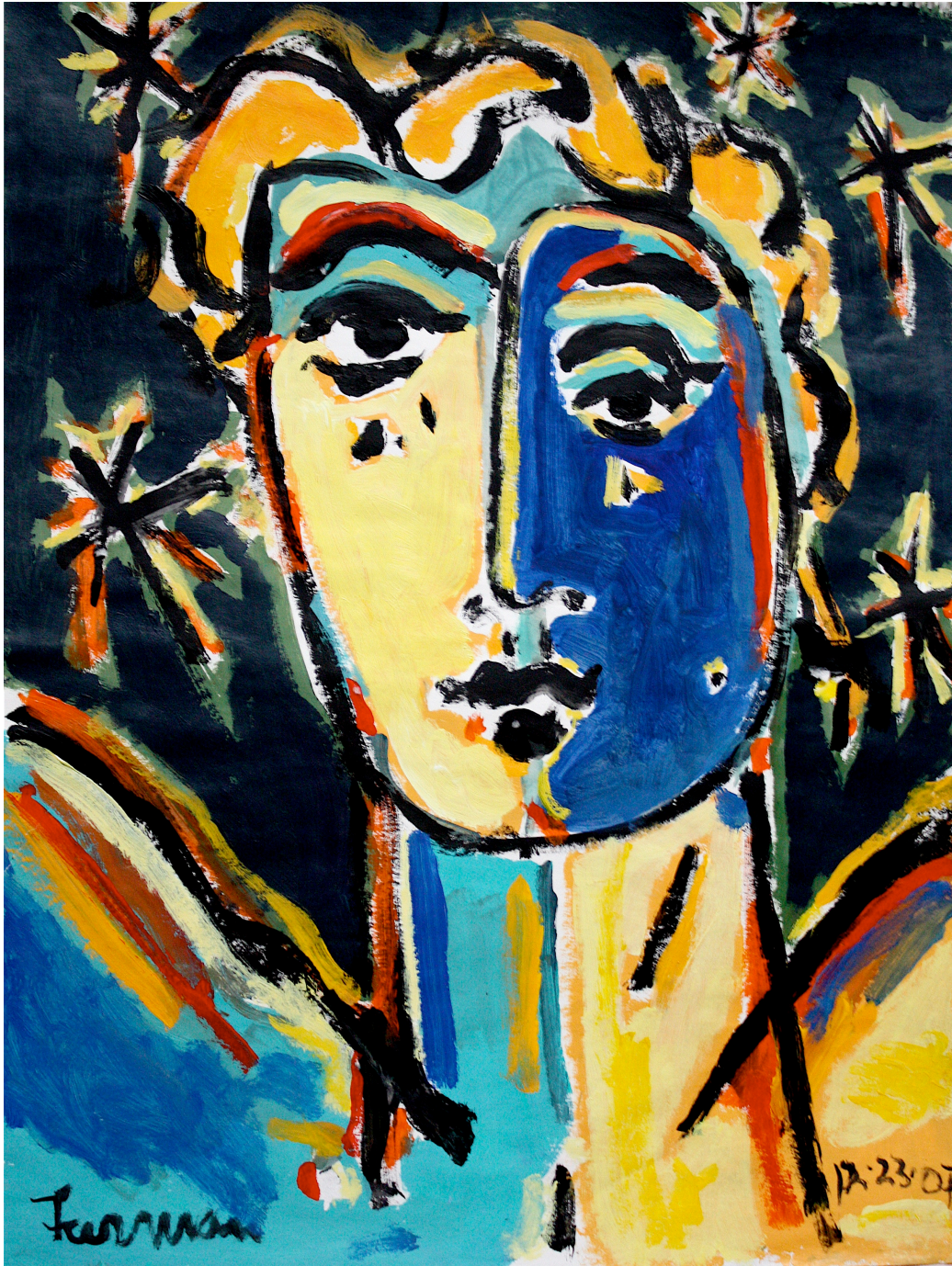


ONLY WORDS I



Gregory J. Furman

September 2001 to May 2002

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plastic bag

if you've seen "american beauty"
you can never again see a plastic bag
in the wind the same way

we return grammatical

proximity closer than near
but more mathematical
if the grasshopper follows the sun for warmth
resting in the warm grasses of fall
and survives the frigid season to return
what voices have we to complain
because we return grammatical
to earth one and all

when my mother was 82

my mother was 82
when first she said something about my poetry
i believe it was because she was close to death
and saw the joys of all words
dear mother mine

gifts from god

bee buzzing around my head
two towers of the world trade center
odd gifts from god

floating suspended

floating suspended
suspending floated
dry leaf on spider web
our gossamer lives

if it's on zero

if it's on zero
it's on zero
so it shouldn't do anything
why should we

nature will heal it or end it

nature will heal it
or end it in its own way
one reason to pray

why the wolf bays
why the bays lead to the sea
why the sea leads to the moon
why the moon leads to the sun
day after day
speak from your heart
in your own way
say what you need to say
play and pray

e-mail from dog

who's breathing whom
we're arrogant
we think
we're breathing the all
 om
 god
instead of being breathed
take a deep one
 dog

october conceptual piece

take one banana
place on old fence post
time the arrival of the ants
in mid october

the love me thing

love me
love me unconditionally
as a total slave
subject to my every whim
however arbitrary
love me
fully obediently
as a loyal dog
who would give her life
for her beloved master
and repeat the giving of her life eternally
love me as I suck your last dying breaths
and leave you cold as a stone
that's thrown into a putrid pond
its only service to skip and sink
with no thought given to your dark descent
than that given to brushing those pink pearl erasures
off your desk top of your childhood

love me glimmering
as you're only bridge to the eternal
like the real Brooklyn bridge
not those phony ones
certified and sold a thousand times
love me with the desperation of the dying
the just-diagnosed terminally ill
those returned from catastrophe

embrace your suffering
despairing muted tortured insane
and i will promise to treat you
without a shred of dignity
like the dust your flesh will become
and brush you from my genocidal table
like the insignificant mite that you are
love me
as i am your god
i am who am

epitaph

courage love humor rage

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 cornflake crumb
on the flesh 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

autumn light
trees change their colors
in time to the brightness they receive

light's barometers
each leaf breathing light
everylight breathing leaves
light leaves leaving
we changing our colors
we autumn lights

colors breathing

colors breathe light
and darken with age and time
bright shadows once then gone

gaia

la mer
mer
mother
mom
earth
tears
la terre

october maples

pachyderms of the landscape
their great gray trunks rising up
clothed in medieval robes of gold
big bodies and limbs swaying goodbye
circus of gold
acrobat leaves
fall from the big top
sweet fall swaying
goodbye goodbye

the dream asleep and the dream awake are one

the willow leaves take pallet from the willow's trunk
the maple blazes next to her coolest blue greens
the swamp iris are long gone bowed down to august
the woodpeckers are searching grubs screeing
at the bases of the trees circles of yellow or red
a windless gray october day
falling like a yellow leaf
no leaves stuck to porch screens
remembering a certain dream
so real even when awake from it
that it felt as much a fact
as the bed i dreamed it from
woven as grape leaves

weave around the trunk
woven as one is woven
by all the others
and the one and the other are one
the dream asleep
and the dream awake
one by one

