

# **BLIND RIVER**



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**March 8 2003 to August 8 2004**

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## blind river

### I

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

### II

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

and low and behold  
it is only this calm river  
this calm vast river that flowed  
through one and all

### III

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

### IV

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

and low and behold  
it is only this calm river  
this calm vast river that flowed  
through one and all

V

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

### **waking the worm**

corseting or cosseting the forces of nature  
the sun bending to an eternal sense of now  
is very much like milking a cow  
the warm dug skin flaking transparent  
into the warm milk spring of bovine kindness  
a warm trained hand a gentle heart  
taking the time the fleshy mechanisms of nature require  
or waiting for the snow melt waters to run  
when the bodies of drowned worms  
if stacked into a towering pink and gray spire  
would form an eiffel tower an arc of triumphs  
and the proletarian or pedestrian lumps  
with the sun rising higher in the sky  
bring joy to a point of joyous blindness  
and we know true from not true nature  
rain and earth and mud and a longer day  
putting on a light show of desire and glory

waking the worm

**peepers**

from out of the mud  
to sing the loud night away  
drown out the proud stars

cyotes howling  
bring the pond to a dead stop  
even the peepers

a thunder of frogs  
delicate green tea waters  
joyful stirrings

**same fields**

same fields  
same sun  
same horizon bound clouds  
same redwings  
whistling spring's first song  
how can this be  
continuing continuing  
still it yields

**spring geese**

their talk is in their wings  
the wuff wuff wuff of their quills  
the landing one speaks to the floating ones  
and the floating ones cry call honk  
delineate the contours of the pond  
they can be heard to grumble  
or to go dead silent when listening  
to a strange or hostile sound  
a strange or hostile listening  
and so they float in the dark  
heads tucked under their wings  
their sentry's posted and alert  
the rest resting on the obsidian surface  
under the light of the stars  
the black surface scrim  
is caused to shudder when  
they kick their webbed feet  
to keep from drifting to shore  
where the fox and coyote lurk

**through this window**

through this window  
i see a stand of birches bending to a willow  
leaning over the still frozen lake  
fog rising up under a frozen moon

**anadramous**

the smell of sweet water  
is like a dream  
until i begin to taste it  
and then i taste my blood  
shedding the shackles of salt  
leaping in exultation  
to see the palisades  
and necklaces of bridges  
with their sparkling beads of light  
reflecting my white milt in deep of night  
and swarms of sweet silver menhaden  
avoiding shadows of osprey and eagle  
diving deep spawning and dying  
fighting for the right to go on  
having gotten it right at last

**red sun gray hudson**

the george washington bridge is a gray shadow  
the jersey shore rising up from palisades is a gray shadow  
the river is gray and the black ducks moving  
away from the steel noise of the train  
create black v's which trail a ribbon of red v's  
that ripple crosses the river to the gray new york shore  
red ribbon on river's surface  
ball of the sun  
great red exclamation point

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

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

**look! a change of light**

look out any window  
at the changing of the light

the way landscape painters  
have always looked  
look out any window  
at the changing of the light  
the way landscape painters  
have always looked

**ghost river**

this old river and all its hills  
all its bends and islands  
all its haunting ripples its silent rills  
is but a gray ghost dreaming  
a winding ribbon of cloud  
a waterwheel of illusion  
where land and air and water meet  
and play a tiny game of hide and seek  
a silent rolling phantom tour  
of whites and blacks and grays  
ghost river of our days  
this old ark streaming light and dark  
all rich all poor the same

**smallest skull**

the smallest mocking skull  
like a science fiction alien  
shines hollow  
through our sallow skins

**horses waiting at the base of central park last day of february**

it's a wonder they don't eat the pigeons  
those gray and white feathered termites  
seething around a yellow plastic bucket of oats  
close enough to equine ivory teeth to be bitten  
horses being sloppy eaters  
and impatient for their next amble  
spilling halos of tan grain  
in their lovely desire to get back to work  
rags of snow on the tree limbs and sloping hills  
everything moving furiously furiously  
yet strangely still strangely still  
in the snow a child's red woolen mitten

**lone tug boat**

tug boat lone tug boat  
tug boat pulling all our childhood dreams  
take us up river up river

beyond this small world  
of tears and screams

**white flowering pear**

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

**hero with a thousand faces**

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

**ancient clock**

the moon and the earth  
are an ancient clock  
moonset moonrise  
hello goodbye  
earthset earthrise  
you wise and foolish  
you foolish and wise  
goodbye hello  
another minute minuet  
the round planets play  
tick tock tick tock  
hope you get  
your money's worth  
mirth and sorrow  
today and tomorrow  
sorrow and mirth

**oh green oh green oh green oh**

the eternal trees are opening up  
to the sweetest coming of the eternal earth  
first come coming and coming again  
kiss upon caress caress upon kiss  
as if in the first come  
every green memory remembers itself  
in the shudder of all loins  
even the old the brittle the dilapidated



the near-dead the marginal the infirm  
there is still this green hush  
of a small warm spark  
(think of winslow homer's adirondack fires  
glowing in the adirondack dark)  
this this is spring this  
my dearest friend  
never to see your face  
not once less once again  
and if you are only half awake  
and if you are only half alive  
you know I know you know  
oh green oh green oh green oh

**the beast of all holocausts speaks**

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

*April 26, 2003 4 a.m*

**man in a non-motorized wheelchair on 31st street**

the traffic was a cliché of locked  
steel jam stealing time  
covering the steel toast of streets  
everything was in bloom  
even the fumes

everyone took off their coats  
and got their bodies back  
people were drinking slurpies  
and eating freedom fries  
SUVs were guzzling gas  
and takeout Chinese food palaces  
were launching bean sprouts and egg rolls to the stars  
big trucks still had winter salt under their carapaces  
furniture stores displayed couches with attitude  
people were mailing letters and smoking cigarettes  
pizza wedges with pepperoni slices  
were flying like triangular UFOs out of pizza parlors  
and dogs of all stripe were sniffing their obligatory sniffs  
false blondes and false brunettes  
true blondes and true brunettes  
importers of fine oriental carpets  
parkers of cars and cars of parks parked  
people removing and putting their clothes back on  
and at the corner of 31st and sixth  
fitting the intersection like a mechanical hand in glove  
was a determined man in a non-motorized wheelchair  
powering his way by moving his feet  
the heels on his shoes were worn as his soles  
suddenly he was the vanishing point  
the perspective in a late spring cityscape  
when the cab driver paused to tip him  
the whole world turned to an applause  
a wave of light fell on a dry urban shore

**private marina**

the wait and kitchen staff  
all lined up in white  
not far behind them  
the sun all a grin  
the gray hudson's horizon  
white sails of river craft  
river rock sand bars  
and the clubby afternoon light

**but spring grass**

the grass is trimmed  
like my father's crew cut  
in the fifties  
my how I miss him  
and the neat word "nifty"  
twist and shout

the grass is trimmed

**wanda found an egg**

on a day so scintillating  
that the trunks of trees  
glowed like polished brass  
wanda found an egg  
so brown and green  
and fragile that it seemed  
anything that had ever fallen down  
would rise up and never drown again  
pileated woodpecker hawk turkey owl  
the broken egg stolen from the nest  
by a fur or feather thief  
had to be among the finest  
the shell a delicate memory left  
mottled like khaki camouflage  
like fossil kin from another age  
or the finest porcelain bowl  
clever thief got the rest  
how nestled in a million blades of grass  
did it allow itself to be seen?

