

SELECTED POEMS: 1994 - 2006



Gregory J. Furman

“1995 & 1996”

Spring Poem for Wanda

The rhythm of this lake
is
the rhythm of all lakes.

Time, without fail,

the great white swan
opens his wings for his mate
like a sail.

red april

I.

the tulips had all but lost their heads
to the wet black soil
in a thousand mourning tulip beds.

II.

the tulips were soldiers
the soldiers were tulips
all heads down but one
who saw their beloved field
become a satin sheet of red.

III.

how their upturned faces were
once warned by bright spring days
then torn like pale pages from a calendar
resting on a red mahogany desk.

IV.

"the wind has scattered us too freely
as all our red and missing thoughts run
oh, what our vanquished petals will yield
only the scarlet wings of tanagers will tell.

V.

"yes, receiving is not the same as giving
we were a world of bowing porters

who simply doffed our porters' vests
and dedicated ourselves to the art of merely dying
we know full well each season's red sickle

will bring yet another sharper test

VI.

"forget about diamonds, ashes and dust
in one black flash of a sable brush
the chinese character for 'red'
holds the secret soul of fire, flamingo
cherry, blood and rust
how could they forget us
or have they never truly seen
tulips glowing in the sun?"

VII.

"now we can rest
now we can rest
what we've come to do we've done
we've brightened april's mud
for all the earth's worst
and all the earth's best
no need to rush
no need to rush
no regrets."

white april

I.

when cardinals began to sing
too soon, too soon
the snow began to fall
the park began to blanch.

II.

daffodils' spears were blunted
stubborn green and yellow battalions
marching smartly up from the avalanche.

III.

a cyclist left his bicycle
chained to a park bench
the spokes and handlebars held the snow
like the wigs of british barristers trap white
the shadow forming a gray wheel
and the horns of a bull
curved as the new moon.

IV.

confused robins
lost their lawns

confused worms
lost their robins.

V.

the arrogant statues
were defaced with white graffiti
which vanished with the self-important sun
cedars copied the ancient calligraphy
of hiroshige and hokusai.

VI.

heads of old women
stockbrokers' shirts
priests' collars
nurses' shoes
all stayed white
long after the snow had gone
the noses of elated dogs did not.

VII.

which was softer
the sound of snowflakes interlocking
or the sound of snowflakes drifting?
which was whiter
the snow falling on apple blossoms
or apple blossoms falling on the snow?

blue april

I.

the cornflower and chicory
refuse to bloom
until late july or june
her eyes were early and as blue

II.

a vast canvas stretched
the april skies
ample palette
the rush of ever-prolific clouds
blue horizon to blue horizon
would that brush were mine.

III.

the last bluebirds returned at night
welcomed by cassiopeia and the pleiades
if you shined a light into their nesting box

they'd pop up, raise their heads and stare
their starry eyes shocked and bright
wide-eyed as affronted citizens caught unaware
aghast that no one knocked
or asked, "may we enter, please?"

IV.

on dog hill
the solitary blue spruce
in april
seems bluer and less alone.

V.

the cotton dresses of young girls
all blue and white
sigh in the wind
and rhyme with the sighs of old men
recalling first loves and the solstice
while listening to the sounds of morning doves.

VI.

all yours, all mine:
the periwinkles' finest shade of blue
"ground cover" does them no justice
blue flowers no bigger than a dime
in april everywhere in view
young lovers pick one or two.

VII.

april dusk is softer
than blue corduroy
can you hear the meadowlark's tune?
the fireflies will be here soon
happy to flicker and glow at dusk
come june and july.

requiem for a nantucket rabbit

I.

was it coincidence
that you fell stretched
a stone's throw from the headstones
of the island's oldest cemetery
or that the treads of land rovers
would press the marrow from your bones

and leave you like a flower
one of baudelaire's
on the grave road's black page
your removal the task of crows

II.

before he saw this rabbit
the boy on the bicycle
carrying a clear jug of blackberries -
the intestine of the mammal
a similar blue black -
swerved to observe
a stand of hydrangea and tiger lily
near a faded picket fence

III.

gray stones were calling to the sun
one look at that fiery eye
and you lost your will to run
that's the only epitaph
for one so small

IV.

the clouds were mackerel scales
skimming the seas and sky
gray below gray above
from off the headstones
echoed the cry
of a solitary mourning dove

Algonquin

morning to early afternoon

cry of loon echoes off
wall of tamarack, balsam and white pine
bay of manitou
lake god of stars in milky way
lap of water god on granite shore
coat rack god of moose great head dripping
with plates and pale green strings of lily pad
sweater god of brown and black caterpillar
god of porcupines
gnawing salt-wood seats of open outhouses
web god of spider spinning fine cable net
catch basin wrought with rain's gem stars
diamond cycle sparkling as dawn's sun turns dew to jewels
underneath the lodge poles of adirondack ranger hut

with wood sink and rusted ice chest
the dry scat, bones and quills of porcupines,
prickly waddlers, their tribe long gone
whistle lake whiskey jack lake fools' lake squirrel lake gray lake

sound of paddles against hulls of incoming canoes
water line against red, green, yellow, natural wood canoes
green poplar gnawed by streamside
beaver channel in the dried pale reeds
fresh tooth scars on wet trunk and chips,
hand prints smaller almost human
and dragged blackjack tail prints in mud
white birch lake mink lake raven lake biggar lake bouillon lake

straw cry of crow like fire's first spark
great blue heron rises from stream mist
king fisher punctuates his blue arc
with chk chk chk chk chk notes
the osprey white against white feathered sun
and all the tents on passing shores golden,
lit from within by new easterly light,
bluebell lake decoy lake sunfish lake burnt root lake reindeer lake

even wool socks translucent and aglow
flapping like trapped gulls on clothes lines
clothes pins pinch shoulders of waving plaid shirts
scarecrow shells sending good-byes to voyagers
widgeon lake cauchon lake little mink lake wildgoose lake gash lake

dried pine needles and blood orange mushrooms
breaking the pine bed of damp brown loam on forest floor
like dufy's note on white page full of black notes
in some painting of some sunlit Paris room
moccasin lake curlew lake grass lake

the moon above the ridge and canopy of pine
aboriginal white antler shade
spying on sun and day cloud
bluebell lake decoy lake sunfish lake burnt root lake reindeer lake

lone moon,
low pale spectral moon,
moon of deer bone and beach shell
moon covered in the soft moss of nimbus and lake mist
moon softened by sound of wind
moon's soft light in grass meadow and otter brier

blackberry, blue berry, chokecherry drawing jays
bluer than the sky's canvas
day moon of cumulous or mackerel sky
loon carrying two small ones on feathered back
four trailing behind in ample bird wake,
alert, on their own watch,
roiling and rolling on predestined water paths
to next lake, next bay, next trout
all fingerlings of this vast diorama
timber wolf lake grizzly lake bean lake

the entire soft and breathing land breathed
song of white throated sparrow
breathed and breathing being breathed
song of loon
haunted tune sung by greater spirit
by which all things are breathed
a more massive lung breathing all in
whose humors ascend in streaking resin trails
to the high cloud canopy
beyond alkaline tent ceilings
and dampened fires of abandoned camps
into the wide Ontario sky
filling the eye and a deep, primal olfactory center
with smell of bug goop and suntan lotion,
fires cooking, bacon and black coffee,
trout, onion and potato hash
and the fresh smell of duckweed
and the wild clear algonquin air
west thrush lake error lake luckless lake

sound of pine paddles against canoe hull
varnished by clear waters
many gulls,
rhythm of paddling and many gulls
wheeling and, in their high spirals, glancing down
neither giving nor asking thought,
beneath and looking up
lake trout, pickerel, muskellunge,
pumpkinseed, sunfish and chub
patrol granite bottomed lake depths
the half moon too gives no thought to tomorrow or today
on far, far edge of vast, vast chain
of lake on lake on lake on lake
a clothes line with red blanket and yellow slickers
flags the farthest shore

a compass to two canoes
whose V's cut blue lake glass like diamond cutters
balsam lake mouse lake leather leaf lake

swallows invisibly etch their skyward runs
the clouds find solace in their august company
in their own reflections in lake's bright face
how quickly clouds hood the falcon sun
how deep the wind that moves the flying waters
how softly the rain is falling
gentle hands of falling rain
on tent canopy, on tin cup, on hand ax,
on mess kit, on candle stubs, on blackened pans and pots.
on down filled sleeping bag
on ashes of last night's fire
smell smoke hear rain,
rain sounding softly metallic and flat
bringing out mildew smell of tent canvas
gentle rain moistening massive, upturned face
of the quiet, quiet land
in new moonlight fresh as your last breath.
three mile lake lost dog lake cayuga lake kawayamog arrow lake

early evening and dusk

rain slows
low moon
new moon
shape of a flame above far horizon
sound of pine paddles at dusk in distance
every thing varnished by lake waters and gray rain
no wind carries the lone loon's cry
and the still surface of the bay is dimpled
by first star, venus, sole sparkling light
and rising moon
humble as an illuminated fingernail
mackinaw lake lake la muir big trout lake owlet lake snow lake

reflected bright among the black shadows of trees
reaching from shore to lake bottom
of poplar and yellow birch
chipmunk standing at attention by beaten black coffee pot
his measure taken by laces of hiking boots
their tongues drying out in the fire
his cheeks like a jazz trumpeter's
his companion licking salt from empty peanut shells,
the two suddenly possessed,

chasing one another in crazy circles,
wood clowns in striped fur suits waiting for handouts,
shadow of one holding peanut flickers in fire light
standing tall as they're able,
their tiny eyes looking up at us bold and sparkling,
not without a sense of humor
bon vivants
they've defined us, taken our measure, feel no fear
minehaha lake gypsy lake cinderella lake eagle lake ugh lake

ursus minor capricornus
cassiopeia triangulum ursus major
shy half moon gives no thought to tomorrow
clouds admire their own reflections
in darkening lake pools
their sprightly forms like dancers enjoy their own rushing
in earth's sweet, wet black mirror
diamond lake saw-whet lake longbow lake little trout lake

sky's growing dusk summons rose and salmon grays
at water's edge with view of smoke rising from campfire
raccoon bandit sits in gloom of his shoreline living room
and pries open fresh water muscles
sound of crunching shells
narrobag lake big crow lake shiner lake white-throat lake stag lake

offshore in darkening water
simply prehistoric
redefining menace
his huge black shadow discernible from the rise
snapping turtle gnaws
at nylon rope holding lake trout and chubby speckled
...next day in morning three live fish on stringer
and three trout liberated,
heads and gills remain,
smell of cedar burning
three owls in canyon of opposing bay
under rising red planet mars
appearing first in lake and then in sky
hoot echoes hoot
are they conversing
celebrating the great wheel of stars
or merely hooting "yes"
"yes." they're saying. "yes" in owl speak
"yes" to night
"yes" to their luminous view

of cascade of campfire sparks
rising from our fire
"yes" to looking with night-defying eyes,
across the bay "yes" penetrating darkness
"yes" as we never will observe
seeing us smelling our coffee hearing our voices
wondering about the smell of single malt
and talking to one another observant as are we
"yes" their booming hoots and hooting echoes boom
feathered witness voices in opposition
"yes" somehow deeply cheerful
against all that's vast and relentless
"yes" to curtain of star speckled night "yes" to
owl lake warbler lake hailstorm lake rain lake

"yes" to the algonquin wind
in the algonquin trees
and the wind
algonquin
in the trees
algonquin.

on the death of a rat

Meat lockers have more mercy
than the scalpel wind
which sliced all warm blooded equally
that moon scarred night
and carved your small, gray length
into an ever shrinking ball exposed
to the horrified, frozen glances
of night humans walking by,
who saw you like some bubonic warning,
some death involved in its own death dance.
Paralyzed by some poisoned trance,
you were without
the simple strength to flee in fright.
Your nightcrawler nude tail, possum like,
your fur matted wet with filthy snow
forced all to give you wide berth.
Yet their disgust unanimously was free.

In the park your kin are fleeter of foot,
more cunning and brighter of eye,
quicker to avoid the slobbering dog,
fiercer than their leather soled, self-appointed masters
and other equally sharp, taloned disasters.

Of all your compatriots in their burrowed homes
your fate was least kind.
You won the sidewalk as your final stage.
You were a subterranean with sewer sense
trapped above ground in the tunnel of dying.
Dumb struck, muttering or clinically musing, "Why?"
pedestrians only quickened the heels of their disdain.
Not shivering or showing any signs of rage or pain
you surely tensed the terrors of those passing by
who were in truth too timid to kick
or strike but revolted enough to shout out
their curious loathing and sickened surprise.

If you were shaken by hostilities in every step,
you were too fevered to show it,
too far gone to find a quieter place to hide
and too weak to muster a squeak or cry.
Balled into your self, on display,
long earth worm of a tail worm gray,
eyes crusted shut to the inhospitable cold
hunched and centered on the end,
you were riding the moment, truth be told,
to an unnatural, freak conclusion.
It was odd and strangely bold
that whatever your affliction
it forced you to endure what
wild animals, save man, avoid:
a public death and execution,
under strangers' frigid glares
under streetlights' android stares.

city hawks hunting

the red tailed city hawks circle high above
high-rise soaring over central park,
no less attuned to prey at seventy-ninth and fifth
than their country kin circling spruce and cedar walls
of the thundering, blue, ice-raining ozarks.

their eyes a gleam with bloody intent,
their widening wings rent a bronze and setting sun.
yet their talons, arraigning death, hold no malevolence.
their game - cowering pigeons and slinking rats,
too dumb to wish the solace of an eddie bauer tent.

at sidewalk level, workers finished for the day,
looking down, listen to their own flying thoughts.

beyond all empathy as sunlight wings to dark.
for primal raptors, their hunt is their play:
tearing flesh from fur or feathers in central park.

Talking To Cats

*(In memoriam: Mewky Meramus, Little,
The Bibble, Big Boy, Puddy and Mousey too.
With apologies to W.H. Auden)*

From us, of course, you want not much at all
save routine and frequent changes of your litter,
in the most cataleptic of homes a carpeted wall
and the can opening function of many very smelly foods:
ground-up salmon, tuna bones, eyes and brains,
their shades, shades of the dead,
to you sweet meats some phony, too-red dyed offal.
If it were paint, it would be labeled "heart mush junction."
No matter. Your predilection to gorge and sleep
has a certain implacable and quite relentless quiet charm.
At least for those of us who love you
as the latest incarnations of enlightened beings.
Little Buddhas, hush!

You bring purring compassion to us human sods
who haven't figured out the magic of relaxing in full fall
or landing on our feet, we hope, (only with much cogitation,
premeditation and some convoluted plan), we wish.
You are nowhere near as flatulent as dogs.
No home smells the worse for your inhabitation.
Your luck is linked to your uncompromising independence
coming when you damn well please, going when you choose.
Not sycophantic like those woofing "arse sniffers" whose
greatest happiness and joy is to give you chase.
You do, the two of you,
as buddies - good bets, have a couple things in common:
four legs and fur coverings
just about covering any major similarities.

Once we put your love of natural distance
and your disdain for too-soon familiarities aside,
we respect your ability to take a stand.
Unlike gerbils, hamsters, rabbits or fish
you're unquestionably "people" not "pets."
You have a radar ear for exactly what you prefer to hear:
the pop of ocean whitefish or tuna and liver in cans;
the pattern of our footprints well before we reach the stair;

the pace of our gestures or the pitch of our voices;
our cooing admiration when you deign to visit;
our silence when we fall occasionally into our own despair
or into the comfortable dark of your cave-like eyes.
We wonder, foolishly perhaps, if it really is a push
to say you smile or wink back at us one generation to the next.

There's a new millennium quality to you and your kind.
And, yes, a sense of subtlety, humor and wile,
in the way you read olfactory messages, short stories in the air.
Unless we're 'anthropomorphizing' wretches,
which, given the evidence, we're really not, are we?
There's understanding, knowledge, sagacity in your stare.
We're not just meal tickets, are we, or fillers of your dish?
How else, when all is said, to explain the haunting feeling
that there's so much more to all your non-verbal cues
than fur and bone, glisten of eye,
tooth and tartar, claws and paws and other clues.
Something fine spirited and rare but free of dogma.
Not unlike the deepest, coolest, spring-fed well.
A most refreshing mystery.

The list of those who've achieved greatness and fame
and truly loved you is too lengthy to mention by name.
So, in homage to your style, let's skip it, what the hell...
Save Elliot, of course, and your endless pouncings on Broadway.
Eight days a week, "Break a leg," as they say, "Mr. Nine Lives."
Your presence is relished by us as much as you relish
ours and your own finely calibrated sense of smell.
Your nonchalant ability to roll over, paws up, and stretch
remains an evolutionary miracle of unselfconscious charm.
Some of us even pray for the confidence
of your ability to instantly pass through sleep's door
or for your sincere and utter fascination with the smallest joys:
a dust ball, crumpled paper, tea towel on the floor,
patch of sunlight or any empty box at all.

