
in a lifetime of breaths

one word
in a university of words
a footprint after the blizzard
when sun begins to melt the snow
i am the little man
a trembling leaf
in a forest of trembling leaves
a straw
in a word of barns full of straw
a broken string on a broken guitar
in a millennium of broken guitars
a thought
which no one remembers
not even i as i awake

i am the little man
a tiny flame
on a single birthday candle
in earth's birthday cake
whose only aim is to blaze
and be blown out as a wish
i am the little man
when i look up at the moon
i am always erased
by the brightness of her face

i am the little man
someone is writing me down
spelling my tiny name in the autumn sky
not like a star
in a constellation of stars
not like a drop of rain
in a sudden downpour of rain
not like a dream
in a life dreams
but a small song sung by another

i am the little man
a familiar fragrance
in a field of unfamiliar fragrances
a single brush stroke
in the hermitage or the louvre
a grain of salt
in the great salt lake
a feather
that has become a pen

and writes the sound of tears again

i am the little man
a single hair
from the head of a single man
among the heads of all time's men
a sunflower
in the field of van gogh's hungry eye
the day he filled his last canvas with light
small son of a small sun

the necessary stranger

to find my self
i have become an outcast
chasing the dream of myself
hunting in the hall of mirrors
between sleep awake and wake
the necessary stranger
foreigner in my own home
visitor within my own heart
i have become the one ignored
to know rejection
i have embraced suffering
to find myself
i've had to lose myself
to love myself
i've had to burn myself
to ash to the ground

prayer to my father

for those who say an absurdly
cruel anonymous and fearful dark
is all our voice in mine over some felt transom
says "no!" and makes me bold
i hear you when i hear my own voice
i hear you in my blood's imagination
i hear you singing in my dreams
in some eternal garden pulling weeds
in some eternal kitchen making ice tea
in your blue-striped under shorts
sweatband in your sweaty forehead
sweating over the old sink
battalions of lipton tea bags bellies up in steaming pots
in hotter longer augusts of childhood
can you hear me, daddy?
like some determined work horse

your simplicity and gentleness
your kindness even in anger
the heart you brought to everything
which finally betrayed you twice
once when you were only two years older
than i writing now and once last
my mother's account of your eyes rolling back
the slab chill of your forehead
in the funeral parlor when i kissed you last
not good-bye not good-bye not good-bye
waking in the dark of 3 a.m.
we miss you, daddy
in us your bright voice speaks
says forward
says scale the heights of fear scale them
says hear the other voices them
says listen listen listen
we can hear you in this other room we can
we are waiting for you to walk the midnight stairs
to rise up through the celestial attic's door
where we all sit waiting
waiting and smiling down upon you
drinking iced tea and smoking lucky strikes
all our broken hearts together
singing good night irene or let me call you sweetheart
or other songs sung in other broken worlds
since the first songs were first sung
listen listen listen
from the other side you make me hear
not in my doubting mind
but in my doubting heart

wanda's hands

dark the deep of night
when i wake in cold hotels
and hear the hum of air conditioners
and the vents like some mad mechanical beasts
breathing everyone's small breaths
recycling breaths like massive mechanical lung
before the cure for polio was found,
breathing me insignificant in room 3303

i think of the point on the map where i am
and the point on the map where you are
and draw the line of Donne's compass
from my heart to your and yours to mine

and in the silent cubicle of this sterile hotel,
where lingers the not so faintly antiseptic
smells of dueling room fresheners
and industrial waxes
i think of your hands' touch.

i take comfort in remembering
the simple fact
of your hands' touch

putting dishes into the dishwasher
quieter and always more gently than i
rearranging and changing
one book on gardening from here to there
one ironstone bowl from here to there
touching sunflowers or pink roses
kneeling in the garden to remove
the dried stems and blown flowers
of hosta daffodil or dogwood
petting our cat
or pouring water in a vase for winter tulips

your hands
are like winter light gracing narcissus
or the idea of generosity
or a warm and fluent female sun
in a warm country with a forgiving turquoise sea

the presence of your hands
the memory of your hands
your simple touch
contains mercy without boundary
your simple touch
defines quiet and the best of me
county cabins of calm and peace
no need for the convolutions of analysis

we who live too much in our heads
do occasionally recognize a good thing
do occasionally simplify our frantic complications
and in those plain moments
breathe clearly as one does in a balsam wood
or near an open sea
and say to all who understand:

i pray it will end

for the two of us
with my hands in yours
or your hands in mine
glad for our time
glad for our touch
glad for the touch
of your hands in mine
of my hands in yours.

perfect sunset no film no camera

the towhee is singing
drink your tea drink your tea
the red breasted grosebeck
tweedle leedle leedle leedle
the nimbus clouds over the far meadow
and the new green of late spring singing too
the cardinals woo-eeep woo-eeep chir chir chir chir
this spot of now so green
these skies so blue so blue
this green(here name landscape artists you really love)
whose summer sun and shade green
shadow and brighten and shift as cloud glades move by
manet's petit dejeuner
or monet's boathouses
or pissaro or john marin or milton avery
the sky's opening up
and the grass is a broadway musical
evergreen like you'd find it on a full lit stage
kicking up its emerald green shoes
like the dancers in oklahoma annie get your gun
or dorothy's kansas a kingdom by the sea
king birds and phoebes hover over the fields
fat cock robins get the dusky worms
rising to the cool of night mid may
constables' clouds constable's own clouds
and the light at 7:49 p.m.
is like a deep contentment of the heart
that we all crave
and few find
perfect sunset
no film no camera
for this beautiful night
but the film of my mind
to the light of your eye
watching my hand scratch out these words
on the turquoise lined pad

the film of my mind....
the film of my eye...
to the light of your eye
the light o your heart
to the light of my heart
illuminated projectors
this must be what they mean by “art”

photographs of two of my sister’s paintings

first photograph: “hospice memory”

this was painted by one
well acquainted with death
and all its throes
where hearts and mouths ooze
pustule green and facial excreta
there’s the circle of pain
the poor pink palms
on either side of the clock
half a women’s torso
or half a castrated man’s
the image is ambivalent
a ninja turtle figure bound
amputated hands and feet
walking on and swinging the stumps
a red worm or intestine
swings down from the circle of time
and a red fence electrified in yellow
leads the lurching blind figure
its eyes bound shut
into viewers’ living rooms
under an all knowing chocolate chip cookie
which could be a cartoon face or dark moon
is a cemetery of 31 headstones all blue
is it a lamb from sherri lewis
or the lamb of god
or just a shape that looks like a lamb
signed justine
paintings her history
undaunted by pain
or poisonous cocktails
coals of fire or the ever present and past
realities of suffering mayhem and death
signed justine, my sister, justine

second photograph: “signature painting”

the palette announces itself first

hot oinks light blues pinks or greens
butter and butterfly yellows
some somber institutional roses and purples
like the bricks of schools, hospitals or asylums
in place of an open sky
the painting has two halves
the upper justine's name
an ideogram in pastel shades
a swam "j" a serpent "s"
an "n" grafted to an "i"
like a chemistry experiment
above the name the "t" of roofs
a train or institution
and trees like those outside
the bedrooms of our childhoods
the lower half is the mouth
which is the life and center of
a mardi gras or carnival face
of a women whose eyes are swimming
in the tissue that is memory beginning
eve eva event evanescent
the butterfly your third eye
and below an odd biology
of what could be paramecia
condoms or pale pink penises
the mouth like a wish granted
seems to come genie like
from a prescription or perfume bottle
and under the name of eve in primary red
is a uterus heart or fountain "u"
surrounded by the pink of vulnerable skin
everything is itself
and yet within the shopping basket
of the pine wood frame
the composite face doesn't smile
but is mysteriously determined
to point to the artist's signature
connected by the "e" like a white piece of yarn
to what appears to be a boy's or animal's pink penis
or some other pink breast
or pink moon with a nipple
that the puzzle comes together
in a harlequin's face
has the force of a dark secret shared
compared to "hospice memory"
it is a happy surreal landscape

no more sinister
than too many cartoons on a rainy saturday
or deciding to get out of bed
the morning after the day and night before
or thinking about frida kahlo's final triumph
over evil cruelty and pain

for garcia lorca

inside every beating heart
is the king of the crickets
and inside the beating heart
of the king of the crickets
is the blue lullaby all mothers sing
and inside the blue lullaby all mothers sing
is the emerald swift of joy
which swoops and dives
hunting the golden hatch of spinning mayflies
whose diaphanous hearts rise up
from the river bottoms
and fall down
from the tops of trees

valediction on use of the word diaphanous

most critical lexicons and 'ographers'
will fine the word
for being too pretty or ornate
but it's ok
when the moon
like a classic bentley roadster
pulls up high in summer sky
and the celebrity clouds step out
to delight starwatchers
all oohs and ahas
to use the word like an oscar:
"diaphanous"

if you substitute the word sheer
it means too little
like sheep famers cutting fleece
or tabloid ads for lady's underwear
but when the weather furrows its charcoal brow
and the sky opens up
like a giant front end loader
and the rain pours down in sheets
varnishing everything in a silver sheen
it's ok to whisper

as summer storms sing to us:
“diaphanous”

you wouldn't apply it
to the work of oldenberg rauschenberg or grooms
but of an evening
at the metropolitan museum of art
walking through the Grecian gallery
and feeling the flow of fabric blown by wind
or drenched by rain
caught and cut in stone
or standing by Monet's river's edge
or Hiroshige's winter bridge
you might be inclined to say quietly to yourself:
“diaphanous”

one evening on the screened –in porch

one evening on the screened –in porch
you're listening to the rocking obbligato
of crickets wood frogs and toads
fireflies are rising up from near the marsh
like steam off tarpaper roofs in harlem
or seltzer bubbles in glasses in cool dark rooms
they're carrying placards
which say. “just try and collect us!”
and they are wearing odd costumes
one dressed like a sheriff
another in leg irons dragging a ball and chain
his outfit all black and white stripes
looking like madonna or sophia loren
a crowd of warner brother and disney characters
roadrunner and wily coyote among them
all milling about or chasing one another
and on horizon amorphous shapes lining up
to finalize their licensing and trademark rights
before showing us who they really are
as they parachute from the imagination's clouds
and land in the dark streets of reality junction
the fireflies punctuating the darkness
like drunk copy editors after a deadline
lining up at a neighborhood bars
and when you hear that dog bark
you think. “pluto?” but it's actually mars
you look in the mirror
as you unzip a labrador brown zipper
and see yourself emerging from a dog suit

naked as the night of your last hot bath
you look up and you realize
you're standing in the rotunda
of the cathedral of st. john the divine
having missed the blessing of the animals
and the birthday of st. francis of assisi by weeks
a voice booms, "welcome to paradise!"
and in the morning the lawn boys
find your body i your rocking chair
copy of "the son of the morning star"
evan connel's meticulous account
of custer and the little big horn
opened to page 296 on the screened -porch floor:
"...the claybank cream with black mane and tail...
the official seventh cavalry transcript
lists Commanche as a bay, weight 925 pounds,
height 15 hands, date of birth 1862,
itemizing 12 scare from battle wounds,
reputed last survivor of little big horn,
found sitting on his haunches
pocked with arrows and bullets and bleeding
(the book for blood thirsty juveniles says 28 wounds)
now preserved in a humidity-controlled glass case
at the university of Kansas
where he endures generations of sophomoric humor
and the pilgrim admiration of the occasional horse historian."