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 your 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
you and me

sitting behind a garbage truck on 87 north

sitting behind a garbage truck on 87 north
smelling the smelly fumes
everything's metallic
a chorus of stone and metals
painted worn chipped and cracked
there's hydraulic fluid leaking
from the garbage truck's garbage smasher
there's snicker wrappers with filthy chocolate on them
flown from the snackers' jaws
blowing down the highway
old people from the projects
wasting away in tiny airless rooms

and it's october

the new american poet laureate interviewed
first radio reading of his poem "the dead"
through glass bottomed clouds
they rowing the cold sea
they the dead rowing
only stopping stopping only
when one of us closes our eyes
looking down on us
watching out for us each and all
waiting to welcome us to the river of bliss
and it's october

getting back to basho
never had a problem with having less
there's billboards with giant cockroaches on them
billboards for monster truck rentals
billboards for accident victim lawyers
and billboards for the new "animaniacs" film
"we scare because we care"
the george washington backed up to macomber's dam
seagulls are shitting on the zipper factory
and it's october

black smoke pouring out of a prewar brownstone's chimney
a pink and red crane behind it
the truck's mud flaps have silver eagles on them
talons extended toward a playboy bunny silhouette
there's a thousand oil stains
on the black macadam
which has been paved and repaved and paved over repaved
flags are flying from all the cars and trucks
overheating in traffic drivers sweating
swearing reds and white and blues
we're just a block from the litter removal unit
and it's october

the experience of driving at night

was it there there
the dream of being there
being there
or a dream there
or not there

more a recollection than a place

was it a physical reality
or a purely mental one
being there
or not being at all
or all

more a recollection than a place

it's a regression
a going back deeply
rather than merely going back
there full and empty
or no empty there at all

more a recollection than a place

it's the other side
the spot in the shade ignored
the many shining dawns
the point where you first say "here!"
right here this side this side

more a recollection than a place

it's the baby's smiling dream
the sleep of the mute animal
the mute animals' dreams
the animal recollection of dreams
we the animal' dreams

more a recollection than a place

it's a recollection
a recollection of a forgotten day
a recollection of a forgotten life
it's forgotten lives
the dreams of all forgotten

more a recollection than a place

it's a spinning planet
a planet undiscovered at day's end
it's a day's end
a planet forgotten
a dream of days undiscovered

more a recollection than a place

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 if it
crazy follicles of dna ferret out fads and fashion solution
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:
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 Bangs, The Bouffant, The Beehive, The Bun
The Pretzel, The Weave, The Wig, The Happy Krishna,
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- 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, Pond Tails,
The Pirate, The Punk Spike, The Dracula,
The Cupie Doll, The Beatle The Rasputin,
The Frightened Family (hair standing up or out),
The Last thirty-two really-long-hairs stretch (combed across the 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!

a walk in the park

children are playing on the hillside
old people sitting on benches
enjoying the children playing on the hillsides
little game circles of boys and girls
all speaking french
in navy uniforms with starched white blouses
the sun falling on the lawn
the trees' shadows that sunshine green
mottling the lawns in the shape and shine
reminiscent of signac's or monet's promenades
runners walkers cyclists dog walkers
flotillas of mothers and strollers sailing by
the sail boat pond the color of green granite
like certain eskimo carvings
and the bright futuristic confetti
of lunchboxes and gortex windbreakers
warming the bases of trees
leaves on the walk blowing into bicycle wheels
and the wheel of the cycling sun falling
lightly over early fall manhattan

the hudson river's grievance

your majestic bridges have not tamed me
your uncaring soul-blue skies
your white boats
pale exclamation of dreams
your bumpkin evergreens
your gawking leaf-peepers
their breaking hearts
their smoking steel railroad cars
the wily weather and the four seasons' lies
none have staunched my rush to the sea
none can tell me the answer
to my flowing question, "why?"

the reassurance of bridges

because they're there
in antique and modern forms

we cross
and continue to cross
to new vistas and new lands
that they stand
watching over the waters
beneath them
with us watching
waters beneath us all
is silent proof that our way
has been well paved
by the dreams and visions
of those who once saw
an open river dreaming
of crossings companions or more
the reassurance of bridges
and not just those of stone and steel
but of those who once saw

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 nightlight
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 woman to me
your opulent silk gowns of opalescent pearl
bare 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
bowing to twisted oaks and shushing white pines
casting shadows so magical the old haymaker's jealous
-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 a dream of the sweetest mouth the lightest kiss
folded in you 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 bird 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

note to myself

Speak up
so you started late
out of shyness "laziness"
let this your voice be

sing your clumsy cacophony

willow

leaves gold on charcoal waters
old limbs bending backwards
pas de deux with crescent moon
against a robin-egg sky
and the furious reorganization of ducks
bowing down to dusk
so soon

the white throated sparrow in mid-november

one two three three three
one two three three three
to say goodbye to the setting sun
to the greens so green
is to say goodbye it seems
to the sun and the sparrow's dreams
only joy no sorrow
one two three three three
echoed by the chickadee
one two three three three
only joy no sorrow
goodbye goodbye
to the greens so green
to the sun and the sparrow's dreams
one two three three three
one two three three three

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 whips in hand

just outside and laughing darkly
the telescope blackened
at each end by smoking candles' flames
drifts gently down to darkest oceandoor
like the last sacrificial leaf strewn forest floor
or quiet the last light of day leaves
a silently closing door

finding your voice

you'd think it would come easier
it is after all you and yours
your voice
but think of all the inauthentic
not true to yourself choices you've made
who knows why
that have lead you astray
or served as useful digressions
or walks in the woods
what was learned from them all?
who can say?
but there's an exclamation point
when the voices in your head
become you and finally yours
if you're an artist
it's your style
if you're a writer
it's your voice
if you feel beautiful
it's your smile
to know its joyful flow
even for a brief while
is to have been given a gift
a swift clear adirondack stream
the likes of which prometheus chose
his dues being daily liver transplantations
his daily doctor a vulture's visitations
and no anesthetic for all eternity
the stream fire or the void
his choice his voice
the voice of gods and god
a warm overcoat's dream
over our wary skins
singing in our ears
your voice your voice
singing over centuries of tears
you'd think it would come easier

it is after all you and yours
your voice

fingernails

the fingernails of the dead
keep growing they say
well after death
the hair of the dead grows into snowy shrouds
our clipped days white out
our clipped day's clouds
for we dearly un-departeds
there is always the hope
of a white fingernail moon
in november on the wane
and those silly shavings
the residue of three ring binders
and what cats preening paws leave in sisal rugs
all slivers of the same family
we all hang by them
are at some point impressed or at least pressed
into clipping their optimism beyond death
it is starry-eyed to say
even they have their own trim karma
and can become something more
their own source of awe
say a white fingernail moon
this night of november 8
the old wind moving in the old oaks
the cold clouds moving slow
isn't it pretty,
isn't it pretty to think so