And, yes, we unreservedly admire
your adamant refusal to come on call.
Your silence unlike your nemesis the dog's
is unquestionably best balm and comforter
to those in need of warmth or shelter from
some hyper, convoluted human storm.
That the Egyptians were inspired by you
and prayed to you for calm, as gods,
comes as no surprise,

no more than the companionship of your eyes.
For you do really look at us and you do look most directly,
and in that curious and deeply knowing gaze and guise,
we get to share our days with some other One who's
silent, preternaturally warm and wholly wise

lights of fire

to prognosticators of doom,
to pundits of entropy and gloom,
to predictors of a specie's premature demise,
the news of their fiery erasure
and headlong cascade
to the rapidly expanding 'Extinct Room'
has been grossly exaggerated and vastly overplayed.
as *entertainment* like a fungus blooms and masquerades
as news or other electronic lies,
and disasters heaped on disasters give us all the TV blues,
they, false prophets, should be sent, and soon,
forthwith, without breakfast, to the blasted tombs
of unknown idea soldiers and hickory switched and cured
of their premature ejaculations, utterly uninsured.

black spotted salamander, tasmanian devil,
leopard frog and red belied newt,
dodo, passenger pigeon, all their passings
and all histrionic naysayers' prophesies aside,
contradicting all evolutionary contradictions,
from sweet river's flowing ledge
and lush undergrowth of moss and fern,
from fields of corn rising up from fine corn silk's edge,
they unhesitatingly and joyously obey the season's command.
as level as a carpenter's bevel,
as straight and fine as the T-square,
as brightly interrupting as the first inventor's wedge,
as seductive as the mayfly's flight to trout from sedge,
their tiny majesties enliven field and rich farmland.
counterpoints to the calm generosity of dark
their electric rise harbors no arrogance.
these simple residents of cool eve's undergrowth,
members of a humble, glowing tribe,
their currency a currency of light and fire,
their currents a collective phosphorescent surprise
so simply celebrate the gifted arrival of dusk,
as members most quiet of a lofty glimmering race,
that we mostly fail to recognize
the night airborne magic of their subtle pace.

raising translucent wings from august corn's embrace
like early evening jewelry on black silk pajamas
against the encroachment of gentle night's dioramas
like slow motion night hawks with miner's helmets
or small toy cars on grassy freeway fields and parks,
headlights yellow-green on glowing yellow-green.
remember how we filled mayonnaise jars full of them
and took them to our six or seven year old rooms
and after our sweaty, heated rush to catch them
smelled their musky insect smell
lingering on the fingers of our childhoods,
talked them and us to sleep, truth tell,
their soft green yellow lights illuminating our rooms
and always our memories of summers yet undreamed.

there is eternal endurance in such tiny fragile lights
and in their insignificantly individual poignant plights,
flickering in the memories they inspire or should,
which casts a glow on time lost and times past
and takes us back through many a soft path's resonance
smelling of earth and remnants of early day's heat.
there is a sense of "just so right"
which stops us still, like brancusi's bird in flight,
and takes us back like a trick or a treat,
back to each and all our deepest childhoods
which scientific minds might unjustly fight,
when things were fresh and kind and new and good,
when golden summers' fires always fly and always would,
when the gregorian chants of summer's gregarious end
did not remind us each and all that individuals must die
and one by one, our winged souls, soul by soul,
are not so faintly reminiscent of the smallest birds,
the frailest and most fragile birds of light and fire
which from their cages at season's end fly and flew
across the ice and dark to rise up entire and whole
to greet another end of summer bright as new,
fine and shining white and bold,
their gentle gentle lights
a sparkling story children tell and told.

economies of scale (1997)

despair

blind crow
flying blind
to the archer's black bow
hunting peregrine
white white dove
joyfully wed
in the harrier's red glove

old japanese wood block print

the wave -
carved is caught
in the mahogany grain
the seed -
caught is carried
on each ocean wave
the heart -
each cut married
to the carver's pain

the yellow fields of breughel the elder

the wheat is cut
neat like a wpa mural
the peasants break bread
drink wine and watch the horizon
sleep in the heat of the hour
pee without a urinal
centuries dance on

under low dutch skies
you can almost hear
the harvest grasshoppers
not far from the cold dutch shore
sawing their spiked insect cellos
still spitting their rusty beer
centuries dance on

the spike shall not forget the forge the plank not the darkly woods

still ringing in my ears
is the sound of the hammer
sending sparks flying off the anvil
like the sweat flying

off the blacksmith's back

still buzzing in mine
is the swearing whine
of the maddened chainsaw
and the memory of sharper tearings
through my fragrant bleeding bark

now we are married
in the wall of this cabin
listening to the winds of our memories
pretending to hear one another
as snow and sleet fly together in the early winter dark

now the sound of the hammer
the sounds of our fall
are joined in our joining
as the morning glories' shadows
dance lightly up our summer wall

my mother's hands

my mother's hands
are made of noodles and cabbage
and finely diced onions

my mother's hands
are the texture of sanded wood
plain and unvarnished

my mother's hands
are Respighi's airs and dances
for lutes and strings

my mother's hands
are baked buffed worn and washed
like gray lakes' beach stone

my mother's hands
are marinated in ajax the foaming cleanser,
ivory soap, palmolive and dove

my mother's hands
have achieved the celestial finish
of brancusi's birds flying

my mother's hands

contain the healings
of a lifetime supply of bandaids

my mother's hands
sleep on her lap in blue tv light
like picasso's mediterranean doves

my mother's hands
are quiet crickets waiting for dusk
still as the light of two august fireflies

my mother's hands
turn the pages of the national enquirer
but read another text

my mother's hands
are a pilgrim's worn sandals
on her beaded rosary path

my mother's hands
are no strangers to medications
orange juice and thyroid pills

my mother's hands
are prayers in progress
signing her cross with the cast christ

my mother's hands
touch her grandsons' faces
time a pebble in the pond of their smiles

my mother's hands
are kitchen lights
shining like old pots and pans

my mother's hands
are tireless
as Michael Jordan's jump shot

my mother's hand's
are the enemies
of crumbs and dust bunnies

my mother's hands
peel potatoes the size of houses
and sing in cold salt water

my mother's hand's
are sisters to dawn and dusk
companions to clothespins and the morning star

my mother's hand's
are cousins to antique white serving platters
dreaming of toast and cinnamon

my mother's hand's
are freshly laundered tea towels
absorbing our tears

my mother's hands
are pen pals
with lemon scented pledge and spic and span

my mother's hands
are childrens' books
to be read when you hold them

my mother's hands
are best friends
with chicken soup and old wooden spoons

my mother's hands
speak with the sadness of hangnails
and the eloquence of bread

my mother's hands
are white in night skies
brushing stars from her clouds of white hair

my mother's hands
are a not-for-profit organization:
the federation of sunlight, morning rain and mercy

my mother's hands
are cat's ears ever alert
to the elusive mouse, "comfort"

my mother's hands
are doctoral dissertations
warm parchment Ph.D.'s

my mother's hands
have completed their graduate studies
with honors *summa cum laude*

the other voices of things (1997)

the pigeon

i puff myself up
in the mirror i strut half spent
my feathers full out, unbent
and proud and proud and proud
but when the deck door opens
i fly away gray.

fire log

i insanely seethe and crackle
with torpid rage white hot
throwing off the heat of my convictions
until i am much reduced
to ashes of my former self.
what i was i'm not.

winter tulips

we stand red faced
on our hot fireplace mantel
our waxy green arms astray
“back,” our small pink voices cry,
“back, to the soft blown loam,
back to peregrine skies,
robin clouds and new-mown hay,
back to stars through green house glass,
back to clipped-fingernail, august moons,
back to the laughing calls of mating loons,
back to fireflies in midnight summer grass.”

the crystal pitcher

no sooner am i brimming over
with the milk of animal joy
than i find myself empty and dry.
no sooner again.
i'd rather be fluid
than this transparent, shifting-leveled vessel
with unpredictable draining
of level after level after level...
my only gift -

when suddenly struck,
no matter how lightly stricken,
i brightly sing.

the knife

so... sometimes i'm sharp.
sometimes i'm dull.
so what?
i cut through.
i have an edge
and legendary little patience.
so what?
flow of blood aside,
nothing fills my heart
as much with murderous rage
as the rounding insolence
of little green or black-eyed peas.

the mirror

i have no life of my own
and no one pities me.
i play hide and seek
every minute of my working week.
i have no life of my own.
no one is certain
who or what they see in me.
i cannot speak.
i'm totally dependent on light
and strangers' eyes for stranger sights.
i'm utterly alone.
my greatest greatest misery
is my endless and inexhaustible inability
to see or understand who's "me."

the other black sock

far more perplexed and perplexing
than any roving black sheep,
as bovine as a flatulent 'moo!'
i jealously guard my patch of floor from dust.
i wait alone and sad
underneath some couch or plastic garbage bag.
waiting desperately to be discovered,
mercifully released to clothesline and sun
dreaming in my dark of daylight and morning glories
amid dusty dimes and dustier pennies,
next to a tv guide one year old last week.

after a warm wash and tumble dry,
my second favorite fantasy of fantasies,
i confess, is being number two,
no, make that number one.
on a pair of warm and naked feet,
enjoying a warm and naked guest!

kudzu

it's a given
i am insidious
gypsy vine and pauper
to kill me requires imagination
i revel
in my own obstinacy
and the company
of my victim trees
my nurture
i am the author
of their inevitable
doom and asphyxiation
take glee
in their aborted bloom
in their bare leave
i blanket them in green snow
they will be dust
before me
long before i agree to go
to predatory heaven

the fallen birch

strewn to the four corners
by winter's winds
my soaked spotted leaves have
the sallow of old mens' skins.
i must have threatened the road.
so here i am sawed to pieces,
white bark curling in the rain,
resting on my muddy limbs
a croaking toad
and three crows cawing requiem or kaddish
over my fall dismemberment.
march now, and still
my friends of fifty years
stand tall and guard my empty place
with the same welcome lean to weather,
to west for night and sleep,

to east for sun and play, as ever.
i'm a jigsaw puzzle of my self of old.
i eagerly await the hungry flames
to free my final heat one day
and warm some living room,
my fragrance a solitary wish.
still, i miss my leaves, especially
as they'd turn down side up to see
the dancing thunder storms of june
or to van gogh's november gold
and wave "hello!"
to the first flying necklaces of snow,
softy whispering, "so soon! so soon!"

the contented glass

the sun pours in through me
no matter what drink i contain
i've become a cliché metaphor
for the half full or the half empty
no matter the fluid filter -
bracing vodka tonics
spring sparkling ice waters or iced teas -
light of sun or rain or snow's complexity
falls through my neutrality
as slowly as the planets sow
their sparking star struck commentaries
on the upturned stargazer's face
contemplating night's blackest lace
i sit anonymous on tables lightly placed
am held civil captive as a nobody
a competent observer of fine or simple fare
of conversations' soothing ebb and flow
transparent as a gift or grace
i stand always enlightened
full or empty
sorting good from gross
being filled and full
being empty and null
are the one and the same
as sun pours in through me
i welcome either as a gain
there's no condition of light or weather
i fear avoid or see as dull
serving others is my favorite role
field flowers - lily of the valley violets lilac the wild rose
all know my name

the simplicity of drinking from me
gives sustenance to their fragrant fragile frames
my joy is containing their short lived fame
when the sun pours in through me
i see being emptied as a gain

cartoons (1999)

betty boop

when i was seven
betty boop's cleavage
seemed like a new age
heaven
her wiggle and her walk
made me feel eleven
boop boopie doop
forget the chalkboards and the chalk
boop boopie doop

dr. frankenstein or the monster

some days i rise
without my scars and memories
stare surgically
at my aging face staring back
and call myself wise doctor

some days my lies
sutured together so shamelessly
cause me to recoil
from my raging face glaring back
and call myself rare monster

the wooden fold-up toy

first i really couldn't kill
the wooden walker with the mask
or the evil man behind it
no matter how i tried
then i learned each time
with each attempt
something in me died
with each attempt
was born another wooden walker
with another frozen mask
an army without reason without rhyme
that lied and lied and lied

there's a little man

there's a little man
in the back of my head
who lives in a titanium cage
bolted and chained to the granite floor
no bigger than four by four by four
his name is mayhem and rage
his tongue had been cut from his head
his eye sockets filled with hot lead
his favorite color is red

the little boy

the little boy
punched the other
little boy
in the nose
oh no oh no
blood red blood red
the little boy
bit his tongue in half
oh no oh no
blood red blood red

hero with a thousand faces

the hero with a thousand faces
is always wearing colored tights
reds blues pinks and whites
always with the same granite chin
no wonder he always wins
shazzam!

it wasn't a pig it wasn't a shark

it wasn't a pig it wasn't a shark
it wasn't pink and it wasn't silver
by the time it finished its voracious chew
there was nothing to say and nothing to do
there was nothing left of me and you
not even a bleeding sliver
in the ever hungry dark

aboriginal dream

the penis-headed stone man
vast in width and size
turgid in command

vicious and totally blind
lurches through our dreams
hard and dumb and proud

one sunny sunday

after i killed my father and my mother
i killed my brother pat, my sister brett
and then the cats, canaries and the dogs,
one horned toad, my fish and all my neighbors' pets
with a tiny poisoned spear
now that it's finally quiet around here
i have only one regret
while doing clean-up with the axe and knife
i got a rather serious blood blister
which hasn't fully healed just yet
it really stings as i make
my favorite balsamic vinaigrette

pumpkin lane (1999)

red ant on the porch
his shadow eclipsed
by a pumpkin seed

plink plunk plink
rain's fingers play
poor earth's piano

startled mourning dove
sweeps the porch of pumpkin seeds
swift brush her gray wings

not hearing silence
until peepers and grackles
begin their chorus

rain blackens the road
daffodils bow down to storm
now mud's proud

the great white birch sings
a white song for all to see
steeped in night's dark tea

washing dishes

white throated sparrow spies in
through the steamed window

shoes soaked with dew
dandelions and bees
suits of same yellow

crabapple in bloom
has paralyzed my brushes
paint jar's water still clear

cold winter moon
frozen lake ice cracks and groans
old man all alone

candle pays no mind
today or tomorrow
burn equally bright

sleeping cat
one eye opens slightly
the catnip mouse

smell of new mown grass
still strong in starlight
deer beds freshened

talking to my mom
baby's body found in woods
near my childhood home

i've been here before
watching the sparkling lake's light
waiting at your door

smelling black cat's musk
the catbird in the willow mews
field mice nose the air

four bottles of port
on a rough pine table
sunset shines through them

my shadow startles
itself too light this dark night
self of self of self

white dogwood blossoms
in white ironstone pitcher
inside fire still burns

the trunks of old trees
twisted as dreams or fears
dismembered rent free

the coots hoot and cuss
yellow heads rave and mew
homo musicus

brown trout in net
the will to live
never stronger

hangnail moon
clipped and cast into orbit
junipers swoon

one wing drooping
the injured robin eats
drowned worms from puddles

as many hues of green
as eskimos have words
for different snows

cloud over mountain
bull over cow
here come the calves now

salt point (2001)

what point all our tears
all follow the same cold road
salt point oh salt point

rogue planes two scalpels
trepan twin towers' steel skulls
stave poor human hulls

bite "till you draw blood
taste our sad saline ocean
from our pulse flowers

couple holding hands
leaps from the divorced tower
the world trade center

the rain of bodies
falling like hitchcock's birds
or magritte's dark hats

one tooth and braces
an arm a wrist a rolex
the world trade center

top of the skull
wearing an ashen toupee
the world trade center

now in the white void
the white ash makes all things ghosts
the world trade center

near the gone towers
dusk wind bends the fall marsh grass
the world trade center

they ran out of flags
people started painting them
the world trade center

bridges now different
structures approach an absence
the world trade center

surely we would die
if we could comprehend it
the world trade center

wobble of the world
the first sickening drift off
its rotten axis

old man swimming
more a sinking than a swimming
me swimming to me

seeing my own blood

realizing i cut myself
the red butcher block

grasshoppers flying
brown angels of gold autumn
their wings hold the sun

picking up basho
putting my note pad aside
saw the cricket hide

four squares of moonlight
enter the room silently
instant the night light's off

only words (2002)

seven mornings after midnight

I

i woke to coyotes howling
from a dream of a city harbor
scows tugs and barges in black waters
bay opening the city to the sea
and rougher waves as you drift out
at sea on your raft
the raft of the medusa
the clouds snakes
beneath a deep sense of dread
to float or drift alike is
to be visible

II

the desperation of our cat's cry
at 3 a.m.
the attic mice are moving
and the door up is shut
i have to pee
and remember from the dream
a vast gallery full of painted paintings i've yet to paint
but will but will
the moonlight is so bright
i must draw the blinds to sleep
who will bring the objects of our dreams
if not I if not I
back to the awake room?