*May 3 2003 late afternoon*

**phone call i never made**

after these years and all our tears  
i'm sure you'll think me a fool  
but first i was drawn to  
above all your eyes, your face  
your breasts flattering a cotton dress  
or was it a cashmere sweater  
i wanted my hands beneath the fabric  
wanted my hands on your skin  
couldn't wait was upset to wait  
didn't own the courage  
to ask for a caress  
to take off your sweater or your dress  
to be invited in  
thought for once maybe too soon  
first dinner, second or third glass of wine  
the streetcars on bloor street rumbling by  
the snow falling with january determination  
i couldn't take my eyes off you  
was thinking this is perfect  
the falling snow is freezing time

one of the season's blizzards is setting in  
short of a fireplace which i didn't own  
everything was perfect or better  
you seemed to be enjoying the salad  
i'm sure you'll think me a fool  
for knowing you wanted me  
knowing you knew i wanted you  
no words can tell of me and you  
two wine glasses some unfinished wine  
tulips bending near the bed  
warm inside the two of us  
outside the snow falling oblivious  
each cold flake on flake a caress

### **book of the mind**

he threw himself  
into the book of his mind  
like an orange peel or lemon rind  
gives spirit to an exotic drink  
he preferred its narratives  
to movies or tv  
and read it steadily  
on trains and plains  
on lakes in the middle of fields  
where he could hear the crickets think  
book of the mind  
lead us to a better day  
book of the mind  
show us another way

### **birdfeeder**

as mundane as a winter morning  
and much less grand  
the nuthatch poised to free a seed

before the black casing was cracked  
a mad flutter of wings  
the kestrel sheltering its prey

wings two pair of praying hands  
in the eye of the smaller one  
the talons of a new day's sun

### **poems whose titles are lines from other poets**

**into the shining of trees**

a green breath held for what seemed centuries  
winter turned burned browns to brume whites  
a long cold song of snow and muddy ice  
then as swift as blizzards dreams or throw of dice  
it all returns out of stubborn pride or spite  
at first in ones or twos  
and then in twos and threes  
at first soft purples then newborn willow greens  
then infant green on dark and ancient boughs  
first in thousands then in tens of tens of thousands  
under skies a hundred shades of blue  
into the shining of trees  
fly free fly free  
*for wendell berry*  
*from "finches"*

**a bench was his catalepsy**

the breathing then becomes a single note  
no brake in the movement of what he thought  
and the movement of what he wrote  
the fields fill the sun's room with fresh cut grass  
the air's more brilliant than the movement of sand to glass  
a deep transparency resides within this breathing clock  
clearer than a clear vase sheltering cold water  
and a new broken branch of apple in bloom  
a bench was his catalepsy  
and he craved it as lovers crave what's true  
as very few insomniacs crave  
the merciful decomposition of sleep  
ride this quiet wave ride this quiet wave  
have no fear of what's old or gone or new

*for wallace stevens*  
*from "notes toward a supreme fiction"*

(catalepsy - a condition of suspended animation and loss of voluntary motion in which the limbs remain in whatever position they are placed)

**terrible lightning  
in the humility of brutes**

terrible lightning  
to know wholly our flawed limitations  
to be cowed by petty fears  
to wait long unanswered on long distance calls  
to stand un-accommodated in the rain  
unappreciative of what it is to be soaked to the skin  
to wonder whether where we take our stand  
holds terra firma or infinity beneath our calloused feet

terrible lightning

to be stricken with the wonder  
of being able to put one foot in front of the other  
to see to the horizon's vanishing point  
to sweat and piss and breathe  
to look deep into the eyes of animals  
and see the memory of a deep brotherhood forgot  
with species we love but know not

terrible lightning  
to coast without a desire or stopping point  
to float unauthorized or worse yet anonymous  
without the mouse squeak of "i'm here!"  
to wonder about the shifting tide of who we are  
and to ignore the opportunity to be free  
to not hold as holy each chance peregrination

terrible lightning  
to never truly know those we're closest to  
to see each closing of each door  
as an eternal growing void  
to emphasize the piling up of distances on distances  
of every petty instance on top of instances  
to seriously take note and fail to cast a vote

terrible lightning  
to never know or hunger to know  
to not want to know what shines beyond roads not taken  
to not desire to go past the boundaries of what we know  
to be so stuck on getting by we can't be shaken  
that we fail to look up and live with blinders on  
to ignore the importance of trusting that tiny voice  
inside our heads that says "break out. do and go."

terrible lightning  
to feel that continental drift of ground beneath our beds  
away from all we've done and worked to own  
to realize that nothing is what it's all about  
nothing but the desire to sing to see to be  
the saga of the flower before it's blown  
the central point of rest the holy place of home  
that we furnish and keep swept clean inside our heads

terrible lightning  
to close one's eyes and feel the pity of the dark  
to hear the echo of the caged soul bark  
to walk around the primeval forest all alone

and talk out loud to those long gone  
into the winged un-answering electric air  
to write the eclectic contract of our schemes  
within our bones to bid farewell to the maps of all our dreams

terrible lighting  
to walk the old dark valley of the shadow of death  
naked alert breathing a final chain of breath  
to look up beyond the giant's canyons looking down  
and hear the echoes of your blood and fragile thoughts  
the scree of canyon wrens the roars of moths  
to truly see the silent moon and congregations of the raining stars  
and truly know we'll not soon walk this way again

*for william butler years*  
*from per amica silentia lunae (1918)*

**saccharine lines**

you know they say  
the problem with loving  
people too deeply  
is that they each each day  
break your heart  
every time  
steeply more steeply

**venetian perspective**

the clouds at the low horizon point  
are not surprisingly much smaller  
than the big ones casting shadows on  
the small figure on the far side of the lido  
just beyond the bridge of turning tears  
wearing a red shawl in the fog  
infinitely smaller than the calico cat

in the foreground is yes or no now or later

red and gray and yellow the finches  
raised for song or the horizontal bars of grief  
in cages entertaining patrons  
enjoying linguini in white clam sauce  
in a small family owned bistro  
fear of death or any fears at all at bay

in the foreground is yes or no now or later

fear of idiocy or sickness  
fear of things we cannot control

just beyond conquering the impossible  
the clown of hope wears a disguise in the fog  
a silver horn and a long red nose  
hard to make it out - clown or god?  
in the foreground is yes or no now or later  
on the horizon of our worries and our cares  
we're raised like finches for our song or grief  
in cages entertaining our dining patrons  
behind bars of silver every age all ages  
the smell of garlic in the air  
singing crickets on a very small leaf

in the foreground is yes or no now or later

**tiny ray of light**

at the far end of the tunnel  
is a tiny ray of light  
and the glimmer of another side  
just beyond the pulse of blood  
just beyond the fickle heart  
less generous than any banker clerk  
or some non-feeling jerk who sits on a throne  
and judges all behind the gilded bars  
a comedy of bumper cars and slapstick tunes  
a funhouse medley of patrons and patroons  
past the clouds past the moon and stars  
waits a queue of other untold reincarnations

**timothy astronaut**

2G7M3184

timothy edward faver  
NASA on right sleeve American flag on left  
the rings of saturn below his shoulders  
behind him his and all our rocketing pasts  
and the royal mantel of jupiter or mars  
in a blue black sea of swirling stars  
portrait of the young prince  
in a periwinkle blue zip-up astronaut shirt  
knowing the convention of the photograph  
self possessed and smiling and calm  
happy to be here in this his time and place  
at space and science center 2003  
far beyond the balm of our stairs his galaxies  
unfolding onward and upward and outward  
from here and now to wherever his eternity will be  
young astronaut with the youth of wings



his interplanetary path and his galaxy sings  
openly greeting his interplanetary future  
his sentinels the tender smiles of twinkling stars

**two eclipses same hemisphere**

one was obscured  
by a bank of cloud  
so dark and dense  
no one even saw the sky  
and renters owned  
and owners paid rent

the other rose a song  
above the songs of geese  
above the highest star  
was known and loved by all  
from near and far  
found peace even in war

**moon bone I**

black dog of night  
fetch your moon bone of white

**moon bone II**

black dog of light  
go fetch boy  
your moon toy  
night's round bone of joy

**bird shadow**

as phoebe flies to top of tree  
the afternoon sun behind him a hymn  
takes his shadow up the high maple trunk  
and finds on his perch a feathered glory

horizontal holy shadow  
married to a vertical substance  
one bird's slight comeuppance  
tiny miracle in nature's shrine

**decapitating daffodils**

beheading their dry heads  
like a bored executioner  
with an officious finger's snap  
the ghostly yellow train glows  
behind me hundreds follow hundreds more

tumbling down through dark earth's door  
but it is not my pain alone that soars  
not i alone who knows time's slow blade  
whose invisible edge forever cuts and roars  
to bury once-clapping crowds in spring glades  
of once-hale minutes hours and days  
tumbling down through earth's dark door  
so impatient for what's new or newborn  
that these pale moments already so gone  
now hurry to get on to get on  
with swiftly coming back again  
the now living flower forever rising up  
like cream skimmed from a cup of dreams  
poured by the bored yet fertile dead

**polo pony**

pale palomino  
pale rider in bright silks  
twined around his thin wrist  
red mallet on a rawhide thong  
the ball  
the head of a man  
the earth  
the heads of all men  
pale palomino  
twine around twine around  
pale rider in bright silks

**orange**

o range  
o he rang  
and gore  
noe a rag  
go near  
o anger  
roe nag  
on rage  
gone ra  
on gear  
orange  
roan egg  
darn ego