aboriginal dream

the penis-headed stone man
vast i width and size
turgid in command
vicious and totally blind
lurches through our dreams
hard and dumb and proud

miro and his landscapes

it's a bit cute
the way he surgically depicts
the carnage and cartoon like battle
that is life at its most primary
how i love miro
things eat one another
and smile
and everything smiles back
the lines smile
and revel in being seen

numbers are people
geometries are animals
guitars are played by butterflies
and if a fly lands on your finger
when you're writing a dancing letter
or on the landscape of your toe
with the vast proscenium of the blue atlantic
as an oceanic backdrop backdrop
you're reminded of phalluses and cunts
all happy individuals' happy insects
all smiley on forty-foot canvases
and giving every seed pod
snatched by horny winds
a little blow in the right direction
stars moons and anthropomorphics
happy animals happy clouds
which could turn on you
and bite you to the bone
but to have been bitten and to bleed
even though to the very marrow
would be part of the comprehensive joy
sorrow would at best be comedy with wings
pain and horror
bulls and gnashing animals you could love
because they too are trapped
like matadors in the bloody ring
and everything burns and radiates light
and smiles and glows so sweetly
and sings dust
and sings fire
and their fires sing
and their blood in the dust
sings too

the birdhouse and the bench

by the old willow
a birdhouse and a bench
put there by my one true love
like the inventor of the wrench
they turn on one another
the willow the birdhouse and the bench
their whites are old
their structures bent
in time and seasons' clench
their shapes are worn
as only love can be

the phone is ringing
the birds are singing
old sounds of memory and dreams
seasons by time softly shorn
by the old willow
the birdhouse and the bench

**the way a calm river flows out
in circles from the rocks on shore**
so much of it comes back to circles
widening from a center
until the circles have vanished
as a pebble thrown registers in rings
until its energy becomes the waters' surface
which is another grand circle
Hudson river to the Atlantic sea
season to a sea of seasons
on calmer days the pattern more obvious
calm and calmer and calming
to be in the great ebb and flow of it
in the blue diamond light
the great eternal blue heron
flying low and close to the slate shore
majestic blue wings
flying and gliding
gliding and flying
with no effort apparent
the bird's gray and the rock's gray
air bound and earthbound
sweet water tiding it all over
a kind of grand circle
until seeing at eye level
no more than twelve feet away
spellbound the staring primate
the heron sweeps out river center
wakes us from our dream
and makes its way down stream

by choice
my only companions
the solitary cricket
the clatter of birds
the crows cawing black
into the sunday sun

skinny pigeon

all feathers
quill and bone

promoth

soft light-seeking promotion
“promote” with a lisp
NFL flying insect
people in favor of moths
highly professional moth
misspelled word for mouth
with well-cared-for teeth

the notion of editing in 2002

writers rise up
write what you want
just don't fall into the trap
of “don't release it
until it's ‘perfect’”
and you've edited out
glossed over
made pretty
or whitewashed
the brutal truth

cricket at midnight

you could do a lot worse
you get to sing
all summer long
well into fall if you're tough
watch summer nights come down on the fields
like the hand of a heartbroken mother
on the brow of a dying son
hear the neighboring dog howl
to his cousins the coyotes
life is not too bad
the woodpile for safety
from the voracious mole
night cooling your dark earth down
the moon and stars your nightlights
and for your tiny insect soul
each new day at dawn
a sweet drink of dew
served on every blade of grass
just for you
black as a tuxedo

what is it about bugs?

it's their dopey fury

the bumble bee, for example,
smashing his face into one big screen then another
of the big screens on the big screened porch

the predictable moths
inventing ways each soft night
to slip under every window screen
to mate with unresponsive night lights
and wake up trapped inside in light of day

the ravenous and maniacal deer fly
who failing to distinguish man from horse
is slapped to death by man
slick with tanning oil
in a pink inflatable arm chair
in an aquamarine pool

the insidious deer tick
uncrushable field lamprey
hitching rides from fields grass tips
on to hairy mammal trains
infecting blood while drinking blood

the solitary cricket
blackest black in the palette of blacks
some bronze as cast and polished by foundry
sitting on leaf on pool not singing
knows an extreme situation
when stranded in one

the dragonflies
hovering like helicopters
patrolling for gnats

the architect wasps furious in their mud daubing
or in crafting their papier-mache nests

the goal oriented ants
whose only satisfaction it seems
is dragging objects larger than they long distances
forming conga lines of diligence
in pursuit of food, battle, relocation, or sex
once in great while you might observe one

washing his fierce ebony mandibles
like a cat pawing its jowls after a good meal

the ditsy butterflies
seemingly out of control and directionless
but however flighty
always flighty
always finding the bulls eye
of the tiger lily and the flower's heart
to unwind their coiled proboscis in

the dusty grasshoppers
legs like olympic hurdlers
spit like tobacco juice
changing their seats
in the bleachers of their yellow outfields
as the sun changes his place at bat
the livelong day

the gentle fireflies
with their mayonnaise jar funk
and sweet miner's lanterns
a net of lit knots in the willows
rising and falling with each throw
of night's dark breeze

encased in their medieval carapaces
the bugs are driven by some metallic soul
it's their dopey fury
that makes them perfect target for their predators
the phoebes flycatchers bats at dusk and us
it's their dopey fury
that carries them in mindless multitudes on multitudes on
millions on millions of generations on

it's their military lack of concern for the individual
and our horror of their having their bones on the outside
and their squash of guts within
that makes them repellent to us
terrible as portrayed by hieronymous boch
where he intimates not so subtly
that our voracious and unquenched blood lust
as a race comes directly from them
and we haven't shaken it or them
for all the pins we've stuck in their chitinous spines
could find such furious nest in our raging blood

their larva a hatchery for out lust for mayhem

why the buddha smiles

he is in the anechoic chamber at Harvard
and he hears only his own blood pulsing
his own nervous system thrumming
it's sunday and the phones won't ring
in the field of his mind where he sits
on a woven matt of yellow grass
he sees only the morning sun
drying the field dew
and a doe and a spotted fawn pause
at the fair end of this field
who observe his suspicious stillness
her spear shaped ears like satellite dishes
the fawn lollygagging about
little white flyswatter of a trail
agitated as a cat's
contrapuntal metronome
to his anechoic chamber

diminishing: moon and cloud 10:52 p.m. july 16

facing the gibbous moon
a single cloud
with a face like fidel castro
becomes a tiny abraham lincoln
and then howard cosell's toupee
the willow and the fallen maples
the maple and the fallen maples
the ailanthus and the old locusts
are cut out of a cobalt sky
by scissors of starlight
like silhouettes of school children's faces
cut in miniature out of matt black crepe
the crickets are expressing their admiration
and the july wind softly agrees
as the july moon softly sets

riverscape

that 'point a' is removed
from 'point b' far away
so that the white boat
on the gray river
appears a child's toy
under the palisades vault
say a quarter mile from 'point b'

there are a hundred lines radiating
cables of influence sun rays
a shining open hand to 'point a'
tinkers with the illusions of scale
as a tinsmith cuts
the shapes of flying birds
from the yielding tin
his eyes concentrating
on sharp edge on flat form
at the same time
his flying silver birds
are given flight with every snip
of the tinsmith's shears

the masquerades of the unexpected

the fact of kitten and cockroaches
who show up unannounced
with fierce persistence or trusting charm
to our delight or scorn
only tells is that symbiotic species
always find us and our random trail
and surf the waves of our abundance
or our reluctance to say "die!"
when you switch the city lights o at 3 a.m.
and in the tub find a commercial for raid
or you walk outside the country door
and find two kittens singing,
"so where's the kitty kibble, pal?"
the fact of kittens and cockroaches
and other masquerades of the unexpected
can be counted on to cross our paths
in different guises as we hope against hope
that we're above surprise illusion or intrusion
thinking if we stay immune remain aloof
maybe nothing will ever change
maybe everything will stay the same

house of voices

sometimes it outs down
the bloody bone it's gnawing on
its metal tongs its scalpel its needles or its pen
to stare into the dumb and howling distance
to listen for an instant to its many names
being called and calling
before bending to its awful labor once again

letter from yourself in the hour

when you're drunk with pain

in the hour when you're drunk with pain
in the hour when you're swept away
in the hour when you fall in love
and everything is new again
never forget what new means
forever hold that memory as true
and live at that mean edge
on that heightened plane
be happy that you are here
be full of joy live in love
charged with love's diamond light
and from the dizzying whirlpool remember
that now is a precipice
from which we all must plunge
in joy or in love
free or not
your choice is you
yours to choose
signed
yours truly
you

cat listening to the catbird cry

moonpie- part mahogany striped tiger,
part leopard spotted bengal
hears the catbird cry
his attention is to a nearness
voice of gray mimic
enough to make him pause
and listen in his tracks so keenly
it's as if he asks himself
why would a quaker bird
with a rusty rump
make a sound so close to mine
that it stops me in my field walk
distracts me from musk of mice and voles
and under the cloud of dusk
forces me to wonder what and why