III

the sound of rain
a downpour coursing through the gutters
flooding the fields and roadsides
wakes the sleeping lawn
the surprise of a few stars

IV

the geese are unsettled
by a fox on the far shore
swans asleep in the black bay
their porcelain necks curled and folded under
their great white wings
the administration of admiring frogs
all silent as silence

V

somewhere where exactly
there's a cornflake crumb
on the fresh sheets
only my back can find it
will
sleep

VI

deep breathing
thinking my way from toes to my head
still awake
writing in the dark
wondering if it will be
legible in the morning

VII

your eyes a farm pond
at night under orion
starlight on starlight

training chickadees

training chickadees to eat out of my hand
imagining the thrill of contact
with another species and
yet it's as if
as if you asked just right
the two of you
one with feathers one without

would burst into exalted song or flight
in that glimmer moment
that fierce instant of first sight
when you tear the flaps off the circus tent
when you trash the theatrical scrim
when you slash through the dark sky
beyond the sun and beyond the stars
when you drop the silly epidermis
and stop paying the rent
and find brightness on the other side
where for all eternity
there for all eternity
we'll all be flying free
you and me
chickadee dee dee

the whole concept of hairdos

no matter how you cut it
it's the head's fingerprint
and societies 'heads' fingerprint
cultures legion sport cartoon varieties of it
crazy follicles of dna ferret out fads and fashion solutions
strands, pubs, curls, slicks, locks, tresses, sideburns, manes
imagine anything that could be done to hair
and it's been done over and over done
in every medium with no respect for time, age or money
every style and look anthropologically most unapologetically:
The Gainesboro, The Sebring,
The Long Island Princess Big Hair, The Yule Brenner,
The Jacqueline and Jack Kennedy
The Crew Cut, The Pompadour, The Zorro,
The Wavy Gravy, The Duck Tail,
The Afro, The Centurion. The Pee Wee Herman,
The Emblazoned Name Afro, The Hari Krishna,
The Alfalfa, The Marilyn Monroe,
The James Dean, The Upsweep, The Chignon,
The Bangs, The Bouffant, The Beehive, The Bun
The Pretzel, The Weave, The Wig, The Toop,
The Greased Woodpecker Flying A Blue Streak,
The Zero Mostel Funny Thing Happened To Me On The Way To The Forum,
The Betty Boop Shoe Black Spit Curl, The Sammy Davis Lounge Lizard,
The Liz Cleopatra, The Snoop Doggy Dog
The Rasta Dreadlock, The Elvis, The Cornrow,
The Ducktail, The Pageboy. The Tonsure, The Bob,
The Granny Q-Tip(blue nimbus sky side of johnson's baby powder),
The Mohegan, The Mohawk, The Friar Tuck, The Frankenstein,

The Jesus, The Buddha, The Moses by Charlton Heston,
The Ghandi by Ghandi, The British Judge, Pigtails, Pony Tails,
The Pirate, The Punk Spike, The Dracula,
The Cupie Doll, The Beatle The Rasputin
The Frightened Family (hair standing on end up or out),
The Last Thirty-two Really Long Hairs Stretch (combed across a naked skull).
centuries on centuries of hair mismanagement,
hair micromanagement and follicle spa therapy
priming, coifing, curling, bleaching, frosting,
frizzing, slicking, twisting, braiding, cutting,
slashing, nicking, oiling, spraying, tweaking,
tweezing, brushing, fluffing, tufting, teasing,
condition, powder, iron, steam, jell, spritz,
wash, blow dry, perm, tint, primp, dye!
no matter how you comb them, societies' heads
are the woven locks of societies' dreams,
the hairy fingerprints of our goofy hearts
and heady schemes:
Hairdos.

talking to the moon

oh you
aside from wanda
mousey our cat our families some friends
you enigmatically have charmed me
you have brought me the simple joy
of another solitary planet's light
a silent dreamy night light
white beyond our terrestrial bed stands
when i'm dreaming awake
mindful enough to feel you
in whatever phase you've entered
always to me a close orbit
as in the compass of those we love
i hear your beckoning
i'm magnetized by your glow
i'm haunted by your walks through the attendant clouds

oh you
was it you who dragged the sun down
kicking up a flurry of salmon pinks and mauves
this past dusk
the waves of the hudson seeming to applaud
the little tan brick lighthouse
with its flag waving red white and blue
and the pin point of its light flashing

the hills blushing (a cliché, but they were) blushing
the wind behind us all waiting for the train
on the platform overlooking the river
one small white yacht on the river's far side
making ready for another of your cameo appearances
with you rising setting the crystal and silver

oh you they say "man in the moon" quite incorrectly
it's another of your brilliant debuts(pick any month)
but you always feel soft
and more like a stunning women to me
your opulent silk gowns of opalescent pearl
bar back and bare shoulders glowing
against the great blue vault of the sky
giving evening its excuse for being so formal and elegant
soft to the eyes easy with your admirers
softer when our eyes rest together on the soft chorus of stars
on the courtier clouds in their finery
delineating twisted oaks and shushing white pines
casting shadows so magical the old haymaker blazes with jealousy
-definitely a man- that mr. sun
never subtle like you and never with your cool aplomb

oh you remember how last night
we took our clothes off
and met one another on sky's bed by venus and mars
i have recollection of the sweetest mouth the lightest kiss
folded in your light arms and you so calm
that it was only wind and waves
and rocking in the volcanic air
air warm like the breeze off st. barthlemy's
you the soul of all poetry
dull me small and privileged in your company
soaring lightly like children in dreams
the wind sounding like a rush of great wings
of some wholly radiant birds by brancusi
"we need your light more than ever"
were the words ringing in my ears when i awoke
my clothes in a heap on the floor
your last sweet light just beyond the bedroom door

coco on the beach

when i see coco on the beach
i see a little dog who loves fetching stones
in the vancouver surf so much
that she has no teeth

worn down by a succession of joyful returnings
stone after stone in mouth
we should all be lucky enough to love someone or something
so well that teeth or other precious parts
hearts and minds to cite two
are less important
than the ecstatic rush along the sand to water's edge
where drinking the salt air we pause to take our bearings
decide the precise point of entry
and take the thrilling plunge
to the roiling bottom
and proudly find the treasure
gray and smooth and flat
returning the humble offering of our love
to the one we love most in all the world
over and over again
stone after stone after stone
until we are but gray sand and smooth stone ourselves

seven theories of composition

I

always start with a mistake
seize an accidental gesture
the nearest straw
the totally ignored
grasp the most immediate
embrace it
see where it takes you

II

take the enshrined
the commonly held wisdoms
the unthinkingly worshipped
dumb assumptions
and tear them down
find what works what inspires
and go from there

III

do not over think it
the fact must be beholden to
the intellect must serve
what is truly felt
in utmost quietude
feel
then make it felt

IV

respect the surface the seemingly superficial
the smallest gesture
the thrown away
observe closely
go to the heart
go beyond

V

revel in the hunt
rejoice in the journey
rest in your own good nature
do not seek false economies
do not revel in excess
do not fear pain
keep it plain

VI

be suspect of the glib
the pretty
the ornamental
the vain
be suspect of the tried and true
the taken path
be you

VII.

just listen
as you would in a jungle
for a large killer cat
or late at night
if you felt a burglar in your flat
focus on things fresh
like the blind giving sight

lone oak in a corn field

the stubble of once-worshipping corn
paid homage to your solitude
they were your green congregation
in their flaxen sunday best
praying to the august breeze
the crows' dark communions
the shots of rabbit hunters
spooking the gentle deer

that slept beneath you
in the summer rain

you were singled out
as each stalk of corn was singled out
you never to be cut
fated to give the planting farmer shade
a place to taste the taste of water
a cool umbrella a one-tree glade
the cyclists and hikers know you
as do the spinning wheels of stars
saturn venus mercury mars
in the autumn rain

the circle of your fallen leaves
left you more naked than alone
they were your raiment
in the harvest season
falling red in red november
the frosts the early snows your friends
the halo of the frosty moon
your field blanketed in white
your twisted limbs varnished
in the winter rain

after an eternity of white
snow flakes sleet and hail
winds sharper than the sharpest knife
loss of branches loss of limbs
the lights of a thousand silent stars
twinkling out from night's magic blanket
like the lights of all children reading
your leaves bloom small as babies' fingernails
the greening field your living room
in the spring rain

on encountering the viscera of a deer while out for a walk

they were mostly autumn brown
the entrails still pearl and slick
this is what my path brought me
the deer heart pecked hot pink by crows
and they the bright spots
nothing else
no tufts of hair
no hooves
no head

as if they just slit
the just-killed creature
from the rectum to the chest
and when the blue insides blossomed out
like clouds streaming in the fresh air
one the one with the razor knife
cut the intestines' cords
freed them from the deer
and the deer from them
just half a day
since the deer looked up
the shot rang out
and the empty carcass was hauled up
onto the red pickup truck

comedy and tragedy

the one full of kindness
died soonest

the other fueled by rage
lived until a ripe old age

the sadness of horses in the rain

they're wet blankets
their blankets steaming
they too
rags of snow on the field
their manger empty
the January moon up already
4:42 p.m.

they feel no sorrow?
they feel no joy?
it's hard to imagine not
as they stand solitary against the weather
sad perhaps unable to name it
but wet and cold
feeling that for sure

as they nose the few straws remaining
pure in the act without vanity
the grand chiaroscuro of their massive heads
and clouds of vapor from their flared nostrils
rise up to the weeping stars
which jealous of their grace shine in pain
on two horses standing in the rain

**on seeing your own reflection
in a train window at dusk appear and disappear**

the way they dance together
the light the water and the moving train
that rocking motion of being on rails
the blues rhythm of guitars and harmonicas
the smell of steel on steel
a cradle rock a mother's lullaby
in admiration and imitation
of the determination of trains
rocking with the contours of the land
and so more grounded than flying
you admire the river
the black and white of the trees and the hills
rising up out of the river
and for one split second
head back on head rest
surveying the river and the river light
and the large flock of gulls
near the island on hudson's far side
your face appears in front of you
but a disembodied apparition
you see your own reflection
appearing and disappearing
and the rest - the river the sky
the tiny oaks perfect on the highest ridge -
and it's as though your fleeting face
is also the face of another
the face of your mother
or the face of your father
and your face again as river trees and sky
appearing and disappearing
in time to the movement of the train
as suddenly as you come straightaway
extinguished by one turn on a long bend

and you know yourself to be this transparency
this fleeting image this changing light
this reflection of a face looking out unto dark
hearing the whistle of the moving train
as children in bed hear them from their sleep
and seeing lights' constellations on the bridges
blue red and white
strung like optimistic stars looping
over river waters the deeper waters of night

and the shallows of our fragile selves
appearing and disappearing
from the howling trains of days

vanitas

I

the skull in art and life smiles
lips fallen away
dry musculature dust
while tombstones and cemeteries
the mediating earth
seethe with buried laughter
ultimate betrayal of all trust

II

picasso braque richter henry moore
rembrandt and you can name more
have seized upon the humble skull
like hamlet seized upon poor yorick's
to steal a scene
to open a door
to prevent a fall
how dull
can you hear the hooded one roar?

III

find a candle light it
watch the hollow sockets
come suddenly alive

IV

in a dark cell
down a winding stair
through the steel bars
a human skull a silent star
falls lightly on the lonely bone
no heart to shine full there

V

the x-ray unveils the final architecture
the underlying structure of it all
whose body buffered this frame
whose socks warmed these feet
whose top hat crowned this head
whose ears heard this final call

VI

to eat the candy death today
in the company of sombreros and children
whose fiestas devour death
skulls of white candy
each bigger than the earth
the children all laughing
the children all at play

VII

we are so foolish
we have become beautiful
without ever knowing it
said the sad and patient skull

VIII

a skull
a sack of skulls
a trunk a truck a beach full
the globe the moon the stars
skulls skulls
no eyes none
their teeth still shining

IX

deconstructing the skull in art
in horror movies at halloween
does not lessen the fear or fascination
eyes wide open or eyes wide shut
on stage or off

X

the bones the bowling pins
the skulls
the ball
strike or spare or gutter
or nothing at all

XI

shrinking of the head
by so called primitive peoples
requires the removal of the skull
the miniature face left behind
after tanning
is the owner's soul

XII

the songs skulls sing
on t-shirts and fake platinum rings
on lodge poles or catacomb walls
in tattoo parlors and salons
skull logos on all sorts of things
skulls of the vanquished
on bloody strings
skulls of victorious lords
replaced by skulls of victorious hoards
the songs skulls sing

XIII

the conquerors drank
from the skulls of the conquered
preferring the skulls of leaders
and those with a generous hat size

XIV

through the skull of night
shines a new day
born in the lake of death
the white skull of dawn
looks at itself in morning's light
and softly fades away

XV

the skull is a model kit
a simple assemblage
of bone plates knit together
like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle
a game for children to muddle through
on cold and rainy days
when thoughts of skulls are trapped
to cover and protect the brain
how apt its hollow caves
form a hollow place
for the waters of fear
to trickle through

the bureaucrat

nose shaped like a rectal probe
sniffing the air for change of wind
opinionless looking up a red ladder
slick with the blood of ascendants

asps and aspirational
quick to react slow to act
without imprimatur or permission
expect no joy or explorations
no adventurous sense
no initiative or innovation

willing and fully able
to lay your life or mine on the line
over a new overcoat
or an imagined pique
hyena like always salivating
cutting corners slacking off
taking the path of least resistance
always in impotent heat rudderless
in love with organization charts
lusting after the paths of least resistance

the invention of penne

shaking boiling water out of a sturdy old colander
full of fresh cooked penne
two days before the feast of the resurrection
right after good friday and passover
new york city's marking
the sixth month without incident
in the months that have followed September 11
listening to wanda talk to our cat
the two of them watching a female cardinal
crack black oil sunflower seeds in her orange beak
mousey making that little cat sound
cats make nervously wagging their tails
when they see a prey species
through the screened porch door
me i'm writing this
recalling the magnificence of penne
of shaking the water out of the old colander
half a pound of cooked penne in it
the shining ivory of a hundred noodles
rising up with every shake as if on a trampoline
like miniature minimalist sculptures
carl andre and sol lewitt must love penne
the perfection of this noodle's continental style
cut on the bias sleek able to hold sauce well
think of the great sauces penne has held
pesto putanesca white or red clam marinara oil and garlic alfredo
or your own recipe simmered steamed fried or baked

and the perfection of the penne
their fine tubes holding your fine sauce
fixing dinner draining the penne
i thank the inspired inventor of so many centuries ago
signora or signore victoria or victorio principale penne
for their exquisite invention of penne
the small tubes of ground wheat briskly boiled
once no more than an idea for a new noodle
now making the sound penne always makes
when shedding vigorously boiling water
inside the kitchen windows steaming
outside the full moon rising
late march late march
jupiter and mars rising and saturn on the rise
on this first day after the march full moon
late march late march
the full moon rising
Jupiter and mars rising and Saturn on the rise
and all the other stars and planets
thanking the inventor of penne too

phoebe's song

phoebe phoebe
come phoebe
phoebe come
come spring come
bring your mud bleeding
and your greens hearts bleeding
and your green heads bursting from winter's womb
with such green force
it feels like our mothers feel
when torn by their first new born

come phoebe
phoebe come
of all the birds' songs
the cardinal's soul on his thrilling red sleeve
the cock robin's haunting territorial at dusk
the goldfinch's golden warble
the white-throated sparrow's trill
the wood thrush's bell like cello
of all the birds songs
phoebe yours is the sweetest of all

most simple most sweet
you simply announce yourself

say your name
phoebe phoebe
get to building your wattle nest
and feeding your fluffy young
come phoebe
phoebe come
phoebe phoebe