**into the teeth of the sun**

into the teeth of the sun  
go the cottonwood shadows

the red wing and the sand hill crane  
the sound of moving waters  
and the song of birds  
innocent as all eternity  
as time before time

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

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

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

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

into the teeth of the sun  
young and old go dancing together  
circles of colts and mares cows and calves  
beaver raccoon muskrat and otter  
all elements giving boisterous birth to  
and nurturing all other elements  
blazing charity of a vast loving heart

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

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

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

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

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

into the teeth of the sun  
go the trembling juniper and dog bane  
the bear grass and buffalo berry  
sow thistle sheep sorrel and bittersweet  
the water hemlock sage brush and wild sarsaparilla  
greens and all manner and palette of greens

enlivened and using their raiment to live

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

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

*for ernie beyl and vince gordon*

*on the bighorn*

*may 28 - 31 2003*

### **drinking song**

strong spirits flow over the lips  
love pours into an open heart  
as wisdoms go that's all we know  
before we board that final sailing ship  
so bright light or fool knave or hero  
say farewell to nature love and art  
what seems an end may be but a start  
and not a final fall from one to zero

### **replaying fishing**

#### **on the big horn**

#### **in my head**

there is a bend of foolery in it  
the taking by guile of the fish  
from below its silent feeding lair  
the fly tied with a bronze wire  
and fur from the ear of a hare  
the connection and glorious release

the bronze and orange of the brown  
the rush of red and silver fire  
rainbow flashing in the platinum glare  
a surging underwater prayer  
totem of the elemental power  
of merely being there awake aware

this strikes us as a fish strikes us  
this haunts us as primal as a wish  
this haunts the ancient waters' rush  
this haunts every vibrant shudder  
of montana's earth and sun and sky  
of the ever jubilant montana air  
for ernie beyl  
6/6/03

**the bowman who aims his arrow  
at the center of the sun**

the bowman who aims  
his arrow's flight  
at the center of the sun  
with his whole soul's pull  
always strikes the eye of the bull  
of blinding truth and light  
in blindness his full vision spun  
for stevie wonder  
6/6/03

**the little boy**

the little boy  
punched the other  
little boy  
in the nose  
oh no oh no  
blood red blood red  
the little boy  
bit his tongue in half  
oh no oh no  
blood red blood red  
*dream 6/11/03*

**snapping turtle**

snapper hissing at alien traffic  
spine a barren mountain range  
black dorsal peaks  
tongue a pink shock  
softer pink than a baby's bum  
long patient in deceit  
beak crueller than any raptor's  
clawed feet small alligator tail  
but its eyes its eyes  
without fail tell the tale  
of prehistoric histories fall and wail  
reptilian before humanitarian

merciless to that which crosses it  
snap a branch or a child's wrist  
with no more pity than a mop stick  
or the crossing of a country road  
or the klan's burning of a cross  
inheritor of an old cold wrath  
seized in an unforgiving vice  
its black and hissing head  
is severed from its past  
still hooked on the object of its hate  
the torso and the feet still flailing  
a silent wail of pleistocene rage

### **terrible lightning**

terrible lightning  
terrible light nighting  
terrible lightening

### **the serving of plastic knives in the minneapolis airport**

leaving mary tyler moore town  
"she can turn the world on with her smile"  
missing the 11:13 a.m. back to la guardia  
because security now requires the inspection of shoes  
and so required not lacing fast enough was stranded  
the Lands End black T with the American flag heart side  
in the extra large was out of stock  
and the "Simply Books" had nothing to read  
the Minnesota Store a tribute to the moose  
in all media incarnations incantations and representations -  
key chains, t-shirts, moose hats, moose belts, moose slippers,  
moose diapers, moose bracelets, tie tacks and rings  
moose jam, moose chili mix and hair conditioner  
moose baseball caps golf balls and watches  
(moose clock with antlers propelling hours and minutes)  
next door to Chili's Two bar and grill  
i sit down for a time-killing lunch  
where the gay waiter with glee says to all,  
of *The El Presidente*, the gargantuan trademark margarita,  
"for a dollar more you can get a large one!"  
red haired boys with pee wee herman haircuts  
chow down on The BigMouth Burger  
and little girls with blond braids look bored  
before me chili in a bowl with stringy orange cheese  
diced raw onion cubes pale against chili red  
the meat the mystery equivalent of pressboard beef

i see that my knife and all our knives are plastic  
which triggers a vision and not of a dream  
two renegade planes pierce the world trade towers  
once again in my mind's eye oh no once again  
and I think of SARS anthrax biological warfare  
and america's drive to victory  
and dirty bombs and suicide bombers  
and yet another end to peace of mind  
as we once knew never again to be known  
and realize how good plastic knives  
and a bowl of fake chili can be  
in Minneapolis on my 56th birthday  
waiting for the plane back home  
*6/14/03*

**black salt**

black salt is the salt of all years  
of the tears of all men  
more bitter than rind of rotten lemon  
black salt black salt  
distillate of all our breakings  
more precious than gold  
seasoning the food of the young  
the breath of the old  
eternal grief pillar  
of all who have looked back  
home of all rudderless vessels  
broken on the wrecker's reef  
black salt black salt  
dark seat of our pain seat of our joy  
seasons all our trinkets and toys

**after the downpour**

after the downpour  
the puddles held rain  
like one whose rage  
makes him embrace his pain

with the sun's single shining door  
the puddles became multitudes of mirrors  
like one whose vain age  
invents a jury of imagined admirers

**nitey nite**

nitey nite  
sweet night  
sweet knights



sweet damsels in distress  
the press of light  
on her evening dress

**red wing**

red wing's epaulets  
high above the deepest greens  
feathered fires dream

epaulets of red  
against a quilt of green  
red wing blackbirds dream

**what is carved from stone**

what is carved from stone  
is but the path of stone's will  
willed to one man's hand

**five cedar waxwings in the sky**

first they form a parallelogram  
then an awkward trapezoid  
then a vast rectangle  
then an expanding X  
a pentagon a square  
a triangle with a square base  
then a simple wavy line  
then a child's version of an ellipse  
but as they approach our eye  
they become a quintet of birds again  
with a cardinal's crest  
and torso of a pilgrim gray  
red check near wing tips  
a raccoon mask rimmed in white  
then suddenly as a falling pen  
that leaves a crooked line on a white sheet  
they take their perch on the old mulberry  
and eat the ripe blue black fruit  
leaving the sky to its own devices  
geometry-less a void of blue  
yearning for the bright company  
of their random winged drawings  
and the art of their sweet cries in flight

**one-line film scripts**

**starving surrealist**

every sewing needle has a sewing needle through its eye

**anthropologist**

out of his zip-up Neanderthal suit steps modern man in Armani

**climbing mount everest**

around the heads of frozen climbers were halos of wintergreen altoids

**kung fu fighters**

electric fan of whirring arms and legs lifts the plot's sagging dirigible

**the man who would be king**

the mummy's head still sports the diamond crown

**horror movie**

the light bulb in the brain liquefies the frozen gray matter

**horror movie II**

defecating from his mouth he woke up on soiled satin sheets

**horror movie III**

he gave birth through his penis to another two-headed penis

**horror movie IV**

eternal life in the torturer dentist's chair teeth and nerves growing back after each grinding obliteration

**urban comedy**

every character is woody allen

**war film**

the acorn in the squirrel's teeth is a hand grenade

**makeover**

out of dolly parton's velcro mask preying mantis with tiny chewing mandibles is spawned

**nuclear meltdown**

eons later a zebra striped horse with the head of a bee gallops free through the empty city's smoldering streets

**romantic comedy**

penis in tap shoes vagina in stiletto heels

**the 2:45 didn't leave until 3:45**

the 2:45 didn't leave until 3:45

a bunch of business class passengers  
were migrated under protest to coach  
the whole train was standing room only  
but the old george washington bridge  
and its football-field-sized american flag  
both looked the same old same  
inside the Amtrak train  
the same old stale human odors  
the same old murmurs of people talking  
the same old white speed boat  
leaving a long white wake  
in the same old Hudson  
the same lazy geese paddling slowly  
everything hazy and too warm  
air conditioners fighting the same old war  
the same old woman with too much perfume  
planning her trip leafing through fodor's  
making her way through her glass of chardonnay  
the same old rocking on the same old rails  
falling lightly asleep or half asleep  
after a wine from the train's bar car

### **july dusk**

the jet stream's  
the same white  
as the new moon  
as thin whips of cloud

the black boat-tailed grackles  
cackle as they fly  
the movement of their wings  
anything but loud

the same white  
against the black flame of night  
the moon a winged parenthesis  
typing an imaginative line of light