the shift from records to cds

a larger circle becomes a smaller circle
a diamond needle replaced by a needle of light
and when i hear you i feel all right

yet you contain in a tenth the space
the music of our loves and times
our friend the still spinning center
the electricity of this crazy world's rhymes

you turn us all around and on
as if some one flipped a universal switch
and all of a sudden the power's on
and we light up like 200 watt light bulbs singing

preserving beethoven or bach or fidelio
you present us with that cloud of dust the past
long after the bones and bella cantos
are mostly must or Mozart
that you're still round
like the circle of our seasons and our dreams
makes your sound play warm and round as the sun

moonpie

he lands with a flop
making hardly a sound
in the obliging last stand of a new england asters
at summer's end he's but an indentation
in the tall grass mahogany black and tan
everything about him is stiletto and rapier
from the ocelot lean of his long frame
to the bengal sharpness of his claws
the catcher mitt of his injured paw
no longer swollen and held aloft
the fur shaved not grown back
the only memory of his now healed battle wound

scenes from movies that i always carry with me

from papillon

at the end or so it may seem
we're all on a precipice
shaking and looking out from above
at the infinite horizon
throwing coconuts down
as flotation devices
into a raging merciless sea
yet if we leap with conviction
without letting our spirits break
there is occasionally on the other side
of this vast forbidding spanse

in the wake of oceans of waves
paris beautiful women wine
fine food music poetry and song
and for those with the greatest courage
love sweet love

also from papillon

when I look out of my prison cell
in this dungeon where
there is no blue sky or no sky blue
and ask those closest to me there
“how do i look? how so i look?”
as prisoners on death row often do
i see papillon asking
heart always fluttering after freedom
like richie havens sang it at woodstock
freedom freedom freedom freedom
and when they through an angled mirror lie
i realize i never should have asked
because i already knew
i just needed the song of another’s voice
to assure me that mine is still here
singing and asking and singing
today before I die

from the man who would be king

in the final scene
we’re all standing
on a creaking rope bridge
thousands of feet
above a vast chasm
might as well sing
a spirited military march
to god country queen and king
saints and sinners
and go out on a musical note

also from the man who would be king

the author’s a mere recorder
who catalogs the adventurer’s life
the man who would be king
is the man who survives all falls
to bring back from the brink in a bag
the severed head of his friend
as evidence and proof final
that any adventurers are left at all

what was vertical

the station kiosks advertising
talk show hosts or free bank checking
a lighthouse near a power plant
the palisades west side of hudson
an empty coca cola can
the weed three ailanthus
in railroad yards
the yellow cranes and ladders
the playgrounds' slides and swings
the ascent of birds
the factories' red brick walls
the pediments and fundamentals of bridges
the cellular towers
the masts of sailing whiter
than the cuffs of investments bankers
or potato chip dips
the street lights on this gray day
the flagpoles and their waving flags
the aspirations of our hearts
all our hopes and dreams

early fall

suddenly in the rain
it's all brown and rust
gray and yellow and red
dark orange and must
and still the flowers
of late summer persist
ragweed aster fleabane
side by side
with mushrooms
the size of human brains
puff ball
early fall

please touch

i'm no art exhibit
and you are a work of beauty
but sweetly malleable
i am a study in imperfection
and you the perfection of light
please touch

a real day off

sitting on the porch
a dark late august day
yo-yo ma playing
what pablo casuals played before
napping and interested in everything again
purring like tiny roto rooters
children' toy motor boats
attacking right now pounce!
the snort of the startled deer
eating the early apples
the crickets out early on a dark day
celebrating with great gusto
the very last days of summer
the horses clop clopping by
with their high breasted riders
and the black capped chickadees cheeing
dumb bugs hitting the porch screen
my glass and my glasses on the desk of my lap
the same as always obstreperous goldfinches
a long whistling kind of cricket or bug
providing the alto
to the brilliant cello base of bach
free on saturday
a real day off
kittens 'draw and tu' sleeping on my lap
exhausted from playing with the wire bind
of the stenographers's notebook
i'm still writing on

most important that we love

most important that we love
as fully as our weak hearts permit
to give out of love
of our briefest of lives
to give what's in our power to give

end of summer

how can you sum up
what it was to be a child
of the relentless school system
subject to dull pedantry and bored masters
to know weeks in advance
the looming of summer's end and school
to count the hours and the days
as a prisoner on death row awaits his day
and counts the hours and the days

the shortening of the sun
the dying of the trees and fields
the end of that crickets cry
to say the chilling lakes and oceans cry
the dying leaves the dying days cry
can not approximate the cry of children
of the relentless school system
who cry out inside with a vengeance
and rightful sense of rage
facing the end of summer
an endless year of school
stinky kid smells in the coat closets
dank rooms and streaming windows
with the snow or rain coming down
slower than the molasses of boredom
after a summer full
if imagination reverie and bliss
can you, reader, remember
those days long ago
can you, recreate their bright new sun
can you find the summer of your childhood
in all your turns and bends
slowly lightly lightly lightly brightly brightly slowly
to bear the weight of age so gracefully
that contrary to all evidence
you are younger than before?

the price of azaleas in 1988

for a dollar ninety-nine
an azalea bush in manhattan
was a good deal
sitting in a seventh avenue diner
eating a friend egg sandwich
i saw one

september crickets

within the stride of one step
six to a footprint flit from the cut grass
black black times number of steps
times six acres
infiltrating the base stems of things
disturbing by the rumbling of human shoes
the multipliers- foot, feet, feet per acre-
the measures of and wild flowers
lupine queen anne's lace goldenrod
new england asters, the crickets din

and you know why they and their kin
-you can't call it thunder-
and their pulsing seem a pulsing inland sea
insects and waves of the songs of insects
an inland sea which speaks and sings
with the exact persistence of ocean waves
indomitable and eternal
their short lived husks
their bodies and their simple songs
fertilizing the ever- rejuvenate fields

academic summaries of seven poems by billy collins

I. snow

the great white equalizer
is perfection calming chaos
no matter what you place against its fall
or choose to compare it with
its white notes
conduct the orchestra
of anything everything and all

II. paradelle for susan

too limited
nothing truly fits
too much time wasted counting syllables
using the same words when there are others

bird of your love
quick branch
waters below
my familiar pain
darkens the mountains
your letter flies
perched it remembers
another shore
the highest crossing
the nervous hand
the thinnest handwriting
our wedding band

III. bonsai

tiny tree inflates room
needles and thimbles become furniture
tiny things loom large

iv. afternoon with irish cows

the elusive cows of our dreams
plato's black and white
maps with legs and milk
inspiring apologies
from sculptures and artists and poets
down through the ages
moo moo and
multiples of moo

v. marginalia

shopping lists
notes in used books or texts
peoples' hidden smart or stupid thoughts
stream of consciousness graffiti
like galleries in the ufizzi
from parking lots outside supermarkets
or on the floor near checkout counters
bring their writing readers back to life:
"we are but dried ink now"
but if we touch your heart
are mundane as any husband or wife
we handwritten thoughts stumbled upon
not bought but simply found."

vi. taking off emily dickinson's clothes

poets are perverse
they can picture fucking
mystical spinster poets
before anyone else dares
they know what functions
tippets, clips, clasps, and whalebone stays perform
they can place the word "iceberg" next to "nakedness"
with no compunction
faster than you or i can close a bedroom door
faster than any old man
in front of a TV starts to snore

vii. moon

the child within us
is always there
to help us
cradled in our arms
to feel the ancient moon
standing in wonder
wonder in standing
the moonlight falling

like a beautiful woman's hair
this shining presence
is always there
the child within us
and the ancient ancient moon

fleeting early autumn

giddy yup giddy yup giddy yup
cries the fleeting autumn warbler
giddy yup giddy yup giddy yup
flies the fleeting early autumn

great mating and flying

the pair of dragonflies
are late mating and flying
no matter to them
under sunny september skies
that they're on time

justine's buzzard poem

that the high flying
eater of carrion
can be crowned
with the eagle's crown
gives hope to the ailanthus
commonly damned weed tree

bowl of tangerines on marble table in a painting by a matisse

they are an apparition
a still life miracle,
like the great sea beyond the room
or the great sea beyond the room
or the fronds of the date palms
seaside yellows blues and greens
filtering the gold of mediterranean morning light
so too the shadow of the light blue bowl
cadmium black as cadmium night
in which the tangerines glow
on the rose marble table
the usual paisley patterns play in folds
and the cross of four window panes
forms a sharp and joyous crucifixion
the windows crucified by the sun
the tangerines crucified by the morning light
the palms crucified by the window glass
our eyes crucified by the simple sight

of a bowl of tangerines on a marble table
in a painting by matisse
the crucifixion of the seeing and the seen
the crucifixion of what is and what has been
the crucifixion of the shining present the weeping past

what to do before publishing a book of poetry

write good poems
get them printed
make sure they delight someone other than yourself
have an alphabetical by title index of poems
find a decent photo of yourself
one you really like
that gives an inkling
of your eternal side
avoid readings
avoid philosophizing on why you write
treat the public forum
and the public as gingerly as possible
above all
keep your distance

simple subtraction

subtracting ourselves from equations
is like the flight of the morning dove
all but impossible for us
no matter how hard we flap our arms
until our one true love
goes away or is gone forever

and then i realize
how small my small worlds is
i am alone and lost
without you
my one true love
no matter how hard we flap our arms
until our one true love
goes away or is gone forever

and then i realize
how small my small world is
i am alone and lost
without you
my one true love
no matter how hard i flap my arms

people talking on cell phones on public transport

the volume of their voices
exceeds that required by a convention center
yes, when you can't see
the person you're talking to
it's important to project
but who suffers the tedious directions
to fax or e or do this or that?
the rest of their fellow travelers at once
giving tedious directions
to fax or e or do this or that
then no one would be disturbed

gifts

a beautiful silk tie
to show the marketplace i care
enough to change my ornament

an irreverent book
to inspire me to laughter
when i throw my whys against the skies

a glass of armagnac
to slow the pitch of a sliding firmament
and fly me back to the window of the stars

a small circle of friends
a joy to know who all think well of me
an afternoon in fall, a cup of tea

