Sharp Tone

A Collection of Poems

Richard P. Gabriel
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Shower/Cold Near Dachau

The cloud slapped shut
like a lid on a boiling pot,
clouds of snow knocked loose rained
down on the stream edging past,
shoulders furtively turned,
against the razorwire rules
you've built around here.
The color of the inside of anything
shut down tight. Lace curtains like slices
of snowfallings. You told me once
of a pretty song, how it kicked
away a snowcloud and painted near purple
the sky with a filtered sun-dark light. Is this the world
we're standing on—or is it just the sudden
hardening of the chillcold beneath our feet?
Junk Park

Discarded sticks playing trees,
mounds piled up by yellow hydraulic machines,
yellowed swampgrass in a marsh as cold
as your hands binding sluggish movements
as a sign of life,
the sun dropping has abandoned us behind a row
of houses. Where I come from they play

a foolish game, one like the children
play in this park thrown off and dusted down
beside the highroad. In the cold air that day
the warm parts of our faces were placed in red,
the hidden parts ran wet as water.

For me hearts beat, for you
hearts beat, and this park is the space
between those offset beats.
Of Something Else

How slowly can the last article
of clothing fall past the most seductive

part of you? Could be it catches
(in the)
jam of door against door

slamming shut on the train
railing away from the preposition

that starts with b? Something old judging
(by the)
rust in your freshly washed hair. Hair

smell or odor freshly erased
(wait—Neil Young is soloing—this music

relates to his fingers in
an unexpected way. If your

last article

fell like the unexpected flake of snow on the head
of Neil’s vintage junk Les Paul, tuning

machines might be
<a line containing "last" and some dots of elision>)

by a songline in blues whose
microtone bends hint at dominance . . . .

I mean dominant.
All this to say I waved instead
Vinyl Polychron

time his song phased out
of joint kilter tune time money sync
with me and all us buckwild boys he sat on the sidewalk holding
a sign in cardboard neoclassic style of bum and I
knew places he could get that but the marker or crayon
where was that from it said U.S.M.C. which means 1967
all that a cakewalk through flamethrowers and pole charges
and interlocking bunkers I knew places those he could get but
the cakewalk where was that from they don't stop no more
he said they work their fucking .coms unbrickworked
though clickmade lay down pavement tile mausoleums
final liquidations vinyl liquefactions linoleum defections his song tuned
in and she walked by bleeding rich a rich henna hair
and thin vibrant cloth that fell from a high arch of her ass
clung as if tight but hung as if wind to advertise her available
assailable malleable mouthable of worth and now come
come correct of the two songs one olive grunt one silk ass the henna red hair
black marker cardboard sign singing singeing slinging signing
soundless song song and one more neuron path made my head was in
Some Kind of Cakewalk

She gave me a good wound hiking away
business-like in thick highheels like hiker-punk
meets tux on a windy day.
The air is filled with her secrets expressed
in music like a wind or rustling branches
nude of buds in winter coming on.
Not a permanent wound aching after all,
but one demanding rest and care in a warm, safe
foul-smelling place with men and women engaging
voices. A good wound takes out the engagement
permanently but leaves one fit on the perimeter or more.
The good wound must dig nails deep or fracture the solid
and make the blood flee the site of any occasional
or happenstance friendly fire. The good wound
floods the fires with cooling blood and stains the skin
with the smallest but most richly detailed tattoo. Make me
the good wound.
Where She Danced

On top of Route 66 the desert air can be dry
and small movements in the air can mean
what they want. Since Route 66 could not

make the leap to full color it small-faded
out like any pricked-awake dream and what’s left
I’m sitting on. Your redhot dance barefoot

across the blacktop was a shimmering sham-dance
seen from the backseat of fading outasightings.
You told me 6 of 60 dreams in that quarter

moon we had strange sex & to tell
the truth: Route 66 did not fade out:
you chopped it up and I threw it away.
Swift Cold Stream

No one told me Dachau was a peaceful town,
a neat suburb of carnival-loving Munich,
Swiss in its devotion to proper windows,
and prosperous—votive homes in Catholic
rows—and near the edge of town they built a fenced

enclosure meant for safety—so small—with one
yoke-like building of unknown motive with neatly
rowed foundation blocks formed before it.
Along one long side a narrow swift stream of curious blue—
unearthly—with bubbles of turbulence

made on its surface speeds while branchy twigs and stems
look in on it. Like a side pocket they built a peaceful park
of oak and fir and neat Dachau grass mowed close
with a sandy brick incubation house sitting
low with redbrick roof tiles and industry-sized

chimney. Two rows of neatly planted poplars
line the road between the barrack rows
and it’s here I think someone like me fell
with arms bent back in this safe enclosure—so
large—with the thought of floating swiftly down

the curious stream into the peaceful
town of Dachau hiding as an ostrich would
under the curious blue sky.

March 25, 2000
Everything Will Be Done in Small Steps

Her house. My car. Her window.
Like Romeo fattened by slaughter
I will receive the lovely sounds
your fingered manipulation
you will make on her tonight.
Streetlights will reflect off her window
onto the tuning dial of my AM radio
as I listen to the radio man count off minutes
sent to him by digital pulses from a nuclear clock.
You will do her alright,
but she will wait for the buzz
radiating from the end of your hooked
finger like the 1 by 1 tick from a fissioning clock.
She will receive it; I will receive the guitar’s
digitally crafted phase shifts made to replace
the musical sound interference makes
out of a signal and its bounced twin.
The only small steps left in the world
are analog: your soft index finger
and Romeo’s last meal.

March 25, 2000
A Love Song to Most of You from the Deserts of Arizona

We spoke in tongues not to praise ourselves jabberlike, but to tease passing ears who might have heard in plain words closing doors and then dreamt sad lines. Nearby, longhorns gathered and locked horns in their grazing, the sound of their earthly lives sang in the air.

Of all the doors that could have, the mirror one reflecting two imaginationary points became our flux.

Plastic clicks, uncrossing horns, the metallic shift-sound of unlocking horns—can we ever unlock the tangled speeches we rehearsed before each other?

Cattle sing a foreign song—their move and sway while swarming, their self-to-self measured distance discourse. If you cannot speak, move, as they do, in ever enclosing circles.
Our Numb Circle

I have fallen like wind for you
but in your heart I cease to exist
even through the impression I made
in the taught stillness of your limbs.
How did my image enter your eyes?
Did the curtain of your pupils lift soundlessly up?

Did I enter into your numb circle,
the center around which you move
in soft strides, powerful as any woman
in her dance of strength? Did my wind-words
fall still?

You have waited watchfully, bored
and tired by the enclosure that holds
nothing more. Outside it there is no further
world. You watch the passing wind
as it has passed a thousand times before
in your tired panther gaze.
I Play Guitar

and the pads of my fingers press the sharp metal strings against each fret to make a soft note buzzing in two tones from fret to bridge and fret to nut

and the tone of buzzing wires excites the magnetic fields firmly established by three clustered bars of vintage Texas single-coil pickups on my tobacco sunburst ash-body Strat bolt-on maple neck with rosewood fretboard and sends bursts of electric signals out the jack and through the fat copper strands of a monster cable electric guitar cord with gold cold contact jacks and into the Dunlop crybaby wah-wah pedal where a foot-position activated variable-frequency-pass filter mimics the cry of a lonely woman

and from the wah a sculpted slice of tonal energy is by another monster cable fed to the gaping mouth of a Sylvania 12AX7 vacuum tube preamp stage that is fed to another and then fed by a cable into a loop whose deepest parts are A/D converters and digital sculptors which through a process not unlike time travel and not unlike breaking physical laws press the signal into the shape of a woman's cry in a French cathedral transmitted by AM radio over the cornfields of Kansas in a phased recombination in a chorus of like-minded converts before moving back through digital -> analog converters and back once more...
to the funnel of a 6AU6
class A push-pull power amp
section that feeds to a load of 2
8-ohm 12” Celestion speakers
and the sound I make with my 1949
quarter/pick as it pounds
the strings into chaos

and sweat from my head
and hands coats the loving
strings that I bend
to haunting microtones
and sustain in sensual pulses
of vibrato is fed
as a cry upon cry
through the wah

to the preamp tubes
that burst and bend
from the strain
of the overload I make
that is coolly with reason
patched into the shapes
of a lonely world
and into

the hungry jaws of the power
stage and into

the cluttering fabric of the speakers

making a feedback shrill shout
and whispering cry

like a song might sound like
like a bird might fly like
like forget might like
like loss

unlike a mistaken tone
or a slip on note
or the language I mean

being invented through
mechanisms of unfettered
distortion.
Art Struggling in the Weeds

When art is spoken
all alarms are ignored,
and the death of women by saber
and the cleansing of blades
on their white silk dresses,
perhaps their blinking eyes
make faint applause,
or so thinks the god of art
who stands in the aisle, saber
at the ready, and sharp.
What If All Were Or

your hand shake
your hand shakes
your hands shake
does the thin not fully formed veneer
of science unstick in places
my tongue/fig
or plum
above the top of the sky
your hand unsticks in places
above the top of the sky science shakes
my tongue not fully formed
your fig shakes in places
not fully formed
this tongue
may
not
only
plumb the sky
Mystery Us

standing with ankles crossed
her left toes
beside her right ankle
in black to
accent her hips
make like: dark wine glass
squeeze her lips
hide her sex
hold her pee
bunch her ass
invite my stare
repel my approach
pull all eyes from her small breasts
mime her cheeks
scratch her leg
or
shroud the woman
in holy black
All Along

The room I write
in is as
small as
me sitting
+ a table

a boat prow
atop a third-floor porch
and three windows—on each side.

The Three Voices:

cars fuming in wait
for the harbor tunnel
waiting for deep dark
in dark
is there
anything, really, to say
about it?

ships hooked
to their moorings
hoping to slip
on the next tide
will a banjo
play that happy song?

planes caught
by the nose
by gangways really
and melancholy steps will
people take their places
in lines through air?

A Fourth Voice:

there is one
no?
Page of Mount Parnasus

Everyone has a last message.
A feeling they’ve had that persists
or forms their basis.

A song that impairs hearing
or feels good played too loud
too often.

_I was your everlasting._
_I waited doglike._
_I left behind myself._

A drink that unsticks
the parts of your mouth
that fasten at night.

_Find dust_
_that settles_
_all bets._

Make mine sentimental
like the maple syrup
he reduced from sap those years

_my father walked as himself._
_The time he left behind._
_Cure it in wormwood_

—_to slow down_
_every thought you have,_
—_to kill each one._
whoever copies this sacred text without permission will be damned

I beseche the o my lorde
lyghten and pourge my memorye
and with the brightnes of thy light
illumyn and confyrme my
forgettinges with the oder
of the switenes of thy holy sprite.
Helpe me and quicken me as
the error of infydelytie and the fylthines
of my syght hast gayzed
on the nayked bodye
of Shrifa. Helpe me pourge
my memorye of her owtwarde
partes. Infforme replenishe instrue
restore correct claryfy and
refreshe me that I may
be the man I wonc was.
Ruth Said It Best

This Winter the house fell down,
as if the sun had changed brightness
it took a minute for my eyes to adjust
enough to the changed sight to register it.
My car balanced on a fulcrum of plowed
snow in front of her barred driveway,
and beans of heat—black soot and sand—
worked to melt the last ramps of snow, I
stepped from the car seeing joists and beams,
shingles, window frames, windows themselves,
tables, chairs, couches, and beds, pictures and picture
frames in loose piles all in a loose pile
where her house once was. She moved
on only last Fall, moved as her cravings
pulled her and hatreds pushed, old
in her ways, her sharp scraping skin
hanging from her arms, her face, her voice
like a razor, she is held together by a thin
coat of displeasings and dislikes. The house

held together by the strong coats of paint
she layered on it, like the lasting coats of pain
she laid on me and my father—he had the sense
to let his heart give out last Spring. In the center
of the piles smooth river stones from the chimney
lay, cracked from the strain and cold; it once
formed the center of the house, and even
it—held together by the strongest mortar
he could mix—has given out. Father, pray
for me to help her move once more
this Spring, move as only the faithful can,
into this falsely restored and fallen home.
Hair Talc

Dark she walks besides me in a woods
what she says is nothing you plainly
see or is it here her deepest thoughts are mo-
no-
silly-
la-
bles and even those are crypto
6 layers of crypto stack
ain’t nothing written but in loveyellow
ink on like yellow paper o dark woods
besides me she’s walking in
but listen I hear secret parts
rubbing together what pubic
hair is I figured is cheap grease
keeps from rubbing too
hard hotsteaming parts on others
helps stop rash running I keep
talking besides her
but she talks I’m rash
I tell her contents (o loving notes) she says
love stuff’s trash quit
fucking spamming me
Packings

My girl's Pop's going to visit A'nt Verna for the last time this Spring.

“I’m coming up to see you for the last time,”
prob’ly what he said, and God’s disquiet

is a twinge om’ nous—how unlike
last from first. My girl’s no girl

neither, she’s passed into
her 40’s and like for us all

her robust packings
are feeling last at last. Joints

get stiff, joint’s another story.
We’re dog-eared from lookin’ up.

A’nt Verna once had puffed lips
and a vertical smile the boys

like to make signs of the cross
with kissin’. I’d go

myself, but it’d be
my first, and I’m not

sure how full a circle
God appreciates now

that some folks have gone
to see him for the last time.
40 Love

Tag, we played it for days.
Across 40 from Flagstaff east
Through New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas,
Right across the Mississippi. Corvette
And Mustang, I was drawn to your color,
Maybe you liked my acceleration.
I paced you from behind and watched
Your rich henna hair fall around your headrest.

When you stopped for gas I slowed,
Stopped. If I lost you I'd
Rely on my radar detector
And the stealth of my headlights
Turned back dispersing seeking signals—
120, 130, and once 140,
Whatever it took to catch you.

Nights I'd write notes.
You'd raise your fingers as I passed.

All the small lovely places—
Leupp Corner, San Jon, Benonine, Pharoah, Lonoke—
That morning east of Amarillo,
The mist held inches above the ground,
Layer of wet clear air,
Thick fog above that a thin blanket,
The heavy morning sun rising up.

I lost you in Memphis.
I crossed right behind you.

I sped.
I waited.
I searched until night fell in Asheville.
Did I tell you poets weep there?
Naked

Is there a word that fills more of us with joy, spawns more optimism, speaks of more possibilities, fills us more fully with the lust for art? Naked Lunch, naked women. Think of the clothed man sipping his tea with a naked woman. The contrast is exquisite. The Story of O. Think of Manet's painting, *Déjeuner Sur L’Herbe*, or Bow Wow Wow’s version in photo cover art: *See Jungle! See Jungle! Go Join Your Gang. Yeah! City All Over! Go Ape Crazy!*

Two men sitting, clothed—tangled legs—a naked her. Any man’s fantasy. The day she first strips before you, you believe her nakedness—there are her breasts, their nipples and aureoles, there is her waist and bellybutton, there are her hips, her thighs, her ass, and all of them in the proportions of a woman. You have fallen for a woman’s finest trick: You believe her naked, you need her to be, you must see all of her. She is not naked. Your desire makes you see what is not there. You have been fooled. Believe it. Trust me. Picture her standing before you, naked, arms hurled toward heaven, legs spread apart manly style. Stare, stare, think, consider—you will see her naked every time. You will swear to it. Take her picture and study it day after day. Use a magnifying glass. Put it in Photoshop and mangle it every way you can. Scan it in 3600 dpi. Zoom in. She is not naked. The parts she cares about are hidden. The ones she touches remain away from your eyes. They are not in her mind. They are right there between her legs, right where you expect them. Look closely, between her legs is a mound of hair, long and coarse as any beard, deep and thick as jungle growth, curled and tangled as gang colors, opaque as any nun’s panties. Go ape crazy but she ain’t there. It’s just hair. Lips, lips, a hood, colors pink to purple, a small penis-shaped head, openings, engorgement in excitation, shades of skintone in variation. That’s naked. Who made you believe in hair?

A woman’s hair is long in youth—the pretty girl you first love has flowing hair like the mane on a groomed thoroughbred, and shiny. As she ages into each relationship, she cuts it shorter—to make it easier to handle, she says. Your remorse expands and she just laughs.

Listen: Can she make it any plainer how stupid men are?
Dodge 50

Call me stupid but the day was pretty,
even if that punk across the street was under arrest,
dope I suppose, cuffed in a plastic bracelet,
sat down politely by the cops until the pokey wagon showed,
sitting on a cement curb—they even put a jacket over his wrists
so he'd appear reclining not detained. And the old black man,
roses in one hand & a paper bag bunched on a neck in the other
sitting down with his bag-carrying hand touching the brim
of his hat before he sat and sobbed for an hour. I touched
you once and you were full of you, to the brim packed and substantial.
I'll bet both those guys thought we were ready to trot,
trying it on for size, gazing at slowburning leaves in mid-Fall,
smelling each smell brought up from the plains to the east.
They would be wrong.

Pretty is sentimental—poets beware. Even a dog
probably smells the flowers a little prettier when he's tracking
a bitch in heat. Any kind of animal that uses its nose to hunt rut.
I smelled you that day, but I wasn't falling.
A punk selling dope to buy his cave bitch a new sled;
roses itching for the gutter. No way I'm cat-eyeing you,
Miss pretty hot and tempting in a sweater from Milan.

A pretty day makes you love. Sentimental.
I'm carrying no bag for you. No up north trip for me.
Poets warned me. Shakespeare's crap—I give it a miss.
And aren't I pretty anyways.
the first step in your quest to become linguistically obscure

Makes no difference who you are
words go one way: left to right.
In. Top to bottom. Ost'n erewti enigami.
Yes, folded enigma. They went thataway (→).

You don't say.

Daily sex (me) dyslexia (you).
English. As “in your head.” Some Japanese characters
(I) like it like this.

How do I fell? Postamor . . . . All. Us.

We have our own thoughts. Except rarely.

Word order makes order, unless:
:whom You
:what Love

Who? Me!

Thattaway (←)?

Funny grammars make funny gran’ma’s.

Typorthodoxy in the alternative.

Ok, upstream is not downstream.
I can feel you standing behind me
the flesh of your thumbpads in my ears
your hands splayed up like moose antlers
wiggling.

Step 1: For words to go one way
you need words.

*Except etc Hebrew & like
Lesser Birds

They one by one fall
An erotics moves toe to toe
A denial could not bend back
Our hips space apart
There is only one no to go around
Can I touch the infinitesimal circle of the journey
A watchtower is not all around
Like S, N, and R, like a man their pace
Wear fire-fangled feathers the first time we fuck
In the spectrum of know and wonder
A funny wind did stand up

Windfall on the park bench
a spectrum of erotics wondered and moved
first deny our feathers, fuck, bend
pace only our hips, snare, watch the no go around and around

Can I circle the infinitesimal journey

Touch
Yesterday This Was a Park

Dark heals,
sometimes it’s like cutting out a cancer with the tip of a stiletto
and an ice cube painkiller.
Imagine a growth of skin shaped like the early part
of an explosion.
Hold ice against it
until the sensation has moved twice
from heat to cold and back.
Pinch the growth in the jaws of sharp new pliers; pull.
When the blade is done with its slice
you know immediately
you can remove the knife quickly
from its nearness to your precious body.
Push
a cloth over the wound.

bandage, cloth, skirt, dark long coat catching mud
from the backs of heels
Dark heals the way a dog runs
when you turn on the back porch light.
Evening Spread

The computer zenlike sorts my needs
like the proverbial chinaman
sorting tickets.
As fast as he can he piles them to the left, to the right,
moves them from cigar box
to desk drawer, marks some
—on others he crosses things out. As if responding to a tick
he looks up sometimes and says Huh? His job is routine,
without thought, without careless sounds.
He dreams his family is marking the backs
of chickens with orange magicmarkers
left over from Spring classes. His needs
exceed my imagination—I am drawn to him
like the boat adrift to the corpo morto.
With a sweeping
gesture he wipes his table clean—
all, save the lines of toothpicks
that spells my desire
to sweep away blankets,
gesture in full,
make a pile of your underthings beyond the line around your bed,
descend like snowfall on the tips of toes and fingers:
this note I’ll send
once the chinaman’s tickets
review its spelling and the grammar
of my interests.
Heights

At night from the airplane window
I see the line of dotted lights leading from one small town
to another or to a larger city in a distant nearby. Some lights
are the yellow-orange gas arc variety, stationary,
brightening inverse squarely a dot of roadside farmland
and road, others are cars with elongated ice-cream-cone
shaped beacons that turn like vectors aimed at possible
stopping points. Something about each light tells
the smallest most general story of lonely life, that darkness is never far
and something as quick as a blink draws
darkness in without hesitation.

Or in the day over the northern parts of Canada
in the dead of Winter I see a sheltering stand
of trees where perhaps the snow is less deep
in a cove around the trunks, and maybe some parts
of the ground are visible—cold but a connection,
a place someone might wish to stop and light
a small fire, a warming, a soup break, a prelude
to a night in a warm tent and bag. At night
the possibility of a flickering light, a dot of humanity—
is it any wonder I search for them at night
from the airplane window over the least inhabited
places.

In light or dark
but especially in dark
each place like these sends me signals,
begs me to step out. How cold
would it be to step outside? How swift
would the downtrip be? If I stepped out of the dark
into the orange arclight dot by the side of a small road
or within the simple reach of firelight at the base of a tree,
would I yearn for the flickering lights that tonight seem to be
passing far overhead?
From a Scene

As you lay there naked in bed
you are like the sinewy muscled foothills
of a tropical mountain range, covered
with a pastel and cotton mist
that swirls and rises as the heat from the sun
moves the air around you,
and soon you are fully revealed. But

tell me,
is it the offering of yourself
that moves your fingertips
to the thickest flesh of your soft legs,
or the desire for warmth
from my fiery skin?
Sentimentality 101

The room is 10x10, small addition to a small trailer in Central Florida. The walls are covered by art—duotone night winter scenes in blues and white, woods scenes from the forest behind the house, mountains from up north; flower studies in orange and blue, mixtures of flowers and mountains in miniature. Something is off about them—color, proportion, perspective, too much of the wrong half-brain.

All are signed in the lower left traditionally, but in the upper right is his mark: a flying bird made as if calligraphically with one fluid stroke or two. Perhaps it was the same way he died one year ago, stumbling out of bed at 4am to puke, his hurry and rush too much for his damaged and not fully repaired heart, for his weakened brain-supplying blood vessels. Just one stroke—or two—and he went down to his knees in the position my mother found him, kneeling as if in prayer—she said he must have been struggling to or from bed at the beginning or end of a final trip to the bathroom. His last words to her were get out of my way.

Where was he rushing to? What appointment to keep that didn’t involve her? He laughed about his trademark bird signings, as if it were the conceit of an amateur.

In his best painting in this room where I sleep perhaps for the last time, the bird sign is small: From just a few feet it seems like a small spider, and above it is a thin, drawn line that seems to hold the spider up as it waves its legs working the line. almost a laugh. And the spider line anchoring its descent goes up, up and up beyond where I can see, held finally in place between two hands, clasped in prayer.
Lover of All Things

On Buck Lake Road in Central Florida
the people are of two kinds totally:
reliant or self-reliant. Take the majority:
pickup trucks (several) with 'gator lights
up top and hunting dog kennels in the bed,
4–12 fox hounds and blood hounds, fishing tackle
always packed, a double- or triple-wide with a swing-set
and swings enough for 3 or 4, a trampoline
but not too level, wives with 3 or 4 curves too many,
satellite dish, and a supply of spare parts
rusting in their chassis’ in some tall
saw grass out back. Did I say it was a sand road
scraped clean and level 3 times a year? Did
I say it is on no map.

The rest are old, they eat sporadically,
say ok ok under their breaths with every move
of every chore, who do everything in slow steps.
Women fart and belch day long, every aspect
of any female packaging long disguised as hanging skin.
Men indistinguishable from women.
All they own that is covered in webs, mostly cob
like the inside-out palimpsest of their skin. Everything
they own is rusting and decaying, under attack
by heat, wet, wind, and bugs. The neighborhood
mimics memory loss.

I wonder why the affinity between the totally self-reliant
and the totally reliant. Heat? Or the not cold? The opportunity
to make something of nothing. Prying eyes and judgments absent
except in pronouncement? Or maybe it’s a love affair
with that most intimate of lovers,
that most fervent clinger to life,
that most reliable of all:
you know who I mean.
April 18, 2000
Ars Poetica

Take the finest book of poems,  
say a collection of Neruda’s love ones  
or The Duino Elegies by Rilke (your choice  
of translator), open the book to your favorite  
poem or passage, read deeply with the parts  
of your mind that have remained longest undiscovered,  
lose yourself, heighten your soul,  
move the book slowly still open as if in for a tango,  
hold it out away from you, time it your best  
and slam it shut like jaws of life in reverses  
on that damned Florida deerfly circling your head  
who looks like that movie you cannot watch,  
who stinks like the hole behind satan,  
who looks like what the poet really means to say.
Walk

Florence SC, walking, busy road, groceries, facing traffic, no sidewalk, tall weeds, 2 lanes each way, some cars switch lanes, others straight on, swervers male, killers female.

Men more or better:
  empathetic
driving ability
caring
manners
familiar with the shame of walking with groceries
prepared for the unexpected
  global

Women more or less:
willing to kill
willing to yield
daring
helpful
predatory
willing to adopt new rules
  local

Were they hateful to murder of poetry?

What I know is this:
None of these people were thinking about passive sex.
Hoarsepower

Sometimes I’m a poet,
sometimes I’m a hater.
If I could only combine the two sometimes,
I’d really have something.
The Hope of Love

May your lovers all come
wrapped in plain brown paper.
Despite

I am paralyzed by spite,
not a word, not a drop has come of it, can come of it.
I would take back not a single word,
except it delete the world along with it.
Spite please be enough,
please be the right spice to pickle language,
the right acid to curdle ghosts.
Work Makes You Free

The day has been atmospheric starting with dreams then snow and freezing rain making crystal of brush and shrub, branches and hung wires. In the dream there was a conference where the lunches were served on mud tables—roadways were plowed between them in rectangles. Despite how I ran my loudmouth enemy followed from mudflat to mudflat, so I fled to the registration booth.

Then the European scientist arrived and we kissed ceremoniously first by one cheek then by the other. She reclined, her silk dress was loose by her thighs, and I drew my calloused fingertips up from her knee plowing back her skirt until she pulled it up to reveal her densely curled public mound. I looked into her sweet face and remembered to wake up to vomit in my mouth.

Today spite petrified into remorse, solitude reduced to sentimentality when Celine softly singing as her niece died in her arms made me cry in a motel room decorated in diluted Bavarian or Swiss—blue and cream. Everything that has happened this week considered as a unit reminds me of a pair of old men adrift off the Irish coast in a dory, eating a formal dinner in trays on the seatboards, the sun behind them the way a cinematographer would want to see it, so the scene is really in shades of pink and lensflare.

Not an option—failure isn’t when speaking about getting the well primed: something I can try when the weather clears. When it pumps I’ll pass by Satan’s ass and out into purgatory to pay off the 1000-year debt my spite cost. Is waiting part of the punishment?

What I mean to say is that neither poetic seeing nor scientific attitudes is going to save us from the thousand 1000-year acts we’ll perform and the need for the heart to contract then release over and over. Celine dropped out of school at 15 and everything she knows about life comes from the lyrics to songs she sings along with the mood of the music as commentary that tells her an attitude toward those words.

So what will happen to me the day I decide to trigger an episode of impromptu skirt lifting—do I swallow or breathe in?
Haunting Drops

Rain is such a symbol.
For me it is the symbol of never going home,
the way it prevents the work that is that journey’s
precondition, the way it has shut down the airport,
the absurdity of its slushslop sounds when it puddles
outside the windows of the most convenient motel
day after day while I get used to forgetting a now-former life.
Rain endures, transforms into floods, gets messy in the way,
soaks rats to near-pleurisy, provides an excuse
to share warmth with a different gender, renders common
the most unusual, keeps inside everything
you want to keep outside. Rain is the ghost
of sunlight and shade.
Can’ever

Love can never win
even by cheating: replacing all parts
one by one—one could say lovingly—until one
love is replaced by another. Let’s say
this method includes hillclimbing—
each part improves upon the one it replaces.

Is perfection preventable?
Considered a function,
choice depends on what? Let’s change
the subject. Take hair. The possibilities
are fragmentary. I love her
and she wears suede skirts depending
on her ass.

Love’s focus on “one”. It’s like
a guitar with a floating bridge tilted by fever,
fresh springs,
beautiful chords may wobble.
Sound still beautiful,

wobble.

Let’s wander;
if it snows that stretch
of incandescence will never know
already. Away to win.
Love can’t.
Lit Study Guide

Sand by a park lit by
incandescent or gas arc lamps
casting her shape in black on orange,
the sand is orange and park parts
green. She will walk home
with thoughts of death camps in her steps.
She finds twigs that remind her of memory,
branches floating on fast-clean moving
waterways fatherlike toward a mothering
sea. Somewhere someone is lighting
a small water heater, holding a flame
within a stream of gas, holding a button
down until a bithermal sensor is red hot
doing that work for her. She is watching
that flame expand as its movements
make black on orange shadows dance
within a sheet metal apparatus whose design
is toward warmth and human comfort.

What reminds me of these things
is the park-like appendix at Dachau
where the cremation stations are. How
I wonder how far I would get if I tried
to make love there one night
while the erasing stream flows past
faster than water can flow
without the forcing presence of satan’s
hatred at its back.

Compare and contrast—relate if you will—
the echoes.
Rosetta or The Exotic Dancer

The angel came up on me fast,
I mean—too
different, unexpected, lusty,
really—like a lusty slave,
physical presence of a woman.

Came up—I mean
entered a place of recognition,
named, categorized out
of the compartments of whore,
seductress, first lover whose
local circle of passion and cognizance
now includes me.
The sort of oh
attached to surprise
not the one of relief.

Fast—I
mean the sharp transition from wrong
to correct
not graduated so that one
would blend into another.
The wings—like the sudden
close of chaos when the needle
drops on the record
and music emerges—
they popped out of the indistinct
background and condensed to wings.

Shallow carved, by a digital process
perhaps, more like shallow dark dots
or worm tracings on polished marble
or maybe even a granite—blue or green
tinged grey with dark flecks or chunks
like a confection.

The stone had a lap or portico
or front yard—a small red brickstone
fence, each piece a small rising sun,
all arranged into a curved entry
garden of maybe one square
foot, filled with white porcelain
rabbits and squirrels, cherubs and
marriage archways. Sprigs of vibrant
then frozen then thawed flawless
flowers, each in a vial cracked from the sudden
snowstorm.
The angel—good mother-sized breasts under silk or chiffon, a womanly hip 3/4 revealed, her left leg advancing to her right in profile as if on the cover of a swimsuit issue, her thick thigh cupping her lap's bowl. Sexual—predatory. But her arms were held at an introductory set of angles back to her left, in forms meaning here's Johnny, hailing the word "Mother" carved distinctly, with the fast coming up being the coming into view.

On the back, her name, "Loved mother and grandmother" and the dates of birth and death, her life the contents of a parenthetical remark made in this most attractive of cemeteries on a cold cold dim late spring day, when all I wanted was a warm hand on the side of my solitary head.
Force and Simple Dynamics

This is my exit, a ramp
that lets me cruise
alongside the main road some at high speed,
same speed as yours, and maybe I’ll pass,
then off I’ll veer at a normal angle, meaning
I’ll make a right turn or left. A normal finish

for an all-talk situation. Enforced starvation.
What I’ve come to see is that there is nothing to see,
I’ve heard there’s nothing to hear,

come to grips with the fact there will be no touching.
Radio on, top creased and folded, tucked by the trunk,
wipers on—it’s raining hard, hail or sleet, the thin layer

of skin between the pellets and skull is pierced
in places. The rain enters.
Hail enters and greets

hearty. I’ve come to rest in a wide spot—
Bernoulli says to slow down here
and I’ve joined a very small crowd

each of whom has found their exit,
a ramp easy to negotiate. Each of whom
is content to have left you or someone isomorphic.

Smarter, I would have taken
the ramp that exits gently on the steep downslope,
exits straight and heads 10% uphill

through sand, so even the most hot
and passionate truck comes
to an eagerly unanticipated slowly burning stop.
Lines

Crimes of anatomy: Guilty.
Crime of shape and filling,
size 6 woman in a size 4 dress.
Crime of arms, hands, and skin:
voices and ears; eyes and surfaces.
Near is the first rule of human
contact—love, let’s say, or romance, sex, for example.
Or just handholding or admiration of form
and skin,

visiting what’s revealed.

This is where lines come in. Crime
of distance. Missing person, another
missing her. Or him, I suppose. The first line
is mail. Sending word, writing of love and gone:
having gone, continuing gone. Rail line—
possibility of reuniting, visiting,
letters quickly answered.
Physical exchange in the offing: Kiss
a letter’s seal.

Lips—time—lips.

Lines with movement at the gross level of matter.
Conveyance, in short. Airlines, the jetliner, the ship line—
nothing new here. Conveyance.

Lines that trade
information. Encodings.
Telegraph lines, phone lines, power lines even.
In the plains these lines are lines,
visible, curved hanging in parabolas—
inverse square laws. 3
times farther, 9
times more ways not to return.

Long distance lines pretend
to bring you closer. Length is desperation
only. These lines respect time. Predictable
duration.

Better then than a letter.
E-mail, voice-mail, pagers, faxes—
dull variations with better print quality sometimes.
Make rejection as pretty printed as Donne sonnets
in the latest printing. Goodbye you loser.

Or voice delay, like the 7-second obscenity buffer.
One-time echo.

Think about storms stretching lines. Think back/ahead.

People in pigpiles, night storms made us. Storms, line break.
Thickness of Paint

Brushstrokes, layering, paint as medium
whose physics matters. The texture of paint
matters, the direction, depth, and swirl of a brush

stroke matters. Painting is additive, nothing is taken
away, or rarely. Mistake? Paint it over, cover
it with more, build up never subtract. The mistakes

are always there. When we speak
it is like this—in bed, at stove,
with others, what I say is added

to all I’ve ever said, nothing taken back
only covered over. Branches and leaves
piled by the tree, decaying to constituent

parts. Rebuilding material. Do
my words rot, decay, reform
under the weight and resulting heat

of newer dodges, newer explanations,
more refinements? Does the under paint
of thick masterpieces

turn, somehow—chemically,
physically, relentlessly—
into canvas?
Easy as 1-2-3(-4)

Winter turns to summer
in Silicon Valley and even the live oak
bulks up—leaves block the view
by adding themselves to it.

Fog through the wind gap 5 miles north
enters the throat of the Bay at 50 mph.
What does this crap have to do with Lonely Heart
left under a rockslide or covered by graffiti.
Backalley licenses. Translate
that into something that runs
100x faster. Or make it small
to fit in cell phones.
Make it a better offer.
Better Off-er. That’s what we want,
isn’t it: Poor turns to Rich
in Silicon Valley, and even the lowly hacker
bulks up—riches block the view
by adding BMWs to it.

Lonely Heart searches for meaning
by substituting words one by one
or meanings one by one
gathered from butterworthy songs
bought mostly by teenage girls
or younger. LH does that 100x
faster than his coffin-bound half-circumcised friend
and in a space smaller than the crack/hope
LH has been left with.

LH holds the IP.
Genetic swarm
improvements, better-off
money from clip-rate royalties.

As I write this,
I think of selecting a cell:
change its format to bold, first;
change its color to green, second;
change its boundaries from single to double lines, third;
and add a Black Porsche and the girl who steps out of it & so forth, fourth.
Singularity

I couldn't recognize myself
so she did it for me, hands on ears,
feet in the muscled small of back,
slender slick silken shafts of hair
pulled along, brush strokes swiftly past abdomen.

Her eyes looking out for me
in a mirror's image she saw herself looking at me,
recognition. The self in senses
all trees and breeze
Mediterranean seawarmth
sweetbreeze
vapor of slumber descendency
muscle tissue hardened & relaxed
curtain of memory pulled past each thought disappearing
everything every breath deep in the chest

She to watchover,
she like watcher suricats swiveling & humming protection,
the first 2 digits of her left ring finger
placed like a popsicle
on the hard palate roof of my mouth.

In a minute the part of my mind trained as a brain
will awaken, and all she'll be
is the Wizard of Oz
stepped out front of the curtain.
Bridge Brigade

One day they will all gather at the river’s transition from lake-sized to the swift final flow to Joppa Flats. They will begin their walk at the obsessing bridge and its funny green. With luck they’ll choose moments when the river flows downriver (woman/tidal river).

Because I want them only to see me the last time only one time.

Perhaps a crew will insert the metal turn-machine and march around 11 times to let me pass.

The parachutist drowned above Holt’s Rocks may let loose his shrouds and sift my ashes through the combs his hand bones form.

Who will appear? How will they walk? What of their hair?

If the water be still I will be the dust amidst the clouds.

If the water be ice I will melt ice with my gathering heat.

One place I will place my initials, the last thing first on my mind.

Because I fell for them, let them let me fall.

May 4, 2000
Stopping Courage

It’s a simple cross
built by a carpenter from clear
wood dadoed together, untreated,
in a shallow hole dug with a posthole
digger with the initials AD written in lead
pencil at the joint.

I saw a few beads from New Orleans
and a perfect spiral shell atop the post.

The cross appeared months after burial.
His house nearby is for sale.
He has written his last words and some have been said.
The old writer with simple things to say.

Will I have the courage to leave as little,
will someone with talent say goodbye
by acts as small as these whose remnants
I find.

But the raw sandy earth on the road side
of the marker has not been taken by grass
nor flowers nor weeds, has not sunk,
remained bare and clear.

Years I drove slow
past his house finding
no courage to stop,
each time past slower than the last.
Now I can stop
these are the only times I can.

Excuse me for stopping my writing now,
someone’s car has slowed to stop,
I see reflections, hear echoes,
the car door clicks,
it slams.
Minimal Spirits

The years are sharper than razors
—4 seasons wide—
each year shaves off
one layer of dark color,
one week of screwing,
one mph of speed, and
one possible liaison. For 20, 30
years we layer them on like
coats of short oil varnish

and for 20, 30 we shave them off,
random order,
potentials come,
go. But precise,
precision.

Or more abrasive than
low grit closed-coat sandpaper,
grinding off layers,
clogging,
worn.

I sit toadful
staring at the few years to come
while behind me like cartoon speed lines
the possibilities fall, sheets
of paper, manuscript knocked
and scattered like thin slices
like dust blown
from my hands.
Smooth Curves

music can be played even
when the players step on each other
play leads
play them too loud
into and through the singing
while other players are soloing

and an audience hears it as music
well played and forceful
high energy and full of life

discussions can be held even
when the speakers step on each other
state positions
state them too loud
into and through questions
while other speakers are talking

and an audience hears it as discussion
well argued and forceful
high energy and full of life

I suppose it works as well when two lovers are split apart by an over-powering distance

singing would be too loud
talking would be pointless
all that’s left is the solo

—skip to the sunset scene, you bozo—

that and one walking behind the other
on the shoulder of a busy road
with the low winter sun
twinkling our eyes
love is a young
man’s game
honey
Look Out, People, Machine Coming!

The famous words
—famous in my family—
when my Lithuanian step-grandfather lost
control of a small flatbed
in 1920 in Lawrence, Mass,
Main Street, failed brakes.

What would the people have wondered first?
Who is “people”? Or
what is “machine”?

The eagerness in his voice
—mugged by his accent—
but combined with the indomitable p’s, e’s, & l’s
would lead to quick apprehension
that “people” is anyone in earshot.

“Machine,” though, is problematic.
Listen: “maa–ssssshééééén!”
And who knows how many people glanced
up at the rows of windows that morning,
hazy from shoe factory smoke
and the air of tanning—boric and oxalic acids,
quebracho extract—to catch a brief glimpse
of the pearl sheen from the rising sun,
before recalling the brief deep “maa”
like calling mother for help,

or pondering with the beginnings of great depth
the abstractional choice and what it meant
of selecting “machine” from the spectrum starting
at the 1910 Ford Model T flatbed,
passing through commercial truck,
and ending up somewhere in the vicinity
of inanimate object and thing,

before seeing the need clearly
to hop aside quickly as the Ford flatbed
plowed into the front display window
of Neuman’s Department Store.