### **talking to myself**

the fascination of talking to myself  
is that i often hear a voice within my voice  
bigger grander larger than myself

### **july dusk II**

over the red peak of the barn  
the moon is white

as a snowman's mitten  
sprinklers are soaking lawns  
the july evening yawns  
the mornings dove coo  
the boat-tailed grackles cackle  
night comes down like a shade  
a ball of yarn  
pulled by a kitten  
a sharp knife's blade  
a lover smitten

**life of an anarchist**

from failure to failure  
up to the final victory

**old friend july moon**

old friend july moon  
shape of a lemon wedge  
rising above the cedars  
lilacs and old privet hedge  
moon and the vaporous hints  
of vanishing clouds  
sing the same old tune  
pale old logical calls  
as the caws of crows

**frog princess**

if you'd kiss me  
like you kissed me then  
in my old volkswagen  
in that parking lot  
in chinatown  
under a crescent moon  
if you'd kiss me  
like you kissed me then  
i would live forever

**crows' wings**

crows' wings have fingers  
they pull the open air  
with fingers at their tips of wings  
like olympic swimmers  
putting the pool waters behind them  
clawing their airy way to victory

**victory**

to arrive at the end  
with equanimity  
the final loss  
a gain  
pain's end  
a god send

**dragon flies**

of the sixty-two species  
that fly over our little village  
i've seen only four so far  
one - the largest - burnt umber  
translucent wings of tangerine  
one that shade of sky  
seen only as sun goes down under  
one a shade of day glow green  
wings the color of old women's eyes  
and the last and smallest a warrior  
a florescent metallic bronze  
the kind you see on toy racing cars  
or hear in the trembling echoes  
of japanese temple gongs

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

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

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

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

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

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

so many plans and ramshackle shacks of plans  
straw huts pup tents and walls with weak struts  
creaking and sagging on the verge of collapse  
so many philosophers sitting on the fence of perhaps  
militant muddled fooled crazed but mostly befuddled

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

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

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

so many eggbeaters and old wooden spoons  
cork screws frying pans and the man in the moon  
drawing the plot line of another cheap cartoon

mickey mouse and pluto daffy duck and betty boop  
living in slums cartoon hearts cutouts to their roots

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

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

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

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

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

so many boat-tailed grackles chasing bugs on green lawns

so many over-weight strippers wearing polka dot thongs  
hardening arteries and toast going stale  
so many saints sinners shrinks autocrats and autodidacts  
bending the bars and barbs way back escaping from jail

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

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

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

so many good soldiers and ballerinas  
clowns cads shits grits and pollyanna's  
doing a death-defying dance leaping their leaps in mid air  
human frisbees winging their way through the wilderness bare  
defying gravity rhyme or reason without stress or a care

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it



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

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

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

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

**beyond the fling of the dull ass's hoof\***

katydid cricket and cicada do conspire  
to ease the burden of all memory  
red mars will rise closest to the earth  
again in fifty thousand years to burn cheerily  
the moon's a sickle above black trees  
and silence marries silence silently

the openness of the country is its birth  
consuming flame is the death of fire  
silly fashion and the city's tears all conspire  
the season's gyre hemisphere to hemisphere to turn  
the moons a sickle above black trees  
and silence marries silence silently

*\*Ben Johnson cited by W.B. Yeats in "closing rhyme"  
from Responsibilities (1914)*

**what the sun burns up of it  
the moon puts back \***

what the sun burns up of it the moon puts back  
one's gift to the other is the other's lack  
the days furiously wave like flags to a cork board tacked

and who is to pass judgment on light and dark  
what the blind desire to see the sighted lack  
how can the repetition of celestial spheres  
dry up oceans turn desert sands back into a rain of tears

what the sun burns up of it the moon puts back  
i want to tell you about an unhappiness that makes me happy  
the supreme joy that comes from opening every door  
the resting in the temporary residence of fugitive toys  
the listening to the mind's silent chiming chimes  
where is the roar of the onset of night on night?  
that kneels at day's end like a tiger drinking light

what the sun burns up of it the moon puts back  
sometimes the memory of a particular fervent scene  
the way the iris stands blue amid pointed green spears  
the globes of peonies their leaves splayed like open hands  
the greenest sentiment of april may and june at their apple core  
the winds of barren january february and march's marching roar  
like a red chalk renaissance cartoon weeping under a mysterious moon

what the sun burns up of it the moon puts back  
i have packed my memories in a box of polished bones  
i have called cave cliff sea swells forest desert the turrets of trees and tree trunks home  
cast your fate to winds as winds of summer cast the dandelions' manes  
drift with the drifts of temperate seas and fan the embers of the stars  
the poorest light is light that's buried in the fragile spark of sparks

*\*from Alan Dugan's "Plagues of Dead Sharks"*

### **the rocks**

only the sound of waters  
black in the sunset  
against the rocks  
leaning against one another  
like old friends  
their postures set in stone  
in lake water their eternal  
patient faces facing the seasons  
and the fallen tamarack on far shore  
comrades in erosion

hear in the sound of waters  
lapping against and eroding  
their stony skins chafe  
we believe they have no life  
we believe they have no hearts  
but they predate us

and they are waiting  
for the next millennium of waves  
to carve their destinies  
and define them  
and they are stalwart  
in their silent acceptance  
of their touching neighbor  
eternity  
,

**twin suns**

tonight there are two suns  
we two sons only witnesses  
one in the sky and one in the waters  
the clouds have converged and conspired  
with the surface of black waters  
to allow for these brilliant twins  
to reflect one another  
so briefly that forgetting  
there were two is impossible  
a water sun and a sky sun

we two sons only witnesses  
this monday in late july  
in algonquin algonquin  
as the loons begin to cry their cry  
far down the bay  
with the waves oblivious  
laughing sweetly happily  
one following the next  
not complaining a rising wind  
stirs the lowing pines

**twelve sunsets**

the first  
was an ax  
in the cedar lake  
rawhide loop of clouds  
hanging off its  
shining yellow handle

the second  
was an old fashioned coffee pot  
steam percolating up  
from the many cups of hills

the third

was the osprey's wing  
hovering above a shoal of rock bass  
before plunging  
gold weight golden talons  
below the burning waters

the fourth  
was a spike  
driven through last waterlogged plank  
of day's sinking raft

the fifth  
was a mirror  
admiring its own emptiness  
its blank blazing self  
leaving no reflecting trace

the sixth  
was picasso's women weeping  
beauty hidden in their silver tears  
on this tarnished silver day

the seventh  
almost failed to show up  
a bird song  
sweet final trilling note  
the song sparrow's brief flight  
before the song of nights forgotten

the eighth  
was a canvas tent  
covering the bays  
and all the living creatures of the bays  
in a great healing canopy of green

the ninth  
was a single gull  
on the wing  
horizon bound

the tenth  
was a star watcher  
lying under an open sky  
days work done  
looking up  
to the eternal laboring

of the planets and the stars

the eleventh  
set in a frenzy  
of gnats and mosquitoes  
in a frantic buzz

the twelfth  
was so elusive  
like the smell of burning balsam  
so feint and soft  
in its descent so awake  
that people in canoes  
at the far end of Manitou lake  
did not notice where it went

**deep summer**

this is when the wasps' and bees' buzz  
echoes the sounds of low flying planes  
when the cardinals still sing  
and the different families  
of cricket frogs and locusts have no shame

this is when the dragon sun and butterflies  
defy the ability to identify  
when the hum and throb of life  
sense the first tense intricacy  
of what winter will bring

this is when the sky's grays are grayest  
the trees green the greenest  
the heat's heat the hottest  
when the hum and throb of life  
warms itself to summer's rest

this is when even sitting still  
the sweat drips from brows  
makes light shirts dark  
when whites are cabbage moths  
and lakes and streams ripple sweetly

**gone forever**

i had a thought  
or it had me  
i should have written it down  
instead it has written me

now it is lost  
for all eternity

**like too many ideas forgotten**

like too many ideas forgotten  
i am always me  
but a changing definition  
a symbol essentially  
of what I was  
when i wanted what  
i never knew  
when i thought i knew  
what i should be  
but never followed through

**my broken toe**

the heft of it after  
the accident's play  
aspired to big toe  
the pain of it  
was like a thumb  
caught on the striking block  
nail clean through nail  
and shattered bone  
the surprise cure credit lazarus  
get up keep walking  
eventually it will go away  
to its distant home  
the bed of all forgotten hurts  
like a supporting rafter  
or sudden laughter  
or what's before after