the way the willow bends
the smiles of the one i love
the cooing of the morning dove

the sallow disc of a fleeting moon
the fiery are of all things planetary
the lights of venus, jupiter or mars in june

for bill castagnoli on his 73rd

everytime i think of your cancelled checks
keeping you company in your coffin
wearing a suit, you, not the checks
all rubber banded together, the checks, not you,
all dressed up in Ralph, you and the checks,
they wearing tiny cashmere jackets
since they have no legs and need no pants

i always go into one of those laughing rants

for me you're a cross between
a roman emperor and that skinny kid
i never got to know in high school
that we'd both make supremely ugly women
is but one of things we have in common

trouble taking orders from women we love another
i say, wear what you want
(my nephew, timothy, often dressed like a fool,
wore cooking pots on his head
and his grandma's bear robe with no fear or dread)
our philosophy on this diverges
me resisting to the end
-too much like my mother

your sense of the ethical necessity of precision
in the written word had often focused me
and brought me up short to my betterment
your advice on business had always supported me
and lead me to some good decisions

i can see a certain logic
in your affecting the stance of a grand duke
in the medici court with yapping sleeve dog
especially when we three go bullfrog hunting
or when in your lap he hurls puke
at sixty or so on the Taconic
that you don't drink wine
coffee, cappuccino or espresso
and hate fresh tomatoes
will remain an anomaly and mystery
without precedent in Italian American history

your brain is young and clear
like a Venetian gondolier's
your body's cracked
as a Vatican hell,
we can't go back

so, write something great
our clocks tick tock in deed
and just because you don't look 98
doesn't mean you're guaranteed

celebrate!
do it your way!!
happy birthday!!!
September 22, 2002

madonna and child on delta flight 1089

crowned by a blond halo of furze
his head mostly hairless,
the size of a pail pink cantaloupe,
comforts the palm of her right hand
like a softball in a right fielder's glove
her thumb softly stroking his temple
feeling his happy pulse pulsing
her head wobbling like a baby's
or a weightlifter's relaxing after power lifts
it's a game they must often play
each time her head rolls around
on the ivory axis of her neck
his eyes squinch shut with delight
his laughter tinkling like wind chimes
and then he bursts into song
which sounds like a solo prayer fest
at a Buddhist monastery in Kyoto
or someone really happy to be gargling
for the very first time

a heart

they cut a heart out of an field
so all could walk around its edge and stare
it soon became a golden flower bed
and then a wound that bled maples red
maples and maple red everywhere

frida kahlo

i.
shipwrecked and wracked
she painted, no fuss
"whatever passes (d) though my (her) head
with no other consideration"
and, thus , we see our souls

ii.
she is dark, dark and beautiful
as warm nights in mexico
her black brows
preceded the nike swoosh

black eyes black eagles
dark vision no flight possible
iii.
she has corseted her upper body
with a white sheet
her head thrown back
muted by white sheet
muffling her screams
hiding the contortions of her face
the pillows, edges embroidered in red,
the room as naked
as her spread legged lower half
delivers an adult head
hair slick with afterbirth
the head of Frida Kahlo herself
bloody key to bloody lock
1932 "my birth"
oh! oh! oh! oh!

iv.
she now lies awake and bloody
on the black horizon of a hospital bed
red intravenous tubes
linking her ambiguously
(giving blood or getting poison?)
to a black toilet with black scalpels on its lid,
female hip and pelvis bronzed,
an orchid purple as a bruise,
a snail extraterrestrial embryo
and a manikin of her womb
the skies are deeply sliced
into infected blues and grays
"Henry Ford Hospital 1932"

v.
she is a blood spattered room
a naked Frida
one stiletto black highheel on one foot
Diego white shirt black hat
shirt and pants below his heart
spattered with her blood
a crow a raven and a dove
holding a white banner above
which proclaims as flags all do
"¡unos cuantos piquetitos!"
"I gave her a little prick!"

vi.

for all the fanfare of flowers,
shiny cloth and golden crown
Dimas Rosas is dead cold dead
that undertaker did a better job
of composing her hands than face
no one closed her eyes
postcards of the scourged christ
on her sad pillow
poor Dimas Rosas
daughter of frida and diego
dead at the age of three
dead and three
her still open eyes

vii.

to be split
neck to groin
like a melon
a steel column
driven rectum to brain
to live to know
to know and still to live
her tears are a hard rain
of hard cold and pearls
sorrow's sperm on her face

viii.

self- portraits with animals and birds
dogs, monkeys, panthers,
parrots, doves, ravens, hummingbirds
messengers from other havens all
take us in, return our stares
her face such a stoic black
expressionless as a wall
that we struggle our way in to her masque
and only when she paints or thinks of death
does she ever so slightly smile
only then

ix.

she stands weeping
one foot on a bloody shore
a severed bleeding heart
bigger than a saint bernard

cut and thrown to the ground
leaving a trail of blood
from the stormy mountains
to the salty sea

the other foot ready to disembark
-galleon of a shoe in full sail-
quietly threatens to tear her in half
she had no arms
disembodied they rest
in a school girls uniform
in a tijuana peasant's dress
rod like a see saw ridden by angry angels
teeters upward through a hole in her chest
where her heart was once a noah's ark

was once
through his hole
"memory, or the heart"
we saw dark clouds' heads
their hair cut short like a man's
blood red blood red
no rest no rest

x.
in their eyes we see our eyes' light
animals accompany us as our dear friends
fellow travelers on our paths of mysteries
they know something we do not
in their silent dignity
the impenetrable jungle night

xi.
the skeleton of death and dread
comes mined with fireworks and severed heads
flowers exploding from his bony chest
he sleeps above our treasured beds
our fragile honeycomb of dreams
blood red blood red
no rest no rest

xii.
we are melons
to be spilt and carved
"viva la Vida"
"long live Life"

carved into our living flesh
ringing in our aching hearts
for my sister, Justine September 22,2002

concrete poem

ouch!
ow!
aah ow!
aaaaahhh ow!
 aow!
oh! oh! oh! oh!
ends on on bad note
pain no pain
glows dark
kapow!

a contract with two kittens

me, you two, and meows
in fifteen years you'll be
fifteen and a half
mousey will be in cat heaven
and maybe, but i hope not, we too
here's the deal, furry feline friends:
this should be read in the lispy voice
of warmer brother sylvester, the cat:
you eat your kibble and stay fit at it
and we will too
through all the twists and turns and bends
and when the postman drives by
at the ends of our days
and we're sitting on the porch
in oranges and browns, all gray and rust
in october sweet october
we'll lift up our drowsy old heads
from our daydreaming naps
and think, :my, my, my....
fly away, fly away we must."
and then get back
to the hard work of resting
and finding peace true peace
for this our troubled world
if there is a world at all
that we can call our own
then sweet then

slippers lining

the kittens; savage attack
shreds the old slippers lining
like children opening presents
on Christmas morning
as if it were the first shredding
since the beginning of time

**how the sun rising over the atlantic
makes everything black**

the seagulls on their flat webbed feet
the poles and lines of surfcasters
dogs chasing dogs in the white surf
dogs fetching smooth gray sticks in the white surf
their masters puffing not far behind
couples holding hands
kite flyers and kits watchers
solitary walkers in procession
to the winding shore's vanishing point
readers on recliners reclining readers
red white and blue flags on the far bluffs
and the bluffs themselves
a trawler and boats under sail
surfers skimming the waves' crests
the sea is silver
as a broken mirror under spotlights
or the face of a diamond
and everything even vaguely vertical
is backlit and black
except the songs of silver waves
lighter than the day glo sun
except the songs of silver waves
softer than the shoeless runner's run

seagull tracks

you can picture them even in absentia
heads tucked into their chests
against a mild not' easter
or a small pebble that could be a crumb
with an intensity that could be called dementia
the mature ones don't scare easily
orange feet and black backed
as the somewhat addle-brained youths
who'll follow you like a feathered dog
whose knees bend the "wrong" way,
humanly speaking,
their footprints in the sand

cross tire treads and balloon strings
charred logs and broken shells
history of a morsel search
offering no logic but chaos random
but if you traced your tracks for a day,
even if you know yourself well
tell me how much more orderly
your path long forsaken by you
would appear after a day or two
of your having been there or here?
mere walking like going to church

lone figure

at the far of the beach
beneath a purple cabbage patch of clouds
the atlantic throws off spume and mist
like stallions' sweat steams on cold days
at the far end of the beach
beneath limestone schists
anticipating the october night
is a solitary figure, sex unknown-
my lost childhood?
my father, grandfather or my grandma ma?
or the simplest dream i ever dreamt?
as assassin a sister a brother?
an enemy or a lover?
in the just set sun's failing light
lone day soon to be long gone
lone figure lone figure
ever so slightly out of reach
like bach's unaccompanied cello suites
played by yo-yo ma

montauk fishermen at sunrise

the sun renders them black
exquisite cutouts
of hat and line and pole
receding like porcelain figurines
down the beach's sandy shelf
the ocean and wind and ocean wind
the morning sun on the breaking waves
orange as a bowl of tangerines

gull on gull

the immature black back
standing timorously by

observing the cannibalism
not out of propriety at the carcass
salted by the sea and sea air
chest cavity blown open
feathers matted with sea weed and sand
tangled in the purple ribbon
of a long ago burst party balloon
washed up by the incoming tide

their soaring flight and controlled glides
are so beautiful we forget the beauty
of their true function of clean up
which is their genetic destiny
you can see it shining
in their hunting reptile eyes
it was then that i found
the blood stone the color of dried blood
which rests on my writing desk
to remind me of the ever present
presence of cruel and arbitrary gods

saying goodbye to the ocean

such was my sadness, i almost said,
“seeing the ocean for the last time.”
but i would wish that on no one
my wish would be that our recall
be so sharp that each could build
from memory a model of our love
so precise and true to life
that like slide projectors
we could switch the apparatus on
and see the living replica on
and breathe the sweet sea air
and be present in the tidal company
of all we deeply love