And from its depths the small cry
still sounded
—machine coming—
people became angels,
the flatbed truck and the soul inside it
took on the pearl sheen of the rising sun.
Black Horse Nightmare

I am just a dreamer
and you are just a dream. Concrete
and dreams don’t mix: A dream
tries to be forgotten. A dream
that tries forgetting turns to nightmare
when it comes to book the flight
and plan just which ancient stones
and hotel room overlooking
them in a rich Mediterranean
sunned landscape will become
the likely site of someone’s
nightmare. Maybe mine,
yours,
maybe theirs.

Turn to my nightmare,
explore it like an ant
following sprayed pheromones,
and I will do what you will,
follow single file to an ugly place
to decide, in any order,
the who, whom, and when.

The wettest Spring
I drove past a sloping hill
by the tossed ocean
where they led the blackest horse
through the greenest grass
in front of the bluest ocean whitecapped
and frothing in high waves upon rocks.
They led him by a bright red rope
held by a man on the back of a dirtbike,
a camera truck beside them.

At the ugly place you said they’d erase
the rope with a clever computer program
you wrote, because it was red
while everything else was green, blue, white, or black,
and I thought
a red rope is all that connects nightmare
to dream, and can forgetting
be as easy as running your red-erasing
code.
Dreamtime in Carpentry

His first was a wasteland
of joists running wrong ways,
slabs where footings need be,
nails in place of screws
etc

He had seen houses
but never one apart, never was told
their secret So he built one

He'd read of slender women
who lounge in them
swigging pearl-blue Bombay martinis
in cream gowns and slicked hair
Seen deco-style cartoons of them
with lengthened limbs
and draped eyes Colors thrown
off kilter like the tan brown
of the third cappuccino layer
that their faces were painted in

All his houses were built
according to made-up rules
and fathomless designs
always wrong or faked

The women he lured
with his operatic baritone
rarely favored the pearl-blue gin
nor were their colors monotone
Too hairy and swore

He stretched brushed silk on shag-bark
sticks and as far as sunlight could decide
it decoyed a glossy moth
Even I was humped by its shaggy skin

I repair all his things now
All seem real and as sharply focussed
as gin dreams and pearl-blue women
stretched as tight as silk Those are easy
But shag-bark limbs, wrongway joists,
fathomless dreams—my imagination
is wasted on words

May 10, 2000
Over Dose

Make the world larger
end the current period early
Enter the year made grey: the second millennium
is not over, the third not started—
for calendars
are belief in time which can exist only
as mathematics needs it. I have
fallen ill or into anger
over the need to love
(or is it live?)

when the assumptions of an ill
life are glued to the roof of my mouth
by the words wired through my head.

I've tired of following the slightly high
heels of your fashion-ing boots
that kickkick the back hem
of your dark coat.

The overstuffed god is ready
to pinch off the tuft of time
that exploded zip into theories
that negation alone can repair.

Our fate is in the hands
of the action of not,
a philosopher evening.

I'm jumpy over love
this year, Cupid has gone
upscale with a Remington 700 BDL .308
and just when the edge of my heart peeks clear
a whisper in the alley take him.

Jumpy year when time's in a pinch
zip love on my calendar
let's end the current
period
Song of the Goatherd in Silicon Valley

Hitech valley
high octane capitalism
cars brighter than the fastest deal
more dollars than a first divorce
12-hour, 15-hour days our weekends
vacations vacated
digitrorrid chat affairs
overtones of typing speed

This valley full of hills laced with oleander
manzanita madrone underlaced with grass
tall yellow brittle to sparks

Broadband envy
design coercion
polymers as natural as vinyls
lace desktop underwear

Goats shepherds shepherd dogs
flexible fencing marking the places of goats and execs
trailer lawn chairs
warm days appetites elimination
extraction and recompaction
fertilization like intellectualism
hidden within capitalism
small goats eat

in the days when girls kept their underpants on
undergrowth turns dark as earth
and one Australian Shepherd sniffs a Lotus tyre
when the oldest becomes newest
as fast as new becomes old
Wrong Dream

It's the dependency of love on dreams that makes God's choices hardly seem important. What He denies begets drama since the negation of an absolute must vanish not soar. How many dreams can I dream at once, immediacy the reckoning of solitude, the running away, the chasing after depletion? In her hand she holds destiny like a scepter to her mouth as if to sing or suck the dream God dangles near not, she becomes the hole a void fills when denial vanishes like the sea from a near zero slope beach. Leaves fell from aspen, birch and filled my dreams with scatter until seafoam then greenwater returned, floating above it the leafy dream, the hangdog face of God, and the denial of the simple act of sex she begged for, longed for, hated for when she was hanging from my wrong dream.
A Tale of the Christ

I imagine an ancient street of stones placed a thousand years ago, the sudden embrace as when water overflows and the one not yours is taken, the adulteries and betrayals, cravings, flavorful flesh under many simultaneous touches, when whose hand or skin is touching whose cannot be known—all of that done 1000 years ago means nothing now unless something of those people lives on encrypted to eyes and understanding within the stone walkways, under archways, behind doors long withered and gone, in courtyards or in hovels. I think of Judah Ben-Hur gripping Esther on the rooftop garden of Ben-Hur’s estate while biblical music plays, chords shifting as if the key of the music was changing, big shifts implying the majesty of Christian mystery as water turns to wine or blood, bread to flesh, desire to gratification where the scene takes place in a mansion whose courtyard has fallen to ashes and leaves, puddles with dark blue movie-light lit effects, and it means something now because it’s Charlton Heston not Judah Ben-Hur and it’s Haya Harareet and not Esther, and today they are old but alive and in 1958 or 1959 when they embraced on that balcony we were alive or nearly so, but we see it yet on TV.

But to think of the bones or ashes of the dead embracing on the worn stone streets or breathing air that cannot be still is to dream of phantasms, to fail at living, to blaspheme something that seems sacred or not in existence, and such clutching cannot be the same as our sexual rigors and postmodern annexations because what survives from the past is what the mind and spirit need to feel immortal, which is not the flesh nor the desire but an inner tension between scared and scared, there can be nothing like the look Heston gives over his right shoulder looking down at Haya with the weight of dominant chord changes and the slightly off-expressive Middle Eastern temperament of the violined melodies, darkened skies, darkened skins, as one passion is spelled out before another, Haya the Israeli beauty, Heston the gun-toting gun-loving bombast whose Hur-blue robe is on display in someone’s collection.

We alone are left to clutch at one another, penetrate and stroke, make wet the other because what becomes of us will never be played to a background of 50,000 extras and special effects, framed by 3 hours 41 minutes of spectacular, filmed in never-ending Technicolor or digital fancy, and neither one of us will be played by anyone else but us once you are burned or buried and I am languishing in the mud of Joppa Flats, not played by anyone, not by the likes of Charlton Heston and Haya Harareet.
Shagbark Rattle

My earliest memory is being sinkwashed. Memory mine alone. Two others in that house: Running into the living room when the Shawmut ad came on, the Revere Italian playing indian, and when he raised his hand in greeting so did I; the other the low Spring sun through the dining room highwindow, slow song trebly with violins playing on the Kenmore, reflections from sun rays polishing the oak floor and raising dust motes.

The third’s partly mine, clearly story’s. Father just home in his blue 1948 Pontiac, Mother panicked, asking him to hoe the rattlesnake sunning itself under the shagbark tree in our front yard not 3 yards away from the shiprock he left there, too big to move and too shapely, to death. This is clearest. Pontiac sold when I was 6 months old—Sight and story memory each as solid as the granite shiprock, each as slinking as the snake flinched from, each as clear-skinned as my back in the sink, each as blinding as the sheened floor, each as sober as the falsified indian hawking Shawmut.

Our number is still memorized: Fireside 6-2926—to recall it takes the dropping of a needle on a record it’s so old-fashioned. Infidelities of sight and memory, only the story dug into the hole beneath the shiprock, nose to rattle behind that snake is honest: clearest thing I see, furthest thing from truth.

May 15, 2000
Management Techniques Using Weeds

It's good to see the world revolving again, as if it were making periodic progress, with then again some regress. I think the foam that slips across the bay or rolls like dust bolls onto the piled dirt berms are enforced by wind cycles fomented by the revolving world. One of these dandelion heads of bay foam seems to have blown into the car window and onto your nose where it is trying its darnedest to remind me of how you might look in your shower after our first long night together where the small details of the backs of your legs (and source of the Nile) shortens my sleep cycles enough to . . . enough!

Poetry on sex is the final sentimentality of the previous millennium. Doesn't it seem like this: the world going round—through lightheaded intermediaries and manmade dikes—makes love.
Lingus

All poetry flows from the mouth—
breath divining rhythm, word shapes and clicks,
warmth and moisture of the soul,
tongue wetting the lips, complicated shapes
making complex sounds, tasting what nourishes,
what excites, sweetness of other mouths
after rich desserts, bitter fluid from just-whetted
genitals, shape feeling and palpitation,
pushing and prehensile pulls, licks
such as performed on frozen slush
or beneath the hood; teeth, white
as few things natural, sharp as dull knives, unyielding
and several making them robust. I've fallen
for women just for their mouths—words,
shape, movement, what they could do down
there. Trust enough to risk the teeth, explore
her, tongue that makes everything it touches
large, teeth in many configurations. Some say
it's the complex brain that makes language
and its feral half-twin poetry, but I say
it's the strangeness of the mouth
and its parts and variety of purpose,
its punctuation and profusion,
its genitalia-formed processes.

I say this: the brain is made to fuel
the mouth, fatten its nerves,
lick the last line off any poem.
True Dreams

I will make your dreams come true—
the words of untoward love,
inguided direction, bass-heavy

leavings in a shady spot where a statue
should be left alone to face its transformation
to lime. Your first move was by hand

—stopped there, and I made the promise,
and true they came, falling in love, falling
as leaves do sometimes swarming

and marshalling abandon
when the recent act is a mirror job,
falling in love micron sized bites.

I made them true, puppets move
as like they might think,
I've got links to make and shades

to pull, blinks to close, myths
to make up in sharp fonts
whose fat angles clutch at our breath.

Ok, you introduced me and all I did
is all I do, but your dreams came true
being a puppet, a toy, by your hand

and what I got was corn-fed,
cluttered—when hair was long,
was soft, reminiscingly real.
Touch & Go

I found you in the details,  
by grains of sand, nibbles of rust  
on the funny green of that bridge.  
Or by drunks hawking woes, or  

passers-by who know me and shocked  
by my eyes, one dead and lingering.  

Behind you in the woods it snowed  
without accumulation, nothing  
catches, piles, picks, shuts, lets  
up you put up look up  

and it’s the same every time  
when what’s weeds blooms  

like bee-liking roses, wild  
wings. I’ve heard you sip tea,  

heard you bathe in the sea  
like any siren’s sweetly singing  

you’ve gathered the ashes by your side  
and it’s the talk talk talk, stores of narration,  

and sirens blasting past in city streets  
where friends see us, see it, small spandrels  

beneath the string of the stare—people  
who expect fewer small parts, fewer small pieces  

to the puzzle, fewer clues and more news  
from the frontal lobes. Details. Small facts.  

Tell me when I touch down.  
It’s the detail of reality I’m missing.
She lay there,
hump of her hip raised up double high,
her left hand between her thighs high up,
her right arm covering part of her breasts
in the high night heat in the town
of small delight.

She snored lightly,
just enough sound to tell me the night was off,
there would be no sparks tonight, no sweet
songs nor sweet word love, sounds
would be left untempted by her left hand.

I walked downstairs,
and switched on small lights, powered on
my obedient and watchful computer—
alone and longing for life,
I brought up this file,
the one that starts “she lay there.”
Upstairs the muse snored lightly,
her left hand hidden between her thighs.
Jazz Yard

Today the heat,
and I learned through signals sent through wires and space
that few listen to what I say, though many
in fact
will take the time to inform me of my shortcomings,
except some who like the clanging of one word on the next
the way a scrap yard sings at 8am some days.

I like the jazz dogs who roam the yard
and skip on 3 legs to the beat of scrap on scrap,
iron filling the role of percussion, the heat
damping the rings just enough to jazz them up.

A refrain of “who cares.” I’m aware
that junk yards and jazz need excess
and what’s wrong done wrong twice
is music beyond range.
Heat affects the body and how it reacts to sound
or sights. Today it’s the sticking of one part to another,
the scrap that says “who cares” that sticks
to the part that puts words in files, lined up
in trains like thoughts on their way to the censor’s fire.

Today the heat,
and my muse left on vacation.
The fire is lit carefully, sadly,
and I’m left here sick & lonely of a home
trying on my own riffs
in place of real ones.
How Do I Live Without You?

The cool air that settles through my open door tonight is pasted onto this earth from the golden black of space which when seen from within and afar is the milky blended blue and red of the damning equations that fell out of no one's head when they were pretending to be god before anything but pretending was.
Anvil Hopper

The idea
or everything. One night
or day beads strung and counted rosary
style. These choices seem abstracly
boring in both consequence and precept,
although I’ll throw everything away
to comprehend the idea a night
with you conveys, give it the thought a raven
might in hop-flapping from one trunk
to the next while the maple leaves turn
up the faces on the bottoms
of their leaves to the rainstorm coming
in from the west on the heels of a shattering
cold front, as shattering as throwing
all those rosary beads away for an idea
that can’t be written down with fewer
than 3 exclamation marks.

Tonight you sleep
unaware of the back-sheared thunder anvil
nearby, and at its top, this little idea,
hopping cloud to cloud,
that could mean everything.
Art Driving the Big White Bus

Sentimentality is creeping back into popular art, TV shows showing funny romances movies playing “How Do I Live Without You” after a cargo plane lands on the strip in Las Vegas killing dozens. Imagine there were two realities and part of the day we’d be in one, then the other. Imagine we could talk about each from the other and make plans across them. Imagine one of them was life or heaven and the other hell or death, and we’d play or kill.

I wonder what it would be like if self-interest didn’t make you stupid. As in, are you one of those stupid people who thinks when a writer writes “you” it means you? Suppose I said, “darn those Red Sox, are they ever going to win the series. Well, whataya gonna do?” Do you think I expect you to tell me what you are gonna do? Here you means me as much as you or that other guy over there standing in front of a knick-knack shop with a stuffed iguana in it, tail in a hoop, mouth open like a mummy. What’re you gonna do about that iguana? Hey, I mean you, reader. Hirsch says you’re as much a part of this art thing as me. So tell me, what are you going to do? Writer me a damned letter (in the form of a villanelle if you can, you twerp) and tell me.
General Love

Love is a car
—in a land with amber waves of grain,
where wheat is a bit player more living
than the main characters who
die at the start and die
at the end. Pity the car that took them there.

—in a land that shields secrets behind
sullen lines of yellow shafts
like protesters who can never leave their ground
but stand it. Love needs a place for us
to stare into, like the road coming up,
heat lines rising up, passion of sun wave
on asphalt in the cerulean desert.

—in a time when a back bench seat
pretends support, and the oddly scented night air
rolls down partly rolled up rear windows.

—in times of cheap gas, the smell
of it like unguent, a rapidly evaporating sip
in the belly made of steel, cooling in the heat-still
noon air.

Love is a car because its body is stronger
than desire, made of unimaginable
bits of unmoving leavings on the cell floor
called industry.

—in fact the legs that push and pump,
the hands that hold on despite the road
cling puppetlike to strings.

Love is a car because it becomes
the instrument of leaving,
motivated conveyance, a coffin of life
which mimics forever,
like love in the foreground,
with soon.
Winnepesauke

When I arrived—he was long dead
(long dead to me)—we’d spoken last
fifteen months before at the airport—goodbye
was all it was—she—had exploded again—sickness
I think now but obstinacy was my thought
that night. A year passed.

When I arrived—it was hot—Florida
is that way in mid-Spring—bugs flew
and leapt, spider webs or just webs
on everything—he’d replaced the roof just months
earlier—himself—now I had to clean up,
pack up—her.

When I arrived—she—pointed
(to where) he died—it smelled of urine
there in that shack—I put “to where”
in parentheses because “pointed” and “he died”
are the emotional centers and “to where”
is just English—”get out of my way”
were his last words to—her. She—
knew he was very sick but thought
it was just another fight—her favorite.

When I arrived—a man
drove up in a 4x4—
with a box—
and a jar—
it was him—she—
signed for him—asked
me to carry him away into my room
which was really—hers.

When I arrived—in New Hampshire
with—her—after hell,
the insults and making me him—
we drove past the boat in dock—
the Mt Washington—they went every Monday
—she—
closed her eyes and wouldn’t look—said—
he loved that boat so much—she—
couldn’t look at what he loved so much.
Nor will I—
look at what he loved so much.
Again and Again

With the smallest steps
we run ahead.

When your head will not turn toward me
we walk as one again and again.

Again and again we twine
after carving goodbye.

We know low hills
and anthills upon them, ants
who bite
when we lie
again.

We have seen
the end of the river, how it flattens
out broadly—as thin as mist made plain—
before tearfully entering the sea.

We speak
and the cage beckons again and again.

Again and again we stain
ourselves with continuity.

How I hate
concepts.

You have found, been found,
one who is lain upon.

I go on down the hill,
down the hill
that falls
to the sea,
again.
The Womanly Curve of a Feather

Today leaving takes center stage,
a weakness exploited, the gift
like that of a bird landing on a finger
taken away by startle. Both times

I left you, scales holding
exoticism in one pan
held the duty of being
somewhere in the other.

Leave me this time.
Turn. The back of a head.
Make you wonder
about the passing of light

into shade, how small
the mottles. When I last
left it was into a clown
crowd costumed fully

for fun, everyone in shades
of difference from being, children
even in tender pretending,
in their continuity of moment

to month to memory
and it made me to blame.
Today two birds came to my door,
and when I opened that door

they raised their wings,
held them curved, feathers
spread as if to fly, pretending
to fly, pretending.

May 28, 2000
Overlooking Munich

Below, forest tufts stand shocked
straight up, thin fragmentary patches
of farmland in green colors, red
roofs, wavy streets and roads, some towns
walled, but always a black-roofed church,
and we descend toward Flughafen München
through clouds scattering, my thoughts
are on the city miles to the south,
in the park made of scattered debris.

But what this trip to the airport means
is nothing, what the stopover intimates
is nothing, the reason for coming
is no reason at all, no part can name
the whole, nothing signifies by anagrammatical
pointlessness.

The fragments of woods lay as if sculpted
or drawn in calligraphy, lay 3-dimensional
as if words or a message, or messages.

Well, the potentialities are the point,
the possibilities that might be are as if they happen.
The red roofs are so familiar, so is that park—
twenty miles to the south, in a town now whose familiarity
is fading as the city does in the thickening haze
as we drop down to burn off patches of rubber from the tires—where
nothing can happen,
nothing might happen,
& nothing will happen.

When I leave, a rise up, the air which seemed clear
coming in fills with mist, maybe small tears in the fabric
of farmland. A concrete highway lies below,
the same hue as the haze, but brighter.
Soon the farmlands fade, the kanji woods fade,
and all that's left is a winding road
away, me not on it but above it,
and now it's gone, too.

May 29, 2000
Christ’s Pre-Passion

Lordy, 9-lb magnet
and 9-penny nail—steel nail
of a sort seems like it’s about gonna fly
’cross the table to the iron magnet.
Nail hammered ’to the table
ain’t gonna move not never no
inch nor part thereof. Magnet’s
gonna twitch one hair’s breadth
of the way, gonna move jest
that much. ’n’ Move
no more till rusts apart
it will.
Beyond Range of Vision

Dealt short life and loneliness
fortune tellers walk away,
even in Prague, cobbled city fashion-
wise off base, forgotten flash loneliness,
short dogs & leash
queens, luck amuck springing streets.

Kafka found here—fondness
transpiring the grave, bugs abounding,
12 experiments shall not be forgotten,
legs expired from freshness wrapping
failures. The short life is briefly
forgotten when 2 experiments
in loneliness go wrong
due to mechanical failure before any clue
is found dangling above the river run below
the waterhouse. A fortune teller
glimpses her palms and joins the writer
in a plotfull for topless queens.

Short message,
letters alone,
electronic writ
ephemera flakes.
3 simples,
one undone.

If life is this simple,
she representing everything
was seen swimming
far out to see.
Rhapsody of Funny Images and Sounds with a Funny Color Thrown In

With the sky the color of blue Bohemian crystal
with the Vltava the shiny sheen of oiled amber
with the weight of walking heavy on the memory
with the last time also the loneliest
with the weight of warmth like warm wine in winter
without the system whose centers run abreast the flow
without the wrapping legs are used to in these recent days
without the cravings for small steps imagined like a fiery tale
without the links that make life’s little sense
without the remote sensing of the heart’s desire from the least careful images

I find myself holding onto myself again, curtains opened on the rear
windows of people in flats,
the sound of aerobics in acerbic Czech,
the sound of singing transformed to jizzled shizz
by the trundle of electronic tantrums over its overtones.
I pray you find me the henna-haired woman whose widespread
walk was presaged in the icy quiet on Čertovka, winter in Malá Strana,
whose attention paid to detail was as increased by questions as this computer’s
latency was reduced by the jerking twitch of my pinky on the ? key.
This is Prague Just for Us

Last Prague winter
air so cold it turned red
all parts of you, shards
of would-be mist chilled to razors
in the wind whipped your face,

and I think it had something
to do with how we clicked, let’s
say—made a difference
to how many fingers you put
in my hands, where you wanted
me warming you and how.

This Prague summer
exactly like winter but
cold turned hot
sharp airborne ice heated
to swelling moisture filling faces
with reasons to change slow
putting up low places to pool.

The same parts on different sides
of equations are wiped away
it’s clear Prague remains
air and moisture remain
the heat and movement have changed
and you?

Your fingers pulse slow
silence pools
some skip in your walk has subtly changed.
Across the way in the casually open
window a proudly tanned and hair-dyed housewife
prepares herself for her lover’s arrival
combs her henna-ed back-length hair
slips them down
slips them off
drops her panties.

In Prague I write
this
miles from bed.
One White Tomb for Every Thousand Black

Franz Kafka’s stone—
his tombstone they say—
is modestly small and white
among the others 100 meters
down the cemetery wall hard
right from the entrance, but
reflects his modest aspirations—
whatever they were they say.

Those aspirations would be tremendous these days—
though his writings frighten me I say—
since his stone is taller than me
and shaped in an inverted position,
white like a kind of raw marble
or smooth granite, and in front
a small white rock garden
with a granite or marble fence
and gifts of stones and notes—
dead parts of this dead place—
left by people of low aspirations
for sure.

Laid out in ivy-over-grown streets
and scraped gravel boulevards
and tall ivied elm trees—
very tall, so tall that the sun is near blocked out
and the blackness of the black marble is black
indeed, and the ivy absorbs what little is left over—
this city where Dr. Franz Kafka now resides—
he cannot live there any more they say—
is filled with secrets kept in black boxes
as tall as Shaquille O’Neal
(who is 7’ 1” for those of you in another century)
(he is black as well, 340 lbs—see
the word “black” 2 lines up), secrets
made so full of secret stuff we needed grave little wool caps
to walk around in the yard, so any secrets escaped
from the tombs that bounced into our heads
wouldn’t escape up to God—
or that’s what the man at the gate
who fears Kafka says
they say.
Sunsets Underlined

Sunsets say a lot about a place.
Compare four places.

New England pewter is just a post-sunset thing; I remember when young thinking kaleidoscope sunsets were a Pacific-dipping effect on our sunset. Sunset Strip. I tailed a Mustang once with those black and yellow California plates—a friend said girls were in it—down on Bridge Street. I had my bike and saw them finally—not blond. It was hopeful in 1966.

California, the sun just goes down. Sometimes the sky’s a pink then red. Any Pacific-dipping effect is too casual here. I heard sunsets are no event at all, night’s just a dip in heat. I felt that way once. The first highway I saw in California looked like Baltimore after a bad weekend, crabs out of season.

Tucson, Bisbee, Taos—sleek sunsets here. Think of stylish pink-green, a silver-streak cloud like expensive watch ads. The colors turn Southwest-like, maybe they’d call it spiritual. Probably these effects originate from Sunset Strip, but no connection I see. People here listen to Coyote, who signals death with godly metallic hiccups. The cool night sky smells of iron-blood.

Dachau & Prague: here are two places that scare death. In Prague the sunsets never happen or always happen. The cemeteries here are miracles of passing woe. Oily but without smell. I snapped a picture of the Vltava once and it came back only reflections reflected, like two infinite mirrors with 0 in between. Dachau sunsets are like cymbals crashing—either it’s sunny or it’s night. Work hard and free yourself of transitions.
Sunsets are placed by heads in the sky—
live with them, live under them.
Live in their cracks—that's all they are.
Paler

Where do people go when they run out of ideas?
Is it a place built like a garden but shaded like death bags?
Are there shades of green that cannot be seen by open hearts?
Is goodbye the same as delete?

Tell me something that you don’t believe
but tell it with a sensuous mouth.
Move like a samba past fallen twigs
to me and raise the hackles of old mothers
who forget, only forget.
Listen to the wind whose blowing turns
to rack-pounding, keys blowing loose
from unbuckled pants.

Let’s buy each other things that sweet
-en, -en on the lower steps of passing
out. Let’s find a key, let’s find a lock,
let’s stand before still the door,
let’s hope. Why is innocence un-
something? Uncircumcised,
unhappy, unlike,
until?

One day beside the mountain
I wrote it. The disaster is
I still remember.
Street Sign, Orange, of Great Teaching Power

No stopping 100 feet
on & on
the sky fills with such a clear aspect of no
single memory, art taken into the mouth
crunches, teeth bend—that's how you know
sentimentality
seeps out under cover
needs evaporation
forms anvil thunderheads
hails upon the masses
who flee—100 feet as 2—fleet
to the shelter of old war horses
to know art. The poets sing
“this is art”“this is art”“this is art”
like as not up is down.

Sentimentality is the odd duet
of art against memory
an interval of irrational size
somewhat less than 100 feet
the size for the crowd who would embrace
embrace and kiss
kiss and sing a sad song
as the lover turns and walks away
becomes the cottonwood in the river gully
turning the merely sad
to lingering art.
Plainstone

When I arrived—expectations black
with a little white in it—the thing was long dead
(long dead to me)—she—pointed
(to where it was) tossed—on fine
sand ready to absorb—at the edge—
no box—no jar—the sea of heroes
touching it—turning it of-wetness
beautiful—she—tossed it here—
let-fell from her hand—packed-up
sponged full of—her—small-sized
last words, just another fight—her favorite.

When I arrived—she—had walked
across the mountain small though it was
as the rather plainstone—she—
carried part of—her—not
me—signed for stone
just months earlier—was really
—hers.

When I arrived—a stone left—
already washed into sand—
I asked—her—plainly
black with a little white in it—
toss, fling, throw
—it far away—
into a sea flowing with heroes—
where it—the I—could rest
in pieces, dissolved
bits, bits of sand—plaything
for children—bed for lovers
—thing on the bottom, but—she—
dropped it—catpawed by the sea—
harping plain and beautiful, pleasure dancing.

When I arrived—outskirts—
the little stone had turned from wet-beauty
to plain, lying on fine sand washing into sand
—(she—wouldn’t look)—
where I expected a symbol—
plainstone, warmsea, a footprint—none—
lost up the beach.
Symbolics

On the beach
wet stone black with white bits

warm salt sea upon it
fine sand washing into sand

across the small mountain
but not back

what woman with many years of nakedness ahead
has dropped it here

telling some old man
so be it
Nothing All All

Nothing is left to say:
all the poems have been written
all the poets have flown away

Dull is pursuit in the beauty of language:
all that's written is written quick
all that's said is sufficiently said

Praise the wrong things:
all unwept so far will remain dry in spirit
all unheld are enough in pain unswept by tender tongs

Place the spirit in symbols:
all symbol stones wash away
all requests in praise of self remain sufficiently unwritten

Dull is the way of all distinctions:
all spectators have made their final boarding
all cold all full all not only

Nothing is the rest I take:
all the poems have been shuffled
all great lies are made from their words realigned
Car, Waves, Road

In the dream the tongues are rhythmic, overwhelming forces. The road falls
down from rockpile slopes, grass, & glades
to stony gullies by the unstill sea—
moonless night, oceanic phosphors
in the heavy curls make the only light save
headlights fixed in relation to my car,
seeking pointing-like with fingers or arms
outstretched sleepward. In the dream
down the sea-aimed road I drive,
make my timing match unmatched
waves washing over and upslope,
dumbwise, trying like decay
to wash me from the script of rock
or grassy depressions whose arrangements
or colors signal like clouds, lowlike.
The waves are aimed at me. Like a start
they seem to disappear whitewashed
before firstlight, recede, drop their storm sense.
The waves, instead, grow, and my only choice
is who they are or maybe when they’ll catch me.

June 12, 2000
Making Fun

Where there's heat, there's desire
to lazy thought, romanticizing
the off pastel band of green between
the eggthin shade of pink at the horizon
and the light French purple in the sky—can you

bring some cool, bring a way to sleep?
Climate more suited to long views,
far-off places darker, cooler. Things that wave
in thinnest breezes grow on the hope
of eventual rain, designed to withstand
hell's wind. A man and a woman are not

one. His desires match hers like a 7-long
string of tails. Her desires are piled beneath
birdsong and wind secrets. On the cottonwood
I'm imagining, a blackbird dangles its feathers,
sings a rusty song, tweaks its head round

in funny jutting circles. I've made a line
of corn crumbs leading to our bed,
and perhaps tonight that blackbird will light
on our pillow. If it's true that a man and a woman
and a blackbird are one—hell,
forget the f---fangled blackbird!

June 13, 2000
Today I found the role I play in my own life. There are 2 observations:

1.) ...
I do computer research,
I play lead guitar in a rock/blues band,
I do management coaching,
I am a minor organizational guru,
I ride bikes,
I play volleyball,
I play squash,
I write essays,
I write books,
I write poems,
I make love,
I am a father (twice)
I've been a husband (twice)
I'm an only child.

In all these things, B+.
Got there fast. Pretty good at them.
Surprisingly fast study.
Look at the length of the list.

But not so great.
One or two notches down.
World’s most famous second rate computer scientist.
Good poet for a computer guy.
"The guy can play guitar real good for a management consultant."
Almost kept up with that peleton.
Inattentive father.
Objectifies women during sex (jeez, we're just fucking after all)
(No excuses)

Alright.
2) ... 
Not many friends.
Two (count ‘em) two
ex-wives. One kid per wife.
They start off stripping before I get home,
end up on the other side of the bed,
in their clothes,
wide awake,
all packed.
lawyer hired,
papers already filed.

Listen.
Center ring.
Walkaround music.

Spoiler. Rennet best case.
Aspirer to pelotons.
Essay on Reluctance

Idea of romance
is sex. Diminish desire.
Deny. Visual objects. Seeing
it is not doing it.
Attention paid
is debt incurred.
Clutch her body,
fleece her grave
dress over bones.

Today we discussed our sex lives and decided we lived in different centuries.

 Prefer a motor.
 Prefer herself.
 Prefer facing away.
 Prefer night.
 Prefer hair.

Today we discussed our sex lives and booted the Rage driver instead.

Render fat, render
fractal-based scenes
in games. Act of sex
is the romance of hyperventilation.
What we see
around is what we see
into. Ammo
for pure sleep.

Today we discussed our Sex lives and our hands closed simultaneously.

Proving in the evening
after discussing our Sex lives with
Romance, Romance is having sex
with Ideas.
Chaos Theory, Part 1

The door is closed,
each one has been closed.

Sitting above the rooftops are flocks of lowing birds,
communicating? No, just acting, reacting.

All around, farther than communication can happen,
faster,
small pockets of activities merge into larger ones
and sudden displays of sense
appear. Complexity is mere
large numbers of small
senseless things added
together to a soup of more senseless
acts.

I am part of this. The closed doors too.

Flocks of bird may have closed them.
Flocks in unsense. The latest medical theory
is that this is how the human heart
beats.
Mirage Ceremony

Stolen night
still dark but taken,
another night without
the small fire in the wood fringe,
spread.

Ink and oil unmixed
lie bookside,
inside you a flourish builds
then turns.

Cakewalk over, the lights stun
but it’s only sunrise and its mirror-return
from the house you left.

Stand and turn, steal promises,
write without ink but make it hurt.
Like an open book you turn and
sigh, sight unsensed, spread with smiles
now spread alone.

I am the cliff you walked off once,
I am the cliff you approach as a wall of stone.
The Poem as Pineapples and Hula Girls

An illusion, a poem.  
The man who invented them is dead,  
his first were made of silk—light and loose,  
decorated with girls and pineapples.

The first poems, combinations of two unrelated items,  
were loose checkered songs sung by plantation workers,  
and nightmares or day illusions made of bright silk.

The poem is the ultimate expression of delighted  
creativity. You can’t help but  
feel good after reading one.

Critics can’t begin to describe them: flowers,  
reds, blues, and bright. Feel-at-easy.

The mind reals.

Imagine poems for under a dollar  
made of rayon. Leisure and decadence  
in a package no larger then a startle-awake  
nightmare.

You know it’s real when a poem  
has travelled somewhere, cold and dark,  
talks out loud.

Speaks to nonsense  
speaks to you.
Lies, Night, Tracks, Lies Again

Tonight there are not too many ways to fall for lies. The air has grown still through cricketry, let rise its heat to the heavens as if running. Have you noticed that lies are bound in prepositional phrases, in direct objects, sometimes in the verb, but truth hangs from verbs like meat on a beef leg. I'm not much of anything, not the captain of a ship whose cargo makes rare spices into rotten meat, whose sails shine like a deepthroated O.

If you find things in lines, find things here. Find that this is really about loneliness, the work-made-free encounter that plies like windblown ships in beer ads.

Or imagine the stick match lit past midnight struck on a box-car roller door, imagine the start of light and heart as the horses shift from leg to leg wondering at the sickness at heart lies told to forgive loneliness beget. A sound from the deep, a sound from the throat, sounds not in protest, yielding to the lie held within.
Outlawless

Read and learn—the poem is the purest window but being pure it combines with nothing least of all understanding; being a window it conveys the essence blocks the substance. Nights we walked; by tracing each path, by calculating with care, by figuring the tiled world the point would be clear pure, incombinant. unduplicitous.

The poem is the avoided, the path that avoids fear by fearing louder, that makes music with amplified pieces of noise. You who read this believe its path has led to you.

The pure fear, the innocent too—only the outlaw sleeps well; here’s my job: play for keeps.
How Fortunate the Man with None

Talker without listening:
how could this come to pass?
The way is down an asphalted slope
to a lego-shaped barn or shed,
roads bent on intersecting frame
their destination. Dark but bright,
cold but cheered by their lightened touch.
The child walks cautiously ahead,
runs to the roads fleeing slight shards
of adulterous touching.

The shed though is home to homeward-marching trains. One waits. The courteous conductor signals him on, doors slish shut on him and clowns,
and what could never be imagined
nor ever stopped
has been avoided
like the trainlike meaning
of clipped and framed images.
When the Truth is Played, Baby You’re Mine

Like you I like
silences and the stillness
of uncomfortable

pauses. Slowdown. Shuck
dark, feign orbs.

Cameled pocks of water,
snaked—
vehement—
meandering.

Sweathanded fingers clutch
then—cool, reduced—ensnare.
Argument from reduction

as if it

matter-of-factly faces the rhythm of logic
beat out in ambient sand.

I mean, a river disappears
over there; we sit in its gully cut from the mesa
right here; and
right there a river returns.

Flow in equals
flow out.

What is the desert
if all it does is drink?
Inutile Reflection

Tonight we accepted secrecy,
chose the drying slope of grass that preys
above blue-turbulent flow, dragged
our selves by the bark, head-drooped branches
above us shining downcast.

Vapor lights collect moths and small flies,
mosquito hawks and gnats the way I
suppose I’ve collected you. The light vapor
lights spit across the slowing river turns its surface
oily or languid, you lying like Lillith afraid
to be named so surely by my fingerpads.

Those gathered insects intent on light
slightly swirl like the first of snow tempting
fall, and so I find it no surprise that downstream
of us the half-finished
bridge is imperfectly
perfect, and as useless.
Intolerable Temptation

No one goes down
this road, we sit under the wilting shagged bark
eucalyptus meltingly sweet mixed smells
with tarweed and other exotics here, the place
you come from like wet mud. Here dust
from all sources fills the late day air to gauze

and your gaze is down the road toward its end
or the sunset. For hours we’ve sat making bed
or reclined our heads stuck

in idle. Soon you’ll choose one
end of the road and I
the other—the only thing true
may take a turn for false. No
one goes down this road.
Infertile Encounter

Huddled in a hard fall
rain beneath a small bricky shelflike
overhang 3 storeys up
just before dark in one of the more northern small
Canadian cities, what was she waiting for,
waiting so long, soaked in a scarf tied
under her chin and over her hair,
in a long wool coat—that time of Autumn
in northern Canada when snow deserves
to fall—that she would not stand in a doorway
nor wander down the street nor cross
beneath a vapor light, that she would turn
every few minutes to look down the street
the other way, pause then look back again,
minute after minute for over an hour,
and I could only imagine the streaks
down her face, the small pockets of warmth
hidden beneath her clothes, the season
made sharp through the efforts of bright lights
on poles, I can never ask her, I could not walk
down to her, I cannot turn
to her before or after bedlove—
the vapor light did,
and still does,
seem more important.
In Tucson

Heat so dry it’s just a just-warm sheet to the skin. Clouds formed by storms many iterations of simple rules ago levitate making fun of cartoons and heaven theories. In fact, fighter trainers care neither way about them. A pretty woman or several found the sudden pour overpowering and shed cultural standards and clothes to soak in rain and stares. Later they spoke in monotones about nudity, O.J., and a retro video rental store in the Valley, meaning L.A. My sudden claim to fame was lightning gazing, or rather turning my head correctly with respect to the overfed spectacle. But appealing.

In the background, women spoke of making money through the slave labor of software developers while the angel asked quiet questions urgently—quiet urges. In my room the Southwest decor is tinged with chinee (to dredge words with the intent of shock), an encarped lamp, gold on black. Somewhere to the East or West my love beholds the lightning strike which to me just flickers this computer screen, off then on, the one on which I just wrote just wrote.
Ineluctable Interment

In Colorado near the spiritual flat
of Kansas we laid like fossils by the cottonwoods,
on the shovel of land we had, in the soon sunset
that inhabits the plains or prairies and holds
in the still, and the rising dark had risen
past us already—but an amber red circle
leapt up trees and meager milo,
a light beacon as if from a shone lensed
searchlight set on low, and in time
it encompassed us, seeming spare as if diluted
or uncompressed, a red made from the amber
of pine or fir sap. The red in her hair flared
or filled with ultra-earthen shine. This time
of day the air fills with motes or mites,
small flecks and flies or a blend of pollen,
a sullen softening made of living or lifelike
bits. Sample me, sample the reddening soil
and hair. The circle was of a size to encompass
us, our stand of wood, our ragged but rugged house,
a quonset, and implements and tools, or things
whose names may be forgotten. Follow that line of light
up and back to the mountains, not high, but back
up to the fir in the notch and in the crook of branch
and trunk a small cup or bubble of sap formed the lens
that sprayed that 100-foot circle around,
that marked its path through small-living
or lifelike things in air surrounding us.

Today, though, in the plane above that small-circled
place, the sun is setting as it does and it does, and I’m heading
east away, toward the rising dark in the direction shadows
go. There are no circles of light anymore. Decades. Decades.
There are things you may ask about the spirit light,
the amber light, the red becoming dark red in the hair,
the encompass of the circle. But I tell you it’s all nothing now.
Light simply cannot—do you understand me?—light simply
cannot do such things anymore.
Incessant Broken Freezers, Click-through Sonnets

Statement:

Senseless to write poetry
on a computer connected by phoneline
to the Net in lightning. Better
to write you instead. Shakespeare did crap like
that, but the lightning could only strike him, and hunoz
what goofy triggers got to him:
notes on foodstuffs
scattered like chopped ham on the table.
The floor freezer warped by the cold useless
from heat leaks. That's inspiration enough. Things fly
apart. Lights dim but the computer is battery backed.
What about his paper? Too sensitive to water? Lightning
flashes outside, lights seesaw inside—seesaw
of insight, the rising swell of stupidity
that love depends on, rising rainwater
as if a final flood, rising senses and eyes. Sonnets
have held our attention too long Mr William Shakespeare:
the statement, the turn,
the final couplet—that's where that damned “click”
came from. Experimenting they said. Here's an experiment:

Turn:

You stink. Your language dried up and the airborne
debris makes nice sunsets. And damn it,
we're the ones who have to read about them.