**katydids**

their lace wings green  
lighter than mint green  
the katydids arrive in august  
katydid katydid  
the katydids at summer's bus stop  
katydid katydid  
their green lace wings

**on saving a dragon fly from death by drowning**

it's no picnic  
microbe lizard fish bird mammal or bug  
we all know it instinctively

the fear of extinction  
the basis of true communion  
mortal knowledge of our mortality

you were drowning  
losing air light your sense of true task  
wings heavy as the almost dead  
old yellow sun completely cold  
crickets ignoring marsh hawk not caring  
black crows cawing not one concerned

we do have small friends  
beings we do and do not know  
each in awe of the other  
even bugs have brains  
you knew to land on my friendly hand  
to place your bets on humanity  
rather than die in a chlorine sea

walking the fresh cut field  
i ran into the same dragonfly  
he landed on my finger  
head nodding like a long lost friend  
with three hovering comrades of his own  
so summer warms us  
and the dragonfly flies away

it's plain for us all to see  
the setting sun chasing the rising moon  
each in awe of the other  
a bright progression of wonder  
the simple flight of morning to day's end  
so summer warms us  
and the dragonfly flies away

**there is a crystal diamond in the brain**  
there is a crystal diamond in the brain  
which rotates sparkling at the speed of light  
that tells us fondly of love hate wrong right  
and spins illuminating pleasure and pain  
this same jewel when slowed is cubed as ice  
and still as fields before a summer storm  
the crickets of its memory sing in each season  
and remembering them is easier when they sing  
the clouds hang low gods thunder  
the cat bird annoys the bushes

by the pond with his repeated cries  
songs poems paintings sculptures prayers  
mount up to form a mountain  
which becomes a sea  
crystal diamond you and me

**the autumn grass is high  
enough to lose a dog in**

the black lab  
the old retriever  
the mixed-up mutt  
all vanish  
in this sea of gold  
this side of the railroad tracks

the rusted necks of cranes  
gigantic metal grasshoppers  
jack-hammered slabs of concrete  
graffiti broken glass planes of power plants  
cars in lots steel eggs in cartons

the autumn grass is high enough  
to lose a dog in

**sail boats on the hudson mid august**

gray companions  
mesmerized by dusk  
behind ossining bars the prisoners

see the unfettered line  
of a single jet's exhaust

a few white sails  
a few white boats

fishermen back to back  
on hudson river estuary

one sees the setting sun  
and its waning light

one looks at the silver  
of his trolling line

hopes for a little strike  
a little tug on a patient line



all dream of freedom

**succession of bridges at night**

their arch outlines  
are so still  
they appear as dark listeners bent  
straining to overhear  
the waves of summer insects  
in concordance with the river  
nostalgic for the sea  
gossiping and moving on  
rising and receding tides  
stoic witnesses stealing time  
from the river banks

**taking penis for a walk**

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

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

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

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

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

**end of summer**

at the beginnings and ends  
time stretches  
like saltwater taffy  
or the ocean's vanishing point

or everything forgot over coffee

suddenly you don't want it to be over  
the smell of field grass and cut clover  
crickets fireflies and the obstructed stars  
the multitudes of obstinate trees  
the end of green reluctant leaves

you and i are sad as stopped clocks  
contemplating our complicated passages  
wondering if we got all our messages  
sifting through a multitude of sieves  
planes ships harbors docks and unlocked locks

**no shield against what the present brings**  
there is no shield against what the present brings  
no staunch to staunch its flow  
there is no love so grand or mighty  
that time does not eclipse it  
as we walk that long dark valley  
long forgotten many souls ago  
imaginarily hand in hand  
there is no song that sings the heart so out  
as its ancient hunger for new songs to sing

**finally coming into the fullness of your own**  
and suddenly it all remembers  
the early mornings the nights of love  
the voices of strangers in the alley  
the sound of the silent phone

years of study trial and preparation  
the chaos of the ever doubting mind  
finally show a glimmer of compassion  
a few exalted things seem easier to find

the sweetness of this sudden dawning  
comes more as a lightening than surprise  
is mixed as a black and white striped awning  
masking the electric chart of your own decline

**narrow foyer**  
if the door opens to the left  
the table goes on the right  
if the door opens to the right  
the table goes on the left

it takes a little subtle heft  
to dissuade the eye  
from an unbroken line of light

**the fish is the exception**

the fish is the exception  
so if you hunt fish  
you'd better love  
streamside lakeside riverside  
the sounds and smell of moving waters  
and unusually low returns

wealth is the exception  
so if you have it  
you'd better love  
as if you were the poorest man  
for the dollar is not riches  
and what defines a man cannot be banked  
beware the dollar that steals your time

love is the exception  
so if you've found it  
you'd better love  
like it was your own last day  
the way she laughs and smiles  
the way she lifts a cat or dries a dish  
the way she lights your soul and mind

**red squirrel's burial**

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

his little carcass to good use

**for daniel  
after algonquin**

don't worry  
you'll grow into your natural seriousness  
and this is a gift

don't be put off  
by those who don't feel  
your acute sense of mortality  
and this is a gift

don't be constrained  
by anyone's edits or ideas  
you have plenty of your own  
enough for two lifetimes  
and this is a gift

don't be intimidated  
by people with "social skills"  
there's nothing wrong with yours  
save them for those you trust  
on whom they will be best spent  
and this is a gift

don't feel rushed  
there is time enough to learn  
for those hungry to know  
let nothing put you off your game  
your own ways of shedding light on you  
the intelligence of your flights and voyages  
and this is a gift

don't be afraid to make a loud noise  
drum your voice into the stultified world  
wake them all up  
when pushed push back  
when lost trust your true heart  
protect your truest voice  
all at your own pace in your own time  
and this is a gift

don't be too polite  
a little friction sparks a lot of light  
for you and those around you

the abruptness of a strongly felt conviction  
can turn things around  
and confirm the right direction  
at the small cost of speaking up  
and feeling uncomfortable with your bark  
and this is a gift

don't underestimate the power of joy  
what brings this to you is bigger  
than all our individual joy  
keep your eyes and ears open  
you will see and hear what most do not  
it will be your duty to steel your courage  
to bring your telling of it back to all  
be humbled by your role as bearer of news  
and this is a gift

don't get stuck in ruts  
with speed of change to thrive today  
requires the routine shedding of all baggage  
think of it as the trimming of nails or sails  
toss it all gladly onto the outgoing tides  
as a small token of thanks  
for the privilege of your family your roots  
watch the old ways recede onto the horizon  
be alert to new dawns new ways  
balance requires much work be done  
and this is a gift

don't fear accident or loss  
in each resides discovery and light  
that many never find or are blind to  
they are the well springs of life  
what is taken away or broken often gives  
or makes whole in another way  
the maize of what our wheeling days mean  
will always be seasoned by the rude unexpected  
those who resist are burdened and blocked  
the diamonds of accident and loss cut bright  
for those undaunted by pain and free of the clock  
and this is a gift

*on the plane home from a week in algonquin  
july 31, 2003*

**my father's eyes on thanksgiving**  
the year before he died  
i dreamed i was sitting on his right

the right hand of my father  
we were all there  
my mother my three sisters their husbands  
and their sons all their sons  
the table was flush as we  
a norman rockwell abundant fare  
i'm sure my father knew full well then  
he was going to die and soon  
the doctor gave him a single sentence  
"you're past the point of worry, stan;  
you can look forward to a normal life..."  
one thing to know theoretically  
another to be told to hear and know  
you are going to die even though  
the doctor said something else  
this surely is to know a difference  
because he knew it near he saw it magnified  
sharply through his thick, horn rim glasses  
not the color of rose but of fog  
i looked at him at his magnified eyes  
as he gave the blessing  
like a contented well loved dog  
we all saw his eyes fill up  
his seconds and minutes like hounds ran by  
his every word without self pity  
just some simple animal sounds  
halfway between a sob and a laugh  
so we all cried a little laugh with him  
and laughed some dumb little animal laughing cries  
as if tricked by some unexpected sight gag  
when the king turns clown slips on an unimportant banana peel  
or some important guest at table falls suddenly asleep  
into the steaming bowl of mashed potatoes  
and suddenly wakes up from his dreaming  
thanksgiving turkey gravy  
dripping from his face and eyes  
still holding onto the sterling silver serving spoon  
*for stanley vincent*

**the crow and the moon**

the crow shone black  
the moon shone white  
crow's fingers stroked the air  
moon's silver sail was bare

the crow was dark  
the moon was light

the crow's voice a bark  
the moon's voice an ark

the crow was a gliding night  
the moon was a shining bone  
the crow and the moon  
alone each flying alone

