

**SELECTED POEMS: 1994 - 2008**



**Gregory J. Furman**

# “1995 & 1996”

## Spring Poem for Wanda

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

Time, without fail,

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

## red april

### I.

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

### II.

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

### III.

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

### IV.

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

### V.

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

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

will bring yet another sharper test

**VI.**

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

**VII.**

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

**white april**

**I.**

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

**II.**

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

**III.**

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

**IV.**

confused robins  
lost their lawns

confused worms  
lost their robins.

**V.**

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

**VI.**

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

**VII.**

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

**blue april**

**I.**

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

**II.**

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

**III.**

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

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

**IV.**

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

**V.**

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

**VI.**

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

**VII.**

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

**requiem for a nantucket rabbit**

**I.**

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

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

## **II.**

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

## **III.**

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

## **IV.**

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

## **Algonquin**

### **morning to early afternoon**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

### **early evening and dusk**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **on the death of a rat**

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

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

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

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

### **city hawks hunting**

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

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

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

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

## **Talking To Cats**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **lights of fire**

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

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

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

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



## **economies of scale (1997)**

### **despair**

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

### **old japanese wood block print**

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

### **the yellow fields of breughel the elder**

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

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

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

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

off the blacksmith's back

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

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

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

### **my mother's hands**

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

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

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

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

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

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

my mother's hands

contain the healings  
of a lifetime supply of bandaids

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **the other voices of things (1997)**

### **the pigeon**

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

### **fire log**

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

### **winter tulips**

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

### **the crystal pitcher**

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

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

### **the knife**

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

### **the mirror**

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

### **the other black sock**

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

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

### **kudzu**

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

### **the fallen birch**

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

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

### **the contented glass**

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



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

## **cartoons (1999)**

### **betty boop**

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

### **dr. frankenstein or the monster**

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

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

### **the wooden fold-up toy**

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

### **there's a little man**

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

### **the little boy**

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

### **hero with a thousand faces**

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

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

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

### **aboriginal dream**

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

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

### **one sunny sunday**

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

### **pumpkin lane (1999)**

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

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

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

not hearing silence  
until peepers and grackles  
begin their chorus

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

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

washing dishes

white throated sparrow spies in  
through the steamed window

shoes soaked with dew  
dandelions and bees  
suits of same yellow

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

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

candle pays no mind  
today or tomorrow  
burn equally bright

sleeping cat  
one eye opens slightly  
the catnip mouse

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

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

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

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

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

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

white dogwood blossoms  
in white ironstone pitcher  
inside fire still burns

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

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

brown trout in net  
the will to live  
never stronger

hangnail moon  
clipped and cast into orbit  
junipers swoon

one wing drooping  
the injured robin eats  
drowned worms from puddles

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

cloud over mountain  
bull over cow  
here come the calves now

## **salt point (2001)**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

bridges now different  
structures approach an absence  
the world trade center

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

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

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

seeing my own blood

realizing i cut myself  
the red butcher block

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

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

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

## **only words (2002)**

### **seven mornings after midnight**

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

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

VI

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

VII

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

### **training chickadees**

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



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

### **the whole concept of hairdos**

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

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

### **talking to the moon**

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

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

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

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

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

### **coco on the beach**

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

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

### **seven theories of composition**

I

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

II

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

III

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

#### IV

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

#### V

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

#### VI

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

#### VII.

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

#### **lone oak in a corn field**

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

that slept beneath you  
in the summer rain

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **comedy and tragedy**

the one full of kindness  
died soonest

the other fueled by rage  
lived until a ripe old age

### **the sadness of horses in the rain**

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

## **vanitas**

### **I**

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

### **II**

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

### **III**

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

### **IV**

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

### **V**

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

## **VI**

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

## **VII**

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

## **VIII**

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

## **IX**

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

## **X**

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

## **XI**

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

## **XII**

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

## **XIII**

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

## **XIV**

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

## **XV**

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

## **the bureaucrat**

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

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

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

### **the invention of penne**

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

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

### **phoebe's song**

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

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

most simple most sweet  
you simply announce yourself

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

### **among my father's gifts**

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

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

### **among my mother's gifts**

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

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

### **falling zebras**

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

### **the flowers they are less fortunate than us**

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



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

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

### **advice to chipmunks**

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

### **never having shaved with a straight razor**

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

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

never having shaved with a straight razor

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

### **through a dark glass darkly**

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

## **love and freedom**

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

## **only words II (2003)**

### **and still I hear the meadowlark sing**

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

and still I hear the meadowlark sing  
in the platinum light

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

and still I hear the meadowlark sing  
in the platinum light

the remains of the trade center all gone  
the ground sanitized swept clean  
the multitudes of photos of the missing dead  
tattoo construction sites  
the sad subway of our past

and still I hear the meadowlark sing  
in the platinum light

the birds are burning  
falling like souls lost in flight  
we are still breathing their bodies  
as the charred hudson forgets the sea  
and flows into the night

and still I hear the meadowlark sing  
in the platinum light

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

and still I hear the meadowlark sing  
in the platinum light

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

and still I hear the meadowlark sing  
in the platinum light

**the farthest kill at little big horn**

his silent obituary stone a paraphrase  
of antoine de st. exupery's  
"I fly because it releases my mind  
from the tyranny of petty things."  
and fly he did  
the west point case study