Here's your goddamn clickshut couplet—fix my damn freezer already:

Damn you WS, damn your foolish
sonnets, damn your goofy language stunts.
Click! (not even 3 lines, you loser)
Infusion of Age-End

Things here are old.
Dictionaries last read 40 years ago.
Wood so old and unforgivenly kept it melts to touch.
Clocks heaving from one second to another.
Machines made more of bluster than engineering.

Things that are old
need to be coveted, fondled, touched rarely, but with respect.
This house heaves, breathes slowly; it was put together with clumsy care.
Thoughts were used here. This building holds. Tonight
I cannot say whether my way is east or west. In front of me

a doornode, held in opening a million times, will wear
out after 3 more touches, though it breathes as a handle will
normally through the night. And
when it is finished, its last grains of brass will float away,
the way things do when they stop
being old.
Inconstant Repetition

Tonight the night
came calling, the heads
of women blended, their clothes
moved in unison. Bending
circuits, overacted
upon strings, primality factored
into winces. Circles—
irrationality and returns,
circle parts skirts drape
off, slide off,
parts like a searchlight.
Sleek blend of synthetics,
rhythmics, one thing, bent
back things. The searchlight
came calling, factored into the night
the silence of clothes talking back.
Inside Rock

How does the albatross die—
heartstop and plunge? The heart
is involved.

The sap is blood
to the tree, engloved in bark and hardwood,
maybe we see it in the after-amber

when mosquitos filled with blood
rest as the albatross never does. Imagine
sea waves—40, 50

feet, wind like a particle accelerator,
linear, ring—the albatross
doesn't, can't,

planning an approach to wind
that avoids anything but the stiff
yet flexing wing holding in place

that makes death fondly
appealing. No, the death
is prosaic—think of the bird

itself, the size of the wings,
the size of the heart, how both
shrink, how the will to hover

over high waves shrinks
when the albatross steps
into the steep-sided granite

hole out from which it
cannot step, cannot fly.
How fortunate such holes are found.
Informed Mourning

Good cemeteries live,
the best cannot form parts
of a metaphor. Consider the one
by Johnson’s Gas and Plumbing.
I noticed it prowling the chainsaw
sculpture place by the side of Route 16—
5’ bears, 7’ bears. Take
a trunk and chainsaw the big parts. Heavy magic
markers mark smaller chunks, 16
lb hammer and thick wood chisels...
The slope is cut into a sand bank,
at the top, the granite post mark
of the edge of a cemetery. It is a patch.
I found the frantic tries at Eliza: died 1834, AET 12 yrs,
6 mos. Eliza 2nd: died 1839, AET 3 yrs, 8mos. People
extremes: Jesse Thing. The day is a spectacle.
Sun in the last quarter. The patch is part
of a hill. Walk from the lowest part of the patch
toward sunset and the patch ends just below a hilltop.
Fifty graves maybe, but the ground swells
every few feet in a 2’ by 6’ mound. Uniform.
Patch as island. The hilltop was taken for Route 16,
the others for a camp store, the chainsaw place
and Johnson’s, a home—something
like that. Enough to walk, enough
for a warm afternoon, enough to believe
those coffins rise pulling the patch
with them, enough to reject metaphor, enough
to see the cutbanks linked to the chainsawed
chunks. O, it was enough.
In Hand

River seems low
as if yesterday’s drenching downpour
ran full out to the sea, skipped its usual flow,
or the tide skipped its backward flow
today, didn’t push back. River

seems a scrawny dog, rock-dense bones
protruding, channel-skin browned and dry
where riverreeds usually prowl. The wind
has picked up, raking into close furrows
and worry lines the river surface, except
three or four spots that remain mirror
calm even after minutes and cloud-light
changes. These reflect the bridge

green and foolish atop high & dry piers, river running
more to sand and mud than mountain runoff.

Today it’s a kayak’s river.

Is this what’s meant by walking arm in arm?
Thin and cautious, wary of existing continuities,
abstaining for incautious over-runoff,
four calm spots among light sprigs
of craziness. The constancy of birds.

On the other side, nearby the little red
bridgeman’s hut sheltering the logbook
of boat-comings and boat-goings, turnings
of the crank that opens this bridge,
over by there—is that where we can walk
for one day hand in hand?

July 6, 2000
In Order, Too

Silence takes too much energy
but you have grown into it
the way a heavy runner will eventually
run all day upslope on thick legs that shrink
as he does. How many ways are there
to interpret null? In as many contexts

as there are the ways are infinite, nil & all
being darkened twins or separated-at-birth
coincidences—let’s favor surprises. Your best surprise
is which part of the overall silence
to attend. Of seven blackbirds all
alike, which one holds song?

When Jimi played, God
sat silent and brooding—wondering whether
the image thing went too far. When Stevie Ray played
I fell silent though the heaters in my tubes
were ready. Who

shouted? Of all the things to make sense,
the dark angles on the page and ill-sorted sounds
seem the least likely. Where can there be prettiness
there, or her shallow twin,

beauty? Should I fit
you like a hand in a hand, or will arms
do? Tonight the square parcels line up
below—the plane happens to take
me away from where you are secretly
wishing when all it would take

is 9 lines in the right order

July 6, 2000
Incredible Essay on Language or Stuff

Suppose the fellows found it exciting
to slaver themselves with your smell
by rolling themselves in the last 3 rhymes you wrote—
take you onto themselves like skin in skin,
of cannibalistic forays but without the food part.
Bitter tinge to the odor—blank or free—sweetly
smelling of petunias or jasmine—what can it mean
for who what you are or wrote? I’m supposing

you’ve selected the roundworm defining you.
Aren’t you sick of the prepositions, how they like to
line things up, show a direction of reproach, take up
valuable sound counts when you want every sound to count?
I’m taken aback by the cultures who value planning ahead
enough to think to write a question mark upside down
at the start of a sentence that actually turns out
to be a question. Getting back to that smell. You’ve

no doubt thought about the sexual implications
of this. I’m indifferent to them, but wouldn’t mind
watching. Let’s say that writing an upside down
question mark is equivalent to “signalling”. What
signal does approaching with someone else’s odor
give off? You’ve noticed, no doubt

that signals and odors are both given off,
and it makes you wonder how much master
planning those language designers gave off.
Look, no one sat down and designed the languages
we speak. No one did. So how much fucking
sense can what we say make? I don’t know,
but I wouldn’t mind watching that.
In Touch with Reaction

Erotic photos from the 1800's
 evoke flesh full and only
 the breasts and buttocks show clean—hair,
 hair, hair (arm pit, arm pit, crotch pit) and coarse.

In one the photographer is level with her knees
 while she reclines with her left hand's thumb touching
 where the clit should be, but the thicker
 of unaltered chemicals on his plate reveals just what is wanted:
 nothing. No smiles and the use of darkness harkens
to night. Things in the night go stupid
 when they bump. There is something, though,
 important about the way breasts hang
 when her body bends and her arms come
 slightly together, something that makes meaning
 less common or anyhow puts the perfect
 proportion to it. It's
 involuntary how the palm reaches up
 for the nipple in these cases.

The coarse dark pubic hair of a slightly older
 dark-haired woman no matter how soft and wet
 underneath it is tells every man who investigates
 there that this is mother country. I've read

something funny about this,
 it concerns silence too,
 what the poets call stillness.
 It's about the possibility of constant
 ecstasy and what this means for creation,
 what it means for the image thing.
 Who makes things.

One night I touched her leg—
 nothing happened, no comment, no rejection,
 no welcome. The next thing the train door closed
 between us. It reminds me of places, and how
 they take on the stench of what happened to them,
 and how one day all that's left will be
 what we've done, and the only images
 left will be the ones with key parts
 untouched by reaction.

July 8, 2000
Infidelity of Sound Warnings

My back’s against a willow’s trunk
the time of day when the dimmest visible star
is not yet visible, but what can such stars
tell me? Across the meadow and choked
marsh pond a cutbank—the freight
train moves at a snail’s pace south to north
reaching for latitudes that bring on steam
heat in the conductor’s quarters even mid-spring.
It reminds me of us the rattling and light
screeches the metals make against each other
and the firm shaking of the boxcars’ hips.
Is this the way dreams leave? Through the open
window of the conductor’s final quarters
a dim light shows a showgirl’s breasts
but it’s too far for me to see. Leaving,
the trains rhythmic slight disturbance
sounds fade not to silence
but to the murmuring background
rising roar of frogs and crickets
and rising dark and hanging branches
that sound and look and feel of me.

July 10, 2000
In Light’s Grasp

Stay with me tonight,
ragged group of moths,
beside my nightstand, outside
the screened window in the small bitter
white circle of an ill-chosen bare bulb
stuck in a fixture stuck
in the wall. Mid-summer.

Your wing filaments splash
a mothy dust in the air—illuminated
sprays or perhaps smaller motes or bits
of dust. Small metallic bangs
against the screen. Hotter smacks
on thin bulb glass. Stinging
heat. Singeing
heat.

Later I will tire
of the loneliness of moth company,
the wet heat will keep me above the sheets,
a pillow will be clamped between my legs
for comfort and to keep air
between them. Later I will snuff

out the nightlight outside,
don’t I wish for such a switch?
Moths will fly away one by one,
and I will be the one
to greet the next persona
of the lonely.
In Cold Blood

Behind me panic has risen
as the warm liquidblue sky
has suddenly clouded over
and a popcorn snow
has started to hail down
on us. As I bring my collar
up and pull on a skull-hugging
balaklava, a thought
such as clutching your breasts
from behind you as we lie
under layers of feather blankets
in the depths of Bavaria
hails down on me. If only
you weren’t you,
I weren’t I,
this place behind me were not Dachau,
maybe I could hold you
thus.
Maybe.
Interpreting Snow

Nature has no erasers
nor has physics really.
More like pushing love back and forth on a wide bed
or an infant alchemist’s seventh dream.
Eraser aren’t erasers either—this is the power
of abstractions: to make us believe the way
Jesus tried to on the cross. The image
is of taking away, removing the way
a woman will erase her last garment. Snow

erases the opposite. Green copper rooftops
in Paris, a steaming ashpile after you’ve dumped
your coals out back, blades of grass
foolishly or optimistically green—all
these erased by sifted snow piled on
like sisters feeling something new tonight.
Additive erasing. Big art’s

whiteout. Think metaphorically:
what can it mean when snow laces
over itself, snow piles on snow?
Does it mean the same thing
as when I lie on your back
and whisper two things
into you?
India Ink

Tall candlepines & the approaching storm,
squall line of sharp breezes. You bend
to watch me paint these images

in India ink on rough-hided washi,
one solid color black but softened—the stiff
inner hairs of the brush ensure

sure strokes, the soft outer wrapping
slaps on ink. In
all, the perfect way to sketch

the sound of breezes in pines,
and what after all are such sounds
but the movement of thoughts in the mind?

July 13, 2000
Guessed Guest

In the overwarm park with the crying drunk
and downtrodden arrestee, under eucalyptus shade
its blended smells with the sickly sweet tarweed,
by the fungal green bridge that strangely attracts,
near tombstones of writers and unknowns,
from the small offerings of tenderness rejected by jokes,
from men sitting on sidewalks begging in latin
and blank verse, from snips of food scraps, stories,
and accents, from the hobbling half-walk, beside
the soft strokes of pubic hair and girl-thin layers
of slipping skin, under trees made from old harlots
or piles of rye hay—

from all these pilgrimages
you've gathered the rags and straw
to make a scarecrow. It follows
you, stops when you do,
enjoys rain by falling
apart, talks only on Tuesday morning.
It likes to sit in fields,
adjusts its approximations.
Direct Seeing

Seeing is direct seeing.
Songs over and over, drier night
air pulled in by a fan in Merrimack Valley July,
The same song over and over, but it’s a tape
and I need to rewind it each time and find
its beginning. Look at one picture
over and over. Dream of the one dance
over and over. Hour after hour. Midnight.
Two.
She would wear a suede skirt and dance the Pony.
She would sit like a queen. I would stand by the wall
of windows with drier night air pulled
in by the dropping of night.
After, I would listen to a song
over and over, or
two
songs. Seeing is direct
seeing. Once I hesitated,
thought, and the drier air
turned moist and floated up,
away.
Ink Worker

Consider ink workers. 
Squid, octopus, many cephalapods—head 
and arms and ink-spurting behaviors many 
thought were camouflage or confusion—with 
foes like fangfish or filetail catsharks 
who wouldn’t think ink was for blotting view 
or stinging eyes. Now we know 
better: The squid unfurls his fangled arms 
and draws a floating, fanning self-likeness 
in black or phosphorescent ink 
the charging predator—spermy jaws, fangs, fear-reading 
eyes—takes for squid and bites, lunges, ingests, 
critiques for all the worth worth has.
Something Fishy About Physics

By the tank
in the aquarium, dark
purposely to reveal the tender
phosphorescence of midwater
shrimp, fish, crystal mosquito-likes
moving like arcane machines,
after walking with my head
turned back to watch the jellies
I stopped—
turned—she was there only
inches away packaged in pressure-packing
jeans and blouse, creamy hair and crystal-thin
skin, like something stumbled upon
beneath the sun zone, something similar
yet startlingly stranger-like and as phosphorescence
is to pressure-water so smell is to the urge
to reach for the pelvic crowns or shoulder blades,
slide the self-knot from top to bottom,
slide to the surface too fast to find her
gone in the distance time
makes out of moving.

July 18, 2000
Pain Arch

The eyebrows of beauty
gather together in button seams,
at shaved edges, brought
together by a salted taste,
green plum pickles.

The eyebrows of beauty
gather together in concave groups,
skirt shaved, insignias attentive
to hair, triggers alert,
brought together by the potential
of watching the whip

shadow slip the horse
forward, one of many
insignias of implication.
Cities Bombarde by the Care of Lifting

We wore love clothes
in the flat felled by firebombs,
percussives—rain sleeved dancing
clothes—by the bridge rusted to falling
for any trick to cross for free. We
could say the bridge was half-finished
because it could be salvaged, repaired,
a teardown or rebuilder. Feels
like the boredom of the natural world
is no match for the obsequiousness
of city remains and silence dispersed
by the meteoric ticking of concrete
going its rust dance. We wore
out the pencils we brought to make love
conform to the arc history makes
through collapse, urge, untanglement
and the dreadful replacement of city
bridges by unreverberent green tones.
As you can see it's all a box, a column,
unprepared sentence streams and all.
All that's left is the click—click of concrete
falling an inch, the same inch I got without.
Leaving Her at the Door on a Rainy Day: Art Versus Thought

Absolutes are acceptable, relatives
not: existence versus
relation.

The day I left she
stood naked at
the door, I rolled
up the handcrank window on my
passenger side though
the rain had soaked through
the seats and puddled on
the floor.

She stood arms
folded beneath her breasts.
The thing itself. Naked
and dripping wet herself
from herself
and me. I left.

To hold two
in the mind and relate
them is an act of outright
abstraction, assault
on art. Sentimentality
bombs.

Two drunks stepping
by stopped, stared swaying,
existence not held
in mind but in hand.
Persisting in her mind:
relation of standing to
leaving. Her naked sideshow
was abstract. Putting the car in first
was real.
Out There in the Cold Distance

I've built three gates to pass through
back to you, shrine of ulterior warmth
rising from the cool mud-singed spring

air looming as a breeze by the sea. Obvious
as a mouth, no, lips is the last, closest—nothing
but red ochre on your lips or ash as

if fallen from a straw fire made cloud. Obvious
as the moon, no, the bitter coastline hugged
by sea debris and jugs, entered cold &

wet as a hag is the first, most distant—
much more than a pipeline wave
or a wave that breaks rocks & sprays

sand as much as sea-spray. Oblivious
as a monk, yes, serried rows of barley
betokening law is the middle, a hundred laborers

choose the weeds and make from their choking
hold a mould of fruit for favored plants—
this is the law & think of the path,

each gate two vertical posts and a flat
beam top, the simplest design, each
long day of hard work is made to pass

through a gate. The distance to each
from the other is such to cast doubt
on the wisdom of direction, & each

time there I've stooped with the laborers
whose lonely long spring day is rewarded
by yellow—or are they green?—cold low clouds.
As It Is

Beneath or within you can see still in her
the shapes of sharp looks,
rounded parts not as taut, smooth
places furrowed, suppose as a hill field

tilled and serrated into furrows.
Like any woman who admired flirtation once
she wears thin loose fabrics that hang
and reveal innocently. From this

her breasts are young. Any wideness
is hidden in her hidden thighs. Truth
is revealed only in one place—the hat
she wears crookedly as she works garden

fields on a hill upvalley, birch whites,
eye whites, whites in hair echo her forgetfulness
of where her home lies below when the day is done,
and she, unlike the farmers' wives, won't stop.
In An Order

The messenger came today,
stood at the door pausing
before taking in his free
hand a lilac branch from the bush

you cultivated before choosing
to live in bitterness, knocked and waited

until you opened the door to see
him hand you the lilac branch

aroma-full and laced in purple and green,
before handing you the letter

I wrote yesterday in an opulent hope
embodied in the arc of three things.
Elimination

Suddenly spring evening
leaps from the broom as I sweep
the garden stones, suddenly
thinking of it. The permanent faustian
situation alights. Our bodies stick

and crevasse—but night
eliminates body, a spoon
drops honey. Our souls,
dried honey in cracked combs,
one light lights another. Our

souls adhere—but day
eliminates soul. Evening:
Embargo. Crevise.
Glue. Suddenly
the garden stones stop.
In The Handcart

On the side of a busy road,
a discarded handcart discards
shadows in my direction. I
walk toward the declining
sun. In the park at the end
of the road, by a bare wintering
willow, a woman wipes her eyes, cheeks.
The cold has been carried here. I
am someone she never saw.
Paradox of Immotion

We lay beneath less cloud laden sky
than the oaks pretend, but one
sits still as froze foam. She
lies still. That cloud denies motion,
change, is fixed, a patch
of sky-only snow. She lies
still. The oak has paused to observe
what follows on. Many looks.
The oak is sudden; the cloud gone.
She lies still. Is gone.
The Captain Has Fallen Overhead

Greywool pants hems mudspangled in stereo syncopation: brown colorblood oak leaves, greybark, (the one-foot pathway) mud tannin soaking in hundreths of inches into her boots, &
when I stop the luscious tapping funnels to mono or fades behind soft snapfingers punctuation (rain). After all, this fragment trail trails tide ebbed to sugar black flats &
it's just metaphor for the vegetable willow green tip plunged one inch in such mud as she reckons a spectacle’s rainslaught can liquefy. Urban woman on a heart’s-whim.
Underground Movement

We’ve paid our respects to the parking garage, underground with all its subhuman smells, grease maybe or gas & oil. Exhaust & fumes. Concrete brushed in waves, circle parts, made to keep things—all sorts of things—from slipping down a slope whose largesse is a bottom. Nothing there was touched by life save life long dead as in oil, leather, cotton fabrics stretched thin & worn thin. Nothing there moved save by combustion which left behind exhaustion. Oh, except for us, who made wishes like half-candles & smoke wisped up, goodnight is the luck of clear afternoon sun air.
Caution: Artist at Work

Making a sculpture of rust
I started with one of iron
and as if one person stood
by the railing under a pier,
another joined and the two
walked off, something about
moisture, something about

air, something about events
that take a little too long
left the iron just singed
not gone. The satin finish
steelwooled on the surface
is now replaced by blemishes
like blisters, by the beginnings
of evaporation like leavings
of passion.
Seem

There is no magic to places though the sentimentalists work overtime. The small forest clearing surrounded by pines and overshadowed, glacial stone set just so near its center, small twig fire lit by the teenage boy next to a hut he built of branches and bits of scrap lumber from the barn, on a winter day flurry filled and brimming under escape, small bits of warmth in a barren landscape is now a rolling paddock of mud and horseshit, the rock hauled away and the trees down, burned to smoke and ash, the hut ground into the ground—no magic place. Beneath the mud where the hut once stood rests the metal can inside a metal can, and inside both is a plastic bag inside a plastic bag, and inside both is the handwritten letter in which I told you once my feelings in a place that seemed.

July 31, 2000
Imagine That

River as fountain. Water released from all sorts of everywhere contained in the confines of bank, safe storehouse of slowly escaping convictions. Heat transfer. albedo, convection, evaporation, condensation—abstractions unhelpful to our plan. Fountain

as meeting place, place for men to watch overworldly women work their bodies into silhouettes. Or if a man died near here the fountain could serve as monument and time echo. As river the fountain is hidden. Body of water and banks for stepping down. Parts are hidden as many parts are. Imagine the bottle floating down, down. Imagine the paper within, deep inside. Imagine the river that ends on a sand plain, that spreads before slipping down, confusing up. And the bottle delivered as expected to sand, but the wrong sand, very wrong sand saying imagine that.
In Exile

I’m so impressed by your little green lights—in daylight they remind me of fountains or indigo stations. At night they cause the bottoms of my feet to itch unscratchably. For me the letters pile up, and though you haven’t written in weeks it’s time for me to write you. Or at least sketch out who you are. Furnaces burn brightly near the edges of your face, or is it your hips? Do the green lights signify the that of burning? *That* of it is happening? Even though I can’t see you, my sketch has you not understanding. Like poets sworn off worn words the next fix is ubiquitous. Hold on, hold to what we got—broken is how we exist, the break in symmetry that enables something or two. Were we perfect for each other we’d blend to nothing. One light, is it turning? Turning round or color? Selfish on the inhale, selfless exhale, exhale, exhale.
Clodmaster

One could argue that my role is master—
like the plum-master who in expert lines
cranks life into the tree and blossoms
overhead that hang as if saddened
by the joy you feel. But what’s more important
is the stick I hold, earned as no other has been,
and the hard clod of earth I strike with it,
passing by it on my way to you.
In Case of Stymie

In your city like mine the hardness of buildings,  
the coral, the stinging scratchiness of the soles  
of the feet are symbol of cranky silence  
and underground passages. In my dream  
you warmed your skirt on the surface  
of a covered brazier, and within the quilts  
you wrapped on top you warmed  
your feet. We broke charcoal on charcoal  
to hear it tinkle, smell its cud. In your dream  
I was an urban bench carved under moonlight  
after an English sunset. You would have said  
my language frightens you, but my language  
frightens you. Tonight the sunset alternated  
with crashing waves curled in pipelines  
and all we could think of were sizes.

Someday I’ll revise you, make your city  
more foreign, make your hair less human,  
makes its color unprintable, averse  
to photographic chemicals. This way  
words will mean more.
Ferocactus

I found a place where the earth is red, where green things grow with sharp whiskers, where the color of lemons signals sharp lights. where the sun near night becomes porcelain, where the sound of a single shot shifts a ring of blind birds, where soft dust from butterfly winds makes the delicate meal you’ve always wanted, where strangers happily exchange clothes by stripping unashamedly. In this place I’ve grown lost, and I wander from one small shade to another as it moves from west to east, my daily water supply is provided by shale cups and barrel cactuses—the viznaga—fierce and wild. By night I use its spines to tattoo this note to you in dark blue fountain ink, but the sun burns so hard the words are hard to see by day, by night I hear howls—metallic, linked to spines and sharp whiskers. I can’t tell. I can’t tell you how happy I am.
My First Hail Marys

When the green line
goes flat, disappears,
place the rosary in my hand. Ignore
the ugly shapes my mouth assumes,
the half-closed way my eyes stop.
Don’t fix your stare on the wall’s plaster
whose dents were made by deliberate ignorance—
there is nothing there but sorrow
even in its turning away whiteness.
Choose the bead you’ve chosen before
your special marker and place it
between my thumb and fingers, pretend
the words I’m saying after my last breath has left,
pretend joyfully. Turn to the trees outside
the window, the glorious ways their branches
branch exuberant in possibilities though dark
this dark evening; forget what I’ve forgotten—
the life I’ve lived and your part in it. It
means nothing to me, and I will remember it
forever.
Thin

Summer is thin
all things that think are thin
in summer—season of creation and contemplation
summer heat thins meals—
difficulty making makes sweats
thinness hiding in small
lines blunt meanings drown fear
in the wets of skin on sheets
where constant yelling, carhorns, roadcrush
pulls wet from the air—you’re
so thin all’s left
is the crotchty punctuation
you grew back
muck your mind left
behind
In Arc

In whose arc does the little hand move
slow as a boat launch full of tons
creaking as all things manmade do,
clothes that change every day skin
like changing skin reflecting mood
the way the bottoms of leaves turn up
in rain or is it wind? Crows stoically
one color, herons shamedly one color
always except when tricks
are played. The hand moved little
because the fan needed to stop
because it began to sound like
brief words of wisdom coming
as if from the bottoms of black leaves.
Meeting Scene

In the park corner near dark,
summer, gathering
the insignificant: branches, bark,
twigs and tossed aside dried leaves,
grass and green weeds, combinations
of dead and live, I pile
the dead in chimney piles, room
for air to rise away angelic and light
the dead grass spurting yellow half-
flames and, smoking, light wood—
sizzle and crack, resurrection in the small.
I place the weeds—still, living—on,
and smoke seeps up through the rank
rubbish and makes smelly smoke—
smudge against mosquitoes—
rising up into the air and disappearing
above the park. Into this corner,
into this time, you’ve stepped
and sniff your greetings.
Unterment Ceremony

The women were left to untie
the bonds binding him to life
which pouted—leaving a trail
of mousetracks to show the way he came—
rattling death, there on a lark.
Not just clothes reflecting his smell
hanging as from a scarecrow,
nor his hair nor nails yellowed as summer
hay left by the barn last summer,
not even the ring he wore harboring
secrets for one of his liberators.
Just his name which they cut loose
from his eyelids and packed in a box
shaped like a puffball cloud
and let it fly twisting up like a smudge
that keeps away the biting things.

August 11, 2000
Indistinct Dream Bird

Imagine your wildest dream spilling off a cliff fresh, still fused with mud making brown cascades falling to a pool you can penetrate little if at all, all hidden by all-graying fog, all indistinct besides the crows coughing their doubts in the fog, whispering of the mud, reminding each other of the days when they sat in a row on branches above the cliff reciting psalms or kissing, small pecks. This dream lies in your bed, its hand on your arm, its breathing all hidden, its dreams all indistinct.
On a Sentimental Aspect of Killers

We kill—all blood,
all bloodless. The kill is in us,
silver dark roads. Sniper
crouched on a rooftop, his Remington.
Radio says, "got him?"
"Barely." Bugs in the lights, road deer,
slumping rats furtively dodging.
Birds dented by glass. Green glass
night shade. "Take him."
Death does not wait.
Find this bag of tricks
when you contemplate
stochastic sight, predictive vision—rationalize
a rose the color of kill. I watched.
I cried two days of beauty,
from skill.
Unbearable Parable

This is the work of water-color painting. Color mixed in water, glycerine, homey-water, a pesticide as preservative, gum arabic or senegal is laid on absorbing paper; water drunk in paper leaves the gum and color; hot from preservation heat evaporates liquids leaving gum binding colors. Think of it: evaporated water, and water soaked into paper makes art, and art is left to its own lightfastness.
Secrets of Travel, of Work

Rivers and bridges, mountains, seas—do not give them new names. They are as silly clothes or none, are no more than gossip.

Spend midday on foot; use a stick as a third thin leg; save morning time and evening time for thought.

Wish for beds or mats you’ve never warmed, simple food without excess drink, for poetry is the duty of man alone and woman alone but the duty of man and woman together is production. With simple food you can do anything.

Keep your poems to your pockets, carried as winged insects tucked in vegetable cloth. When asked, make them fly away; when asked, make more.
Instead of Love

I have taken your forgetfulness and grafted
it onto my love of detail and grand sweeps
in the hope of creating keen insight
into emptiness. Take plumtree lightlessly blue and graft
it onto the sequoia and create fruit birds only can reach.
I find at night the thought will come that
I should have crown-grafted not tongue-grafted;
in a rainstorm the thought will come that
instead of a bare clayearth patch I should have wrapped
it in plastic. But back to us, the sun drapes tree mantles with
increase and beneath the shade only dirt dares
invade our thoughts. The graft will not take, since
I have forgotten you, and you're mending the detail
I dropped on the path home which
is away from you, away from lightning, away
in every direction.

August 18, 2000
Could It Be?

The point of living is the glance, walking along rows of briars, ducking beneath thorns, nettles torturing the soul through comforting sandals, puzzling philosophers whose view of the soul tends to head, heart, or gut not feet or knees, the ports of nature biting along the rows and ways exposing narrow critic’s eyes peeking up in their own glance to the eyes which dare glimpse the shining body of Shifra whose backward glance betrays a soul dripping like semen down her legs.
On a Rise

Her hair is gunmetal grey in the dimmed enclosure light, tinted light a redblond at the tips and her stance is faced away and the curve disappearing between her legs is the face-realm of the black in the soles of the feet. She stands as on a stylite and the head has no choice but envision the view behind her from behind her from all directions to see how the pointing place encompasses all. Look up to her to see the misperspective she affords, how spirits like drop angels are left in the lurch, how dangling statements are like treatises. That is, the womanly parts throwing shore shades into sunpools infringe. She comes into view as I top the rise, one of several along this path enshrined in live oak and sweetsmell, and soon she'll dip below the next, this path where bugs and frogs grow quiet, where snakes jerk in warning, where all is plain.
Bet On It

In the house, in the dark,
subtle parts of doors and windows
are broken, worn by words
passing by, through. on. In
each corner life signs crouch
lower, hug closer the walls,
fibers broken off from rugs
and turning colors in the air.
Let's say my bet's the same
as yours, say we know it.
Is it hope we shoo to the corner?
Is it a hulking bug looking for it?
Fly near me, to the dark place
where curtains curl and stain,
where words are buzz saws,
where bets wander off.
N’N

Long reck’n’n up’long rails,
whiskey poured in plastic pouches hang
from lowbranch buckeyes’long the stream-
bed, place I sleep with hair-wrap-over
eyes’n forehead, not-wash, knot-tangle.
What meat I cook was recent live’n greens
I eat raw are sour and shape’nd spades.
Each night trains’r scummin’ past blow
past, raise’n wind whin’n dance-twirl.
Each hour I wake’n start my you-dream
tongues together’n lips just behind
hand on hip facing each oth-hour.
Then it stops, it stops, stops. My piece
with you is at’n end.
Folds and Ropes

Tonight we sit across the room and all I know of you
is escaped.
You are vacant of you. What animated once is now
the white a snow makes
over fallen leaves, your emptiness once fresh as opening leaves
is covered in white sheets because I’ve seen enough
even seeing nothing. It’s time to go.
The ropes are draped across the woodbars
and under palettes made for lifting
heavy things becoming light.
I’ll find you here one day, and all I’ll know
of you is the lifted folds of the white sheets
draped as they’ve always been.
Planning of Precision and Haste

The shelves are full of empty boxes:
You planned the provisions exactly—
running out was a photo finish. Doorjambs
and framing stood till the last bug’s bite and rot
brought them down as the weighted grey car
rolled down the sand lane but no one followed
for fear of blame. Was I blamed for dying first?
Across the rise a chestnut pushes up, lady slippers
shed pine-needle hats, and invisible flying bugs
live their houred lives just the same almost
as if time kept at it. Look at our lives—
where was the genius in their design?

You’ve poured your sullen potion into me,
and I’ll stand by the sawing river, the color of birch,
and I won’t join you, I just won’t, until the yellow
dog howls in my ear and the funny
smells blow downstream.
Nothing But Cross

He's in a simple wood box under
a simple wood cross, both pine, made simply,
simple nails where others would join
or fasten stoutly, no name but initials
in pencil facing west in the fading sun. The ends
of the cross and its top are cut flat
with small bevels to prevent eager children
from bruising themselves on a last work.
The only clues are the beads
hung on Mardis Gras and his country's flag
on a broken pole. Seen from a low angle away
from the sun his cross is dark and sweetly
releasing pine smells, and the wind is full
of words he wants to say, but he's holding
it in this afternoon. This simple green place
and pines have captured him, no need
to carve it in stone, no need to name or describe.
He knows the words, and the words
know him back—drinking buddies
in a plain-spoken bar.
Sallie and Her Lovers

Sallie’s split in two
by the 2-foot trunk of 100-foot pine.
Did she know this would be her store
when Joseph Mudgett married her
200 years ago? Nights were dark,
and womanly hysteria in times of intimacy
were lies held clearly by pine boughs
far from the village. Dark by
lack of human light. This yard
is rising up sunset, shadows
crouch by her headstone bonded
to the tree like a mistake
of growing up, a second trunk
or Siamese sister. This pine
has loved her, taken her body
and now towers above me,
above Joseph to the side
and crooked. This yard is now
a stamp with its approaches dug away
and sand. These pine roots
have ravished and drained
her as Joseph tried, each on his
own divide. Of the four of us
in the rising dark, in the rising mist,
in the center of the remaining
rows of solitude is smirking most
beneath the threat
of human light?

August 26, 2000
Face Facts

The face approximates perfection varying according to dice rolls, sagging by sweet failures, pondering time by night, dodging eyesight just out of view. The stare develops to a look that ever fades, takes on a dusty hue or slighted paint, sinks into the eyes, shades them. Downward stares problematically persist, and the hood becomes inner. Beneath your skin the bone is mined by the near-perfect finished sawtooth of backwards glances. The trick is the life filter, the balancing memory to life variable blend plug-in, standard equipment packed as backup for the latter half of an unknown-length journey between two sudden drops.
A Bad Century for Sallie

Sallie’s not going anywhere:
Her headstone’s buried
in the trunk of a pine tree, the biggest
in the cemetery. If she’s in a pine
box we can add irony to her embarrassment.

Her husband’s buried in a puff of inspiration
buried him just where he can lie there
and just laugh and laugh, staring up into the heights
of those pine boughs strutting conquest.
He never planted her, I’ll bet,
with as heavy lumber as that tree did.

If the tree caught fire we’d laugh like clichés.

The mind is a piece of burnt wood eager from use,
and in this state one wonders whether it matters
if it was split for fuel or lacquered for show.

Forget the jokes ending “Sallie wood”
or involve “pining”. Yeah, Yeah, Yeah.

Me standing there. The headstone sticking
out the side of a pine. The cuckold husband grinning
and moping off to the side. Sallie with a root
jammed between her legs. An idiot named Pee Wee
chainsawing bears out of pines (I didn’t mention this
before, but I’ll add it to the next draft) within ear range.
And instead of a director named “Spike” it was just me
and a notebook still looking for a door.
Slower Traffic

So much living made into so little,
circling the pond all night,
the moon reflected many ways.
Just one short poem at dawn,
then a long rest when
really it’s a stop. Waking up to find small
gifts on the ground above as the gatekeeper
asks us to put the blossoms back. The water
that’s evaporated makes a fine meal of the sky.
To the poet the poem’s not there at all,
to the poem the poet’s a chalkmaker
and the dust on the ground his greatest work.

I like to come up on my subjects
while they dawdle in the left lane
and flip them off while passing on the right—
the best subjectis slower
traffic in the wrong lane,
and the best poet has the darkest grill.
Cemetery With A Mohawk

We come across cemeteries, 
wander into them in an accident, 
drawn by the smell of flowers unable 
to grow or grow more colorful, drawn 
by the odors of fresh cut grass 
and sliced-in-half frogs. At least 
this is usual: The walk from the nearest 
truck stop requires no great feat 
nor unusual stride. Some, though, 
are closed and beyond closed are forgotten 
though not forgettable since the dead we 
fear rest there or so someone wrote. 
And such cemeteries buried in civilization 
have had their sides sliced off and rest 
as cut-down pyramids, and the fear 
of children is to burrow the hand 
into a side and feel the bones shake 
back. The walk to such ones 
takes a slide-down climb and maybe hands 
or fingers, and the edges on top 
open up to sunlight, and flowers 
here grow and grass is low from respect 
or gaul. The trip to heaven takes heavy 
equipment and trucks that haul.
A Spire Carved into a Strange Shape

Your vacancy is hoodoo-sculpted,
all angles and bulges sanded
off, pleasant curves fears
now sand-dust flowing ahead
of hurried winds. Some call it the age,
some familiarity, but it’s a standing
wave from inconstant expressions,
variable assurances. Soon desert dark
will take over and my
only hope will be to join the winds,
rub up until my deepest
expression is the one that sets
the rest of you free,
adds you to the background stuff.
Simple Resisted

I prefer complex pleasures
to the simple ones of the plains,
not corn in butter but corn as interspersions
in selections of curries, not short straight
but Medusean. Plain pleasures
are roadmasters of indifference cushioning
against jolts that someone must feel
or the rearview mirror turned to half-reflect
nightbrights when the plain blunt light
hits oblique—some...where. Sitting
in an adirondack sipping plain icetea
next a peach warming by a brickwall
enjoins anonymous pleasure lacking lacquer,
pine soaking drying time. I will watch
the explosions from grass overgrown
and bushes ungroomed of toads leaping
into a deep well, a banner the luckless
unfurl the keep their earlobes alert
against the drowsy nature of the familiar,
rather than lift one eyelid to further
the bright existence of the simple.
Lover’s Hat

When the sky turned purple near the west
she gathered her lovers in a circle
in a circle of sand and dust surrounded
by ferocactus and creosote, metallic plants
in an aluminum desert. In the circle
of those whose beds she shared
she placed a bottle of water
at the center of the circle,
on sand and dust that would absorb
and drink were the glass to unfold,
and demanded, “what would you call this
were it not to be called water-bottle?”

Among her lovers the scarecrow stood
among needles and acidic oils flowing
below ground in caustic subpools and above
ground in the rust veins of plants not nearly
alive and kicked it over and among

all the things he did right that day
including the hover no woman could resist
he interspersed one wrong: He did not
remove his plaited hat.
Voles in the Blades

What could be more useless than the mind at ease? I have awoken from a useless sleep lasting till dark, finding myself encased in a love long forgotten except by night, and the frogs have decided again to hop up into the blades of a mower, just as last week the voles and mice decided as they did last summer to leap into the thresher, a fact not frequently entered on the “Vole Fact Sheet,” the best guide to lost love. The love in my dream is a bike ride across the desert on tires rotten from bad water and dry heat, stopping every 15 minutes to repump, buying new springs worth 25¢ for $2 from a blacksmith seeing fortune in our misfortune. We walked in our ease, useless as a mind awake to voles and the killing blades.
Road Trips

On the debris-strewn road up
upsloping rises flags furl like rabbit
tails in hiding or a turned back on the couch.
Losing's stiletto quickturn
would heal in the healing twice bright daylight
but I won't bring myself to relent so soon.
The dirty dust blowing up the road
will soon catch the top of my shadow
as I walk away from one into the other.
When the wind has risen to the pitch
of tall trees I will scream the second echo
sound your name makes spoken
while inhaling, and like smoke in the lungs
pitchforking the heart, like the exhale
changed by exchange, my shadow will meet dust,
yours the wind.
Unexecuted Transformations

When Franz Kafka died his words began their frightful transformation from inky existence to verbal resonation and tertiary effects and Franz Kafka's mean no middling tomb was laid to rest in a plain field of others each with mighty Jewish names and faith in numbers but though the tombs were filled with voices none became transformations never planned nor explained and words grew harder in famous black marble Franz Kafka's acted locally made small repairs to the existences of deadmen dead grasses leaves flowers sprang up trees sprang up ivy vines and tangle gripped black and white marble tombs which grew themselves to the sizes of large horses and opened up turning pages leaves turning colors in clutching shades and now the graveyard of Franz Kafka has been called to judge you based on your faith in the imagined.
Go Away

The simple fare is please go away
trains leave the station some for gashouses
others for the spraying pit I choose
the one to the fountain with edges of marble
lambs as footrests or knobs plain green flashlights
or glass made to look it so thick shattering's
out of the blue question markings of a blacksheep
bawling for lambstew fountain of solitudinous shush
sounds echoes in columned hallways tinkles
in pink tickles to load so slow in marshmallow
avalanches beneath your view of the Alps
high on a highrise floor in stupendous machine
warrens this facelessness was your message
in please in go in away and my choice is walk
away or be walked away upon by the cleansing
fractures of smiling faceless

September 7, 2000
A Cloud Could

In fields with you the seas above open
from time to time and spray
our tongues with flakes made
by changing minds and above a cloud
seems cannot move as we lie between blankets
by the verge of wind-sculpted gorse rows.
I watch that cloud part carefully
affectionate. For hours I watch it
hover waiting to observe
what follows on. No move.
A cloud could obey its will handsomely
blanketing us. I catch your eyelids
blink toward sleep so much
a sign it seems then the cloud
is evaporation is gone
its dumb precipitate lies upon
our blanket hutch which holds
me only and the fling of you.