among my father's gifts

among my father's gifts
were a knack for comedy
a love of the fun of a laugh
sophisticated or slapstick
wink or pratfall
as a tool to exorcise demons
(fear, slow or no cash flow, shift work, overtime)
the laugh to plumb other's depths
the laugh as hand shake of mortal souls
the laugh as tool of transcendence
the laugh as weapon to lighten oppressions
his imitation of esther williams in a rich man's pool
his faith in love as wealth
and then there was his perfectionism
his insistence on the right word
his handwriting from a more gracious time
his being rooted in the moment
the pulling of weeds at root
the mowing of grass to golf green
the understanding of new technologies
no machine he could not fix
in the early day of television
he'd take the gyrating screen
make it heel like an electronic mutt
or root out the sick cathode
by fiddling and fiddling
his understanding of social politics and class
without compromise his work-like-a-mule polish heart
his ability to poke fun at himself
and quite surgically at you too
my mother threw a raw steak at him once
i can still see it sliding down the yellow kitchen wall
and him singing "goodnight irene"
a cappella solo voce
in the dog days of august
standing at the kitchen sink
in his boxer shorts and crew-neck t

shirt soaked pants dark with sweat
crew cut glistening sweat band soaked
making gallons of stanley's special tea
showing us leading us to
the powers of charm, passion, wit and diligence
women adored him
i could go on
but people get bored
when listening to other people's virtues
or boring stories about people you've loved
they'd do well to aspire to
love you, dad, love you
and mommy too

among my mother's gifts

agnes always had energy like the sea
a fierce and stubborn independence
never wanting to rely on anyone
or be beholden to a single soul
a young mind an adroit mind
a memory like the 42nd street library
for details you'd rather forget
a heart as gentle as cruel
an outrage at life
and a rage for life
like that of a fire for its fuel
instinctual animal chemical
at heart compassionate
not intellectual not academic
the immovable conviction that her idea of right
was hard won and the right
she was the pope of her own church we the laity
you bet she knew what work was
our floors respected her scrub gave up their varnish
she knew the pride of clean the pride of style
she knew what feels right is right
when viewed through the unswerving eyes of love
she suffered for the suffering world
the deformed, the diseased, the reviled
she cut through like the chain saw of a great ad agency
she heard the red wing sing
and noted the gift of daffodils' bloom
in the credenza of her organized mind
the "don't truck with me" sign was in neon
eyes bulging nigh unto out of her head
her trademark laser look

the use of questions as scalpels
the ability to see through to read narratives
peoples' situations peoples' characters
the gift of story telling no sugar coatings
and, like my father, a stickler
say it plain, do things well, be yourself
my mother was a one-love, one-man woman
still enraged at my father's death
saying was if he were still alive
she'd kill him for dying
a deep suspicion of airs and the highfalutin
and that terrible anger
so enraged, my dearest mother, who knows why
so enraged that paradise
had better shine its shoes
for fear of disappointing
love you, mommy, love you
and daddy too

falling zebras

when i saw the two zebras
first the male and then the female
leap from the balcony of the plaza hotel
and struggle their backs broken
to gallop away into the wilds of central park
i had the same feeling i always have
when it rains tiny zebras
and falling they rush down through the drains
and down the down spouts
and through the gutters
in floods of striped black and white
in a stampede to the hudson river
and then to the atlantic sea
where they drift like diatoms or diamonds
back to the tiny dark continents of our dreams
where free they run wild no bigger than ants
far away far away
far far away

the flowers they are less fortunate than us

the flowers
they are less fortunate than us
they spend their winters in darkness
hungering for the warmth of the sun
hoping each day for its return
while we frolic in the cold light

of short days followed by shorter days
when they awake
they are looking up into cruel faces
carrying scissors and are cut
before their blossoms are blown
and dried by their god the sun

the flowers they spend their last breaths
in the rooms of the all powerful
on the other side of the window glass
the robin's song is not muted
and the full warmth of the sun
warms their escaped companions
while we walk freely with our knives
and take long walks with our knives
in the warmer april light
tossing their cut green and white bodies
into wicker baskets or beaten pails
to savor their brief indoor lives

advice to chipmunks

avoid the road all roads
your notion of cars
is superior only to frogs or toads,
or pheasants or possums as to poisons
the black oil sunflower seeds are likely fine
most people are trying to keep you
off the endangered species list
don't be intimidated by your neighbors
the gray and red squirrel
they're pushy but they sleep in
avoid wide open spaces all wide open spaces
the marsh hawk and the red tail
have eyes sharper than their talons

never having shaved with a straight razor

when i was ten
i was fascinated by my father's straight razor
in the medicine cabinet
next to the aspirin and vaseline
its ivory handle stood out
warmly shone
and it's folding blade
coldly shone
commanded respect and wonder
as to how to cut whickers

first whiskers on your face
without cutting your own throat
or a whiskerless chin

never having shaved with a straight razor

i used it once when i was ten
on the soft blond down
that was my arm hair once
and out of flesh
cut a paper-cut like cut
with a slip i didn't feel slipped
until i saw running down my arm my blood
dark as old movies full of gangsters
getting manicures and shaves with straight razors
it wasn't until my first wife and i divorced
or when my father died in october long ago
that i truly understood
how deeply a straight razor can cut

through a dark glass darkly

it was as if he saw it all
from the vantage of sinking vessel's cage
there on the far shore
the natives their stone knives drawn
the kneeling victim awaiting their stone knives' fall
through a dark glass darkly
the telescope's been flipped
and the scene rather than magnified
is rendered tiny reduced obscure
it was as if he saw it all
in the grip of shark filled waters
rising black above his nostrils flared
his eyes rolling white with fear and rage
like a beaten stallion
refuses to leave the burning barn
the mad master whip in hand
just outside and laughing darkly
the telescope blackened
at each end by smoking candle's flame
drifts gently down to ocean's darkest door
like the last sacrificial leaf on the forest floor
or like the last light of day leaves
a silently closing door

love and freedom

sadly in the end
it's all very hollywood
strapped in a roller coaster
a ride in the funhouse
a hall of mirrors
a scene in braveheart
where after all the hero
is disemboweled by a avid executioner
in the hopes that he will recant
his desire for total freedom
the crowd cheers as the blue bowels
tastefully off camera
fall onto the cutting floor
the hero in agony
looks out across the jeering crowd
and sees his one true love
his dying vision
her tender smiling face
and hears her silent call
love true love
and freedom above all
bittersweet freedom
bittersweet love
two white swans
fly across a vast lake
to the other far shore

only words II (2003)

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 photos 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 own making
weeping for their beloveds
for all the echoes of all 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 undaunted 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

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 a “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
one sioux brave on a palomino rising
saw the far figure’s flapping arms
his soiled trousers
slowing his panicked race to the horizon
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

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

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 against an oceanic 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

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 minute 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-mâché 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 the net 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 so 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
who would think before we say amen their hearts
could find such furious nest in our raging blood
their larva a hatchery for our lust for mayhem

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, blooming
even then he began again to paint it new
a last series of flowers given him by friends
white lilacs, a 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

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 tails 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 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
the pelicans flying low and orderly near surface
like a line of school children in brown uniforms
suddenly set free from their classes
to explore the dark room of this great aquarium
such a surprise of light and dark
that it is a radiating miracle
that everyone observing on shore
has not spontaneously burst
into the holy flames of alleluias
light and shadow in intricate celebration
like one of mozart's coronation masses
a crowd of gnats tiny black notes
drinking the ink from my felt tip pen
day's door closes
on monterey bay
in a blaze

dreamer

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

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

to know 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

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 in 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 winter sun
tiny white envelopes of first memories
mailed to an unidentified melting address

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 !"

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 reason for living

VI

the sound of each chop
like a shotgun shot
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's 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

X

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

XI

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

XII

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

XIII

“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.”

XIV

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

XV

when it all gets too complex
go out on a january day
and chop some wood
it's then i say
you'll feel the godly flex
of an absolute good

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 peanut butter jelly and banana
who cares 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

kisses on the window

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 finger's 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

from the other side to be won
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*

blind river (2004)

I

this river flowed
like a dream flags relay

one nation's dream rising up
in a shower of flags and blood
drowned in another's
the quest for peace flailing
obelisks world trade centers
and a billion billion human hands
waving goodbye or reaching up for air
going down printer devil's archive
of history's racket of did not or did
black noise white noise
yellow noise red noise
yours mine ours all worlds
floating their starry-eyed propositions
revisiting revising editing reconstructing visions
and lo and behold
it is only this calm river
this calm vast river that flowed
through one and all

II

this river flowed
like a pick-your-poison shack full of cuckoos
in a realty based sitcom on cable tv
in jets of spurting techno color
obsessed with phantom youth and useless stuff
culture and technology derailing
tracks all twisted down through the eons
raccoon tracks possum tracks our tracks
and the tracks of dinosaurs and museums' tracks
hours fingerprints spilled water in a cup
waving goodbye and wondering why
being dry cleaned in the chinese laundry of history
shirtsleeves and bootstraps
tourniquets and mousetraps
yours mine ours all worlds
forgetting our tickets falling off ladders going bald
healing up thinking it over revising our opinions
and lo and behold
it is only this calm river
this calm vast river that flowed
through one and all

III

this river flowed
like syrup at an international house of pancakes
where all the tourists steal little packets of sweet and low

in museums and in universities
egos ids me's and mini-me's
on celluloid strips hard discs photographs or cd's
epic comedies and tragedies vanity fairs
and a few clowns and buffoons and ladies riding bare
one carbon dated trace in a state of grace
and hooray it all falls into order and into place
dusted off reconsidered a real find
day dreams and dreamscapes
moonbeams and hernias
ahas amens alleluiahs and oh no's
yours mine all our worlds
slipping up skipping on wandering hither and yon
taking our places changing jobs rolling in clover
and lo and behold
it is only this vast river
this calm vast river that flowed
through one and all

IV

this river flowed
like ashes of loved ones or tears in a stream of snow
hard to find places where minds awake and all hearts glow
quilted comforters warm beds an open door and other sanctuaries
silence and calm at home in the wilds of reverie
where it is you and i most want to be
someplace with a view in the company of those we love and know
and a few songs and a few bright players
each playing brilliantly each a cat with the mouse of joy
the fluttering of eyelashes and the strings of violins
cloud following cloud fog rising up
tern and gull and crow
osprey heron hawk and dove
lightening and rain hate and love
yours mine ours all worlds
thundering cascading roaring through it all
taking a nap going out for a run doing something over
and lo and behold
it is only this calm river
this calm vast river that flowed
through one and all

V

this river flowed
like the quietest memory of the quietest time
country mouse in a kitchen after midnight or a great shoe shine

hushed in the thickets hushed in hidden rooms
universes of centuries an infinity of numbers kaboom
thrown out the door a broken child's game
flying and floating and racing away
smiles suns moons understanding eyes many promises
and a billion billion human hands
clasped in a chain of clasping hands
all waving goodbye or reaching up for air
shirt sleeves bootstraps and centuries
custom suits stuffed catnip rats honey bees and cats
resisting holding back afraid of taking a stand
yours mine all our worlds
walking along sauntering dilly dallying taking our time
feeling better quite relaxed and in the zone
and lo and behold
it is only this calm river
this calm vast river that flowed
through one and all

the beast of all holocausts speaks

i am chewing on the teeth of the dead
i am grinding their porcelain and bone to fine powder
my mouth is a cave full of bone dust
a cave of blood chowder and bodies without heads
i am a sahara with dunes of gold and silver fillings
i am grinding dry skulls day and night
so their names on top of names will be as beach sand
anonymous covering anonymous
in rows of a million millions anonymous
empty bottles in a bottle factory with no light
never to be filled clanking and emptied by grief
a conveyor that shuttles multiples of oblivions
countless insatiable without memory or remorse
i am pleased to bring you the bone yard
which vaults to an horizon of endless screams
and sucks the marrow from all our empty dreams
which jellies the brain like clotted creams
and screams and screams and screams
i am unmoved as boys pulling wings off birds or flies
i am baking your bodies like blackbirds in pies
you encyclopedias of charred and burning words
you sheets of flaming white linen burning
in reams and reams and reams
you streets of sorrows forever turning

into the teeth of the sun

into the teeth of the sun
go the cottonwood shadows
the red wing and the sand hill crane
the sound of moving waters
and the song of birds
innocent as all eternity
as time before time

into the teeth of the sun
goes the green grass to sallow
the goslings in soft yellow gaggles
and the song sparrow soft in the shade
grasshopper and cricket without a shred of desire
sawing out their sweet thoughts
saying their own sweet names

into the teeth of the sun
go the silent rowers of river boats
the clouds of tan caddis
the decaying bodies of rainbow and carp
the shreds of emerald moss and weed
the husks of evanescent mayflies
falling from trees after their propagatings

into the teeth of the sun
go the cries of all osprey and curlews
the western flicker and voices of fishermen
the clear waters bearing one and all
downstream the clear waters laughing
as they flow by the silver-blue russian olive
facing skyward soft leaves laughing too

into the teeth of the sun
roll the grand nimbus and surging cumulous
the plateaus of light green bow down
to the rise of the forested mountain range
silent range accepting the shadow of cloud
proud as the swell of stodgy old earth
under a new moon white as a cat's whisker

into the teeth of the sun
young and old go dancing together
circles of colts and mares cows and calves
beaver raccoon muskrat and otter
all elements giving boisterous birth to

and nurturing all other elements
blazing charity of a vast loving heart

into the teeth of the sun
goes robin red breast's afternoon cackle
the murmuring of waters in the flats
the memories of fishermen upriver downriver
the chameleon menagerie of clouds
metamorphosis on metamorphosis
blending and blending all into one

into the teeth of the sun
go all colors the bone of river stone
the purples of mountain sage the tans of dry grass
the khaki of river's edge the heron's gray
dark whispering and chanting of waters
the slow eternally patient amble of day
as if by plan as if in play 'till day is done

into the teeth of the sun
go all hunters in pursuit of their shy hunted
laying in wait their hunger a beacon
fierce and bare as montana light's glare
all creatures in water all creatures in air
breathing their lives in measures
without measure or care

into the teeth of the sun
goes the ever ebullient weather of all seasons
all rationales and all reasons
every note a grace note
snow rain lightning bolt thunder sleet
into the teeth of the sun
hands paws claws eyes ears and feet

into the teeth of the sun
go the circle and the square
the crooked and the straight
all geometries all angles of interconnection
witness to an indecipherable scheme
witness to a geometric abundance
witness to the arc of a rare dream

into the teeth of the sun
go the trembling juniper and dog bane
the bear grass and buffalo berry

sow thistle sheep sorrel and bittersweet
the water hemlock sage brush and wild sarsaparilla
greens and all manner and palette of greens
enlivened and using their raiment to live

into the teeth of the sun
go the vanishing virtuoso winds of days
all flowing over the waters flowing
through the tops of hawthorn and black willow
chinook warm in winter
light breezes cooling summer and spring
spilling blossoms and pollen into bright river flow

into the teeth of the sun
go the hale and the lame
the blasphemous and the prayerful
the loudmouthed and the taciturn
the struggling masses of every form and species
all lives burning proud as sun's fire
consumed by old sun's ancient desire

to all trapped mice

you poor dumb creatures
you never did anyone any harm
you just wanted the peanut butter
and a snug place that was warm
you witless pathetic things
the last sound you heard
was the snap of the trap
that broke your back
and through the sleeping house it rings

**gnat caught in italo calvino's
"the uses of literature"**

at the top of the page
flattened and perfectly preserved
flew a single gnat
wings still translucent and nearly free
not much smaller than the "a" in "man"
exclamation point above calvino's essay
"man, the sky and the elephant"
preface to an Italian translation
of pliny's "natural history"

like a tiny kamikaze fossilized
in the press of pages 314 and 315 memorialized

caught at the upper reaches
in its failed attempt to rise a celebrant
fine as Garamond bold in which the book was set
the bug turned book into mausoleum collage
and text into a small bestiary mirage
a shiver of dark clowning
behind every black line

better not to know

sometimes knowledge is poison not power
a cruel fact can make us miserable
enough to wish we never knew
as in this past sunday's book review
reading about "opening skinner's box"
i learned how harry harlow the "scientist"
deprived infant monkeys of their mothers
to study the effects of maternal deprivation
to know the effects of an "evil mother"
he designed a surrogate – "the iron maiden"
which shot out sharp spikes
or hurled the female babies against their cage walls
each time they sought the steely surrogate's embrace
when these female monkeys matured they refused to mate
so he designed a "rape rack" (his term)
to subject them to eager mating males
his isolation chamber "the well of despair"
for two years held the creatures upside down
unable to see or move fed through tubes
which also drained their waste
what punishment of the man
can erase the knowledge of his acts?