**graffiti on a road sign
for the long island expressway
west to the midtown tunnel**

the letter “wwi”
were five feet tall
in silver neatly outlined in black
the artist had to scale the sign
thirty feet above a four-lane superhighway
cars speeding by at seventy below
the whole piece accompanied

by early morning darkness and headlight glare
the roar of flying steel
automatons looking up
wondering what urban fungus
could have created this blight
while he had the spray paint and vision
to risk his own arrogant life
and be young and bold enough
to call the act art

day to night

day to night
night to day
day in and day out
tonight today
day out and day in
day night
night day
light night
night light
light day
day light
out night
day in
out day
night in

gull stretching

standing on one yellow leg
extends the left wing
and left webbed foot straight out
skinny kid in a feather suit
and yellow work out pants
at a seaside aerobics class

the ocean sands

i.

the ocean sands
where beach once loped off
like a tan labrador fetching a bone
is now all sea, all salt sea
a rise double my height
only four years gone by.
my how the ocean grown.

ii

no painter, none,
has truly caught the feel
of your memory colors at dusk.
in all the history
of men smearing oil on canvas
the best is rust
compared to the present real
reel.

iii.
i see fire on the horizon
i smell, on, am lifted by the sea air
like chagall's bridegrooms
hearing the waves and wind roar
i toward the tiny red flicker
of a man-made fire,
smell the pine pitch of logs,
see the silhouettes of black dogs,
canine perfection at the vanishing point
on the beach at violet dusk
sun's flames mute, flatter and soar
each looks up from his or her pitch
and all of nature
the wind the sea the sand and we
roar and roar
a fine howling bitch

iv
tire tracks in the sand
the web of the four wheel drive
how would tintoretto paint it
how would your eyes in a quick glance
and knew it to be your last glance
how ell would your memory paint it quick

the sound of the wind
how the softening of solemn embers
of the falling sun's glow
so slow falling so slow
on the tan beach and on the gray horizon
tinted by the dark brush of the night
so quickly go
so quickly go
so solemnly
go

v

in few motel rooms or bungalows
are people lucky enough,
one or, more lucky, two,
to understand and be seaside in october
their lit lights are a kind of orange
of the kind you see
in carved pumpkins
with candles living in their orange hearts

dog prints foot prints kite prints bird prints
child thing man women animal bird ride
the lit lights are a kind or orange
a kind of orange courage courage
that brace us against the onset of night
that face the corset of night
the faces of houses
are their windows lit
that all that is
that is as is
will abide

vi

the time to be there
is when no one is there
the time to be there
is when no one knows
there is a there there
the time to be there
is when time is known
as tires treads,
or the sounds of waves,
or the singing stew of a few birds,
or a few bird songs,
or the lights in houses on the cliffs,
or the infamous sea
the dark, dark sea
and the white throated sparrow
singing solely for you and me
singing defeat then victory
brilliant and solitary

vii

it's like primal fear
or simple evaporations
when one looks directly

at the very worst
at the merciless infinite
of the gargantuan blood dark sea
when one knows one to be
so small so small so small
infinitesimally
et.al.

viii
the kelp is strewn
in salty disarray
like a body before burial
after a battle
in a strange war
between the land and the sea
like bodies
the waves crash in on one another
crash in on one another
in a strange war

ix
if you look west
into the rays of the dying sun
paw prints man prints shoe prints
finger prints truck prints toe prints
the laser eye recognition system-
which knows, the worst or the best-
opens the door to dusk
and early October
glows

x
the grays go progressively darker
from morning dove
to poor pilgrims' grab
to charcoal

charcoal clouds

clouds above the sea
and you, my love,
my dearest love,
and me

xi
jelly fish jelly fish

clear as gelatin
clear as shucked implants of human breast
on the salty sea shore
breast of wind, breast of sea,
breast of sand, breast of dune, breast of wind,
the wind and the sound of the wind,
the sea and the sound of the sea,
clear and tumescent,
firm as your first love's breast,
or you first erection
in the palm of your hand
on the tip of her tongue
light as your most fervent wish
jelly fish jelly fish

xii
salt,
salt, salt, and salt,
and salt

xiii
tears,
tears of joy
and tears of sorrow,
tears
waves of tears
and oceans of tears
years after years

xiv
smiles at dusk
and smiles tomorrow
it will be a long time
an infinity
until the sun smiles
on this rhythmic darkness
of sea and sand
and ocean
black as dried blood
smiles at dawn,
"the good "morrow"
after a full moon's yawn

xv
sun down
smiles and cries

over the ocean
your eyes
our eyes
sun up

not far from the ocean
not far from the dunes

not far from the ocean
not far from the dunes
like garbled radio tunes
in the belted tracks of tires
are nests of gull feather and weed
odd pieces of wind-sanded plastic
a bleached oreos cookie box
and a metropolis of broken shells
among them, the most distinguished,
the mussel shell sanded and cracked
to a salt spoon of enamel black
and a certain lively blue from matisse
when he lived on the mediterranean
or the blue of braque's primitive birds
poised to enter another world
of turgid clouds and hammered gold suns
a surging sea the clouds of coal bins
of olden days olden days
punctuated by a solitary naval orange
on a vast and complicated beach
that stretches far as the eye can see
who can possible tell this glory?
that stretches far as the eye can see
who can possibly tell this glory?
that stretches far as the eye can see

haikus

crows usually black
in light of first september
totally slate blue

give yourself the time
every hour that you need
do what you must do

september the first
cat purring in goldenrod
wind rustling through us

crickets harmonize
with chickadees in maples
the last butterflies
they are love war play
no harm to one another
learning repertoires

cannot be greedy
for genius riches or love
it's given or not

no musician
the moon comes up over trees
rachmaninoff still weeps

seeing the mansions
overlooking the hudson
form the poor side of the tracks

the lightness of dreams
which haunt us all live long day
never forgotten

aching in my heart
fall and we are all dying
back to earth, we leaves

you sound like you're dead
my mother said on the phone
long way from jersey

six three three eight eight
the trains numbered like dates
destination bound

permanent derail
cormorants drying their wings
still bit like flying

seeking the lost mind
i see the fallen mushrooms
day after the rain
the migrating birds
scared by the train rise up
black flock of a dream
black dream of a flock

gray riverworn branch
floats downriver to new york
pining for the sea

seeking the lost mind
i walk through my memories
stacked like firewood

seeking the lost mind
i see bridges i once sang
hear bells that once rang

seeking the lost mind
my cellphone forgets to ring
yet i know you've called

seeking the lost mind
everything's a song to sing
the music of your pulse

seeking the lost mind
everything's a song to sing
the music of your pulse

seeking the lost mind
we had a couple of beers
all move no one steers

play some monkey music
pale imaginings
unaccompanied

one time on a train
behind a sexy woman
broken on the shore
in a broken land
as empty as only the infinite can be."

the last flowers of fall

it's as if all of nature
conspired to the condition of Manet
on his deathbed, his leg amputated
and the infection that would kill him
festering, alas, festering
even then he began again to paint it new

a last series of flowers given him by friends-
white lilacs, as single rose, a lone chrysanthemum
to join him by his narrow bed

so these last few flowers of fall defy the end
of frost and death and fall after all
and brightly from their fallow field
butter and eggs, fleabane, small purple asters
in mid october fill a peasant's glass
and now inside this country kitchen
make every other hot house flower
the cultivated beauty queens and kings
look merely spoiled, fat, and crass

blue dog

blue dog blue dog
your bark is a shower of stars
roll over you old tick hound
in your great blue kennel of dark
baying your old blue dog howl
chasing constellations and planetary cars

blue dog blue dog
running round and round
before sun up
blue friend of the lark
before sun down
blue friend of the owl

yellow dog

yellow dog yellow dog
yellow dog of the sun
bark you r yellow bark loud
your empty belly
growling growling
in the empty summer sky

yellow dog yellow dog
no clouds of bone
no bones of cloud
thrown to your hungry
hunting yellow eye
yellow dog of the sun

red dog

red dog red dog

red dog of pain
bark away bark away
litter mate of cane
go away go away
do not darken
our poor doors again

gray dog

gray dog gray dog
gray dog of sleep
turn around turn around
when blizzards fill our streets

black dog

black dog black dog
black dog of hate
hide your fangs
hide your fangs

the cat in your lap

that the cat in your lap
doesn't bite your penis
is a gift from the gods
men are from mars,
cats are not dogs-
they all come from venus.

the bodies of the leaves

walking on a gold cliché
the bodies of leaves are leaving
an old yellow net beneath my feet
as we are leaving it is fall again
as they are leaving us
we are leaving one another
and we are leaving them
isn't it beautiful sad
that by spring another
fall season will be born
out of cold falling rain
and all bodies if the leaves
that fall beneath our feet today
will enter deep into the earth
will all be old and gone forever
as a net of green
soon to be forgotten
now unseen come spring

will make us glad again

monterey bay

six trawlers with motorized dinghies
setting the big circular loop of their purse seines
the gulls myriad as flies
hills far across the bay a shade of rose
bay waters a shade of turquoise blue
that would in a watercolor feel fake
the great black backed gulls soaring
the kelp beds black in the last light of day
the treeless hills now purple
and birds and the reflections of birds
moving over the dark waters
the sea otters using their talis like rudders
to stabilize their cute float
never impatient in forage
comedians on their backs whacking away
at mussels or clams on their bellies
lolling lugs on a rolling rug of sea
in their own living room the bay
joined by a companion gulls
waiting for a free feed
the harbor seals, earless sea pups,
barking goodbye to the day
the cormorants skimming the surface
their black reflections shadowing them below
red kayaks yellow kayaks a single silver canoe
all following a line of brown uniforms
suddenly set free from their classes
following a knotted rope on their way
to the dark rooms of the great aquarium
such a surprise of light and dark
that it is a radiating miracle
that everyone on shore
has not spontaneously burst
into the hols flames of alleluias
and the intricate celebrations
of mozart's coronation masses
a crowd of gnats like tiny notes
drinking the black ink
from my felt tip pen
day's door closes
monterey bay
in a blaze

requim for space and time

one thing is both false and true
we all live in here together now
here being the grand flux matter
colliding like muti-colored bumper matter
in multitudes of galaxies and private amusement parks
animal crackers in a cosmic noah's ark
we ideas of ourselves all in a row
we imaginational imagineering's
one and all without mornings
drifting through like jewels or tropical fish
in the aquarium of every day
we ideas and notions of one another
we concepts of our world seen and unseen
viewed as if by tiny silver astronauts
from the powder gray surface of the moon
our little blue and green marble earth
in the black velvet sandlot of outer eyes