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

### **for garcia lorca**

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

### **miro and his landscapes**

it’s a bit cute  
the way he surgically depicts  
the carnage and cartoon-like battle  
that is life at its most primary  
how i love miro

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

### **cricket at midnight**

you could do a lot worse  
you get to sing  
all summer long  
well into fall if you're tough  
watch summer nights come down on the fields  
like the hand of a heartbroken mother

on the brow of a dying son  
hear the neighboring dog howl  
to his cousins the coyotes  
life is not too bad  
the woodpile for safety  
from the voracious mole  
night cooling your dark earth down  
the moon and stars your nightlights  
and for your tiny insect soul  
each new day at dawn  
a sweet drink of dew  
served on every blade of grass  
just for you  
black as a tuxedo

### **what is it about bugs?**

it's their dopey fury

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

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

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

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

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

when stranded in one

the dragonflies  
hovering like helicopters  
patrolling for gnats

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

the goal-oriented ants  
whose only satisfaction it seems  
is dragging objects larger than they long distances  
forming conga lines of diligence  
in pursuit of food, battle, relocation, or sex  
once in great while you might observe one  
washing his fierce ebony mandibles  
like a cat pawing its jowls after a good meal

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

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

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

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



it's their dopey fury  
that carries them in mindless multitudes on multitudes on  
millions on millions of generations on

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

### **the last flowers of fall**

it's as if all of nature  
conspired to the condition of Manet  
on his deathbed, his leg amputated  
and the infection that would kill him  
festering, alas, blooming  
even then he began again to paint it new  
a last series of flowers given him by friends  
white lilacs, a single rose, a lone chrysanthemum  
to join him by his narrow bed

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

### **monterey bay**

six trawlers with motorized dinghies  
setting the big circular loop of their purse seines  
the gulls myriad as flies  
hills far across the bay a shade of rose  
bay waters a shade of turquoise blue  
that would in a watercolor feel fake

the great black-backed gulls soaring  
the kelp beds black in the last light of day  
the treeless hills now purple  
and birds and the reflections of birds  
moving over the dark waters  
the sea otters using their tails like rudders  
to stabilize their cute float  
never impatient in forage  
comedians on their backs whacking away  
at mussels or clams on their bellies  
lolling lugs on a rolling rug of sea  
in their own living room the bay  
joined by companion gulls  
waiting for a free feed  
the harbor seals, earless sea pups,  
barking goodbye to the day  
the cormorants skimming the surface  
their black reflections shadowing them below  
red kayaks yellow kayaks a single silver canoe  
the pelicans flying low and orderly near surface  
like a line of school children in brown uniforms  
suddenly set free from their classes  
to explore the dark room of this great aquarium  
such a surprise of light and dark  
that it is a radiating miracle  
that everyone observing on shore  
has not spontaneously burst  
into the holy flames of alleluias  
light and shadow in intricate celebration  
like one of mozart's coronation masses  
a crowd of gnats tiny black notes  
drinking the ink from my felt tip pen  
day's door closes  
on monterey bay  
in a blaze

### **dreamer**

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

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

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

### **the cliché of melting snowmen**

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

### **chopping wood**

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

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

**III**  
buddha would approve

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

#### **IV**

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

#### **V**

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

#### **VI**

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

#### **VII**

the alliance of breath and light  
the marriage of the empty and the full  
the taper of the handle  
the shining arc of the ax  
the sharpening of the iron  
measure of sinew and the man  
measure of iron and the wood  
the ax head's iron  
the ax head's edge  
the oak handle's pull

the muscle of the man  
measure of what one could do  
and what one should  
measure of the man in full

### **VIII**

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

### **IX**

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

### **X**

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

### **XI**

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

### **XII**

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

### **XIII**

“i am the fire  
which devours you rare  
you and your waiting hours.

i live only to transform you,  
you wooden heirs  
of the infinite ever-flowing air.”

#### **XIV**

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

#### **XV**

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

#### **ode to liverwurst**

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

oh exotic spread of finely ground innards  
squozen into a casing tube  
defying the cold cut slicer  
demanding a warm knife  
how many times were you sliced  
and traded for a baloney and swiss  
or peanut butter jelly and banana  
who cares if you're odd  
you have your loyal offal fans  
breakfast lunch an dinner

oh creamy mystery meat spread  
your seasons are fall and winter

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

### **kisses on the window**

on the Amtrak from new york to rhinecliff  
looking out the window  
ice and snow like frozen tears  
on the moving train of winter  
the words show against a setting sun  
the palisades and george washington bridge in sight  
written on the window of the train  
from within or without not clear  
with a warm finger's hasty scrawl  
two crude valentines hearts and the words  
once for a special passenger  
but now a message for all  
"my kisses are frozen on this window!"