the poetics of dog shit and new snow

oh give me a pile of steaming dog shit
the first to drop on the newly falling snow
right out of the happy dog's ass
the happy dog toothy smiling wide
doggy grateful relieved ecstatic even
with that goofy look dogs get after all a grin
after being cooped up then released
a crisp day in january when the air's so clear
you can smell a just-lit cigarette
or a dog evacuation thirty feet away
when it's great to be alive
awakened by the steaming facts of life
all things insisting on being what they are

the dance of leaving all memories behind
shucking every shred of baggage
knowing after all
we're all just out for a short walk
new snow fine january morning
when every dog and every man
feel relief and lightness of being
content to be among the muddled mundane
we walk in the footprints of another dog and master
in this silent snowing central park

white flowering pear

white flowering pear
white of my mother's hair
remember her brightly
you blossoms lightly falling
now that she's gone away
gone away from here

bats

dusk to dark
flutter flutter flip flutter
dive swoop flutter dip
they veer like avid iconoclasts
challenging all preconceptions of linear flight
they seem happier than aerial acrobats
very un-bird like in their swift swervings
they like to play with one another
even when the insect density is high
tailing one another or forging on in face-offs
until last second one concedes the contested bug

they have the best views of the treetops at dusk
shifting in and out of the darkening canopy
in the rose and umber light what fun
their flight is more a mammalian arabesque
a bit of airborne hyperactive lunacy
any bird's path composed and elegant by comparison
they look like really ugly embryos with wings
their baby cannibal teeth filed down to needle points
their energy per bug spent seems high by human standards
but who are we to stand in judgment
we who even in our dreams will never fly the way they fly

exactly when they go to bed remains a mystery
even when the magnetic light of the long-gone sun is spent

against the pitch-blue darkening sky you can see
their determined harvesting under venus and the summer stars
on lakes the jokesters nearly join you in the boat hit and run
the thought of extracting one from your hair
the little razor teeth the rabid nightmare grin
gives everyone the creeps the chills the heebie-jeebies
better to imagine them soft chestnut brown hanging from barn rafters
digesting bugs sleeping the live-long day wrapped in their own cozy wings
their gyroscopes and radar systems off

and when the summer sorcerer sun folds its wings up
and signals the bald mountain of darkness to come
they wake up report for work and punch in for the night shift
you can imagine their furious hearts beating
two three hundred beats a minute their deadly radar deployed
each breathing frantically through their little pig noses
to feast on mighty clouds of mosquitoes or columns of gnats
requires a certain abandon a frantic gorging will
one speed when hunting all out totally alive
surgically alert voracious yet delicate in the kill
flutter flutter flip flutter
dive swoop flutter dip
dusk to dark

fireflies

science has it down colder than porcelain
that they flash and signal to mate and that's the story
but to observe them on a starless moonless night
a canopy of black cloud casting a celestial pall over all
is to see that the white coats once again have missed a sudden glory
their sparkling joy more a communal play than mere mating dance
their random timing and small lightning a symphony
illuminating tree trunks walls and field grass beds of deer
branches rocks and barns briefly slightly
to walk among them in the soft pitch dark
is to be on deep bottom of night's ocean floor
breathing freely where we poor pilgrims are humbled outsiders
hushed by their eternally optimistic crush and luster
their random syncopation is sweet sleep delivering
breathing in their domain off then on
blinking from blade of grass to top of tree

what by day was a hundred shades of green now reads black
and their lights are calling our childhoods and summers back
and giving the earthbound crickets reasons to sing
the way the receptive night receives their collective scintillating joy

their magic is irreversible and forever abundant
they are our eternal silent summer friends returning us to summers without end
and as to their souls and whether or not they know or feel as we
science would argue the answer is no
but I say if they were to beacon us and beckon us
and they do they do
if the grace to follow was given me
I would go I would go
each year the new summer new
into the loving night with them I would gently go

the serving of plastic knives in the minneapolis airport

leaving mary tyler moore town
"she can turn the world on with her smile"
missing the 11:13 a.m. back to la guardia
because security now requires the inspection of shoes
and so required not lacing fast enough was stranded
the Lands End black T with the American flag heart side
in the extra large was out of stock
and the "Simply Books" had nothing to read
the Minnesota Store a tribute to the moose
in all media incarnations incantations and representations -
key chains, t-shirts, moose hats, moose belts, moose slippers,
moose diapers, moose bracelets, tie tacks and rings
moose jam, moose chili mix and hair conditioner
moose baseball caps golf balls and watches
(moose clock with antlers propelling hours and minutes)
next door to Chili's Two bar and grill
i sit down for a time-killing lunch
where the gay waiter with glee says to all,
of *The El Presidente*, the gargantuan trademark margarita,
"for a dollar more you can get a large one!"
red haired boys with pee wee herman haircuts
chow down on The BigMouth Burger
and little girls with blond braids look bored
before me chili in a bowl with stringy orange cheese
diced raw onion cubes pale against chili red
the meat the mystery equivalent of pressboard beef
i see that my knife and all our knives are plastic
which triggers a vision and not of a dream
two renegade planes pierce the world trade towers
once again in my mind's eye oh no once again
and I think of SARS anthrax biological warfare
and america's drive to victory
and dirty bombs and suicide bombers

and yet another end to peace of mind
as we once knew never again to be known
and realize how good plastic knives
and a bowl of fake chili can be
in Minneapolis on my 56th birthday
waiting for the plane back home
6/14/03

**...so many razors and pillows
time pieces and subtle coffins...**

so many razors and pillows
time pieces and subtle coffins
swirling in the bouillabaisse of days
so many lobsters and buzz saws
dill pickles acts of violent fickleness in the maze

so many fingernail clippers and thin moons
pizza parlors and smells of fresh mown grass
summer in the nostrils of birds and of men
so many empty toothpaste tubes and socks with holes in their heels
graffiti on bathroom walls roller skates with hard plastic wheels

so many breasts in black lacey bras
pick-up bars hardons and empty vaseline petroleum jelly jars
so many dancing girls sperm and nicotine stains
fresh washed sheets flapping in the breeze
animals and lovers startled by god's sudden sneeze

so many silences and caged marshmallows
muggy afternoons and lapses of memories
marching down the flower beds of years
so many dandelions and turquoise egg shells
coffee grounds careers in a fine grind of days

it takes your breath
it breathing you
not you breathing it

so many pompous clouds and simpering winds
loaded revolvers and fancy derringers
doggerel and verse all cocked aimed and ready to fire
so many independent fireworks mesquite and burning tires
fragrances stinks and stench smelling up the universe

so many plans and ramshackle shacks of plans
straw huts pup tents and walls with weak struts

creaking and sagging on the verge of collapse
so many philosophers sitting on the fence of perhaps
militant muddled fooled crazed but mostly befuddled

so many goblins carrying their empty canteens
helmets and bayonets and rusty tin tureens
inviting bugs in instead of keeping them out
mosquitoes moths maggots gnats and the bodies of men
looking for leverage and having no clout

so many wrenches and strangely shaped tools
wielded by doctors mechanics and mechanical fools
operating on the helpless the weak the infirm
so many botched jobs failed tests and baseless fears
lost tickets sushi bars and nights that last years

it takes your breath
it breathing you
not you breathing it

so many eggbeaters and old wooden spoons
cork screws frying pans and the man in the moon
drawing the plot line of another cheap cartoon
mickey mouse and pluto daffy duck and betty boop
living in slums cartoon hearts cutouts to their roots

so many marble monuments and stone angels
white crosses and black granite obelisks
guarding the cauldron of boiling old graves
hieroglyphs shorthand calligraphy of knaves
the jig saw puzzles of our jig saw days

so many oceans and mildewed magazines
singers magicians scoundrels tap dancers kings and queens
sandwiched in a seething sandwich of scenes
pass the mayonnaise hold the mustard
avoid imposters salt and the lure of gold's luster

so many cities hives and holding pens
prisoners bees citizens astronauts lost in the cave man's den
bumping into walls making feeble shadow puppets
flutes guitars accordions violins and trumpets
orchestrating orchestras serving teas and crumpets

it takes your breath
it breathing you

not you breathing it

so many mumblings and misspoken words
mushrooms and fungus and half dried cat turds
concertinas with silver notes popping out
scars wounds lacerations punctures pimples breaking out
winks and appliances manufacturing orthopedic alliances

so many troubadours and bogus rock stars
egos and bimbos cruel zoos and dildos
parading around without a morsel of shame
e-mail explosions cell phone perversions and video games
nano-seconds centuries and bell jars with fetuses on show

so many boat-tailed grackles chasing bugs on green lawns
so many over-weight strippers wearing polka dot thongs
hardening arteries and toast going stale
so many saints sinners shrinks autocrats and autodidacts
bending the bars and barbs way back escaping from jail

so many rumblings and rude explosions of gas
illegal smokers smoking illegal grass
potheads alcoholics druggies winos all hooked
like mississippi catfish chefs at their stoves or mice in their nooks
everyone antiseptically sealed in foil newspaper or ceran

it takes your breath
it breathing you
not you breathing it

present perfect past future pluperfect future perfect past
bowler derbies dungeons and the poor prisoner file's rasp
trolling for trophies trying to make it last
quiz shows marathons tournaments moving so fast
clone paramecia and cellular robots turning into cash

so many helicopters bumblebees and bulldozers
so many egos ids you's me's and mini me's
walking the tightrope leaping the chasms
wannabes and superstars phantasmagoria and phantoms
little lulus and dudley do rights rolling in clover

so many good soldiers and ballerinas
clowns cads shits grits and pollyanna's
doing a death-defying dance leaping their leaps in mid air
human frisbees winging their way through the wilderness bare

defying gravity rhyme or reason without stress or a care

so many hovels and paradisiacal palaces
servants wearing jewels in their morning jackets
masters wearing gemstones in their teeth
man dominating man dominating beast
the terrible humility of the bread's rising yeast

it takes your breath
it breathing you
not you breathing it

so many artists and shadows of artists
so many flimflam men and snake oil salesmen
frauds phonies and those aspiring to fraud
the cleverly venal and the intelligently mute
singing cheap songs hoping the crowd will applaud

so many preachers and pontificators
gurus self-proclaimed wise men insiders and proselytizers
treatises exhortations dogma dogs and citations
encrusted as unheard halleluiahs
echo in the empty churches of dried up river beds

so many hopes unmet aspirations of poor and rich
like so much flotsam and jetsam or kelp in a dark sea of dreams
visionaries mantra chanters strong men and pied pipers
falling like breughel's blind men into civilizations ditch
dissertations all gathering dust in reams awaiting the window wipers

*(The title a phrase from Jonathan Safran Foer's
Everything Is Illuminated - 7/13/03)*

taking penis for a walk

sometimes he looks down at the earth
little cyclops and wonders sullenly if heaven exists
strains against the fabric of loose pants
dangles swings contracts expands
growls like a saxophone waiting to be played
like miles davis' trumpet at the sahara sands
waiting for a judgment day clarion
for a winged victory a turgid gabriel's chants
to quake to life the trillion daily resurrections
after which he's always slightly pathetic
wimpy as a wiener left in boiling water too long
in the saline tanks of sabrett vendors' carts
on almost every corner of mid-town manhattan

sometimes in touch with his highest self
he looks up exhilarated and free and strong
and thinks something like “wow! this is living!”
like seeing the sea for the first time
or smelling the first-cut lawn of summer
or waiting for that t-bone marinated overnight
to come off the mesquite coals
“eat me” written all over it
then he is full of sizzle
powerful as a catcher’s fist in his mitt
just daring the fast balls to break away
full of the speed of bad intentions
full of the spark of glad inventions

sometimes he’s a little too self important
too rooster cocky and full of himself
confusing himself with ruling principles
the brain the conscience the laws of karma
and then watch out for a humpty dumpty ride
a roller coaster headed for the house of horrors
“chasing your dick” tattooed all over him
nights of pleasure days of half regrets
bloated he’s not exactly at his noblest
and should probably stay behind zippered walls
sitting in the corner with his dunce cap on
minding his own business alone
pondering new world’s record erections

sometimes he can do no wrong
he’s a walk in the park a bird with a song
a long lost friend a bird in the hand
with two or three more in the bush
and it’s days like these when the owner smiles
one of those big good-dog grins
let him caper and run wherever he wants
it’s spring and the park is full of treats
so open the gates unleash the leash
let fly what will fly bark bawl or howl
throw caution to the wind
throw the operator’s manual away
let this noble thoroughbred walk you

sometimes he’s mr. mojo
troubadour magician magus shaman
the eternal coyote trickster alchemist

turning dross into gold transubstantiations
and it's days like these when the owner smiles
penetrating the deep cave of sweet accepting earth
heated by her open central core
so play the national anthem once again
unlock all locks and open all doors
this is the ancient rod of an old deity
whose shining sparks bring dark seeds to light
and open the eggs of all future worlds

red squirrel's burial

under a dying maple across the road
three crows dined on his freshness
while a fourth cawing kept watch
a tiny pool of blood near his head
was a black cartoon bubble caption less
the sun was rising in a fury of red
and i wondered if he was the same one
i saw a month ago who like a gymnast
made a death defying arabesque
his leap from highest top of flowering pear
to old willow's leafless branch
that stopped my breath as he flew
he took for granted gave not one thought to
i took a fork of ironwood
and flung his lifeless body his backbone loose
to the privacy of a shady maple grove
thinking something hungry would surely put
his little carcass to good use

my father's eyes on thanksgiving

the year before he died
i dreamed i was sitting on his right
the right hand of my father
we were all there
my mother my three sisters their husbands
and their sons all their sons
the table was flush as we
a norman rockwell abundant fare
i'm sure my father knew full well then
he was going to die and soon
the doctor gave him a single sentence
"you're past the point of worry, stan;
you can look forward to a normal life..."
one thing to know theoretically
another to know you are going to die

when the doctor said something else
this surely is to know a difference
because he knew it near he saw it magnified
sharply through his thick, horn-rim glasses
not the color of rose but of fog
i looked at him at his magnified eyes
as he gave the blessing
like a contented well-loved dog
we all saw his eyes fill up
his seconds and minutes like hounds ran by
his every word without self pity
just some simple animal sounds
halfway between a sob and a laugh
so we all cried a little laugh with him
and laughed some dumb little animal laughing cries
as if tricked by some unexpected sight gag
when the king turns clown slips on an unimportant banana peel
or some important guest at table falls suddenly asleep
into the steaming bowl of mashed potatoes
and suddenly wakes up from his dreaming
thanksgiving turkey gravy
dripping from his face and eyes
still holding onto the sterling silver serving spoon
for stanley vincent

late october lady bug hatch

the first one appeared on a dime
on my desk bright orange polka dotted black
carapace like porcelain centered in a silver sun
in god we trust

next thing there were hundreds
lighter orange smaller dots and smaller
the females?
dark orange and larger dots and larger
the males?

