

# **THE ALBUM OF IRIDESCENCES**



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**May 4 2008 to June 20 2010**

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#### **brief inventory of things truly seen by few**

the sun the moon a rock a pen a wrench a wren  
the seasons tied to their celestial hitching post  
the stars a book a look the way the rain darkens hills seen from afar  
the watchdogs of all clocks and the nagging hour's barks  
the streaming video of memory and the lost socks of all our lives  
pour and flow trip and tangle as silent riders in a subway car  
things that disappear are spent go away and come back again  
intrude conspire collude to show us some fleeting things seen by few  
this intransigent reoccurrence of coincidences this album of iridescences  
this earth this death this birth a lock a key shining in a single drop of dew  
for akiko with thanks for *"the list: the uses and pleasures of cataloguing"*

#### **mirror walking down a road**

only the sound  
of congregating geese  
on the far pond  
a hundred song birds  
singing a hundred songs  
light rain in the gutter spouts  
and a mild wind in the trees  
road dark with rain  
nothing north nothing south  
dandelions closing up  
last of the locust blossoms  
white at the edge of the road  
and first 'jug-o-rum' of bullfrogs  
cats sleeping on stone porch  
half the peonies in bloom  
their pistils red blood red

#### **late november leaves**

even at the end of their season  
the leaves on the lawn are ferocious  
as the leopard and spotted as his coat  
but extravagantly passive and banal too  
in a gilt filigree of red and rust and gold  
part of an old and infinite reverie  
they seem to know what i do not  
evidenced by their tawny complacence  
in the warm complacent autumn sun  
i envy that in them  
my self importance refuses to wilt  
i wish i knew their secret  
could tap and plumb their acceptance  
and find my final palette  
bright as they audacious in their calm

### **raw umber**

in attics everywhere the wasps are teeter-tottering  
on wire legs rickety as old folks about to die  
outside the november rain and wind are raw  
as an unexpectedly rude and boring guest  
the season's cornucopia is a rotten heap of slag  
a funnel for all that's decomposed funereal turned off

whose birthday is today is not to be reborn

somewhere there's a smiling sun but not here not here  
raw umber even the drenched deer look resentful of the chill  
filthy pigeons huddle like bowery bums on dripping window sills  
there's nowhere to go but here inside where  
the rotting pumpkin head-in-hands of here and now  
would rather quit curl up and hide or just quietly die

whose birthday is today is not to be reborn

### **the snow's sestina**

from behind the stand of cedars comes the snow  
with frozen lake and low sky a gray conversation  
each flake a filigree a finely-etched circle  
a silent crystal army of albino angels progressing  
implacable intent on keeping some promise  
all the more mysterious for their shy silence

but what the nature of these wheels of silence?  
how connected to the identity of snow?  
who the beneficiary of this woven winter promise?  
who the principals in this subtle conversation?  
as orchard field and marsh are clothed in white progressing  
what the nature of this glowing circle?

the circle of sky to tree to grass to earth the circle  
the muted sound of cars whispering in white silence  
the circle of the storm progressing  
the circle of every falling flake of snow  
all things engaged in a very quiet conversation

the circle of an ancient wish an old promise

but what the nature of this chilling promise?  
but to blunt all angles soft all edges in a gentle circle  
to remind us that time is merely a season's conversation  
moving to a destiny a dusting of silence  
moving to the condition of country cloaked in snow  
a reminder of our little lives softly progressing

and what the nature of this fine progressing?  
but the nature of a fine recurring promise  
a gentle falling a mellowing like that of falling snow  
a circle that is a promise a falling silent circle  
that aspires to the state of a comfortable silence  
a circle that is a muted conversation

each story a song line our true self's conversation  
with that hero alive inside our self's progressing  
beyond the monkeys of the mind to a silence  
that has the character of a special promise  
that is itself a calm circle within a circle  
that is itself illuminated by this falling snow

and so we partake of this ancient conversation  
of earth and sky and snow and mind of man progressing  
and find ourselves but snow falling into our own well earned silence

### **the sestina of forgetting**

the dread of beginning or ending lives in the seed of forgetting  
memories fondest or faintest all adding up to an absence  
was it on full or empty who can recall?  
we are all filled with a hunger to return  
all wonder if we were born to be haunted  
all mired each in our own little history

yesterday's lunch what we were once that's history  
the failure to remember the persistence of forgetting  
the slow disappearance of fact in a house haunted  
the tortuous changing of presence to absence  
the absence of coming and going always ending in return  
a carbuncle healed over the scar the only recall

what would it mean to have perfect recall?  
to have an all-encompassing sense of history?  
to never have to fret about a right return?  
to never be deviled by cruel forgetting?  
to never live with this strange sense of absence?  
to not know what it means to be haunted?

it would be to be the reverse of haunted  
to have a sense of total balanced recall  
to never be held hostage by loss or absence  
to escape the coils of the python – history  
to know no form of forgetting  
to gladly welcome every unexpected return

to find every memory a truer newer return  
to bring light and air to the tomb of all things haunted  
to reverse the relentless process of forgetting  
and forge a brilliant form of recall  
that holds the past in perfect history  
so the absence of those we've loved is no absence

but the opposite of absence defying absence  
making every memory a truly-lived return  
taking the nightmare out of history  
breaking the chains of all that's haunted  
changing the definition and uses of recall  
forgetting the very meaning of forgetting

so that there will be no absence in absence  
no need to wish for a return to return  
no need to parse history for there will be no history

### **success in marriage**

don't lose your sense of humor  
on bad days  
stay away from sharp instruments  
and firearms

### **ideal marriage**

wife blind  
husband deaf

### **recycle**

the dun leaves of autumn  
are a gift nutrient  
the subservient carpet of fall  
a windfall to violet periwinkle  
skunk cabbage and fern  
roots bulbs bushes  
the gallant seasons  
all obey an ancient law  
mixed one by one  
by the mix-master sun  
carpe diem all

### **great colorist the sun**

i am the great colorist  
the sun  
the shapes of things  
give me reason  
to fill their outlines in  
just for fun

### **the pendulum**

i know too well  
the swing from fear to action

from there to here  
from love to hate  
from take to give  
attempts to enlighten or forgive  
those who passive live in fear  
those content who too often wait  
for i too have lived there  
now and then in heaven  
now and then in hell

### **her nipples**

her nipples were a dream  
firm as the tip of his tongue  
hard as his cock  
each shuddered  
with every touch  
as the slow second hand  
of a priceless clock  
the throb of him in her  
was like an ocean liner  
bringing its slow mass  
into a waiting foreign dock  
ocean bound ocean liner  
slowly sliding into an exotic port  
their body to body adjustment  
an old cliché ballet  
but to be inside  
that center of warm desire  
where all sense of outside  
and the world is all forgotten  
the difference between one and two  
one another's names  
who was who forgotten  
in the silky slide  
of groin to groin  
keeps uninitiated and initiated  
coming back for more  
he saw the vein carotid  
in her neck pulse once  
just this side of too much  
and then they came

### **dubai**

the shush and whisper of the palms  
the turquoise of the persian gulf  
the ever-visible burj al arab  
and everywhere neat and trim  
lines of rust and gold marigolds  
at 'the one and only'  
against the traffic's gridlock  
a cyclone fence an acre square  
enclosing a dozen camels  
women in burkhas behind the wheels  
of range rovers and yellow hummers  
on my way to "bee movie"

### **i looked at death**

i looked at death  
and death looked at me

i said death  
yours is the final victory

death looked at death  
death looked at me

death said you  
you you're wrong  
this is not true

when you die i live  
when you've had your last breath  
i still must give

long after you're gone  
i must continue to live

when i stare in my mirror  
there is no one there

when i open my doors  
there's no one behind them

you have father mother sister brother wife  
when you die  
you are missed

i've never had a single friend  
though i've lived forever  
without the comfort of an end

i did not ask to be hooded executioner  
the one whose fate it is to kill  
it was He who made you and me

who tangled me in this tangled knot  
who chained me to this insatiable maw  
that no man no bird no beast no fish

and all their carnage can ever fill  
ever day ever more

my only wish my only prayer  
is that i were not forever more

### **reclining cows on pleasant valley hillside**

to see their supine aggregation  
piebald as magpies  
kindest blacks and whites  
against an emerald hill of summer green

all but one reclining side-by-side  
all facing the same direction  
like closely-parked vans  
under the slate umbrella  
of the old pin oak's shade  
under the shockingly blue  
eye of the sky  
is to know  
there is no religion no denomination  
no pomp and dominance  
to match the alleluia of their cowness  
yet they are still righteous  
still a fervent congregation

### **city pigeon**

there at the red  
at thirty-third and third  
he was dark as dirt  
so thin it had to hurt

pecking on a crust of bread  
light goes green  
he takes flight  
light goes red  
he's back again

none of his kin  
had half the wit  
of this enterprising bird  
half-starved still he seemed

glad to be here  
in another life we might be him  
in another reincarnation  
i'd buy him a beer

### **baby squirrels in may**

one then two then three then four  
soft tails shining torches back-lit by morning sun  
a tad witless your roly-poly scamper  
quarter-sized scale models of your parents  
no economy of purpose in your riotous rush  
no crampons or carabiners to aid your hurry  
undaunted rope-less rappelling heads down  
unforgiving tree trunk wall sheer vertical!

you whirling whirligig tree rats  
how do you manage  
to keep your banker-gray suits so well groomed  
to hang upside down by your hind-paw grappling hooks  
while washing your whiskered mugs with your front?  
a miracle of animal insouciance  
your idea of movement very simple  
you can never get from A to B too soon



madcap skirmishing furry fur balls  
in the hollow of the old locust tree  
your only passion to nibble a sweet bud or two  
and climb around in supple clutches  
to play and nibble and dart cable-less  
speedy living elevators testing your skills  
running right side down hanging downside up  
in the ecstasy of one another's company

you furious scrambling future nut crunchers  
in and out of the hollows of old locust tree  
as much your mother as your own  
not a centimeter of her unfamiliar to any of you  
scuttle clatter rush and blunder full throttle  
like death-row convicts just reprieved  
the turkeys below chuckle-gurgling in the fields  
as mud-luscious spring unfolds again for us all

tiny roustabouts nibble bumble scramble  
climbing tree moraine in supple clutches  
higher and higher they ascend  
farther and farther out on slimmest limbs  
'till one plummets to the ground  
like a gray-flannel flattened tennis ball  
shakes off inelegant interruption of his fall  
and scampers up for more

you shim-shamming tree-nook darters  
furry flurry giddy on the ale of spring-fresh air  
lit by some internal fire  
of fearless joy not wholly your own  
swirling in squirrel rugby rucks scrums and mauls  
sixty feet above the grass  
you know no notion of fear  
how is it you so rarely lose your grip?

you gyroscopic acrobatic end-of-limb sitters  
how's the view up there?  
as mr. sun winks through crowds of clouds  
and pond mist rises off top of pond  
like steam from a skillet  
the geese clearing their throats  
and two swans white bottoms up  
foraging for sweet weed in the shallows

you leap light as live feathers with intent  
simple complex comics extraordinaire  
illiterate as to the murderous killer books  
of fox and hawk and car and truck  
how so gentle so quick exquisite  
alert alive possessed by some ancient trance  
with the aid of what prescient shaping hand  
worry-free how you nimble gray dancers dance!

**the broadmoor colorado springs**

the mountain light falls a powder of pollen  
the foothills the cottonwoods a yellow blaze  
black swans coots geese pintails  
white swans their young whistling  
leaving v's in the wake of their parents  
temperature's dropping in minutes by ten degrees  
as diamond-bright sun supremely articulates  
the pagodas of white pine and mesquite  
blue spruce compass-white and saw grass  
people strolling as out of hiroshige  
tiny determined some dire some silent calm  
craggy old roustabout in worn jeans  
with young asian woman diaphanous  
her gown the color of cherry blossoms  
walking hand in hand each clearly smitten  
two mallards waddling invade the patio space  
feathered free-loaders panhandling  
and by the lake shallows under pale sky  
the goslings whistling, "here! here!  
now! now! what about me! what about me?"  
traces of snow on peaks light falling softly  
resident crows cynical cock their heads take stock  
of resident chef in white crossing lake bridge  
his white toque made slightly pink  
in the long shadows' dark flames  
lit by the setting colorado sun

### **another sunset**

a silent lion sun  
stalks the horizon  
while his little brother  
a black and white cat  
in the tall field grass  
his tail an exclamation  
runs to greet his shadow  
in pursuit in pursuit  
of cricket bronze cricket  
saw-leg fiddling goodbyes  
for all those  
sweet remains of the day  
for all those  
whose day's now done

### **little oreo**

door of horizon closed by sun on the run  
even the brightest greens in the last light  
took on a purple tone and cast  
the belted galloways each end black  
broad white stripe in between  
all resting motionless but one  
little oreo - we named him -  
wired by the waning light  
an alternating current of fight or flight  
played attack retreat and run  
exploding back and forth again and again

stampeding back to the magnet  
of his mother placid as a massive wall  
each time extending the distance of his run  
by his own length or two until spooked  
by shadow clump of mud small bird's call or tuft of grass  
nostrils flared nose glossy as a patent leather shoe  
possessed as a "claymation" cookie turned cartoon calf  
trapped in his own game of judging distances  
think feel fear think feel fear then run  
back to his mom his sun

### **what did i learn from poetry**

forgiving or unforgiving  
nothing that we all  
don't learn from life  
that time is unrelenting  
full of peace or strife  
unforgiving or forgiving  
as a good or evil wife  
before or after every fall

### **dandelion**

spring's small lion head  
your yellow sweet yellow  
king of weeds  
polka-dotting lawns  
delicious delicious  
green salad green  
of those few of us  
who've truly seen  
how few of us  
not jaded in caves of yawns  
fellow spring fellow  
have truly seen  
your yellow sweet yellow  
spring's small lion head

### **prayer of the happy few**

jesus on your cross  
maybe we've not lost enough  
we resent your being boss  
and your simple message raved  
that those not scourged reviled spat upon  
are truly and forever lost  
and those that are are saved  
jesus on your cross  
we resent your being boss  
maybe we've not lost enough

### **june morning**

was doing forty in a fifty zone  
on the other side a dunce  
a black limousine a lot faster  
coming headlong at us

the squirrel his judgment in a knot  
had made his way half way across  
go back my side or cross?  
his terror an impairing goad  
he kept on at his loss  
wrong zig wrong zag small disaster  
in my rearview mirror  
saw him bounce just once  
coin-flip  
flailing on the road  
this fine june morning  
death won the toss

### **book is bird**

the book is bird  
its open pages  
wings once read  
through all ages  
inspire us to fly  
wings so wide spread  
sing and sing  
about all unknowns  
a flight path un-flown  
to where no one has tread  
for hang-gliding sages  
easy as picking up a phone

### **corn**

my country's time is timeless  
measured in green  
mute mile upon mile of wild armies  
gene-bred to own every hollow hill field and stream  
every hunger home table plate and dream

my country's earth is well ploughed  
every furrow full of births  
every week each soldiers' height  
every kernel an exclamation point  
grows in girth owns more turf

my county's soldiers have wings  
fallow yet aspiring to sky  
our stalks are american bamboo  
now inches a week all summer long

my country's labor  
the height of men is to accept our fate  
as john barleycorn born  
to be crushed torn and roasted  
as st. lawrence on his grill

"turn me over...this side well done"  
eaten kernel by kernel like  
steps of breathless climbers  
hungry climbing the matterhorn

eaten by the voracious cannibals of corn

### **one cloud in june**

i am taking a breather  
poolside on the recliner  
day dreaming away a day  
recalling the summer of my childhood  
on my back smelling new-cut hay  
the pool feeling the same way  
reflecting migrant clouds in play

this one cloud today  
started out as a hound dog howling  
seen from below his lower jaw  
and upper open one floppy ear above  
became a pair of muskrats  
frolicking in love on a high white ledge  
and then two slowly swimming koi

behind a ghostly privet hedge  
in a vast ultramarine pond of sky  
and then i heard the applause of waters  
the birds all singing:  
those shifting clouds they're tricky  
sons and daughters of sons and daughters  
for sure or never for sure

### **two women getting on a train**

enter mother and daughter  
twins in matching furs  
look like they just leapt into  
two just-skinned beaver skins  
skinned for these two carnivores  
exit mother and daughter  
disheveled matching blurs

### **this housebound flight of time**

high above the sooty roofs of houses  
high above the churlish smoke of flues  
flies the churning chorus of years  
past present and what will be

ursus major ursus minor  
big and little dipper cups up  
big and little dipper cups down  
pouring cascades of moonlight star light

everything receiving and breathing light  
everything aspiring and conspiring to  
this shining round diamond  
this housebound flight of time