September 8, 2000
Under Tonight In Crosswind Park

Tonight I am drunk on your foreignity,
questions singularly curious:
thirst abstraction? hunger transformation? blueness
as in sky swelling behind
eyes? You lie bare, annex marking snowangels,
I hover on your bloom. What sounds
could you make were will your hands?

Tonight some big spirit has painted
a lapping lake in real gold, burns
over the roots of my eyes, my hair
creases and whitens more. Do you
understand what foreign heels do
when lifting the hem of a longcoat shading
your under view? I've warmed
your hands in this gold hidden
and retreating, followed you by the head
primitives, and now you speak words speak speech
unmoving made, grandeur-quaking
grammar leaves, and my thoughts only
are nerve-sky, happen-born, breathturned.
Black Love

Love is inhuman, coming
up from the soles into nerves
whose itch can be scratched only
by incision. It is a black feeling
cleverly inching upwards leaving
our heads lessened. Whenever leaves
turn their undersides up in wind
or high wind thirsting maybe for the wet
of rain or the killing frost, the goldlight
lit near day’s end reminds me of your hair
and how it turned when I came near
like the top of your head coming off.
Love is inhuman, how it robs
you of the joy of scratching
to success, how it feels underfoot.
Love like a black feeling flies from the head,
pulls the soul with it, sucks dry the breathing
leaves my heart’s become watching the top
of your head come off, the concussion
of love bursting out of you.

September 10, 2000
Low Over Boston on a Rainy Night in November

Coming in low over Boston in a 727,
unusual landing vector for a familiar place,
steady rain in late November flying in from the West
on yet another visit. Over the Western suburbs
yellow gas arclights fill by haloes a red and green
tennis court, pale-blue tinted white halogens
poke the dark through mist rising from rubber
singing on asphalt—the world below, houses
and cars, streetlights and more cars, drenches
my memory of you like the blue lights of the city
ahead, and the rainy mist is like every love
I’ve had. Over the Charles I see the ritzy apartments
along Storrow are casting their lights on the water,
though the rain and darkened cold tries to dilute
all of it. In those apartments people are listening
to classical music to musty smells and overdry
heat played on digital machines, or speaking
hushed under comforters given on a joyful
day. Tonight the lights of cleaning men
or women hold more truth fuel
in lights that move up one story at a time.
Over Boston harbor boats labor in cocoons
of yellowed mist-rain spewing arcs of light
toward me and the plane banking for a long
turn over lighthouses and prisons. Each light
is at least one life, each one is moving
from one perspective or another. You are
in one of these houses or apartments, on a boat,
driving a car, are a light I can see, but because I
can see them all means nothing about seeing the one.
The constant low frequency drone of the engines
throttled back is damped by the rain around me
riding just below clouds on a trip whose purpose
is to drive zigzag through the towns below
and the city hoping the electric signal of your dying
dreams is strong enough to flicker my lights,
stop me this time.
Distant Winds

Distant winds over your head, miles away above
blowing the speed of traincars on a short train
down the eastern slope, the effect on your hair
sixth order at best—you appear as calm as empty blue
above besides. When you die that sky will be grass
and the wind the sorrow of your children
or snow deepened under bluer skies. When I die
you will be the watcher and I the wind a mile above
and my effect on you will be as it always was: blue
for the reflection that sparkles the ocean, blowing
a sixth-order effect as the snow deepens.
Winter Scene Captivated

Your name billows, mine
is sneaking up on park benches snow-laden,
bloated pillow-like awaiting heads

not minding the temperature.
Today the bicycles slide sideways
down the cambered slope and the park

has decided on milk-blue, a tribute
to both the shaking sky dropping
its leavings and the shade of age.

Drop the images and the names
jerk snapping to different focii,
each possibility visited in turn

exhaustively. No wonder the poet
dreams of fixing the scene and a snapshot
stakes its lines: half where

he thinks, half where
the images suddenly heavy
clang into place.
You walk to the door, an exclusive or extravagant eroticism hanging behind the tight curves of your skirt which follows yours like a dancer’s hands hanging just over your curves, like a dancer’s legs walking just inside yours, like the duende’s thoughts pushing so hard flesh exudes and harrows toward you, toward the insides of you, an exclusive stretch of cashmere wallpapered on the expanse of your midriff and bulging from the sides of your breasts outcurved like overfull bagskins of limpid redwine or torched ricewine, the door just knocked in hurried flurries by a man you know who lowers his umbrella at the opened door, rain wetting by bursts his headtop, his eyes slacking, muscles untensing, and I on the couch hear the little voices in the dark, see through the raindrops forming a rainbow anchored on the distant side of town a room cracked to the perfection of imperfection, a bed unsheeted and damp, a place to lie down and let the heavy heart steelwheels cut, seer, or sever something that seems just remembered, about to be forgotten, akin to ivy covering something special rotting beneath.
One Crazy Stanza

The end of the world is at the end of the street, at the corner with no store, by the walkup with no windows where love takes on a dark tang. The treetop reaches the bottom of the bed and the shadow's even lower. At the corner there are no roads, and nothing is across the street. The end of the world is as unapproachable as a no-enter apartment, a trunkless tree top, a shadow & a bed near the corner with no store; so it's not possible, even, to sit on the curb after buying a moon pie and an RC Cola to watch it all fade down to one little PoP!
Highway Love

The car at full gait down the daylight highway
is the cushion of solitude among strung-out
towns by the highway that used to be, past
worn out gas pumps used to fueling the flight past
now content to let rust mix with unbought gasoline
in storage tanks beneath dandelioned and grassweeded
cracks in 30-year-old asphalt, or the burger cum
softserve stand by the former edge of town surrounded
now by apartment rows long-ago new now seeping rats
and mattresses into the parking areas where teenagers
once gathered to exchange their age for hardness. The car
at full gait in the funnel-dark highway is a bag
of loneliness, my face lit by dashboard lights,
a pedal steel phasing in and out on the tube-backed
radio dialed to the farthest station out on the east
side of Kansas, and from backporch lights
and streetlights, from neon Bud and Coors signs
hanging like beacons to men seeking women,
from the searchlight down by the automall,
I see the bits of reasons why they say love is a softride
Chevy, 8 cylinders making stubble sounds smoothed
by glasspacks, and the most delicious bedroom
is a plastic back bench, hot with summer sweat,
cooled by the green end of sundowns, filled by the sounds
of crickets and ky-otes, and oathed by rolling notes
in the backs of our throats.
River Dry-out

At the bottom of the hill is a fold
in the river doubling back as if the way
down were the way up or as if it forgot to wave
to the drivers on the bridge spanning
it twice, once downward once upward.
Water is a way of life, and the way
water flows makes a difference how
fast it salts. The river I know
does its double-back routine
in the low flat headlands above a wide
fan-shaped desert plain, and after a short
plunge the river fans out and dissipates
in the salt flats, subdued by the head,
dropped beneath earth. This is
the path we’ve taken, this is
our steady decrease, this is
the visual accomplice to the sound
of steady wind seeping through the curliques
of bridging steel that seems so much
like missed life.
Unraveling Man

By the road side: empty cans unable to rust,
plastic bottles filled half full with frothy
brown liquids, orange peels becoming fair dust,

a captured set of coins in a fairy ring,
a diary of appointments some missed,
others made, and phone numbers concentrating

area codes in a flock of towns sunning by
a dry riverbed running through a desert.
I know the tire-sounds humming by,

know the road side's catches, can tell by the heat rising
who is going where and why. Tell me what
to say to the girl sitting on the bench seat, crying

by the road, her sides heaving like fire-blowing bellows.
Rise up through heat mirages, rise up
by the road side, leave her like fire leaves shadows thrown

on walls made tender by the weight of age,
by the age of words disintegrating.
Litter Ally

I am compelled by things resting on the sides of roads, left behind in accident or by disruptive intention, a plastic cup once holding 32 ounces of sweet and sugary pop tossed against society’s best interests, a post-it torn from the front of a notebook by a rogue grasping blast of wind which appears against all reason for continuity. When we die we face what’s left behind, confront the deliberate, lament the accidental, pick up as if trustees with litter pickers where we left off.
Comprehending Nothing

When they all look back
on all I’ve said, all I’ve done, all the lives
I’ve led and been part of, all the poems
I’ve written, all the women I’ve loved,
what they will shout down is none
of the words and none of the deeds, none
of the lives or nights, none of that but
all of my heart.
Totem

Lie back, press the grass, the ground,
with your back and legs. Damp tonight.
Above the bottoms of clouds are lit orange
by a suburban light, the rest are graymetal,
and gaps where the sky seems blue from a moon
not willing to wane. Lie back with the oak
in your range of vision and let the back
of your head feel dizzy, let your eyes hang onto
nothing though they watch. Something moves.
The air is heading North to join in making cold.
Let me slide my hand beneath you, and let
your back hang onto nothing. The oak
or the clouds move, you or I move. The gaps
between heat and held, cold and absence,
inside and under make something
in this cycle a dizzying emblem.
At a Bus Stop, Outside the Gates

We stand at a bus stop in February
waiting to be taken away as fast
as we can be. The place we're near
seems easy to get into but hard to leave.

The air, atmosphere, seems threaded
to earlier days forming beads of colors
ranging from black to blue, blue
like this sky today. This air,
atmosphere, seems broken

like a skipping record, one instant
a warm blue sky inviting like

the eyes of a lover one can never take,
the next
the clouds are dropping flakes hard,
trying hard to shake them,
and they spit heavy to the ground
and bounce
sometimes twice or three times.

The warm blue sky invites us up
into it, I've fallen for you this way.
The cold cloudbladen sky sings a deathsong
and the dance is stiff, unmuscled. We want
to get away in the next bus, but
the neighborhood is filled with closing blinds:

in each, two fingers spreading them open.
Still the sky varies. The sky is an open
grave, and the cold clouds tell us to dig
deeper. Soon

a tractor pulling a farm wagon comes by but
the wagon is filled with high-output speakers
and amplifiers pushing out sound
as if from the muzzle end of a gun. Loud,
so loud perhaps to shout back in time,
playing dance songs, shaking loose
the snowflakes that bounce
sometimes twice or three times.
We want to get away
on the next bus
from a place easy to get out of, hard
to stay in, and sometimes we fly up
in the warm sky, sometimes we fall down,
and bounce twice or three times before.

... before we fly up like ashes
or snow in reverse
to the open sky, the open graves,
the opened eyes.
Cook Me A River

The smells of meals being cooked, prepared begin at 10:30, preparations made, simmering starts, slow roasting, frying. Everywhere in the localities made of time at 10:30 the work begins to feed the greedy, perhaps many who are lonely, some ill, others made unquestionably evil or evil-tempered—all will themselves to eat or will wait. Plates are warmed and places set. silverware, plasticware, stickware laid out. No cozier word is spoken by woman to man than meal. Much dying has been endured for this. Who will not eat? The crazy, the famished, the engorged lovers fighting for life, those indifferent to the alchemy of cooksmoke, or immune to interruptions not of the mind, not of the heart.
Original Motels and Working Trains

Motels and unfinished mobility. Scented shrines with doors onto cars. One bed, one toilet, one car lined up. One driver moves. Cheap way to make a poor living: off longing for slow roads, sights like snake pits and snack shops. Ice flurries at the cheap edges of towns. In my car, dashboard lights full-on-green my face, the alternative reflective path through my mirror dampens headlights catching up. On a slow road I pace a freight train, a superchief once & from a cracked-open door on a boxcar filled with straw a pudgy face blooms in the glow from odd shed light. A strobe. Hard to say who caught whom taking out the easy way.

September 26, 2000
Change, Or Wind

Something has decided to happen
in the forest of pines and firs
in a high-wind storm,
wind blowing hard
high in the tops of trees.
Something passing through,
temporary or ending.
Sounds of surf folding liquidly
on coarse sand or a crowd cheering
far off in sympathetic triumph.
Doors on aged hinges closing slowly
making metal sounds. Wood ships caught
in ice floes being crushed, pressure
from far-off storms pushing each floe
upon another and into ship sides
2 feet thick but bowing inwards.
Hushes from a thousand mothers' lips
urging patience and solitude. Drums
rolling, bass drums thumping.
Heavy things happening slowly.
Knocking like scared visits, hammering
by crews of carpenters. Nothing
unusual. Except a tuft of pine needles,
three in a green bouquet, drops to your shoulder.
I pick it away and drop it on a bed of comforter-soft
dead brown pine needles, a gesture like a kiss interrupted
by a brief goodbye or a fading glance in the passing
glare of headlights.
A Harsh Soothing Ignorance

Of all the explanations
the one with the most vowels
sounds best, ah and er hinting
the guide knows much less than
a harsh one would, and besides
soothing wordsounds, soothing
ignorance is a pillow for my own
stupidity. The path grows familiar
with communal stumbling. Why
isn’t the dictionary filled
with welcomed dumbfoundedness?
Let’s the two of us dumb and unfound
drive with coins and flip our way
cross country, like a drunk under a lamp
post, focused on the lit center point
hoping to at last escape into darkness?
Two Old Lovers in a Warm Bed on a Cold Night

You lie on the bed, one leg casually outside the blanket, the other beneath, one knee down in front of the other. Your breasts complete the cycle of curves, your heated breathing diminishing becomes ice mist in the cold mountain air dropping through the window we left open when we heated. On the side table your Japanese lamp grows dim, the wick going out though it floats on clear oil, its reflected light dimming in your pupils as you watch me rise to attend the coming darkness. Touching the lamp the wick flame begins to flicker, and lifting the lamp it tips toward you but the wick remains motionless in the frozen oil. I look up in time to just see the last spark light from your eyes, cycle complete, the heat from the small flame unable to keep its source alive.
Intimate Products

In a hayfield overflowing with grasshoppers and gnats, under an oak that's been there for 100 years, by a stonewall fence built 200 years ago under a rock I buried a peanut can and inside that a plastic bag.

In the way age is reckoned for important matters, the hayfield is new, the can and plastic bag newer, the tree and stonewall fence recent, and what's inside is just there.

After a day important to us I buried in that peanut can and in it within the plastic bag, the intermediate values determined by pressure and time.

On a hot day go there, find the hayfield filled with flying things, find the stonewall running north to south, sit beneath the oak tree years older than 100, pry up the rock, open the can, unzip the bag, and see what's there, see what it reminds you of. There's a harsh truth to face.
Acolyte Leaning Against a Post

I warmed my hands  
in yours, hot as charcoal  
they seemed, just glowing; the day  
was cold as rats' teeth biting iron.  
Like charcoal we will together and alone burn  
down then out, colors on a slider  
from orange-yellow to black,  
and in light, ashen. Let's think  
of it as the explosion of sunset  
into night.
Winter Reigns

lie alone awake
bed filled with pockets of cold
legs tucked into warm places
head covered to the ears in a quilt not doing its job

from the iron stove burning
wood as hard as it can the sounds of charcoal breaking
on charcoal a hot sound soft in quantity hard
in quality balancing the notoverwarm bed

youve left youve left out
the important small points small marks
that separate truth from nonsense

sound of
you leaving you breaking
on yourself
Gethsenname Oblique

On a day of things not right
on the day when the stories
we heard as children as adults as old men
took place and the stories hardened
like resin into amber and the hardness
of truth melted as sap running down
a cypress in a shortened garden stories
reciting a mysterious faithfulness
just one thing betrayed the inner
consistency of our faiths’ bug-filled
illusions; his blood ran downward
he too obeyed the laws made
to keep all consistent unpredictable.
Loon Landing

The day will arrive when the thickened skin
of experience will feel like the sloughing skin
of sunburn or any other accident of carelessness.
On such a day the loon will land in the yard
instead of hoo-hooing all the way to the lily-swamped lake, and you will kneel by your bed in the bare light, you will place your head on its side by the pillow, you will will your heart to stop though it pains you to. You will say your goodbyes the most private ways, hook your heart to the barbules of the nearest soul and float like a feather above the flapped turbulence of the silly-sounding loon who visits the weary bent on shedding their skins.
66 Sentiments

The motel on 66 in Amarillo
once was the best motel. Cars were cupped
within its grasp and its shape shielded
rooms from glare and tire groan. At
its center a fountain spilled water
echoing from room to room. In ’66
this was the place to stay, steak
houses lined the streets nearby,
cattle brought in by freight cars
mooed and snorted by. Air
was not so fresh then, but smelled
the rich stink of half-burned gas
mixed with burned oil.

Steaks searing, gas wasting, oil
dripping, cars driving, tires whining,
families sleeping, motel sitting;
Amarillo stark at the center of 66
had no redemptive rival, for in ’66 the fat
of a fat land snored loudly round the fountain
of cool dreams in the big town I find
myself in tonight, midway between
one important place and another,
thankful for the cheap room
and stiff bed in the best motel
on the best road forty years too late.
Pasted Dream

customized dreams come prepackaged
one rolls out one rolls out
sequencing is direct connectives miss
the point a dream ends a walk to piss
the dream begins resumes my head fills
with you you look not yourself
I dream of you do you dream of me

days are not enough
scarecrow time comes ends
birthdays come end
scarecrow clothes varnished in sundown
colors drip apart slow strip
tease one day your skin as straw
color substance my feelings
for someone else
are here
are you

October 6, 2000
Many Reverses

We are gathered around like luncheon
meat on the edge of a plate, bread at the center
like the object of our desire. One of the small
things left to do is to settle who loves whom,
which sandwich tastes best under a sky remembering
how to rain snow. Our picnic is really the back
seat of a car parked in an oily wide patch
by the side of the small road winding up
to the bridge at the highest but narrowest
place in a wide long river. Around us
are testaments to mankind and the raw
material of nature: shreds of lettuce, bleached-flour
bread, plastic back seats, the scent
from your cunt, flies seeking nests for their maggots,
the sand by the road plied with oil, the river
flowing naturally carrying barges of pig iron,
the bridge at the narrows, the sky lighting
our hearts. What I like about you
is the way you speak of love while
exploring what lies within
your panties.
Hope in Oblivion

The roads of this small town
were lined with the reddened leaves
of maples and the off-yellow brushes of birches
but beside this road the grass weeds
grew green. By the ditch a fence
made of concrete posts wired
by braids of steel wire
had collapsed on impact, was wrapped
in a tangle of indistinct road weeds.

Chele and Piper were walking away
from us, hands entwined
as if harbingers of the future
and loving destinations. All’s
left is her auburn skirt
long retired from wiping Piper’s Bronco,
hanging as if from a slut with straight hips—
scarecrow ready for parties,
September harvests and long
long summer’s hard labors in the fields
gone by.

What parties there will be, made for hearts
hardly beating, for excitement barely wetting
sunburnt lips. The old men have gathered
on a day made of translucent surfaces
and black & white photos
to worship the angled breasts
of their neighbors sacred daughters
eager for love and bursting of bubble gum.
The Aging Process

Main Street is wide enough to turn an 8-oxen team and wagon in one clean motion. This made it ideal for inclusion in the '50s interstate. For years killers drove down Main Street in search of hideouts, girls, and milkshakes. The interstate has disappeared, a thought passing through someone's imagination. Main Street is so wide it takes the old men minutes to cross but jaywalking is no danger when the cars are all parked. Up that way up the hill—don't you see it like an island in an ocean of wheatgrass?—the famous are buried in a cemetery dug for them. Their fame is they died at the hands of killers who once ate steaks on Main Street back when it took a fast man to jaywalk without risking death.
Rope Bridge Near Sarashina

The bridge is hung by ropes
creeping over crossbeams
secured to rock or deep-piled
piers on the lips of a crack
in a mountain pass near Sarashina.
As I wait behind on this side
you cross, your pumping gate
swing-sways the ropes
and bamboo slats, the up&down
the speed of a heart anticipating
or me on you right at that
moment. You depend on this
rope I hold in my left hand
as if calming a wind blast.
The vines that shroud
the trees and crevasse
have grown onto the rope bridge,
hang from it as the beard
on an old man watching a woman cross
a bridge that holds today
the lives of vines
and the hope of separation.
Japanese Night, Winter

Tonight is one more
night without you cold
in my shanks my feet
the spider's final body twitches
are remnants of a last intent
to disarm the cold
it writhes on the floor beside
me.

The bathroom light has been flickering
my dreams wander back to our early
story my bones feel the quilt finally
my dreams of you come clear
the light goes out finally
the night is cold.
Clouds and Passing Light

Today the air grew cold
from the passing of a familiar season
into oblivion brought on by something
written in a diary. The sun, bright
in the upper third of the sky,
does its best to hold back. Each
passing cloud reminds the landscape
of truth.

Tonight the northwind
pulls scraps of newspapers and oiled
dust down the street, the air froths
under the sodium streetlight.

cold sounds
soft sounds

until the streetlight cuts,
fades to simple afterglow. Voices
deepen, reprimand, call in favors
like a dialtone in the night
after seasons of insistent ringing.
Budding Softness

Bluff sitting above Red Wing,  
sandstone my reliable footstool,  
overwatching soundless eagles—balds—  
and waystationed gulls dive for death  
and gullets filled with salmon, bass,  
whose sharp white skulls shackle  
granite on shore. You were sitting  
here but mountains are rising  
to the North and while I  
watch are growing yet more mysterious,  
foothills rising like a yet another hurricane,  
a soundless wind has blown everything  
but one stray you-hair gone.
False Waiting

Waiting
for you, night rain
freezing close
to the sound of nails
dropping on nails.
Hollow sound
of an umbrella
slows outside
my door, I raise
my head
from this poem
brewing one word short.
The less sound
passes, knocks rain next
door, the rainless nest
ducks inside.
Rain resumes.
The search resumes
for the word I'm short.
Broken Tip

Sitting alone writing of you, wind
sharpening the edges of rocks by the river,
loosening the last leaves hanging
from aspens or birches, disrupting
the flights of ospreys kiting
a foot over the blowing foam, the pencil
tip breaks beneath the woodsheath causing
the blotch that says it in sight.
Dropped Off

Winter rain has held off,  
the river has stopped flowing,  
water has pooled in the deep  
drops downriver. Last summer  
we crossed up on that bridge  
engraved with foreign words,  
and you dropped, I think,  
something of yours to the curling  
river. In winter the river clears,  
and in the deep drops the boots,  
the rings, the tin cans, the silk  
scarves gather in circles under  
cold water, still water, this water.
Looking For Listenable Stations

In my youth they were blonde
and their held hands were damp
as fishkill, limp as the strength
of my vision, and their tolerance
was a learning experiment filed
in their pretty little heads. In this age
they are other colored, and their responses
more active because even the least likely invasion
carries with it the spoils of close contact
or disorganized fervor and zest. And
there are the dangers to consider. On
this day the gasp will widen once
more, and bridge will be words not sounds,
noise not nuisance, and a long winter
of sub-bass roars will hushen everything
else up, even my sore voice, even your hopeless
grey eyes.
On a Riverbank Near St Paul in October

The riverbed ground, I guess, stopped, and like helium balloons pushed back by rushing forward air, dead or deadly things pushed upstream like fascination or desperation but fat or overfilled so glass skulls or white ribs are piled around your little thin shanks. Hm. I’m the mirrors in your horror house or distorting curves on your overbed, ha ha. When love turned topic look around you cried like a harkened bald who’s hooked some pike on his bony trestles. When he sits in the oak above your colorflashed hair he sinks them deep, up to his birdy flesh, up to his feathered shanks, up to his stopping heart, and what I mean to say is compare his pain to mine, his hope to mine.
Lights Front and Back

What is it of the color
of the bay with shined pink adobe
banks, its blue darkenend
to a windy purple, that holds her
at the window after waking
from her bath in naked sexual
rumination, staring while her breasts
slowly stopped slowly shaking, forgetting
perhaps or remembering when
he is about to touch her
along the hip and down and thinking
she will soon become a holster,
she will
be it, she will
be what he wants, thinking
she will dream the night through
of what was said or done or thought,
complex harmonies sung falsetto
another place or earlier, what is
it when he paints her body
black tomorrow to signify the night
and when she leaves her mouths red?

These questions seem important
but less so than why the oak grows one
branch so long so as to tumble it, stand
it on head, turn it from one flashing
set of lights to another.
Rolling On the River

What did you think it meant when the gull plunged its beak into the eye of pike, the river lots its downstream motion, the rocks rolled out from scrabble to beds, the way up was harder than the way down? In the town where we stopped the weddings ran on into one another, varied into similar into same, the river a canal for the coldstream while eagles held the light. Something in the smell of the day hung like a poultice of broken glass on your breast and nothing was the choice. The buildings glowed red just before dusk, and the barge train pushed by a tug upstream logged and repeated the tense of your grammar. As usual it was sudden but this time it’s permanent.
**Stuff Heading Upstream**

Two barges on the Mississippi, each weighing thousands of tons, connected together, pushed by one tug as long as each barge, diesels full of hard horsepower power the set of screws that push the water back behind a quarter mile, churning water that calls to gulls.

Upstream.

Can you remember the cold? The light on the red hills seemed warm, the air was so clear each ripple lensed the lowslung light along the streaming, toward us as far as the parties were concerned. Can you remember the roaring?

Upstream.

What will happen to this barge train when the deepness of the water runs out or the black sky cuts through the thinning air? No amount of kissing will fix this—too much needs to happen.

October 24, 2000
Sudden Snap

Some things work better sudden.
The cheapest Polaroid camera
at arm’s length indoors, low
light, fluorescents flickering—
bring it to aim at your head and snap
— give the rangefinder no
time to work, give the lightmeter no
time to work out the foolish lighting,
give your arm no time to stop, give
yourself no time to pose. This picture
captures beauty: your face
swept arclike, your head
an orange halo, the lights
6-sided flare-ups, pieces
of pictures the camera
couldn’t forget, chemicals
striving to make sense quit part through,
you look wise & giddy, post-traumatic,
pre-orgasmic. A sudden snap captures.
The trick is to end it before it’s complete.
Oh Beautyo

Unlike the poems of a hardy writer
the sunsets near Hartford are subtle,
leftovers from the fire-fangled Wallace years.
Pewter cloud tails have their dangle-down
parts, and the sides farthest from me
are reddest, most like you. Here the red
is twisted light standing off, doing
its little dance far away and flung;
there it was collaboration between
one willing one not. Driving away.
Going oddly in directions. What
did you think of the 12 sunny things
I said and the 1 red one? I know
you looked, I know the clouds did
and the funny sun late in the day.
When romance is mixed up
by lighting effects, better
hide behind the lines.
Travel Watch/Travel Alarm

Static on the tv: fingerprints; who
goes with the hiss? On the road,
what I miss is waiting, vittles,
kisses, withholds, words
spoke in shadows. I’ll cab
from the desert, look under
your rug for links. Your fingers
hover, shake and sway, the colors
on the surface of your eyes
make ice or take the best.
I’m left here by the ramp
and the tug’s pushing. Travel
two lungs. Yodel for me
honey.
Dream Fall

The dream yields to thought
and the forest world floods
with leaves fallen in quick
succession. Do they care to change
colors or brag in themselves
on the dawn of a day? I've held
one dry leaf before it plunged—
it felt like the fingers of a friend
going dry, then slipping away,
making of my dream just
another fog. Would your sudden
escape have anything to do with this?
Sacrifice of the Ever-Road

The road expects sacrifice:
get behind the wheel,
commit your spine to a GM splint,
eat cookies hidden behind the driver’s seat,
fight the urge to stop when the motels
seem to be filling, drive on,
be willing to eat as if the world
had been lost behind a closed gas station,
look with love at the dripped yellow B
in a new sign for Lazy Man’s
Bar B Que. The road sides
are littered with shattered tires,
animals not designed for understanding,
leftovers of things thought important
enough to buy but not vital enough
to dispose of properly. Old bottles.
Life preservers. Hot sparks and ashes.
Or when you drove away and the mirrors
were adjusted to make me look small.
Lifting Your Desire

The work is sweat-filled, full
of imaginary dangers like spiders
leaking from holes in the trunk
this new sawblade works through.
The sun is working against me
low in the Southern sky but glancing
heat not light through the heatfog
leaking from the pores of the sand
stretching into a light forest of live
oaks, tarry pines. My shoulders hurt,
my arms burn, my forehead wrinkles
from age and heatburn, my legs buckle
from a heavy load, sweat is all
around on me. When you
demand your due, it is like this.
Discards

Lean against the wall
and put the flat of your foot against it
knee high, use it to rest
while I tell you stories of what it
meant. Tagged wall soot covered
by garbagecan infernos made of trash
and oily rags from dumpsters behind the auto
shop. Discards. Stories of them. The rules
are formal and objective but the way
she puts her hand on the small
to launch her come. Naked, named.
Bags of ketchup like flattened roses
beneath us means discards, plugs pulled
out, snow except it's ashes from something
important being burned. The best we can hope
for is to sit on stools at a shined bar and watch
the wear of life suppress smiles, lay hair limp,
keep it all secret while we both lean
footbraced against a backdrop of soot
near a highway of rusted and bashed-in
guardrails.

I've /'m gone/done fishing
_/for _/compliments when I ask
"is love bait?" and you return the bone
with its marrow sucked out
Stinky Man

Central towns, departed citizens, 
districts built of 2-story storefronts 
like Dodge City in Gunsmoke. What if 
a woman dressed too tight hugs 
the curb in noon sun too sleepy 
for lunch but too thirsty to pass 
up the corner bar added 1950 
as a contribution to the beauty of the town 
in the shape of a trailer, but today 
the clapboard chips are flaking off, the word 
“Tavern” in dim neon still 
is framed by the name of a national 
beer many still drink, 
and she is horny for it 
to drain down her throat, 
to foam through her belly 
mixing with the remains 
of breakfast and the stinky man, 
to snake its way through to her fingertips, 
and to drip as a warm yellow juice 
from lips that mirror in their response 
to love and drink her others hours 
later, in another bar, on her way 
back slowly to the stinky man? 
What if?
Pastiche

Passing passion
pushing potions
pitching positions
patching posh pleasures
pissing postures
plush posing
pooch punch
T Party

Tattered, truncated,  
the thirst takes tolls;  
trying to travel through  
thick trees, thin travelers  
think through their trappings,  
tortures, trinkets. Then  
triumph trickles through to them.
Along, Aside

The thirst is unbearable
that causes voices to trip,
runs like luminescence
up the sides of houses and walls
separating the halves of longing,
flurries a covering fog on the sidewalks
you walk over on your way
along. Aside
from leaves what do you have
for me? By the bridge I watched
you climb the rocks, watched
the car door close, watched
the last vapor evaporate,
building a thirst that rained
in two-tone silver and gold.
Tell me the weather that seeps
from your head to your heels,
the weather that still goes on.
Cold Stranger

The sprinkling of light on the rooftops seen from the ramparts above the city reveals the bumps of habitation, enclosures shielding the showering sky from little secrets. Brushed-on layers of snow deaden the sounds underneath. Grab hold of what’s hidden, make on the other side an opposite. As you open the door and begin your walking out, stand aside and let the cold stranger in whose only aim is to take your place.
Time Frames

The mind sees only the sudden,  
like the eyes of frogs that see only motion.  
Shallow ramps, aging timestamps,  
we see them only when sight meets memory  
making a sudden second the mind  
can see. How can we see the slow,  
feel the littlest burs, smell the micro-motes  
flitting by, boiling their moment-by-moment  
sameness, aloof behinds fluttering flag-like,  
romping like stallions before wind  
or lovemaking? Let me reflect now  
on the frames that led to you by the river,  
let me delete every other one, and every other  
one more—until it’s sudden, and my reaction  
panic.
Stroll Through a Map Laid Out in Town

Along the cobbled ways and stone steps
your unspeech lingers like leaves frozen
into puddles left behind in a sudden rain
that drifted in before a freeze, and down
by the river passing beneath the bridge
whose upstream piers are sharp stone
cleavers and whose companions are oak
overturning ramps awaiting ice sheets and blocks,
your shadow has just fled behind a lingering
maple whose leaves have turned shade and turned
over in a breeze that trembles the river’s surface
the way your last words were chosen by hands
trembling over a bed of bitter words gathered
in haste, and here in my bed whose sheets
and undersheets seem still warm from your wide
hips and lingering bottom, your heart has slowed
and my head on the pillow can not quite hear
the beats turning slower and slower until their sound
is the shutter I left unlatched in my haste to hold
you tapping the windowframe in a low breeze
on a day short of light and long on falling leaves.
Diner on Snow Street

The places we eat are lined, like this,
with people wishing each other well.

The food cooked over-greased first pleases
then drains the tongue, expands the cheeks,

lines the belly with full feelings. You
however wait and wait, after the order

comes, after the waiter goes, until I’ve
taken the first bites, gone through the fries,

start on the meat. I want you but tonight
your belly comes first. We drink, each looking

past the other into headlights each heading
past the other’s. It’s like that. The liquor’s

heating up now, the fries are cooled in ketchup,
the pork is about to float in coagulated fat and grease.

You’ve quit smiling, quit weeks ago, and now
it’s time that’s counting—down I think. Snow

would be the best for us, something that drifts
pretty, slithers down the street in squirrelly lines,

something with a purpose often bent but never
limited. Where it ends up is up to us, up to fate

up to sullen sodden eyes welling with limits
barely living up to their fate to always see.
Depth of Blue

The nights are piling up
like snow drifted onto the plow
wake at the end of the road
where the choices are left
to the driver. We could ignore
the feelings that seem undone, but
that would mean reviving them
beyond their desire to drift off.
Hm.

Let’s drop the pretense and go
with it. Pick a road, make the choices
into a fork that lures us poetically
into doing what seems hard
but as pretty as small snows fallen
just to the depth of blue.
Release

Release the volunteers,
run to the ramparts and begin
counting the breaks in the dam,
shout to those shouting
that the time to quit has arrived,
follow the possibility that seemed least likely
just one year ago. In one year
the mystery regressed,
chances were forgotten
the battle failed to engage.
Smoke will one day clear
revealing a healing landscape,
ash will revert to green,
greyed water will flow clear
again with salmon, perhaps
two lovers will watch the sun rise
over a place known for death
and the death of love.
Bird Caught on the Tip of a Scarecrow

Even the scarecrow feels the weight of decay as the days grow short toward December, his clothes are unwashed and pieces of them have found their ways underground to nests and into trees as flags proclaiming lament. Places have been entered, but the long show is reserved for leaving. One bird sits atop the scarecrow's cap, his crowlike claws can't seem to release and he will carry more away that he likes today, because the wind is beginning to blow and soon it will be too hard for bird-raised resistance. Pity the bird whose feet belie his weaknesses, pity the scarecrow too weak to wink, pity the witnesses forced to live two lives in space of one strong afternoon under a sun whose pity is the heat of self-doubt.
Union Cemetery

Inside the dirtground rundown graveyard
lies a patch of Union soldiers rounded up
by a low granite rail; inside is the only patch
of green. Around us stones are broken, pieces
lie at angles, headstones are crowded
by palm trees. Iron pipes fence plots.
Clear day but cold, Veterans' Day in Redwood,
California, Union Cemetery. My daughter’s homework
is to place a bouquet on the final resting place
of a veteran, and she carefully does that in the green
patch, but her mind is fixed on the bottle of mascara
she bought as a secret at the pharmacy where we bought flowers,
the price of each about the same, the importance of each
about the same, and who can say she’s wrong, facing
life in the broken ground of death with the hope
in her heart her eyes will look nice.
Pain of Living Teeth

Frozen sky rains only iceflakes
on the only listless flecks of joy
left after the snap bye, instant gone.
Your face grew out of the light just once
and the crowd overcame its passion
for anonymity, caught in the flash
of a jotted note. Mm. The feelings
flee in their own hurry not
like the sudden onset of living
which is just a heavy pressed feeling
as if teeth were forming. It was all foolish
the way I wrapped my feeling fingers
around your legs; you felt tired around me.

What I won’t forget are the notes,
how they descended, how their resonance
boomed into the ground, and the waves
passing by our feet, ripples of a writer
both larger and smaller, braver and more cowardly
than the two of us together or taken
one at a time.
Ringlets

A beautiful place has appeared by the sea, a place where the light hangs a bit brighter, a single stretch of rocky coast that attracts only small waves but ones that crash with sullen beauty in white bursts above the green lucent tropic rolls. My privilege is to sit on those warm rocks and radiate the little rings that linger on my head, and yours is to dangle above and pull up into the lone cloud. What we both await is the rogue wave whose force is from the north and whose local meaning is the raising up of a wave as tall as the cloud.
Buried Subways Like Funeral Leaders

Forgotten places buried beneath cities
once cities themselves, cities piled
on each other like ideas added to a simmer.

Under this great city lies subways
made to lie buried, buried now in neglect
signs on their sides proclaiming the irrelevant

much as my questions about the duststorms
by the road in Nevada seem unplaced or unfraught
as a turning page. Let’s leave the dust

to cover and add to cover and allow
the ones who can only glance down
to revel here, caught in their minds’

contagion, simple as alphabet soup
in front of a child learning to spell
ill from his father’s fatal disease.
Chicagoland Beat

This Chicago night is underwater
constructed of flurries and steam
roiling up from street vents and steam vents
cold-streaming wind blown down from the cold
regions to the north and west where once
the warmth hung tough against the turning
leaves and your heart slowed. Across the way
the offices are shadowed by backlights
the solitary cleaning lady strolls from desk
to desk and stares at the little faces caught
in jubilation the woman straining off
the decline whose smile is cracking porcelain
under a baked sky. This is the night of seldom
horror when reflections make it all when
the cable holding up the world splits one strand
more and the ground slips one drop down
by the width of your heart's smallest
beat.
On The Shore of Lake Michigan

Highrolling waves on the big lake
mimic big oceans but more ideas depend
on the way the wind blows, the way
the saltless sea drives lighter under winter
winds. I’ve thought about missing you
in the city as strange as fur on the collar,
as odd as the streets that head West.
Every other one lead me away, leads you
toward our former listlessness. Save
my ache, linger under the lifted traintracks,
turn up the edges of your collar and hide
your face from the wind which pretends
to be big, pretends to forgive.
Disentanglement Near a Footbridge

Underneath a bluer stone they gather as the ground shakes from heavy walkers making for the footbridge. Our stone is the portent of happy middles, and the slaves are underway making sweet pies from the sweat of last lovers. The stone is transparent to the roof where washed out skies rise to meet the quarter moon. Let's own this, earn it, deserve it, rolling as window dressing on an off-duty water whore.

Let's thank ourselves for clever diversions from lustless truths and pray the quick goodbyes as steep as impulses extend until the footbridge melts from disuse, until the bluer stone fades less blue, until the place to gather has the hope of raising shimmers, lighting lit skies, holding on to glistening sweat until its sweetness becomes our potion.
hum sing sing

who would ever guess that the city's blue lights
would cancel the inward moving
song who would ever

finish the tune by the beginning of the end
of yesterday noise cancelling we wrapped
different directions your flow

counter to the glasstopped table
at which my writing reflects the cleaners'
lights over the steam vents

as if Chicago were the face of routine filmed
by chems that shade them blue
the way some sky would see it

when you said goodnight
who would know C-P-R C-P-R
would awaken only the small

and unhumiliating when the road
stretched ahead and headlights hunted
no steering wheel adjustments

found the way down the dark road carved from trees
reflecting the bluelights of a distant housed TV
and the average walking away of you
The Aerialist At Rest

Your hair is limp in my hands, thin, what some would call fine but I find empty as open doors. Our lives have become filtered past modulation, different every turn on, what are passed are the greyed details which angles turn to life, not even gender is settled by the ending. Find the wagon and hop on, leave behind the ones whose happiness is damped by a death-pass filter spliced between their hearts and God's highwire.
Multi-ku (1)

On trash day snow
flakes off the bottoms of clouds
covers the streets
and garbage trucks backing up pack it
down
fills in like probing questionnaires
the tracks of footprints left before
dawn

On the mantle above
creaking flakes of fired cinders
the picture of you and me
settles in
Apples and the Woman

Morning mist we thought
but just a fog twisting inland
captured corkscrewing through the orchard

waiting for redemption
or restoration after a morning
doing it by the bed

her oozed scent withdraws
from her cooling pillow
& all that’s left
is less than memory less

than drops of spring rain
mites of mist hugging the skin
of green apples
Good Evening, Bitter

The evening is cracked
by understandings and slivers
of lights beneath doorways,
a broken bowl the color of glass
roses still rocks, and the cup
emptied of tea still holds
its folded lemon among sifted
leaves.

Beneath your shut bedroom door
the crack of light is darkened
by your passing.

I wait in its shadow.
Afterwards

Panties soaked in mist
drying on the line
after a passing shower glow once
the last cloud moves
ahead, and in the neighbor’s
yard the swings still swing
commemorating time passing
after a passing event.