we all live in the capsules of our minds' eyes
like children reading
under our blankets past bedtime
suspended in belief or disbelief
rebels with flashlights defying parental curfews
delirious in our adventures and dreams
no traffic lights or stops signs here
just the diamond beacon of how we truly feel
about ourselves and one another
and precisely what that feeling
causes is to do or to become
in this wandering ethernet
flap your wings, my fellow fledglings,
my dearest sister and brothers,
cosmonauts all twist and shout
for once for one and for all
make it right make it forever new
for Melinda Davis, friend and futurist

flying

to be encased
in a monstrous welded tube of steel
sealed with steel rivets all around
thirty thousand feet above planet earth
to breathe the fetid oxygenated air
fro two, eight, sixteen, twenty-four hours

and feels your nasal cavities dry up
and your back and muscles dry up
to eat the tepid foods
and plastic snacks
even in the “upper” class
with a wider recliner
one one’s wider recliner
on one’s wider ass
stuck here stuck there
is to know the joy
of going nowhere
to know the joy
of being on the ground
sweet earth’s fairs ground

black birds in the tree tops

brave against the fickle weather

the clouds have the character of ocean salt
low as the grand waves rolling in
with disdain for the interior’s interims
and civilization’s vast excessive conveniences
the black birds in the tree tops understand
the rawness of the weather’s shifts
the drift from sun to fog
brave against the fickle weather
heads up in silent song
looking beyond looking
beyond the silent rolling clouds
to some feathered understanding
of what some might call “god”

woman pruning a privet topiary in the rain

on ennismore gardens muse at 7a.m.

certain actions falsely reassure us
hopes of a semblance of order
make us make dress up live it up
take the time to care for little things
of even less account than our itch-mite selves
and yet, not surprisingly, trust
that nobility is still alive there and here
in an elderly woman in her bathrobe
pruning a privet topiary in the rain
to resemble a suburban dairy queen cone
on saint parick’s day in London
its emerald green swirl haircut
its ascending groomed spiral

a mirror of the futility of hope
a mirror of the nobility of hope
of moments ordered and evergreen
not with garden shears
but with simple office scissors
before anyone has awakened
to feel or see the light rain
falling on ennismore gardens mews
this gray and dreary London day
an elderly woman in her bathrobe
prunes a privet topiary in the rain
the tiny round leaves falling
green shadow at the base
beneath a red pot of fired potters clay

how few UK pigeons have three toes

it's hard scrabble
life as a pigeon in london
their smallest but painful risk
losing toes and walking on pink stumps
until they heal
ruffling packages of crisps
for remnant crumbs
descending in gray hoards
to toss the neon bags
until their salty treasures yield
vying with no-toed, two or three toed cousins
over tasty bits
and walking on amputated joints
until they heal
the sheen of their phosphorescent feathers
and their sharp red eyes
no consolation to them
but colorful to us
none the less

the geese

they always fly in V's
long column to buffer prevailing winds
short column for respite
rotating rests in shifts
and flying black
against the gray fall sky
the leaves below in yellow circles
at the base of naked sugar maples
the geese honking down on it all

red and rust and yellow in drifts
gray senior citizens
taking their afternoon teas
in rest' homes in shifts

slipstream

a rebellious student
with a radical flare
the jet at forty thousand feet
leaves a chalk white trail
white across the blackboard
of the november sky
a defiant graffiti line
technology's white wail
which the college of clouds
quickly erases

last door to paradise

for centuries we've been taught
that our animal nature is fraught
with barbarities and savagery
red in clae and tooth
but truth be told in truth
you are the ones whoa re bold
you are the ones who are true
you kill to live
and usually with no bite or blow
no torture, and , if so,
not born with a sense of wrong or right,
only in blind instinct's play
and always individually.

we kill for lust or joy and massively
in programs massacres or holocausts
we exterminate the best in ourselves
with a kind of obscene glee
and wake up drenched in red
obliviously "free" of our murderous history
how can you sit so trustingly by us?
so calm so generous so watchfully?
old boy good boy
still our fast following friends
brave heart, brave animal heart

your animal sense of time

your animal sense of love
your gentle eyes' light
our last door to paradise
quietly reminding us of
a time with no beginning
a time with no end
calling us back to begin again

dreamer

to wile away your time and sing and sing
grasshopper poor grasshopper
with no food in you larder
as the cold winter looms

to sing your song harder and harder
grasshopper poor grasshopper
in you fierce celebration of waning light
of the fast setting season's sun

to knot in your heart
grasshopper poor grasshopper
that the rich ant furious in his industry
who had fled underground long ago
will sing no songs and see no light 'till spring

black branches

i crave the calm of black branches
that reach out from the old sugar maple
with the patience of forever
and no sense of human need

to the air the fingers of their branches
implore what? light air life?
and through every day of every season
their fondest wish is met
by the consortium of days inspired
they reach out in silent joy past time's net
always the same reaching out
against blue skies black or gray
the posture of seeking while beholding
quietly and more than quietly
a simple equation for being

an ever lightening expansion
of simple grace over time
as if the simple act

of enduring frost and freeze
of budding, growing leaves and losing leaves
were after all but one and the same
i crave the calm of black branches
that reach out from the old sugar maple
with the patience of forever
and no sense of human need

day and night

it was dark
now it is day
on either end
i try and pray
reader my friend
to find my way
and never fret more
than for what's around
that very next bend

**the veins of you hand
in the shadow of an open fire**

the kind of fires that console
not horrify
like the V2s Nagasaki or napalm
the kind of fires that console
like your country hearth
the heat of your own heart
the fire at you favorite camp
the fire of being here
are the ones that fill you full
of warmth and gratitude
you see your viens beneath your skin
in the shadow of an open fire
you think, "lucky outside's out
and inside's in"
pity and laughter
terror and tears
applause
credits then lights on
people dream of the wilderness is gone
next day you douse the embers
and canoe back to civilization
a few hours seems like years

cat of the souls licking its back

the same cat

licking its back today
will lick its back tomorrow
hooray hello
hello hooray
the same cat following your footsteps today
will follow tomorrow
hooray hello
hello hooray
today today
tomorrow tomorrow

cat of the mind

cat of the mind
waiting waiting
for the mouse of an idea
to pounce to pounce
cat of the mind
waiting waiting
any idea of a mouse will do
even one under an ounce

beads of sorrow

if you string the beads of sorrow
on a necklace one by one
until there are no more beads to string
if you keep all the photos of sadness
in albums until there are no more albums to fill
will you finally give up being a collector
on the wrong side of joy's door
with no more sorrows to sing?

half asleep raising your hand in front of the fire

sitting in your easy chair
raising you hand in front of the fire
without getting burned
is the difference between action and dreams
the dream to be real had to be earned
the heart to fell love
must burn and be burned

mommies
without your love
there is no dawn below
there is no up above
without your pride
there is no pride in us

without your courage
without your trust
we would never know
what courage was meant to be
how trust can set us free
without your heart
ours would never understand
the meaning of a noble start
the magic of mother's heart
the powers of love and art

for carole castagnoli on her birthday- 2002

you have at heart of your most elegant heart
the richness of prairie earth or loam
causing things to get lively and bloom
you have been blessed
with an open nature and endless generosity
no gift too grand
bottomless the well
of your love of giving
always the most beautiful host
always the most gracious home

your laugh is the laugh of laughs
uncut diamond of the minds
fortifying as a brace of bourbon
a coming out of the cold

for you living well is art enough
to make it more complicated
is boring to you
what you set your talents to shines
like your collection of vintage jewelry
(which you with a self-styled jack benny
our sympathies- must be tough
keeping mr. money penny in line)

do not be stamped
by you daughter's daunting sophistication
it's her ability to pop balloons
to delineate the chiaroscuro of pomp
the circumstances of pretense
and bring it down to earth
that she owes mostly to you
her love of the precise word
but faster, funnier, lighter, hearted

to bill

you bake the world's greatest chocolate cake
and give the best presents
which means knowing the receiver well
you're the secret recipe for empathy that takes
precious few can pass that test

we share the love of a good curse
nothing like a fucking swear
to dispel the arrogant demons
of stupidity or despair
and curl the faint hearted's underwear
all in love with prissiness beware

you like to call wanda peculiar names
like nim-nutz or numb-nutz
mostly after climbing out of bed too early
contrary to your royal neapolitan need too early
in quest of the antiquarians' very best
at the pre-dawn godforsaken mighty flea
a godforsaken five or six a.m.
-two chilly willies-
an Italian, and a polish "Thelma and Louise"

you are a peace maker
and a constant friend
you enlighten and enliven
every room you're sitting in

with the two of you
you and bill
femme et home d'esprit
the number of our memories
laughs and laughter
defies the limits of human accountancy
more laughs than bill's ralph lauren checks
like thousands of numbered gregory pecks
hanging sequentially from the rafters
just waiting to queue up
(who but bill is countin'?)
and jump into is fabled coffin

felice navidad
dearest friend
we bless the day of you

and the day when
you and wanda met
when we're with you and bill
we're always glad
never sad
always happy and well set
full of felicitous felicity
felice navida, literally,
and love always love
from wanda, all four pussy cats and me
december 7, 2002

suddenly there is snow in late november

suddenly there is snow in late november
and the fields take on the character
of a acne plagued teenager
the dark stubble of dead grass tips
popping out like whiskers from pimples
on the white face of this albino field

deconstructing billy collin's "dancing toward bethlehem"
four stanzas
two of three lines
and two of four

tell of new lovers lost in love
as only new lovers can be
at the end of yet another collapsing century
we see his palm on the small of her back
a last insistent gentle touch
even as they round the final bend
and time's mirrors buttons and shoes
falling back and further back
into a heap of centuries
all red dust and shattered glass
at the very end no time to think
or even order a final drink

as our seaside resorts slide into the sea
the orchestra the diamonds the tuxedos
and our illustrations company
hum their closing tunes
the last note of their salty destiny
mysterious to the very end