### **forsythia**

shock troops of spring  
first wild yellow to bloom

that lights the way  
for all the later fellows  
yellow midwife  
bearing yellow firebrand  
gold-flowered shish kabab  
your flaming yellow calls  
the dandelion and daffodil  
up from earth's cold womb

### **buffalo nickel**

buffalo nickel of my childhood  
worn smooth as old pewter  
how many packs of bazooka bubble gum  
did you buy in your lifetime  
prized for bodacious bubbles the size of melons  
which collapsed like punctured pink dirigibles  
a sticky mask a second skin a scrim  
over the blower's face and eyes and brow  
now with a gullible wish and a flick  
i send you spinning head over tail  
on to the old face of our frozen pond  
where you will be born through ice  
by his eminence grand marquis exchequer and auger  
his majesty the lion-maned sun  
down and down to the muddled bottom  
companion to sleeping turtles newts and frogs  
radiate your glowing currents in the murk  
and ask the distant warmth of spring to come  
help us hold dear the currency of our pasts  
save thanks for the wonders of our five senses  
before the small change of our coinage is spent and done  
flipped as we are like a bet flicked  
by some mighty gambler's inscrutable thumb

### **upside-down torn ticket stub on railroad tracks**

DATE

\_\_\_\_\_

KEEP

IN

SIGHT

### **the vulture**

never say the vulture  
displays a lack of culture  
his tastes are gregarious  
his palate multifarious  
he'll sample every carcass at his roadside inn  
he'll eat almost anything that's dead even kin  
every size and shape of fare squashed or flattened

when they tried to trademark 'omnivore'  
he already owned all rights and patent  
his tastes range from contemporary modern  
to old masters as long as they're good and rotten  
his head shaved bald is very zen  
he doesn't care who or why or how or when  
what we throw into our garbage bin  
for him's a gourmet treat to waste a sin  
if he were a priest preaching at his rostrum  
he'd say skunk mouse vole deer rabbit squirrel and possum  
are way better than a Sunday *dominus vobiscum*

### **authority of black**

there blasé stands crow  
he the only negative in a sea-green lawn  
planks of sunlight his parenthesis  
he the capital C  
in children's alphabet books  
the black bird of evening  
snuffing the sky's ultramarine  
whose great wings bring  
great night inevitable  
cause the red bird to sing  
farewell to day  
cause hamlets villages and towns  
to switch their lamp lights on  
and stars and moon to rise  
and vainly contradict him  
he the authority of black

### **july bird bath**

the steel-blue cricket hunter  
the black-and-yellow mud dauber  
the yellow-faced bee and bald-faced hornet  
the yellow-jacket honey and carpenter bees  
all visit the bird feeder just to drink  
the god of their thirst  
and their quenching the same for all  
as finch, cardinal, nuthatch, phoebe, sparrow, wren and jay  
their difference in scale  
the same as a man and a whale  
the god of their thirst  
and their quenching the same for all  
for the biggest and smallest of small

### **gypsy**

my home is no home  
home far away from no home  
i know the test of emptiness  
of being dwarfed by field road and sky  
and barred from cozy places  
with no accommodations of my own  
which I know to be the truest nest  
for those like me whose constant state  
is fleeting as a firefly's glow

step by step hour by hour day by day  
a dancing in the wilderness  
that none not one of us  
even those blessed  
can ever own or rent  
our inheritance never spent  
our pilgrimage our angelus

### **the poem**

the poem is a lowly way  
of capturing us  
in the net of the present  
its pity and terror  
keeping us afloat  
gift from far away sent  
a minute trust  
minute by minute by day  
in this great sea we all swim in

### **one and one**

today the world is once again an ark  
every fish bird mammal reptile or bug  
in biblical pairs of twos  
and i new noah a lone sluggish lug  
see two deer two morning doves  
two geese two rabbits two turkeys  
all in twos - turtles frogs fish  
salamanders crickets ants and spiders  
iridescent hummingbirds that hum  
and so once again thinking of you  
you and me as one and one  
how did i a dunce manage to lose you  
peering out of dumb pain's dark  
to go from one and one to only one  
to watching envious a world of twos  
to only one oh now without you

### **saturday morning**

the hello of august silence  
is blackened by a cacophony of crows  
the shadows of their bodies and wings  
silhouetted on the silver-green varnish  
of sun-splashed marsh and trees  
composed against a pristine score  
as if a rowdy crowd of calligraphers  
hurled their loaded brushes of black ink  
against a shining palimpsest  
stained by their black caws' radiance  
and only then do we deeply feel  
brighter than the morning sun in our eyes  
the end of summer that white butterfly  
that flits and flies and one day dies  
and recalls elliot's sibyl of cumae:



“...I saw her with my own eyes  
at Cumae, suspended in a bottle,  
and when boys asked her,  
“Sibyl, what is your wish?”  
she would reply,  
“*apothanein thelo*” -  
“I want to die.”

### **ember glow**

remember how not long ago  
we hacked and sawed the dead cedar stump  
and just before turning in for the night  
stacked the broken cedar shakess and shards  
on the white-hot bed of ember glow  
and aided by a light rain and lighter breeze  
keeping the smoke smolder low  
breathed deeply the old cedar's scent  
which filled the campsite and the tent  
to the sweet-sad loon's accompaniment  
and we were hearing the cleverness  
of raindrops falling on the canopy  
manitou's waves a complement  
their sleepy chop falling and rising  
on algonquin's granite shores  
as if lake and smoke and rain and we  
were all deeply breathing calm as one  
as if lake and smoke and rain and we  
dreaming were all transformed and became  
a long hall of doors opening slowly  
unto a great healing which has no name  
for **daniel arnott**

### **kali's necklace**

a round of skulls strung snug  
a string of all failed loves  
long gone their graves long ago dug

### **hummingbird**

feathered helicopter  
giant liberace of a bee  
blurred wing drone  
small airborne hovercraft  
long swooper longer swooper longest  
triumphant glitter archer  
and arrow all in one humming one  
rare to find him still in his red and emerald vest  
sitting on a dogwood branch for a moment's rest  
a flying flickering color blindness test  
brilliance varnished with clear shellac  
even lilacs' darkest purples seem pale  
other birds envy his ability to shift  
verticals horizontals ups and downs  
right angle any angle all the same to him

once when the late day light was a liar

like a dart he bulls-eyed the screened porch screen  
his twitter raging at the completely unforeseen  
he threw it into full-throttle reverse  
and was off ecstatic as if he won a big las vegas bet  
when feeding he's very conscientious  
as thorough as a good store clerk  
sampling every purple trumpet  
then zooms off in a sweeping arc  
his other favorite colors pink and red  
as he lives he shines opalescent iridescent  
his a shimmering neon holiness  
the deepest heart of summer's fire

### **counting down counting up**

counting down  
always looking back  
a mopey clown  
his floppy boxcar shoes  
down the railroad track

counting up  
always called ahead  
a mountain climber scaling  
up the sheer-ice wall  
to the mountain top

### **gulls on pilings**

#### **east river**

#### **hell's gate**

how do they stay so neat  
without a personal valet  
night and day impeccable  
tailored black and white and gray  
bills yellow web-feet orange eyes blood red  
thirty-three of them forty tarred pilings  
sleeping each as if on their own nest  
all facing due south synchronized  
as if hand-carved manufactured  
decoys to attract others of their kin  
they could be toys or souvenirs  
in the gift store of the river  
collectibles from the yet-to-be-filmed  
disney epic 'common herring gull'  
perfectly peaceful so calm so without care  
so unconcerned about the planet's crazy spin  
as if they and their sun were the only clock  
a sleeping flock yet each so solitary  
feathered solar cells storing warmth  
recharging on the river dock of the day  
under cloud and cityscape looking down on current drift  
no thought for tomorrow spending or thrift  
no pretence no show no fan fare  
so plain so common so rare  
eternal friends of chronos old father time  
these birds that never sing neat as a pin

quietly keeping one another company

### **ode not to a nightingale**

you have inspired many  
“oh’s”, “yons”, “dosts”, “thous”,  
“sweet joys”, “harks”, “thys”,  
“hearests” and “eternals”  
yet for all your literary coverage  
i must respectfully take umbrage  
most of us have never seen you  
nor experienced that fresh hope  
of lovers whose hearts poets say you fill  
not a note not a feather not a strain  
only a google photograph and recording  
but who wouldn’t trust milton, arnold,  
rosetti, drummond and shelly  
especially shelly and shelly’s “so sweet  
that joy is almost pain”  
a consensus among most poets  
that your song walks that line  
but still all this palpitating and echoing  
in wooded vales and throbbing veins  
forgive me, tawny-throated one,  
but though “sick with sweet love”  
your “music-panting bosom” brings no balm  
to my dull twenty-first-century heart and brain  
maybe i need a dose of english moonlight  
a bracing yet languid touch of thracian wild  
more mute agony trumped by the tranquil thames  
eternal passion bursting through the crowded leaves  
fugitive voluptuous grecian languid blooms  
by a grecian sea under a grecian moon

or maybe the humble phoebe is enough  
for me forgive me phoebe i humbled him  
upstate native he’s a most artful songster  
if you’ve heard him you know he knows his stuff  
he just calls out his name again again and again  
phoebe phoebe phoebe phoebe  
maybe his shaker simplicity has kept him  
from “music-panting” celebrity and fame  
forget all those hot cheeks and sear’d eyes  
the trills riffs liquid notes and baroque warblings  
forget the music of the spheres and angelic airs  
one thing about the phoebe to remember  
as summers follow summers as years follow years  
his song owns the charm of moms and apple pies  
his simple song is his name  
phoebe phoebe phoebe phoebe  
his song’s a complex comfort  
to our down-home yankee hearts and ears  
phoebe phoebe phoebe phoebe  
how i miss him in cold december

**for wanda**  
**with THANKS! for “On Wings of Song”**

### **periwinkles**

they prove infinity by an exhaustion of blue  
another and another each perfectly indigo hue  
ground cover most fleeting pigment of spring  
blossoming filaments like me and you  
up from the sod for their briefest fling  
their early show of joy countering  
old gone winter's rue

### **weather**

drift-wood stone shell bone and feather  
all as common and as rare  
as fragile as the changing weather  
that greets us in our meanders from here to there

### **returning home**

no matter how far and wide we roam  
a journey is a golden cage  
from which each heart flies  
free again upon returning home

### **differential**

some little differential  
some expert hand upon the switch  
makes all the world of difference  
between a nation of frustration  
a heaven or a hell  
and the quelling of an itch

### **watching the flooding ewaso nyiro**

watching the flooding ewaso nyiro  
rising waters the color of milk chocolate  
with no trace of sweetness no hint of benevolence  
as if some angry god's carotid was severed  
by an even angrier one and from mount nyiro  
worshipped mountain of the samburu gushes  
as if from a cosmic hydrant chaos  
vengeance and chance of sudden death  
maleficent torrent of dark 'blood' intent  
on drowning the great camps client and guide  
the low-lying savannahs anything and  
everything with the temerity to oppose  
ill-fated enough to slip from melting banks  
or so shallow-rooted to be sucked down and in  
trees tall as buildings the width of thirty men  
logs thick as sofas root bases splayed  
doum palm umbrella acacia salt bush  
rushing pell-mell to some muddled terminus  
carcasses - jackal? baboon? impala? vervet?  
but meat in a dark fondue uniformed in mud  
swept on by some apoplectic prime mover  
the sound a thunderous rolling fierce unceasing roar  
everything as if fated for the brutal delectation  
of some Gargantua's insatiable maw  
elephant white rhinoceros cape buffalo leopard lion

ant-lion elephant-shrew rhinoceros-beetle buffalo-weaver  
leopard-tortoise gerenuk cheetah ostrich oryx zebra giraffe  
this dark flowering orchestra hurled down river  
by this engorged river this pitiless ewaso nyiro  
on this oddly-bright celebration of a morning  
all serving notice stark reminder blunt wake up call  
that our all-too-human vanity of naming  
everything and anything is but a tiny wish  
our subtle classifications but fairy tales bedtime stories  
that broach no order hold no control win no pity  
find no gold in this angry timeless old-testament god of old  
ewaso nyiro ewaso nyiro ewaso nyiro  
**for David and Isaac - Guide and Driver**  
**Samburu National Reserve, Kenya**  
**November 5, 6 2008**

### **an afternoon with hippos**

below the high ravine red-clay banks crumbling  
into rising river the color of nestle's quik  
there they are twenty-six or thirty of them?  
their backs shiny dark gray as their cousins porpoise and whale  
their bellies and ears lighter a bruised rose-pink  
and they solemn and comic in their breadth and hulk  
and i having seen them only captive and sullen in zoos  
feeling eternity in them free as the very first explorer  
to encounter them wild trying with difficulty  
to count them as they so leisurely submerge and rise  
submerge and slowly rise inscrutable whale-like  
their puffy eyes slit as a too-many-times-punched boxer  
on their own ancient clock of river ravine and sky  
their little comic flippy ears ever erratic feverish  
silly as those those propellers on kids' beanies  
telegraphing their pecking order their worries or intent  
with grunts and snorts and burps and chortles and 'plosions  
harrooongh hungh hungh hungh hungh  
hippopotamus hippopotami hippopotamus hippopotami  
placid stolid immovable floating in bliss  
like picasso's massive mediterranean swimmers  
harrooongh hungh hungh hungh hungh  
in tuba tones when miss-judging log for crocodile  
or asserting or challenging dominance in their 'bloat'  
their 'pod' ever-shifting alpha males up and down river  
on guard protecting adolescents females and babies  
surprisingly curious serious-eyed searching as when  
at top of ravine the maasai in bright plaid their children smiling  
mother bent under burden of kindling and cord wood  
their goat flock's cast bells clanking at ravine top ambling by  
the whole 'dale' turned and looked up as if to say a tribal "hello!"  
a daily much-awaited occurrence? expected diversion? a welcome?  
spouting spitting shooting gushes of water like whales  
from their flapped nostrils then yawning as if to swallow all creation  
their teeth a menace canoe crushers greatest killers of humans  
rising spouting napping sinking spouting sucking air expelling water  
they repeat the cycle and repeat the cycle and repeat the cycle  
as they play musical sofas surreal in the rushing currents  
they have much in common with refrigerators pianos

stoves small trucks and all massive immovable objects  
yet the roman's 'river horse' surprisingly right  
their underwater trot like triple crown winners in slow mo'  
for in the water they are gigantic thoroughbreds  
light on their feet adroit preferring the shallows their paddling  
an ascending descending gentle ballet bounce off bottom  
the choreography of them a study in hierarchy  
always an alpha up river always an alpha down river  
the females and bumbling babies innocent and funny as clowns  
the adolescent challenger males pushy testing their metal  
in mock combat harshly rebuffed then the alpha's triumphal  
harrooongh hungh hungh hungh hungh hungh  
harrooongh hungh hungh hungh hungh hungh  
as if to confirm and broadcast the outcome  
any floating thing smallest debris a source of instant concern  
friend or foe testing friend or foe testing friend or foe  
moving from distraction to submerged sleep akin to cat naps  
communicating not unlike geese at night  
the state of their nation's security telegraphed to all  
in grunts and honks and burps confirming reaffirming settling down  
their lives a floating dream in a dream of floating  
sometimes only their imposing backs visible as boulders  
the alpha male's nightmare head long as a big first grader is tall  
and the babies the babies frisky even at half a ton  
rolling on their backs practicing their yawns  
yawning and more yawning piano-lid mouths pink as bubble gum  
cuter than disney's fantasia could render in tutus  
heads on their mother's backs content and fearless  
confident that any challenger will only win papa's jaws  
their only true enemies cunning croc and drought  
their sweat red as blood their hides crack and burst  
and slowly they die swell and melt  
in hundreds the stench haunting empty riverbeds for weeks  
- the samburu and masai gather their bleached bones for trade -  
but they know no fear or worry their calm eternal  
in the cool of the night they move fearless inland for a nibble  
and cover miles in forage for tasty greens  
in the cool of the morning from the hot-air balloon  
you can see the line of their tracks filling with water  
like zippers zipping the soaked trousers of the savannah  
leading back to the eternal dream of their river home  
who is the king? who dares challenge their canines?  
even simba touted king ruler imperator emperor of all  
tail between legs steers clear gives them serious berth  
hippopotamus hippopotami hippopotamus hippopotami  
harrooongh hungh hungh hungh hungh hungh  
[http://www.soundboardcom/sb/hippopotamus\\_hippo.aspx](http://www.soundboardcom/sb/hippopotamus_hippo.aspx)  
to hear their alleluiahs their messiah-hippo-chorus  
**for chief kennedy and moses - guide and driver**  
**mara safari club - maasai mara**  
**november 7, 8, 9 2008**