**late october lady bug hatch**

the first one appeared on a dime  
on my desk bright orange polka dotted black  
carapace like porcelain centered in a silver sun  
in god we trust  
next thing there were hundreds  
lighter orange smaller dots and smaller  
the females? The males?  
dark orange and larger dots and larger  
already said goodbye to Indian summer  
and today the last day fell off  
the maple-etched pumpkin cart of fall  
an afterthought like confetti after a parade  
the warming must have awakened them  
whole colonies mobs flocks crowds clusters  
winging busily about whatever lively business was theirs  
moving as if their race and tiny lives depended on it  
i wondered if the cats would see them as hors d'oeuvres  
and whether we'd have to sweep them up  
enameled bright orange their souls all gone  
next day their lifeless husks would fill a coffee cup

**the stars at 5:35 a.m. october 2003**

to rise up  
from all your dreams  
from a warm bed  
to brush your naked teeth  
and walk out  
into the cold october  
well before dawn  
the stars sparkling chill  
in the bottomless blue black bucket  
of the last of night  
hope of a sun to come  
horizons still  
deep asleep  
the day your cup



**great divide**

own  
want  
hope for  
n  
o  
t  
h  
i  
n  
g  
love all

**st. thomas I**

rainy day on the beach  
with warm towels  
unless you take time to look  
at the character of the passing clouds  
you'd think the sky was gray  
rather than a hundred rounds of gray  
a thousand gray mythologies  
the faces of fish and fowl  
fishman or birdman  
metamorphosis on metamorphosis  
the iguanas sleeping in the agave  
sheltered from the downpour  
varnished by the rain  
the black pelicans plummeting like stones  
feeding on fry in the shallows  
island winds moving in the bougainvillea  
causing the banana flowers to tremble  
under the touch of the softening rain  
the island winds themselves trembling  
under a conspicuously absent sun

**st. thomas II**

the beach looking out sentry like  
over the octagon fort on the nearest hill  
the umbrellas royal blue centurions  
the curve of the bay a beautiful tan breast  
the catamarans schooners motors anchors  
florescent buoy marking two divers snorkling  
and a line of white buoys white as waves  
breaking like dominoes off a distant reef  
the waters a turquoise that rivals hopi stone  
the stormy skies their silver setting

people coming and going for dry towels  
and the rain coming and going soaking them  
the pelicans cruising the shallows just offshore  
fold their six foot wingspans in  
and drop like sudden feathered-covered rocks  
the fish in the pink coral flitting in and out with the tide  
peach pearl silver tiger orange zebra black and white  
the voices of people their conversations carrying  
and the dry leaves of the palm trees rattling in the wind  
red and white sails far beyond the pink stucco hotel  
as a sleeping baby's skin

### **out of the tunnel**

as my eyes adjust  
i blink in wonder nod in awe  
as I turn to touch the sun's bright lance  
i see the ant on his sandy hill  
the flying swans of clouds above  
the entire landfill seething  
alive with ferment and insect love  
the burning brand  
that is my heart in flames  
flying like the pearl gray dove  
the cement of skin and bone  
and blood and flesh and hair  
that we call our meager lives on fire  
darkness never able to hold back light  
light accepting the shawl of dark  
and all in a shimmering breathing dance  
wind and rain and earth and snow  
all I want to do is think like god and dream  
watch this silver river flow  
hear the caw of the coal black crow  
and witness my shadow  
run away with the eloping sun

### **the dirty rear window**

i am the accumulation of road dirt  
in summer the foul slick of rain and oil  
in winter the freezing slick of salt and snow and sleet  
produced by the rude vagaries of weather  
outside i wait for my driver to squeegee me  
to clarity the outside world as i know it  
in a conspiracy of windex and antifreeze  
inside i accept the harsh light of city lights  
and the gentle sun of april with equal equanimity

outside carefree children write on me  
“wash me” or other predictable graffiti  
inside i take comfort in the screech of wheels  
and how each dirty season feels

**law of green**

from seed  
to stem  
to thorn  
to leaf  
to flower  
to fall of all  
the green hours run

**an allegory with a boy lighting a candle  
in the company of an ape and a fool**

el Greco wasn't too fussy about his clouds  
but you've got to admire the primary colors he used  
and his send-up of satin saints and martyrs  
the droplets of blood dripping from their foreheads  
their shining eyes rolling to the skies  
even now the brightness of their robes  
recalls a bleeding spanish lion sun  
bright as a cartoon roaring on tv  
you can see why Picasso loved him  
the pious straining to be pious  
the holy disconcerted struggling to be holy  
to pay attention to their boring prayers  
crucifixions, resurrections, levitations, mediations,  
immaculate conceptions, purifications,  
skulls and crucifixes in dark rooms  
and always a little rag of blue sky breaking through  
and the limpid presence of sunlight  
portraits of politicians, publicans,  
clergy, royalty and merchants of all flush  
may you escape his pain yet seize his fire  
his view of Toledo caught in the instant lightning strikes  
his figures carved out of the lightning flash  
nestled into it or fused  
like soulful grapes or pears fused in aspic  
like you and me fused in time  
two worlds two words in a slight castilian rhyme  
and at the end of the grand exhibit  
down a narrow museum hall  
a boy lighting a candle  
for an ape and a fool bemused

**photo in the new york times style section**

they were bound together with duct tape  
head to toe a three-legged, two-eyed beast  
one holding a lock one holding a key  
the middle 'foot' two legs bound together  
was grotesque and lent the creature a limp  
one eye each was all they had for steerage  
the businessman on his cell phone was staring back  
at a loss to understand this avant-garde masquerade  
a splayed two-sexed thing lumbering  
to its ultimate statement  
gave passersby the gift of pause  
made even alive minds reflect  
on the nature of our determined couplings  
as we move from wreck to wreck

**dr. frankenstein or the monster**

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

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

**on borges going blind at 54**

three years more vision now than he  
what sights have i found  
in his eternal mystery

**oh the geese**

oh the geese are nibbling  
nubs of frozen grass  
sibling feeding next to sibling  
in baseball fields and dumps  
and their feathered rumps  
are whiter than the falling snow

**twenty-two swans**

in the setting sun  
in the bright blue bay

twenty-two swans  
feathered fathers mothers  
sons and daughters  
calmly feed  
calmly play  
in the clear november light  
white and white  
and white and white  
bright in cool waters

**ever and a day**

when i think of you  
it's forever  
when i dream of you  
it's a never ending ever  
when i call you  
i hear my name  
when i love you  
i love all the same  
when i think of you  
there's no never

**a day at odds**

some day's are lived by plan  
this day arose from an old ash can  
and sprinkled chaos on mind and hand  
no act was purchased without a price  
will and intention scattered like wedding rice  
every movement met its contradiction  
nothing was done with out walking  
and walking around and around  
the lists and dreams and schemes  
a day at odds is man

**confront your pain**

you can still walk  
if only in your mind  
you can still hear  
if only in your will  
you can still see  
if only imaginarily  
you can still taste  
if only in flight and haste  
you can still feel  
if only the relentless turning  
of an ancient burning wheel

**to all trapped mice**

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

**bad back**

odd that by sleeping on the porch  
to smell the rain and feel  
the first rainy night of spring  
and see the crescent moon set  
through the lifting cloud  
and hear the peepers sing  
that the cold damp wet  
of our screened porch slate floor  
should make me roar in pain  
the toll of turning old

**old white birch**

now the peepers sing all night all day  
a medley of sun and light and mud  
the shadow of your triple trunks  
on the road light as powder of ash  
when the sun breaks out  
turns dark as three strokes  
of a Japanese brush  
dipped in ink and swiftly pulled  
by the sun across the country road  
and into the parchment run of bush

**penny in the street**

i know life is mostly suffering  
yet when I find a penny in the street  
i don't curse small offerings or riches never found  
but see in one small find the power of many  
and try to celebrate what comes around  
it helps keep mind and feet  
and piggybank firmly on the ground

**spring night**

spring night only the slightest breeze  
the belt of orion twinkling brightly  
over the black limbs of trees  
spring night the peepers sweetly sing their tune  
not an attentive cloud in the dark theater of sky  
stars hanging proudly from the pale neck of the moon  
spring night the geese gabbling softly in their bay  
the fine chair of casseopeia drifts unoccupied  
constellations dance a poor man's ballet  
spring night winter's silence finally broken  
the big dipper upside right again testifies  
that all things frozen still will now be spoken