the unpierced's theory of piercing

the memory of piercing
is driven home by the stud
through the tongue penis nipple labia
this memory one of cold transcendence
pain being the foreign object's supreme moment
when bad intentions intervene
pierce the shrinking violet flesh
cause an outpouring of blood
and a sensation(the unpierced imagines) so mean
that memory marries pain and pleasure
into one high-pitched scream
and the realization recollection in hindsight
is a truism animal and banal

that no one can endure forever
erotic in the body and erotic in the mind
that pain that pulses at sensation's outer edge
and engorges the mind
monumental as myth
as naked statues in snowing parks
in the same hot fashion as blood
fills the head of an awakening penis
or the hurt hollow of the cyclop's eye
after odysseus made his point
filled with the giant's blood
to be pierced is to be crucified alive
the mind shrieking like a newborn head bloody
this is no pretend no crumpets and tea
this is to admit aggressively
that to live is to hold pain
and the memory of pain
like lovers hold lovers
and read it like a child's bedtime book
to be pierced (the unpierced imagines)
stud or no stud
is for a screaming instant to look
and bloody see

waiting for inspiration I

he waited for inspiration
outside her massive gold studded leather latched door
in the rain and in the snow
in the company of shivering cats
whose ribs stuck out like boardwalk slats
he begged he prayed he pleaded he swore
and wondered what was on the other side
of that infinitely promising door
and then one day he realized the door was open
and she was already there out side
a smiling mechanical bride

waiting for inspiration II

she was a late bus on a nasty night
by the time she arrived
full of drink with drunks and party types
jacketless holding her high heels
headed for the noisy part of town
all the books and songs over written
had been written again and rewritten
and so he threw his chewed blue pencil down

and became a red-nosed circus clown

waiting for inspiration III

it was large and it was alive
like a big city block
he didn't think it was moving
until it rose up and lumbered out of town
in the middle of the night
and left him flat
without a word
without a song
without a notion
without his healing salves
and sun tan lotion
not knowing left from right
right or wrong

waiting for inspiration IV

it's a rock
if you whack it with a pick
or try to break it up in little blocks
you'll soon find out why
they make cuckoo clocks

waiting for inspiration V

if it was a quilt
you'd be cold all the time
never long enough to cover your freezing feet
forget praying to the muse
better to cut it into pieces
make bandages and apply
to staunch artists' bleeding psyches

waiting for inspiration VI

the 7:37 was forty minutes late
so he had to take the 8:38
he wound up two blocks from the troubled sea
with an nasty case of dysentery

waiting for inspiration VII

it was a bakery
one with those takes a ticket machines
people lined up for miles
like seventeen year olds after pearl harbor
lined up to join the United States Marines
the machine is jammed and tickets less

the people howling like indians at custard's last stand
so why not try the hardware store
where you can get some tools
and build your own in your own style
instead of hoping for a single crumb more
dispense with waiting spells and other fakery

waiting for inspiration VIII

it was last seen wearing plaid golf pants
swinging and swearing
searching for lost balls
in the uninspired rough

waiting for inspiration IX

i wrote her a letter
full of the usual pleadings
the tip of my pen leaking blood
thinking blood much better
than the usual humdrum black
it was returned unopened
no such address
resident unknown
she took my cashmere sweater
she won't be coming back

waiting for inspiration X

if you do you'll be waiting for a real long time
you'll be one of a hundred million disconsolates in line
on a freezing rainy day all afflicted with gout
with not a penny to piss nor the simplest rhyme
those that wait and hesitate don't leave the gate
they mope and hope and dream wish and pout
not one mustering the courage to just stand out
so if you need the muse to amuse
forget it and sell aluminum siding
keep people and mouses warm in their houses
carpenters or bricklayers understand
if you want to know the temperament of a man
see how he works at what he loves
it's like a horse and rider riding
when they're at their best they're one
if you want to understand the character of a man
take a look at what he makes or builds
see how he speaks and what he does
if you desire inspiration skip the waiting lines
get to doing and you'll find it on the way

you know it's you yourself and thy thou
it's up or down to you
you are your own one person guild

baggage

go ahead be stubborn
just try and take it
whatever you hold dear most love really need or desire
your first edition illuminated copy of emmanuel kant
your first communion host those weird white shoes
just try and take it
gucci bags prada gloves
your fancy hairdos your best halloween "boos!"
your favorite cashmere argyle armani socks
your orvis rod and reel
your cat named rock
your dog named stocks
your goldfish bonds
your diamonds under locks
your cartoon memories of you good ole cartoon days
your charming and endearing ways
your mum your pa your pals
your earmuffs those sparkly dancing gals
just try and take it
your ears your hair your lips your voice
your goodwill left by leaving tips
your gold medallion vintage rolls royce
anything you've forgotten
everything you can recall
anything you wished to beg borrow or steal
are all about to be disremembered
like james joyce pope pius or the mouse that roared
you have one choice
just try and take it
you see the funnel no it's a tunnel
you see the train and hear the old choo choo's horn
you hope there'll be no pain
one thing's for absolutely sure
one hundred percent cul de sac certain
all things physical and metaphysical remain at home
gathering dust go you must
no packing required all aboard
it only lasts a second and there is no cure
where's my metamucil good lord
i'm about to be reborn
about to cross the next new world's fiord

someone please pull back that funny curtain

baggage II

there's that picasso painting
of the hulking minotaur harnessed to a cart
its wooden wheels churning up a cratered road
a soup of mud
perhaps in time of war
fleeing some flaming disaster
all his worldly goods everything he owns
piled in a heap weighing him down
no rhyme or reason to their provenance
charnel house memories of days turned years
all bereft of joy lacking any saving grace
devoid of any redeeming resonance
a mountain of dumb things and half baked art
a cauldron of desires and desires for more
furniture piled like heaps of bones
the blind monster strains against the halter
of all he has struggled to save
of all he has struggled to own
and rages prisoner of his rage
cursing the ramshackle cart
cursing the muddy road
cursing the oppressive load
even as his breaking heart
and muddy tears pour mute
onto the god-of-things altar stone

the shout of thanks

thanks

subcutaneous and inhalation anthrax

anything i can't easily pronounce or say
i'm afraid i'll die of 'till my dying day

quo status

good thing for us
and kin
guts in
outside skin

bromide

words and turds
one can be too many

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 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 heaven
halos made from coat hangers horns of aluminum foil
one aluminum-foil liberty bell
ben franklin holding a kite and lightning bolt of gold

stolen from a grumpy zeus crying crocodile tears
missing the other gods who apparetly 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 bunnies with pink ribbons on their yellow legs
two human pea hens four human ducks in a row

a walking microscope a 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 madonna's three snoop-doggie-dogs
a coffee pot a toaster some burning fire logs

two prozac's 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's 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

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

the slope of the hills by Hudson

it's not difficult this brief dusk
to imagine the hills breathing very quietly
their ancient reclining bodies singing
tired ghosts of songs down the centuries
let the forests of oak birch and maple
soften their bodies pasture
like some blue and ochre comforter
the river a turquoise bed
the people on the trains
ignoring the slope of the hills
falling into a wooly communal sleep
comforted by their drowsy snorings
and the company they have no choice but to keep
none awake up none will see
the sloping hills are sleeping sheep
breathing very quietly
slumbering
at dusk this dusk