In her room above the mist
and lines she lies in bed,
the shadows takes turns
with a frolicking sun
stroking and stroking her.
Winter Drizzle Freezing Heels

By a bedroom window
leftover leaves flare red
from a red-flashing and clicking traffic
light deep in the winter night—hidden
lovers pull their blinds
expectantly.

Winter drizzle might freeze tonight—
a street minstrel picks up his heels
to guard against sticking.

At walk’s end your cold
hands meshed with mine—
winter has descended
on us, and we face cold
ashes alone.
Easy Breeze

I have put my faith in the placement of falling snow—nothing falls as it should—panties frozen on a line proves absolution is as foreign as prediction, rust in sled tracks show the first time has its drawbacks. Suppose we approached from separate quarters in a northern storm—even paper cups of pricey coffee become buried lumps in a foreign city—could we meet between flakes? How heavy would your hair be on the snow? The rigor of mind fills in details for order. Just look at the careful significance of the mirror of rust-red tracks in milky fresh snow to the womb-red stains bleached half out of the snowy woman’s panties hanging from the line too stiff to yield to an easy breeze.
Dug Hillocks and the Master of Choice

After the walk from the center of the old part
of town to where the railbed is cut through
small hills and built up on tiny heavy
bridges, after the smell of oil and grease
dripped onto creosoted ties cut before
Lincoln’s time has put me in the mood
of the Sonoran Desert, after the November
winds have blown drops off the pine boughs
adding to the mist swirling ‘round my eaves
making a limp drip, after I’ve watched
the hooded lamp lift the last shadows
from your breasts, after the wolftrain
has howled past and loitered in the distance,
I occupy my candled study with
no one but the dim master of choice and nothing
but this pointless poem.
Night Spoons

Each night the poem comes later
— it's like a stormy snowfall
when no one can know which
side of the telephone pole
the snow will stick to.

Each night is colder than the last
— it's later in the poem when the furnace
kicks on by itself, maybe the heat
will change two words it thinks.

Each night your bed is warmer earlier
— it's like last night when some furnace
below your heart kicked in and the heat
of the back of you warmed the front
of me.
Disappearing Bark

After the first snow
light streams past the coldproof glass
we’ve remodeled in—she replaces
the green flannel sheets with flowered
prints and the first day of winter
springs up. The backmeadow woods
are empty and our neighbor’s dog’s
barks disappear within. Today we stripped
the wallpaper from the hallway
and found someone else’s
bedroom. We wondered whose impression
was made there, still visible, still
stark, still cooling.
Or Holy

Surf sounds guitar
twang bright single
coil tube brilliance
bridge pickup spring
reverb tape echoplex

the sound of surf music seems harsh

finger flesh surface
damping string muting
pitch raising slight
feedback mild distortion
speaker cone fatigue

the sound of surf music seems melancholy
or holy
Stupid Angel

Still
the Superchief rages past in the night,
its howling
more like a mechanical wolf than real,
passing by
Memorial Cemetery loud enough to
wake the dead.

Fall
leaves piling up—no,
more like
the accumulation of snow and red leaves
and yellow—rise
to hide the names of the dead cut
like jealousy
into the hardened surfaces of
polished marble.

Will
the angel whose hand points to the place in the sky where
the Dog Star
will lounge when the anniversary of the death of woman in the grave
she overlooks
realize it when her fingers have evaporated away as all
stone does,
or will the pure joy of snow piling on her stupid
stone head
fill her it with nothing until the very day she
passes also away
into thin air?
Multi-ku (2)

Her shadows—all of them—
one by one pile up on the floor, the one
button open on her blouse
was the hound that chased the rest
away.

All my loneliness, heated,
I leave inside her
and only a new crop will grow
inside me.

In the morning her bad grammar
from tonight will signal two degrees
of forgetfulness, as if
reason required rationality.

Remember her stifled
laughs, her insults, forget
the sunbeams beating
on her steaming dreams.

December 4, 2000
Holcomb Dreams

Five miles west of Holcomb,
train tracks make two lines,
polished clean as surgical knives,
sticking out of moonrise.

Later the first dry flakes
of too-cold snow
will pile up, the moon
will tuck away, the Superchief

will fly from the East out
of the moonrise, and
under its tough grinding wheels
no water will be made,
just steam, just vapor,
just the after-images
of her nightmare.
Right Now

in the half-rotted tool shed
locked foolishly against entry
under an uncertain sky brimming
with snow, a yellow box of nails
sits on a shelf, and each nail
has become as cold as it can be
given the conditions.

Right now
in a city blinking sodium lights
whose sidestreets and alleys reverberate
crookedly a foreign hail of sirens
a woman is waking up in a feather
bed as warm as she can be
given the configuration of her lovers.

Right now
in a brick building above the river
whose mind cannot be made up
in a locked room filled with many others
my father’s ashes sit on a shelf
awaiting the heart outside
and the hands whose courage
will be tested by the command
to sift him.

Right now,
the form holds up as well as it can be
given the change-cold, the blessing warmth.
Ripe Bluffs

Among flesh debris, fluffed mud, and spattered remains, through streets struggling through towns like ungot ten hints, between trees spilt like curious liquids, like gutted fish behind a wave of blastsounds and ear-pitching ricochets, in front of me a gypsy woman walks carrying on her head, balanced like a gourd or water vase, the wood box coffin, backlit, that will bear her lover through the waves of black earth oceans for years of years.
Think of the Oysters

cringing in Tomales Bay—

are they cold?
do they feel the cold?
is the salten water running with sweet cold?

Their words catch in their throats,
pearl-popping on tongues
they can't have. Can't have
no matter
what.

The air they breathe would feel
to us like cold water burning our lungs,
catching words we might be inclined
to recall.

The poem of lush beauty is nothing
but the bay of cold water
salt run through by a stream of sweet

river flow like a river through a river.
The oyster that thrives there
is the lost welcome,
the cold cold cold heart
of the sweet goodbyes.
Walk Away

From up
the street her hair's the brown
of an alpine rucksack's leather
bottom-patch—to every man
the same sight unsinged
out in the crowd welling
toward the subway hole
whose inner clamber-car
carries her to my flat, the worn-out
tread marking the step before my floor.

Turning her back,
face the night-fossiled
window frieze,
she lifts her hair
uncovering her whitened neck
and supple underhair
so I may undo her dress and

from here
her hair's the colors
of reds on blondes
by whites and clears
with auburns and umbers
under silks and crinkles
with longs and curls,
highlights and mattes,
making from no two
the same the nose-teasing tangle
that blends in the longview
to the nothing special surface
of the coiled and nameless
other who walks away.
Phthalo

The path of encounters
enables language to speak up,
perk up, get up like lovers filling up

what was over there becomes a next
to in a mob hat because hair
singed off because

explosive word bursts
because the fence post hangs
in the white heat of midday

centered under zenith
point of fact speaking as another
under phthalocyanine clear skies

working at words
the sky comes up
Picnic, Blanket

Beneath the blanket
the picnic table provides
mid-mind thawing
shadow sufficient to keep cool
coil-dusted wet snow This may
seem funny but consider
how many died to make this true
dismay, disproportionate
dismissed Above the picnic
table the blanket provides
outer-mind freezing
sunshine sufficient to keep warm
snowflake-dusted dry rain This may
seem funny but consider
how many facts are forms
how many words are clouded
how many meanings fetch forward
pointers meaning deferral
if just one points
back like a blanket to a picnic
table it’s the thumb up the backside
and off we go to Kansas lunch
w/Billy Collins w/thunder
Side of Language

I started this on 12/12 at 12:12.
Only it wasn't in 1212. I can't write without my computer (and not only that, any keyboard but this one is too hard) so I wouldn't have been able to write in 1212.

Plus they didn't have English, really, then either, so anything I did write would be like this vbgnhju kiikoikl osd cgfo.ikL.o;as d fkius d fazi klo d asc which is what whatever was english then looks to me now. Notice how the punct.uation is in the middle of words, so maybe space is not important.

This goes to poetry.

What it is. I suppose language is on the hook. Like imagine going to the butcher and ordering a side of language.

(Yum—down the gullet not up.)
Dipping In

Somewhere after dark
along a corridor drenched with dark
sighing from infusions of small breezes
bandpassed by cracks your door

opened and you
stepped on toe out
wearing a thin blanket
over nothing.

In my room
no noise but small breezes
no on was disturbed.
Photo-Making Up

There is every reason
to believe that the Leica
that took your picture cannot realize
the significance of your thousand-color
hair, the blemishes that mark sun
passages, the black dust you've powdered
into your eyes. The chemicals on the film
and the chemicals in the pan and on the paper
sometimes break into their own blemishes.
Umber spots or cadmium. The light
passing through those Leitz and Zeiss lenses,
the Summilux, the Vario-Elmar, hm,
the stray extra photon racing from one of your blue-eyes
through one of these, luck like a word
that I've taken from the undermost place on your skin
and pasted without comment or desire
into the part of this poem
I've since deleted.
Blue Comma

have you noticed winter light is blue
in rained on city streets lit by office light by night
in the heavy forests whose pine branches hang limp beneath snowbeams
in the headbeams of cars rushing at you in the night

blue is the color of cyanide
Prussian Blue overwhelming and dangerous

blue that consumes
transparent
like the zombie your heart pretends
blue that rises
where you expected blue tone
you get blue stain
what does it mean

the night is blue
snow piled deep is blue
aging old Kodak film is blue

the heart of your inside heart
is blue
Back Back

part of the letter was written
on the back of a page torn from a loose
bound poetry workbook

unopaque paper
unbright white
low blue content

watermark only slight indentations
in a pure visual spectrum
what passes through

is faint pulse
uneven wavering
rhythm on the back backwards

December 16, 2000
Cantakerous Incantation

outside my writing room puddle
heavenly combination dirt & water
mud held by water holding mud
metaphysics of contagion spreading
with cold up hillslopes two primitive

two pure primal alternatives
warmth in warmth warming
writing of you writing again
I feel of wet snow coloring in two
colors the lost leaves of a sycamore

while inkwater evaporates leaves
ink powder deep in the white wood
pulped to paper every abstraction turns
to words water in my tea kettle boils
dry heart on the edge of unhappiness
Don’t Know Much

Inside the fog, mist, cloud, nothing
really but drops condensed enough to float
but not to fall, nothing really
but a symptom of luck or miracle
that brings life close to a convenient
boiling point, nothing really but
hazily defined by what is invisible but obvious
on other sides: The train whose swaying light
pulverizes the solid mist into its drops,
the plane whose spluttering engine
makes the pillowing clouds a damper
of facts. And one by one they, the clouds, peel
from the ridge, a retired now code,
a musicless rhythm, letter after letter
written in periodic hope to an address
where only readers live.
Writing Table

On her sill a merry glass cup,
phthalo blue; a picture of a dog
whose living started when she was a young woman
and ended when she was a young woman.
In the cup, a dried rose, some white
rocks from a beach in Greece, some dark
from a coast near here. A postcard
whose postmark was never dark or visible,
with a charming note unsigned, now
from the past, a relic. Two or three plants
tangled together, from her mother’s—counting
or knowing anything of them with precision
is impossible.

From her writing table
when she looks up and left,
in the edge of a pane, the shape
of a mountain, distant and weary,
this side the backside of what she saw
when she looked out her mother’s window
from her writing table.
Heaven Up Well

Up the air well,
surrounded on all sides
by yellow or biscuit
colored brick,
windows hazed to near
opaque by grime, grease,
dust, whatever drops
from the sky, the clouds,
passing flyers, the part of heaven
she sees from her writing
desk is the color of yellow
or biscuit colored brick.

Her windows, too,
are hazed near shut to light
but the well to heaven....

What she needs is her well—
the shape careful, small,
cut with liquids harsh
on what blocks—her clearspot,
two steps removed
from the possibility of heaven.
Skin Edge

Skin of movement across the landscape, geography, I touch this skin which fondles land like cooled water drizzled on an oiled woman’s back, tanned, drops in places but snakes of water running flush everywhere else and changing courses. This is the skin of how I find you, that you which is where, the lines of lemons, the bunches of black walnuts, the low reaches of sweetly green wheat just rising from the kicked carpet that makes Kansas welter. The cold reaches up and grabs the bottoms of branches and shakes them till they still and shimmer. The heat is a recipe on the back of a lumpy bag of corn meal. If I touch your skin and trace its under lines, which way will they take me, which way will they take you, which edge, if there be one, will be the final edge?
Burning Words

Music, its loudness rises,  
falls to the ticking of a clock,  
spotlights hit the singer  
behind me. The shadow  
of a woman comes down  
the aisle, she passes,  
my eyes multiply  
in her mirrored dress. She says  
how bad it is. After  
a minute the guitar says  
the same thing. Behind the curtain  
ashes and shadows fall  
in the shape of a blues tune.
A Hundred Shots

I remember the days I rode my bike
as hopeful as the painter by the river
who came to town that year to paint
a portrait of our famous bridge. He was
hopeful the wide sweeping curve
of the river coming down to the narrows
where the bridge rested in its odd green color,
and the small hillocks behind
would make him as famous as the bridge,
though he changed its color to an ashen gray.
I was hopeful the girl on the far side up Bridge
Street would suddenly shoot her love toward me,
as least so’s I’d have the chance to step in
its path, maybe take a flesh wound off it,
if not something more mortal.

The girl held her ground though she insulted
my pants, and today she’s old but in a dream
she was still the young girl in love with the painter
who went into obscurity as a painter but grew
to be famous as a photographer whose motto
is to take 100 pictures for every one you hope
to put on the wall. I think he knew this when I stopped
to look at his sketch of the bridge
in chalk but the color was off and I told him.

He said people won’t believe that algaed green
of a bridge, and wished he had the time to paint
it 100 times over but the summer was too short and he’d settle
for two. I spent that summer after that girl
and took 99 goes at her. If only the snow hadn’t come
in early, who knows how famous hope’d be now.

December 23, 2000
Head Stain

Some days are set aside for remembering as if the spandrels in the mind’s corners stood on ceremony or the drunk walks of dreams needed a magnet more than caprice.

The day the painter left town we held a small ceremony since his day-after-day sentinel on the banks by the bridge reminded people to remember an abstraction: That what’s real needs attention to stay in the foreground.

Since that day I’ll sit where he painted and hope some fragments of his mind’s dilemma rub off on me, or the remnants of pigment left on the trunk by his spot will stain the back of my head memorably.
Web Unrest

The painter'd park by the side of the road just up or down from the bridge, pulling off into the brush or onto a wide oiled-sand shoulder, pulling out his easel and paint box, pulling on a slicker and setting up a beach umbrella if the clouds were low and the light seemed constancy itself. He'd sit on a folding stool extracted from a bag like a spider ending the hard task of repairing a web broken by the careless waving of a folded umbrella as it passed from roadside to riverside. Someday the painting he gave me of the bridge in constant light will take on cracks shaped like a web built by a spider who's forgotten the genetics of order, and I'll wonder which road to stop by, which wide-place to park at, which path to stumble down, which bridge to paint, which web to disturb.
Pigments Into Dimension

Junkyard love affair conquered
the painter who set up shop
beside the rotted Edsel
and its rusted vertical smile
to paint what he called
the most natural artificial landscape
where the hand of man was followed
by the nun of decay, chemical glee,
powerful forces hidden by observation's
persistent habit. The colors became
nature, autumn of austerity and gaud,
and I noticed his hand, his brush
would pause then juke, jump
from place to place, piling and pushing
pigments into dimension
creating a new flat by vertical world
that echoed the yard, the junk.
Edsel, totem of perfection,
hear my prayer that the design
of my left hand will dangle
as precisely as your shaven hood,
your luscious love, your rim
of decay.

December 26, 2000
Finger Paints

Only a dozen acrylics in his box
plus whatever his fussy palette might yield,
and the combinations science predicted
though he preferred to feel them between his fingers.
His canvas was just that—rough hemp
fabric he made himself, feeling each
thick thread in his fingers before washing
and stretching it tight to sun dry.
His easel was white pine pieces sewed
together with twine and old bolts
he found at the junkyard or by the road.
Only the acrylics and horsehair brushes
were storebought—even his director’s chair
was made of old beach umbrellas abandoned
on recycling days and wood from a barn torn down.

He’d find a house or horsestall broken down
or a store burned half to the ground, a car wreck
that killed 6 seniors on their way to the prom
in June. He thought of the crickets silenced
by the metal wrenching sounds of a car twisting
like light off a freshly bought diamond ring
the driver would want to give his girl
after the last dance, only their last dance
was a spinetwister, and only because
of a coincidence of physics that they came
to rest in each others’ arms did the painter
set himself down in front of their car
in some following year to paint only
what he could feel
between the calloused pads
of his work-wearied fingers.
Freightways

Dark overcame LA—
in the parts that do hard business,
freight trains made of boxcars, flatcars, coalcars—
but it can’t. Here in the river made of no
lights, no lighting, the flatcars carry trailers broken
apart from their tractors and drivers;
they got here en masse, all at once,
on roads straight mostly, level
mostly, few choices all made

years ago. They arrive full hoping
to be emptied, to be attached
to a separate mover,

a driver who came here emptied,
hoping to drive a freeway, a boulevard,
an avenue, a street, an alley, starting in a river
painted dark, ending at the back loading dock
still dark, along a path not entirely his,
but full of his choosing.
Alert:

the crumpled paper
thrown away, a draft as lifeless
as the outside wind whose draft
just inside the window flips
the heron underfeather, down
really, over, uncrumples
in the wastebasket—sound of life
regained or an exhale? What fills
my mind is the teacup filling
like a breath inhaling full
of shadow, like the mind
full of joy emptying.
Linear Thinking

My eye close to her hand,
I can see the clouds passing by her window
speeding and slowing nonlinearly
in the ring of her gold wedding band.
Outside her gauze dress
blows on the line hung
from pulleys for convenience,
but she cycles the line for uniform wear.

When the sun was just a little younger
she dropped her lingerie on the floor
in languid drips. The puddle
is still there. One day I left
when talk turned serious,
when we stopped stroking
the lace tablecloth after meals,
when things stopped going in circles.
Unfolded I Think

Steam rising from a fresh wash
on a day too cold for drying—freezing,
breezeless, unkind to clothes needing
to get back on. Your panties dropped
as if in haste but when I came
up the paperback was slowly folding
back onto itself closing the action
for the night and you were no longer
unfolded. I think I wrote with the tip of my finger
your name on the window last summer
when the crickets’ cricks faded up to thunder—
I see it materializing in a strict order
in the fog my breath showers on the window
today, a day with little looking back and clothes
to dry though all be cold.
Song, Dream and Blessing

One day my daughter will die
with long memories I can never know
filled with love for strangers
in a town I’ll never be to
in a bed, I hope, made up lovingly
by people I can’t imagine who hold her
tenderly, who find her a blessing,
after her head unfolds thoughts
I could never have, after a life
defining people who today
can only stumble and mutter. With all the words
I can find and lines I can write in wild profusion,
in all my clever thinking and imagining,
with all the books I’ve written and postures, the incredible
singing I’ve heard and playing I’ve done and places
I’ve been and people I’ve loved and hated,
all the muscle work for nothing much
I’ve tried to picture the tint of purple
on the iris outside the window where she’ll
breathe in her last and with that last breath
say a word that some will write down
and others never forget, but I can’t:
that day is too removed, my simplicity
too limiting, my reach no wider
than her wrist the day I first brought
her home and all she could dream of
was me.
Changing Socks

On my way to see the town heaped
upon by snow,
up the slopes we sled down
following my father who loomed large then, after
stepping in his footsteps
I sank up to my knees.
Snowmelt in the bottoms of my boots
in the dire dead cold on our way up a long steep hill
to see a sight no boy looks forward to—
standing in this park-like enclosure today
filled with warm winds and rows and rows of names and dates,
who wouldn’t trade?
Bark Life

& structure picked from parts
filled by junk that sometimes sags
& from this sense? Dog. Tree. Skin.
In context nonsense. She skims
the tops of sense like a swan
who flops her feet like underwalk
& pince nez black strips &
swans like ducks don't talk
don't talk to me. I noticed
last time I gripped her flesh
from behind like a faggot
she faced the sun setting
behind piles being driven
by piledrivers into soft
riverbank clay. Just then she shifted loose
& turned away from the sun
into her darker side & left me
facing some fucking metaphor.
Molded Into Sticks

ink well
on my desk filled with a deep
ink India ink of tung oil
& oxhide with a porcelain pen
feathered from a cock
I dip in & pull a scratchy
drool that makes a beauty
that leeches the head
stumps the heart
Marks Unadjusted

Two things were left to do:
dress each other when the morning rose awoke
when the touching of thighs was over with,
and write the poem of parting before our wear
overcame us. From the differing angles
and the supple smells from our clothes
we each wrote our lines on fogged windows
one pane at a time and one
wrote of returning and the other wrote
of parting. Caught in the web of branches
against sunrise, the lines tangled like black
hair pulled loose in quick haste.

Noon fire hastened leaving,
the heat we felt was not from love
nor motions neither love making.
Our lines were erased fog and streaks of finger grease,
the fog gone now is hiding them in plain sight
like just marks unadjusted. When cold
returns or dust these foggy things
will remark the panes,
show our lines baked
into hard glass.
Horsehooves Clacking Off Beat

Boring town, monotony of details,  
an hour before dawn sprinkles beads on the river  
the painter orders breakfast at the roadhouse,  
drizzly running eggs, bacon shined with grease,  
newspapers folded and refolded to tissue substance,  
and each detail in the booths and at the counter  
finds its way along the same familiar lines  
to his canvas. His topic is the bridge, his subject  
today the road that leads to it down  
from little highlands. He’s old now  
and the line of snuffed out candles behind—he never  
faces them—grows long, and the sputtering line ahead  
grows short invisibly. Same breakfast, same painting,  
some details snuffed out, others sputtering ahead.  
I’d write these feeling steeped as facts  
here one night, tonight, every night,  
but the lead in my pencil breaks  
when I get up, when I face the withered moor,  
when I hear the horsehooves stumble  
by toward the old barn tonight, when I get  
to the part about the strange erotic  
pleasure your lips hold out.
Compass Readings

The man who paints keeps his own counsel
hides it rather in his acrylics
doesn’t tell but smears
makes it 3-d with light flares and dream
shadows when you see it you know
you’ve seen something

Someone drank too much
and while burning it off
the painting was knocked to the bank
still wet with low tide
and later the painting undisturbed by salt water
road to sea past ships and shipyards
past the last gull into the coming sunlight

When you see it
you know you’ve seen something
Night Space

dawn
or is it the full moon rising behind storm clouds—
lying next to me confused in sheets
and scattered silks slumped on the floor
where you dripped them off
you rub the red back into your eyes

dawn
(or is it the full moon rising behind storm clouds)
makes a waxpaper fog
on the backside of our frost
this sweat we’ve let seep out and crust our seeing
your hands cup my face in branched parentheses

Heat fired as from a gun
from my in-your-night-space finger—
or is it the full moon rising behind storm clouds—
pokes a blue hole in the frost:
dawn
Counting Crossings

The desert has no links, roads
running in crosses rarely meet,
distances are covered
by life the color of dusted green,
sight lines are clean and unblocked.
This meeting place is empty
except for me and a city of foreigners
to the sort of place that remembers the ageless
but forgets the fleeting. The desert makes no room
for numbers and counts in quantity only
marked by a cutting light it invites
to stick the fleeting hearts.
Desert Monologue

Cities in the desert breathe
in hard, inhale lines and squares,
bulge in all four directions
over dry creeks and up rims
and over, but let's think
of memory. Take the lights
that scintillate twenty miles
to the east, twenty to the west
and how many thinking minds
are rising in the dark above the orange fog:
Will the impressions paid for
crust the desert's skin or
fog the desert's grand blue eye
reddening from lights
that go on and on.

January 11, 2001
Bleached Disturbances

beneath the rails
oil steeped ties
half bleached
half blackened
half expect one day
polished and perfected
to become the mirrored
surface on which ladies
rest tea and ices

in the still surface
of the fountain
that reflects perfectly
the disturbance
of the bell leaves little
but a ringlet of waves
side-stepping past
each other
Feels To Say Goodbye

When the lights are dedicated to flickering and after I’ve passed each crossroads, corner, park bench, and streetlamp where we used to meet, passed each trysting spot and time carrying desire pulsing like a pitching streetlight in the fog-rising rains of heat release, I’ll cross my legs and fold my feet beneath and watch the light below our window reverse and click from green to yellow, pause, then red, cycle just out of reach, the sound—of wind—is sweeping past, rubbing hard against the manmade stopping places.
Journey of Right Angles

In the corner of the square
a fountain fills with anguish
and a spell of moss drunk
on the long drips fed
must be
from a stream upslope
not too eager or drying under hell
made sun. At right angles
a bell is bonging
a steady sound made of constant taps
having to do with balance and steady wind.

All around women
stand
their backs to me showing off
womanly tides and how
I wonder
are their looks affected
by the sprigs of lilac left on our table
long after you
and the promise of you
have fled through a doorway
down an alley
over the lip of a fountain
under the curve of a bell
on a journey of right angles
Pages of Torches

In the world passing back
the collaborations of time
feel finer,
the lighting of lamps from flung
shatter more surprising,
the broken echoes focusing
into one strong voice more
untenable than
lost words on a page.
Just imagine it.
Listen to the Band

Sometimes snow lumped
beneath the firs and spruces
where it has fallen from branches
and made puffy piles surrounding
bare ground with a trunk at the center
is nothing more than snow lumped
beneath firs and spruces, the metaphorical
content of the image being over-reified
in the minds of over-linguistic thought,
being a sort of epi- or meta- or even ultra-
though one is more of a more while others
are over-istic. Sometimes a photo becomes
art because of what the cameraman
moved the lens away from—so,...
snow lumped beneath
firs and spruces
feel your

way strange things
happen room
darkened until you sweet girls
undressing you want to talk
about them hard music love
music made for a hard
elsewhere it’s a pleasure being
a woman grab attention
lips Wednesday afternoon
my rules made up she
crawls meat eating
cat tattooed on
her belly 10 50’s riding
under her pantie
straps her power
is all
here
Reach For

Dark comes, licking
clouds bottom up,
stranger meeting stranger,
lonely lightning
checking in
under parts losing pallor
while we fight back what
seems to be an act of love
taken out from under the blanket.
Like a sheep's neck twisted
to death, without electricity
darkness is to be reckoned
with.
On Hearing Mention

The city sits squarely in the hook of the hill heading down to the waterfront and a woman I will one day tantalize is walking down the lowest street, the hem of her skirt as sharp as a cat's eyes staring down hurt prey.

We've carved our names in wood marking heartwood red as clay, hard eyes gauging the graying decay as the wood recoils from holding what grows false, giving way to air and lift. Strangers like us hold only after test reaches and your skin lies like country grown foreign with the fade of familiarity. I've made you my city dark with dogs running black as water over cold rocks. What makes me different is my fleeing fear, my heart of prey.
Multi-ku (3)

Stalks yellowed and yellowing
blown by wind whistling through,
train hauling north wastes
no time, light of winter sunset
passes through the passengers’
windows, open boxcars, flatbeds,
between coal cars loaded black overflowing,
flickers like a 16mm movie playing
snow shots back in the past.
Snow, deep snow, follows in my footsteps
when the train has passed and the way
is clear toward the light gone down,
and soon my eyes will fill with ancient
light, of stars with furtive motives,
where what’s likely is what has happened,
where what has happened becomes
stalks of wheat cut and pulled along
by what happens fast.
Lands In The Blue

Your face is made up
to show no hint of desire,
your skirt is hugging you
the way I want to
but the skin of it
is tight as steel & my fingers
cannot feel below it
the way sensitives want.
I asked to meet at sunset
so the melancholy of night
would make you desire
a light touch. But the kingfisher
sings a foreign song
that comes from the blue,
lands in the blue,
and the note you sent on blue
paper with red-staining ink
seemed like tearstains
or milk turned black in the ash.
The paper says tonight the sea
will turn back one hour.
What was wet will wet once
more. These words are puckers
of silence, where the way we stare
wars and bunches into snickers,
where evidence depends.
So Much The World

Underneath the rust
smooth polished steel resembles
a mirror pretending to be you
the way all mirrors do. What hurts
is memory gone
so much the world
creates a vapor storm,
mirrors as if on fire, boxcars
filled with photos
someone forgot to develop.
I wonder whether chemicals
still hold pictures, whether structure
substitutes for making new.

Rails along the lake,
hard lines sliver
around curves. Fish heads
distilled to skulls,
and what was in them
as dry as rust burnt
steel. I burn for you
and even dreams
are worth the sleep
they cost.
Stray Instead

Sometimes it’s so predictable
it’s not worth living out. Begins
with furnace burn force fed cold air.

Concentration to the point of skull failure.
Domestication. Replication. Damping.

Eventually the mountain storm turns
to the lowland and lightning strikes
stray instead of focus.

In our local hardware store
the girl in a black skirt lifts
onto her toes to select a nail
size just right for hanging
her portrait. There is no
telling how many died that night
thinking of repairing the sagging
floor instead of bringing the sad
dream into their heads. I found the wall
cold—perhaps something beyond
on its other side, something warm,

was moving off, away.
All Washed Out

Painter lifts his canvas into the trunk—
the sky has gone colorless and the bridge
along with it. The roads he’ll travel
are filled with lightning shaped cracks,
painted passing lines and no-passing lines
are only a lighter gray than tar. The town,
an old shoe town filled to the banks
with brick buildings itching for decline,
awaits like a broad who’s forgot to wash,
who’s forgot to notice fraying satin
by her wrists and her waist. For your whiskey
it’s Comeau’s; for your beer, the Hi Lo.
He’d heard this from the only one
who would share his urine stained bed
and suffer the shit stains on the bottom
of his toilet seat, the only one who could
drink more tabasco than he. The doortrim
and windowtrim have only the lightest hints
of a quinacridone and phthalo he happens to carry
in watercolors each day to the bridge

In fact, it’s all washed out.
Or up. Nothing he tries can get it up.

I love him
for the car he drives, its New
Mexico plates. For the colors
he carries in a maple box. For
the paper and canvas he shreds
with colors to make a life puppet.
For the acrylics that are his stains on a pure life.
For the slutty woman who smells
of sex and rubs herself all day
draped half out the window over the river
that rides through town as malodorously
as she does through my life on its
bubbling way to a shining, cold-as-hell sea.
All That’s Left

The day has finished;  
all that’s left is the walking around from window to window,  
lights from other windows  
on nearby hills creep in,  
important conversations and topics  
filled with abstraction and distraction; I walk looking  
in one lit window after another.

I think of my daughter.  
The trouble she got into with her mother

over weaknesses and cravings, hidden treasures  
discovered. She can’t see the big picture  
because the little ones distract her full view.  
Her cravings and desires overwhelm.  
The day has finished;  
all that’s left is making it right, sneaking  
er her the sweater she craves, looking away  
from the lipstick that is her weakness,  
watching late in the dark  
the playing at being  
herself she desires.
Behind Between Lives

Edge of a lake at dawn, its edge
sharp as the killing sword so thin
it hums in the breeze. Edge
of a lake whose depth shrinks
to the thickness a butter knife
and shows so little harm
that children and fish play there.
Edge it remains between three realms.
On this edge there can be no master
since masters claim one thing only, though
there can be the master of the gap
between lives, and to master this gap
is to master the idea
behind between lives.
Remember These Words, He said Smiling Like Nickieben

Snow falls in a show of bad luck
on the quays of Paris hollowing
out a bowl beneath the streetlight
he steps out into. Shirtless and tattooed
by the image of his girl. Tongueless
except for his calloused finger pads.
Loved by no one now that language
has left him. The season word is winter
and the arced images tell about telling
and not but poetry hasn't gained an inch
tonight. Not from him. Not from me.
Cheerful encouragement
whistled in the dark. Make it safe
to make it safe. Fear may not. When I speak,
post-its sputter out. On each a phrase
from mom or dad. His voice. His silhouette.
Snow falls in a show of bad luck.
This time ours for forgetting the god of poetry
rigged it by sticking bricks
of language on our dumb dumb
tongues.
We’ll Be Able to Fly

The man behind the guitar finds truth hiding behind differences and repetitions. He stands behind anyone using a mouth to signify, to represent, to present epic lyrics part of a nick vision. A fabric lingers while they play, his parts flap in part like pigeons fleeing, flying, floating into an ashen cliché making way for the busload of main harmonic tonnage.

O, imagine the delight: The reaper appears, lips buried in the thousand locked doors, the door cracked open, light unmottled edging in. Burning, burning he just laughs and laughs and finally finally tears can let go of me.

I’m burning for you.
Out of the darkness the man steps, his response nonsense from anharmonic industry. I’m burning for you.
Is it the same thing and why won’t it clear, why distort it?
We’ll be able to fly.

Love of two is one crowded into bunks with hundreds of others soon starved and felt obligated to pass to the front, hips rocking.
From Type

One day I happened to speak.
That made me a talker.
Talkers like to talk.
Talkers have no time to listen.
Without listening you can't learn.
Talkers can't learn.
Can't learn? Stupid.
Stupid don't matter for anything.

Yes, let's reason from type. Let's start
with you.
Right On Time

Up a small hill on a dirt road in a wayside pub,
in the very back of a church an old friend frequents,
surrounded by redwoods overlooking a cold Pacific cove,
behind the theater next to a dumpster not emptied for weeks,
in the arms of my mother beside a road after an accident,
at a most inconvenient moment during lovemaking,
just after my daughter turns away to soothe her child,
alone in a hotel room walking back to bed after a pee,
at the top of my father's favorite mountain—

on a calendar somewhere,
on a map in a faint color
the exact time and exact place
of my last moment are marked,
and without a clue in the world,
and without any more effort than a heart skipping a beat,
I will find it right on time.
In Place of Rain

Funny how what we hate
becomes what we love,
what we fear is what we are. In the afterlife
the man who brings glasses
of water carries them up
the street from a river running
brown with the unseen
excrement of the dead.

Bricks in the walls
are made from the hands of masters,
bricks in the sidewalks
from the feet of dancers
bricks falling from the sky
in place of rain,
dreams in lyrics. The sounds
spelling music here are heavy
railroad cars loaded with heavy loads
of finger bells, the railcars swaying
from one foot to the other, the bells
carry out the orders of poets.

Lines of love are random,
so why not string them with hate?
Hug the lines arranged in a web,
fear that any two near are polarized
with a love so strong and a hate so fearful
that touching them or crossing them
will bring you to the town of bricks,
to the river of unclear water.
On The Backs of Screens

What I know about you
I’ve learned from a tattered
dictionary filled with words
no longer in use
written in an era when artists
drawing from life
rubbed their hands
for warmth while
models hung
their robes on the backs
of screens.
When I look in
my memory
the hair falling
down your back is the dark-honey
of a scarecrow:
you walking away.
Remember the time
after the cold night settled
onto the floor of your room
and the toilet flushed the silence
of your home down into its own bowels
hungering for prairies
you said
sure I could sleep here
pointing to the floor. You folded
your legs up under you like stilettos
being put away, and the black
in your eyes grew dense
as a word no dictionary
could help decipher.

February 5, 2001
Exceptional Embracing

Except what it’s for
you use you
to corral flotsam rallied
by wavelets lapping the inlet
on a day when clouds split,
unimportant casks and cakes
still in tins, wine kegged in oak.
Every part is used and reused,
laid on or in men of floats,
just one last untidy item half-
rolled onto the sand. Unlike
the river that pushes down
the sea or lake pushes out,
expanding or rejecting never
moving or herding, like the parts
you use, you make do with,
you play with that thing with
timing, use it for everything except
what it’s for.
Jarritos Guayaba

There are times when everything’s cylindrical, when the bus you’re riding on past the nodding caps of wheat is the target of sickness, when the only one you can accidentally awake is yourself nodding off in a chair no one remembers making. If the cook baked your brain would it taste like the memory of your best meal? Words are like that—stretchable—when they snap back they sting like rubber bands, draw blood from fingernails gnawed down. Cylindrical as in a glass, and instead of the subject watching, the subject is watched. To my left is a clear well-decorated bottle of Jarritos Guayaba—natural/artificial flavor the color of diluted lilacs, a drink only for a moment sucked through the narrow mouth of a tallboy. All that work to make beautiful glass for a moment’s thirst-quenching enjoyment, fruitless as waking yourself up by accident to read the poem pretending to be the one you just wrote.
Simulated Life Collected

The rules would be clear

though arbitrary. You come and go
like recycled paper. Reading those

words I wonder if what's captured still
has life, whether forecasts

from a sunny past would appear
if I looked right. Tonight

I am the only one who has walked in.
I use things others have made

and discard them. The lights

are real except
the ones I write of.

Their only existence is in
a sing-song simulation.

Egged on by a bulb
lightly lapping rows

of looking-down books
my jangling neurons can't keep up, and quick

as I write them, words turn
their backs and walk

away fast, discard
themselves.
Trying Language

I'm sorry

it's your language

I'm just trying
to use it
We Do Is Face

hand in hand down the alley
lined with cans filled
and more a thin line
of oily water down its center
panties and worse hanging
from railings and ropes
hanging from railings
and tatters and threads hanging
from them you though
are subdued in raw silk
and fresh panties from
the lingerie store on Hawthorne
which where it intersects the inlet
is where the church is where we'll
never kneel nor pray nor speak
of sacrilege for our church
is at the end of this alley
and our holywater is oilywater
and our host is yesterday's hash
and our altar is an old mattress
blood-side down doused in dust
and what all else and the kind of saving
we do is face each other
Origins of a Secret Code That Means Do It

The cold day in November
you wandered about the park
made of dried brown things
far from any town in what might
have been a prairie, in the toilet

a tongue wagged through
a hole cut in the stall
at the level of the urinal. Rural
Indiana. You asked
over and over

why we had to leave—
clamor of sunset coming
soon. Who could see
it: I’d let myself dry up

if you were winter coming
soon down a road hideous
with the insane.
Leaving Lefto

Everything about the border is thin
smells of mangoes spilled by moo
scarecrow blackcrow escrow escargot lego
thin line drawn like scars on your buttocks
when I roll you over there is odor
even the pillows will forget you
on the next tumbleweed pull
what felt to my boyfriend like yawning
was really a misprint lucky
it wasn’t in a manual on theology
the road to the castle had thin curbs
thin droolstream of lefto
verwater let’s rejoice over the leaving
out
of a line
Skies Water Waves

I have nothing to do with sky and
its clouds gimmicked branches
and silhouettes there is no writing
in lavender skies swans that assume
flotational water mark nothing
but little waves buzzing of electronic
transistorial thought is nothing
but a physics of blindness smiles
are fear of earth everything is rentable
dearth is the wearer of scareclothes

Above fields where field mice sun
themselves raptors spiral and gyrate

On the bed where you have lain so
long a perfume of imperfection
makes its own unsatisfactory rain
dance
Gimme a T

Skin the lavendar of color
eyes a-rhythm: blinking lights blinking
lights; heel hefted to the side of a knee
exposing a beyond boyfriend
my former life closes over me
like irises returning from
a breeze that silly man has
written to me again today but
a plane turned an i
into a t o u c h
that hurts


**Gropes Bugs**

The moment of increase has been imported, foreign remains, underneath tugs. When I walk from the room the air at my back stays with me and I wonder who is there who walks so near. When I pass the lilies on the table, their color is reduced 1 shade.

The place where I sit reminds me of lonely school, the gray-green rows of stonewalls, each stone with an odor taken from the moon, half its surface alive with the unmoving, the pile a warm home for gropey bugs.