### **the quality of salt**

the sky has the quality of salt  
he said touching the circle of the moon  
and putting his godlike finger  
to his bitter godlike lips  
on the table of the sky he barked  
I draw the salt of day and night  
the salt of moon and star  
the salt of dark and light

### **talking to god**

i woke up one morning  
and in the same voice  
that i talk to myself in  
i talked to god  
like a child with a string  
knotted to an empty can of tin  
i was in a cathedral  
with the ocean for a surging floor  
the ceiling a nave of cloudless skies  
dark earth a vast open door  
it was an endless hall of worship  
of many brightly colored mirrors  
reflecting brightly one on one all on all  
trees and fish and frogs and bugs  
every variation of man from saints to thugs  
multitudes of inventors and inventions  
shining brighter than the sun in my eyes  
were the many smiles of the sun

### **heartbreak**

there's glasses and shards of glass  
there's notebooks and the ashes of notes

there's memories spin  
there's the blood tide of next  
and next of kin  
and next of next of kin

there's waiting and wanting  
and the sink that's never filled  
there's wanting to be shakespeare  
and finding deep within  
your treasured treasure chest  
"the complete guide to co-ops and condominiums"

there's forgetting your fist kiss  
your first felt alleluia all you know  
your sunshine your water and your air  
your plants your pets your sight all you love  
your every wish your beating life  
there's hearing that irrevocable lock snap shut

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

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

like a tiny kamikaze fossilized  
in the press of pages 314 and 315 memorialized  
caught at the upper reaches  
in its failed attempt to rise a celebrant  
fine as Garamond bold in which the book was set  
the bug turned book into mausoleum collage  
and text into a small bestiary mirage  
a shiver of dark clowning  
behind every black line

**better not to know**

sometimes knowledge is poison not power  
a cruel fact can make us miserable  
enough to wish we never knew  
as in this past sunday's book review



reading about “opening skinner’s box”  
i learned how harry harlow the “scientist”  
deprived infant monkeys of their mothers  
to study the effects of maternal deprivation  
to know the effects of an ‘evil mother’;  
he designed a surrogate – “the iron maiden”  
which shot out sharp spikes  
or hurled the female babies against their cage walls  
each time they sought the steely surrogate’s embrace  
when these female monkeys matured they refused to mate  
so he designed a “rape rack” (his term)  
to subject them to eager mating males  
his isolation chamber “the well of despair”  
for two years held the creatures upside down  
unable to see or move fed through tubes  
which also drained their waste  
what punishment of the man  
can erase the knowledge of his acts?

### **the luxury of time**

june through december  
january through may  
i always loved her  
she the luxury of time  
forever new in her beauty  
she who gave me back to me  
because i took the time to see  
her beauty new forever

### **the weighted ear**

the weighted ear  
hung side of tilted head  
is an open horn of plenty  
a vortex that will hear  
if the owner is not deaf or dead  
the chip chip of the nuthatch  
the warble of the carolina wren  
the whoop of cardinal the scold of jay  
the crooning of the morning dove  
the falling click of pumpkin seed on seed  
and after the catbirds’ mews  
and purple finches trilling revenues  
and many swan lake nights and moons  
here come the flowers of the sun  
yellow petals glistening  
golden heads bending royally

as if intensely listening for some  
secret music yet to be sung

**trumpet flower**

what is the name  
of this perfect purple trumpet  
with its heart shaped leaves  
smaller than a new born's finger tip  
for every rickety earthbound ant  
a shining emerald tower  
the barking sun on the horizon  
the new day in its first fine hour  
the old haymaker does not linger  
so take note stay in your easy chair  
leave field guide unopened on the dreary shelf  
see how the dog-like early morning light  
chases its own shadows through the trees  
observe how the birds wild with delight  
speed and dip their way over sluggish bumblebees  
black and yellow and heavy  
still buzzing from their sleep  
and be content within your deepest self  
to simply call it "trumpet flower"

**the ananda magra yogi cab driver**

the taxi number was all ones and threes  
all ones and triple trinities  
"each one teach one each one teach one  
we must go deeper than the deepest sea  
we must go higher than the highest sky"  
he was driving but he was looking at me  
sometimes in the rear view mirror  
sometimes facing me directly  
back of his head facing the traffic sea  
he was from ghana  
"god," he said, "G-O-D,  
Governor of the universe  
Operator of the universe  
Destroyer of the universe  
the goal of life go deeper go higher  
and manifest our joy  
each one teach one each one teach one"  
he was on fire with conviction  
and turned a mundane ride  
into a cosmic valediction

### **circles**

it was the band aid on my ring finger  
reflected in my wedding ring's glow  
that sung the round of circling  
of again and yet again returning  
to the same enchanted places  
hearing the first spring peepers sing  
or ordering the exact same meal  
in the same restaurant two times in a row  
or walking in a recurring dream  
to be with your own true love  
the way your arms formed two hemispheres  
armed fortress against the ever widening  
round of nights and days and years  
curling round and round like smoke  
like old dogs before they drop dead asleep  
before a sympathetic waning fire  
outside the gash of a winter moon  
bandaged by the wise attendant clouds  
each new cycle all its own  
a planetary loop de loop of flesh and bone  
the snow seeming not to fall but rise  
each flake a universe alone  
journeys from earth back up to hungry skies

### **gravitas**

density can be our advantage and our friend  
unaccomplished and obtuse we float  
in the aquamarine pool of our lives  
constructing an impregnable moat  
thinking it will never end  
until one day the eager-beaver Janitor  
on fire to sweep the spotless bottom clean  
pulls the plug without thought or rancor  
and we wake up to find ourselves  
in a fickle sea of quickly falling levels  
wondering where we are and who we are  
searching for a more seaworthy boat  
or some useful carpenter's bevel

### **the sound of rain I**

the sound of rain  
is an avalanche of applause  
one then a million  
a clapping concert no pause  
thunder and lightening

clap hands in wonder  
all bowing rivers run

**the sound of rain II**

this pouring rain  
is an alphabet of applause  
multitudes of appreciation  
for the performance  
of lightning thunder storm

**the sound of rain III**

the sound of rain  
is applause  
from one to a million  
from small start  
to true rivers run

**sound of rain IV**

the sound of this rain  
is an applause  
a million droplets falling to their birth  
to soak wet the earth  
and fill full the rivers run  
to harmonize with thunder  
and taunt lightning  
just for fun

**the poetics of dog shit and new snow**

oh give me a pile of steaming dog shit  
the first to drop on the newly falling snow  
right out of the happy dog's ass  
the happy dog toothy smiling wide  
doggy grateful relieved ecstatic even  
with that goofy look dogs get after all a grin  
after being cooped up then released  
(see steadman's watercolors of defecating dogs)  
a crisp day in january when the air's so clear  
you can smell a just-lit cigarette  
or a dog evacuation thirty feet away  
when it's great to be alive  
awakened by the steaming facts of life  
all things insisting on being what they are  
the dance of leaving all memories behind  
shucking every shred of baggage  
knowing after all  
we're all just out for a short walk

new snow fine january morning  
when every dog and every man  
feel relief and lightness of being  
content to be among the muddled mundane  
we walk in the footprints of another dog and master  
in this silent snowing central park

**the cat on my lap II**

the cat on my lap  
braces himself with one paw  
against my calf  
and licks his flank  
as if this were the only thing  
he'd ever done and was born to do  
the intensity of his act  
shows how diligently all care for themselves  
self kindness in the simple act of keeping clean  
he only looks up to interrupt his duty  
when an errant carpenter bee  
bumps against the screened porch screen

**the towhee at dusk**

the eastern towhee  
sings 'drink your tea'  
just as i pour this brimming cup  
for you and me

**the color plates of summer**

water nymphs and larvae  
aphid-like insects  
flea-like insects  
earwigs and silverfish  
diving beetles and water bugs  
hopper-like insects  
plant bugs toad bugs and weevils  
grasshoppers crickets and cicadas  
mantids and walking sticks  
ants termites and dragonflies  
cockroaches and damselflies  
flies  
ticks mites and scorpions  
bees wasps and kin  
moths and butterflies

**mother dining in**

she stuffed her daughters full

by teaching them to stuff themselves  
with moon pies ring dings and tasty cakes  
their vast bellies hiding their sex  
closeting their beauty in their flesh  
leaving her the alpha goddess  
aging female stealing their new sex  
of her once beautiful daughters  
neutered in their own succulence  
they stood on the stage of a stair well  
innocent stars and sung their young hearts out  
so sweet the music that poured out of them  
that they forgot the source of their angry hunger  
more angry than infected wounds