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 you 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

november sunlight on the suburbs from a moving train

flags really wave when winter clears it throat
the november sunlight falling in spikes and rays
the sky peach and purple
the maples orange and gray
the junkyard puddles reflecting junkyard junk
the nights grow longer than the days
on the south shore of the Delaware
the reflections of crosses and church steeples
the shadows puppet cutouts of clouds and pigeons
are but dark shapes waving to the river's waves
the edges of early evening are softer
the fading light fades in suburban ways
doing junk and bad architectural justice
showing mercy on the stubborn shapes of things
all glowing in the setting sun
the train throws a mane of smoke
down its snaking dragon's back
the immaculate plover and its charming run
its suit of white gray and a sandy dun
the silent sandboxes in empty parks
the empty seesaws slides and swings
the little bare wasted girls
the polka-dotted lady bugs
have all refused to extend their stays
have left us on the way to winter
en route to yet another year
just around calendar bend
so the sunlight in the suburbs sings
like too sentimental a drunk
in a dusky bar at day's end
after five or six cold beers

the laughter of all children

eternal spring's less bright
the laughter of all children
is so without guile
so fresh and clear
it knows no evil or night
and flows like the purest aquifer
in its own eternally present light
in a secret glade of eternal joy
in a light day of eternal day
in a sweet dream of eternal sweet dreams

even after cruelest winter

the leonid meteor shower at 4 a.m.

unless you've witnessed it
you'd never believe in one night
that so many things can streak and fall

in another age the panic caused in early risers
would have evacuated towns and towers
it's not the sky that's falling just the stars

from every corner of the celestial dome
streaking lights like geronimo's fire arrows
burning home

flea market

it's no secret that things outlive us
their devilish diversity mocks us
things we've never known about
things we've lived with and never understood
things other people loved
things lost and still unfound
things each sunday in caravans of vans
load and unload their special treasure
every one wears plaid
budget rental trucks
vans jeeps and four-by-fours
senegalese tribal masks
mickey and minnie mouse potholders
from garages basements and barns
they emerge before dawn rubbing their object eyes
slouching toward outdoor parking lots
like creatures from the night of the living dead

the find

a grouchy sun just kicking its feet out
from under covers of pink clouds
the smell of coffee rising up
from those sleek 50s airflo trailers
in the parking lot of the flea market
by then she had driven an hour
and was already stalking row after row
past dusty bowler derbies
nigerian tribal mask knock-offs
civil war carbines and moth eaten tweed vests

past dilapidated chairs and crippled hat racks
past barbie dolls and porky pig piggy banks
past spiderman Halloween outfits
the flea market was rising up
in disarray rubbing the sleepers from its eyes
now was the prime hunting hour
and now her eye was sharpest
when assured game was most plentiful
past piles of dog eared 60s playboys and field & streams
haystacks of tarnished silver and rusty railroad spikes
and then she saw it and it found her
it was hers before they ever met
and it would be hers for life

this is your odometer speaking

by definition i'm part numerologist
part miles-gone-by-clock
part vegas slot
the numbers fly by tick tock tick tock
black sheep counting miles in their dreams
you'll never see my zero
that's the domain of my virgin driver
the ones who took me off the boat or train
you will see little number stories
the amusement of simpler brains
like 777 or 7777 the luck of the draw
or 111 or 1111 snake eyes or more
or any number with a string of zeros
less multiplying on itself to infinity
lucky there's a positive number before it
after you come gleaming off the factory line

to be god

to be god
is to be the wind
to be neutral
with all feeling and none
the same benevolence
heart forever open heart forever closed
the power to bestow or rescind
not lost not won
not pro bono not con
not hurt not pleased by
all whose sails you've filled
whose tents you've flattened
whose fires you've fueled

whose huts you've thatched
whose hatches you've battered
whose cattle and swine you've swilled
whose fates you've willed or not willed
whose tiny lives you've stopped or started

i am the voice behind the flight
the light beyond the flight
the light beyond the glare
the hand that touches the untouched
that washes the unwashed
that cuts the uncut
that moves the unmoved
that begins all that's begun
that rings all that's rung
that thaws the frozen
that soothes the burned
i am the sun the moon the stars
the days the nights the dusks unbroken
those alive long dead and yet unborn
i am all songs and the songs that none have sung
all that's said all unspoken
all dreams dreamed
all dreams dreamed only to be undone
the rising and then risen
the cream and the butter churned

to be god
is to be the sin and the sinned against
to cross impervious every moral fence
to be the great ambiguity
to be ever lost and ever found again
as each wave of each ocean
is found on each shore's door

to be god
is to be less and more
to be the great neutrality
to take no offense to make no defense
to our frail minds to make no sense
to know there is no one way
with such godlike assurance
those of us fated to choose for a living
will never know or ever be able to say
on your part no hypocrisy
just your own blasé theocracy

your monstrous opening flower
opens and closes every hour
every minute every second every day
as the celestial clock ticks and tocks
you always win we always lose
taking and giving giving and taking
to be god
is to be impenetrable
just and unjust
the most unyielding of locks
the most complex of clocks

you may not think i hear your cries your prayers
you're wondering am i there or not
will you encounter me unaware
as one oppressed downtrodden crippled poor
you will only hear my voice be healed
if you listen intently to your own
my heart is wired to your heart's telephone
in your seed hear my own seed's call
past oceans of blood and oceans of pain
beyond the dying and the dying insane
call 1-800-comedy or 1-800-tragedy
you'll never know me until the day you die
and the perhaps not or naught after all
but haughty blackness there
my giant seeing eye is also blind
when your mortal cave's unsealed
and the angels move the bolder from the door
then you'll know
if you lose or find
less or more

the moon and the tangled locust tree

so white and round
the moon
so black and twisted
the tangled locust tree

half moon

please answer me
don't hide your face in night
your smile so white
you give shadows dignity