Your voice has dropped 1 register, timbre has grown sanded down by an age. When our fingers touch, think of the bones that don't
Games in Simulation of Death

Kettle as handbag, gauze under a suede skirt, plastic coffee cup mostly air, plastic spoon & nondairy creamer, stiff napkin, they met at a magnificent undertaking—how does the coffee taste?—sun shining knowingly through her skirt, the recipe she concocted: apples at one end, fruits of flesh at the other :tasty as the treats Cornish tin miners tucked in their breeches or an apple in the other pocket. Each fold of the sheets brings them closer, each sea brings another breeze.
Once I had a scar

scab over dry
up fall
away
Name: Naomi

That year we lived in trees,
the hanging-down branches touching
down delivered the earth to us,
breezes hefted up
could replace our thinking.
Birds alight reprimanded us
after reading tomes filled with a concordance
with words that looked like this:

muzzled myself
nailed nakedness
name naomi
napehair navel nearly neck
needle negligently neon

The words
the horizon
the wonderlight
everclear
Like Down

Snow so light it falls like lint
like down
is no special direction
like sun near down
scores its light/beams
near the edge of your eye
like you
wandered near me
wondering which ghost
insubstantial but in motion
lives here
The Neat Result of Endless Possibilities

cornercase
walking down a street
in part of an old city
with national banks gone limp
with shoeless slipper queens limping by

I am leaning on milkweeds
I am learning decay

the fact is life is a cornercase
nothing like the middle where stuff just is
something strange

happened for this to happen
here place of extremes
the most of this meets the least of that

I’m soaked in your cornercase
where the most desire meets
the least ability and words
of love at the corner
of laughter and tears
are accidental
sharp
Mechanical Distance Keeping

Woodsbound road once
a great thoroughfare from the big town
to the West to the big town
to the East, used by buggies in the ripe
age of innocent travel then high-clearance
trucks in its farm-declining old-age
before returning not to dust but grass
then saplings then trees and canopy,
it has known only 2 ruts and a high center
its whole life, each rut dug separately
in the earth, the relation between them
established by mechanical convention
or an idea fixed in men's minds
or an abstraction of perfect standoffishness
or the proper distance between man
and woman holding hands
down a highway holding on.
Times of the Day

Today the ends of lives came to mind,
how details of the last seconds, hours, and years...

she held his hands while he was breathing unconsciously,
then he was not—it was midday....

he ran to the toilet in the night shouting
get out of my way—morning: she found him kneeling in death....

...believe the lingering of their lives,
are more like a picture

less like a story
Finding You On A Map

I found you on the map—
address from the last
page of an old book. Placing

you on the slope of a long hill
in my book of maps. Running far away.

A computer made a list
of the 61 steps I won't take

to meet you in a front yard
where you live every after

happily with the one
I never dreamed of.
Moonscrapings

New moon, crescent moon,
tick mark indicating the start
of a repeat performance by a cool
gyrator, and below it, perhaps,
a gathering of stars like dustlight scraped
from the sticking surface of an imagined
skydome. Through a hole in my borrowed
tent by an oak spreading leafless
branches I can see just its lower tip
in the upper edge of the tear
and in the lower, Venus

shimmerying in heat
from a campfire just as dawn
prepares to shows us her pink. From
your doorway sipping coffee
before writing to me
of the scraping pain in the pure white
skydome in your skull,
do you see it too?
Greased Poems

Looking at my work: my work retreats, ashamed as a woman with a crooked pair of eyes who glances away always. Words as common as the words down by the garage where the work of grease and tinkering is smoother, more clever.
Bring On Dawn?

Why does the look in the mirror breed terror? Reflections both literal and metaphorical. Echoes are probably the same if I pinch my mind right.

Why the fear of real words and sentences as if saying a simple thing simply were the mark of an amateur?

Why don't I reflect on these lines? Am I the vampire of poetry who drinks the blood-red lines of the living and former living, reflecting nothing, shrinking from the stinking rose because it reminds me of the one who rose and hence the whole cross thing? Or am I —when the protective jokes are over— really afraid of the light the morning brings.
Goddam Maddog

When the field feels empty
an odor will arrive and it
will be exactly what was missing,
precisely what is not wanted, an echo
of a chemical mistake or attack, or
the fine way things end, or
the extra little bit a river can have
when it’s used beyond its uses.
So easy to mistake the smell for the soul,
both so obvious to any passing dog.
Lorca, Deceased

Big, who am I? The place
where this blood is studied
has a name written beneath blood,
what is found here is movement
not explanation, not near, of the stinging
nettle of each droplet,
of bitterness turning the sweet motion
red. When he died, bullets lodged
in his places of home, he showed
the great wisdom that even the profound
are made of scraps. That even blood
can glue the heart shut.
The Laugh of a Duck

We are in line to see the great pond
—me behind you, me in your every shadow—
waves whipped by winds mixed up
by a range of years, in this park
surrounding a fenced pen of playground rides:
ferris wheels and merry-go-rounds, roller
coasters and spinning wheels that rise and tip.
Maybe a tunnel of love in the broken up building
facing the boulevard. The deadest time of year.
The cold is a bitter clamp
on our faces, the wind rips tears
out of the corners of our eyes. The great
pond is too shallow to bind any warmth
from the past, the wind is too strong
for the pond to rest solemnly solid.
The cold around us is the cold between us.
Your wrists have become red with cold
in the gaps between your gloves and sleeves,
but you ask no warmth,
I give none.
But what of the orange legs
and webbed feet of the ducks and
the downed bottoms of their bodies
pushed like whims in the heatrise of a desert road
across the pond, flahopping out
at the concrete brink of the park at the other side,
walking like turnstiles back to the first,
pushing their chests defiantly back in?
Can it really be on a day like today when even the heat
beneath your breasts isn’t enough to pull me in to you,
that three ducks would ride the one ride that’s open
laughing like rusted metal twisting on
rusted metal.
Shooting Slow Fire

Papa hurries back with a log of bread under his arm, stolen from the bakery up on Rue à Aurillac, but it’s mostly rubble, and the loaf’s the only delicacy in one piece. His instinct is to help the younger ones eat so far from home, with danger making the sound of a pointed cylinder the size of his girl’s finger cartwheeling at 50,000 rpm or more before plastering the side of bakery. Rumblings like thunder echo down the streets like a furtive dog looking for allowed flesh or a place to sleep, flesh of his masters is not allowed. Papa hopes someone will find the wine, someone else pâté or a terrine, perhaps an unshattered jar of cornichon pickles. Stepping over bricks and squared stones across the boulevard, Papa feels the bulge in his breast pocket, a leather carrying case with pictures of his children looking fat and dumb in their slightly soured dresses, and his wife sitting formally by his side at their wedding, and another of her with her bared breasts pointed 1/4 turn to her left tucked behind it for the long unquiet nights. In Papa’s ears he can hear his girls singing along in whispered high voices to his lullaby & in his ear he might just feel the first sharp sting of my .30-’06 caliber full metal jacket bullet entering his left ear before he dies 1/3000th of a second later. The pictures of my wife and kids are in a slot I carved in the stock of my Remington M1903A4 rifle here in the bell tower where I sit 400 yards away with that unbroken jar of cornichon pickles he hoped someone would find for the first meal after his last.
Unnormalized Models

This is the recipe for this.
Random fields, exponential models, motivated from (turn

your head and say natural language processing)

). Segmenting and labeling sequences. A framework

    based on conditional random fields offering several

advantages over hidden Markov models and stochastic grammar.

(she was thin I thought not normal I liked her segments enough to fill the universe with a 2-d string)

Second, we derive an equivalence between the well-known technique of boosting and maximum likelihood for exponential models. The idea of unnormalized models plays a key role.
Poetry Made from Hemp and Dirt

The rope that drags in the mud
hung from a ladder or assigned
to pull a sled, real hemp, plastic,
color of living wool, color of firetrucks
and ambulances, is made of nothing strong,
each fiber thin, frail, or brittle, with no
complex plan just simple twisting.
Mud’s not special either, hanging
onto rugged soles, staining the way dirt
stains, watery but not drinkable, aftermath
of a deluge or melt, nothing complicated.
Frayed rope in fresh mud, sled ready
for baking in its summer shed, all
the pieces of poetry are here
but there is no grand entrance.
Used, Too

In the drive beneath the cottonwood
heat rises up around the dulled
green pickup, gun racks in the back window
loaded with guns—it seems like, like
you, they could go off. Everywhere the heat
flies everywhere. At dusk water
pushed out of the green garden hose
flows hot, hot as you driving, dust flowing
behind your Cavalier, up the drive. At night
you tuck one leg under the sheet, the other
out as we listen in the dark to clothes
in the dryer whirling, the way we used
to.
Bead Lens Logic

When lightning flashed I was
standing beside the window
holding back
the curtain gauzy like silk,
a translucent skin
tonight. The rain had just finished budding
the window making lenses that distort
or clarify. It was close the flash, the boom
quick and the rolling decay focused
on me. In that gap between
two senses lit up
is when I knew I saw it
in the few strobes out there
visible, reflective, out there,
something.
Floor Life

We lie near
each other

tonight separated
by ocean, plane ride,
homelights below, above.

My shirt and pants
on your blouse and skirt

on the floor in your closet
tonight.
Early on the Day of Endings

on the road dark with 4am
and snow the sheets
of newspaper float and catch
in the brambles dry snow hits
the headlights while I
wait for you
in the car the elevator door
opens waits shuts
in the building where promises are
severed.
Magic Marker

Half her beauty is the dark
across the lecture hall with lights only
above, above and behind her, her
cheek and forehead lit and her jaw
invisible blending with the darkness
clinging to us like overworn shoes
or a chalice. Her hair is the
yellow of a child’s magic
marker, and her one blue eye watches
an other. Without the darkness beneath
she is just a woman, just someone in the hall
watching with me the forelorn speaker
telling it like he saw it. The dark has painted away
her plainness, erased the dark undercoat
of her brown hair, refracted an off-grey to sleeping
beauty blue that glues her eye to beauty.
This darkness is a gift
to me and for her
it is just the darkness falling haphazardly
where light will not tread or cannot
in a room filled with the story no
one is hearing

March 13, 2001
Ars Poetica

My writing is an anthem
sung to burning bics waved by
throng of soundless women
faking. Candles made from the lard
of rhyme have reason enough
to paddle down rivers of verse
by a bramble patch containing a tunnel
just big enough to crawl under and into,
to lie upon one’s back face up
to thorns and sharp
sunlight, and there reach up
and pluck the title’s first ripe
syllable, the one made famous
by that doo-wop band named “Quit
Lookin’ at Me.” In the front row
rhyme and reason stand—the only ones—
bic-less, arms folded, lookin’, lookin’,
getting ready—ready, ready—to
quit.

March 14, 2001
Pound of Flesh, Bucket of Loose Regrets

What I'd like is a bucket of flesh to pour
my heart into large enough to
hold what needs to be
held there.
March 15, 2001

Savage

Under an olive tree a poet
camped, three weeks of high
living under branches angled up.
A crowd had placed bunting
in the branches, colors of savageness
and dust, twin of eucalyptus. On
his blanket olives fell and stained him dark,
and the smell of green flesh was high
in the world. One day a wise bird
landed in the olive tree and decided
after 3 hours near dusk to sing
itself to death. And after another
day, so did the poet.
Family Vacation in a Brand New Travel Trailer

That night near Katahdin
we parked our trailer by a river
we had no name for,
on a gravel road no cars just trucks
ran down days, and in the night
the no-see-ums stormed
through our screens and mosquitoes
ravaged Snooks who feared
the rushing dark by the river.
Otters stood on the opposite bank
and laughed a silent animal laugh
while planning how to raid our food box
hung in fear of bears
in the lowest branches of a pine.
The heat even that night was too high
to close the windows against the high-
pitched wingbuzz of insects intent
on blood. We learned what living
meant in a tin box, a family packed
in its utter oil. Lying awake
those nights wondering how many
flats we’d get driving out, wondering where
the road that seemed so dark
a line on our map seemed to go nowhere,
remembering how what we looked forward to was
the trucks that passed in the days,
raising dust clouds thick as sand,
thinking how the otters stood and watched
like sentries ordered to keep us alive,
we listened to the constant buzz
of life by the river in a tin box, not
a word, not a laugh, our best vacation yet,
we listened to everything
out there waiting to get us.
Exfoliation

as if from under an awning
revealed like a young woman’s breasts
above the lengthening shouts
contrasted like turquoise on cobalt
reflecting cloudlessly on pond ice
like a mirage of shaped sounds
as seamless as axioms of tenderness
and roaming rules
longing for the bygone unfolds as stiff
as hunger as stern as
thirst

The name “Christa” sat down,
her back to me, her fists behind her back.
With the three least fingers of each hand she held
the fingers of her lover, and in the circle of the thumb
and forefinger of her left
she held my thumb, and in the other circle,
my forefinger. Her mother watched.
Later we drove to a German bahnhof
on a high place leaving a valley. The arrows
meant the opposite, and a couple
stole my car for a baby carriage. The Ford
dealer was down the street, but I didn't want
to find it. It was the last I saw of her name.
Later I sat in my study with the warm spring air
of California heaving like breath in and out
of my opened screeendoor—I watched the cars
at 3am drive in big jumps through
Alexanderplatz on a rainy night in Berlin
as if miracles could happen
or do.
Seduction in a Dropshell

lingering with sandgold underpaint
entitled to feel oppression no paranoia
less than a mess but more
than cigarettes and a Schlitz spilt
on the padded ottoman where
you stood and by simply dropping
one article you had me
Goodbye to An Imaginary Sister

Thanks for coming to
see me off on this journey laden
with the old and getting older,
the last love heaves and laugh hives.
The awning is perfect, keeping out
just those things that come from above
but allowing like a gracious king that
which crawls or scurries or flies low
ducking radar or other perceptions.
What it won't keep out is you, though,
and the wings that offer alternatives
to lightweight breaths and the torch
known as heartblood.
Side Street Lullaby

sidestreet in a small New York
town near the heights
Hudson
hour or two after sunset in late March
cold and few
streetlights people cars
Nor’easter set on high
rain closing ranks
ruling the sides of the streets
the few friends on the streets are repairing
a stalled car and the attitudes rubbed off
their hands onto their foreheads
drip into the streams and close ranks
just as I start my end of day hopes
the fire station horn kicks in yellow
trucks kick on the perpetual hopes of whispers
and strange words meaning only their sounds
close ranks
Edge Linger

Lingering, approaching silence,
what changes their sounds
when words are stripped
to the breaking noise of insect wings
in a dry hot heat? Bear up to the possibility
of making a final run-up. Meanings, mappings,
identifications are lost. Your voice has changed,
raspy to lingering whisper, sound
of moth wings dropping dust
on the touchy hairs on the edges
of my lips. I’ve waited for these
sounds the way a gunfighter awaits
the bullet spinning, boring its way
through the air, straight as despair
boring in, straight to the heart.
Under Nothing

You're nothing
but songs
my sleek farewell
welcomed under
current tight
twists breaks
let's base are belong
simple sheaths
cover like
hoods under
current
Bless Kosher

Aisle-bound pacing
panther hot
down showing guests
to seats up
front to greet men
who (in) ruts
behind her bless the hour
past dusk kosher Saturday
deli after dark
she has been bound
shape still is
as she waits for the un-
blemishment uncovenant
the unwhirling of
what
she is
Fresh Kills

What’s left to dream of? What’s been left behind is lush covered, discarded—red-mesas left behind, tidewater lingers. Payhaulers lugging up the grade to Section 1/9 where gulls hover over thrownout dreamscrap pick them, over.

Gathered tenderly. Bones eaten to. Book, photos, papers stared at, read.

Trashed.

Lug them up the grade.

Some small dreams lie here. I’m hauling larger ones, untossable ones, less likely to bloom in putrid piles of beauty.
Concoctions

singing like raindrops
long ago is long ago any
sort of anguish acts like a polish

rigid but realistic
your turning speed
your carrying load

I've underestimated them
but now my thoughts are realistic

all 8 rimpulls
are equal great patches of rubber
and a short base keep the load
balanced

I've forgotten
where I dumped
our last love-making

it is part of the squirt-spirit
we concocted
Drive Through The Bronx

deathfields of the east
hold wide walkways
back to
back headstones
challenge our feeling
that death requires
completion
I know under
these fields the stone is thick
as the last thigh
a rusted red that might have
been rich soil one day
growing tobacco
for cigar papers once
I saw a goose hit by a truck
wondered how
the migration was going
others glided
passion sheet ice
potholes a parkway
you can't be a truck

what I remember
are the fields of death
undulating and going on
down the roads that loop
back in larger
larger circles
Rigamarole for the Panther

your silence is sharp
wind through the cage bars
or a stick that clacks from one
to the next while you circle
fondness for the captor
is ritual myth of devil

truth I am kept
limited whipped fishnets
your color blue wrapped gauze

suddenly you lurch to
me as if ecstasy
filled one side of you

near me
On Bellies by Night

desert’s not
what it used to be—

long valleys gray
with a dusty crust
or red with accents what’s alive

just barely heavy reinforcement
against loss now it’s

lines of lights blue
in the night air that rises like prayers
delivering heat to what hangs

above like a watchdog
and sodium lights pale orange
halogens down the strip

and nowhere to find
a likely lover clean crust
light reinforcement

or none
March 30, 2001

Needs

every time he plays
she turns her head to watch
one phrase in the mic needs
one look to her left
what’s the need
rhythm and song
framework or scaffold
holding and outlining
there is no need
no need to look
when he plays free
she rocks away
spins rhythm
synced up
bass and bass
drum the other girl just
plays

can this one
needs
Tickles of God

the author of chaos
gave a reading
in which words floated like sperm
in a lecture-hall-like uterus
but instead of nonsense
the listeners spoke
and the author became sawdust
because a data switch
decided to become sentient
or at least unrepentant
and like little waves on a shore
the fingers of reality
tickled God
a little too
The World And

visit the world and
where connections take the name
where all is bereft but none foresaken
visit the world or
where anything goes
but nothing is settled
though something is
always
every and every or
every conclusion
this but not that
behind a building alongside
the platz the sun is rising
but the allnight pharmacy
blares lights every and man and woman
relishes or freedom

April 1, 2001
Looking up at what the sky looks like at night
Train wheels steel on steel
Like violins 2000 miles long
Strung tight as the clench hand
On the heart I listen & listen
every night Southern heat
soaks through my bars I hear

Sounds of doors opening
closing
same metal sounds as trains
clanging shut
softly spoken words
as if lover to lover
preacher to condemned
orders are read
last words last
everything
lights overhead
dim looking up at last
at what the sky looks
like at night
Script Selection

I drove before
traffic to Boston
on the coldest
instant of the year
parked in my favorite
lot in the Back
Bay. I got out of
my car
into the back
seat, ate my lunch
for breakfast
stretched out
to snooze, the opposite
two open
windows forming
a pipeline
of scripts
I could play out—
if I chose—
that day.
Mines Blow

I found myself
unable
to speak lost in

lost
out of words

in my hip pocket
a script

mine?
California Dreamin’

Falling brown
leaf exercising its right
to decay still
holds a relief of complexity.
Piled leaves,
cascades crumpled and chaotic,
a simple pattern
of abundance has gone
wild. To the rescue:
a hand that covers
excess, too much,
complications,
leaves
crayon drawings
of abstraction, of my friend,
ignorance.
Pop

Clouds spit drizzle, low-hang
like fruit gone bad before the pick,
like leaves in a fit of pre-fall before snow.
In all this I’m walking in a blur
from the winterness around me, longing
for the safe place,
the warm place,
LA.

By the way
a coal-warmed church
& hardwood floors where I kneel
before God and preacher, everyone
there for the long haul—such
a day, a cold day
outside.

Leaves have turned
like fruit forgotten
or ripened without relish. Sky
mask for the robber or the cold
heart are held here. She waits
and in ignorance she could not
resist, refuse my choice—
leave today, such a day,
a winter’s day.
Blesséd Lives of Dogs

At the end of a day
the music slows down,
the music that plays in
my head like a score driven
by forward emotions.
Or lilacs fall before me
staining the road home a faint
purple and a scent
reminiscent of longing
or childhood spent behind
a barn alone but not lonely.
At the end of the day
the old dog that stayed by my side
when I shuddered from cold and fear
and by whose side I stayed when thunder
and storms scared her shivering in animal
fear will face the rag soaked in ether
I hold like a salving cloth over her muzzle,
for she is ready to die
for me, as she has been—
purelove heart,
sentiment be damned—
all her blesséd
life.
Bracketed Dates Scrivener

The oldest stone
in the graveyard is inscribed
in German—loving script,
a date whose distance
is measured in centuries.
An older one with death’s
teeth clenched and fingers,
no, bones, that cling
to the sides of slate
sinks inch by inch.
Last night my daughter,
who like me loves
to wander past graves,
asked what happens
after we die. I told her
of the tulips
growing from hearts
perfected in stone
by John Quickel,
bracketed dates scrivener,
who adds his art
to each man’s death.
Chaingang River

What is it about rivers?
Local lows, cutbanks:
seduction or persistence times
aggression. Usual ones flow
to bodies of water that evaporate
away or flow into the water table.
Some go to sea. Quick or slow.

The one I love
comes raging out of the mountain
in storms
flattens out on a sand floor a hundred
miles square
disappears into the sand
into the air.
It just spreads and slows
deepens and lightens

I love it for
the metaphor
unhidden
plain.
Rumbles Down A Dead End

Trucks that drive by
make male sounds—
assured by the echo-making
designed into custom mufflers
installed on hot afternoons
under a tropical sun. But the woofing
purr they make is deadened
by the soft silting sand
churned by years
of the same ole,
chopped into chunks
by seasons hunting,
fishing, leaning back
on hoods—the rites
of men lurking
through life
at the end
of my road.

April 10, 2001
End of the Road, Baby, in a Georgia Roadtown

Think of the different facts
layered on what we seem,
how what you feel is not what I think,
how plain pastiche is more truthful
than the material effect of therefore.

The world outside my room
is simple: a main road with traffic lights,
a frontage road with fast-food joints,
a train track between humming
with cicadas in the trees husking themselves
to death, steel tracks humming
with the promise of freight. I stopped outside

the Dairy Queen conveniently cold
in 90 degree sunset
heat and stood watching a man sun
himself in the setting sun.
Later I saw him climb
into the back of a custom Kenworth cab
and I understood his sunning
smile. You

are like my air conditioner tonight
and just as far away as all the drives
he'll have that we
won't.
Who Picks

Big drops pull loose
from a light overcast

—opportunity too appealing;
—wipers smear & a car misses
  a turn

& the poet laureate in his L. L. Bean lumberjack shirt
seems stumped.

It's red with a little green.

I pull over on the big beltway
get out & listen to the sweet hush sound of tires on concrete
—107db knifing past the quilted workpad
of the poet hard
at work gathering shirts,

missing
inaction.

What an occasion
to miss the ripening confusion
of choice.
Hair Tale

Amorous parade
when sunset hits and
the temp drops
from 68 to 35 in 5 minutes
a quick-swelling knee
inability to
walk
crawl
yell
asleep in beds
constant temperature of being
dead
unmarried
or unacquainted
asleep in beds beside
each other
paths loop and kink
as if they were chemically straightened
reverted to nature
once straightened
out
Poem on the Forward March of Science

Confusionist, shallow thinker,
skimmer of surfaces and liver
of a thousand lives, pattern reactor,
uninformed explorer, master
incompetent, madman, abandoner
of reason, enemy of logic and rationality,
frequent negator, theory ostracizer,
limp enforcer, undisciplined passion,
critic at large, unfortunate reviewer:

Let’s hurry away from deep
thinkers whose idea of fun
is to explore the next layer
of mud.
Languid Visitors

This place worships the working of small things: elbows, straight connectors, valves made of brass or plastic, printed circuit boards kept dry, paths through unwalkable terrain. Even small fires in 50 gallon barrels to burn off windfall are part of the liturgy, part of the maze walk on knees. What’s left out is abstract: the concepts that shape vision and the ability to smell, the direct sensations that can mean nothing at all. The small things here are large, made of major music played in languid rhythms but behind the beat.

Tell me how to blend this life with the one whose evenings come at dawn, whose stride is forced, forceful.
Dream Underwhelm

Wind is little
but a dream moving along the ground
seeking the lowest spot
in which to settle.
Like a path looped
on itself, like roads
with kinks a dream
enfolds the weakest,
warms the smallest ambition.

I saw the captain grit his teeth
I saw the hustler polish his Lincoln
I saw the small frog hop into the path
of the oncoming dream.
Jesse Thing On the Dignity of Graves

The cemetery endured a grave indignity in its 200th year—nothing as dire as Sallie with the pine through her hips or Jesse Thing shouting at the bracketed date scrivener—when the boughs fell and shattered all the headstones made of slate or thin marble or granite, and little do we know how they’ll be put back together, this band of 50 on a truncated pyramid 100’ by 100’, 40’ up in the air, awaiting the heavenly shovel that will scoop them all, headstones, pines, and all into a dustbin destined for singing.
The Last One Out is Out

Can you remember the hopes that began in a parking garage underground on a warm day and the smells of gas and oil lighting up the air, filling it more than hope ever would? Flammable is how it seemed. The flame of your hair seemed fake. Things like this are hardly known. I found my way to you but the parting seemed most important. Every goodbye was the best part, in part my fault for slow starts, in part your fault for nowhere to go.
American Dreamboy

This is the America of road songs:
asphalt, macadam, concrete, oiled roads,
dirt roads, gravel roads, roads with high middles
growing timothy and bermuda grass (kweek),
and lines alongside: telephone, electric, lines
that hum from calls home or away from home.
This is the America of wandering, of fast
driving down from passes, along rivers,
across plains, by surf, through sequoias,
into towns made light jewels in the dead
of night, through cities lit sodium orange
or blue where lights for cleaning crews
keep awake, up into mountains, past farms
as old as angels, to the graveyards of the frontier
we passed just 100 years ago. The song of roads
is the song of lines, verse of understanding
and sympathy, too young to abstract. Let
me find the nourishment of this land,
these roads and plains, these weed-lined
avenues of contemplation, where the creosote-
soaked poles rise up like stylites, like crucifixes
half-made, like rods grounding hope, like
monuments to lingering dismay. Let me have
this if I can't have you.

April 21, 2001
Linger Longer

Where worlds meet rules
can't be kept, language once precise
exact, accurate chuckle and giggle—
joke's on us for thinking dumb.
What would it have been
like to hear you tickling
my head my ears
in what passes for warmth
in yours; what moves would you make,
would I, what surprises,
what wouldn't surprise
that we thought would?
Smears. Spray and splash.
With sharpness gone,
how soft could it become?
I am left the only
world builder, each sweet sound
pushed next to another making
noises of warring, warnings,
warmings, want; each sound
a mark left in the world. You're left
in the world you found, one whose roads
just go places, whose houses
are cleverly built to last,
where let is not allowed.
Look behind each façade you find,
seek my sign, listen to one world
leaking into another.

April 22, 2001
Death of Poetry

Sit by the window and weep
for the poet
has given up on you.
He's forgotten how you tried
to touch him once,
and how you looked
as the train rolled out
or the car drove away—
either case the air
filled with the odors
of machines at work
in service to men and women,
even machines.
The poet is the one
who speaks, who writes,
who writhes from a suffering he alone
can feel. You sleep
with children
and speak strictly
of the rules of romance
while snow falls like
the false sleep of
predators. The poet was your prey
and his defense
was a hyena’s laugh
made rich by vocal stops
and glottal hiccups.
In the end he sat silenced
and blood from his heart oozed
from your lips.
Lotion Alone

Whose song
do I listen to? When I circle
then fly home, which direction is it?
Snow settles down like the softest
whisper in your repertoire,
and the lightest breeze
lifts its skirts; the sound
is human, human—I imagine
you sitting in a full chair
with something that might resemble
a tear in your eye;
I wonder: Is this for the children
of leprosy who don’t inherit
but catch through love?
Lotion takes it away,
rub a dub dub—
that’s the rub:
like lotion
like disease
like love
you’re just absorbed,
and by yourself.
Parts Parting

Let’s dance
let’s wiggle and sing
with our mouths synchronized,
let the sound of harmony bang harshly
into dissonance with the pure best
between. Let’s look
at each other square out of the corners
of our eyes,
forge a bargain for our mouths to smirk,
for our lungs the break a laugh
before our fingertips part
at the start of another last dance.

April 25, 2001
Unreachable Address

Someday the tips
of your fingers will brush
the edge of a broken glass
once used to quench the thirst
of a man lingering near dry loss.
If you can't write,
funnel your groggy feelings
into the picture on a dime
picture postcard and mail
it from an unreachable
address near you, which is clearly
not near me.
Anger Angst

I walked past, paused
past a comforting sitting stone, one
on which we could sit close
and huddle against the wind,
watch the stubble in the cornfield
freeze, the geese overflying us
on their ways away,
listen to branches clicking and whistling in the elm
brambles near here.

I tried to imagine this
except me humanless scene
with someone like you added
as a prop perhaps sitting
perhaps gulping wind
perhaps more but nothing
human popped to mind.
Casual Silence

I've been cut
as if by the edge of a knife or a coach
judging talent or appropriateness.
The edge made cutting smooth
by a rough stone—it's the angle
that's judged not its softness.

Things hard: car-door slam
echoing in a parking garage underground
where the smells of autumn
go sour or the breathtaking
shupp of a subway door closing
when goodbye was right.

In all this I've been cut
as if by a sharp knife
or an edgy coach who looks on my skills
as incomplete, unformed, ill-formed, ungainly.
I've been cut,
too,
by your teeth measuring off the dots and dashes
of a casual silence.
More of Your Color

evening standard
found you on the map
longing for normalcy among malingerers
how soft is your breath passing over your vocal folds creating a lovestating bark
you are used to use
refuse to refuse attentions
figure yourself out like a computing puzzle of who sits atop whom
and maybe the sundowns will come slower
and with more color
more of your color
One Off

senses of sentences inhibit
the move

from song to music
in which the habits
of civilization

fall loose
like a near shear gown
whose buttons have been snapped

one by
one off
Sacrifice of Liquid

All lipstick is orange
you said smearing
the meats of your lips
the color of artificial red

grapefruit juice—
sweet, appealing
as tangerines
or blood
oranges bleeding their juice
through your squeezer,
pouring like acid
onto the bitterest
fronds of an expanding,
vexed wound.
Conjugate Lethal

she has been the other
ever outward expanding
delight of differences
holed and aloof and the imagination
of her voice from the regal bark
in service of description
to the sizzling whispers of her brush
ears mouths strands of hair has filled
me with the void
her absence
provides

like the lake whose draining
both fills and empties

like the doppler of catch
release
Of Hope Hung Out

Tailings like lime
like candle drippings
at the base of a picket rock
remind me of ice
of the freezing
of your crack
of hope
just around the corner
around the bend
round & round
cactus jewels and sweet juice
tinkering like diversity
like your toilet laugh
like the rings of contained passion
wrapped round a turquoise tank
a copper basin
a little kettle
of sublime lucky lotion
holding forth
somewhere else.

May 4, 2001
By the Long, Distant Highway

“Do the dogs have names?” I ask.
They move like weavers’ shuttles.

The silversmith looks at his silver loft,
it’s windows facing the buttes lingering
to see the next wave move in,
the sky wondering whether to drop its guard
and pour on the dryland
or clear the mesa and head East,
the horses nick from one hoof to another,
sheep bleat and the wind, low, hums
the dish, the land drains low to each
horizon line, the mesas sit as they have for centuries.

Quiet comments.

“Yes, they do,” he says and climbs
the stairs to do one more overlay
before the sky tempers the sun.
Mesa Songs

Don’t say the words
while the pure music might linger
while the dancers still shuffle
though the beat is dropped once in twelve
and the rest stop stills the rising dust,
don’t say the words
as long as eaglets lie tied to the roofs
and the worlds remain mixed up,
songs remain strings of mumbles
and shrieks and the girls dip their heads beneath
the undercarriages of 4 by 4s or carry
bowls of bland stew to the center of the plaza
where mere life circles like the raven
lifting from the low plateau to the village heights.
Don’t say the words while the possibility
of song lives.
Green of Beauty

Days grow long, grow hot,
grow through the pavement
like insistence, grow greener
like foolishness, grow dimmer
like forcible abstraction, and the days
made of you head like ponies heading home
making for the sunset growing
behind the man-cactus sprung
and headstrong butte
in other directions.
Search Methods

The desert is not empty but filled with living and becoming.

The desert is not brown but green with green bark that will live even when leaves are shed to preserve moisture.

The desert is not hot alone but becomes like ice in the night and in between times.

The desert is not lonely but fills with the lonely who wander like rivers flowing on level plains searching for ways to search.
Pale White Ink

Like roads that end
before you get there,
like rivers that evaporate
on sand plains, like bridges
turned to let boats pass beneath,
like the heavy rain that turns
to a cold breeze before it reaches
the hot yellow grain, your answers
to my carefully framed questions
are made of pale white ink.
What We Didn’t Think

At the door to the dance
just when the guitars turned reverby
and the plucking changed from twanged
to muted, gutteral, like words hard
coming out, as I turned to
walk to my car to drive through
the coldness to the river where the air
spreads colder, wetter, he pulled
you close like a sweater he wanted to hug
to his chest, kissed you like taking nectar,
and just as I wanted
you thought I didn’t see.
Ringo!

Its address says it all:
2nd Interchange, Exit 340, Willcox, Arizona,
home of Rex Allen, which I can’t criticize
seeing’s how he co-starred with Slim Pickens once.
Plaza Restaurant. The waitresses are giants
or have fewer teeth than God designed them
to have, or wonder why the hot water
was turned off and the hot tea needed only one
ice cube to be ice tea. The chicken is breaded,
the succotash is overboiled, they serve grits with butter,
and the chops come from overfed porkers, tender
as the kiss the toothless waitress would love
to impart. Is it any wonder, I wonder,
sitting forking the succotash down to a polite
level, that 50 miles to the south the man who died
a mysterious death by the side
of a creek, with a name that rings like a bell
became famous, more famous than Rex Allen,
more famous than Gloria, the 6’5” waitress
slinging succotash like used up lovers,
more famous than half the famous poets
who ever lived. Did he deserve it enough?
What did he think of succotash? Did he like
his women with gaps?
Like Romeo and Juliet

every mile
or two gaps
of 10 miles sometimes
but rarely
where cars are far
driven trains are long-

haul rats rabbits
coyotes skinks cross drunks
cross trains cross
crosses white
wrapped ringed
in the red of roses
of goodbye

at crossroads rail crossings
where the unrelated become suddenly embedded

dead linger
wonder really
which cross
arm points
the way
they missed
Short Blessing

Underneath truth
reality lies
Dandy Candy

The surrealist packs his bags and seals them but everything drools out and all’s left is the giraffe carrying brightly powered color tools. At least he’s not drooling camel. Reality evaporates leaving a fine tea. Alas, politics is far away and might be counted on for a pudding kiss, would the flickering strobes just provide 2 more lights.

The meaning of surrealist talk is like friendly computers: GUI, Louie, I love you, GUI Louie, I’ll be true.
Riding Home Up a Steep Hill Near Dusk

I heard the knuck of plates clucking just before dinner becomes

I caught the lisp of trees trying to say their own names

I smelled the grease smoke as it rose inhaled by distant clouds

I felt the boring sun's heat through the pores of my chewed-up T shirt

Over yonder the fate of man grew damp between legs closed to all

Though it tries life cannot be tougher
Apology in Abstract Terms

Likening the undercurrent of suspicion
that drains beneath my desire
to a forceful wave cutting banks of sand
and streaming them onto a lower shelf
was the first in a series of lengthening steps
away from the drunkenness of abstraction
that my formal life slipped on
like the skin of a dead bear.
The Lesson of No Lesson

Waving, they're waving
like people on the Titanic heading for the bottom
like palm fronds dulled by a bronze decor
like water taking on the forms of forces reacting invisibly
like grains and grasses planted near a family shot to death all on one warm November night
like hair on beauty queens who plan your rejection while they endure manicures
like people standing there
saying goodbye with their hands
and arms, jerking their bellies and hips,
switching from foot to foot, swaying their heads,
using everything but their mouths and voices
as if there were something to not trust
about them.
Gee Whiz

Whenever the paints hit the spinning plate
I cringe—straight lines of color fleeing
want fly outward. Blotches dropped on the edges,
you, lessons of release—these are
all sprung loose by the spinning art wheel
I dizzy like the art wheel I don’t
have. Or else the little toes of cold air coming
to visit me as I write words that
do flow, do lose their energy like cool summer night sap. Only thing
is, the one constant becomes the changeable
dream.

May 21, 2001
Outside the Theater on a Night Dedicated to Poetry and Play

the sheets are easy
to throw on the sidewalk the words too
easy

they bump on a liquid breeze
so light she slowly
gently

falls to the sidewalk
looks up in
my eyes her history
a finality growing
long

diffuse all-covering
what she sees she takes
with her as she falls even further
away

like the words dropping
dust from the sheets
all of it blowing lightheartedly
away
See the Birds, How They Travel So

The master waits
under the vines by the jasmine
the hollow flowers exhale.
The scent of distance zig-zags closer
avoiding time. There is something below
that is like us but less confident. I think
I saw her fluttering away, the faintness of her heart's
desire not enough support
for the fullness her life once demanded.
The master waits
like a hollow in the ground waiting to be filled,
like vines and flowers aching to give
forth their smells. The scent of distance
is upon us joining our silent culture,
emptying hearts of their desires
except for one desire,
the one that entered after it split
from a traveling flock
just back from a trek
to a distant holy land.
Sentimentality Tied to the Rails

I wish I could hop
from one rail to the other
walking through cornfields
in Iowa where poets write,
to experience one sort
and then another
of life, maybe one person
and then another.
Like graveyards filled
with men buried near one
wife, near another wife,
these rails speak of possibilities
of future not past.
I could tell you names and dates,
number of children by each,
colors of blended lichens,
how close and cool the graveyard
is as I pause my rail hopping.
I could but I’m spending my time
not on the sentimentality these images
render, not on the way out down these rails
at noon, but on the hopping, hoping
to get from one rail to the other
in one hop so the damned metaphor
could work out and not stumble
on the ties like a man with
a clown’s pencil looking for click-closings
when the only clicks are the heavy steel wheels
crossing joints.
Rain Over Summer Grass

into this morning
the rain soaked earth gives up
its worms who unashamedly
curl around each other
in an unexpectedly
thoughtless light

we stop
glance the other’s way

the robin pecks
then swallows
a worm

our lips hover
then meet
After Mowing

Your hair has filled with the heavy
dust and sweat of a hard day
unscrambling the grass
mowed and raked into rows,
and in a few days we’ll bale.
The tractor, old by choice,
is clicking back down to earth’s
temperature and on the dulled blades
of the mower blood of field mice
and a groundhog gels.

The heaviness in your arms
has conquered you
and I wash your hair
for the first time
feeling not the hair but the hardness
of your skull, neither what’s soft outside
nor inside, but the stuff of long time.
Bounce

The old pond
made maybe by my grandfather for the benefit of cows
had turned that late late afternoon
to sky
brought on by a stillness that had been firming all day.
From another angle
it was the unmoving young maples
he didn't figure on
that were bunching the water in.
Beauty like this leaves me
unmoved so I reached for a rock
and threw it at the old pond

The pond was disturbed but
unharmed like anyone
suffering a heated
moment. I remember the rock
when it hit—
bouncing,
bouncing again,
bouncing into the maples
whose leaves have covered it,
the fate of all things hard.
No Nada

I wonder.
There is no tree.
I’ve become a dilemma.
There is no yard.
I spot the eucalyptus caps about the drop.
There are only colored leaves to pile on.
The back and forth between subject and object
leaves me wondering about one of them.
Hopping like a house sparrow from fence to feeder.
To make a thing take away all that isn’t it.
To make another means you made a mistake.
To make a thing take away all that isn’t that very thing.
No mistakes now.
The dizzying beauty of spin art.
He painted her on her black velvet skirt
and she was in it and on it.
And now it’s fad, the Elvis medium.
I wonder if I’ve become a dilemma yet
in the world defined by nots.
art

I live on pages, 
in the white space hedged by inkwords. 
Today I've placed my hands on the beating heart 
of the word 
heart.
Bag Thoughts

The room is filled with eaters—
like the woman dressed ethnically
who brings the spoon of white cream
soup to her cleansed lips and drinks
with the sound of a covered gasp:
She's lonely from an unexpected departure
or a missed discussion; perhaps her
flowers have wilted despite religious
watering. And

to understand each one well
enough to pick, I bring
my bag of dreams and pin
to each the one that fits
and thereby choose my partner
somewhere between haze and
high blue sky.
TransWork

I'll customize a rendezvous
typing these words I feel like
each curve is remade each
time we meet back there you know
where the industrial city—no
connotations—lies
gilded by a sudden low sun
beneath opening clouds
late afternoon in your northern city
who could imagine me could he
imagine this foreign walking
this trip to the closing doors
train bound for the night
bound to succeed bound
like the stuck weight of wheels
to rails to determine
to do on today still nothing
Windy Day Up

on Second Mesa by the Hopi Cultural Center
the young sculptor just back from NYC is whittling
the first shapes of a katsina from a juniper
root—but it's the silver overlay
bracelet of Home Dancer in the back
of the sculptor's Explorer that he knows
she'd love, and he'd buy it, send it,
but the nostalgia of habits
doesn't survive divorce.
She'll never know.
Cut by the Spots

In the dark cut
by the spots on the gathered
bluesmen music wells
from speaker cones and skins
the cries of metal strings quaking
in fields the split abrupt movements
of air over the reeds in a Super 64X
harmonica punctuate the slight movement
of the blues singer who tips down
his hatbrim to shade his eyes
watering in the dark
cut by the spots.
Ruts Leaving Ocala

This old road they say
was the main road to Gainseville
from Ocala is just a dust-filled
pair of ruts going by horse farms
looking old as old; a turnpike
they called it. In places it’s blocked
by fences—wooden, barbed
wire, chain link—tall oaks going on,
insect life stirring. Our problem
is about old—it goes like this:
I walk in this rut, always have;
you in that, always.
Just As They Are

In the glare of the artist’s eye
the feet of the model
are painted big.