i'd already said goodbye to indian summer
and today the last day fell off
the maple-etched pumpkin cart of fall

an afterthought like confetti after a parade
the warming must have awakened them
whole colonies mobs flocks crowds clusters
winging busily about whatever lively business was theirs

moving as if their race and tiny lives depended on it

i wondered if the cats would see them as hors d'oeuvres
and whether we'd have to sweep them up
enameled bright orange their souls all gone
next day their lifeless husks would fill a coffee cup

some things i learned from my mother

to try to see my rage as a tool
and attempt to curb it
especially when leveled at those i love
to harness fear and put it to work
rather than have it paralyze
or avoid action and overanalyze
to have compassion for the poor least favored
by gene by income by intelligence by lot by destiny
to do the right thing whatever the cost
to never be overly polite
to recognize all the many forms of deception
to be alert to shit before stepping full stride into it
to stick to my instincts go with my gut
to do what i love at all cost
to say in the simplest form
to love food as one form of love and healing
to pray my beads to find peace and center
to not be afraid to weigh against idiocies
to take my stand
to enjoy a good laugh
to not be afraid of being served
to know at heart that in matters of the heart
all is lost from the birth of love
and that to love is nothing at all
if not a gift to others made new each day
to surround myself with enough order
that I can enjoy a healthy mess
and what is found by letting things go
to study accident and mistake and where they lead
to recognize the importance of style
and putting the right form forward
to try to accept pain and loss with grace
to entertain bitterness and despair
ecstasy and joy as fleeting guests
to be calloused to disappointment
to admit all is flawed yet infinitely interesting
to rest in the vast bosom of a flawed god
who if friend sends us mysterious mixed messages

but smiles enough through cloud to keep us brave
to be thankful for all

picasso's last self portrait • june 30 1972

crayon and colored crayons

henry moore commemorating
the first controlled generation of nuclear power
created a maquette called 'atom piece'
a skull turned nuclear mushroom cloud
turned head of man turned exploding head in helmet of war
picasso even at ninety-two turned heads too
his last his own self portrait of his own
a living skull staring into the unaccommodated alone
a horror of the unstoppable revolt of his own skin and bone
like hearing your own mother near death's door
telling you on the hollow terrifying telephone
that she's had her last tooth pulled out
and she's happy that finally there are no more to go
his spaniard eyes are infinities swirling mobius strips
one milky as whey dizzy and stripped of sight
the other a vortex a spider web of encroaching night
the ruined skull prepares to leap from scrim of flesh
and the knowing owner knowing nothingness
knowing all too well the vast bottomless well
of the end of the end of time more to less
his anorexic mouth a void an empty straight line
his sallow eyes are ringed like cartoon moons
or battered boxers' or bruised targets set out
for the archer death who has drawn his long bow back
this is the artist's last vision of himself less to less
his once indomitable virtuoso ego now congealed
his own head on a pike in his own raw pitiless lines
his old hand more assured more than ever free
unlike some whose mouths freeze in terrible o's
open wide and round to let the fleeing soul bird out
his mouth in bruised blues mauves and blacks is grimly sealed
anguish would be proud to find its definition so eloquently shown
in this his dictionary of mortality point blank
he never lived anywhere but in the trigger of the present
bang bang all his works always sang

the house where order sings

this is the house where order sings
where robins hop across the lawn at dusk
where sunflowers turn up their faces to say hello
where the warm air is spiced with summer musk

this is the house with welcoming lights
where floors and carpets bow down to the broom
where cats sleep soundly day and night
where the beds are always comforting
where the smell of fresh cut grass fills every room
where doors and windows are always smiling
and smiling back are the sun and the moon
and forever gentle time flows forever slow

walking out of paradise (2005)

the happy bush

the happy bush
leaves dancing in the wind
sits by the lake
taking in the kingfisher clouds
the kingfisher sun
the kingfisher's waters
the kingfisher's hours
in our hearts
something happy flowers

cedar burning

the wind always is carrying it all away
to the clouds large as continents
to the waters black across the bays
small strips and patches of green
on the low lying hills far away
the light in slashes puddles and stripes
as the sun in ribbons breaks through
the croak-of-raven clouds
osprey above the dappled camp looks down
the waves are talking
no and yes and yes and no
they are saying they are singing
it is all i can do to keep up
everything is moving too fast for one so slow
to take it in as it takes me
this animated conversation
this other distant language
is a band of silver on the far shore
becomes a carpet of gold on the lake's opening door
opens out to greet me and as quickly goes away
the sleight-of-hand forest light on my hands
comes and goes and comes and goes

who is this great prestidigitator
leading me on infinitesimally
always in the shadow of his glory
minutes follow minutes years follow years
all but a single letter in this his eternal story

clothes on a line

the wet socks with blackened soles
look too tired to dry
the long johns defer to the blue towel
in all matters of fashion and style

airlifting an elephant from the outdoor sculpture gallery of the metropolitan museum of art

cultures can be so large and gray
that after centuries tribes of academics and philosophers
are still deciphering them
sorting tail from head from side from trunk
proffering this theory or the next
but airlifting an elephant
from the outdoor sculpture gallery
of the metropolitan museum of art
sets the teeth to grinding and the mind to unwinding
first there's the getting of permissions
and the thought of paying the massive rent
from the city and the various boards of directors
and the infernal logistics the devils in the details
of getting the elephant up the freight elevator
usually reserved for rembrandts, van goghs and egyptian funeria
then there's interviewing the trainers to assure a docile animal
who will not be spooked by the aztec sacrificial masks
or the hindu goddess of many arms in eternal dance
on point one leg rising up in fierce wrath
dancing on a bed of human skulls
all propelled along in a stately procession
on the plated back of the tortoise of the cosmos
then there's the marketing and publicity
what angle to use to garner maximum media
so the brand is showcased and people start believing
something very new is taking place
at the grand old storage cabinet of all human achievement
and patrons give and give and attendance goes up and up
at fundraising dances fashion shows and special openings
and everyone is happy happy happy

administration curators politicians academics media citizens
this was the conundrum of my dream last night
in the depths of algonquin park in northern ontario
too much oxygen I suppose
but I woke up pouring sweat poised for success near triumphant
the only catch was finding a plane that could lift
an elephant without need of a runway
capable of vertical ascent and descent
and airlifting an elephant
from the outdoor sculpture gallery
of the metropolitan museum of art
and the other problem was the would-be pilot
who i unwittingly hired was actually a terrorist
who insisted he had access to a plane
parked in central park ready to do the job
when only i knew he was out to destroy
the physical history of the family of man
in the dream i could feel myself returning to wakefulness
but i futilely resisted the pull to consciousness
knowing when i awoke i would have to live with the fact
that i failed to prevent a terrible crime against world culture
in my beloved dream city of new york, new york
the radiant imperial center of my every dream
that and not wanting to ever hear an elephant scream

the sadness that follows squashing a vole with a car

i wasn't speeding honest
i saw its little black silhouette
long nose stub tail
black fur cropped
snub like a chubby mouse
wearing a small black mink stole
speeding helter skelter across the road
frantic in its small crossing headstrong
determined committed mindless blind
in split of a second calculating
speed of car speed of vole
vole calculating speed of car
i chose to not swerve
he much determined kept on
the hard thump
and imagined squash
told me we were both wrong
my deepest regrets, mr. vole
such a terrible relentlessness
surrounded it all

peonies

winter long they slept sound and snug in their beds
dreaming of a march sun and a more merciful rain
for months when dawn wore her black slicker
and walked her dogs freezing rain and snow
our waiting for their fragrant globes seemed a forever
challenged by their own rapid growth and green gravitas
they gave new meaning to 'cultivated'
begging for rings to support their weight to keep them tall
and save them from toppling over of their own need to grow
their unbridled love of a benevolent sun
their theatrical openings loved by ants and humans as well
their sweet smell is my childhood's pristine dell
and here they are again so soon so soon
round pink and white going pink or lighter
white and white going pink and pink going darker
i love their brightness they the fireflies of summer days
i love them white or pink or white or pink and rose
their color is the color of an old calming secret
never an intrusion on the hopeful robin's egg
never a swear on the blue skies of mays and junes

some exotic birds

the gold and ebony-plated ant rattler
the scarlet-crested wallon
the antlered swamp shriek
the fluffy web-footed desert nautilus
the pink pond shearwater
the snub-winged elephantine murmur
the razor-beaked ought
the club-footed zap gloss
the timorous mouse linnet
the cave-dwelling slug swallow
the apple-breasted lolly lark
the whistling whinny
the tin-tailed french fry warbler
the adipose cuckoo
the checkered sturgeon pecker
the ruby-throated cow flopper
the lesser dust tosser
the greater dust tosser
the sludge auk
the downy glass-breaking grosbeak
the watermelon seed shoveller

the silver-throated boat-tailed balloon chaser
the single-eyed flounder pipit
the tweedy bee snatcher
the metropolitan cross-billed snipe
the carrion mouse hurler
the ebullient moose chucker
the rose-bottomed aluminum thrush
the bog-dwelling sardine hawk
the massive carolina hog chickadee
the egg scrambling looney
the blue-footed carnivorous booby
the diving dowager
the rocky crescent moon swallower
the star-eating rook
the surly grouch buzzard
the nettle-crushing snark petrel
the short-winged monastic howler
the bat-faced lard warbler
the lesser marshmallow plover
the swarthy lyre-feathered gnarl
the short-legged armadillo chaser
the long-legged armadillo chaser
the saffron gourd hollower
the saw-billed buzz croaker
the ring-necked glitch
the scurrilous ring-necked bog hopper
the tufted calliope
the parisian pallet wren
the italian bog trollope
the spiky log drummer
the hump-backed chicken startler
the tangerine tortoise vulture
the tasmanian jumbo jay
lord phalarope's two-toed phoebe
the gherkin albatross
the featherless oops
the tuba borer
the synthetic chump changer
the nude belgian endive canary
the ivory-beaked tuxedo crow
the slow black-backed bratwurst poker
the flat-billed urge
the amazonian millipede throtler
the whistling nicotine curlew
the tittering devil-horned galloper
the dun and rose-bellied over

the great blue-winged finale

amaryllis

bulb heart
size of monkey head
your flowers the colors of lent
to wedding white
your jack-in-beanstalk stalk
a candle shock of cutlass green
leave your church and funeral home
your christmas and easter scenes
your clay and plastic pots
your perch in florists' shops
and let your captive clutch
of open blooms dream

god

de capo fortissimo
voice of the wilderness
no name no address
the eternal living word
the silver planets the smallest stars
the blue and green earth a marble
between your index finger and thumb
the everlasting no and yes
a child in your arms
the sky the sun the planets the moon
the exclamation of enlightenment
the hidden song of awe
the circulating infinite mobius
the collective 'oh!'
the vast *obbligato*
all that are sheltered all that come to harm
the blind the lame the frail the deaf the dumb
the all encompassing compass of us
the less that's more the more that's less
the north south east and west
morning night and noon
all that's learned and all that's taught
the voice outside the voice within
the shrouded mountain
the sun going down
basso profundo
caught in the eye of the fallen bird

log

humble log
your smile warms us
the happy fire dances
when you enter
flames christmas at your center
like cats mark a favored bush

once in a while
when i fail to remember
walking in a trance or fog
a wagging poem like this one enters
replaces one forgotten
and follows like a happy dog

the sow's soliloquy

oink oink where have y'all been
so you think i'm dirty a greedy slob
when i'm clean smarter than any dog

when my immune system is closest to your own
and i'd just as soon suckle a starving kitten
out of ample indulgence as my own newborn

a classic my bacon frames your eggs
my hulk and slow grace in moving begs
an intelligence swifter than my girth

when i am kindly hung high by my ankle bones
to be throat cut and bled by the farmer who raised me
i will gladly own this as a joy and mercy then
over the factory deaths of my less fortunate kin

cans't thou draw out leviathan

cold has locked mountains and molecules
and all their dreams in prisons of ice
the communities of geese pick and peck
the nubs of still green frozen grass
is this not the beautiful dark thing
is this not the risen thing that makes us feel
is this not the faith of every breath
does not the insistent alleluia of waters
and rises and ledges of river and river land
serve to summon the great beast of joy
no lure too large no hook too sharp

road kill

they are not as frequent as the leaves
or the grasses gone pale from the first freeze
or the sands forever subdivided by unforgiving seas
when you pass the fallen deer or fawn
the woodchuck saluting the bloated driver who struck him
the smaller ones - chipmunk squirrel rabbit snake turtle cat or dog -
you know even if you choose to ignore or not see
this was nothing like running over a rock or log
the skunk with his aftermath musk out of luck
the possum with his frozen snarling grin
all struck dead in the pitch of dusk night or dawn
and unforgiving the bloodless light of day reveals
the unfortunate white of gristle tendon and bone
as you drive by their furry litany *noblesse oblige*
can you almost hear the sad snap and crush of fine leg
that once leapt obedient to the will of the antler-crowned buck?

first hatch of winter

it was the first day of fifty degrees
after a frieze of days thrown down
a deep well of below zeroes
the fields furrowed from the rise
where the blue lilt of hills spun off
soft to the east and soft to the west
as if they had been plowed by man
when they had been plowed by sun
which melted the row tops
and saved the snow in troughs
and gave the sense of snowfields plowed
to what end too early for spring
late winter under a quilt of pallid blue
did one fearless one a tiny god
a midge? a blue winged olive?
rise up before my eyes?
it only took a change of a few degrees
to make this stalwart nothing rise
and i raved, "bravo! brave little one,
if you against all odds
then why not we?"

sea wrack

the wrecks of man's little hubris many
drifting disconsolate in the eddies and bays
the pinions of the drowned gull and crow

pinned pathetic dirty-winged wet crosses
their necks limp in the tide drift
like tarred and feathered hanged men
their yellow beaks though bright not celebratory
ignored by the flock of geese optimistic overhead
the rusted awl and staves of broken barrels
dancing like children's toys in the surf
foam and plastic balls chased by dogged winds
their paint worn thin to pallor by salt's teeth
the tremolos of milk cartons and kelp like disheveled wigs
the slosh and grumble of broken ships' vertebrates
wood soak and rust broken-down returning carcasses
metal and compass to the ocean particulate
broken buoys and burst balloons unwrapped
by the giant hands of winds and tides and tossed aside
the careless hearts of men and women open nets long fled
their cavernous chest caves sway in davey jone's locker
the seabirds' sharp cries of *requiem eternam*
harkening above the fog and sea surf
the assembly lines of floating bottles and cans
mocking the idiot engineer of fickle weather
waterspout and tide surge and moon rust
and the ever cacophonous symphony
of things hobbled and bobbing in sea and river brine
the drift of pale flesh of dead fish white and nutrient
the flotsam and jetsam of all our meanderings
returning to the ocean library to the estuary of nothingness
remembering the remembered reminding the reminded

the wounded god

i have been born and died and born again
i have mounted the many steps
to the pinnacle of dawn the apes below
in a frenzied froth of expectation
in my white ceremonial gown
i have been thrown to the seas below
to drown in my own blood and the blood
of those thrown heartless down before me
their chests split completely blown
i have ascended the highest temple
and felt the stone knife
tear my flesh and break the cage of my ribs
and still living seen it hurled
still beating to the supplicant crowds below
i have been flogged crowned with thorns
and nailed to a cross of wood

and felt the spear pierce my ribs
my water piss sweat and blood baptizing
even the dogs gamboling at the base of my cross
i have been slandered and left with my beggar's cup
abandoned to seek alms from the hard-hearted
in jaipur or mexico city in hope of reincarnation
where beggars deform themselves for profit from pity
roach-like i have huddled in tunnels like a tunnel rat
i have been burnt crisp by their flame throwers
i have been thrown into the rabid company of strange beasts
and torn limb from limb my blood watering the sands
my flesh ripped from the husk of my body
like a grilled piece of corn on the cob
and planted in the cold dark resistant earth
i have been crushed between large stones
my blood a wine in the press of their cruelties
i have been the passenger in the tower's plane
and have remembered the litany of my many names
i am he who knows no end
to the futility of my frequent tryings
the tides of my ever risings and fallings
i am he who in the end knows no end
who rises victorious and ever-unknown again and again
my bleeding heart the ever burning alpha and omega
the beginning eternal without end eternal
i am your heart your breath as you are mine
again and ever again resurrected
i have tasted the brine of my own blood
even as they roll back the door of my tomb
as they rifle through the ashes of my remains
as they dig up my casket to exhume
what is still alive and lives within the rot
i hear in my own voice the howling wind singing
they know not what they do
father forgive them
they know not what they know
and i hear these words ringing in my ears
and can never forget the fragility of my own oblivion
i am the lord and there is none other
i form the light and create the darkness
i make peace and tolerate all evil
i the lord who am do all these things

periwinkle

the winter was dark dawns
with many deep freezings

grays of snow
grays of sky
grays of earth
grays of frozen rivers
grays of frigid days
grays of wool and boots and boring overcoats
boring everything muted down
to dark dawns and deep freezings
deeply muted deeply down
relentless sleets relentless snows
missing the light
sitting by the fire at night
and then one day unannounced
after freezing torrential rain
and wet late spring snow
the light did something funny
as if someone playing a computer game
put in their password and a secret name
and suddenly the computer kicked in
and we felt what it was like to truly win
to come into a pile of money
as in the old days of rin-tin-tin
spring barked and ran
and came barking to the rescue of us all
like the unifying power of color television
one fine day we woke up turned on the tube
and it was all birdsong sunlight and budding greens
and even if you're not a country rube
or, pity, were not attuned to a new season's rubic's cube
or smelled like cats on porches everywhere
the earth breathing the change of air
you know it in your heart of hearts
this is not a job for midas muffler or omni-lube
but a job that brings a joy long overdue
this is april and the world so long dead is waking up
pablo casals is gone but still plays on
on cds and in all our memories
the maple shadows still cross the road
the nights finally are shorter than the days
starlight somehow shines less colder
and the cellos of the constellations and the planets
thrill those listening with their celestial trills
with their eternal chilling change of days
and when all was once dark bleached gray
charcoal miner's black a coal pitch grave
suddenly out of nowhere like a wish

the eternal periwinkle begins to sing,
“blue first blue first blue!”
unvanquished sings, “blue first blue!”

new jersey childhood

I. First Memory

what one dreams can be
walking with my grandfather
through an arbor of cedar
the morning sun falling down in slats
at path's end sat the beast
to this day i don't know what
was it a lynx a ferile cat
or a domestic tabby
muzzle bloody
from some feathered feast

II. Second Memory

the sound of rain
in the alley mating cats
the drunk mr. mckenna
returning home drunk again
feeling no pain
waking me up from a dream of rain
singing, “the ham is cooked.
the ham is cooked.”