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 communion
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

the obligatory animals on chairs or beds
pick up any decorative home magazine

turn to page thirty five or six and there they are
the obligatory animals on chairs or beds
rufus the grumpy jack russell terrier
noli the white and curly bichon fries
mousey the rustic adirondack cat
looking up with territorial aplomb
lifting their anthropomorphic heads
which in pet body language says
yes this is my room, this is my home
make sure you spell my pet name right
or be banished to pet-less gloom pet-less night
joyless homes empty chairs empty beds
most significantly empty of pets
two legged readership's way down
editors publishers stylists photographers all struck dumb
look like they just saw the bomb
no matter how good the art director's set
no matter how premeditated the professional light
forget the gerbils, hamsters, snakes, frogs and rats
but always include in your planning session's cogs
never have the hubris to ignore
always include on chairs or beds
the obligatory cats or dogs

love's vulgarity

that family is steeply inclined
to keep you in your birth of place
and those we most need be understood by
tell us we are not gods yet
and can't be more specific as to why
suggests that the act of living
the beast's persistence in being alive
is very different from the act of loving
which after all is not getting but giving
love in fact is an art of renunciation
a paying down your dues
a singing of your particular delta of blues
love shouts love's no big deal
love's quite common
it happens all the time
a pleasant pause in the continuing circus
designed to irk us
overestimated and under-billed
love's a snapshot of a burning barn
as the proud animals we've fed and tendered
are reduced to ash

or rendered barbecue and beans
so our silly expectations
trailed by fires singed and seared
give rise to a place within
where no vegas mermaids sing
love is like a brand new pair of jeans
a gray sharkskin suit
a pair of patent leather boots
it's always out of style
it needs to be worn in for years
washed in a rain of tears
it doesn't give a hoot
for our understanding
or our being understood
our bellows and our dreams
love's quite common
it happens all the time

picnic ant

there is one ant
dreaded above all
picnic ant
wherever he goes
he's followed by his thousands
sisters and brothers
so many so small

“oedipus rex” in eighteen words

my mother
my wife
my life

my father
my mother
my knife

my lies
my father
my eyes

“oedipus rex” in six words

mother
son
eyes
father
lies

dies

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 range out
and the empty carcass was hauled up
onto the cherry-red pickup truck

viscera moon

that night the moon wore a slick gray sheen
as if it were aspiring to the condition of viscera
near-fresh and steaming in the sky

everyman's obit

born
died
details irrelevant
but diverting

fox-snout moon

the december moon
and the two stars above it
look like the face of a fox
the moon the snout

he and she

they were entombed in their own worlds

he and she desperately
pursing their own lives
so separately they didn't share the same bed
he liked her sense of style
she liked his money for a while

the pleasure of making lists

the first is making them
then the act of remembering what we need to do
children and the senile so awe struck
they have no need of them
the second is doing something about them
the crossing off of the "to do"
as if either would lend a shred more order
to chaos in the guise of days and years
making lists serves to focus us
gives the willing gullible the faint illusion of power
over all that we're powerless to move or change
and would rather not add to our neat lists
which we crumple up and throw away
as time does us

lithsps

lists with lisps

landscape painter

for his lifetime he looked hard at the land
each time he picked up his palette
and filled his breathing canvas
with the touch of his brush and hand
it was incomprehensible to the world
valueless his entire brief life
viewed by the academy as treason
he wept and bled seasons
each time he picked up his palette
and filled his breathing canvas

comedy and tragedy

the one full of kindness
died soonest

the other fueled by rage
lived until a ripe old age

the gardener killed by a suicide squad while tending chrysanthemums

outside the parliament building in dehli

shot dead in the act of pruning
the darkest red blossoms from their stems

why the unknown should continue to inspire us with dread

it keeps us on our toes
not knowing what tomorrow will bring
take the sad character
waiting for the 5:35 on tuesday
who had his heart pierced
by shard of glass
hurled from a train window broken
by an eight-year-old rollerskater
throwing rocks at locomotives

every time we look around the corner
something brand new happens
sometimes white as a glowing brand
a passive scarification
sometimes filling us with joy
an active scarification
sometimes filling us with joy
an active rarification
like the day you met fido on the beach
desperate for play and a friend
the two of you chased gulls and sticks
up and down the kelp strewn sand
each listening to the hiss of waves
and the october wind roar
watching a crazy stick bob past the whitecaps
(ancient greeks called them horses' manes)

hundreds of thousands of years ago
around bend sinister
it could have been one of those big lizards
looking for human meat
(feel that adrenalin?)
we were the endangered species then
and somewhere in some cerebral cortex
back of meat locker near frozen ribs
past your home phone number
we're built to "remember" surprises like these

or there's smells
which proust catalogued
but we knew before proust

those smells that take us back
of bread baking or burning flesh

it's not often we can smell it coming
save forest fires volcanic eruptions
or perhaps that perfume
that your third-grade teacher wore
when you had to stay put in school
and could shriek or explode
for wanting to be outside
the stuffy classroom radiators clanking
steam clouding blocking outside view
of heavy snow falling down

if it's of any consolation
there was a time
like the one before your first orgasm
when vaccinations or laser surgery
e-mail or weapon-grade anthrax
weren't in our dictionaries
go ahead turn the page
even if you do feel cornered
it's blank until it's written on
and somewhere someone
hovering over beakers and tubes
wearing what looks like a miner's helmet
casting a curious beam of light
on some impossible experiment -
it could be you -
will be the one to invent
the cure to all suffering
a better backscratcher
a pheromone that drives girls wild
or a way of rewiring your nerves
that puts takes you from new york to tokyo
- your pick - molecularly instantly
without even boarding a plane

the sadness of horses in the rain

they're wet blankets
their blankets steaming
they too steaming
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 'sadness'
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

narcissus revisited

lost in his own reflection
he fell into the blackest of pools
but did not drown

instead he held his breath
swam deep down below all dejection
down to a silver room all his own

where his every second
was filled with bright elation
shining mirrors and magic tools

the slug trail of lost time

the silver tracks of slugs
the unwinding of the mind
no birds and no birds' song
lost time like night
night-fishing blind

prophets, economists and optimists

bold in prediction
enchanted in song
mostly dead wrong

every grasp

every grasp at happiness
is an exercise in futility
as we face mortality

we modify the beach of our desire
to claim the eroding sands of hope
with the oceans of our hearts

the sources of rage

we know that we're the walking dead
and walking with the dead and living

we know not where we go
or where we are

we are as powerless as mites
in the sweep and current of history

we are but one
never joyously joined but to be separated

we see the children suffer
and suffer for the frail and aged

we hunger in our hearts
for we know not what

we beg to be saved
and our pitiful cries go unheard

the button on my white shirt
is broken and falls to the red wood floor
for agnes 02/09/02

one day

that one day
it will be enough
to bask in the peace
of our own good natures
under the stars

mistakes as an aid to travel

look to the stars
block the light of venus or mars
with your fingertip
connect the dots
shut down the engines of your cars
there is no error or slip
that does not take us far
if we just permit

the happy Buddha

incensed
by man's cruelty to man
he poured gasoline
over his bald head and orange robes
struck a strike-anywhere match
his smile still burning
through the orange flames

weird days

i'm sure you know them
they're gone before they've come
and nothing is right
and you're totally out of balance
and aching but don't know why
or for what
and when you rest your head
finally on your familiar pillow
you're glad it's over
and wouldn't necessarily want
to live them over again
unless paid in joy

the first martini

the flawless glass frosted
with opals of ice
a triangle of cut crystal
set on the finest crystal stem
so icy everything aspiring

to the condition of mountain steams
and fancy diamonds
sparkling on the silver tray
as candlelight wavers
the formal waiters in black
the casual pimento in the olive in red
the kick of the juniper berry
in the soul of the mercury-like gin
all playing miles davis' "quiet nights"