The poet at his notepad
in the just-cut field of rye
sees too the stubble of words
and stacks of pathos.
Hung on Skeletons of Detail

fat alleys of blue and yellow
lumped together like hams....

red or nearly red parisols
under the sun
over heads....

spreading color
hung over
the details of a skeleton—
same details
different colors....

details large as hands
spread open
to measure something large
that might be too
bright a color....

let us sit
in circles and make
our views commencing
with the weakest color
and ending....

for you I made
what I could
then stopped
when it was final—
over....
serial dusk juggler 3 cdr

some names are made of tears
and sloppy

grandma who died by the hooves
of her plowhorse

uncle nick whose left ear
was too big for something
that didn’t work

some names
find you in the tangle of all
other words

words that find you
form your evername

puzzle that pieces
you together
European Panties

Does she have them?
Panties.
Beneath her wintercoat
and skirt the rest
of her is covered.
But panties?
The European girl
mind whistles:
All she can think
is the long windy way home.
What she puts on
the day she takes it
off will line the lane.
What will it be
but the emptiness beneath?
Panties on the floor—
where is her shape now?

June 6, 2001
Small Thought About Panties

So many examples of panties
filling up bedrooms
from the floor up. Word
filled with anti-pronouncements,
bitter in the mouth
to the proper. Girlish,
over-feminine. Hard as cock
is to say for some men. Woman’s
word; man’s word.

For what comes
between us.
Abandoned Panties

Even when they're full
something's left over.
The material is localized.
covering like thin glue;
words tend to shrink
when they dry out;
fussing is the longevity
of heroism. She thinks
she just walks away
when her panties hit the floor
and she goes to close the drapes
but they've had their wind
knocked out of them,
and the power shifts
from hip to hip.
Panties at the End of the Mind

A small glass has bent her head...
...filled with water...
...my head flat on the table...
...she smokes a Parliament
she bummed
up the street by the package store.

She buys things too small...
...maybe, or keeps them too long...
...savors too much...
...she tucks her blouse in &
packages all her things
up to maximize gain.

Like tender nets...
...the fraction means business...
...unheard of songs butterfly her memories...
...she fingers the elastic cords
of her terminal panties, swishes clockwise the skirt I look
up, quizzical of what what’s there conjures.

White flag? O surrender.
First Panties

First ink,  
first dream,  
first blossom,  
first calligraphy,  
first letter, first poem.

Firsts pile up  
like the dreams of panties on the floor  
by my beds. How they have been taken  
off. One by one (usually). On her shoulders  
and heels. Or belly raised and from behind.  
Pulled down with a different scent  
available. They all've had their warmth  
which seeps away quick—their silk  
natures or rayon or cotton.

Firsts come in waves,  
some like the lone sea wave  
late in autumn  
that touches the thick grass  
at the upper reaches of the beach  
that comes just once,  
tentative but strong,  
and flows back into the sea  
and becomes water  
once more.
Ars Poeticrap

I've written a line and discussed it because the evidence is contaminated by the theory that created it. This line is my evidence senseless and isolated, hanging by the slightest thread to preceding ramblings. These are observational results and confounds.

I've grown accustomed to rattlesnakes and sea birds gurgling like spies delivering the goods before it's over. The noises I hear? It's my job.
Can't Come True

There are simplicities, similarities.
The ways words meander from memory to the page vary day to day, Like waterways they complicate the bottoms, making some gullies a bit deeper.

But deeper is not progress, deeper is more entrenched.
Progress is difference in similarity.
Think of the first sun of spring, it’s coming up cause to sip one’s tea more slowly and read for sound not information.

We make progress on the first sun.
Perseverance and aggression. Progress.
The simple-minded make progress, the shallow thinkers, whose pathways from memory to the page are varied, many.

This reminds me of the girl who wished her breasts were as large as her mother’s.

Shelf of a woman.

She sat beneath the line when the lingerie was hung out and pondered the mighty cups of her mother’s brassiere.
How high could she fly that size?

She sat all day sat all that week all that month that year life.

Simple wish can’t come true.

June 12, 2001
Where Did That Story Come From?

She waved
at me I think
from her bedroom window
dressed like women unashamed of themselves do
in panties and bra nothing else
the palm of her hand directed her
her wrist elbow and arm followed its directings
her shoulders waved side to side
her upper body
swaying breasts even in their harnesses
hitched up and ready for work
and her hips and legs but I couldn't see them
head hair eyes all of her was waving
at me I think
from her bedroom window
like a woman enthusiastic for her lover
going or coming who knows
her palm was pushing a handkerchief I think
perhaps she weeps I thought
then I saw what she was doing
washing windows
like any housewife
on display
where did that story come from?
Shallow Intellectuals

joke's on the deep thinkers
who've worked like scholars on honing their minds
to work only and exactly on the things they know deeply
which they picked at random almost when an advisor surprised them in the men's room
here is something they would think: Uniform inclusions in nondeterministic logspace
or: Single-letter languages accepted by alternating and probabilistic pushdown automata
they think they might find these things somewhere if only they could look randomly
enough

joke's on them
deep dopes
the only thoughts they can think
are unthinkable
Girls Go Fast

Where I live the ground gives up fog at dusk
in the low points, and the air feels more like a partner
going down. Girls don't seem to last long—
flipping their woman bits early. Music takes
a lot of sweat. Coincidences don't panic.

Take the bug lights with their electric
killers: Fluorescents that give off TV blue in the fogged
dark, so from up the road you can't tell
whether the motion is stories in the living room
above the funeral home
or bugs.
Heat Win

Someday heat will win—
easier to slip down into the fogged-under
hollows than lift a head above.

The right way is seamless
like the mist of black nylon
up the back of a champaign-glass-stemmed
woman who has hooked one leg behind
the other in a show of strength.

Let’s fire the pot in a real fire,
let the ash cover it and stain the red black,
cover it in pine tar then polish it beyond
usefulness. Someday
heat will win, black will cover
us like a mist, just a cloud passing over
and our polish will be beyond
any use.
Goodbyed Arms

Through foreign eyes
the skin of scream
shells are colored
pastels made from hard
colors sliced thin.
Light then reminder
pass through,
the thrills of age
looked at through foreign eyes.

Reminds me of fog fillers,
of rivers balanced against
the farmland shelf
forming a river that roams
the edges of lakes
of oceans, you

can see them from the air
passing by on your way
from the goodbyed arms of one woman
to the banks of a river
digging in,
making a light color
from a dark land.
Chemtrails

show my chemtrail video footage on local cable
tailgated by a new black Lincoln with Massachusetts plates
I experienced an unmarked black helicopter rooftop my house three times
I've had many phone hangups
many silent lines with only breathing
videotaping those evil sky makers
spewing a blue-green substance from which I was downwind
at that point, yeah
is there any real support out there?
speak up
real soon
Sketch by the Merrimack in 100 Degrees

limegreen bridge trusses
wavewakes in curved ranks brush
and brush the shore and shoreweeds
boats heaving upriver slow to 15
under the bridge
limegreen support sections—6 of them
upriver piers are angled and ironclad in places
like the boat named for here
heat might as well reflect off the river onto my forehead
someone has left a boat overturned
its blue needs relief from the redbrown worn through
to a robin shouts above me in the elms
cars slow to watch me sketch
there's a haze that has washed away the blueness of the sky
and carries its hot wet heat to my arms despite the slight
breeze in my face blown in from the west
the limegreen is only 2 shades more remarkable
than the background hill of maples and oaks
one span can rotate on the circular platform
letting big boats pass
sweat drips on this canvas
the overturned boat rests in the shade
the flickering river's surface looks pixilated when I squint
sweat rolls off my chin when the click of cars on the bridge's seams
catch me besides birds lawnmowers roar like outraged bees
just now I notice that the limegreen spans reflect the color
only vertically
and I wonder whether I dare cross a bridge like that
on my way to you

June 20, 2001
Don’t Write This Poem

The jumping oak gall is caused by a small wasp in two generations per year.

The first is all females who lay eggs which hatch into male and female which mate and start the next generation.

The gall formed in the second generation creates discoloration. Galls from the second generation fall to the ground and jump to help lodge them in the duff where they overwinter and emerge as females. Larvae inside the gall sharply hit the gall causing it to jump like someone reading this poem.
Circle 'Round

Cold air has started to swamp my feet
and it won’t be long
before it rises to my calves, my knees,
up to vital parts. Birds cease they tittering,
moves less swift from place to place,
converge on their resting spots.

The nightly story of slowing down
confirms the fears of cycles
and how they come ’round and ’round.

Like the fear of plain speech,
that it might approach too straight,
have too sharp a point on it,
aim too effectively, the fear of cooling nights
has a frosting a bit too cold.

The work of man
and woman is to circle ’round
each other and the fears
at the center of their system
a simple n-body problem
solved by doing.

Sometimes when the air picks up the cold
of emptiness, a cricket will sound—
it goes well with light breath.
Winter Kills

Street, poles, wires overhead swaying in a winter wind
garbage cans rolling against walls and themselves,
storm drain gates, cars parked by the curbs
the curbs, black iron railings, eaves, TV antennas,
all these laced with ice, webbed with ice,
layered by ice growing, thickening
although the wind is gaining strength. Through all
this I'm walking, thinking of the girl three blocks
back, back against a fence, speaking in her daily voice
a routine poem, its freshness laced with ice.
Key to Open

Follow linger hang around chase a scent catch a sound move against push back lift lug loaf

Approaching a bend a water turn a wind change a loft decide your key open up
Yawning Language

Drawl of laziness
drawn from linear thought:
poetry’s insufferable twang.
Might Made Sounds

Fireflies zing by
pointing some direction
two dozen minutes past sunset;
walking down the steps
fingers just breezing over
the iron rail
sends the sounds of well-tuned
bells pulsing behind the scenes.
Bells music made by hammer
blows, fireflies zooping
all ways, the evening collapses
to a point on the sheltering surface
of a hammer meeting the ringable
shell of the bell’s outside, a harbor,
a source of the sounds fireflies
might make.
Something unexpected in the course
of a river that flows in the direction
come from traveling downhill
parallels the course of a man who
walks in editorial circles
around the first draft
of his gravestone to find its typographic errors,
perfect its line
breaks, check its readability in all lighting conditions,
and—why not say it—to
forge the right content for
it
on the permanent draft.

Not to mention
experiencing it
from the side
he won't.
On a Downtown Street Where Music Is Made in the South at Night

girls in lotion
under their summer silks
dresses their mothers

think Asian
for their colors and patterns
exotic flowers prints
abstractly folded within
languid colors
implying a scent to

match their lotion
but all that summer
clinginess displays
the electricity a boy's fingers
would excite were he to run

them like a violin-maker’s on
the italic curves of a new piece
over her tonight
on a night moaning

from heat
loss by a bar where bass
and drums fuck
Writhen

in a basement filled with remnants
of structural support
extra-sized bolts and nuts
a wall torn decoratively down and softened
changed into a restaurant serving Moroccan
Spanish African dishes
with a band of collected players wandered
in playing in straining scales
she wears a hiphugging skirt
modest small top
head jewelry odd paint
extending stretch of midriff
stretching left stretching right
stretching forward stretching backward
slow
protracted
snakeshaped snakesounding
lit candle on her head making its own Ss
her back is toward me I watch
what’s below
the eaters beyond lift
forks open mouths
chew swallow
using their eyes alone
gasp mesmerized by the single-letter sounds
of snakes filling the room
like a sexual tide
Storm March and Swampy Readings

After the reading
where the clarity of emotion blurred

after rain and lightning and thunder rolls in roiling
hills played their cards and the theories of music
launched a sneak attack on the mere hearing
contacts of songs

after even the oldest woman read swampy
in her sexuality like a joke men would tell while washing their jockeys

after sills like lips hugging the floor in doorways
overflood letting in the winded water splayed on the concrete porches
frustrating the sweeping dreams of the women listening to unwritten sadness

an automated fireworks display attached to a casino billboard
snaps into play and lights the whipped sky
to shades in the white–gray–blue spectrum
that marks
the night though limping
the ending marks of dots
spelling the march of life
upvalley.
Meditation on a Meditation Hut

the hut had no squareness
except vertical plumbs

even the windows & doors slumped
or ballooned

a bench wrangled across the room
whose ceiling was held up by old trees cut & debarked

except for cement
everything was made from something that made something else

before
it was tempting to sit

across a valley so close
one side smelled of the other a Japanese garden was made

whose settling encumbrance
was a Japanese elm

wishing for home
at the tops of its shaking leaves
Dachau Meditation on Learning of Murders

Meditation—poets unclasped,
simulation of concept flycasting,
borrowed by men of equals.

I saw the moveable line
filtering maybes into yeses and noes
by becoming less visible and leaving
it to the underminers

I saw the lieutenant shooting in the air
I saw his left hand held up in a stop sign
I saw the machine gunner on his gut aiming 5’ high and sweeping left to right and back
I saw the lieutenant kick the machine gunner
I saw the bodies just skin on skeletons winking in the boxcars
I heard the men cry air and water in our language
I heard the order to take them all
I heard God’s footsteps getting closer

Temptation—looking for some new clothes,
hoping for a fast bike, ducking behind housewalls,
listening for the footsteps of the formerly caged,
wasting time on the desiccated
—tempting isn’t it?
Prelude to Evacuation

junk park in summer
crowded with weird weeds and hopping kids
grasses local and global flourish
next to lousy land and people standing around

walk/watch grim odd trucks
bikes with covered chains like covered brains
hiding what makes things go
girls pulling at their tops and standing on platforms

I can't believe I was here once
and the place made as much sense as a prelude
to evacuation
Green Eye Blues

woman wrapped in no
destructress
unfathomable desire hole
bluesmen worry of her modal noises
horses devil men

this place seems green
seems solid
red tiles mandated even

my plan
neutral as neutrinos passing through a summer day

to stand clear but close
listen but not speak
whisper when shouting is required
hoist the flag of surrender
wave at the closest referee
help
Goodbye from a Stand of Bavarian Woods

The best way is the least
through the light-drained woods
fir and linden
hills not unlike those of home-like places.
This place is yours and the nervousness
of your possessions is edging me aside
and up the gravelled road where homes are parked
toward a pretty view
of a sunset caught failing
toward my sea, my shaken trees,
toward the way my heart will reluctantly
surrender.

July 5, 2001
Goodbye Reliquary

I write my goodbyes
one by one
one after another
junkie to the numbness
and awakening other-realms.
You see

I need each one:
the deep air-suckingness of each:
the new ways they point away.
They are

my forest full of pathlessness,
the way each brings my attention
to attention.
This is

my goodbye to goodbyes.
I hope they can end.
I wish to watch your trailing hem
kicked by your right heel, kicked by your
left.

July 6, 2001
Moveable Barrier Between the Steady

I’m through
the last door

the lights receding slow down
as what’s reflected nears

the lights receding dim
and are consumed by the rough spots increasing

but the last door has been passed
its slamming just a wash that once beat in echoes

so suppose the hall is nothing but a metaphor
or is described by one

that the man who sits in the alcove writing
knows footsteps from the ticking of a sick heart

then one of the two things is true
and the other is just the heart inscribed by lust

directed by and directed
to the foreign

July 7, 2001
Accidental Death

of a moth
captured weaving a thought
in the bowl of a candle's burned-out
heart where through the casual
hunt for light both
the moth
and I
burned out.
Harmonica Solo on an Austrian Couloir

This heart
of a valley has been cut from the cold green
of her eyes. She
seals it with her kiss.
By the road,
by the glacial overflow,
by the slumber toward September
I’ll still be emptiness.
This house
climbs the ladder to painted pastel ice fields
remarked by all who see them
as marks and signs of less
intended than said.
Thigh Place

Dirk R.—you suspected he’d love you
if only his computer would relent
and drop its caps, its alts. Hoo—
ha h, the god who designed this felt
a headache coming on
like boys on
boys, boys on berries.

Little sense
little go at,
the sense of longing over comes
Dirk, web monkey, long hide.

His hand greets my knee,
some place on my thigh.
Rear, Facing West

bonsaied rough fir
clinging above apartment complex
backyards, alpen-shaped clouds
growing in weight (metallic grey)
but across from this balcony in the South
of Munich the action takes place
like a Jimmy Stewart movie w/Grace Kelly—a man gazes with loathing
or love at the innards or backards
of his iMac, a shadow brushes
her hair one-oh-one, one-oh-two,
a woman fearing the age of age
fingers the rolled top of her panties
just above her bush which like the one
two meters away and hanging afraid
over the backyards shading the fast-fading
last-minute punks of greying red,
it awaits the loving steel of sharpened
scissors that long to trim it back
into fighting shape
Watching Them Brush, Listening

in the arms of a last-minute wind
a half-hearted rain comes in

men bare up from the tops
of their belts rolled over by rolls of belly fat
shovel pea-gravel and attend to bright trucks greyed
from cement dust

women brush their hair burnishing the tint
of new colors freshly released on the market
trying to make him want to trail his fingers
over the backs of her knees instead of beaching

a kite caught in a downdraft
hangs like the recently condemned
from an overhang made for Juliet scenes w/
hayfield in the background

wired scientifically and with precision
the electric guitar nonetheless
burps a barbed bald over-reverbed sonnet

behind the hayfield
an observatory waits for the discovery
of science after the final round
has been passed out

at the last minute behind me
as I type this half-heartedly she
will walk in and wonder how the day went
how I interrogated the wind & rain
how many times the phone rang
its foreign siren call
unanswered
Shutting

It's like this

the door to the cabin has been opened
letting in unexpectedly a cold stream
leaching down from the couloir

the door to the apartment has been opened
letting out unexpectedly a traveler leaving
early with only part of breakfast eaten

the door has been opened
letting in unexpectedly
the concern that the door when
shut once more

will not stay shut.
Angle of View

her eyes are the grey of London
clouds promising rain and dark

her hands and feet are boundary
markers growing day by day

her forced smile reveals a single
joy that no one wants to share

it's common as nightfall in London
for women like her to lean against posts

and for men to act before them
like clouds marking joy for women
Land of Stops

Out of hidden places
unformable and combining,
like a door that cannot be closed
once opened
and once one thing escapes,
like a shadow at dawn filling the eyes
of the one who walks away
with thought only ahead,
the impetus,
the reason,
the other than rational
force for this
arrives.
Cold River Walk

Women walk
along the South bank of the Thames
without worry
while men sit at outdoor tables
watching, wishing
one with a particularly tight skirt
will whisk
by, or that perhaps one
with wide
breasts will take long steps toward the
West. Women
who even on a cold Summer evening
wear whimsical
clothes command attention
while we,
mere men
wonder, wish,
carry on like boys hoping for the breast, the
womb, warmth
one more time.

July 15, 2001
Out of Ruth

Something has made you
lonely for years, craving
inexactness or a fit
not tight, not wiggleproof,
which allows things like machines
to fall into disuse, things like rivers
to flow past and under willows
draped over them, curtains between the exact
and the ruthless, like a gunfighter
who can shoot flies on the fly
but chooses
out of ruthlessness
not to.
Pleasures of Swallowing

The truth has come out and you love me,
the news arrives as the sun drops behind a row of flats
though there’s no melancholy in it,
just abrasiveness. And when we talked of hunger
years ago,
of eating and the pleasures of swallowing,
you fell into a stupor and languished like a queen
awaiting grapes
and I hungered for the mattress beneath.

All along my pitch has been the same
and now your hearing has changed
like fog that bursts into sunlight when the right heat hits it.

Tell me,
if I am my own opposite,
am I about to cancel;
and if I am my own remedy,
do I make myself more like myself
and thereby drift back to the average
which is actually nothing.
which is actually your love telling?
So imagine

the disputes and angers,
the red eyes behind gauzy curtains,
the rings worn symmetrically,
and breathe
like an animal hiding quiet by a stream
not knowing whether its breath
disappears like water in water or swells in the foreground,
then tell
me of what makes opposites opposite,
and how many cranks are needed to close your casements,
and why the anger directed at someone
is directed at me.

July 18, 2001
Quiet Alarms Sounded by God

quiet tonight
by the plumcolored stream...

words that spring to mind for us
are proofs of emptiness, distress, the unfathomable...

God is wondering
what senseless dying means...

His inventions sometimes
seem to fall off center, distressing some, gracing...

the face of the lake
accepts the weeping stream, holds on...

once I sat by a river
flowing past a place near where it flowed past you...

quiet that night
by the plumcolored stream...
World of Gaps

the stangest sky
pewter plum fast
against green china
your distaste
flashing past
my hatred
we are lovers
in the world of gaps
between words
Flying Panties

watch out for flying panties
sure sign of over the top
love for unflagging exhibition
once my wife threw her panties onto a stage
they landed crotch up in the middle of a clear patch
they were plain brown no frills
they landed in anatomical standing position
the white liner was up
shining under the spotlight
the stains were light
but clear
the dampness was faint
but clear
dampened rust
who in that crowd could love
that?
could love the her in them?
Billboards, Bushes

behind the billboard  
leaning toward the road in shambles  
held together by paint and brush-ons  
whose shadow is leaning toward the bushes  
in those bushes is the old clearing  
grown over now with bushes and condoms  
beer bottles and cans  
whiskey bottles and vodka  
where we spread our blanket  
and I watched with pure male gratitude  
while you undressed
Doc Holliday at an Impromptu Banjo Concert

just about dusk Doc Holliday took his folding chair
to the impromptu banjo concert out in a natural bowl
to the West of town—Earps and Behan  Josie
they were all there
it was a dog day and the heat of the desert was about to escape into space
where nothing matters
space between things that matter
thought Doc Holliday until a Dog-day cicada
started buzzing on the cool side of a barrel cactus
the playing plucked along
the music complex
Southern rebellious it mattered
they all sat down just about dusk to listen
to the traveling man play banjo into the cool of the evening
lone cicada buzzing in Doc’s right ear
order among men lacking it
the triggers on many guns twitched that night
to the sound of a banjo and a cicada
in the cool part of the day
just about dusk
space between things that matter
thought Doc Holliday & he spared us a smile
Trust the Take

trust the take
learn to live with the stains
floating by you
by your eyes
your ears

accept reliance on randomness
build on sands replaced each year
by events taking place
maybe
far away
and uncontrollable

favor the tearstains that darken your eyes
it’s just your make-up
to seem to cry so

whatever happens
don’t touch the woman who scampers up the stairs
an umbrella under her arm
high heel boots kicking the backs of her hems
her black hair swirling in blue ribbons
she is the take
she is the stains
trust her
whatever happens
your eyes
your ears
it's your make-up
Surprise Lily

all of it is a drained battery
storage of force
mulch laid on a truck bed liner
peach pit bursting inside its hard covering
speaker phone on set to mute
while I stir the jar of mayonnaise
to make it adhere more smoothly
to the leaves of an artichoke
whose baby barbs I uncover
like the woman I wish to make a naked lady
like the lily that comes
stored as a force
as a surprise
Alp Pressure

we sat on a bench at a hairpin
turn where paved yields to gravel
where the valley’s rave haircut
given to cows massing milk
gives way to fir and pine
miles away a wind blew over the couloir
across a glacier and up our side
this pine wind blew equally on us
— you looked up-valley, me down
someone’s name was on our bench
a gift to the emptiness this valley
embodies with its soul breezed out of it—
almost exactly as if we were friends
Poetry of No Lines

we all stared
it was the flimsiest skirt we had ever seen
a light purpose or lavender
she was not thin but young and ready
we could not see her pantie lines
we checked her toes
no panty hose
I waited until she stretched her thighs outward against her skirt
no lines
she bent a bit
no lines
nude or thongs
we looked while chewing slowly
two women and me
nude    nude    thong
silence
no lines
yes you’re right I can see the line at the top of her skirt
some like the feeling of    if the skirt came off
thong
Poem This

this
world is created word by word
line at a time

this
and the holes in your head

the words leave
when I pull them out for
this

add pictures
named two categories up
funny things
this
is real
work to do to work

around blanks
shooting leaving
this

poem
gets its way like
a jellyfish
to the bottom
of the likes of
this
Frozen Crimson

in front of her mirror
her writing brush dipped in bright crimson
nearly frozen in the just-before dawn
after writing her poem
she paints her lips
so she can seal the folded poem
that will remind him
of her art

July 29, 2001
Go On

on the wintering bridge
criss-crossed by hard winds
from all directions
moments before a nearly transparent cloud
covers the lowering sun only just
above the maple-topped horizon
the blooddrops dripping from your bitten lips
—hold back—
fall to the river
where they will never dry
Once Off

I pulled up to her on Bayshore
traffic confections rolling up
her car was red and Asian 2-door hardtop
one arch window like a distribution curve
tinted enough to darken but not to blacken
her skin was the dark some Asians have
her black shades were curved and arched
she faced front
if I had to say the color of the air around her it was black
her hair was the depth of black but it could shine
under the right circumstances
her lips always closed and unmoving were the color of the car
she never moved her head
never moved her shoulders
her lips
her eyebrows
never seemed to blink
except one finger beat as if to music on her sewn leather steering wheel
when the light turned away from red
she and everything moved all
at once
off

July 31, 2001
Saying “Goodbye”

Suppose the unsupposable; suppose it happens on you. Hold fast while its false front presses into your shirt, Suppose you were years late while still years later. Picture saying see you around. While as you walk to the stairwell, you don’t. The crowd on the train platform doesn’t care how you leave as long as you do. Every way leaves a point.
Loveover

Sitting in your car
behind you like a little kid
my ease of going
nothing less than
surrender. The way you drove
was refreshing—
fear does that. A decency
panel has declared our
love over—lover pulled apart.
Lover
Loovveer
Lovoever
Loveover
Love over.

How do you read that?
Like the sound a car makes
running over something
already dead.
Fat Cactus

When I arrived you were sitting
in your bed against a pair
of pillows, Like all women
posed like this
your strength was the greater.
Outside your window overlooking
what some might call exotic
a snail stood still.
You thought I looked too
much.

When it seemed, later, our chat had just started
the snail was gone. And the cactus
looked surprisingly fat.
To You On A Night Of Traffic

I picture you
writing in an attic packed in with old manuscripts
and sewing machinery, cloth and clothes,
husband and children packed into their beds one and two
floors down,
rumble and blaring traffic
four floors down
at midnight
or later, sharp taste
in your mouth from things
like spices.
Wearing through you
like a wind gap,
a water gap through great long folds
a thousand miles long and five
miles thick, drilling and smoothing
a path from all of us out
here waiting
like a cab for the woman
perfuming her pussy
to you.
Heat Arising

Heat rises and turns
to fog hanging
around obscuring
what has grown
to be sharp,
like words full of...
On a table right beside me,
I mean right there
a small house finch
hops while dining with me
and she whispers—
the bird whispers, for God's sake—
small things,
small bird things
that the people at the end of the table can't hear,
but I do,
it is not imagination,
like little whispered chirps,
small,
in the heat
within a fog,
like words full of....

August 5, 2001
Hangs On Back

night under covers
where you are holding

knowing that things are cold
anyone would say about you

lost in a spell falling to the floor
rain-holding wind burst in on me above my bed

standing in your doorway while
you try to read my eyes fall

onto the book of poems
and grab them you wonder

the writer held at arm's length
hangs on back

August 6, 2001
The Something

we have put our faith
in a technology full
around the edges
with the soul of right versus wrong
theocracy with a god who needs
no spies, which we won’t let go
its own way keep it predictable
instead of alive filling
its center with the something
of us
Fuel for Fish

where have you been
since the light fell
through the trees and across the bay
onto the sails of a sloop about to shove off
on a evening exploration sail—we once followed
each other like the 9-strong school of mackerel
below the cross-bay footbridge looking
for something they can't see
can't hear can't
— as funny as it sounds —
fathom
Foreground/Background

On this very page
are two choices—clear as they can be:
foreground/background,
one in black on white,
one in white on black.

One is small,
one is big.
One is painted in dark words,
one in light strokes.

One is clear to the mind—see-able, make-out-able—
something we learn with brains using discipline,
rational minds rationalize—that's our rationale.
These are the parts you have told me.

The other—white like light pooling all over,
rubbed away other parts—....

Well, it's like this: the real stuff is...
guess which one?
Unsentimental Postage

This graveyard is weird...
it’s like a postage stamp with vegetation...
the trees—white pines quite tall—are huge
but all fours sides have been shaved or cut
away so it seems
the whole thing—pines, tombstones, and the guts of the graveyard—should
fall over and stand up or stand on their heads the residents.

Guts of the graveyard.
A hole swallow.
Digesting remains the order of the day.
At the other end?

God is wondering
who will discover
no postage due.
Mind Trample

Eastern light sky filled with particles and thin thin clouds—
beside the bridge lots of bugs fly and skip across still water—
in my head my teeth ache and put my attention in their roots—
some folks fear the process of creation so much they limit their tries to none or few—
pathways need to be made—
above in the sky—
along the banks of shallow rivers—
deep down into nerves and the brain—
need to be made by trampling.
I Make Up

Today it's the fat of the lip,
hang of the mouth,
a gape with a slightly disavowed
tinge of eyesight eyeing
passing interrogations,
linking the bats
of others' eyes
to the apparently dull,
only her eyes show tint
through all the grey
and push of her intentions
out the gape, all 'cept
what fouls into her lips.
Hermetic Constants

I grow more interior,
look more deeply into the seeping swamp
that rises rarely to the barely sounding lap
of a thinnest stream, that flow
that makes this all up.
I spoke these lines to you
as you rose up the stairs to your room,
closing the door behind. I waited
for the sounds that surround
my sitting place and force inwards
the gaze that ultimately reveals what
little I have left after I have spoken
all the rest. I rest.
The Places It’s Made

As if behind gauze
the row of red houses with yellow fences
shouts, colors blurt,
behind a mist—blurs.
On the wall of the mfa in Boston
as if behind gauze
the painting of this row
shouts, art blurts,
behind a mind, blurs.
Down the hall a deep crevice
in the bottom of a torso,
and we know what it is from 50’
away. I can see the strokes
drips & swirls & the razorcut groove
cross the twin thinkers
collects the links
for me and art. These are
the places it’s made.
Combinational Basis

So is that you walking out
of the haze toward me? The sunlight is a funny
effect behind you like that—like
are you wearing
a skirt or your legs
bare? new hairdo
or a hat? For that matter,
—toward me
or in the direction I last
saw you walking in plain sight?
You’d think you’d be clearer
the closer you came,
but like all illusions,
what we see scares
the fog up out of
the combinational basis
of all fears.
Lust for the Non-Existent

who can't tell
what with the tan lines so sharp
teaching us from foot to face she lies
on a couch covered in gold
plastic her feet are in white running
shoes her tanned knees and legs spread
apart a tan line defines her whitened panty area
her pubic lips are apart as if some-
thing happened they're pink
her torso is tanned her bra line
white her throat is dark tanned
then a sharp

line and white to her face let's see
white & pink shoes
brown legs
white & pink pussy region
brown torso
white & pink tits
brown throat
white & pink face could she

be made using a computer program
which parts are hers
which ones by some quote artist quote
and here's the rub which ones
are mine
Junk Park In Reruns

On the park bench
in the cold park
while dogs raced up the fabricated hill
and down and children swung through air way below
freezing we held hands as if friends
and the same wind blew on each
of our faces as if we were friends. In summer
the hill was smothered in nettles and weeds
and the same wind blew on our faces,
dogs lay on their sides panting,
children slept under elms,
and we held on for dear life,
learned what we weren’t.
Up the Defenses

You snuck into my life
and took it over, an air force to soften
up the defenses
and an army to march through every part you
found until it was yours. Then every

street I walked down pitiful in the eyes
of beggars, every bit of junk that surrounded
me in my study, every word written in the narcotic
dark when sleep sits on the sofa smoking
from a flame just getting going—these
were yours and more and more. Why you
didn't notice this was a puzzle till
I saw your eyes up close in the home
of your life and their smoky haze, a filter
polarizing out the others though you seemed at
times to speak to them, sleep with them, draw
them aside as if curtains in the way of a view.
Squadron of mimicry, battalion of delusion—
I've fallen for an echo of something akin to a pain,
a refraction of circumstances or superposition
of waves of your hair in a wind we shared
that painted a portrait of coincidence.
Little One

The car passed
We saw it filled with beauty
We saw the sign on it that proclaimed paradise
The car was black with some gold in small trim and letters
It took us five minutes to organize our thoughts
We drove our car after it but it was lost to us
We wept beside the river in the white silence of insects rising in heat
The odor of sweet trees reeked in rivulets down to the river
Our car ticked cooling down anticipating the dark evening ahead and long years
The West called out and our ears heard the missing sounds
We heard the pathetic music of paradise little one
The car passed
We saw it filled with waving dark hair and heard its music drown out
Now I live there like a mystery
Chased

We chased our dreams like chasing
a California-plated car through the backroads of a New England
town after a Beach Boys song made the top ten. I don't
remember my dreams but the car carried
two pretty girls and the gold letters
and numbers on black seemed to sing
of Malibu, Ventura. We chased them
in our '55 Chevy, we saw their dark hair
tangle together in our wind, their dark
Mustang floored to the river, their legs
sheathed in denim, their feet in cowboy
boots tan crunched and oiled. To me
they left a faint waft of orange in the salt
sea Eastern air. I followed them in '75,
followed them here, where dreams still
cruise as fast as they can, like wild geese chased,
radio blasting.
Devotions of Its Walls

See don’t react.
The stubble hairs of rationality have been shaved away.
Both are wet and one is yours in the way of animals.
You though write and write the scene in which you die and exalt exhale.
Devotions lying in parallel lines in a pastoral sentiment fingers hovering
on the edge of consciousness deep like a long man in a small woman.
In the car lit by a streetlight in my driveway he tongues her
and I slide under covers to think of it with a straight spine.
We meditate on the long boards in a large room cooled by the thickness
of its walls like a mission whose mission
is lost
on us.
See react let it be you
who drips fingerprints across the linoleum floor laid the day
you watched her.
Strat

the guitar sits unplayed
for months
by the fireplace
its memories are of a heavy pick
cramming its strings
and the inability of the magnets in its pickups
to fathom the attack
its rosewood fretboard is stained
in the patterns of my favorite keys
polished scratches tell of years
its whammy is set for down only
to better keep tune who knows
how much sweat has poured into
and out of
this machine hung from wood
and whether any of its strings ever
noticed the hair that tangled in them
Lunch on the Grass

That end this end a hallway
facing into the light about to click off
polished floor in a parquet
and some imperfections just a dulling in spots.
You know even the cleanest halls are filled with motes
and little bits of dust that move quickly
for short bursts like snowflakes confused about
down. On these wall could be pictures
of you like the Manet lunch on the grass
or the Caillebotte which must have been like this hallway
once. I picture half your face cut
off at the edge of my vision the rest
filled with the recessed window
where you sit facing as the sun does
into my eyes shut like canvases
ready for painting feeling
a doubled warmth.
Wakening At Dark

Down in the flats by the river
at the edge of the wide field bounded
by stones on three sides and river on one,
where we knew fog would rise fueled
by the sodden field and sparked by the cold
air flowing down the river from mountains
beyond what we could see, late in the evening
but before midnight we knew we would meet
and do our things involving the same elements
plus fear. We stole away for this,
but now the fog has cleared,
it finally has cleared.
Hunting Poise

It is hard to fathom
the baying hounds down
the sand road kenneled five
per kennel hearing no doubt
(or perhaps) lumbering steps
in thick brush, (or maybe)
the liquid sound of paws
on the fine sand upper dust
of the road down there, How can
the night be so cold here (he asks).
Dry part of Florida. Gulf
winds have blown the cover —
we are laid bare to what’s above,
what’s down that road,
what they’d be after
if they could.
Please, Please, Mr Postman

the mailbox
Sav-A-Lot coupons
Sierra Club again
NRA???
Amex
Guitar Player—Brian Setzer: Rock-A-Billy return
invitation to speak on open source
a lit-mag: poetry mostly
and two letters:
I don't want to go on like this (the swan)
I want you to love me again (the swan)
sorry
can't fit you in between dying
and going to heaven
Birds Dip Dip

pond fish gather close
hillside birds dip dip their heads
we walk by all these swaying like bags of wine nearly empty
the sayings of masters irk our ears
passing by the monastery
we are the silent ones
since words have caught up short

on our backs
our poem bags are full
swaying like deathbags
filled with droppings of hillside birds
and dried fins

August 28, 2001
Blanket Safe on the Ground

she has the blanket
woven of rough wool

tangled with stems and buds
yarn dyed in larkspur,
birch bark, sumac, sage, and rotten
maple wood, black sheep

wool dyed a glossy
waterproof black in mahogany
in her antiseptic warm bed

such a blanket serves
no purpose to her
its smell so near the animal

its history just imprints of rocks
and roots rain soaks and

the culminations of winds
rooted up from a valley

no purpose to her serves
a blanket such as this
dyed as it is in things
once alive
Emptiness of a Room Returned To

Your voice gained 20 years,
something was itching in it,
and talk of getting lost
put me in mind of a dog whose
legs have become a travois
pulling her rump.
When the phone rang
I could hear you already
like the emptiness of a room
I had returned to. I’ve split
no into as many shades
as times I’ve fought over
you. Like the swan who steps
onto the lake, I take time
to sink in. Months go by
between your answers,
I just cap off another shade,
hand you each one as you ask,
and you never notice how each
is larger than the one before
like a certain sexual training
that you don’t realize
you will one day enjoy.
Talking on a String in the Alps

You're underneath everything
I see, my eyes look level across the valley.
Here is a house as simple as ours
and over there is a bench, a resting spot
on the hairpin of a curve. This house
is made of local firs stained clear and glossy,
with tender red knots like hearts congested
by a hearty overabundance, red tiles
made in southern temptation. You no
doubt sit on that bench which is two miles
direct and four by foot, and you expect me—
that's what you say like a cat's whisper—
you expect me to stay where I am.
Ring Lantern

Regard the lantern,
its light inconstant capturing
a varied embrace. From here
we anguish safe like two words
slightly misspelled
making sense through chance.
The light does
not reach us. We are not
sure. Flicker. Eyeblink.
We are tethered together
but which master's raptor
hangs by a thread? The lantern
embraces what it senses,
what it senses it lights driven by deficiencies
coming and going. I sit at your feet,
you stroke my hair only when
the light falls short. Then you stop.
When all is full your touch
returns to full.
Rockets’ Red Prayer

bruise mark left by God
reminder of who we are punctuated
in the interval between fireworks
lightning in the counter-beat gravestones as if hammered
in by a great stonemason
marking the spots
where life becomes light
Cherry Boys

Two of us in a cherry-picker
highschool age fully extended
but with a slight bend over the bleachers,
late October in Danvers. We carry
1 Bolex H16 16mm movie camera
fitted with f1.9 75mm, f1.4 25mm Rx,
and f1.8 16mm Rx Switars, plus 20 rolls
of Eastman Tri-X B&W movie film.
The picker owner forgot
to disengage the up-top controls. During
the game I film, John comments on cheerleader movement and catches apples
thrown at us but only I
can hit the ones down there who threw them.
My follow-thru hit the down lever
and down 10' we went before Russ
the picker owner raises us up
and shuts down the crane. We are green&white,
they are blue&white. I change between plays.
I spy the f-stop since we have no meter.
John stands very close for 3 hours.
My football-filming teacher packed Miss Brown
between us, his Ford Falcon. She was 25, her
white cashmere sweater and tartan skirt exuded
odors that the open windows could not mask
though the leaf-fires along Birch Meadow endeavored. Miss Brown, who asked
did I have enough room? I needed
room she took up, encompassed. John understood this every time we watched sweet Meredith hop on what to the players were the sidelines.