2003, you stack of empty pages

2003, you stack of empty pages
you're nothing more than a bunch of un-booked dates,
a stack of empty pages selling us
on the golden prospects of the great unknown,
a trail of months a wheel of weeks and numbered days

how strange your blanket projections screen
none of our projectors shining on it yet
none of our strategies and schemes
dancing their serpentine minuets

of last year's pages i can recall
few sights few sounds few monuments.
out yesterday a child's etch-a-sketch
with the scene once drawn sharp
now more than slightly blurred.

yesterday's a rusty wrench
a pile of magnetic filings
attracted to half an image
drawn by a child's magic wand
a sailing ship against a cloudy sky
a savage moon, a band of wild stars
falling into seas of fading memory
a night bright magnet of day

removing punctuation
removing punctuation
from something that you wrote
is a way of certifying
the height and breadth
the soundness of every line
and every intonation
without the forced vote of periods commas colons
and semi-colonization

overflowing gutter
the moon was shining on the icicles
which formed on the overflowing gutters

the blackbird flew over the overflowing gutter
and tipped them slightly as he landed on them

the slate shingles on the roof were covered with mulberry leaves
that were clogging up the overflowing gutter

the ladder leaned into the gutters
and the man with his leaf bag
started cleaning the overflowing gutter

as the rain poured down and drenched
the ground
the bags were full
the man was soaked
the check book came out
the job was done
no more overflowing gutters
the end

wanda's poem
december 20, 2002

fragments

sittings outside on a deck chair
surrounded by snow
blue only imagined
above the armada of clouds

she surrounded herself with everything old
when she came to her old age
she knew well what age did to things
and was surrounded by old friends
who had all aged long before her
and long at her side in her home
tables armoires lamps and chairs
who quietly armoires lamps and chairs
who quietly greeted her
everywhere she looked or stood or sat

the flemish the dutch the french
all understood winter light and dusk
the black of trees raising their limbs in prayer
the light pinks and tangerines of the winter sky
bit not so obvious as to be a swear
on the fields of snow
in the crystalline december air
the clouds coy and revealing their
chameleon abilities to resemble
our daydreams and rare projections
o constable o constable
o lovers of clouds everywhere
the gray sky is broken
by the silhouettes of morning doves

winging tier way beyond the march
cardinals still royal red in the dogwood
taking pumpkin seeds to their homes and bed
black in the snow under the feeder
the bibs of juncos and chickadees
as they search for the plumpest seed
the darker it get
the deeper rose the sky
the whiter the snow
other worldly worldly
in the rarest light

the moon cannot be stolen
lapel pin on night's dark jacket
shining just our of reach

some "objective correlatives"
for the hunger of the hungry heart
a winter landscape
en empty field covered in snow
the sun going down
with its customary frightening speed

the look in your eyes
from you, a total stranger,
that says without shame
and so surely and directly
that though we each walk away
we feel one another thinking,
"what if? what if?"

the empty beaches of montauk in early fall
when you can smell the wood fires burning
and the air is spiked with the smell
of a cols and wild sea

waking up from a dream
your head a hive, a buzz
not knowing which is the dream-
the dream you've awakened to-
feeling totally bereft
and longing to know
something or someone
that your life depends upon
but not knowing
because no one does

feeling like one more minute
of this suspension of disbelief
and you, like a bridge in gale force wind,
will crumble into a black bay, a shambles,
a pile of steel hay
if someone, anyone doesn't touch you soon,
cry out for you , say your name,
the way you dream it should be
a warm summer night
a sickle moon

the feint orange light
of the cabin at the far end of the meadow
or across a still Adirondack lake
the stars beginning to rise
and then you realize
that in that cabin across that lake
or at the far reach of that meadow
in the warmth of that far orange fore light
is your one true love
but she and you
from another life
now each in lives of y our own
will never get to meet in this life
in your or her heart
in her or your home

the dripping snow melt
as if the eaves of the barns in the gloom
were a barber shop quartet harmonizing
with the traffic on the Taconic
and the wind in the trees
the cat sleeping on your lap
under your scarf
and you all were dreamers
dreaming of summer
and yellow birds rhapsodizing
the crescent december moon
orion rising along with jupiter and mars
through the brushes of the ancient red pine
the red tail lights of cars going home
to a gloss of red wine
the memory of curtain sounds
the sound of a Buddhist temple gong

day after day

day after day I lay
in this my coffin of disbelief
hoping that someone
will shovel a shovel
of dark earth away
and show me the sun
and what the sun does say
and children wiling their time away
and strangers passing one another
in the crowded streets
with nothing whatsoever to say
and the little leaves falling
leaf after leaf after leaf

the cliché of melting snowmen

who can see the melting snowmen
on the winter lawns of our dreams
and not feel like a child
and break out into a saccharine chorus
of “frosty the snowman”
often in the shadow of snow melt
lurking behind the cliché of winter sun
lives the memory of melting snowmen
the wonder of their rounds
the child on our hearts
understands the true nature
of things that melt and burn
the child in our hearts knows
that we are but snowmen ourselves
melting in the mystery of winters’ sun
tiny white envelopes of first memories
mailed to an unidentified melting address

wondering of anything you do amounts to a hill of beans

there’s the surrealist use of the bean
by salvadore dali
it is walking with a crutch
on an open plain
in a landscape that’s dali-dutch
and there’s the hill of beans
by Mr. Nobody
who achieved noting at all
there’s has beans and had not beans
and yet to beans
there’s ventriloquists and wannabeans

there's wind in the beans
and the birds and the beans
there's what you do
and what you dream
and what you've bean
and dream beans
there's what you hope
and life's uncertain beans
one day yours sitting by the fire
the next your whole family's
a bunch of has beans
in the hospital with severed artery beans
humming to yourselves and all who listen
to beans or not to beans
hope it's bean swell not hell

the wind

the wind is vastly under-rated
like sound effects in b-grade horror films
(it's always the same wind recording)
or more exaggeratedly
in caribbean pirate films
when they need a typhoon
to rock bluebeard's phony galleons
the skull and cross bones flying
in big bathtubs on paramount pictures lots
pretending to be the sea

the wind is mostly known for its extremes
you probably missed that subtle breeze in april long ago
one evening when you were in the stairwell
experiencing the vortex of your first kiss
you probably missed that subtle breeze sighing in the lilacs
just then right in cue just like in a movie

the wind can be sympathetic
like that night after you buried your father
the cedars were lowing
shredding tears of stars and planets
in your suburban backyard
like those belted galloway's on the far side of the hill
in the british countryside, the cottswolds,
thinking you heard them say
"night's not so bad compared to death."

or the campers' wind

the one that accomplishes the snores and farts
of boy scouts and their dads
and billows through the tent in fits and starts
like an invisible mix master
civilizing the smell of humans and salami
with a potpourris of smells
duckweed coming off the lake
that pungent smell of the dying camp fire
balsam and pine balsam and pine
and forest earth and mushrooms at night
but so subtly that no one wakes up to notice

and what about the fugitive's wind?
that rocks a speeding stolen car
fleeing the mind police or worse
across an old steel- girder bridge
the kind you'd find in the adirondacks
as the escaped prisoner- in this case you-
wearing striped pajamas steps on the gas
and as you off freedom's bridge go flying,
you think, "isn't it grand
to have the wind at my side."
especially when this minute is your last,
especially when you're dying
in this getaway car, your dying
and your life is flashing by you
fast really fast

watching a cat eat

the mash of all too fishy-smelling goop
defines our two species' clashing opinions
on what constitutes a meal or soup
but in the relish of eating
we meet around a long evolutionary corridor
in the hard scrabble corner store
of eat or be eaten kill or be killed
moonpie, mousey, andy, tu tu and rin tin tin

canned and prepared is easier
and less fleeting than fair game
but a cat's singularity of focus has no match
in the act of eating even what he didn't catch
and reminds us whose debt we're in
it's we that imitate the likes of him
we are very much a haunted strain of them
moonpie, mousey, andy, tu tu and rin tin tin

come, snow

come, snow
show us how a snowflake sings
soften and simplifying everything
take the edges off it all
show us the underlying centers of things
by so simply dancing to winter's call

chopping wood

i
the simplicity of it
the beauty of the act
direct correlation of energy to end
direct as the blow of the ax
splits the glow
of the slow seasoned wood

ii
results immediate
as arrow flight
especially in the finite cold
the clean wedge of the split
more aesthetic than sunlight
spilt by the frozen clouds
under the bow of the winter sky

iii
buddha would approve
it's as if the now
so pure so sharp
undivided is then divided
then suddenly the stack has grown
clean with all the grains aligned
and in your inner mind
at the center of your soul
it all exclaims, " just so ! just so!"

iv
when the ax rings out
the waiting wood sheds its bark
hastily like a sweater
shed by a young girl
of a winter night for her first love

v

the wood pile and the cord
were born to wait
seasons after seasons
the iron weight of the ax
forged to be the lord
the cutting blow- love not hate
to be split and splitting
one's raison d'etre
the other's livings reasoned for

vi

the sound of each chop
like a shotgun shop
affirming the wish of all that is
to be divided and multiplied
rather than fall
lowly subjects to slow rot

vii

the alliance of breath and light
the marriage of the empty and the full
the taper of the handle
the shining arc of the ax
the sharpening of the iron
measure of sinew and the man
measure of iron and the wood
the ax head's iron
the ax head's edge
the oak handle pull
the muscle of the man
measure of what one could do
and what one should
measure of the man in full

viii

the wood struck leaps from the block
like a soul struck leaves the body
when death at body's door knocks
like the gong of a temple bell
or the sound of a hand wound clock

ix

the woodpile is silent as a judge
as living trees
are silent under the blow of the ax
and the sentence

of the ever changing weather

xi

the smell of spilt wood
sanctifies the chopping block
and the lungs of the executioner

xii

separated from fallen trees
divided and conquered
in the flame and in the ash
returning to the soil and the air
as vaults holding jewels and gold
woods and wood everywhere

xiii

“we have the sound of the old ax
we see our brothers and our sister,
sheaves of wheat brought down,
bread to the hungry fire.
we count out minutes and our days
and await our resurrection pyres.
we are no less consumed by flame
than by quietly drying in the summer air”.

xiv

“i am the fire
which devours you rare
you and your waiting hours.
i live only to transform you,
you wooden heirs
of the infinite ever-flowing air.”