### **some east african snakes i never saw**

african rock python  
blind snake  
kenya sand boa

brown house snake  
abyssinian slug eater  
black-lined snake  
cape wolf snake  
semi-ornate bush snake  
file snake  
green tree snake  
peter's beaked snake  
jackson's tree snake  
rufous egg eater  
powdered tree snake  
cross-barred tree snake  
white-lipped snake  
eastern bark snake  
speckled sand snake  
red spotted cobra  
gold's cobra  
bush viper  
striped skaapsteker  
red-spotted beak snake  
large-eyed snake  
eastern tiger snake  
black mamba  
green mamba  
jameson's mamba  
forest cobra  
mount kenya bush viper  
gaboon viper  
kenya horned viper  
puff adder  
rhinoceros viper  
rhombic night adder  
saw-scaled viper  
black-necked spitting cobra

### **odyssey**

your journey done  
you and the air  
i breathe  
are one  
across a vast divide  
past the darkest chasm  
of all beginnings  
and all ends  
common sense turns uncommon  
i hear your heart  
beat in mine  
i see your eyes  
in moon and stars and sun  
how bright  
they shine

### **the dream of the other**

i was walking side by side  
next to another **the other**

and his breath rose visible then invisible  
against the moon and cloud-empty skies  
lost among the powder of the stars  
the trees leaf-empty stood black as sticks  
warlocks against the far horizon  
and the grass white with frost  
crunched under our feet  
like a strange present unwrapped

then he showed me this string this wire  
buried just beneath my skin  
that ran down the crown of my shaved head  
and around my whole body  
and he pulled it out half way  
'till it reached head to heel heart-side  
and i was like a naked bow  
and though there was blood there was no pain  
and as if from afar i saw myself strung  
strung and pale and pulled back taut

and my body as a sarcophagus of old egypt  
was opened bisected symmetrical front from back  
until lungs and heart and faint blue bowels  
were revealed steaming in the silent night  
shining like living jewels

### **white widow**

by my dark window  
spider moon white widow  
spider moon fat and round  
old as the circle  
your web of thin cloud  
shines sticky white  
over field grass oak and pine  
shining on the lowest of the low  
on the crassest of the crass  
on the highest of the high  
on soft moths fat and white  
held fast in the winter limbo  
of your woven glow  
mesmerized hypnotized  
suspended wings still a flutter  
yet not yet dead not yet  
all around them not a sound  
just a net a round of silence  
surrounded by the spectator stars  
watching in your blue-white light  
tiny gladiators giving up their lives  
in the coliseum of your night  
and not another single sound  
'till the bright birds of morning  
sing their farewells to you  
west horizon bound

### **on the way to see my failing mother**



the mr. softee trucks with their giant plastic custard cones  
are cutting off hertz rental vans and dump trucks  
in their panic to get out of the lincoln tunnel  
the sky out of constable a symphony of dove and blue  
horse-tail and cumulous clouds trying to obscure  
the diamond sun knifing through like an ice pick  
a duet of power grids and planes over newark airport  
refineries and chemical plants a swear on the cityscape  
spewing their foul and motley brew for me and you

billboards in the foreground and on the horizon  
bridge after bridge after bridge after rusting bridge  
silhouettes of crane after crane after crane  
concrete steel grime mocked by stubborn still-elegant gulls  
transcendant circling over dump and marsh and tidal pool  
in that sweet flying spiral they form while searching  
proprietary giving body to the notion of "bird's eye view"  
billboards for cars and soap and perfume and lotteries  
and big-breasted what happens in vegas stays in vegas  
and winelibrary.com and armies of vans and trucks and trucks and vans  
prodded on hell bent on delivering who knows cares what  
righteous maniacal roaring over the high overpasses  
looking down from the high bridges like crazed beasts  
on saw-grass and cattail pale in the mafia's brackish marsh light

at road's edge rising mountains of garbage their u-pipes  
like acupuncture needles deflating the giant body of the dump  
expelling gasses of decomposition of anything decomposable  
above the corpse a necklace of more planes queued up nose to tail  
and caravans on caravans of filthy caravans of unwashed trucks  
steeple of stranded churches sticking up like spikes  
and on billboard after billboard after billboard  
santas guzzling coca cola in a haze of benzene toluene zylene  
outside the imperial city the home of 'in' welcome! to the big apple's skin  
here's what the world believes all of new jersey to be  
service areas their wendy's starbucks roy rogers dunkin donuts  
discount furniture railroad yards junk yards and plumes of smoke  
from who knows what burning what everywhere you look  
not a human in sight a sahara of waste a vomit of chemical guck  
reaching as far as the eye can see as deep as the heart can reach  
sunoco exxon mobil citgo midas muffler selling nothing pure  
newark elizabeth elizabeth-port hoboken bayonne jersey city secaucus  
next stop - "steam-shovel-bull-dozer-derrick-dumpster' junction  
smelly canals with rainbow sheens of oil and the floating oblivious  
dead rats cats dogs birds and live mallards paddling by white egrets  
and geese floating like decoys nibbling on contaminated cattails  
as if in the adirondaks instead of a sprawling watery garbage can

and drivers blank-faced doing 85 in 55 zone  
and i blank-faced too staring ahead into what a future  
thinking of my mother shrunk to little more than 100 pounds  
and her vacant home in the suburbs thermostat low  
as her interest in conversation with her snowy white hair  
and her eyes vacant as her home and her lonely last tooth  
sometimes with it sometimes not who knows

and I think to myself how can one not love  
this frantic bubbling refinery state caldron my new jersey  
nothing now ever new under your chemically altered sun  
no surprises same old predictable insatiable continuum  
like goya's giant devouring fathers uncles aunts grandmothers grandfathers  
and one day with hardly a fuss hard to believe even little us  
and everyone and everything running from what? on the run  
and mommy dearest mommy not entirely lost still not done  
she and her old tough sense of fun still sometimes here with us

### **thankfully**

forlorn forsaken thankfully  
your most human can be  
the most you you desire to be  
turn reverie to reveille reality  
even win immortality  
by waking merely every day up  
and doing any one just thing of things  
that makes any one and everyone kings  
including only one-ever you and me  
feel like time is the fire now to sing  
now love right this every now  
know this 'you' is victory born  
to be steeped as the finest tea  
in the warmest cup of thankfully  
**for Bernadette and e.e. cummings**  
**Christmas 2008**

### **something**

something possesses me  
has me in its hold  
at my humble task  
what is it  
what terrible hand i ask  
i truly do not know  
but in its vast grip  
i rest and play and wonder  
i ebb and flow and wander  
fast adrift in its open sea  
in the mighty exclamation  
the ocean of its OH!

### **troubles**

troubles are deer at night  
in the orchards of our dreams  
in the snow and freezing rain  
waiting in a strong winter wind  
for last apples to fall  
eat without a fuss  
and silently move on  
in the morning long gone  
only their tracks remain

### **sea lion dream**

from my rocking chair on the country porch

i could see them all i thought clearly  
all six lined up like cordwood sleeping  
two in the shade of the old sycamore  
shadows of tree limbs like ribbons  
and four asleep on the road  
when my uncle john dead for forty years  
his hair like a used brillo pad exclaimed  
look! there they are!!  
robert matthew and john the divine  
jerusalem-jerusalem and william gibbons

then someone shouted from the attic above  
they're sea lions!!  
and i saw they were dogs  
one afghan a setter a shepherd  
a scotty and an english bull  
sea lions would never leave their harbor home  
too dry a climb too far a stroll too odd a song  
and oh! i forgot the sixth one  
a weimeraner silver-gray as a circus seal  
whose name was "the power of suggestion"  
sired by "with no regrets"

### **trees across the street**

freezing at sunrise shorn of their leaves  
the trees take on the mantel of orange  
and seem in the wheezing breeze  
in frigid mid january  
transformed changed eternally  
their limbs reborn to every sun beam  
to accept orange just as the high-rise  
by carpe diem are ever-so-briefly seized  
a winter mystery  
that changes to pink and light tangerine

### **hope**

my darling dear  
i'm always working on something  
that will spring me out of here

### **anonymous**

one day will come  
when our life near done  
will seem an hour

like 'dearest mother'  
spelled out in flowers  
dour on her new grave

nowhere to run  
none to save us or to save  
all held by a mysterious power

### **metal palm trees - coney island**

salt water frozen to beach sand  
like a palmer method workbook

white curve on brine curve  
the clouds sullen stubborn  
hardly budging if sand spoke

it would say you clouds take off  
you metal palm trees you swear of a hope  
you fake emblems of our hunger  
to bring florida to brooklyn  
to the many who can't afford a flight

### **round**

someone to love  
something to do  
something to look forward to  
the calm of peering down  
on all the osprey's view  
from high above

### **tracks**

on winter days  
tracks in the snow  
amazing maze  
tell the story  
easier to see where  
all the creatures go

### **chickadees**

there's nothing disappointing about them  
humble as some might say they are  
my pact with them is simple  
common as an earthenware jar  
simple as a sunday hymn  
first i do the human version  
of the chickadee dee dee song

then i hold out my open hand  
full of pumpkin seeds a cup  
and wait for one the bravest one to land  
they know me so it never takes long  
and then i fill their feeder up  
one small victory to always count on  
the longer i bumble along

### **forget**

forget god the spider and her web  
forget the poem  
it is not god a knife or spider web  
though poets would love us think so  
it entraps and cuts only dreamily  
and really there is no blood  
no woven smothering shroud  
only the literary blood of tears  
those maudlin spiral-down salt waters  
that inconvenient catharsis of our years

the constellations of the birds  
care not a jot and carry nothing  
their geometries happily oblivious  
in their determined flight above us all  
the one familiar falling feather  
remembered only by our children or us

forget the birds forget the feather  
no matter how exquisite  
of blue jay cardinal marsh hawk  
junco goldfinch turkey vulture  
eagle sparrow phoebe wren  
even he who has found the feather  
of the ruby-throated hummingbird  
is now forgotten yet again

forget the too-arrogant weather  
it's limitless munificence  
has never deigned to remember  
you or me or those long gone  
we are the only ones  
who need to make a comment  
on the lonely way  
the light continues to fall  
we are the only ones  
who carry the baggage of our dreams  
tote seasons of desire on our backs

rain snow ice wind sleet tides night and day  
without concern for our small farce  
the illusions of our inventions  
needing no excuses no permissions  
to not remember not recall  
not built to consider remembrance  
not made to worry or care about  
the cold music of consequence  
that dogs us day out day in

witness the pitiless drop  
of dew in the spider's web  
shining like a cruel jewel flashing  
and know as the morning sun  
knows to span the horizon it owns  
terror is to remember a pity  
our lives but faucets hot and cold  
off and on and off again tying and untying  
the same old laces on a pair of brogues  
so merely do as the rogue seasons do  
and forget forget forget

**osmo**

we never had a cat named osmo  
but if we did he would come and go  
in such fine manner fit and trim  
in such a splendid way

that all who saw him would go "oh!"  
it must be osmo  
whose name has preceded him

### **to a migrating towhee**

towhee towhee  
you deportee  
you refugee

goodbye goodbye  
better not delay  
your journey's so long

and days grow shorter  
fly away fly away  
to some warm turquoise bay

and sing your song  
drink your tea drink your tea  
on some flowering orange tree

from early spring through summer  
and now late late fall  
you've been a friend to me

### **every time i listen to your voice**

every time i listen to your voice  
i feel a full and right completion  
a validation of all I've struggled for  
a sweet most-just lightness  
like the forever-unspoken open  
unto an unbounded vista  
of a long too-long closed door  
a door that always must be opened  
a promise never to be broken

### **piss christ**

why the hue and cry  
by so-called christians  
over a crucifix in a jar of urine  
when god made man  
chose to join us here  
to die the tortured cross  
how much greater for him to choose  
the son of god leaving paradise  
to be immersed in the eternal merde of man  
to marinate in our fecal vat  
what greater homage  
than to place this simple gift shop cross  
of him suspended a jar of urine  
to remind us all  
of whence he came  
for our eternal gain  
**for Andres Serrano**

### **green pepper**

was it edward weston  
in the early thirties  
who saw peppers  
as if for the first time  
in black and white  
that made one seem  
look like a naked torso  
in living light  
humanized the vegetable  
gave new meaning to contour  
a tutorial on pepper anatomy  
the body builders of salads  
even sliced they hold their pumping-iron shape  
no velvet leotards in any court of kings  
no emerald can match their simple green  
even translated in black and white  
yes weston in the early thirties  
and his muscular peppers  
in their pepperness still sing

### **vestigial**

perfect way to end a day  
ninety proof  
in the blue twilight  
as if etched by master engraver  
most meticulous intaglio  
at our back door  
on slate slab step lyrical  
their little histories  
backlit by the sun in flight  
prints of winter junco sparrow  
cardinal phoebe blue jay crow  
incised into hardened plate of snow  
as bright-cut a perfection  
as perfection nears miracle  
a little chiseled memory a cornucopia  
a commune of tiny presences bound  
to come and go come and go  
on the italianate vellum of snow  
in the late day's virtuoso light  
a catalogue raisonne  
not one of their falls to be forgotten  
a bas relief left by those whose sole art  
is to so gently land hop  
and set a minute  
then quietly fly away

### **deer in february**

far away  
three deer grazing  
on high top  
of snow covered hill  
though august's now older  
can see them still

### **the feathered clock**

as clever a parliament as forever  
an ecumenical flock  
a small intelligent celebration  
sending pumpkinseeds down  
cascading on squirrels below  
cardinal jay chickadee  
bluebird phoebe junco crow  
all species together  
leaving their peaceful tracks  
a dancing congregation in the snow  
they are a perfect machinery  
a feathered wind-up clock  
feeding briskly delicately  
at the feeder's dock  
swooping in and out  
flying up and down  
as if powered perfectly by  
some old inscrutable hand  
as if this and each their moments  
had been precisely planned  
who so gently set them down  
and wound them up so?  
to hop and hop and hop and hope  
their little bursts of flight  
to lightly land on cedar branches  
sending showers of snow to ground  
each exquisite movement  
each fine complication  
a tiny tick a tiny tock  
the maples' blue shadows getting longer  
old day growing ever older  
and then after father sun lies down  
their complications slow to rest and stop  
and at sun up begin again  
an alleluia a feathered amen

### **rent**

own or rent  
buy and spend  
palace or tent  
skin and bone  
in the end  
all is spent  
all are rent

### **gimlet eye**

gimlet eye oh gimlet eye  
for century on centuries  
the ore of your voluptuous shine  
made crazed or becalmed  
the best and least of men and beasts

the barn owl in flight



the branches of white pine  
the thicket shadows all rose up  
yeast under the balm of your bright gaze  
to softly kiss your tender light

gimlet eye oh gimlet eye  
please always shine  
fall kindly on us all on me and mine  
before we say goodbye  
good moon good night

### **wrong elevator**

when you pushed "up"  
it was too late to grieve  
this elevator didn't go up  
to the non-existent thirteenth floor  
instead it teeter-tottered like a broke ski-lift  
down and up and sideways  
careening pell-mell from chrysler building  
to empire state to the ghost towers  
hell of the world trade center  
their phantom pain still burning  
the elevator operator was a cross  
between an executioner and a punk  
in black rubber suit two straws  
from nose holes in his eyeless mask  
allowing him to breath and sing  
the elevator was cold as a meat locker  
a casement a casket a suffocating casque  
we were standing in a puddle  
of rancid urine struggling in the gloom  
to read but unable to read the numbers  
no way to get to our chosen floors  
no way to open the locked elevator doors  
in the little waning light that was left  
shaking his black rubber head  
like some black-hearted robot bug  
he sang when it comes to souls  
i'm the one whose labor it is to sift  
you're on the wrong elevator  
there's no user's manual no directions  
no way to leave this room  
no where else to ever go  
outside you could hear the fat crowds  
smug voyeurs in the amphitheater roar  
oh yes oh yes oh yes  
oh no oh no oh no

### **tunnels**

the string of track the lace the bow the knot  
the too-sanguine assumption  
that the shriek of churning wheel on rail  
the weary winding journey  
moving on moving on moving on  
is muted as the light is stolen

on entering the dug and blasted thing  
this granite excavated hole evacuated  
entering and exiting suddenly  
like the flow from conception to reception  
from birth to conclusion resolution  
from pitch of dark to everything zero  
though once in each and every life not

### **cats in present tense**

their sense  
of the present  
is a gift of pause  
of eternal calm in  
now's whiskered universe

### **woman with umbrella**

in a pink raincoat  
a woman locking her car  
all alone in the parking lot  
her umbrella yellow  
and beyond her  
the great gray Hudson  
and one white yacht