**his brain dog got lonely**

his brain dog got lonely  
and curled up  
on the cozy mat of a book  
words purred and congealed  
and the next thing you know  
everyone was healed  
the dog became a cat

**take everything as a gift**

do not despair  
life fundamentally  
is agreeing to eat a peach  
to take each by each by each  
another breath of air

**surrounded by boat-tailed grackles**

early july dawns and dusks  
begin with their rasping cackles  
they are making one minute  
quite a sinister devilish stir  
and then suddenly the next  
as if the world had come to an end  
vanish as the noise of a radio  
whose plug was pulled out  
by an angry parent without a word  
a flock of black leaves rattling  
falling silent in a flying burst upward  
it is then that the great gasping base  
of throbbing silence is heard

**sundown in july**

the roads at sundown  
were a lace of shadow and light  
the skies the blue antithesis to night  
trembled with birdsong and the cardinal's flight  
and july comes 'round again

the cedars at sundown  
shimmered in the light of the pool  
aquamarine on aquamarine waters ruled  
metallic green dragonflies played the fool  
and july comes 'round again

the birds at sundown  
sang their feathered hearts out  
sweet urgent shouts so free  
no conventions to flout pure liberty  
and july comes 'round again

the breezes at sundown  
are soft as the merciful shade  
softness burnished in millennia's glade  
time of no import to their blunted blade  
and july comes 'round again

the mowers at sundown  
cut the warm late-day grass  
the smell of it cut is the smell of the past  
each blade yields to the blade none lasts  
and july comes 'round again

**two red squirrels and the mulberry**  
the mulberry whose shaded cools our house  
is ripe as early summer with berries  
as black as the iris of the red squirrel's eye  
enough for a platoon of red squirrels

the birds at treetop got the news out  
shouting and eating like fans at a fight  
while these two archrivals refuse to share  
give no peace take nor ask no quarter

you can follow the path of their frenzy  
by the line of birds lifting off branches  
finally one commands the entire tree  
and the loser speeds off too fast for dejection

the victor too spend to eat sits still apoplectic  
under a colony of gorging birds  
that look to him like plump inflating leaves  
or feathered mulberries that can fly

**the letters and the syllables standing all around**

love me shape me mold me they cry  
curlicues of animated ruckus full of possible significance  
put us impermanent impertinents in our proper place  
for this a revolver a whip a butterfly net  
and the proper stance is required  
otherwise they roar and wail like a wall  
blocking your exit with the nonsense of the minotaur  
in hot pursuit goring horn tips and all

they're a circus of fools fouls or fowls  
your pick wearing dunce caps laughing weakly  
walking that retarded perpendicular text  
each slouching one slavishly following the next  
like a line of clowns collapsing into one another  
or a chain gang in black and white prison suits  
singing john henry had a hammer

they've been illuminated typed taped word processed handwritten  
carved calligraphy freed like seagull tracks on a remote sea shore  
they've caused people to kill love hate faint change and more  
odd how determined is the convention of their contortions  
an iron fence whose gatekeeper is literacy  
language by language case by case tense by tense  
they march along to the songs of our humble interventions

they can be trickier than the weather mice or cats  
if asked nice they'll leap and dive like acrobats  
or don a somber face for a sad parade or masquerade  
they've been put out to sea in legal documents  
chained to the oars and flogged into sense  
they're always hanging around in lines waiting for something to happen  
hobos and vagrants all unless of course they pay the rent

one night they staged a revolution  
left every book screen newspaper and magazine blank  
filing cabinets and libraries lost all their memories  
they climbed the highest mountains and in the rarest air  
declared their independence of the sweaty convolutions of man  
with all the syllables and letters long gone people  
had to say what they remembered and remember what they said



**the small company of insects with double-decker wings**

i have become accustomed to the small company  
of insects with double-decker wings  
floating under a blue pool of cool blue sky  
my songs have become little feathered things  
whose sharp notes flee the cage of my chest  
and float above me like clouds their arms in slings  
even as I watch the broken sun pulled down  
and the swirling funnel clouds of gnats  
do whatever it is that gnats in columns do  
as lake and land and fire and forest sky  
all buzz in a blazing wheeling saw  
that cuts and burns the fragile wings of day  
and brings dark serpent night back 'round again

**bats**

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

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

exactly when they go to bed remains a mystery  
even when the magnetic light of the long-gone sun is spent  
against the pitch blue darkening sky you can see  
their determined harvesting under venus and the summer stars  
on lakes the jokesters nearly join you in the boat hit and run

the thought of extracting one from your hair  
the little razor teeth the rabid nightmare grin  
gives everyone the creeps the chills the heebie-jeebies  
better to imagine them soft chestnut brown hanging from barn rafters  
digesting bugs sleeping the live-long day wrapped in their own cozy wings  
their gyroscopes and radar systems off

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

### **fireflies**

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

what by day was a hundred shades of green now reads black  
and their lights are calling our childhoods and summers back  
and giving the earthbound crickets reasons to sing  
what softness can compare to the way their little lights illuminate the great envelope of  
dark  
and the way the receptive night receives their collective scintillating joy  
their magic is irreversible and forever abundant

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

### **some things i learned from my mother**

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

to admit all is flawed yet infinitely interesting  
to rest in the vast bosom of a flawed god  
who if friend sends us mysterious mixed messages  
but smiles enough through cloud to keep us brave  
to be thankful for all

**old pear**

in late july the old pear tree  
becomes a squirrel avalanche  
they scurry down and up red and gray  
to wrestle the tough young fruit  
from the drooping branches  
and hurry triumphant away  
their hearts beating like tiny drums  
their bright eyes shining with glee

**your gift**

never doubt your gift  
there's no need to promote it  
it will like the falcon on the falconer's glove  
open its wings rise up and lift  
every stroke another wing beat of your love

**big trees strong wind**

that they bend  
that they don't come crashing down  
to a splinter's ragged raging end  
that they make a lovely sound  
something between a whisper and a hush  
that they answer the calling wind and musical air  
their wake a plush airborne magic carpet  
instruments of rough and tender weather  
echo and rhyme together  
they are first breath of the now living  
and last breath of the dying now

**my letters**

some days my letters seem all dead paper  
other days though mute black and white  
they seem to come alive  
candles given fire by a lit taper

**the field grass is high now**

the field grass is high now  
in full seed the seed already dry  
the crickets are singing fall in now

flashing their voices like heat lightning  
the black eyed susans and purple asters  
are coming full into their own now  
and the traffic of heat and thunder storms  
rides heavy in the mid summer air  
the queen anne's lace and golden rod  
are starting to bloom now  
the hymn of summer almost old  
the clouds at eight o'clock are gold  
the entire field is alive and humming  
the spots where the deer have sleep  
grass beds pressed flat the image of their dreams  
the bats are coming out to celebrate the dusk  
large beetles are flying waist high  
down the corridors of a narrow mown path  
like truckers beginning their all-night drive  
emerald crimson chocolate metallic green and bronze  
dragonflies hover above storm puddles catching gnats  
there are so many things to drive me away from this  
all my cares and vanities and silly woes  
but all in all I persist I persist  
in leaving it all behind in a sequence of breaths  
far behind far beyond the stars

### **the heart's a blind bird**

the heart's a blind bird  
bumping against a screened-porch screen  
the light of the setting sun  
makes the screen seem to disappear  
and yours and mine and others' hearts are deceived  
by mean illusion when in fact an exit is a wall  
all hearts act on silly hopes and false beliefs  
the other side calling bright and fair  
usually proves to be a history of lies  
unless the gods that cut the screen  
with their ancient carving knives  
give free passage and brighter lives  
but why be misled why beg and whimper feebly  
why not simply fly away elsewhere  
and find a quiet place that defies  
illusions pleas for mercy stubborn gods  
cul de sacs dead ends or places without cheer  
may this blind bird fly away to open skies  
may all these blind birds fly away free

### **clouds in august**

the clouds above the hudson are so low  
you could hit them with a baseball thrown  
from an old row boat in center river

**old shoulders**

shoulders aching in the morning  
limber by late afternoon  
aching again when sleep starts calling

**picasso's last self portrait • june 30 1972**

**crayon and colored crayons**

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

**the house where order sings**

this is the house where order sings  
where robins hop across the lawn at dusk  
where sunflowers turn up their faces to say hello  
where the warm air is spiced with summer musk  
this is the house with welcoming lights  
where floors and carpets bow down to the broom  
where cats sleep soundly day and night  
where the beds are always comforting  
where the smell of fresh cut grass fills every room  
where doors and windows are always smiling  
and smiling back are the sun and the moon  
and forever gentle time flows forever slow