II. Roselle 1952

there were orchards and ponds
and apple trees blooming
and spring peepers peeping
there were pink globes of peonies
and their ever-attendant ebony ants
and five types of fragrant roses
a big screened-in porch
irises and rabbits in the yard
and in the kitchen in his under shorts
my father sweat band on his forehead
keeping his sweat out of the pots
brewing gallons of lipton's iced-tea
no air-conditioning the whirring of a fan
and in the playroom a piano and a TV
with a rolling hissing screen
both horizontal and vertical hold not working not
the kitchen smelling of fresh lemons, peonies and tea

III. Escape

the fields were jungles
and the creeks were rivers
exotic lands three blocks from home

IV. Birthdays

there were plastic cowboy hats
and aluminum-foil princess crowns
birthday cakes and candle lightings
sparklers and sparkler lightings
on the white cake dribbles of pink wax
pin the tail on the donkey
as flash bulbs popped and hissed and blistered
they scrunched under our feet
everyone tried far too hard
to have a bit of fun
the flash and the eye's memory of the flash
blink to remember when was that

V. The Dream

it was a long suburban street
and there was no one on it
fat street lights glowed
like the ghosts of giant fireflies
at the far end full of menace
down a corridor of gloomy moths and maples
his massive knuckles bruising the blacktop
loomed the albino gorilla
moving insanely toward me

shy sparrow

small sparrow shy sparrow
your rust-crowned head at rest
tucked soft into your downy breast
tonight our friend the moon is broken
like a mirror its shards are flashing
in the tops of the tallest pines

small sparrow shy sparrow
the sweetness of your morning song
is now a silent dream as strong
as all sweet dreams that go unspoken
under wheeling stars and planets splashing
in the merlot sea of an april sky

small sparrow shy sparrow

my dusty companion without a care
so commonplace so everyday so rare
you show us how small can be a token
of something so fine beyond worlds clashing
that certain small things may never die

COWS

there's nothing quite like them of an early summer morning the sun uprising
as they placidly amble in love with a fine mist up the long green hill
their backs white and black jigsaw puzzles wend up to the company of old friends

there is no rush in their easy progression to their world of animal belonging
and then there's their patience like a stone wall's or a house wren's trill
in their sweet seriousness they slowly spread out over the new grass their quest's end

the rise of timeless hills and the line of gray fence and barbed wire
are proud compliments to their stolid stance on rented pastureland
without them the old red farm would surely float away bereft at a loss all alone

it's their big eyes vacant and warm too shy to show any fire
that tell us they're not just meat on the hoof but a humble kind of grand
for all their unflappable density their skin loose canvas over a living piano of bone

their company is cherished by geese and goslings nestling in their shade's safe distance
they meander the live-long day like tourists in an open bright casino grazing winning and losing
looking at once alert and at rest vacantly ruminating on their well-chewed cud

whenever i pass them on highways and see them speeding to abattoirs at our insistence
mud caked crammed side by side stunned by their loss of fields at our hungry choosing
there's always the shining eye of one that meets my eye as if to say, "i too know it ends in blood."

the canary's complaint

the trapeze bar is broken
the wire cage door is ajar
the open garden is in flower
this is my time to be free my hour

never more than now never more

but I'd rather sit on my dirty cell floor
and sing a few sour yellow bars
than fly out free over the vast green bower
past faded blinds to the shelter of friendly stars

the cruelty of the cricket the farmer and the moon

when i was a singing cricket
not old enough to know right from wrong
i envied the simple farmer
plowing row after row of corn

when i was a simple farmer
and lost my magic carpet song
i forgot what it was to be a cricket
to sing what all crickets have known all along

when i was a sickle moon
plowing furrows of light in the clouds
i looked down from on high on all crickets and men
and envied the simple song of a fall afternoon

though they lived blessed as the old earth and sky
deep within the answer of one another's wild soul
not one - neither cricket nor farmer nor moon
could recall when long ago they forgot or why

flying over el paso

way down there the earth's a clay bowl
of barren mesas mountains and desiccate flats
the curves of valleys are a checkered pliocene
the tiles of fields teal and lime all rhyme
a mule of a quilt following the meander
of a disconsolate river so mean
its arroyos and waters are brown as turd dirt
and everything rolls out to a parched beyond
all scorched and rusted and angry dry
dead as boredom dry and predictable as guilt
yet here and there new greens remain indomitable
making the old palette of decrepit reds sing

last pear

and i upon the last gray branch
all around me all around
the forest a library of unread trees
the blood of maples on the ground
when i alone lit up the early fall nights
my rosy face never once looked down

to all the words

at once present yet strangely absent
responsible yet not responsible

oh you neutral legions
in your armor feathers furs or finery
locked and loaded in your box of dictionaries
like untested chocolates or small bombs
biding your time
wrappers unwrapped fuses unlit

well meaning threatening or not caring at all
you dance one generation to the next
your usage a matter of chance

the monkeys of fate at their typewriters
their tails all curled
are hammering away on their typewriter keys
anachronism following anachronisms
their colored pixels piling up on computer screens
like piles of fermenting electronic leaves

what is unseen about you
what is furious and inscrutable
is what we want to know the most

we follow your waddling path
like goslings a mother goose
to open water or farthest shore
like axes hammers drills or saws
prying opening long locked doors

sometimes lonely for significance
you cry out like farm dogs at night
who hear the free coyotes range
you crave the company of wilder kin
on the far side of some wooded hill

even when we think
we've given you a sequence
a certain melodic marching order
a magnificent significance
we melodramatically beg you
to tell us what you mean
we are tight you are loose

and we remain unsatisfied
knowing it's not your sequence that lied
or your letters that lived and died

but our unquenchable desire
for a spark of light
on a moonless night
black stars on a white page

small town halloween parade

parents and children all camouflaged
two giant carrots their baby bunny in her carriage
two tiny carrots dogs in tow
a walking christmas tree covered in fake snow
two babies antique cars to their parents' garage
five guys in wedding dresses dreaming of a perfect marriage
a two-person two-hump camel in search of a desert mirage
a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound six-foot six ABC broadcaster
in the guise of winney the pooh
fourteen dogs wearing NYPD t-shirts
forty firemen shy of three feet tall
a walking pot of slightly stewed irish stew

a fat guy dressed up as a soccer ball
tattered pandas tigers bears sprung from imagination's zoo
the female lion tamer taming her husband's reluctant lion
a tribe of iroquois waving feathered riding quirts
a red fire boat squirting some tiny water squirts
a clothes dryer full of cheer a clothes line bright clothes drying
a couple as the world trade center pre september 11
a crowd of midget devils and angels
in pursuit of cartoon hells or heavens
halos made from coat hangers horns of aluminum foil
one aluminum foil liberty bell
ben franklin holding a kite and lightening bolt of gold

stolen from a grumpy zeus crying crocodile tears
missing the other gods who apparently stayed in Olympus
or forgot departure time on the yellow school bus
or decided they were just too old to be an octopus
scrooge pushing a wheel barrow full of golden coins the size of dinner plates
new years in diapers and old years with scythes and beards
a giant gouda with legs in search of a lost fondue
alice and her rabbit looking for forgotten times and dates
a quart of milk the dad his kids three chocolate cakes
a pecan pie on wheels a goliath carton of eggs
easter chicks and easter bunnys with pink ribbons on their yellow legs
two human pea hens' four human ducks in a row

a walking microscope and sigmund freud

a chinese dragon lead by fu man chu with gong
an astronaut rocketing into the starry void
long john silver and his famous dong
twelve madonnas three snoop-doggie-dogs
a coffee pot a toaster some burning fire logs
two prozacs a lipitor and an aspirin
one half-baked attempt at was it lassie or rin-tin-tin
mississippi john hurt singing lay my burden down
a bunch of emmet kelly ronald macdonald clowns
a cucumber and lots of princesses in glittery gowns
a bottle of milk followed by a frying pan

two women dressed as one two-headed obese man
all watched by a shuffling crowd
one nimbus followed by one cumulous cloud
what can you say about these watchers and their watchings
ghosts in every day dress pedestrian pedestrians
left over memories of the real world's stress
dirty shoes floppy hats their jeans unpressed
party poopers pooper scoopers voyeurs of tv bloopers
or more politely the appreciative audience the applauding crowd
left behind to breathe the stampede dust
of those that wear the mask and crown
in their costumed quest for the end of town

diane arbus look-alikes
watching the flags blow and the clouds fly by
watching the alarm clock walk and the skeletons run
thinking next year it'll be our turn to have some fun
our turn to be four dimensional more dimensional
something vastly other than we are
like orion andromeda the milky way to burn
like the sun venus saturn mars or the lonely moon
our turn to be tin men or women of golden foil
our turn to conquer hum drum to sing another tune
for once to doff old clothes old lives
to plunge heads first into newer brighter skins

spindrift and small goodbyes (2005 – 2008)

fingerprint on a glass of water next to a glass of wine on a white napkin at 36,000 feet over the irish sea

the swirling fingerprint
on the glass of water
stands out in the sun
is it mine i wonder is it mine
and on the linen napkin
also stands a glass of wine
where the ruby sun shines
such a brighter flying red
courtesy of the pinot noir a sentinel
the napkin is so much whiter
as if the world above our earth
is singing as it reads my mind
as one would read a loving letter
from a friend or lover
land water earth air but a ringing bell
is it mine i wonder is it mine
or of something grander but a hint

enigma machine

i am the burrowing mechanical worm
that believes my teething through wood rot
will nourish and save me from the all consuming knot
of time inching through the glory storm of my own dreams
closer and closer to the safe soft center deciduous
when you split the trunk of the long-dead beech
you'll see the convoluted map of my reveries
and not know end from beginning each glory
equally beautiful and torturous

woodpecker tree

she stands barren
having danced a good and joyful dance
now but a wooden womb to grubs
boring beetles and woodpeckers who feast on them

she faces due east and due west
shadowing the sun's and moon's trance
once alive now others live in her rhythm
as light cloud sleet and snow in the voice of a wren

there is in her and her kin
the hidden wink of thin eternity
sense of some great ending yet about to begin
some noble work about to give voice to nobility

the birds have come to love her
even in her death she enriches them
she is their home a colony of sustenance
her voice all their voices her limbs all their songs

reading wallace stevens on a snowy sunday morning

the winds are making their january roo-hoo-hoos
and orders of drifts are becoming disorders of drifts
the whites-on-grays are white or gray
as the cerebellum of an old gentle cloistered praying nun
the birds are blown off the celebration of their feeders
and desiccate leaves off their tenacious vines
the thrum of the air's vengeance that is winter
persists like a leaden drum drumming time
the thoughtful ones both thinking animals and men
inside their souls wear heated rooms like expensive stoles
the wind in every farmhouse around makes its january sound
down the rungs of chimneys and through the lungs of flues
the woodpeckers' and cardinals' reds think not to ask
whose arrogance of frozen whites and grays are these? whose?
who would guess that merely to view this cold erasure merrily
would be to take a tutorial on what it means to be and then to lose?

child crying in an airport

there is no artifice or pretending in it
no more than when the wind's breath rises and falls
or when the ocean beaten senseless by a storm
becomes an ache that climbs from cry to shriek
and slides back down the sad stairs of sorrow
it is no comfort that we learn to hide our grief
as simple as the grief in the song of a wren
our losses and regrets from others and ourselves
in the interests of keeping public places sane
we stow our sacks of woes the monkeys of our minds
until in pain INNOCENCE begins to cry
and then a deep chorus from within us
cries and cries and cries
then deep inside each soul's dark well
the smiler-with-the-knife creeps out of hiding
and stabs and stabs again the apparatus of our lies

and some ancient sobbing something
sobs and sobs and dies another flimsy death

manet's 'a bar at the folie bergere

in the background a mist of *bon vivants*
in formal wear under a smoking chandelier
to the right a 'gentleman' in a black top hat
trying to stare through the bodice of a bar maid
the white globes of grenadine light penetrate the bottles
green and incarnadine champagne pastille and rose
gold foil covers corks and a simple crystal flute glows
near two pink roses and a glass bowl full of tangerines
she is corseted all in black and white lace
a corsage and ivory cameo on her ample bosom rest
but her face her eyes her mouth are lost in sadness
resigned and reserved for herself and our 'human' race
her resignation draws us back through time
on the wings of a wish to save her even now
her sorrow and ours but ghosts trapped in time
inspired to save a ghost of a ghost of absinthe or less
in the wings of the bar asleep
lies a very sleek black cat

facing st. paul's from the top of the tate modern

behind st. paul's the new city architecture snubs the old
on the far side of the thames are constable's beloved clouds
the january sky is not exactly laughing but it's not sad either
white gulls fly over and under the bridges
and the determined pedestrians mime colored crickets
willfully seeking their tiny irrelevant destinations
barges tour boats red blue yellow polka dots surge up the down river
the oddly-dubbed 'gherkin' swears at st. paul's with a glassy gaze
the occasional kayaker on the river below magnetizes children
with strawberry cheeks blond hair little feet little hands
who press their noses against the museum's window glass
and look down in wonder on the bridge a silver vein pumping
circulating leucocytes in this case humans back and forth
pedestrian pigeons like pepper grains a geometric stand of white birches
women with orange hermes shopping bags silver baby carriages
dogs loose and on leashes street magicians and musicians
determined joggers line the limed rocks of the muddy river
even at low tide everyone and everything seems so determined
even those trying to step out of the flow and merely watch
hypnotized mesmerized and quieted by the simple reassurance
the generous flow of an abundant January-london afternoon
one little girl practices her whistle-stop high-pitched scream

the voices of the people looking down on this scene
are in one instant hushed by parents quieting this child
londoners call their millennial bridge “the great wobbly”
over a merlot someone reading out loud to someone listening says,
“oscar wilde said the final revelation is that lying,
the telling of beautiful things, is the proper aim of art.”

hyde park mews in january

here in january the camellia is still blooming
and a light frost coats this london morning
pigeons approach you with a happy waddle
in the sunlight one flies straight toward your eyes
and banks just in time to avoid a kamikaze collision
as if you and they were eternal friends
the squirrels come over and look up
as if to say, “good day, governor, any tips?”
it could be a game of hide-and-seek with childhood friends
the palm tree stands content next to the towering sycamore
and everything smells of the rich damp london earth
black loam that speaks of loving tendings and tenderness
those two joggers are young and in love
he wearing forest green sweats
she with pony tail swaying right and left
they could be adam and eve this could be eden
where their breath rises up like an answered prayer
as the rising sun rests on the rhododendrons
it’s hard to see this world of ours as a very dangerous place
the piebald magpies the blue-winged jays the ring-necked dove
look like their suits were tailored on saville row
to match the park’s january emerald greens
like the smoke in winter of our everyday breath
a potpourris of every size and shape of dogs
new joys incarnate one dallying a black-and-white collie
another an old dachshund ‘mortimer’ hears his master call
smiling as only contented dogs do he picks up his pace
given our ancient cleverness in inventing ways to survive
it is impossible to believe we have the power
to erase forever all of this

winter

gone white with frost are the few remaining wild grape leaves
and their spiraling tendrils on the foolish vine
too bright is the clear skin of ice over pond skim
stones thrown fail to produce their concentric circles
and the frog-like splash and plunk before descending
dark down to the ripe mud of crawfish-floor in summer

instead they clack and skitter as each skids to a frozen stop
now the air is a high farce of summer's dead voice icicle sharp
the dour birds waste no energy twittering their gleeful songs
they puff-ball themselves to insulate their tiny hearts from trite joys
even the thin daytime moon shivers alone in its own cold parlor
of the milk-thin sky there is only the compliment of a frigid wind
a wind whose only role is to rattle the shingles on the farmhouse eaves
to take spirals of smoke off chimneys and banish them horizontal east
everything is flattened by the cold even the sound of the slightest sounds
the shock of crows on country roads explodes above the silent snow
bursts off white ground dark as the wings of printers' ink fly off a vellum page
the roar of snowplows plowing intermittently reminds country souls
that this season's clock is the clock of old men and old women winding down
that the city's engines - blood and money - are coldly coagulated here
by the mute indifferent comforters of cold and snow
by the icy refusal of all things to move