### **transcribing light**

there is no ownership to it  
of time of love of light  
they are all an open field  
lit through seasons  
green to gold to gray to white  
our lives reflections our silly reasons  
like ants observed from above  
scurry by a single day an instant  
and the light transcribes us  
as we hop and skip and hurry  
as if bound and indentured  
to each our adventure's  
distant sailing ships

### **sorcery**

the sorcerer's conical cap  
with its inlay of silver stars  
is just a dead elm  
against the midnight sky

to the sound of rain's dark company

the sorcerer's robe  
that flows from blue to umber to black  
is only the tree line  
jagged curtain far side of pond

to the sound of rain's dark company

the sorcerer's magic wand

with its shining shooting star  
is but yellow moon red mars  
shimmering in the shallows

to the sound of rain's dark company

### **pansies**

their little lion faces  
pinks blues whites yellows  
their silent yawning roars

the way the sun races  
through their petals' open doors  
all their colors a bright hello

### **the soul bird**

from darkest reign  
of darkest night  
our soul birds fly  
through lighted hall  
to dark again

### **hidden still hiding**

free fall random as a slow oak leaf  
what thief this flimsy flow of matter  
fish or fist or fox or lark or web of spider  
summer breeze or drop of rain or bend of willow  
all emerge from the same old hollow dark  
steel of plow steel of sword steel of pain  
turn real turn unreal turn real again  
the reel unwinding on rusty karma's wheel  
too large a round for our comprehensions  
brief flash of diamond light's intentions  
worn by someone something hidden  
teasing feint causing healing faint  
for every bishop a blasphemer a bill collector  
for every ornate belief an austere disbelief  
for every institution constitution intuition  
the same old lullaby of all our tears  
that white bird that fleeting flies from dark  
to bright crystal banquet hall  
and back again to night's old park

### **baby squirrels**

the birth of baby squirrels  
timed like a clock  
to the budding of the locust buds  
where they forage from their feeding dock  
where they nibble insouciant  
above the lawns and fields and rocks

### **tunnel**

the string of track the lace the bow the knot  
the too sanguine assumption  
that the shriek of churning wheel on rail  
the weary winding journey

moving on moving on moving on  
is muted as our light is stolen  
on entering the dug and blasted thing  
this granite excavated hole evacuated  
entering and exiting suddenly  
like the flow from conception to inception  
from birth to conclusion resolution  
we hope will always follow  
from pitch of dark to everything not zero  
though once in each and every life  
not

### **crows made blue**

with no warning  
the way the sun made blue  
the backs of a cacophony  
of crows their flying shadows  
precisely black projected  
against the old barn side  
their caws a suite  
faster than a passing cloud

### **sun shadows**

at start of day  
sun shadows  
run to me  
at days end  
they run away

### **house terrors**

they sit silent  
their eyes milky-blue vacant  
outside our windows and our doors  
silent like strange and starving dogs  
they seep into foundations and walls  
like chilling late-winter fogs  
after each your quiet breaths  
you can almost hear them  
quietly staring breathing teething  
doing their odd bubonic dance  
they have been outside  
an eternity waiting silent  
for their opportunity  
they've seen all the rises and the falls  
all the births and all the deaths  
all who went before us and after them  
they are thirsty they are hungry  
they make a sound like owls  
who who who you you you  
haunting all our nows and heres  
silently buzzing like bees in hives  
ravenous ravenous  
they pray to live new lives  
and too-long-ousted want in again  
bill collectors chasing down arrears  
can you sense their bony fingers

beckoning the poor likes of us

### **nature deficit disorder**

quite thy unruly self  
for once truly listen truly hear  
noisy monster man  
that wise inner animal  
that is your inheritance  
only asks you truly look  
to your dog or cat's deep eyes  
and for once see  
a fleeting glimpse  
of mere eternity  
and know  
that which i think i tame  
in truth tames me

### **alone in a strange country's train station**

i've had dreams  
more than a few  
of being stranded  
no one interested or able  
in helping me  
and 'me' is 'you'  
and this, my friend, is your dream too

you don't speak the language  
your directions are all wrong  
your passport is lost long-gone  
you have too many bags to carry  
across the frozen river's far shore  
a dog in pain is barking yelping barking  
what's the meaning of this?  
why this awful sense of loss?

in the freezing rain  
you can see and hear the tectonic shift  
of the massive ice floes' hiss

### **to remember**

the tungsten flash of crows landing  
resplendent top of leafless tree  
sparks an old spark of sentimentality  
flawless resident in light and wing  
we only ask of thee  
to be an ark a covenant  
make each our lights ever new  
help us remember to remember  
and then to be to be

### **to a catskill firefly**

end of june  
on and off  
on and off  
no light so soft

as yours firefly  
not even the halo  
of the summer moon

now you own the tree line  
fresh-cut meadows ponds  
and sweep of valley hills  
far as eye can see  
on and off  
on and off  
tiny part of a larger mercy

gentle many as summer rain  
pied-piper stars your calliope  
no lullaby so sweet  
no note not one as fleeting  
as yours firefly  
goodnight bright one  
sleep tight good night

### **my father eats midnight now**

in the park of eternal dark  
for too many years  
my father eats midnight now  
how i can hear him  
but not with my ears  
him and all our long-gone kin  
down the old corridor of tears  
biting through clouds of night  
to one day bring back here  
in my heart i trust  
a passage way for us  
to some bold shining light

### **summer storm**

the green cast of sky  
darker than leaf green  
a sick foreboding shade  
the sudden fierce of rain  
harder than first kiss after ok  
the smell of earth greeting water  
the rolling of the thunder  
declarative imperative  
the crack of lightning's whip  
as if some behemoth  
took a narrow curve of earth  
wrenched it like a weed from root  
and sent the whiplash explosion  
of electric clumps and clods exploding  
sending cats under beds  
and people to thoughts of mortality

### **a walk with a friend fishing in the rain**

the forget-me nots

not to be forgotten  
their scorpion buds  
mytostosi scorpiro  
delicate four-petal blue  
hence their name  
i had no idea  
that catskill fireflies would rival them  
that night under the silent moon  
slim as a parenthesis  
the river sides were sweet of cow dung  
the color of their glacial past  
the farmers were cutting the fields  
and the smell of sweet just-cut grass prevails  
on the stony path back to the car  
a scurrying gray vole stone-gray  
kept us company through the fresh-cut hay  
weaving in and out  
he had escaped razor rotor  
relentless robot-tractor blades  
and was escaping now the two of us  
not knowingly he was twice fortunate  
we all were cooled by the late june rain  
his little gray coat zipping in and out  
of a thatch arbor of new cut grass  
all three of us walking up hill  
under the larger bower of clouds  
breathing deeply the end of early day  
the miracle of sunday rain

### **pool**

you are as much a sidekick for looking  
as for swimming in  
the pantomime conventions of clouds  
miming slowly gesticulating by  
lion bunny jester spooky masks  
all type of cartoon heads and hats  
porcelain cup and saucer  
the face of my long-gone father  
in your reflection the cedars dare  
flaunt their cedar forest greens  
plane wren phoebe vulture crows and cats  
mirror to all outdoors moving yet so still  
flying by flying by flying by  
i've tested your cinematic authority  
your bibliography of eternal scenes  
hours on hours by your aquamarine side  
me and my summer-suited friends resting  
signore bee in his fuzzy-yellow flak jacket  
madame butterfly her powder of black orange white  
on clear nights the gang of moon and stars  
you are as much a sidekick for looking  
as for reflecting and swimming in

### **pigeons**

their breasts shining gray

as the tailored suits of movie mafiosi  
those little robotic head nods  
with every mincing step of their pink feet  
comical as feathered charlie chaplins  
their shadows in the late afternoon sun  
seeming to waddle behind them  
the faster they move the faster they try to catch up  
as if left behind defying the laws of physics  
way behind a long sun low on horizon  
their long shadows and their bloodshot-red red eyes  
their humming-bird-like phosphorescence shimmers  
as the light on their grape-purple necks shimmers  
the males large making that curdling in rut cooooo  
soft rolling cooo cooo cooooooo

the females evasive always in the lead  
dodging all the passengers boarding for albany  
as the 3:20 from penn staion moves north  
alone on the platform as train moves out  
they hunt and peck jerky feathered vacuums  
for crumbs of cracker chips bits of bread  
fooled by the occasional cigarette butt  
or well-chewed ball of wrigley's  
but so successful that you'd bet they know

(it does not require much of a leap of faith to believe)  
the summer schedules of amtrak and metro north  
daylight savings time or eastern standard  
is printed in their pigeon brains and they plan  
yes they plan their day's routine around  
the trains' comings and goings and  
the hurly-burly of passengers late and rushed  
leaving a snack food train trail  
for these station-dwelling opportunists  
next stop pOOOOhkeepsie

### **fireflies in mid july**

is it an illusion of the untrained eye  
against the theatrical scrim  
of a battalion of black trees  
against the dream of an evening sky  
their mating rut near over  
their lights growing dim  
their sparkling arc their last arc  
with lustre of those about to die  
their path across the sky  
much more slowly drawn  
their dance nightly grows too quickly old  
in semaphore they say good-bye  
goodnight farewell *a bientot*  
we who are about to die salute thee

### **my mother talking in her sleep**



after my father died thirty years ago  
my mother began talking shouting  
in her sleep railing against man and god  
and his absence so shrill and alarming  
we'd wake up frightened as she cried out  
from a place so deep so far away so dark  
so forsaken there were no earthly keepsakes  
to offset the rage she felt in knowing  
that all their pretty dreams had lied  
the tearing process of drifting from more to less  
from her sorry bag of dreams and pain  
wrung as from a rag wet with tears  
her sad and solitary bitter protests poured out  
like alley cats mating or fighting  
that crescendo of shriek that they reach  
in the wee hours in the raw new jersey rain  
of pitiless november when all is raw and cold  
and dizzy leaves are down disconsolate for the count  
her cries a metronome of pain  
woke us one night then another  
shook our little heads awake again and again

### **tiger lilies**

bow down supplicants  
in your saffron finery  
to your Buddha sun

### **sow debt**

alas  
not to be crass  
but too many pigs  
not enough cash

### **the tectonics of charismatics**

be wary of the glib  
those tricky charismatics  
their pretty-boy-and-girl heroics  
beneath their phony glitter  
they're often psycho sick and tricky  
an even eviler  
the slippery shitters  
like satan stalin sadam and hitler  
have been know to fib

### **an academic analysis of all poetry ever written**

degrees of speech-stress  
syllables weak or strong  
word emphasis short or long  
to address the heart is to digress  
making tidy the poets' mess

### **for bill castagnoli on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday**

Bedeviler of fat-cat republicanism lover of tea  
Italian who hates tomatoes drinks no wines  
Lucky for carole who keeps him stylishly in line on time

Lucky for the one-eyed noli – swift arrow and frog startler  
Collector of eclectic some satiric some ironic prints  
Avid historian reader of lives - the great and their times  
Student of world affairs past and present  
True friend generous host escaped ad executive  
Advisor adroit editor trusted counselor on matters business and art  
Gardener – dedicated weed eradicator parallel planter  
Noli's and sumo's dad ALPHA DOG deluxe  
Older and possibly marginally smarter as of birth of today  
Liberal - your picture by the word in webster's unabridged  
Italian renaissance soul sharer of many libations with me

### **for carole catagnoli on her 71st birthday**

Carole and 'caroling' a match inspiring song  
Abundant and beyond in all things 'friendship'  
Regular down-to-earth street-wise like our mothers  
Open non-judgmental accepting feisty friend  
Laughter-loving fun quick to see wit owning it  
Elegant with no pomp knowing style what works  
Chief Operating Officer of your home  
Attentive to smallest details sparing no expense  
Sumo's mom a beauty and a beauty  
Triumphant over cancer with great courage  
Artist in life and keen appreciator of all arts  
Gift giver and giver extraordinaire  
Noli's protector from sumo's onslaughts  
Outrageous over-the-top baker chef and entertainer  
Lucky to have ALPHA DOG (bill) to herd and guide  
Italian always bejeweled like fire in your hates and loves

### **red dragon**

twice i pulled him out  
from the quicksand  
of the pools surface tension  
wings like clearest crystal leaded glass  
a tiny miracle of design in the mercy of sunlight  
redefined the notion of a sunny july day  
perched on my finger  
to watch him dry his face  
like a rabbit chipmunk or well-fed cat  
and shake the chlorine off his wings  
and then yes fly yes fly away  
a dragonfly with nine lives  
to see him swoop and dive  
and hover but light light as air  
his prey clouds of gnats beware  
the ferns bowed down  
the clouds lost their frowns  
his flight put the magic  
of childhood back in summer

### **letters of the alphabet**

all they are  
line after line

after line is word roots  
seeds that flower into words  
black on white black on white  
all these years  
the numbers of them our eyes have scanned  
like the stars in the sky or oceans' sands  
all these years  
our eyes military  
slavishly following  
left to right left to right  
the "p" a penis  
the 'e' a ravenous computer bug  
smiling while devouring  
the 'i' sanctimonious with its dot halo  
the 'o' a peep hole  
the '8' infinity  
the 'y' always legs spread  
the 'B' upper case large breasted  
the 'b' lower case mastectomy  
we get their drit  
we've agreed  
they're our thoroughbred steeds  
taking us for races and rides  
and they line up on command  
they are leaves leaving us  
they are dragons' teeth  
sprouting armies  
they are the spiritual fertilizer  
of the mind's farms  
seductive idea lovers  
revealing their erotic charms  
they are hells and heavens  
as in those magnetic poetry games  
where refrigerators get the brunt  
of 'instant poetry'  
they are the first chimpanzee's grunt  
the 'W' cleavage  
the 'N' down and up again  
the 'Z' swanlike  
the 'X' convergence of all point s  
to a single point in time  
the 'A' arrowhead or mountain peak capped with snow  
the 'H' goal post or gate  
the 'K' force moving left to a wall  
the 'M' two mountain peaks  
the 'L' a nose a foot  
the 'Q' man with a half mustache  
the 'S' slithering snake  
the 'T' umbrella shade tree  
north south road that meets east west  
the 'U' valley empty cup  
the 'V' bird on the wing  
D F G R you tell me

## **paralysis**

am i the only one who dreams  
what few would dare to do  
and when time arrives to act  
i dream on too spooked  
to do to do

### **geese on hudson**

imperturbable so busy  
the geese in the river shallows  
a few headless heads under wings  
preen and preen and preen  
each and every time  
the Amtrak Hudson line goes by  
they softly honk to one another  
“gaggle chortle honk gaggle  
brothers sisters fathers mothers  
we’re here to see and be seen.”