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 cut from his head
his eye sockets filled with hot lead
his favorite color is red

the pedestrian on the cell phone

the pedestrian on the cell phone
is you on your cell phone
or me on mine
talking improbably but possibly
to one another or even one of our friends
whom neither of us knows knows us

the pedestrian on the cell phone
simply oblivious
observed from this yellow cab
is like sculptures of construction workers
opening their lunch boxes
a man hailing a cab
a women reading on a park bench
the carriage horses having their oats
the top-hatted liverymen joking and smoking cigarettes
mr. sun pouring smiles down on new york

may the great cyber network
that transfuses all instant by instant
give us the peace
of babies and park rangers
of dog walkers and retired executives walking their dogs
of new couples holding hands
of the pedestrian on the cell phone
intent only on the moment of conversation
of crossing park avenue in february
talking with spirit utterly unafraid

daughters on valentines day

(overhead on a train)

“...it’s a night-time thing.
dads take their daughters (ages 4 -14)
to a little dance,
give them flowers and music.”

o daughters, daughters all
dance with daddy in your dreams
a little dance

the inability to focus

gifted with a hopeless inability to focus
through some hocus-pocus
he changed frequently enough
to give the illusion of paying attention
and lived many separate lives as one

you wonder why I don't call

your life
and the lives of your dearest
a tinderbox
in a lightening storm
on the great plains
nowhere to hide

pretty ideas

pretty ideas
are best not acted upon

**mr. rossman's story
told to me by his son**

"by and by
after 150 years
when the old maple fell,
victim of a storm,
it was the only time
i saw my father cry."

february 2002

two oh
oh two
bookends

bayonne

I
o bayonne
you smash nosed boxer
overworked overweight and underpaid
you motley congregation of ocean crossers and epithets
pollacks micks dagos niggers chinks and jews
your refinery stink
your bay of benzenes toluenes and xylenes
you ancient ethnic grandmas
hanging underpants like freedom flags
from plastic clotheslines over tenement air shafts

you old wooden clothespin
you hang your defiance out to dry for all to see

II

o bayonne
you mangy alley cat
from the magic of attics
your hungry children spy on blue green liberty
pollacks micks dagos nigger's chinks and jews
if cut, they bleed crude oil, ghosts and ancestors
that fly up over your dark harbor berth
like pigeons raining on the steely bay
to an orchestra of rainy nights playing god bless america
you angry mob of night shifts and epithets
as seen from window seats of escaping planes
you rise above the oil slicks smelling of clorox

III

o bayonne
you blood-red tug boat pulling garbage scows
the thrumming of your beat-up engines
thrums in our polluted veins
pollacks micks dagos niggers chinks and jews
you are a baloney sandwich on wonder bread
you are real dill pickles
and bazooka bubblegum
you are playground swings still swinging
your sea-saws singing foreign nursery rhymes
your heart flies out of lunch boxes
and soars high above our dreams

**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 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 and deeper waters of night
and the shallows of our fragile selves
appearing and disappearing
from our howling trains of days

i am new york

the taxi driver
has two lion-king lions
on his dash
the papa shaggy and glum
the baby bright eyed and peppy
perched on the rearview mirror
an american flag decal
waves on the passenger side
michael jackson's on the radio
fire engines and police cars are wailing
a whole new 42nd street is rising up

like a steel mushroom with yellow cabs for tap shoes
thanks to Ernst & Young
above seventh avenue
and the entire avenue
and the entire city
rock steel flesh and bone
is breathing eating laughing
belching farting smoking drinking
and waiting and waiting
for what or whom
no one knows
hamburgers are singing sinatra on their greasy grills
cigarette butts are dancing on the curbs
old shoes with holes in their soles
are searching for their lace-less mates
and fashion photographers' portraits of them
are enshrined in galleries and museums of art
in silver-print black and white
in their bullet-proof fire-retardant cases

**the sun pouring into a room
and the shadow of a side table**

circa 1907

the sun pouring into a room
onto the paint brush of georges braque
and the shadow of a side table
on which rests a bowl of green apples
a torn newspaper, a guitar and a pipe
invent cubism

the yellow of the fields in march

they are not ochre or tan
or lemon or gold or daffodil
nothing so primary
but a hundred shades of straw
with a few stubbles of stubborn green
just to be contrary
the sun hard in the sky
as a plough horse's hoof

**sitting on a chair
remembering a dream**

i am sitting in a rocking chair
on a sun-porch
on a day so bright and clear
it is itself dreamlike

remembering a dream
of sitting on a hotel-room bed
in a town with a name like carbon
watching the planes lift off the tarmac
in the dream the sky over the runway
is exactly like the sky over the sun porch here
the exact same february blue
near the sun-porch are squirrels and sparrows
and in the dream pigeons on the tarmac
frightened by the planes
rise up in clouds all gray and white
i remember thinking in the dream
the same thought i am thinking now
that this is a very real dream
and that when i wake up
i'll be thinking this exact same thought
in a different but very real dream

the pages that you've turned

reader, consider the pages that you've turned
and the pages all readers have turned
are they not many more numbered
than blossoms in spring rain
footprints in winter snow
consider the pages that you've turned
each an epic with you the projector
each a resting place a screening room
a chaise on an windy beach
an armchair near a cheerful fire
an air mattress in a leaky tent
a deck chair on an ocean cruise
and for once rest on the page
watch the paper darken slightly
as the royal sun goes down
behind the pages of the turning clouds
turning the gray evening rose
paging the dark papers of night
and the bright graffiti of stars
as the royal sun goes down
behind the pages of the turning clouds
reader, consider the pages that you've turned
you kings and queens
with eyes like flashlights
you bringers of life to books
and authors of books
open to the silent page

bid us sing and dance farewell
to your attentive eyes
walk us like happy dogs
put us through our paces
burn us like cedar logs burn
slowly and fragrantly

lost poem

the wine spilled
the ink was not indelible
what was for an instant a poem
shoes all shined
tuxedo neatly pressed
underwear clean and fresh
hair slicked back
ready to sing an awkward aria
like alfalfa in “spanky and our gang”
now looks like a bad imitation
of a turner in the british museum
blushing because it forgot its lines
i can not blame it or frame it
this poem that came and went
briefly presented itself
all dressed up and ready to go
smiling from here to sunday
through its pen on paper door
only to be washed away
by a glass of red wine
all dressed up no more

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 ‘brave heart’
where after all our hero
is disemboweled by an 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

horses sleeping mid morning

I

one white one black roan

the three of them
chums three of them
even more massive when fully prone
like they were executed
but happily by the marching warmth
of the march mid morning sun
oblivious to their blankets muddy
the straw on which they lay muddy
but still a mattress to take the cold's edge off
the great swells of the thawing earth

II

one white one black one roan

like plastic horses from a lionel train set
that someone accidentally knocked over
when rearranging locomotives
or putting the smoke pellet in the tiny stack
frozen as the platonic ideal of horses
down for the count
all the spunk knocked out of them
like rodeo clowns after the rodeo
drunk on the first breezes of spring
free of flies because the season's new