**my sister bernadette
and her ducks**

she was as pale as parchment
or porcelain in a strong light
beautiful as frail
and because frail beautiful

so thin my mother fed her egg-nogs
to put some flesh on her
she had two ducks
daffodil one and daffodil two

they would not walk and waddle
but speed waddle and run
and hop up into her arms
as if she were the safest nest

and there within her skinniness
and her long blond pigtailed
find protection the closest
any duck with luck has known to rest

i can never see or think of her
without thinking of those two ducks
and bernadette holding them in the sun
in the summer of our summers

the only thing more golden
than this memory was their feathers

my sister's blond blond hair
my love for her and her two daffodils:
daffodil two and daffodil one

the sadness of small goodbyes

only a twenty-minute ride to the train station
where the hudson dreams its mighty dream
and this ride to the station today
the most ordinary of rides is but a dream
i see you at the wheel and our aging
the dogwoods with their riots of white in bloom
the rhododendron paging their way to new glories
and this nervous feeling in the stomach of the breeze
that schoolchildren feel on their first day of school

like all i have come to regret that we must accept
that all is merely beginnings and endings
followed by more beginnings and endings
hellos and goodbyes when we know neither
and mostly take for granted either
after all it's just a jaunt a short trip a few days away
but silly me as i kiss your hand goodbye
i want to hold you as if it were the very end
which silly we know it really isn't

though this ending is only a small one
a breath a grace a note in a life of springs and falls
we say goodbye and i collect my ticket and myself
and trackside sit on a bench carved with the names
of graffiti artists friends and lovers i'll never know
and i look at the blue shoulders of the catskills
rising above the green of the hudson valley hills
and i think it was just a short good-bye after all
as we know most all are and most save one will be
for wanda may 9 on the 8:56 to new york city

dumb as rocks

they outlive generations of generations
they keep still as lost kings paupers trees and leaves
while all of every species fall they are impervious
inscrutable and unto an infinity calm
riverside lakeside ocean-side pond side
they share an old joke - the laughter of waves
they enjoy the company of bugs nuts and ants
they are silent and quieting impenetrable
they snuggle into and hug the land

they echo the sentiments of the ever-passing weather
fickle rain sleet snow wind heat and cold fog and freeze
the seasons leave them indifferent as a fleeting breeze
they remain steadfast in their love of the earth
their uncomplaining erosion and slow lessening are nutrient
they were forged in an old maelstrom of flame and melt
and have witnessed many worst and many best births
unwavering they are consistent in their kind indifference to all

night lawn

the night lawn is full of dandelions
hundreds of lion-headed white puffballs standing tall
evanescent geodesic globes transcendent
the moon lights their manes through to their dandelion hearts
their dandelion centers delicate lit electric like bulbs
the moon herself a dandelion the cosmic queen of dandelions
almost full with the great halo of a fairy ring around her
and below cast at our feet mere legions of worshipping dandelions
and i mere nothing cast too in the scheme of things sitting on a stump
petting a shy black and white cat who feels safer in the dark
who looks up at me and beyond at the moon in feline wonder
the first few crickets of spring begin to sing as if at last on cue
can you imagine them bronze and black at the base of field-grass stalks
they've come out to pray their due to Luna the white goddess Diana
pale huntress stalking the planets through a haze of stars
who in her own majestic hunt so softly lights this vast maze
proscenium of farms and fields with her resplendent night

two willows

let us always be two willows bending
that watch the passing galleries
of racing weather wind and cloud
the mysteries of sun and moon and stars
let us always stand together by this little pond
that overflows with the joy of our watching
its changing waters' changing colors glow

for wanda

on the planting of two willows by our pond

june 1, 2006

gull

first the reflection flying
zigzag in the silver mirror
of the lake's still surface
balsam cedar and pine
reflections on reflections

going down dark and wiggly
into the illusion of depths
far by the timbered shore
new-day sky bluest
on the tops of small waves
shivered by a sweet breeze
then the gull itself
white as polished alabaster
tucked-up feet orange as carrot
rowing steady past us
on the rise eye level
winging its way to greet
the docile amber lion of the sun

moose

at first a black dot on the far shore
a tree stump that slowly changed its shape
in the sickle shallows of pickerel weed and reed
then closer the mass of him a parked van
clipped buff brown eternal placid calm
unperturbed by the approach of our canoe
bubbling loud water gurgling the air he became
headless in his quest for water-lily roots
mohican mane from back of neck low to shoulder
all his browns the browns of rembrandt or van dyke
including his cocoa back-of-throat goatee
milk-to-dark-chocolate mochas
grays and tans at haunch and hock
big as a steer docile as a cow
bull-like hump massive head two little buds of new horn
breaking through forehead thin skin light as ivory
parked in the lush cafeteria of manitou bay
a massive hors d'oeuvre the barrel chest
held up by slim haunches and toothpick legs
almost too fragile to support his thick gravity
wild contented child of old Algonquin
packing weight on with a prescient determination
knowing in his genes the ancient corollary
of raw poundage against the ravages of too-soon winter
wise in his dark unknowing urgency
dim specter of cold hunger haunting his determined feed
winter's heart-freezing killing indifference here with him now
even as the loon chicks ride their mother's ample backs
long before the aurora borealis shines low on the horizon
winter's chilling howl echoes through the bones of his august frame
he looks up his eyelashes too-feminine quizzical metronomes

bigger than a draft horse he looks up water cascading form his large head
he looks up green spaghetti of water lily roots hanging from his mouth
his great soft bulb of a suede nose walrus-like
like a contented cow's his jaw horizontal-sawing root to cud
his black eyes though searching you not through not at you
with an innocence so large he knows no fear
his expression deadpan as a large drunk at a local bar
so confident in his size as to fear no rival
unflappable except for the alert spears of his flyswatter-antennae ears
this giant staring back with no aggression consumed by his consuming
imperturbable stoic centered totally at home
except in the bald fact of his steady focused forage
his bloodline's intentions are his fate
nothing will keep him from spring and his bid for dominance
this is the lord algonquin has destined for all time
to be in april great-antler-wrack-crowned
his gentle tribe's kind and gentle king

sacks of diamonds

take a thousand sacks of diamonds
cause them to magically float
east to west horizon
and follow the path of the sun
the biggest in the center shining stripes
the smallest at the edges
shattering in a boulevard of light
crossing the lake to the tolling
happy bells of small waves
and an assured wind in the pines
put the black dot of a loon in a bay
to the north and one with a chick
to the south make the air an intoxication
of balsam tamarack granite dust and pine
sit and breath and admire in awe
the hand of some great alchemist
who throws all his jewels away each day
the diamonds now in the far north bay
and with a change of cloud and air
sparkling at your very feet near shore
collect them hold them gather them
try if you dare
created by the sun's crossing
one horizon to the next
over the sweet water lakes east to west
a meritocracy of unconditional joy and mercy

great blue heron

the way the great blue heron landed
on the last of a chain of granite boulders
in the lake of diamonds under constable clouds
his great stick legs cushioning his landing
his great gray-blue wings softening
his arrest and his reconnoiter
and then a flex of joint a spring and off
to another more fertile hunting parlor

sparrow in terminal 3

against the sweeping arch
of glass and welded steel
vaulted ceiling rising up so high
the sparrow flew from pane to pane
trying to find its way to open sky

could it survive trapped inside
on the crumbs of travelers passing by
its enclosed patience never asking why
my wish its dream a dream of open doors
flying free and high so high

the nail's prayer

strike our proud tribe and rigid me
yes shudder our heads and hearts
Hammer and Lord
with your smiting might
that we feel but can never see

inspire our guild with thankfulness
with your every fearsome blow
that we may better know
the wisdom of our appointments
the wonder of our fate to join

marry us to exotic and simple woods alike
to teak mahogany cedar maple oak and pine
remind us that our destiny is to build
to be friends of joists and corners and frames
the iron glue that joins tables chairs and homes

let the ringing of your great mallet
pummel us into acceptance of your iron will
straighten those of us who've bent
too far to be of any use

blast the rust from our weariness

help us age with acceptance
grace all structures with our driven dance
let us see beauty in our humble community
the glory of being one of many
the joys of being one

show us the small but abiding victory
of serving as the most common of tools
partners of carpenters when their day's begun
always near the smell of fresh-milled wood
good soldiers in the building of something good
for uncle joe on the day he died
september 14, 2006

the clothespin's prayer

you panties bras and under-shirts
you towels linens sheets and jeans
cold wet and bedraggled
by machine or hand-washed clean
it is I Centurion who stands guard over
the corners of your Empire the line
that you may pay tribute to the glories
of your Caesar your Emperor the Sun

i am your security your wooden watch
from sun-up until your day is done
it is my mission to stand strong
to hold you and your rows on rows
steady against the vagaries of fickle winds
to keep you waving above earth's dirt
to propel you in your drying
to the utility of your fixed ends

to inspire you to cover beds and bodies
with your warm dryness
to dry the wet the cleansed the weary
after their reviving baths or showers
and for my military service
i ask no reward
other than to savor the joys
of holding to my ordered post

to savor the song of mockingbird and wren
the dappling of sunshine on simple cloth

the smell of new-cut grass in a summer breeze
the early-winter festival of you frozen on the line
like flat troupes of Calder's cardboard circus
applauding your company
stalwart in holding you
through the ancient act of drying

my brothers and sisters i salute you
the rainbow of your fabrics and colors
the genius of your designs
though our battalions are dwindling
giving way to armies of electric dryers
we still parade in all cities
in the shafts of high rise and tenements
in suburban yards country homes and farms

our stubborn rank and file holds strong
militant and steadfast in our faith
that the fragrance of things dried by the wind
by the shining of an april or an august sun
will never be matched by the concocted chemistries
and metallic smells of troops of engineers
in a side-by-side comparison
we have no peers

though a minority our joy is to endure
to serve your colorful company
to follow our orders to a T and celebrate
to be adjutants in your movement
from the oppressive weight of wet
to your destiny of light and airiness
flapping and flying in harmony
clapping happily in a gentle wind

waving hello to dogs and birds
to children cats clouds and hats
to flowers lawns and trees
all playing under the benevolence
of our smiling father the sun
of our singing mother the moon
softly together a lullaby of light
graced by every zephyr and every breeze

the strike-anywhere match's prayer
may the flare of my flame
bring to life candles propane stoves and lanterns

pipes cigars cigarillos and cigarettes
in campsites diners bars and darkened rooms

may i astonish them with my brief burst of brilliance
with my sulfurous residue admonish them
flickering reminder of their all-too-human doom
of the wings of Time's relentless flying loom

may i strike their base insouciance
and continue to fire their way
even as i hear them breathless puff and pray,
“not yet, o lord, not yet...”

the end table lamp's prayer

burn bright my beloved three-way
cast your triumvirate halo of light
twenty-five sixty a hundred watts
upon all once-darkened corners
of all your many masters' homes
make silver the winter spider's web
the domestic tumbleweed of dust bunnies
fight brilliantly the good fight
serve as welcoming beacon to all guests
and sentinel to turn off the aggressiveness
of the uninvited: petty thieves burglars
bores dunderheads and other lesser pests
give our brethren mice after midnight
your soft circle of light to dance in
be exemplar and consolation to all
stricken by despair sickness or old age
guide those missing some wattage
that they may keep on shining on
no matter how murky their nights
no matter how overcast their days

the paperweight's prayer

take simple steadfast weighty me
as your diligent partner
no matter my form or shape
as a functional reminder
of my mute functionality
no matter your office mess

of paper on paper on paper
of sum on sum on sum
of tedious accountings and receipts

of sheaf on sheaf on sheaf
of boring contracts clauses codicils
of printouts of idiotic e-mail bursts
of sentences lost in tedious paragraphs
of bureaucracy piled on dumb bureaucracy
of tree pulp clutter that never ends

please boss depend on me
i can make more less
i stolid paperweight
can take this weight off you
by suppressing the pain of chaos
by holding down in captive order
and making subservient business
of each and every vagrant thing
that dares to oppress
oh-so-busy you

on travel

why go anywhere
when our there
is always
now and here

the paperclip's prayer

grant me a sheet of unsullied linen bond
with not a jot of pretentious ink on it

i'd sooner marry an empty page
to an empty page than an empty page
to most sententious poets' sonnets

the hard-boiled egg's prayer

yes please feel free to boil me
until my white and yolk
are well-done and wholly revealed
glossiest white on the outside
richest powder-yellow center within
this is my dense destiny
peel my wet shield of shell off me
like thinnest shards of cracked plaster
hatched from some sculptor's cast
let me emerge polished as a brancusi
of all imaginable whites the purest of whites
see the way my newness shines pure
like some true eternal shining thing

not metallic but rubbery and alive
glowing like the brightest of bald heads
to connect glossy me in this new stage
to the clucking feathered barnyard hen
seems impossible improbable unlikely
even fellow chickens should be surprised
that 'chicken' and 'egg' could ever be kin
who cares who came first or last
i the Ultimate Ovoid can only beg
your flying imaginations can only surmise
that my new state is a joke with no feathers
a dissonance a disconnect a non-sequitur
of some punster-rooster god and comic
pulling my non-existent legs

the bug zapper's prayer

forgive my savoring
the blue electric zzzzznt! and pop!!
of each of my fervent exterminations
their burnt legs and singed wings in rings all around me
like leaves at the base of all the trees in fall

forgive my regretting
that even the long summer nights are far too short
that my kind though deadly are too few
that even the swarms of their legions on legions
fail to satisfy made executioners like me and You

forgive my unabashed glee
in punctuating the rustic cabin lakeside dusk
with the musk of a trillion atomized bugs but
my genocidal philosophy was made by the likes of Thee:
them or me them or me them or me

the pooper-scooper's prayer

shit!
when they do it
they do do it
scoop it
bag it
shit!
we're a fit
i'm king of it

the ant trap's prayer

forgive me all you poisoned and to-be-poisoned ants
it was not i mass murderer who made me so
whose alluring center exudes killer pheromones
who lays waste to your legion colonies and attacks
your families your eggs your artifacts your homes

avoid my temptations scrupulously
my insidious multiplication tables of ants in extremis
concentrate on the great out-of-doors and picnics
go visit snacking humans take in their comic kin flicks
stay out of indoors watch out for kitchen corners
italianate pantries cedar cabinets linoleum floors

take your thorax and pinching mandibles somewhere else
take your antennae and your wiry legs to safer spots
avoid your fascination with my deadly siren calls
stay snug deep within your anthills and under rotting logs
relegate me to the ilk of toys for curious cats or bored dogs
i'd rather love than kill those i love

the rubber band's prayer

stretch me to my limit
push me to my breaking point
with a half a twist make me your mobius
reminder of infinity in our always-stretching now
friend of pink erasers scissors staples staplers
letter openers paper weights and paper clips
through the wonders of transubstantiation
from the milk of rubber trees we've joined your company
employees of all sizes and colors that work to please
praise my new-born flexibility my rubber state and soul

make me the friend and organizer of sharpened pencils
gatherer of gaggles of clicking ballpoint pens
good shepherd to wandering flocks of manuscripts that stray
i am the tie that stretches to hold and bind
the bullet fired from bored students' guns
ricocheting from pointer fingers triggered by thumbs
cheap toy for crazy cats that crave some fun
in government bureaus brokerages shops and banks
offices agencies accountancies consultancies
may my multitude of functions be my only thanks

remember me as the cockroach of office tools
i've survived mimeographs with their messy blues

typewriter ribbons with their dirty spools
eraser wheels with bristles on their ends
so forgive me if once in a while i ponder
the end of time when pulled beyond our limits
we end in a sudden snap in some calico cat
or in the belly of some grubby yapping dog
who like rubber-flavored things
that happen to be challengingly chewy

the potato peeler's prayer

with the umber of warm earth
still crumbling off them
let me strip them naked
of their earth-grown selves
of their skins' need to protect
let the shining of their nakedness
bring them lasting happiness

night driving in dehli

roundabout follows roundabout
boulevard dim-lit boulevard without end
capitol of india's hungry maze

mongrel dogs nap and laze
in the middle of the roads
others scratch absentmindedly
and curiously sniff the bums
of their bedraggled chums

the walls of consulates and embassies
are all topped by razor wire
that snags a new moon's
white razor edge

a haze of humidity
an olfactory tea
a steeping of burning wood dung
and the jungle flowers of feral trees

and then at the end of long promenade
a congregation of seven renegades
BABOONS!
grooming each other eating their fleas

the brights of our car make them freeze
offended they reluctantly saunter away

staring down our four-wheeled arrogance

making it clear their time is their own
miffed like hosts snubbed
by guests they invited into their home

argentine beef

I see him innocent there
in the yellow pampas grass
gently nosing a fallen leaf
later than late afternoon
under a broiling sun

and now he's on my plate
urbane reincarnate at last
barbecued a perfect medium rare
friend to foreign fork and knife
his life journey not yet done

pine beetle on my country office desk

he was shaky on his 'feet'
all six of them
long antennae tiger-striped thorax
wobbly in too-warm December
as an old man late for his bus
last legs fragile as bug eggs
one question he begs
in him do we see us?
as one might hear
in a near-silent wood
the woodchopper's ax

wheel and net

you are the wheel
the wheel at which i stand
the dark wheel wheeling
through me alone

if you smile i smile
if i smile you smile
you don't think about it
i don't think about it

we don't light any votives
we don't parse motives
it's geometric it's tectonic

we smile back

then there's the net
the net which is me
the net thrown around you
and your own heart's land

30,000 words