### **dream lover**

of all the ones in dreams  
you haunt me  
no barriers  
no holding back  
your sweetness  
sweet as a first kiss  
your tenderness  
no one like you  
who i’ve only met  
and held in dreams  
but never really held  
never really ever kept

### **train tunnel penn station**

through a jumbled jungle of graffiti  
a tropical excess-express of tags  
signifying the end of treks  
some inner-city artists took  
through this dungeon maze of dark  
and vanishing linears of track

in the gloom of a cave-like “room”  
a mystery of incongruity  
an old homeless man all in rags  
sat on a cinderblock  
and rapt watched a flickering TV  
a pale and ghostly monitor

an unsettling magic trick  
in the blue electric light  
shone a pile of chicken bones  
no way to tell day from night  
or bad dream from reality  
no way back or out of this  
his sad theme park

### **another country**

one day here we will quietly be  
surrounded by a thousand trees  
taking in a thousand greens  
glad to merely breathe  
and see and not be seen  
not a living soul more free  
not one thing will we need  
no hopes no fear no greed no fantasies  
re-making time to only sit and be  
and dream and dream and dream

### **summer storm**

last night lightning broke and shattered  
jolted the cloud-hidden porcelain of stars  
the twelve thunders loud louder loudest and repeat  
louder than the blinding light in shards  
hell-bent rain cascading down the spouts  
lickety-split pell-mell rushing to join  
their fallen brethren in rivers lakes and sea  
it was a Noh drama  
no words no set no stage no make-up  
no actors trying to be true and pretty  
just a thunderous spectacle the tectonics so great  
they sent a seismic shudder to some deepest core  
pierced and rocked the animal heart in all  
conjured up the twins dull terror razor pity  
and what it means to run panicked for the doors  
and dumfounded find in shock and awe  
there's no where to go when every door is locked

### **saving bugs from drowning**

karma laden before even beginning  
no fool i know this theorem to be  
pretty idiocy next to world peace  
world hunger and all the many big etceteras  
that said by the lab-coat rationalist in me  
cruel pool cruel trap all bugs are your toys

but one of summers' greatest joys  
is keeping bugs from getting dead  
lifting them to life a small victory  
dragonfly moth ant spider cricket grasshopper beetle bee  
one by one by one i hear them all singing  
"thank you, god!" and that god is me

### **to all stained-glass windows**

you multi-colored windows  
in churches and places of worship  
your brittle crazy quilt of leaded glass  
is transparently non-denominational  
through you the everyday sun shines

ecumenical as a universal clock  
through over on above and through

boring sermons angels demons pouring torpors  
on poor congregations and snoring snorers  
on hard pews and kneelers your non-dogmatic grace

shines through over on above and through  
the rightest and the wrongest-headed  
like a jaguar's brights through fog  
an aura about you that's so pane true  
independent resplendent transcendent

among the lead-eyed flock looking up at you  
one child's sunlit face in wonder  
smiling innocent looking up at you  
happier than the happiest dog  
oldest embodiment of truest prayer

### **memory of butterflies in late july**

today i half saw three types of butterflies  
one mostly white one butter-yellow  
one orange black and white  
monarch swallowtail and a checkered white

preoccupied I hardly took the time to look

tonight sitting in the growing dark  
reading the audubon guide to butterflies  
thinking back upon their virtuoso flights  
joyous zig-zag sorties one form of ecstasy  
i see in memory what i failed to see  
beauty fast and fleeting never lies

### **summer 2009**

**8/11**

cats as if knocked out  
humidity suffocates  
today summer calls

pears on the old pear  
weight of fruit straining branches  
sun rays tip the scale

striped august light  
woodpecker tree white as bone  
all woodpeckers' home

**8/12**

heat suffocating  
butterflies frolicking  
cicadas now sing

light on pool a chain  
of shimmering turquoise links  
dragonflies reign

cows under old oak  
reclining in perfect circle  
living breathing shade

tom turkey visits  
wary drying out his wings  
different fears for us

andy getting brushed  
tippy wants the same treatment  
fur: cats' underwear

rain on pool surface  
turquoise rings expanding  
beauty for fools too

old pear full of fruit  
will her branches hold the weight  
late august will tell

rain sound soft falling  
birds at dusk imitating  
sun's not complaining

alone with terror  
each unto each one's own end  
bend or break or bend

### **8/13**

river waves laughing  
lap after lap after lap  
train eats up the miles

at la guardia  
all the stainless steel columns  
catch steel sun's first light

the 400 clogged  
back roads north to orillia  
to mirror of lake simcoe  
waters bath-tub warm

the black decoupage  
groups of swimmers  
as if cut outs  
from silver waters

fedex truck thunders  
scares our four cats equally  
different fears for us

### **8/15**

silver sun pouring  
through net of willow branches  
fine simplicity

water skiers skiing  
milton avery cut-outs  
skiers black waters silver

wasps fascinated  
by row-boat's gunnels  
cormorants fly low to water  
through unseen tunnels

sun spiking through  
shines our day slate and sand  
illuminating

trees emerge from a floating world  
the sun a stiletto cutting through  
turning the mist into cut rags

### **three crows roadside**

still as if carved from stone  
the only thing i own  
is a worried mind  
the sound of waters rushing in the bay  
as car traffic  
when it is the only ambient sound

### **lake simcoe cottage view**

canoes motor boats row boats jet skis  
ontario willows bow down to ontario shores  
lake simcoe old lake simcoe  
your gulls cry your screen doors slam shut  
your hum of motors far off shore  
your shades of green and shade  
out of georges-pierre seurat  
could be another afternoon cut from gold  
on the island of la grande jatte

a man no color to him just an outline  
walks a rowboat with an outboard motor on it  
their insignificant but precise mass  
out a hundred yards in charcoal off shore  
the sun has made his figure his boat all boats  
all swimmers all boaters glow  
radiant in water on water below water above water  
a shimmering akin to mercury or isinglass  
precise as velvet silhouettes cut for kings

the man coming ashore leaves a silver V behind him  
in his wake haze and sun conspire in early day  
to delineate the edges of every still and moving thing  
moving every edge to a fine calligraphy  
work of some great tracer and mover of edges  
some great profiler of the geography  
of every living moving body and limb  
no matter how vast no matter now tiny



each struck bright by simcoe's morning light

**8/16**

**osprey over manitou bay**

dark waters trembling below  
in the early morning sun  
shot like an arrow  
white wings  
diamond waves  
sending greetings  
to his god algonquin  
lost in reflections

solitary trunks  
on clothesline between two pines  
swimming in the wind

**8/17**

**chipmunk**

tiny charlie chaplin  
the chipmunk  
in his roaring twenties coat

does everything  
as quickly as possible  
all his moves aspire to 78 rpm

from the speed he breathes  
to the speed he eats  
out of an old-fashioned movie

one foot forward one foot back  
peanut butter sticking to roof of mouth  
eating chunks peanut last

washing his fingers clean after every bite  
some kind of maniac  
mouth moving on fast forward

eyes not defiant but watchful ready  
three black racing stripes on his honey-brown back  
so intense his all-consuming wariness

it's hard not to laugh  
carrying an apple core bigger than his head  
granny smith chunks one in each cheek

stuffing two or three unshelled peanuts in  
face pouch full he disappears  
aha alert he's back

as if to say, "what's cooking guys?"  
what a clown  
nails like a benevolent fu-man chu

what a clown  
funny only to us  
dead serious in his drive to gather and store

his colors the colors of a wet cedar log  
of pine needles and forest-floor  
sunlight dappling through thatch of trees

eyes black as obsidian beads  
sprint and shuttle sprint and shuttle stop  
sprint and shuttle sprint and shuttle full stop

to us he seems all a rush  
to him it's just his natural speed  
intelligent he interacts with us

almost dog-like in observance  
of our every move  
more than any mouse or vole

accustomed to panhandling  
a busker with a non-fail act  
expert in what's in it for him

mr. peanut peanut butter  
mr. peanut crunchy peanut butter  
always assessing friend or foe

fearlessly sharing his home with us  
his antics make us a captive audience  
no where else we'd rather go - his august guests

### **8/18**

a chimpunk sunday:  
one teaspoon peanut butter  
peanut on top  
place on log knot - wait

clothes line now empty  
free of its wet heavy load  
sways lightly with the wind

the waves so content  
they call to cloud and sun  
old conversation

canoe on far shore  
green flames of cedars on rise  
paddles drum on hull

old rotting birch logs  
offer their bark as tinder  
flames' writing paper

waiting for chimpunk

Dizzy G reincarnate  
his peanut-stuffed cheeks

clothespins on clothesline  
like soldiers waiting for war  
wet towels attack

this penninsula  
same as all peninsulas  
this sun much brighter

we are empty cups  
the smell of burning cedar  
wind rain fill us up

two canoes two more  
one white one red one yellow  
loon lake deja vu

there is time and time  
and canoe time on vast lake  
gliding present past

### **8/21**

awakened by gulls  
and lapping of lake water  
rain shine no matter

mars rising at three  
wild herd of clouds dark horses  
their stampede hides the stars

vast forest lake sky  
paints laid out brushes waiting  
view paralyzing  
enough just to look  
enough just to be

swimming to far shore  
darkness of big lake below  
fear of big empty  
no more than a bug

mink crossing river  
swims fast as he can  
knowing what's below

the bees curious  
man's raw meat and honey smells  
campsite a magnet

voices carrying  
canoe paddles on canoe hulls  
sounds like they're right here

wind and lake and waves

mozart would be envious  
forest's symphony

### **contest**

man versus red squirrel  
in quest of peanut  
who's faster on the take  
photo no photo  
peanut gone  
photo of his absence

true wonder how sun  
great father and battery  
charges everyone

brightness of the sun  
does not blind but reveals  
the brilliance of dogs

### **bug visitation**

spider tiny as a tick  
parachuting in  
on a single silk thread  
landing on my finger tip

what was it that flipped us?  
wasn't dan wasn't greg  
thanks gods no broken legs

clouds above like bones  
*pauguk* - algonquin lake name:  
"flying skeleton"

canoe's skin so thin  
light shines through shows shapes of waves  
as we paddle on

in the wilderness  
dreams vivid as hollywood  
no admission fee

seagulls confetti  
thrown down from parade of clouds  
great drum major wind

seagulls like dandruff  
scratched from the white head of clouds  
wind's a fat barber

north tea bay blue-black  
turquoise shimmers in wave troughs  
rare jewel algonquin

waters black as coal  
same luster different pattern  
whose great burnishing

all of the sites' shite  
married in one foul hole  
when full dig one more

butter-yellow lab  
head like a cabbage big heart  
his love an arrow

two stars a rat face  
the clouds a big piece of cheese  
who the cheese? the rat?

the lake so quiet  
our distractions so loud  
please let nature win

one night  
this was what was  
not one mosquito  
clouds and clouds  
and a few timid stars  
lake quiet  
no moon in sight

buster at my feet  
dreaming dreams that all dogs dream  
talking in his sleep

in deep wilderness  
photos of my cats and buster  
keep us company

the tent just fabric  
keeps out all the elements  
without home a home

the essence of home:  
always transient always  
home is where we are

weather against us  
lying down in tent reading  
no cares for the world

wave sounds slapping shore  
rain sounds on tent canopy  
i'll always be here

**cicada in october**

see you later  
cicada  
august was  
your favorite flavor

### **the frying pan's prayer**

my sole purpose my global fame  
is to kiss electric or gas fire  
white hot and radiant to sear and fry  
a mostly-round host and frame  
incendiary day in and day out  
month after month wise ally  
breakfast brunch lunch or dinner  
your loyal copper iron clad or teflon tool  
year upon year your culinary sidekick  
vital in bringing your vagrant vittles  
secret recipes concoctions tricks to fruition  
bacon eggs steaks garlic shrimp risottos  
to my own set-attentive temperature  
sizzling metronome that sputters and ticks  
medium well-done rare medium-rare  
that serves that blue and yellow flame  
of temperamental gaseous chefs' intuitions  
some joyous some apoplectic some morose  
their atomic toques rising up like a dare  
exploding white and mushroom-like  
glaring reigning terror on slaving sous-chefs  
sautéing in their glowing kitchens everywhere  
some with gusto more or less some with flare  
serving but not servile obedient sidekick  
robusto con mucho gusto virtuoso  
that tickles the fancy of the fussiest hosts  
and the waiting lusts of royal foodies  
who smack their lips and grind their jaws  
until the meal is but a pleasant memory  
a well-prepared well-digested ghost  
that elicits exclamations adulations praise  
and incantations of 'thanks a bunch'  
i and my liege the chef  
a sizzling one-two punch

### **rabbit in the rain**

aspiring to statuary  
eyes beads of black  
rabbit in the rain  
he nibbles clover so delicately  
on the rug of just-cut lawn  
with his rain-resistant raincoat on

no fear no memory  
no need to look back  
rabbit in the rain  
when his day is over  
he simply sleeps snug 'till dawn  
with his rain-resistant raincoat on

### **mushroom-on-my-penis dream**

at the base of my penis  
the part guys include in the measure  
was a mushroom stalk and cap veil of skin  
like any flesh  
i knew i'd have to burn it  
with the tip of hot knife cherry red  
but first i plucked the veil so thin  
it was flesh-colored and translucent  
the size of a dime  
and one small drop of blood sidled down  
to the penis shaft  
leaving the mushroom base to deal with  
the tip was bloody like a trepanned head  
of some small animal in mainland china  
where they eat brains of live monkeys  
and which i dreaded removing  
doctors in white coats were everywhere  
and i refused to let them in  
a proponent of self-surgery and healing  
as a first recourse and measure

### **the little girl**

we were in the dentists' waiting room  
of my childhood's first dentist's office  
she was no taller than a chatty cathy  
with blunt cut japanese bangs  
she was wearing a dirndelle dress  
and white canvas lace-ups  
with red and white and yellow flowers  
she was carrying a green purse  
and holding a fuzzy swizzle stick  
with a tiny kermit the frog on top  
i said you look sad  
she said i am  
i said here's my jerry lewis laugh imitation  
ha ha ha ha h ha hah heeeeaahhh  
and she began to laugh tears of joy  
rolling down her doll-like cheeks  
and i was laughing too  
and still laughing when i woke

### **an accounting of a poem by rumi told to me in a taxi by a friend not long after the death of my mother**

the poet dreamed of his lost mother  
who had taken on the form of the full moon  
in the dream his mother's gaze  
fell on the wide ocean  
the tops of the waves were white  
and silver with the warmth of her old light  
to see her radiant and brilliant  
to feel her smile her planetary light  
upon him made him cry with joy

a joy so great he woke still crying  
to see a moon shining bright as the sun  
through the window in his room  
and now awake he thought his mother

now was forever and forever gone

and her light was mere moon light  
on his pillows bed sheets and blankets  
he wept inconsolable his grief so great  
that when the wetness of his tears  
fell from his face on to his hands  
his hands caught the moon's reflection  
and in the salt waters of his tears  
he saw his mother's face and wept again  
but this time tears of endless joy  
reunited with his mother as moon  
realizing there really is no day or night  
that things are never what they seem  
that reality and dream are one  
and will be one soon so soon

### **rainy day song**

the rain takes  
the dryness away  
from earth and brings  
to earth a richness  
this gray birth of a day  
inspires even dirt to sing

### **mistaking two goldfinches for butterflies**

the frolic of their flutter  
their manic rise and fall  
above the honey suckle and queen anne's lace  
the eloquence of this black-and-yellow two  
giddy in their dancing flight  
cheerful quick landing side by side  
the black eyed susans looking up in awe  
at first i thought "tiger swallowtails"  
then as suddenly "goldfinches"  
a pair a single joy old mates a duo  
as in writer and reader flying together  
you and me we two  
rise and fall fall and rise

### **mirrors**

once upon a time  
i woke to find  
a drop of shining dew  
multiplied on every blade of grass  
a thousand thousand  
mirrors round and polished  
not one as beautiful as you

and in each mirror



i saw the red sun rising  
and in each rising  
saw a single face  
visitations of your own  
an infinity of rhymes

and in my many views  
below the bright sun rising  
above the ancient yews  
the raging crows were cawing flying  
before the early morning's dying  
the last thing i saw was  
a thousand thousand you's

### **old pear**

you're so old  
i feel i must say  
'thy' not 'your'

thy branches are heavy  
with so many pears  
this end of july so laden  
that i'm worried  
for all your old tough flexibility  
that you will suffer broken limbs

i'm more than fond of you  
i love you like my mother  
your shrinking cores refuse to die  
blossoms white in spring  
as the white of my mother's hair  
year after year after year  
what's your secret old girls?

grand survivors industrious  
queens royalty countesses duchesses  
how serene so close to the end  
each spring who's white whiter  
your blossoms or my mother's hair ?

how is it you two  
undaunted  
do what you do?

i know a day will come  
when we will break  
as we all do

but i will always be  
the son of three  
by some impossible victory  
sun mother tree  
in our hearts ever ever green

### **night and day**

two beheaded lovers  
as in the court of certain british kings  
which caused the beheading of which?  
the moon the sun  
jealous each of the other's love?  
day or night?  
rise and set rise and set  
their heads shining  
forever in their play  
of dark and light  
a planetary jealousy  
their heads forever right  
high prowed and drifting  
through the cumulus  
a tearfull ocean sky  
day or night  
night and day

### **end of summer**

seconds after a rainy dawn  
wind pressed one yellow locust leaf  
flat to the screened-in porch screen  
and then how slowly  
and longingly did it fall  
to the autumnal lawn

### **fawnsworth**

after he was euthanized  
we named him fawnsworth

for all his troubles  
for us he was no trouble at all

### **first visit**

his bleat urgent uncompromising  
a declaration of being lost  
lost at edge of our screened glassed-in porch

i thought it was a cat about to wretch  
he was a lanky hairball distressed  
all wire legs and soft umber shades  
of orange-rust and spotted white  
his back and sides like sunlight in a copse  
lighter than light on a forest stream  
his scrawny bleats the true metronome of him

full of the fullness of his need  
but well and spry and wary  
tolerating no approach  
then well and when approached  
sprinting across the road  
almost hit by speeding car  
then into field

which married marsh and pond

and this at dusk in time  
with the switching on and off  
of the usual gang of fireflies  
his bleats bigger than him  
“i’m lost i’m lost i’m lost”  
no mother no mom no mom

then as dark filled in in every last-lit thing  
the time when all predators  
stir and stretch their jaws awake  
he knew enough to shut his infant fear up  
and pour his frightened silence  
into hard night’s dangerous cup  
so as not to alert the hungry  
or give himself away  
to everything dark  
to everything ravenous  
to everything thing red in claw red in tooth

no pity in the setting sun  
the frightened stars crept out  
the crescent moon shed its sheath  
resembling a scythe that cut the sky

we hoped his trembling silence would be  
the poor thing’s best sanctuary  
wishful thinking we  
trying hard not to think  
of all death’s cruelties