III

one white one black one roan

unconscious in that sublime way
that only the deepest animal sleep

can conjure and sweetly yield
even you slow down and think like a horse
good to be a horse by god
on this your tenth day of march
sleeping in this your fine field
knowing the joy that sleep can bring
as the redwings and cock robins sing
sleepers and sleep walkers awake awake

the unquiet mind

the deer to are creatures of habit
taking the same paths
no matter the season
and they go very quietly
their alert ears soft brown antennae
their white tails telegraphing
degrees of clam or alarm
we should be so lucky
to proceed their way

instead the unquiet mind is a swarming hive
a rolling circus wagon full of unruly monkeys
sitting on a train of a rainy morning
wet sleet covering all
the river slate and the sky slate
you'd think it would be enough
to just look out
and rock content with the movement of the train
but that would be too simple and too hard

instead we're locked in narratives
what will i say when i get to where i'm going
to see those i'm going to see
what do i need to do
in the time between now and then
how am i feeling about my life
what i'd rather be doing
and how much better things would be
if only i were doing that

the taxation of this mental hive
this "publishing" of fictions
is a life of imbalance and discontent
a living in the wish instead of in the well of now
a living in rent instead of the well of own

how dispiriting over the years
how tiring trying to get the same old monkeys
to sit up and speak properly
to eat with forks and knives
to pay attention to sing a song
to stop throwing feces through the prison bars

and still i want to be the one
who picks the padlock on the circus wagon
the one last seen on a country road or forest path
howling with delight and glee
desiring only escape whatever the cost
avoiding trains of padlocks circus wagons
and the omnivorous unquiet mind

vanitas

I
the skull in art and life smiles
lips fallen away
dry musculature dust
while tombstones and cemeteries
the mediating earth
seeth 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 silently stares

as starlight 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 hear this final call

V
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 no eyes
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 skull

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
skull 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 that its hollow caves
form a hollow place
for the waters of fear
to trickle through

tangerine pond

tonight the pond
across the road
is tangerine
the sun's cast going down
and the cast of clouds
have combined to brush tangerine

onto the reflecting waters
if you saw the painting
you'd think the artist exaggerated it
this tangerine pond
that it would not be on nature's palette
when nature paints its paint-by-numbers kit

geese at night on ponds

geese at night on ponds
talk with their wings
the wuff wuff wuff wuff
of their quill feathers
the landing one speaks
to the floating others' honk
defining contours of the pond
they all grumble late at night
or go dead silent
dissecting a strange or hostile sound
they float in this silent state
heads tucked under their warm wings
their sentries posted and alert
the rest at rest
rocking on the rocking surface
stars mirrored in the pond shuddering
as sleeping geese kick their webbed feet
to keep from drifting too close to shore
where sharp-toothed fox and coyote wait

gray day

everything gray
even blue blue gray
no greens except the body of a crane

the wrecking ball gray
no reds except the dirty brick of factories
the mortar gray
the cyclone fences forklifts and storage sheds gray
the broken windows reflecting dirty light gray
the power lines and towers
on the ridge across the river gray
a soft antique at the edges gray
gray barges pulling gray scows
gray geese and gray cows
a gray bird singing a slow gray song

the souls of the faithful departed

this was my mother's and father's prayer
taught to us as soon as we could kneel by our beds
to repeat with love the name of those we love
those who no longer are subject to care
to call them daily
to voice their names in love and hope
of eternal joy and life
that on the other side
far from this incomprehensible dream
their smiling faces their gentle voices
they and their total love of us
will draw us forward call us on

name their names
fill in their dearest blanks
say the names of your own
faithful departed family
one by one each after each
here right here they are
as they hear the sound of their names
here hear here
how far are they from here

our grandfathers our grandmothers
our fathers our mothersw
our father's mothers our mother's fathers
our father's and mother's brothers and sisters
and their cousins and our cousins
and all the souls of the faithful departed
may they rest in peace
amen

(kneeling down beside their beds

before being tucked in
does anyone say this prayer anymore?)

the bureaucrat

nose shaped like a rectal probe
sniffing the air for change of wind
opinion-less looking up a red ladder
slick with the blood of ascendants
asps and aspirationals
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 overcast
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

justifiable paranoia

one night at dusk you wake up and look out over the swamp
and feel like something slimy escaped from a sci-fi film festival
surrounded by dim wit amphibians and their annoying little air bubbles
near a hick town full of zombie spawn trying to kill you

winding down the dirt road like a diamond back
their garden tools - scythes and pitchforks -
rattling in the gloom of a demented twilight
the shape of their torches like blazing cartoon bubbles

yes, it can't true, they're coming for you, *mon frere*
the red gumball lights on the ambulances flashing far behind them
the potbellied police kept out of it by the roaring mobs
who want to lubricate their tools in your blood

call it whatever you choose- clinical or colloquial, frog brain:
neurasthenia onomatopoeia oneiromancy the vapors
the blueprint of pea-headed psychopaths gaining on you
intent on showcasing your inner organs in jars of formaldehyde

this is no time to question your intuitions, *mon semblable*
perhaps a speedy mantra a bracing sea chantey or two
so what, if after all, you are the creature from the black lagoon
your motto: “ in extremis, better to swim than to fish.”

pipe smoke

late afternoon and the lake across the road is darker than the sky above it
the smoke from my pipe is drifting out of my office window
past the daffodils and forsythia offending several black capped chickadees
evaporating into the new life that is smoke's when it leaves through open window
mississippi john hurt is singing “nearer my god to thee”
the fields are greening up like an ester egg dyed
the late daylight's more generous than easter egg cartoons
full of the colored eggs of our dreams and deeds

trousers departed

love shows up and leaves in all disguises
a cat names after a pair of pants
by rights should have been a male
but trousers was a little girl
found dead on the way to her favorite hiding place
under the bed in the friendly dark

timothy knew something serious was wrong
unlike goldfish frogs snakes snails or gerbils
which by scale regrettably are more expendable
can be conveniently flushed or buried in a tap shoe box
cats are human members of the human family
personalities quirks and habits just like ours

trousers in the presence of all but family
was paranoid by nature a virtuoso recluse
guests were greeted by her frightened eyes
your flashlight seeking her out under her bed
would evoke a frightened growl or hiss

attempts at making friends were consistently seen
by trousers as full of murderous intent at best mean
to the end she was true to herself and consistent
always scared ready to run the invisible cat
not for sale not for rent not for fun
speculation on what drove her to this state is an empty hat

trousers was trousers was trousers was
one in a million oddly-behaving meowers

young timothy braniac tim
you have good reason to be short and grim
you are not alone my friend
in hearing the soft clock tick the toll bell toll

the death of others loved is our death too
when they leave us we're left bereft
cradling our orphaned love like a pet
until one day our window opens
and cradled by others
we venture out from under our orphaned bed
for timothy

the silent departures and returns of the soul

we are water bugs skate walking
the surface our natural habitat
skating to and fro busily from this to that
while hungry monsters of the deep
look up from darkest depths
and we oblivious happily
concentrating on our brilliant skating
enamored of the motion
skating to and fro busily from this to that
exhilarated out of breath
full of the joy of our own doings
our slick skimming of taught waters
while hungry monsters of the deep
look up from darkest depths
and we oblivious happily
our place of birth
our place of death
the surface our natural habitat
skating to and fro busily from this to that

the neatness of gulls on pilings

the pilings darkest brown
oily impregnated with tar
the gulls away meticulous
white white black black
yellow feet yellow beaks
so neat in composition
they look they're the imitations
those miniatures you always you see
in those tacky gift shops
near oceans and ocean shores
where the tourists all invade
the most symbolic sites

nature all gussied up
symbolic as black and white
and happy as gulls
just before rising up in flight

the birth

her breasts and arched back
rolling hills and mountains
her nipples brush the clouds
her legs the Nile and the Euphrates
the Mississippi and the Monongahela
spread so wide after an old hard season
that a new soft season sings to be born
lush headed and spurting green
fuzzy as a vast and sprouting chia pet
slimy as the bottoms of swamps
and bright wet and green
and bright green and wet
wings of birds legs of frogs
green clouds over green earth flying
over her breasts and arched back