xv

the words and letters wooden
the mind chops and stacks
thought's file sharpens the cutting blade
of each falling thought
of each thought falling
the stream of your breathing
inspiration chop
expiration chop

xvi

when it all gets too complex
g out on a january day

and chop some wood
it's the i say
you'll feel godly flex
of an absolute good

shoveling snow

i
the blue shovel shoveling
borders on desecration
the snow's white desert roundness
softening every edge
until there are no edges
until there are no edges
and everything has a slope to it
a white fallen drapery
that falls palest blue at dusk
and rises whitest marble at sun up

chorus
something about the body in action
and the body of the frozen earth
frozen calm inaction
the human form moving
the earth's form immovable
contemplating white stasis
man an exercise in optimism
winter ant winter ant
whose heirs we are

ii
the blue shovel shoveling
creates a geometric mass
that explodes over the shoveler's shoulder
and is cast more finely than ocean sand
crystalline nostalgic in its softness
now the trees tell is who they truly are
the remaining birds sing cold
the blue birds landing on icy branches
eat the memory of their last crabapple

chorus
can you hear the sound
of your young heart beating
the sound of winter birds winging
the sound of all our breaths flying
crystalline evanescent

simple a a blank canvas
waiting for the artist to draw
noble on out inherited sense of awe

iii

the blue shovel shoveling
almost sings in anticipation of the act
progress is measured in rounded cubes
lifted from the great white flow
like square eggs with round edges
the crystals so fine and numerous
that they form a perfect mold
for tracks of nuthatch or red squirrel
sprays of blue spruce needles
or a branch's curl

chorus

snowflakes each a surgeon's tool
one among a billion sparkling
among a billion one tiny star
on the black cashmere of night
who is standing looking up
snowmen with pine cones eyes
they are standing up solitary at night
their straightjackets cut
their pine cones eyes looking up
looking up

iv

the blue shovel shoveling
is part of the song of removal
nature gives and continues to give
we have the delusion of taking away
but we are merely rearranges
creating small temporary paths
that begins to melt with our footprints
blue shovels all we enter the white country
singing cold songs like january birds

conceptual art

i

the pilings at the hudson's edge
are covered with a quarter inch of snow
the artist takes a photo of his fingerprints
and uses his own spit to glue together
a totem of plates of river ice

which begin their vertical melt
under a january sun

ii

a few white caps race
toward the jersey shore
holding hands with a january wind
two clouds cast their twin shadows
in the tree-lined palisades

iii

at the foot of central park
a horse licks the base of a no parking sign
is it boredom
the metallic taste of road salt
or the nitrous residue of dog pee
that draws him in

iv

lumber and steel girders
on the railroad tracks
as amtrak exits penn station
“we live in a industrial world
engineer domineered,”
say the steel and creosote beams
and then on one girder
the melted snow becomes a rectangular lake
reflecting the january all blue sky
which sings out, “not so, not so.
things are not so cold as they seem.”

v

the frame of the train window
the frame of your eyes
our visions awake now now
our constant dreaming dreams
the river sleeps a long turbulent lake
under gray migrating skies

vi

what passes
seen or unseen
noticed or unnoticed
the bin of has been

vii

an empty industrial yard
enclosed by a wire cyclone fence
topped by razor wire
protecting nothing but empty open space
viii

the plates of ice driven
to the rocky shore
the river blue
the bridge in the distance
white as rising ice
alive as me or you

ix

two blue gondola cars
full of twisted rusty steel
a blue caboose covered in white graffiti
a light house white past the distant bridge
a recollection of the marble profile
of nefertitti at the met
the murmur of peoples' conversations
hieroglyphs for all to see
our poor translations

borderline overwhelmed

how much to take on
to fill the big black pot
at the end of the rainbow
that will ease us out
and pray for the complexities
of the age old injustice of getting old
when it takes an hour
to get into your underwear
or your clothes out of the washer
and into the dryer
or two hours to walk from thee to here

to choose is a luxury
to be able to pay the price of choices
a much greater luxury
who doesn't think about what's head
and this colors our present acts
we either choose to ignore it all
and live in joy obliviously
like little picassos starving in paris
or we harness ourselves to the plow
and till the fields' black earth

in hopes of harvest gain

some days we wake up
and the yellow taxis are streaming
like tears down the avenue of the Americas
in the garment district a giant needle and button
towers over deliverymen pushing
racks of clothes wrapped in plastic
cleaning crews with big white smiley buttons on their coats
sprinkle salt on an inch of newly fallen snow
and their white baseball caps
match the salt melting the newly fallen snow

defining rage inherited

beware of czechoslovaks
their rage is infinite as the sea
a force of nature if you can call it that
the likes of which tyrants all aspire to
obsessed with brute survival
they know we are bereft from birth
the only consolation being anger and rage
this is my raw inheritance
an isolation so stubborn in its paranoia
that it would rather cut and maim
than be gently touched

i think and think about my mother's rage
here was the rage of a people of ocean crossers
whose lives were so desolate
that they threw themselves upon the seas
fat with babies and always nauseous
to a new world with scrawny hopes
of something slightly more civilized,
as every child of immigrants knows,
than the metallic taste of fear and hope
that filled their parents' bleeding hearts
in their evil homelands' homes

and this is why their religious icons
are crowned with thorns and crucified
and their naked burning hearts aflame
are pierced by many ornate swords

winter

picture a big field
all of it white

the brushes of trees
each branch dipped in black
the sky rose light rose
rising up to a blue light blue
a dog barking in the distance
adults and children laughing
as they sled down icy hills
the full moon promising
a brilliant white rise
the last new England asters black
the tracks of animal and birds
telling histories of their travels
winding back and back
through the long night
through the frozen snow
under the freezing stars

you were magic
you were magic
as a romantic lyre
as all the tattered clichés
“when our eyes first met
across an empty room”
or “love of my life”
or “soul mate”
or other sappy bon mots
that people conjure up to describe
when in the presence of love
and are reduced to ohs

you were magic
the way you'd put on a sock
or touch a cat
or look out a window
left me flat footed
as charlie chaplin in terror
leaving his jail cell
fee of his ball and chain
the curve of your breast
the line of you face
your eyes softer than april rain

you were magic
in the way you knew me
before we ever met
there was a light about you

a planet's light and gravity
that just lit the way
and made washing dishes
or taking garbage to the dump
or pouring a cup of coffee
or emptying the cat litter
an act of love
for wanda January 24,2003

snowflakes

battalions on battalions
falling falling
white not red, not red
un-scarfed de-gloved
less perplexed
than all who died hexed
on the maginot
or other long lines long ago
still falling still calling

yesterday tomorrow and today

yesterday tomorrow and today
chipping away at it
chipping away
small sparrow small sparrow
chipping away
away and away

ode to liverwurst

oh bane of lunchboxes sandwiches
stinky as sardines
laid out on white wonder
frenches mustard yellow as
a stain on a baby's diaper
dropped from ball park bleachers above
cousin of the French real deal pate
what goes into you
it is better not to know

oh exotic spread of finely ground innards
squozen into a casing tube
defying the cold cut slicer
demanding a warm knife
how many times were you sliced
and traded for a baloney and swiss
or good ole peanut butter jelly and banana

who care if you're odd
you have your loyal offal fans
breakfast lunch an dinner

oh creamy mystery meat spread
your seasons are fall and winter
with a red wine and a crusty roll
on a salty trisket or wheat thin
you're a working class h'ors d'oeuvre
without any pretension
you cholesterol rich schmere
you're good between meals
a friend of swiss cheese lettuce and mayonnaise
with a coke and an old-fashioned dill

the importance of bridges

on a day like this
the Hudson the color of steel
the granite banks under snow
the sun glinting in white sparks of light
all can see the importance of bridges

linking teeming shore to shore
surging up to a constabulary of clouds
the militia of the palisades
the presence of armed soldiers and dogs
the thought of bridges collapse

on a day like this
on the trap door of global war
chemical poison gas nuclear viral
the sun glinting in white sparks of light
pierces the heart like arrows st. sebastian

walking now becomes an act of courage
and the choice of living in fear or joy
is made month by minute
all can see the importance of bridges
born destroyers no one wants to die

kisses on the widow

on the Amtrak from new york to rhinecliff
looking out the window
ice and snow like frozen tears
on the moving train of winter
the words show against a setting sun

the palisades and george washington bridge in sight
written on the window of the train
from within or without not clear
with a warm fingers hasty scrawl
two crude valentines hearts and the words
once for a special passenger
but now a message for all
“my kisses are frozen on this window.!”

saying good bye to mousey

I
seeing you a skeleton
and remembering you a kitten
dwarfed by a king tulip
i realize you're just a cat
a small loss in the vast wander of it all
your wasting away among tragedies
on this blue sphere of shriveling children
nuclear chemical and viral war
is just another tiny tragedy
yet one where your part is the whole
when under the bed your last sanctuary
tired of oral syringes and protein drink
and hardly able to drink on your own
dipping your face into the water bowl
because drinking with tongue stuck to roof of mouth
is no longer an option
and soaking your face liberates
and allows a last lap or two

II

living on water and air
all eyes you turn to face me
a rag of fur and skin and bones
and hold out the shaved paw
where they stuck the intravenous in
after removing two thirds of a lung
and you reach out to me
and i cry out as i've cried before
for father grandfathers grandmothers
friends and heroes loves an lovers
aunts and uncles other cats and dogs
goldfish toads lizards and frogs
gerbils hamsters rabbits and rats
whole numbers once now zeros
ancient menageries of pet lovers and pets

and a friend tells me of the rainbow bridge
and i imagine i see one
and i wish i could hear my father's voice again

III

from the other side to be worn
his voice becomes all the gone voices
begging the eternal question
who are you weeping for?
and i say silently reeling
for loss of victory
for all the pain to be
for mousey you and me
and i say silently reeling
goodbye my friend
goodbye my friends
goodbye to mousey you and me
living on water and air
goodbye you vanishing and vanished
you vanquishing and vanquished
goodbye you wishing well earth
you wheeling stars you pulsing seas
you snows you rains you little ghost of melting memories
February 18,2003 sometime after 8 p.m.
Hudson Highlands Veterinary Medical Group