### **second visit**

this time two nights later  
his fitful bleats were weak and wounded  
hiding in the pachysandra out front  
trying to collapse himself into sleep  
to make smaller his smallness in the shadows

again he came to our screened-porch screen  
this time staring hopeful at our cats  
rubbing his black nose raw on the glass  
seeing perhaps some sympathy  
in their eight astonished eyes  
mesmerized by him

this time he was covered in a swarming ball  
a torture of blue-bottle flies his back  
a moving hive a universe  
an iridescence blue-and-black and bottle-green

this time too weak to resist  
i could pick him up  
this time his bleat so weak on contact  
to say ‘heroic’ fails to capture  
the violence of his distrust

his panicked protests drained him limp  
he had no more strength  
no will to run

**the end**

we found a towel to cover him  
from the fury of the flies  
a terry-cloth gave a sanctuary  
feeling he couldn't be seen  
he was instantly still

two women driving by  
saw me lift the flailing gangly thing  
knew an angel who saw  
all injured creatures as kin

we put him in a cardboard box  
and chauffeured him to her

she not we saw his bitten belly  
the maggots churning in the wound  
and knew the only remedy  
it couldn't be too soon  
was the mercy of an intervention

euthanasia euthanaisa

the word came down so hard  
she took him towel-wrapped to his end

he was a little buck  
we named him  
fawnsworth  
(she said a romantic wim)

we wished  
he had not lost his mother  
or she small him  
and knew whatever brought him  
to our hands brought him solace

his only bleating luck at the end  
was to win a quicker death  
than nature planned for him  
and we all lost a friend

**epilogue**

she had three saved fawns  
small medium and large  
sweetly wide-eyed  
content none shy  
and one one-footed barred owl  
in a spacious shed and stall  
high-fenced with a net above  
with plenty of room for orphans  
to walk around or fly

and when full of themselves  
restless and well  
to leave and live  
and dance their dance

her name is colleen goff  
her card says, "broken bucks -  
licensed new york state animal rescuer  
chemical capture wildlife rehabilitator"

she proves angels walk among us  
and can be found if we trust  
as all angels are by chance  
as we found fawnsworth  
and fawnsworth found us

### **stars and fireflies**

their lights chemical  
the fireflies wish they were stars  
their lights celestial

the stars wish they were fireflies  
unter the watching summer moon

one's lights celestial  
live on high forever  
the other's lights terrestrial  
gone too soon  
under a bemused summer moon

### **back-eyed susans**

when i see you i hear the songs of my parents  
good night ladies sweet adeline goodnight irene  
east side west side all around the town  
trip the light fantastic you are my sunshine

each of you a liquorice gumdrop  
ballerina's torso with orange sun-ray skirts  
you are crazy sombreros in summer's margarita  
hundreds and hundreds on fields and roadsides

in the great ballet of summer  
when wind conducts wasps and honey bees  
cicadas rattle in their midday choir  
they spin like pin or ferris wheels

their dance requires no rehearsal  
no gravity to their distillation of summer light  
reminders of forgotten things  
that live like children in all summers of our lives

### **the radiant soda of the sea shore\***

the sparkling glass of sand and sky and cloud  
the forever effervescent sea  
wears its crystal sequin vest

on every wave top shattering the shore  
and in the mirror of every sequin  
the perfect reflection of the world

people wearing sherbet stripes party plaids  
pinks yellows aquamarines  
towels white-and-red green-and-white  
the day so blindingly bright  
it flies by like a bird on fire  
into the hands of good humor man the sun  
melting crowds of applauding snow cones

everyone and everything carefree of gravity  
palette of skins - pinks moccas chocolates vanillas  
all sunburned singing and tingling  
swimmers splashers walkers kite-fliers picnickers  
chess-and-checker volley-ball foot-ball paddle-ball soccer players  
card-players dog-walkers surfers boogie-boarders runners strollers  
obese emaciated muscle-bound buff or sagging  
smelling of coconut oil baby oil coppertone

it is as if some great archer  
pulled back the shining bow of june  
and armies of umbrellas found their mark  
in sands too hot to trespass without sandals  
the smells of hamburgers and french fries  
the whole extravaganza aspiring to cotton candy  
a soothing cacophony of boom boxes radios laughter  
babies crying people shouting into a whip of surf and wind

and a bodacious blue sky with one white cloud  
and one dark silhouette of a trawler on the horizon  
flocks of gulls and terns like clouds of flies in its wake  
and closer to shore and noisier shrieking and crying  
more gulls and terns dropping down like stones  
soaring gliding like feathered pinwheels spinning above  
the seething human principality of the beach  
**for delmore schwartz**

### **maggot dream**

down from the asbestos tile ceiling  
onto the pickled pine floor  
loads barrels full falling slowly down  
raining maggots and juicy silverfish

there was no way to clean them up  
without crushing some no many  
the vacuum clogging left a slime trail  
and we were out of replacement bags

there was no one to call  
no "mr. maggots away today"  
and when my mother woke up  
she was going to be very mad

somehow i acquired two new brothers

older and they were very angry too  
must have been a corpse we didn't know of  
above the fifties-style hung ceiling

the kind that made an excellent target  
for newly sharpened #2 soft lead pencils  
an overhead porcupine with yellow quills  
on rainy days in second grade  
it was going to take forever  
and worst part of all  
we couldn't hide the mess  
from our still-sleeping parents

couldn't find a slop bucket or a mop  
or that big bottle of mr. clean  
so we worked in dread of waking them  
wondering what our punishment would be  
frantic in the dreamy early light  
of the deeply bruised pink and purple dawn

### **prison**

inside the windowless cells rhyme  
planetary darkness behind locked doors  
thin shadows over tin bowls of gruel

outside the cold potato of a moon  
silverfish schools of liminal stars  
the cruel lights and pilgrim roars  
of speeding fugitive cars

and soon the bronze heartbeats  
of curel sunday noon  
old criminal church bells doing time

### **katydids late september**

the katydids at summer's end are beginning to slur their speech  
end of september admitting communication is out of their reach  
as the first frost relentless and forty-degree nights set in  
the earth gets drunk on downed apples and fallen leaves  
the greek chorus of migrant geese echoes over the pond  
admonition to conserve our words at season's end  
with winter just around the bend mute cold and dark  
admit that less is less and sing with all our will like katydids  
begin and end again all over again you beloved departed  
breakthrough please like katydids and give us a call

### **burial**

wastes land for no good use  
better to divide the cadaver  
worth less than the feather of a goose  
and feed it to the carrion birds  
and give what remains wings  
or to burn the old empty barn  
and let the memory in smoke  
rise up to the hospitality of the stars

or allow student doctors to putter with it

from the grave this is what the bones say

the master overlord has gone away  
and doesn't care about the fallen rafters  
or silent loft after all it was just a rental  
what remains has no more currency  
than a field of wet fresh-cut hay  
or the ruined columns of unedited words  
there's no point no center of worship in it  
the cliché singing bird has flown the cage  
those now caged today are still singing

### **sugar maples**

yellow on yellow on yellow  
old cold october  
you and your maple leaves  
once new so soon now gone  
like hands or flames and hands  
the year the years  
our short stories told  
a wreath of disappearing gold  
beneath your harvest moon  
and soon too soon the snows  
of old december  
colder than any human cold  
older than any human old

### **the zero's prayer**

zero zero  
less than zero  
less than minus  
less than nothing  
no one among us  
o of exclamation  
eternal no  
negative oration  
free of gravity's pull  
nowhere no place no face  
no time no where to go  
empty not full  
still i sing  
more kin to night  
and dark than day

zero zero  
no bones no skin  
work not play not  
have not say not  
i am not  
not sold not bought  
i am naught  
less than less



infernally never-yes  
nothing nothing  
zero zero  
i protest not  
the knot of no  
i am and am not  
the great nothing singing

### **november sunday**

the sun drawn high as in children's books  
the rays like spokes of a bicycle's wheel  
if you think of braque's grays and greens  
and his rattan chairs and his radical birds  
the cubist weave of the new york times  
an old pine table favorite of the cook  
the copper coffee pot ralph lauren mugs  
a gray sky the trees all set in helvetica bold  
the black piano in the key of crows  
thugs chased by the clarion calls of jays  
neat assembly in their military blue  
tit mice scolding the silver tabby  
and the chickadees the chickadees  
flitting on and off the old bird feeder  
pumpkin seeds catapulting to the ground  
black sparks a study in the random real  
sweet november choreographs this dance  
of fall of that last sunny yellow maple leaf  
coupé jeté en tournant jeté battu gold  
in the penitent hush of a repentant breeze  
surely fall will find some sense unreeling in you  
some sweetly-vanishing so-fragile monument  
to what one november sunday means  
of how one november sunday  
to one looking looks

### **leaves in november**

the leaves are playing tag  
with one another "you're it!"  
no "you're it" no "you're it"  
no longer fresh and green  
now brown and shriveled and gray  
monumentally a november wind  
makes them younger  
across the country road  
they skip jostle and run  
like children after school's out  
though they cannot shout  
like little jesters they play happily  
as i from my speeding car  
look upon them all in wonder  
their small souls fly and scuttle by

### **saying grace in the manner of billy collins**

nothing like the smell of breakfast  
on a late-fall rust-and-gray sunday

first i thanked pig number 12, 321,015  
known as "bluebell" at her place of birth  
the holistic pig farm in concordia, arkansas  
rural road number 27 for giving her life for me

then the chicken, yes, "henrietta,"  
at the free-range farm just outside of hudson  
for her two brilliant eggs  
their golden yolks like google eyes  
staring up through me heavenward

then each grain of the seven-grain toast  
and the farmer and the zen baker  
the apricots and the apricot-marmalade lady  
with her booth at the farmer's market in rhinebeck  
and on a curvy red-edged label on an antique jam jar  
in the most beautiful imaginable hand  
with wide-tipped calligraphy pen in dark-plum ink  
the words "apricot marmalade"

then the salt and the salt miners  
and the pepper and the pepper-corn gatherers  
and the coffee growers, pickers, roasters,  
distributors, importers, customs officials  
and then, why not, god

by the time i finished grace  
i had lost my appetite  
and went out for a walk in the rain  
down our old country road  
where i was thankful for the rain  
and my two feet one trying to stay ahead of the other

and for that one black-and-white-dappled mare  
nameless her withers soaked her wet blanket steaming  
in the cold hudson-valley air

all the while thinking how grateful i was  
for my four indoor cats – squeaky, tutu, andy and tippy  
who i had abruptly left behind  
to guard the cold coffee toast bacon and eggs

and puzzled were patiently waiting  
and knew would be genuinely thankful  
for me upon my return

### **if we accept**

if we accept that from here we can see  
those miniature lakes down there  
through that monster fissure of frozen air  
twenty thirty-thousand feet below our looking  
the wreath of kawayamog north tea and manitou  
then we must accept from there  
that tiny intrepid we can be seen

by those who look brightly up  
an innocent and wild menagerie  
from that vast of surrounding shore  
neat from above as a coffee cup  
the sun's beams spearing down  
through frigid smallmouth waters  
the surface refracting reflecting  
the plane's timid silhouette  
the snapper newt and burrowed frog  
nestled invisible in all that mud  
the granite waters blue and green  
the wind's sonata in a rush of trees  
grounded in memory an instant alight  
the endless net of hemlock cedar balsam birch  
the moose the raven the loon  
the chipmunk the marten the gull  
osprey heron shrew vole mouse  
old algonquin's flight of cedar burning  
grounded in this trust of air we breathe  
i see as you saw a full confirmation  
the yes that we and they were there  
the yes that we and they will always be  
there never too soon just for us  
sure as separately we find our way  
to each our labyrinthine destinations  
our soul companions as we age  
only courage and our ancient ally fear  
**for daniel arnott after his flight to ottawa**

### **the sprained ego of the everyday**

like falling hard down the stairs  
wrist and rotator aching nights for months of weeks  
in the stone-cold fireplace of today  
i wake to the monotony of half-burned logs  
and a fat housefly ascending the materhorn  
of the sullied window's louvre blinds  
the dirty dishes their pompous veneer of egg  
in the sink can only muster a morning sneer  
the dust bunnies grow like dirty cotton candy  
stubborn under sofas chairs ottomans and beds  
ashes mourn their loss of once-fragrant cedar  
the winter spiders hold silent court in ceiling corners  
spinning their tensile domiciles above our heads  
demand the apocalypse of a softer vacuum brush  
the spilled orange juice of the sun floods the kitchen  
staining everything within reach with orange grease  
including my hands adding coffee to coffee filter

in the country the leaves are beginning to rot  
soon after a snow storm or two the fine lattice  
of a select few will begin to show through  
in the city discarded cigarettes and butts  
in gutters on curbs and sidewalks may  
with their myriad shades of red lipstick stains  
and cold coffee in dirty lipsticked coffee cups  
mourn all a kilter the passing of irving penn

who once so overwhelmed and off put  
by the twisted toad and ennui of commerce  
put them on a new pedestal all their own  
characters of reincarnated tobacco and clogged hearts  
a testament to his eye's everlasting art  
he gave us the ability to see and monumentally  
what no other eye saw before the shy and shiny ugly  
from far below the sprained ego of the everyday  
look up look up to drek that decomposes slowly

just take the lowly and give it prominence  
obsess the sense of the simplest things  
as did oldenburg and warhol and grooms  
trust things judged without a shred of recompense  
things recalcitrant commonplace unseen and dull  
things whose own peculiar plebian poetry is full  
of uncompromising unexpected jump starts  
things dead that once seen dance like dancers a dance  
waiting for our jaundiced eyes to do nothing more  
than open every door wake up first ever look and see  
the beauty of burgers french fries donuts fans pies  
manhole covers stains any trash wrinkled pants  
hot dogs soaked too long in hot dog carts  
the tragedy of dirty pigeons with missing toes  
the hobo shadows of a winter sun in stuffy rooms  
push the dumb the mute the recalcitrant  
until we can convince cynics to also sing

### **about love**

as we two grew older together  
whenever i didn't see her  
i'd remember  
her footprints in the snow  
come cold december  
come cold january  
about love this is all i know  
**for wanda on our anniversary 12/10/09**

### **the frying pan's prayer**

my sole purpose my global fame  
is to kiss electric or gas fire  
white hot and radiant to sear and fry  
a mostly-round host and frame  
incendiary day in and day out  
month after month wise ally  
breakfast brunch lunch or dinner  
your loyal copper iron clad or teflon tool  
year upon year your culinary sidekick  
vital in bringing your vagrant vittles  
secret recipes concoctions tricks to fruition  
bacon eggs steaks garlic shrimp risottos  
to my own set-attentive temperature  
sizzling metronome that sputters and ticks  
medium well-done rare medium-rare  
that serves that blue and yellow flame

of glaring gaseous chefs' intuitions  
some joyous some apoplectic some morose  
their atomic toques rising up like a dare  
exploding white and mushroom-like  
reigning terrors down on slaving sous-chefs  
sautéing in their glowing kitchens everywhere  
some fried fragrant some with flare  
serving but not servile obedient sidekick  
robusto con mucho gusto virtuoso  
that tickle the fancy of the fussiest hosts  
and the loyal lusts of royal foodie guests  
who smack their lips and grind their jaws  
until the meal is but a pleasant memory  
a well-prepared well-digested ghost  
that sparks exclamations adulations praise  
and incantations of 'thanks a bunch'  
i and my liege pooh-bah chef  
a sizzling one-two punch

### **cleaning out closets**

where does it all come from?  
why do we buy it praise it  
and break a sweat discarding it?  
hearts beating like a drum  
no more things no more things  
thumpty dee thump dee dump  
the hungry heart sings  
shoveling it out like a winter snow  
less less now please less  
no more baggage than i can carry  
as i age rougher than rough  
let the rest be like picasso's minotaur  
and his refugee's wood-wheeled wagon  
as all sentimental stuff  
to none of it am i married  
of this i am certain

### **all soul's day**

white sails  
on hudson shining  
all soul's day  
in the morning sun  
all souls one

### **the sun**

i know you're busy  
and so so far away  
you always won  
all the awards for dance  
when you were in first grade  
and mommy and daddy  
were still here  
with you and me  
and you still get all A's today

### **geese on hudson**

imperturbable oh-so-busy  
the geese in the river shallows  
a few their heads under wings  
preen and preen and preen  
each and every time  
the hudson line goes by  
they softly honk to one another  
gaggle chortle honk gaggle  
feathered brothers  
sisters fathers mothers  
here we are here to see and be seen

### **amtrak to penn station in june**

the purple clover  
riverside of track  
paves the way  
to poughkeepsie  
the hudson's forever  
we train's transients  
try to hold back  
the hours the hours  
looking forward looking back  
clickety clak clickety clak  
we on train try  
to hold our hours back  
our train on rail  
paves our way  
clickety clak clickety clack