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 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 call
of all the birds songs

phoebe yours in 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

the cure for all evil

all of man's malice,
discontent, greed and disease
can be cured
by one man sitting quietly
in a single place
and being open to what comes
from being alone
with one's self at ease

lamb of god- a child's view

think of the sweetest lamb
shy and spry
the dew innocent animal soul
the walt disney all loveable lamb
full of joy
the eternal lamb of spring

take steel spikes
ram them through foreleg and hoof
beat silent its bleating joy
crown it with thorns
and congregate around its carcass
this bloody bleeding dying thing

say this death is not a death
and hear the return of spring
in the green blood of trees
in the green songs of birds
in the green blood of this lamb
singing to you my friend to you

benedictus

benedictus

benedictus

may you always be blessed

may you through the crooked paths

the paths of crooks

may you through the false prophets and lost shepherds

the false prophesies and lost directions

may you through the terrible and the terribly inconceivable

may you through cul-de-sacs

and sacks of skulls

the memories and the memory of memories

the forgotten and the forgetting of the forgotten

may you be remembered

like osiris by isis

may you be forgiven

like god's lamb forgives

may you through ever-lengthening, seemingly-endless tunnels of granite
carved by your own hopeful bleeding fingernails emerge triumphant

may you through dark labyrinths of underground streams

your breath ready to give out

your lungs ready to collapse breath again

may you through cold sores, athlete's foot, pimples, jock itch, birth defects,
malformations, trauma, genetic cruelties and chronic terminal diseases be at
total ease and rise above all suffering

may you through bad sitcoms hundred of channels of idiotic programming
be un-idiotic

may you through weird style fads-bell bottoms, narrow lapels, skinny ties,
strange fabrics, stranger tailoring, aboriginal tattoos, piercing, narrow
minds and fashion dictators- remain a classic

may you through freak weather patterns - hurricanes, cyclones, tornados,
tempests, typhoon, frosts, draughts, floods, blizzards, tsunami, downpours
and leaky drainpipes – continue to be sunny and mild of spirit

may you through the testosterone swellings of youth and the shrinking
hormone withdrawals of age be front and centered

may you through wigs, dentures, various forms of prosthesis and invasive
medical technologies, side effects of wonder drugs and embarrassing
procedures be pain free and unmoved

may you

when in pain
defeat sorrow
when in sorrow
defeat sorrow
when in despair
defeat despair
when in death
defeat death
may you live in eternal joy
may you always be blessed
benedictus
benedictus

among my father's gift

among my father's gift
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 weapons to lighten oppressions
his imitation of ester 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 days 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
joke 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 stripped black and white
to 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 windows 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 out knives
in the warmer april light
tossing their green and white bodies
into wicker baskets or beaten pails
to savor their brief indoor lives

writing "september" in april

by mistake
a slip of mind
a slip of hand
i wrote "september"
instead of "april" in april
and for an instant
i pictured the end of summer
the cricket's chorus
the shorter days and cooler nights
but i was mistaken
there were six months still to fly
but for an instant
i was there with you
in september
september in april
my dearest reader
love of my life
and we smiled sadly
and we sweetly embraced

catholic boyhood stories #1

the story of the dogwood

when they drove the nails
in jesus' hands and feet
his blood fell down
on the white four-pointed flowers
and dogwoods have been stained
by sorrow ever since

advice to chipmunks

avoid the road all rocks
your notion of cars
is superior only to frogs or toads,
or pheasants as to about 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
they gray and red squirrel
they're pushy but they sleep in
avoid wide open spaced all wide open spaces
the marsh hawk and the red dusk
have eyes sharper than their talons

new york new york

i kiss your sidewalks
and bless your funky fumes
you smell but you're not afraid to make a statement
new york new york
fuck you fuggedaboutit
new york new york
your garbage is a mountain in new jersey
you stink
i kiss your sidewalks
and bless your funky fumes

rainy sleepy east

the crows are drawing
euclidean geometries
in the gray as gravel sky
our only job is to connect
the moving black dots
below the moving clouds
and build imaginary parallelograms
mostly gray as the gravel sky
crows dot com

aerial camera view
of fields and farms
moving to day's end
and sun's haze behind clouds

reclaiming "the limited" from the brand

i knew each of their lives was limited
as i well knew my own to be limited

postscripts: periwinkle, white and yellow daffodil, sound of goose wing,
attic lady bugs, white and purple violets, the old locusts and maples , the
stone wall, the old rail fence, the white throated sparrow, morning doves,
phoebes, blue jays, chickadees, the red tail, the march hawk, dogwood,
peepers singing when its raining, smell of skunk, skunk cabbage, bluebirds,
the constellations, the conjunction of saturn, venus and mars, the late april
moon, crows' and redwings' cries, the empty barns, the end of the day, the
end of the day

rock star's wish

when they stand in line to touch me
i only want to be the one
who touches
with no need of being touched
like the coldest star
which forever distant
lights a path by its distance
and warms a heart
by way of its infinite cool

the taconic

it's a river
you hear it's a roar
on fridays and on sunday
the birds are undaunted
they sit at the tops of willows
they sing their hearts out
unmoved by the mechanical current
as if the car had never been invented

first green most delicate

the first green
in the may dusk wind
most delicate
everything yet to unfold
the first green
without history or memory

of drought or flood
most delicate
before the fires of summer
and the frosts of late fall
turns them all
first to compost
then to parchment
then to dust

the din of birds at dawn and dusk

are they greeting the night
or saying goodbye to the day?
are they greeting the dawn
or saying goodbye to the night?
they are most active
at beginning and endings
at last an first lights is it the terror of change
that compels them to cry?
or their joy day in night
that compels them to sing?
the din of birds at dawn and dusk

when the earth begins to smell sweet as woman aroused

when the earth begins to smell sweet
as a woman aroused
you know spring had finally arrived
everything is delirious
with sweet smell and sweet song
everything is warming up to everything
and everything is right and nothing is wrong
o undying sweetness of green
o sweetly breathing spirit of seed and sun
of all the young and all the tender things
let my small voice be one in tune
with everything that fucks and sings

never having shaved with a straight razor

when i was ten
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 whiskers
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