### **saying good bye to mousey**

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

## II

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

from the other side to be won  
his voice becomes all the gone voices  
begging the eternal question  
who are you weeping for?  
and i say silently reeling  
for loss of victory  
for all the pain to be  
for mousey you and me  
and i say silently reeling  
goodbye my friend  
goodbye my friends  
goodbye to mousey you and me  
living on water and air  
goodbye you vanishing and vanished  
you vanquishing and vanquished  
goodbye you wishing well earth  
you wheeling stars you pulsing seas  
you snows you rains you little ghost of melting memories

*February 18, 2003 sometime after 8 p.m.  
Hudson Highlands Veterinary Medical Group*

## **blind river (2004)**

### I

this river flowed  
like a dream flags relay



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

## **II**

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

## **III**

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

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

#### **IV**

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

#### **V**

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

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

### **the beast of all holocausts speaks**

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

### **into the teeth of the sun**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**to all trapped mice**

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

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

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

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

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

### **better not to know**

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

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

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

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

### **white flowering pear**

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

### **bats**

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

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

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



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

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

### **fireflies**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

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

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

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

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

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

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

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

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

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you

not you breathing it

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

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

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

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

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

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

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

defying gravity rhyme or reason without stress or a care

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

it takes your breath  
it breathing you  
not you breathing it

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

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

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

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

### **taking penis for a walk**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **red squirrel's burial**

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

### **my father's eyes on thanksgiving**

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



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

### **late october lady bug hatch**

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

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

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

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

moving as if their race and tiny lives depended on it

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

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

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

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

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

#### **crayon and colored crayons**

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

#### **the house where order sings**

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

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

## **walking out of paradise (2005)**

### **the happy bush**

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

### **cedar burning**

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

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

### **clothes on a line**

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

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

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

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

### **the sadness that follows squashing a vole with a car**

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

## **peonies**

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

## **some exotic birds**

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

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



the great blue-winged finale

**amaryllis**

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

**god**

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

## **log**

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

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

## **the sow's soliloquy**

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

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

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

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

## **cans't thou draw out leviathan**

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

### **road kill**

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

### **first hatch of winter**

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

### **sea wrack**

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

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

### **the wounded god**

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

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

### **periwinkle**

the winter was dark dawns  
with many deep freezings

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

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

## **new jersey childhood**

### **I. First Memory**

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

### **II. Second Memory**

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

### **II. Roselle 1952**

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

### **III. Escape**

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

### **IV. Birthdays**

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

### **V. The Dream**

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

### **shy sparrow**

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

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

small sparrow shy sparrow



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

### **cows**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **the canary's complaint**

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

never more than now never more

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

## **the cruelty of the cricket the farmer and the moon**

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

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

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

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

## **flying over el paso**

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

## **last pear**

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

## **to all the words**

at once present yet strangely absent  
responsible yet not responsible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **small town halloween parade**

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

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

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

a walking microscope and sigmund freud

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

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

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

## **spindrift and small goodbyes (2005 – 2008)**

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

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

### **enigma machine**

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

### **woodpecker tree**

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

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

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

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

### **reading wallace stevens on a snowy sunday morning**

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

### **child crying in an airport**

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

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

### **manet's 'a bar at the folie bergere**

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

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

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



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

### **hyde park mews in january**

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

### **winter**

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

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

**my sister bernadette  
and her ducks**

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

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

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

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

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

the only thing more golden  
than this memory was their feathers

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

### **the sadness of small goodbyes**

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

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

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

### **dumb as rocks**

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

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

### **night lawn**

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

### **two willows**

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

**for wanda**

**on the planting of two willows by our pond**

**june 1, 2006**

### **gull**

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

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

### **moose**

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

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

### **sacks of diamonds**

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

### **great blue heron**

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

### **sparrow in terminal 3**

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

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

### **the nail's prayer**

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

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

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

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

blast the rust from our weariness

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

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

### **the clothespin's prayer**

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **the end table lamp's prayer**

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

### **the paperweight's prayer**

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

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

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

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

### **on travel**

why go anywhere  
when our there  
is always  
now and here

### **the paperclip's prayer**

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

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

### **the hard-boiled egg's prayer**

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

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

### **the bug zapper's prayer**

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

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

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

### **the pooper-scooper's prayer**

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

### **the ant trap's prayer**

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

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

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

### **the rubber band's prayer**

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

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

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

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

### **the potato peeler's prayer**

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

### **night driving in dehli**

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

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

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

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

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

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

staring down our four-wheeled arrogance

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

### **argentine beef**

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

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

### **pine beetle on my country office desk**

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

### **wheel and net**

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

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

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

we smile back

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

**30,000 words**