### **another country**

one day here we will quietly be  
surrounded by a thousand trees  
taking in a thousand greens  
glad to merely breathe  
and see and not be seen  
not a living soul more free  
not one thing will we need  
no hopes no fears no greeds  
no tears no fantasies  
re-making time to only sit and be  
and dream and dream

### **tunnel penn station**

through the jumbled jungle of graffiti  
a tropical excess-express of tags  
signifying the end of treks  
some inner-city artists took  
through this dungeon maze of dark  
and vanishing linear of track

in the gloom of a cave-like 'room'  
a mystery of incongruity  
a homeless man wrapped in rags

sat on a cinder block  
and rapt watched a flickering tv  
a pale mad and ghostly monitor

an unsettling magic trick  
in the blue electric light  
in a pile of chicken bones  
no way to tell day from night  
or bad dream from reality  
no way back out of this his sad theme park

### **yo yo**

as i am flung  
i fling myself out  
with the desire to go farther  
farther than my farthest dream  
only to find myself  
on the way back in  
pulled back trick after trick after trick  
back fast as a second hand can tick  
and for whose amusement?  
and by whose deft hand?  
very soon to tire of me  
would that i could be cut free  
and wind up rolling down  
the black top  
or floating in some pond  
or on some great green lawn  
where i could be a small cog  
in a large wheel going somewhere  
instead i find myself in a dark drawer  
with some cats-eye marbles  
dull penknife a pee shooter baseball cards  
sling shot and and few shiny stones  
until loop-the-loop rock-the-baby walk-the-dog  
around-the-world sleeper-over-the-falls  
returns so quick they're dizzying  
with the manic showmanship of it all  
yearning to be cast into outer space  
with no chance of return  
to run up on the way  
way up on the way to the sun  
or freeze suspended in silence  
catapulted to the moon  
the possibility of either  
could never come too soon

### **god is an unmade and ghostly thing**

a gentle dove  
the naught  
the to nowhere  
the to every one  
the sense of order  
when we feel none  
the destination

the exclamation  
to which our journey delivers us  
the end and beginning  
of each our roads singing  
laughing weeping  
this is the presence of god  
an unmade ghostly thing  
for he is not  
and he is  
    no thing  
    no where  
    no one  
    no other  
    can not and can  
    the grand canyon  
    the greatest bridge's span  
    between life and death  
    every definition  
    all hate all love

full blind  
full dark  
full light  
full sight  
is the knowing of him  
and those that now know  
or have ever known  
or not ever known  
in his mighty web  
all are caught

### **wheel**

after years of hate  
anguish mental pain  
near endless strife  
she was like a hat  
in a high wind  
he emptied the life  
out of her

she his life out of him  
only to have her return  
in the form those who have sinned  
of his mother father sister brother  
idiot priests taking confessions  
and bawling hymns  
and one evil cantankerous cat

### **cat talking to the moon**

tippy is tipsy  
on the light the moon  
transfixed by her bright beams  
that have shrunk his pupils  
to their daytime slits  
and there hypnotized he sits  
a white-and-black bit of fur and ink



muttering grumbling feline incantations  
to the murmuring katydids  
enrapt in the brightness  
of her royal highness diana's  
topaz-and-white moon light  
the brilliance of her stellar loom  
her rays shards and slats munificence  
makes him want to dance a night-cat's dance

makes him want to sing  
"moon, moon rise to the sky-top soon  
soon so my brothers and sisters  
under the spider web of the planets  
the stars and their hunting tunes  
can see the elusive mouse and vole  
in the tall grass as if it were noon  
can escape the ravenous coyote  
and vicious raccoon as if it were noon  
can take in your music and swoon"

come morning he'll sleep  
the sleep of the weary hunter  
tippy cool on the barn straw  
dreaming of night's next high moon  
sleeping paws-up way past lightest noon  
forgetting the sun as it bakes  
and the smell of musk of prey  
on the air just before dawn  
and dream all day of night to be  
swim in the ocean of crickets  
dream of the mockingbird's song  
dreaming of night's next high moon

### **pretty**

all time's flowers

after hours days months and years  
we two one we too we two

under the blue crescent  
of a pale daytime moon

i called out our window  
to the one i've always loved

as she drove away  
she never heard me say  
from the top of our stairs

you look pretty  
with the sunlight in your hair

this was long and long ago  
and now she and we and you and i

are absent neither here nor there  
more subtle than the hint of a shiver

now lighter than the autumn air  
fainter and farther and farthest away

than the most distant star the faintest song  
we two one we too we two

pulled free from the quiver  
and shot by the great taker and giver

only to be found now in the fall breeze  
and in the red of the fallen oak leaves

neither here nor there  
you who read this now

dear one you too  
will join us soon

under the blue crescent  
of a pale daytime moon

after years months days and hours  
we two one we too we two

all time's flowers

### **tin can**

the surge the crash the smash the clash  
amounting accounting surmounting  
to nothing more  
than one rounded can of tin  
now crushed

what i was i am no longer  
now i wear part of my outside in  
part of my inside out  
furnished burnished diminished finished  
recyled by the weather

hollow echo of a harlequin  
of a once-shining yesterday  
which kicked rained upon and rusted  
has become a rusted rained-upon tomorrow  
kicked by kids on their way to school

### **letters**

i had a dream  
and in that dream  
dreamed a dream

i walked the dirty floors  
of a filthy tenement hall

the kind that winos rent  
and behind all the doors  
of that long hall  
like horses sleeping in their stalls

were other dreamers  
i was one  
yet was by no means all  
dreaming of all the letters  
we had sent  
from this net of dreams  
from me to you from you to me  
where did we come from?  
and where will we go?

### **double**

this is my journey  
but the me of my journey  
is not me and the i not i  
i am bigger than me  
and wider than i  
living in each minute  
in each minute i die  
each night i run after one  
who runs away from me  
and yet within me  
and all around  
is another me and another i  
as i live each day  
as each day i die  
another one sings  
and flies beyond me  
and as i hear that other sing  
and as i see that other  
singing immortal fly  
shining and free  
that far-away other  
my lost twin brother  
another less-mortal me  
another facet of that shining gem  
to be and not to be  
moving to double me

### **bull's eye**

every poem is a target  
where writer rifleman sniper  
archer duelist shooter of gun or bow  
aims from a great distance  
at a mute and distant-passive target  
as runners or sprint hurdlers  
vision the end of sprint or marathon

and like those just-add-water toys  
where a dinosaur the size of a cornflake  
becomes a brontosaur big as a basket ball

the target takes on a special secret fullness  
significant to only you or me  
when hitting the center crossing finish line  
with twang of bent bow

or actor's perfectly remembered lines  
or bam bam kapow of gun  
or last rush of breath and strength  
as one aiming striving to hit the mark  
wakes up as one wakes from a dream  
and knows deep in his triathlon heart  
that bulls-eyes are just dull mirrors

a ruse a trick a skill a mirage  
a too-thought-out and over-planned dream  
a bed time story we have to tell ourselves  
a half-good excuse that lulls us  
gives us reach to be half happy  
in the lavish spending  
of our tiny banks of time

### **against the second law of thermodynamics**

is it a test or not a test  
to pull from dark nest of darkness

from time's vast womb of nothing  
the fire of one shining thing

that is to escape the tomb  
that is to know the point of rest

### **the fallen**

october leaves  
head-long hell-bent  
winter's cold jail-bound  
on decomposition  
on some form of perdition  
like dante's plummeting souls  
or human birds on fire  
fleeing twin towers  
of autumn sun and moon  
the leaves form a gold blanket  
on the just-cut grass  
individual upon individual  
warmed in the folds of many  
in the consolation of one  
on one upon another  
of all the fallen no less than us  
our minutes and hours as theirs  
the season exhaling a beautiful last  
colorful gasp no less than ours  
and there's always that one stubborn one  
that refused to leave the frozen branch  
that come march or april  
is knocked off its stubborn hold

by new spring's cold wind  
the penultimate new-season kill

### **the painting**

the painting is a filling in  
between the lines of all we lack  
a lie a fiction a sleight of hand  
as picacasso said a theft  
of the multitude of those who truly saw  
a visual resurrection of those gone before  
an illusion a bright contradiction  
against the dominance of black  
a light adroit opening of a door

### **october 28, 2009**

the vast incomparable "oh!"  
the immense obligatto  
the falling of all  
we and each leaf at or past peak  
mere words in this solemn hymn  
the colors of first prilgrms and port wine  
each a yellow leaf  
caroselling and spinning and drifting  
in an impressario october wind  
notes in this lugubrious oratorio  
all together in our dying

### **halloween**

my face in my mirror  
makes me scream  
your face  
in your mirror  
our bad dream  
too

BOO!

happy halloween  
skin under chin  
requires a truss  
every year less to trust  
two of us aging  
every hour the mask asks  
what now for us

### **one single sunday in november**

if you think of the gray and greens  
and rattan chairs and birds woven by braque  
and the cubist weight of the new york times  
on a breakfast table on a sunday  
and a gray sky the trees all set in helvetica bold  
and the sound of bluejays  
neat assembly in their miliatray blue  
and the chickadees in sweet november  
and that last yellow maple leaf

yet to leave the great mother sugar maple  
and that simple hush of an autumn breeze  
you will have some good redeeming sense  
of what one fall Sunday in November means

### **when your dog turns to you**

when your dog turns to you  
and looks you up and down side to side  
remember it's his nose that's looking

his eyes are just there for the ride  
if you know dogs  
you'll know this is true  
*new year poem for noli and sumo-man*  
*January 1, 2010*

### **city dogs in packs**

wake up early  
upper east side  
Manhattan a.m.  
when dogs and dog walkers  
are out in packs  
sniffing like there was no tomorrow  
heads of all sizes and shapes  
walkers wearing all kinds of hats  
morning is a time of bliss  
no time for sorrow

### **gnats**

thy fine name - nematocera  
so swift your helter-skelter  
soft dun in the morning sun  
hard to imagine a life  
in such a tiny casement  
brilliant in your parapetetic jumpiness  
ziggy and zaggy  
zig up zig down zag left zag right  
in the shooting gallery of the morning  
more than one a difficult target  
a fittingly soft-shifting flittingly evolution of them  
way of many small equaling an intimidating one  
en masse to clock of new day's light  
there's no there there to any single one of them  
not at all about a chance of fun  
certainly not like us about any single one  
something altogether too determined  
premeditated collective drift and fall and lift  
some serious flicker of intelligence  
in their delicate arc and airy tangos  
shifting with ease in the warm breeze  
a high wire act with no trapeze  
a communal cloud startling in their being  
so center-less yet how not  
some tribal computing intelligence  
moving them each collected individual

not all for one but a one for all  
theological proof who could ask for more  
dust mote with intent tribe all-important  
from out of winter's door  
hatched from what smallest source  
how can there be no eternal power  
given their joy their bliss in the eternal now  
when even their friend the tiny pepper corn  
casts a shadow with diligence  
an homage to grand projector the sun  
and then as sun sets low  
they glow as if a flock on fire  
behind their tornado of life  
the hills and cedars are red  
against their midge browns  
and swirl on swirl on swirl  
as day goes slowly down  
a majestic vortex of tiny-ness  
soft as a flock of micro-sheep  
the conscious might of their collective  
how different from us who say in god we trust  
and we alive are swarming together too  
glad of a day with them simply grand  
gnat to gnat in the great funnel of creation  
me and you me and you  
sharing the swarming air waters and land

### **eternity**

age upon age upon age  
who can begin to count it  
us clouds bugs seas sands  
snowflakes and buses  
stars oysters wines trusses  
whiskers olive oils luxury cars  
on distant lakes the loon's haunting call  
on that blue blue river that one white boat  
meaning what? or no meaning at all?  
we presse against the bars  
like toy zoo animals in a cage of tin  
enchanted mesmerized wide-eyed  
captivated looking out and looking in  
to sense anxiety rumbling  
in the throat of that great cat eternty

### **earth rising**

the earth rises to meet my feet  
my walking depends on my faith  
that the earth will be there  
is no wraith no fantasy  
solid ground will be there  
me and my feet to greet

### **maybe soon**

shut off the tube  
and hear the silence in the room

boot the computer down  
forget the tabloids and gossip magazines  
skip the movies and the dvds  
for none of these is what we're searching for  
none of these more than a revolving door  
somewhere somewhen there's more  
maybe soon

forget the trip to jiffey lube  
dunkin' donuts mickey d's tabco bell's boom  
burger king's royal plastic crown  
forget iraq iran pakistan the united states marines  
the quarter pounder with special sauce and extra tragedies  
stop dreaming of the next great thing to buy  
what it will take to please that special girl or guy  
somewhere somewhen there's more  
maybe soon

### **hourglass**

the mute and wild sands are running dreaming  
to those momentarily back on top the speed the speed  
of those just gone and going must seem stunning  
to those below buried deadpan deep and long ago  
the piling up of one on one on one on one  
must seem like some child-punster-god's punning  
the one the many the all-balled-up-in-one machine  
waiting for some sign of intelligence or lack of sense  
to make it mean something something once again  
turn right side up this time-toy  
time oh time dreaming running out

### **pendulum**

i know too well  
the swing from fear to action  
from attempted forgiveness  
to acceptance of those i hurt  
for i have lived there too  
am acquainted with dust to dust  
and the meanings of dirt

### **what is death**

no idea but strongly suspect  
it's worse than the guillotine  
when the severed head  
still aware looks back  
at the departed body  
with perfect regret  
for what it will now  
and forever and always lack

no idea but strongly suspect  
it's worse than drowning at sea  
when the lost lungs give up their air  
and the surrendering mind knows  
the old body will still be there



long after the weight of water  
carries off the tide of ebbing soul  
free finally to go to some other some where

### **en route to tokyo**

inside the cabin of the plane  
the october moon shone kindly  
on the faces of all of us  
sleeping medicated fully or half awake  
and miracle of invention and imagination  
on all the little oak and maple leaves  
far and farther and farthest below

all of us flying under her  
great beacon her under-estimated trust  
that she so white resplendent in her luster  
brilliant old brilliant so finely brilliantly  
would surely rise and shine again  
just for you just for me

so stunned by her was my madness  
so in the power of her hypnotic cosmic gladness  
so touched by her sweet loving light this fine night  
at the beginning of this too-long flight

that arrogant and against all reason  
even in this gold abundant harvest season  
i for a fleeting moment truly believed  
that she diana shone only for me  
and told me true to write this song  
just and only for you

### **starlings**

the buckshot of a flight of starlings  
against a rising sun and setting moon  
all share the trust of same horizon  
all fly against a disappearing sun

what blue finger has triggered  
this jazz explosion this purple-black pun  
how great october has got away from us  
flown away so suddenly so soon

### **mockingbird wish me luck**

in the seemingly-painfully endless  
in the hour of the wolf  
waking  
past middle of night  
haunted by unsettling dreams  
muddled in sweat at 2 a.m.  
hyper-ventilating i hear you sing  
your multilingual song

you who made all birds' songs  
your very own

and when i heard you sing  
i believed as i breathed  
that all would not be lost  
that all was only to be won  
in the seemingly-painfully endless

that mostly things are as they seem  
most days with the rising of the sun

### **hi ho silver**

every time i hear the william tell overture  
or mussorgsky's a night on bald mountain  
i'm suddenly seven and the lone ranger and silver  
and tonto and his palamino scout  
and mickie mouse are invincible  
and instantly i believe in heroes again  
and i'm wearing a white cowboy hat  
and red kerchief blowing out seven candles  
on a white frosted cake shaped like a six-shooter  
with plastic cowboys and indians on horseback  
aiming rifles waving tomahawks shooting bows  
surrounding a little circle of covered wagons  
and i'm praying to god in heaven  
that the roy rogers ranch set  
barn ranch house bunk house and corrals  
will be there for me under our christmas tree  
complete with plastic roy and plastic trigger  
dale and buttermilk their dog bullet  
pat brady and his jeep nellybelle  
all singing happy trails to you  
and roy saying welcome buckaroos  
and the sugar crisp bears singing  
and mommy and daddy smiling  
uncle joe filming the whole shootin' match  
and all things are right with the world  
i'm wearing my davey crocket  
who-killed-him-a-bear-when-he-was-only-three  
coonskin cap made from a genuine raccoon  
and the long-ago sons of the pioneers are singing  
and on another channel the lone ranger rising up  
on his valiant steed gallops on to aid folks in need  
warning bad guys everywhere with his rallying cry  
brought to us by friskies dog food tootsie rolls  
post grape nuts flakes sugar crisp and nestle quick  
hi ho silver

### **towhee going south**

towhee towhee  
you deportee  
you refugee

better not delay  
your journey's long  
the days grow shorter

goodbye goodbye  
fly away fly away  
to some warm turquoise bay

and sing your song  
drink your tea drink your tea  
on some flowering orange tree

from early spring through summer  
and now through end of fall  
you've been a friend to me

### **winter night and the country of dreams**

this night there is no sound  
but the sound of cold and night  
that battery-powered clock  
of old moon planets and silent stars  
no cloud but the cloud of uncharted dreams  
that binds all sleepers in its thrall  
like gypsies in many-colored robes  
who lie down to find their rest  
next to that pride of lions  
that is their pride of dreams  
sharpening their claws on the acacia  
side by side lolling about yawning  
on their beds of yellow grass  
on the unfolding savannah  
that vast and darkling theatre  
of some larger Other's jungle mind

### **january's cold end**

around and again we go  
and down our country road's blue bend  
the crunch and crunch of snow  
above and below the evening's blue  
the lonely pull of the new full moon  
throws a cornucopia of shadows  
light on long on light  
toward you and for you  
this frigid winger night  
their glowing letters i send  
around and again

### **mars**

furnace of cadmium with apricot halo  
waterless water boy of the planets  
what coach has sent you running  
on your elliptical field the sky  
to your teammates the stars  
on their platinum gridiron

you never chose your google-sphere  
no more than i  
but instead was chosen  
to compose this early in the year

low down on the dawning horizon  
you are the eye of a red fire ant on fire  
so much more than planet of war

come daylight you are  
an old rusty volkswagon  
in an empty parking lot  
like one i used to own  
outside the empty local bar  
of our rising and setting days  
shining on

### **my fetishes against all evil**

some on desks  
some buried deep  
in the amygdala lobe  
some in the heart's armoire  
some which rankle  
some which make me stronger  
my prayers to my mother  
and her neck-to-ankle  
faux bear-skin robe

### **architectural digest-ed**

it's as if at last a silent pagan god broke his silence  
and as proof of his being deigned to say something in print  
fetish photos of what for most will be a fantasy forever-out-of-reach  
but there's no leap of faith or imagination required  
because here we are standing in the rare air of beverly hills  
high above the smog and the robert-motherwell-blue pacific  
outside at night the many palms spot-lit from beneath  
the city below a display case of harry-winston diamond light  
inside a dozen palms also spot-lit from below all rhyme  
the moon an hermes timepiece sans birch-yellow alligator strap  
the foundations vibrate on columns of thousand dollar bills  
cast in lucite each of their serial numbers chosen to hold -  
like an ode - a minimum of four numbers in the beverly hills zip code

and the obligatory tale of how patient the eager buyer had to be  
seven months! to convince the long-suffering owner to sell  
and how now finally at last she can indulge her love of entertaining  
her guests go cozily shoeless on heated travertine flooring  
"enough stone to create our own getty," quips she  
a zen-like retreat with fourteen-foot entry doors cast  
from ancient balinese ceremonial gamalongs  
brazilian cumaru (not 'cut' but 'harvested') for eaves floors and walls  
the nobuhiro sato kiso ashtray holding two packs of gitanes  
unopened (no smoking allowed) solely to match the favorite blue  
of her robert motherwell in his prized 1963 'throw of the dice #17"  
which opens grandly out to a view of the koi pond  
below its blooming water lilies orange black white and yellow koi

like some street urchin out of dickens it's impossible  
not to feel the damp chill of one's nose pressed against the 'glass'

of the double-page spread of larsen fabrics on the shade  
of the vladimir kagan lamp which matches the japanese vase  
from naga antiques offset by bergamo silk drapes and br-111 flooring  
in an alcove in benjamin moore tones at the end of a long hall  
rests a 16<sup>th</sup> century bronze of a chinese scholar  
thought to be the world's first expert on the human pulse  
and indeed you can feel your own rise and fall  
when you see on the platform bed's motorized television lift  
a well-thumbed copy of basho's 'journey of a travel-worn skeleton'  
opened to a poem where the exhausted wandering monk (1644 – 1694)  
asleep in a road-side ditch is awakened by chilling cold soaking wet  
and seeing the sickle moon in the mud-puddle pillow above his head  
struck dumb by this beauty tries to imagine he is warmed  
by a blanket of cherry blossoms blow off their branches by a freezing wind  
hearing only the sound of rain and his own aching teeth chattering in the night

### **the magnificent empty**

out of the magnificent empty  
past and future and present  
all that is silent  
all that sings  
pileated woodpecker hunting loon's call  
glimmer of moonlight at the end  
of the longest dark halls  
from few to many  
from young to old  
from light to heavy  
from smooth to hairy  
from nothing to all  
to the ringing temple bell  
the eternal breathing in and out  
of the cold null and void

### **snow day**

this is the day the snow has made  
can you recall that nervous grade-school buzz  
you felt in the pit of your childhood's stomach  
the night before the blizzard on its way  
wishing hoping the fire house sirens  
and radio reports would sing a no-school day  
and waking up to everything crisp and clean and white  
a new softer address a rounder geometry of things  
the sounds of shovels and brooms scraping walks and drives  
taking everything to their outer edges simplest shapes  
that fresh almost-smell of air of snow  
the near frantic wish to be out  
gulping past the cream of wheat and hot chocolate  
wild into the backyard transformed to a crystal palace  
waiting for the flakes watching them  
mesmerized hypnotized calmed by their battalions  
each flake generous each giving time to see shapes  
intricate their every silhouette and baroque edge  
melt on your baby sister's cheeks and nose  
every angle every edge and fine-cut lattice  
on your coat and scarf and arms and wrists

flakes determined storming marching down  
we 'outdoorsers' at first claustrophobic  
prepped mummified in layer on layer of wool  
then out and about never wanting to go back inside all day  
angels on earth-white looking up at hypnotic armies  
then shaking from cold and coming back in  
begrudgingly off with goulashes scarves and mittens  
the smell of wet wool and campbel's chicken noodle soup  
then out again for another bout  
building igloos fortresses snowmen castles walls  
hurling snow balls at passing buses trucks and vans  
and when their brake lights flash red  
running down the labyrinths of alley-ways into yards alleyways  
running like criminals robinhood's merry men  
leather gloves or mittens soaked through and stiff  
eyebrows eyelashes white like octogenarians'  
fingers numb throbbing with pain of cold  
and finally at end of day overcome by sweet fatigue  
out of soaked clothes all in a pile in the cellar into flannel pj's  
upstairs to tv dinners in front of black-and-white flickering tv  
with jiminy cricket or davy crockett king of the wild frontier  
and at last with the window open just a cack  
falling like an astronaut into that gravity-free sweet deep  
sleep of sleeps that one sleeps when you're five or six or seven  
like falling snowflakes or little animals down for the count  
while outside the snowplows rush and roar  
like guardian angels opening sleep's deepest doors  
assuring that all is right with a still orderly world  
outside in feezeing white street-light lit snowy night  
it's quiet as a quilt blue shadows on blue shadows now  
deep in dreams tiny dreamers dream of snowball wars  
and victory losers faces scrubbed and shamed in dirty snow  
downstairs the smell of wet wool on the radiators  
the sound of parents' voices talking about their day  
are theme songs to the camera works of dreams  
many sleeping children resting and the still falling snow  
best definition on this imperfect earth of a safe haven

### **twilight and the white tears of horses**

same old story dreaming  
minutes to days to years  
'do' turns to 'did' turns to 'done'  
beds all made  
breakfast over  
then lunch then dinner  
dishes washed dried put away  
from start of day  
the light a thief a runner  
always on the run

now the fire's down to coals  
only embers left to go  
glowing orange to silent gray  
the last cold red bird  
in the white bush sings

rising moon greets setting sun  
old blanketed horses stand  
stock-still in the silver dark  
only they truly dare feel  
the light snow's glory

landscape where not one thing shouts  
a gray-and-white cubist whiteout  
snowflakes on their stalwart flanks  
snowflakes on their eyes and lashes  
falling silent-white as little stars or tears

### **early spring**

black trees sway in the wind  
the snowdrops pop up  
how the seasons rush by  
some rhyme some reason  
just steam off a coffee cup

### **march wind**

we all of us are blown by it  
in the swirling trance of it  
limb leaf mind and tree  
union of deepest uterus of the sea  
and vast phallus of the sky  
tempestuous it is born to carry on  
and oh how all are owned by it  
see how the trees on high and we  
dance and bend in homage to it

### **spring storm umbrellas**

happy parasols they clearly are not  
more like migratory birds shot down shattered  
or small collapsed construction cranes  
jammed vertical into garbage cans  
slumped next to blue mail boxes  
pathetic outside-in tumble-blown  
scattered down streets under cars curbside  
lifeless pterodactyls all broken wings and legs  
black and blue a wreck of corporate logos  
a torn rainbow of fabric rods and handles  
a massacre of function and form

yet somewhere far away in a better place  
sheltered from wind and storm  
in a simple woodblock print where  
they live ideal and honored by hiroshige:  
three women cross an ancient bridge  
their bamboo umbrellas a shield  
against the swirling symphony of vivaldi's snow  
they play with ancient cedars and frozen waters  
like cellos there is a certain sadness to them  
like new toys at christmas not yet broken

### **star**

not a shooting star at all  
not like fireworks at an amusement park  
it fell like a spent fourth-of-july sparkler  
thrown off the bow of a great ocean liner  
and soft and bright slowly sank  
without disturbing the deepest seas of night  
so slow and easy was its leisurely fall  
that it did not seem like a fall at all  
but briefest company for the loud silence left behind  
of the dark contemplating the mind of dark

### **thief**

be bold  
grab it  
hold it  
feel it  
steal it

time's a thief  
on the run  
a razor in the sun  
one blood-red leaf  
day's almost done

### **toilet paper roll**

she liked the toilet paper roll  
to roll  
from top down

he liked the toilet paper roll  
to roll  
from bottom up

### **moment**

to meet the ineffable moment  
on the razor edge of spend to spent  
to greet the inescapable moment  
on the precipice of now to then  
whether hell or heaven sent

### **cats and rats**

cats and rats  
both yours and mine  
are like  
balls and bats  
or clouds before  
some stormy weather  
or the last bite  
of an over-rated old canary

the only evidence  
one little lonely  
dumb yellow feather  
just below  
the open cage door



a spike of sunshine  
and hello! on the floor  
the sleeping sated cat

### **self image**

in the lying mirror  
you look at your self  
today and say

i'm just fine  
just a glimmer older  
less polite bolder

trust i'm ok  
that's exactly the way  
i looked yesterday

when in fact  
you're a long way away  
from where you were  
or where you'd like to be

now much much less  
than when you were  
much much more

now breathless  
as the years knock hard  
on your self image's door

the old i we all knew  
is truly not the present i  
we see now so well  
ergo why not tell ourselves

a slimmer white lie  
as we get ready to go  
who cares what's true

### **early june**

like bells just rung  
white without a sound  
the peonies' heavy heads  
are sleeping on the ground  
in circles around their beds  
after a night's hard rain  
it's as if they yearned  
for the womb of earth  
from which they sprung  
already dreaming  
of their great mother  
and being born again

### **crickets**

round'n'round where it lands  
no poor cricket knows  
it's hard being a cricket  
cricket life mostly blows  
voles birds and competing males  
all want to you to stick it  
if crickets had hands,  
they'd be biting their nails  
if feet, the nails on their toes  
their three redeeming cricket traits:  
they make a good sound  
when they shed they get ghostly  
often when they mate  
they get ate  
for fred siegel

### **mirrors**

like a well-banked shot  
in a game of billiards  
the black bird's eye was a ward  
of the state of multiple mirrors  
the mirror of him in the eye  
of the man floating in the pool  
the darker turquoise shadow of him  
the man alive in the eye of the bird  
the chain-link light off the pool's reflecting glass  
and the lone photographer photographing them

it does go on and on ahem this play  
until it stops and bird flies away  
and man dries off and drives away  
to pick up children at the montessori school  
the bird of night mirrors the bird of day  
the slender moon becomes a mirror to the stars  
the captured image aspires to a hymn  
the highwire intangible always  
perfecting the mired tangible  
word man mirror bird one amen

### **rooster**

alert as a weathervane  
alert from on high  
his eye sharp as a spike  
surveys his domain  
erect as a prick  
and proud-feathered  
his harem of hens  
diaphanous in the sun  
shy soft-clucking white and calm  
gentle curious raking tireless  
the black bug-rich soil  
scratching for mites in his shadow  
secure happily mastered  
under law of his blood-red coxcomb  
his over-reacher height defines

dominance and 'ascendance'  
the razor spurs of his genes rise up  
to greet the kindred-spirit testosterone  
of the tireless wheeling alpha stars  
righteous-groomed regal  
in quill feather and down  
born proud to own the yard dirt  
his a hard-won barn arrogance  
an imperial power at dawn  
or dusk or any time of days  
all that rhymes with victory  
under his sun-king crown  
his cock-a-doodle-do yes  
brings the hurt of daybreak back  
puts on notice warns and wakes  
rules the weak the feeble the slow  
his iron-willed motto:  
come sun cloud snow or rain -  
claw slash cut and crow

### **peregrine**

sometimes the miracle  
merely is what is  
as when the peregrine  
broke from top of silo to open sky  
the whole hudson valley far below him

lakes ponds rivers creeks streams  
a dream of a hundred shades of blue  
red barns farms gullies hill and rise  
green fields on waves of green fields  
wheat oats barley rye and corn  
large creatures ambling  
small creatures scurrying

his silent regal glide  
his rising with the rising thermals  
something very close to love  
no hurry in his timeless soar  
above all traffics' roar  
everything his keen eye knew  
he owned as his and only his

### **mary agnes**

#### **I**

maybe because she was the youngest  
and i though only ten  
knew she was my last little sister  
and old enough to love her pristine baby-ness  
still my baby sister

#### **II**

nude on her bassinet she was a miracle  
she had attitude  
her tiny hands her toes pink nibblets

this little piggy had roast beef  
this little piggy had none  
this little piggy went to market  
this little piggy stayed home  
this little piggy cried  
wee wee wee wee all the way home

### III

she liked to be in charge  
she was philosophically opposed  
to toilet training  
a late bloomer a vocal boomer  
who would announce her success  
from the bathroom on high  
“i did a big moo-moo. I did a big moo-moo.”  
even then she had to be in charge  
on her clock on her calendar on her terms  
in her good time living large

### IV

hey, in the lexicon of cuteness  
pick your favorite cherub from the renaissance  
and she was sweeter and holier than they

### V

when she started walking  
we'd go for walks up and down our back yard  
checking out the birds and worms and bugs  
then later to a local store across chestnut street  
where i could be big brother and coach her –  
the usual “look-both-ways-don't-rush-out” mantras

her hands were too small to hold my whole hand  
so she'd grasp two fingers and hold on tight  
few hand holdings have compared

### VI

my sisters would play school in the basement  
with blackboard colored chalk and old grade-school desks  
one would be the teacher-nun using sheets  
to mime the sisters of st. joseph's habit-dress  
they'd make up sister names and the one who played the nun  
would teach and scold and punish the other ones

when it came time for mary agnes to be the nun  
justine and bernadette had grown tired of the game  
and so mary agnes forged ahead for hours alone  
lecturing and scolding a mischievous boisterous class of none

### VII

fast forward fifty years  
she's now a teacher of children with special needs  
the teacher she always dreamed she'd be  
a life she's always loved and never tires of

she rules their little challenged brains  
a united nation of wild childs  
like wisest warden buddah president she reigns

### **VIII**

like my father's her love of the earth  
and a fine sense of order  
and how things need care and love to grow  
as it was for daddy it is for her  
a respite her garden is her paradise

### **IX**

like my father with his brothers and his sisters  
her heart is limitless  
she is a magnet of common sense  
a unity to the other three of us

year upon year she was a sanctuary to my mother  
a buffer to my mother's rage and tears  
a safe harbor in my mother's stormy failing years  
a daily comfort friend and daughter

from coupons for bargains at grocery stores  
to keeping an eye on painful bed sores  
no burden of care too daunting  
her patience knew no end

### **X**

like bernadette and justine  
she has the voice of an angel  
the heart of an angel  
and a devil's sense of humor and fun

like all past fifty  
she fights the good fight  
the battle of the bulge  
and is on a winning streak  
has lost the equivalent of a small child  
or a very contented large dog  
she should write a blog

### **XI**

teacher teacher  
toucher healer reacher

what we do is who we are  
in my night sky she's a guiding star

toucher healer reacher  
teacher teacher

### **XII**

when she was little  
we'd play a game

i'd close my eyes  
pretend i was blind  
and she'd lead me  
from here to there to here  
in many ways over many years  
this is what she's done and does  
for all of us today  
**for mary agnes, my baby sister – june 20, 2010**