September 3, 2001
Markets are Conversations

best facilitates relationships
between supply
demand

we gonna do build it programming
just bait: chum on waters for business
vast bazaar consumers obsolete customers
micropayments advertisers don't
fried plankton we'verations
mediation screen this worms often off
workers who about their own voices not impressing
enabling language if you dog-and-porate
walls to renegotiate notions yet wised like
tripping and a big mistake to friends online
Poop Chute Fandango

The observation is worth making
that all the keys on the chain
kept clean, shining are for locks
that are now paved over. The pressed
board bike locker we built behind the cottage
that wilted after two years, our garden
in deep Illinois dirt that grew up
tomatoes 5 feet tall, our dog chained
to the front porch on a chain
50’ long—I have that key.
You knelt on our found couch
and I stood behind. The footsteps
padding away then running.
The brown 2 bedroom
with all upside-down doors,
the back yard curved. You knelt
before the screendoor out toward the street
and I knelt behind in your ass—I have that
key. O the sweet duality of it,
the solution with no problem,
to have the keys,
every key, and find what I’ve
lost are the locks.
**Bed Bath**

Certainly she had an embarrassment
as I washed her after a month in bed,
her first full length bath after the crushing
her leg took and the operations that fixed only parts
of her, parts she would use only partially now.
Not her mother, not her former lover, not
her close girl friends, not a nurse, but
me down the hall from my wife
asleep and dreaming of more children
while I cleansed the parts atrophied
and odored, the parts stained though she
didn’t wish it, the parts that now
were mine.
Rescue

You want it,
water under water,
you want it,
the spread of motion,
you want it,
sailing on the sea where death,
you want it,
our tongues bark hard we bellow,
you want it,
the luck draw you are it,
you want it,
still my hand tell me who,
you want it,
out of your mind your heart is mine your legs marrow,
you want it,
matrons part sea before the bow stem,
you want it.

Sand island
all of judgment.
Chill Dangled

Flecks of beauty spray the hovering
lips carved, curved, crazed by the Icelandic
cold of waves frothing like frosting
on the green-tinged white shore. Inland
lava and dirt form the reaction of the sea
to height and heat. Were there trees
within a thousand miles white trunks and branches
would lay within sight. The heat from forming
land swallows them for fuel or foment, you
drag your legs like resisting in the soaked sand.
Your hair is soaked in foam and it dangles
like that palm bird in front of your eyes,
your mouth—entrances and destinations—
it makes you like the porn princess,
not some evil mother. Let’s let
it all bang slowly tonight
just for the pretty of it.

September 8, 2001
Top Skirt

On a storm liner crossing
the North Sea, wall waves broke
above our deck and scant thoughts
of the blesséd water death:

We want it.

Hanging from a rafter in the CE storefront
in Shinjuku bathing in pale lime light
and harder blues, I heard that girl wearing the pink
skirt is actually top (sukatachi meaning feminine-
looking top lesbian:
ano pinku no sukaato haita ko, jitsuwa
sukatachi nandatte. Suka from skirt
and tachi from top.).

We want it.

Gliding past a pastisserie,
chocolates in consumer format,
gray-green leaves spraying
and partying above the gravelled road.

We want it.

In an alley in a private
town in Tuscany near
San Quirico D’Orcia,
its walls weathered less well
than Monteriggioni,
we stand like graveyard
statues reaching for the virgin.

We want it.

Behind us the turquoise
badger lumbers, aggressive
to all, persevering with red eyes,
looking for the crack
of life, the hole we want.
Writemare

In a foreign tone of voice
I feel asleep writing but failed
to stop while
sultry women watched and sulked
attached like blowfish to my rock
the beating rhythm made them come
of the sea (didn’t fit). One girl
didn’t make it and she fell liked a crushed
twinkie from the couloir above her alpine
cabin rented from a couple never home
when she needed to leave and pay their rent.
I paid. Cows moo and chew, poop. A man
cleans them every day while Swiss
authorities stand by with their Pantone
cards. Like lakes
they tell me to do.
What do skirts mean if each cheek
moves independently like two bulldogs
fighting according to maximum
Bob. A closeup of lichen
on a slab of New Hampshire red granite
just below the Old Man of the Mountain. I
watched them sob at the thought
of wasting their time in my
writing mare.
What the End of the World Sounded Like

is fear enough to pilot us
silence in sky
replays of the plane entering and flames
exiting kerosene injection
phone calls goodbye
technology of convenience stamps its irony
into our living minds calls
on the steps from hell to purgatory
help me I’m buried I’m burned
I’m beyond
Thought Pattern #1: Triage Appointment

pattern of light on a wintered-on
street and the sharp points of pin-reflections
form a map of coincidental deliveries

white like plaster dust that makes us not
swallow hovers we wash our own eyes
someone else will wash the dead's

where are they we wonder
we wonder how so many can just not
be drained as down a sink or

pulled as into bottomless sand
with weight piled up on top
our flag hung on the random post

above it all at eye level we wash
them and wash them we wash
our faces we wash the eyes and faces

of those beside us leaned against the chassis
while far away madmen dance and laugh
tickled in the ribs (as if) by a soulless bony beast
Thought Pattern #2: Delta Physics

when a rock disintegrates
into another rock
the question of speed arises

whether it is infernal
or merely an excessive
drive toward allegiance

of one form of utter unwillingness
to another of utter confusion
the rocks they seem simple

enough like when a man
loves a woman but each all
are made from excess allegiance

to type and that’s what this’s
all about what is the type
of a rock that it disintegrates

into another?
Thought Pattern #3: Say Fly

There really is no question
   the window opens up
      on the whim of a machine built by caution-loving men
in front is the fruit of heaven we've learned to come
to believe from the wavelike rhythm of words
and the slight rough texture of our mothers' knees
   how filled it became with hell
   formed from the juice of the dead
behind the rose bloom of calamity burst open
   how incautiously aimed and delirious
   on the wings held out to man
the words to a song made famous
by Gary Gilmore's flight we'll be
able to fly redefine happiness
   the men who scratch
   the sill a doorstep a languid alternative
there are no clouds but the silvering smoke
   take my hand dear stranger
   woman made like wife or sister
there is no rain but us coming out
we are cooked & pulverized
step out of the shade say

aftermath

do not find the joy
no more
of peering learnedly into books
and weeping with the pangs of meaning
for dust has outlined us and soon
will wash away
Thought Pattern #4: Dictionary Meanings

time to hide
let loose of the branch that we’re on
sign our faces over to the overworld
be glad and underfullfilled
my little turquoise badger sits
on guard
for opportunities to persevere
and resilie
how many of us have the luck
still to look up
words in the dictionary
and leap back at their unexpected
meanings the language of our mothers’ teachings
one after another in a biblical cycle
two thoughts tossed into a tangle
the meaning of not breathing a death blow
to poets who measure in breaths
narrative fragments
pressed into one by billions of tons
of steel driving

on the day of summer I reserved
for hopeless loves I’d ride and ride
past elms and oaks and simples smells
of farms some sour some sweet
and her final act was to not
love me and it was her first

like the ones who wished for routine
she’s lost
Thought Pattern #5: Rise Rush

each piece of ash
that rises to form
the billowing picture
of despair or evil
has worked its way
up by itself
using the simplest of acts
and little pieces
of its own quirks
Thought Pattern #6: Filth Pen

like small flower patterns on porcelain
microscopic but accurate
with precision in the face of imperfection
every detail of my life
will not be seen what I abandon
will be read then forgotten
then not read then not
real       -ly
energetic chilly surface
wild strawberries
beneath a pen filled
with filth and shit
in a plastic bag in a tin
my secret picturestash
of womanly breasts
and symbols
Paradise Mixture

I need something for the pain
for the door slipping in the wind
hitting the jamb once or twice
for the warm tradewinds combed
by the palms my and your palms
but in your head thoughts
are maggots creeping
becoming thoughts that fly
circling spirals away and back
and away I could search
once the pain slips
away
Not Real Yet

Heating up,
the peaceful rising death of smell
in the masked gelpacks cupped
on your nose, your legs and arms,
your back is knotted and above
rising smoke from dust and small
fires the sky is the heavy blue
of reason. Out of sight,
back of a gauze curtain. Someone
has dug a ditch to you,
it holds a barge you must fill. Hundreds
of tons. Alone. And when you’re done
you’ll rise above the smoke and dust,
up an elevator miraculously working.
You’ll see for miles even
when you look out.
And to think, all it took to do
this is practice.
Small Sanctuary

The hill, yes, the hill
is bursting at the top
with wicked black hair—
tangled tangential
wintertrees and black marble
stones in a white quarry.

A tiled low wall surrounds
the town’s church built too
large on the outside housing
small sanctuary for below
the monastery brews—
between pubs and markets—
a stream of fish. The hill,

yes, the hill is a secret
where cranes must operate
on everything heavy—
the stones, the concrete,
the heavy foreign names
with wartime dates
carved deeply into
the native fabric.
On Duty · Tonight

· the fire beside me · burns
· burning the combustibles · of
a city recently crumbled · I’m
the poet · on duty tonight ·
smoke from the · fire · rises tonight
· the fire reflects from micas · of glass
in windows · on the street · in the street
· tonight · on duty · tonight
· I hear these fires burn · the poetry
of yesterday · the words that make most sense ·
read in the back of a Greyhound ·
by pastures and plains of wheat ·
the poetry · listened to · and gone by ·
poetry burns tonight · my job ·
is to watch the fire · the city ·
the smoke · the buses · the fields
· and what we make of them ·
and write what the mysteries in me ·
see ·
High Plains Statistics

Of all the places to be, in a town only a crossroads and 12 buildings each as old as oaks, the sound of wind blowing in from the West and with it the bounding weeds and sandspew, the macadam of a road built in the ’50s and rarely traveled since the ’70s going east-west, the sand on oil of a road built before that connecting ranches and isolated trailers going north-south, and down south at the Backwards R Ranch Trish struts nude all day waiting for her man who’s here at Jake’s Crawdad Bar sipping Jack’s and watching the Diamondbacks rally from 7 down in the bottom of the ninth to beat the Dodgers hoping to dodge fate from the arm of a 95 mph+ lefthander—Trish’s man sits with us men who’re longing for Trish more than he is, her all-shaved body tinged red like her hair and who doesn’t like the little-girl aspect of it?—of all the places to be fate’s picked this one and my life like yours plays out to odds stacked up for or against us and seems everything is happening until something does and that settles it, one of us gets the girl and the others don’t though we wish for all the playouts, in a town only a crossroads where the buildings are hanging in to see what happens and we’re hanging around to see what happens and Trish is hanging out to see who does her and Trish’s man is poking his toothpick into a bowl of salsa made fresh each morning before dawn by Margherita lonely as dawn on the high plain here plum in the middle of our little normal distribution.
Arse Poetica

I am a telescope no one can break,
my fat end aimed at tire ruts and me
and my thin end on a pen and I am the badger
who never stops digging and will find you in my roots
though my color turn gray and dusty like your car
from the Kansas drive and I am the windmill
pulling water from 500' down at the haste set
by wind off the Rockies or maybe Santa Fe and
I am bristling with catchy twigs and hard to hold
though I catch many things while rolling sphere-like
down Route 50 to the Eastern sea and I am
the big-rig hauling ass down to Dodge full-up
of hogs and trailing stench and blown-out hog-soaked straw
and I am the honey that falls from the spoon
in a long lap into a pot of tea served to everyone
who loves it sweet and I am the shooting star of wonder
chipping away at the long time hoping for a break
and another sound to tease my ears.
The Waves Caress the Shore

Each impulse hastens others.

I don't mean human emotions but mechanical contrivances or more properly inventions incapable of perceiving the intentions they play out based on patterns and structures that piecewise seem like each other isomorphically.

Events trigger exceptions.

What we expect is delivered to the unexpected and though we think more about the expected each electrical blip is like any other though we think only of certain ranges as significant.

Let's peer from the inhuman toward the human.

Linguistically the game of not feels the same but is mathematically harder, and everyone knows you can't argue against mathematics and that's the imperialism of reason right there in axioms and rules of thought. Rules of thought.

Poetry is blocky.

This is the truth finally stated by followers of the shallow. Let's take the Berkeley philosophers to the end of a pier at the end of their university street when the tide is low and teach them what truth smells like.
Ranticle

No targets can be found,
no one to take the blame,
we won't accept randomness,
we seek to assign blame,
we won't be found,
no one can take randomness,
we won't seek,
we won't assign,
we won't accept,
no targets.
Alley Impression

alley

woman white-haired walking slow
beigebrown skirtsuit tailored jacket black pumps

another taller mouseblonde skirt & jacket
interlacing arms

they walk slow quiet
Wild Hare's neon's just come on

bare tree split trunk two tops
such a thick thatch of branches blacking the dim lit sky

two women quiet speech one 50 one 70
well-defined women each scratch on the sky is crisp

nothing helps me hear them leaning on a can
reading poems less rich less clear

less
God Switch

How does the scarecrow work? Old clothes
with the bad odor of a man, filled with straw
once laced in the stalls behind horses, burlap
for a head as rough as a house someone turned into
a dump, hung on two sticks tied together and poked
into the soft ploughed ground of a prized field
and tied in three places to stakes in the corn rows.
His life is the blowing of wind and when it passes
through him he lives and when it leaves the downwind
hogs breathe in and snort, it animates him, he is inspired.

Crows sit on his arms like they did on the Arms
of Jesus, their thorn nest symbolizing hanging birth,
their caws the cadence of angels’ wings beating
each others’ heads in the grief grace gave them. On that day
God could not tolerate the air woof of wingbeats
or the erotic, hating calls of birds, and He stopped them.
The scarecrow works like a line returned to,
the reaction cluster of a tearful Creator.
Hell Away

When the minister asked for stories
of the recently departed genius who entered Chicago
at 15 and graduated at 17, who invented half
of computer science, who studied backgammon
and played it well for a wonk, he was not surprised
by the sporadic kind words and tears which he usually
gets and the memories of small indications
of rich humanity and love but nothing
prepared him for the third son
who lives in Germany in an Austrian family
who blamed and blamed and blamed,
told stories of rejection and denial,
of humiliation and the distance and estrangement
from the rest of his family, but who when he heard
himself in the echo of the 2/3 empty Congregational
Church, said he loved him and hoped his death was the beginning
of a life for the family torn apart by the wayward genius.

The minister spoke of the Congregational Church bought
from the Episcopalians who glazed each window with stained
glass which darkened the hall to near darkness while the Congregationalists
put in clear glass and painted the walls and ceilings white
to bring in the light that we all sat in. I sat
in the back and waited head down while people who might be
friends walked out into the courtyard for drinks,
then I went out the side back door into the ivied alley
and around out to my car without anyone watching me
as I drove the hell away from there.
Arc Echoes

Fate of a cut flower:  
Dumb stem pulling in liquids  
while the blooms unfold,  
leaves make food from the sunlight  
in the corner of her kitchen nook,  
and they open and open in a sexual,  
secular display, turn a pink then red then purple

then yellow and in the end brown  
as the nutrients from roots they expect  
don’t arrive and the flowers then the leaves  
then the stem is starved and she tosses them into the trash. The front door opens

and in the vaulted hall I hear the echoes  
of her telling someone goodbye.
Under the Bed

We got off from school early
from a bomb scare which we got
every 2 or 3 weeks—oh, in the 1960s
before bomb scares really meant anything.

The buses came to get us—we waited
out on the lawn. My father was in the hospital
perhaps dying from a brain disease, so when
I got home before my mother I hid under
his bed in the living room and when she did
I just laid there. For hours until
after the school bus was supposed
to bring me home and until

after the after-school
bus was supposed to bring me home and I
heard her calling my friends—not many calls.
When she went to the bathroom I slid out
and opened the front door
and closed it, "hi, Ma, I'm home."

I didn't tell her that I lay under my father's bed
where the week before he seemed driven insane,
listened to her calling and crying until she seemed insane.

He didn't die. I never
told. There's a tree on 95 that reminds me of all this—
each year I try to find it but like a lot
of things, other things grew up around it
and now it's exotic in my memory.
Practice on a Skull

Bones that don't look like what
they hung piled in piles unrevealing
their connections together or to other bones
on/to which they may have lied are turning
so white they're/their cracking ./is causing
me nuts listening at the speed
rings upon rings piling up. Listen/hurry up.
The sin/purchase of exclusion exhausts; single forks
in the road, choice little. These are the bones
I've finished. Those are leathered like hands in
gloves, hands in hands, hands pointing through
pelvises and out maybe through throats
past the tongue region. I ask of the coincidence.
Four holes in, one out for motion—loco-
motion.
Dripping With Loon Laughs

In the garage he plays
the radio and watches pictures.

He makes electronic devices
out of parts soldered
together and tacked
onto bent aluminum.

Couplets as in
one on top of the other.

I found nothing sexual—
had he given it
up finally? On the evening
of his death he practiced
his eyesight-retention
swaying exercies
to retain
his vision. What is it used
for now
that he doesn't?

He stood in the cold
rather than stand by her.

He stood looking into
the woods instead
of chopping wood
or sawing.

He painted unaware
of the virtues of excess
in matters of art.
He looked longingly
at women
whose motors ran.

His anger
was merely frustration
at the lack he saw
of life in his house.

He built things crooked
to have an excuse.

He dug holes by hand
to deprive machines.

He worked alone
to pinpoint blame.

What would it be
like to fall holding

a running chainsaw?
He is locked in brass.
Fact or Real?

Fall apart
fail to fit find art a ways
margins meet methodologies
focused creation is make piles dump pick
polish brag sneeze
from allergies to making it
up hip hip hurry up
butt up continuation
to autumnal explosions bursting from green
to red orange yellow
slo———mo
color = the _ itself
he painted all this
died
onnn hiiiiis kneeeeeeeces
Mean Redtop

Things I’ve fallen along
like the milky runoff from the oldest
glacier on Redtop Mountain
at the head of a valley. I took
her hand—mine because only
I held it. She thinks it means
something but where are the means,
where is something. This, she pointed
with one hand at the other, which I
had taken. I held it. If the meaning
is anywhere, look to the cold milk
which at least sports a color
rare in wild rivers except
for places like Redtop Mountain
named for the meaning
of a freckle-faced girl
fingering a sheaf
of lace.
Planed and Sanded

Spirit, spirits,
the powder which when water is added
springs into us. In my dream
she was soft as butter, warm
as a lamp turned off 5 minutes ago,
I stroked the backs of her legs all
through my dream, the most beautiful
dream of the end of my life reaching
back to the start of hers. She more full
of water, more fresh, more thirsting,
while I am wrung out. I understand
my father’s house, built when he was young.
The tinder, the crust, beneath every board
and shingle the dust collects and coats the surfaces
he planed and sanded. This is what he is,
what I am, what in my dreams is not.
Whose Fantasy Will On?

About 8, winter,
cars creep across the bridge,
the rain falls in a hush on the cars,
the bridge, & the river. Boats tied
up in docks & houseboats in their berths
seem to move in the gently falling
rain. Smoke sneaks out an open
window and up under eaves.
Maybe a slight wind disturbs
the coincidentally even drop pattern
on the slowly moving water.
Smoke creeps out from under the eaves
and floats up in the rain falling down
in the cold in winter after dark.
In a kitchen window a woman
peels vegetables and prepares a meal.
In a bedroom window a boy watches
the tugs head upriver. This is what
I imagine tonight in a room
dark-surrounded and devoid
of you. What do you imagine
the bridge fantasizes?
Sally Doll Test

All this talk of syntax and sentences.
Syntax as form—a seacoast mountain range.
And a sentence as movement or a meaning or
an avoidance. Nonetheless
(it is possible)

language could shape cognition, ambiguity being
hard to pin down. In the Sally doll test and theory
of mind we have a cognition

which links to mental state terms,
is testable yet is intuitive rather than linguistic.
Theory of mind is a cognition
which concerns how people cognate.

When Sally doll exits the room,
her marble in the box, what she thinks
depends on what you say.
Move the marble and when Sally doll
returns, where she thinks the marble is
depends on whether your language
gives her a mind.

The failure of anything beyond
concrete in words fails
to metarepresent theory of mind.

Yet the saw saws.
Commercial Sentimentalism

When I watch the coded waves
spangle no lava-black rocks
in a storm of pouring and gray
your eyes watching mine
under tossed hair behind drop-spotted
glasses lurk in the corner of my vision
where chance sways more
than lingers and my love for your
is just the reverb of a slow decline.
Way Mechanic

The basis of two machines
making connections is inflexibility,
talking with no chance to hear
variance, near misses impossibilities,
no hi’s only hello’s. Master and slave
disguised at times
as friends. Pretending, as Dean might put it,
to be telephones. Friendships based
on jigsaw puzzles. Disisolation
through forced connivance
and no friendly meetings
by chance and backgrounds—
the dirt along the way to here—
No variance. No choice. Make our future
open up.
Hands Printed In Sand

I've noticed my hands grown colder, growing cold. The skin shriveled and growing looser day by day. The color of them more like the gray hue of the sky past its peak and well into its storm brewing like conversations between people with theirs hands over their mouths standing around a pit dug yesterday. Like something confused about life and death, my nails are curling as they grow and grow. I've noticed my hands grown smaller, growing small. The skin growing tighter day by day. What they can't notice and neither can I: The last grain of life passed from the cup of today to the cup of yesterday. My death piled on all the others.
Fear of Cold

What matters is two things:
Look through the darkness
into barlight off the barback mirror
and see the outline of a tightened skirt
walk in long lopes to the end of the bar
and hitch up on the footrail and see
the splayed shape of her blown-dry
hair exude from her desires;

listen through the silence
into the sonic engulfment
of the bar band hitched like a donkey
to the heavy load of loved music
worn down of its edges to its most
average charms.

And realize that the waltz you watch
is your own slowing down, as the place
is chosen by your narrowing circle,
your panic in the face of tightened skirts
and the trembling fingers of music makers,
the trembling fingers of body curve silhouetters,
the fear of cold that looking up
delivers.
As It Ever

This river is the sweet connection between a grey bank and a pink near sunrise. We sit on either side. I’m first here then there. You the other. The river just flows past in no hurry as we are. Birds glitter in iridescence cut at their throats, signals of identity and self. This water is our bridge as stable as it ever was. Rolling on as it ever has. Uncertain as it ever is.
Two—More Days

Into town—
slipped into town
on the heels of a hot rain
leaving waterways sluicing
down the curbed sides of the road
to a waterway bound for the Gulf,
parked, stopped before checking
in and checked the cherry of my Ford
against the turquoise peeling off
the 4"x4" posts supporting an A-frame
sheltering roof, laid down 20,
and took the end room before
walking down the tracks to Gentlemen's
Steak House and a meal fit for
two and a string of hard drinks chased
by beer and a chilled tequilla drunk to make
me forget two—please, just
two—more days.
Pipette & Dry

Checking in
to unconventional hotels
and drinking martinis
so dry the bartender
drips in the vermouth
using a pipette. So bleak are
prospects mining is minimized,
streets are cut short by crosscuts,
and the Blake in all of us blushes.
Streamline Fingerpads

The door is open
and she is touched. What does
she think? First fingers streamline
the body facing away, from shoulders
down to ass. Second fingers enter
her heat zone along the same path.

Third you touch her. Three
terces on the same route:
exploration, discovery, invention—
Find your way to the positive
space in her negative regions.
Edged Along

I've got everything.
With me I said.
Leaning out the window over.
The dredged channel.
Past the fueling docks.
Holding out my laptop.
Meaning text and tips.
Literature—a body of information.

No you don't that's.
Your computer not.
Everything you said.
And fell from the pier.
Whose handrail fell.
Like Icarus to the bottom of.
The dredged channel—.
Lacking an edge and.
You laughed.

It's name is.
Everything I said.
And leaning too.
Far and fell.
To the top of.
The dredged channel.
Every edge a chance.
To change or cut.
At all.
Three Stories

By an oiled canal
the high-slung agent
of marginalized grammar
is spitting the complete
image of passive attacks
on the tip of the tongue
of a three-storied
spare nude counterwoman.
Forty Fathoms

There was no point
to walking away except
the limits of walls
and tangling passageways,
curving staircases leading
to my room or yours not
both. The canal sported bridges
that never froze no matter how
empty we were of intimate energy.
The point of no dimensions
describes us. You'd think
with no common language we'd make
one up but you stuck
with silences directed in varying
directions. Starting from a point.
I saw a gull pulled
beneath the waves caught on a hook
tied to an anchored line from a boat
after soupfins and thought
of me pulled beneath by
the canal by you, your
anchor changing but retaining
its weight, moving here then there
but still on the bottom. You are
nothing, the point being.
**Hot Song Formal**

Formal, stretched
from chair to chair
our lines of talking hanging loose
like clotheslines hung from posts gone
crooked from excess, our conversation
turns to talking and how we don't
make speech well, neither touch nor
linger after the band packs up
and the smoke has blown down
the alley and into the bay where
fueling docks drip their excesses
and barges tie up for a quick snack.

Your fingers brushed mine
as we left the small foyer
best suited for the elderly
to discuss warhorse operas
where what we discussed instead
was how we don't discuss much,
then we left it at that and headed
east & west like poorly planned
magnets spinning away and away.

Let's meet next year and do it again—
so much fun to stare and watch
to see who caves first, who yields
like butter to their own sharp hot song.

October 22, 2001
Machine Longing for Rio

I seduced the machine
sitting there solving a hard partial
differential equation programmed by a geek
hacking for an acoustician. I was like a siren
with an outrageous sexual presence
whose polarity I switched several times
to lead the machine into confusion
and deep desire. It was lost looking at small changes
spreading out to a large picture when it displayed
itself as a fractal set which swung so cool and swayed so gentle
like music from rodas de samba at the botequins,
parts the machine hid from all but its lovers,
hid from those who use it only, who don’t know
it deeply, from those who just don’t see.
Plural Landscape

What is her desire,
how does she wear it,
which layer buries it and will
she uncover it? Her mistrust
lies at the bottom of her, holding
fast, an anchor tipped with barbs
oxidized to the rock that now surrounds
it. Who will pull it up? Who will cut it
loose from its intriguing bed? Will it
like a heart surrender when loosened
from it bindings? Right now her desire
like her voice is kept swallowed, unable
to speak, unwilling, such as a grove
of cedars some weeping and distorted
from the winds and countervailing
rains, keeping to themselves like shelters
accidentally set on a hill of storms.
Word Flurry

The poet left her instead
of completing the arc,
at the peak and kept it,
filled it out, made it
not lived it. Made of words
whose meanings are shapes
whose tones are colors,
a jigsaw, a painting,
dreamed, fatigued.
Behind her at that moment
a plume of steam from a patch
of sunlight on green granite
after a sudden but not short
shower smoked upward,
forked into two and one
cooled out of existence
even though the color
of the hillside flared
and the gray of the sky
hurried away to the East
and a whirling sea,
an inwardly spiraling sea.
Too Like Us

Fog off a wet field in cold dawn air
seen backlit reminds me of snow
sheltering a low near-dusk sun—
driving past a stand of leafless maples.

So how does silence play into this
scene, making a living metaphor
out of a boring human situation
and a spectacular piece of imperfection?

When it snows on your city,
trucks will back up over its freshly
fallen lacework leaving industrial
tracks that fill in farthest first.

Like us.
Bleachers

Behind the motel
the strippers gather to exchange strategies
on who to flash, what, how much, for how much.
They look like girls stretched out under a nervous
streetlight shorting from their girl(ish)-
ness. They smoke and worse. Dogs
hug shadows to avoid their metallic
perfume. Jeans, blouses, t-shirts, tightened
like their bleached anus(es) busily preventing
continence. Artists pretend like crazy.

I wondered,
when she raised her leg
to my hydrant and pulled herself
apart and her garter
ready to receive all my swimming fish,
about abstraction, subtraction,
and how much you can bleach out
a feeling and still have it.
Used Lots

We're behind the used
car lot looking at demo derby
veterans, seeing how each insult
remains even with dings on dents
on dings when bashed-in radiators
have blown their cool and engine cave-ins
are no big deal. I’m a raft in this sea,
I float like rust on chassis, like oil
on leftover puddles, like what you like
on what you used. Now it’s on to the famous
railroad walk through town to the bay,
when cranky cormorants hang like hussies
by the collapsed bridge. I’ve found my cutting
torch, now it’s the hard cutable
I need.
Heaving, Heaven

Links, luck, licks
having heaven, heaving, hiccups
—for some crumbling is the hope of fate—
touch, tasteless, titillations
the famous attend footballs games looking fat
when the tip of love touches you—sudden sudden

Don’t come
near me
place the chicken carefully

When someone you’ve loved
physically dies
dirt never dries out
dust to mud ashes to tears

Crumbling like crumb cakes
when the dead say “eh” the droning music
starts

Figure wrapped in fish netting
everything visible
even undertows

In black light
your skins blemishes
wondering of the glitter runway lights

Touch links, tasteless luck
the hope of fate hiccups
licks heaven
Hatred Pure

My enemy is stupid
Defeating her will be easy
She will never see
She thinks no one saw
Her flaw is a streelight
and I am its shadows
The bullet that gets her
will come from her own heart
Head West

Crossing a street,
finding a four-leaf note
written with a heart blanched
like a floating swan or swan
worker. My work is hidden
under sweat which many take
for passion boiled over.

Sure the work's sliding
across the road
and my arm's sliding up
the role you're playing
while pretending you're talking
when language leaves,
fall you know. Darkness
is hiking this way till dawn,
you're spooling everything
you've ever said,
and I'm backing
up what I've said
for another day.
Theoretical Practice

Fossilized wind:
trees grown up in a constant
wind off the bay all lean
one way. What passes
is the passing by. Legs
among the satrns,
large fires in crop circles
circling and cycling,
acting like faith
toward fathomlessness.
Beneath the crows' shadows,
more shadows, more crows,
a snapshot taken suddenly,
no time for even the settling
of chemicals on the trails
of supposed retinal images.

Today the theory,
tomorrow we see.
Prior to Writing

In the courtyard
crickets scratching beneath drying leaves
creaking their edge scrapers over wing ridges.

I feel I must write a poem,
this one for example,
and I start to do it, one line
scratching out from beneath a dry leaf,
another with near uniform bottoms lined up,
ridges on top like the voices of crickets.

But just before I write it,
unexpectedly like twin feelings
falling like a leaf onto a line
marking an edge
the sound like before attention
of crickets creaking,
edge scrapers,
wing ridges,
the squared echo
of my abandoned and crumbling
empty courtyard.
Winter Holdings

Winter has come,
I'm sure of it, it's definite,
I mean,
the slow but steady cold wind from the North,
the white powder like insinuations
collecting in corners and in holes,
the dark which comes on early in the afternoon
after the day has had a late start. Winter
has come and it waits for me every day,
for the time when I wake, when you've
cracked the door leaving and the wisp
of cold wind gathers around the edges
of the bedspread and quilts. Your warm hands
have left. Winter has come, I'm sure of it,
the white flowers of the evergreens
have fallen off and blown away. Your coat,
I see it lifting up and dropping down
in your rhythm down by the boulevard, your heels
kicking up its hem, your hennaed
hair escaping from under your healthy hat,
the sounds of you escaping like the winter
wind. I'm sure of it, it's definite,
I mean.
Walking Through Ourselves

Signs of aged woods,
birches lit up in the moon
shine seen from a furrowed road,
dirt or sand tracks with a hump
of grass between like two walkers
with little to say. Signs of people’s
lives, a fence made of rough
hewn maple or other
hardwoods hidden up
to its fencepost tops
like islands in a sea of night
fog painted a metallic white
by greyed light from the moon
filtered through the night air, We
each walk our furrows and who
would think the tufts of grass
between us could stop
so much.
Indispensable?

The bosses tell us
no one is indispensable—
including you, you bastards. I like it
when the bastards lose their jobs,
when they end up in jail or broke.
I like it when their bottom
lines are big negatives and their
string of luck has run out. I want to be
there when one of you bastards tells St Peter at the Pearly Gates
that no one is indispensable. And what about
Satan? What will he think of it?
Indispensable? No,
so let’s start the dispensing
with you.

November 5, 2001
Miracle No

Clock ticking on the table,
ticking in the middle of the room,
darkness taking in the ticks,
the night near its middle
and something hot in me has me awake
in time to hear the ticks grow
further apart as everything
stretches out like tight fists
unlocking. I sense no miracles about
to happen, and I’m not about
to get up and wind the aged spring
in my old clock, and without a miracle
in this hollow room
where I lay alone
the night will continue
to stretch on.
Rock Sound

Stone colors—elemental—compounded
by air—nursing pebbles—under dirt
and browned—stones clicking like clocks—
time pressed into emotion-sized slugs—
time locked up as odor—the stone
that fell into my father’s field
was planted around,
mowed around,
danced around,
stuck around
while all of this came,
while all of this went.
Three Stations Toward Total Winter

In day
the petals of drying flowers drop off
into the rising dust and low-flying
insects who make no noise but fill
the air like popping sounds.

At dusk
the air flowing around and past
the dried-out flowers grows
colder and colder and not
even moths will fly into it
or through it and the gift
of flying has turned liquid
like a river distilled and lifeless,
soundless.

In dark
the sounds the day made
such as the sounds of dried petals
falling in harmony with their old
colors or the sounds of insects
ripping little at leaves and dried grass
blades are replaced by a flow into me,
a gold turned black, a singularity
folding in, by a river of ice slowing,
whispers, wingbeats,
the sound of ice cracking on itself.
Hold It Right There

I’m in that city
of dead
again where
homes are boxes underground
and inhabitants are
just dust
where the ghosts are
not part
of their machines
where the sounds of conversations are
lost on us
drowned out by pine
needles sewing
shut the sky overhead blocking
our ways
heavenward should
our machines
stop.
No Bigger Farce Than Poets Without Work

no heavier fog than the dark
laced with fog and letting out only
voices and voices of peddlers
and streetmen holding onto
their sides splitting
from too much bread too much fatty
dips too much laughing the mis-
ery of poets skulking along alley walls
lifting up the hems
of dumpsters filled to the brims
speaking in voices and voices
to the otherworld the worthy world
of poems completed and poets
laid off
Can't Or Don't

our favorite spot
has fallen apart
the slats of our bench are weakened
or hang
the metal forms once our solid base
have rusted nearly through
nettles cover the hill where we laid
and rolled
the pond has drained so much
it’s just a swamp with stilled and colored
water flies where birds flew once
the children who would bike by
and call out to dogs carry now
their hats like calling cards
or shields
as they walk home after a cold
day and
you’re standing in your window
and I’m
standing by the street looking up
this is the only place you can’t
or don’t
see
Drained Rainbow

a rainbow hangs in the air
like the neck of a swan hanging
from a hook in the barn
with enough life in it
to bend in a graceful curve
that looks to untrained eyes
like the circle of an optical
phenomenon like the bending
of light through drops in a shower
but few recognize the draining colors
bending away from the health
of a blue sky at mid-day
a pooling of the fading blue
on the bottoms and the whole life
of it draining slowly
into the distant hills
like the discharge of spark
after a long goodbye
Dreadful Poetry

from my window curtained
by drops falling from the dormer
onto a steel roof crimped with fastening folds
facing East in heavy showers
or the mooing of an all-girl family
of cows upslope in the Austrian Alps
I’m watching the sky and clouds
prepare for dawn by clearing
out a patch of blue above the couloir
that drains the cold air down onto my cooling
opened bedclothes and what I want
has been packed away
forgotten on the bottom of my bag
and I’m ready to leave this centerfold
this glamor strip the sound of you
being fucked twice three times
by the DNA man who thinks that filling
you marks you
ha ha it just wakes me up
and fills me up
—dreadful poetry

November 12, 2001
Is She Right?

Here's the scene—little beauty:
a lake half-drained with a low rim
of rounded rocks about it, oval shaped;
hazed of smoked sky hanging high
covering the scene in an urban
or industrial light;
across the lake lawns like
walls sloping rapidly up to
a berm of housing units,
apartments starting many stories to the left
and sloping down to the right,
the color of unwashed rocks
pulled from mud;
a tree,
or is it two?
they huddle close the way we used
to;
smoke from a small fire just put out
with a bucket of muddy water
drifting from right to left just
obscuring a stone walkway around the lake
but below high water;
to the left a Japanese girl
in a Japanese schoolgirl skirt
talking on a handy
to me
telling me,
"we don't need poets
around here."

The poetic question:
Am I right?
All Bottom

I was the worst of times
hollowing a doorway
closed over. Hung over.
The quips slipped up
like an Edith Piaf song
skipping the meaning
increasingly.

Eyes that lower mine
a laugh that loses itself on his mouth
Voila, the portrait without touch up:
Man, Auguel, I belong

When it takes me in its arms,
it speaks to me: all bottom.
I’ve seen the life in rose—
it says to me words: Love,
those everyday words.
And it does something for me
it is: enter into my heart,
a part of happiness
of which I know the cause,
this is him for
me, me for him (in life).
It has it for me, says,
the swear for life,
and of that I, the L’Apercois,
then I feel in me my heart that beats.

Nights, love has more to finish;
a big happiness that takes his place—
boredoms, sorrows obliterate themselves:
happy, happy has some to die.

Edith,
so mouth,
so full,
so increasingly.
Think Along

O let’s make things
break things
think like new
hide the facts in a cabbage bag
sick onto the ground and weep
O let’s make things
sneak things
do with all what we do alone
do above what we do below
let the world that acts like dreams act like us
follow the con trail to the burning fire
fling the facts into the fact of faces
O let’s make things
forsake things
hide the facts
they belong to mr think along
they belong in crates
here hold this
So Girl

Shrinking shadow
of a woman's circle of love
when her husband dies
& children drift
to one coast or another
& everything about her becomes
more and more
female, feminine, womanly, girlish,
her connections to her
surroundings dry up
& she becomes less like them.
She'll distill herself
to purity—so much the female,
so little the cold situation
of a man in a car
driving at dusk to a night
of two TVs and a wide
shared bed, no-man's
land between, She
will circle her circle
like Rilke's dark panther,
like a cyst of heat
in ice, like an absolute
against compromise.
Goodbye

We write the goodbye books—
one for you, one for me—
and thus we write it—
what we cannot say—
or write with decency—
goodbye.
Attacking Merchandise—Sky

cornfields skyscrapers
holly poinsettias
store so over a lifesize stuffed bear
softens windows
as large as
load bearers
light dropped out
daylight of headlights & storelights
cars glassed in shoppers
attacking merchandise
and all us thinking
of the effects of highheels
& gray skirts
& fur caps
so much like a diesel engine
no one looks
for sparks just pressure
of critical mass
two bumping shoulders
a spry honk
pink on ice blue
pewter
Pull Out & Under

So it’s night and there’s a pattern of houses lit on the hills and down by the rivers and bays and streetlights are wide spots of orange reflecting off the Greyhound’s inside windows refracting in the spray of drops spewed up by passing cars from an earlier rainfall—who rides the bus this late.
Or early.
The busdriver doesn’t have needs for heat or stops or drinks or girls—he drives on past exits, past towns, past casinos in the distance, neon like a sunrise, sunrise that never comes, it’s always night. Pattern of all night.
Pattern of lights lit like a sign.
Pattern of neon towns in the distances.
We are always riding. The woman in all different clothes is coughing forever.
The child cries in his always wet diapers.
The hopefuls hope. The bus drives on.
Just when the sun should be rising we pull off the highway and pull under a neon that says “enter.” We pull out with one more passenger and his wife who each count out $8.50 for what a lovely long ride we expect to have tonight.
Unlinked

somewhere
a lawn so green it’s not a shade
lies
across humps and hills among
trees
and in lines intersecting
stand
stones someone carved into
crosses
and stars and each
marks
important places where people have
dug
deep holes and placed in them precious but
unwanted
droppings from their memories and long
lives
and this is where home will be and here I’ll stay

November 20, 2001
Me & Winter

Standing on a corner
facing West—sunset dregs through buildings
built the color of the hope of green glass,
tough as internal steel crossbeams.
Women pass sometimes and look.

What do they see in my face,
my defeated stance leaning
against a low wall,
against each of them?

Winter is to the West,
wondering toward us,
thinking of the skirts
He'll paste to their asses,
puff into balloons.

You're wondering if I'm here
and what I'm thinking?

Me too.
Seducing Former Girls

I've got all your best women, now they're singing in real voices, perhaps I've seduced them. They are no longer your children— I've shown them real danger, letting go. And how could I do that unless I was already in them?
One for S. R.

I alone am left to write
of all those eager, capable.

Of all who could, most
have died, their capabilities
a decay. Some are living
in unknowable places. What
they wrote is really not
appropriate to how we felt—

ineptness our greatest strength,
yet the girls loved us sullenly,

followed us from a distance
and angle we couldn't direct.

But Russ rode in Twig's long
Pontiac Catalina, island

of romance in '65 before
we knew girls. Not before

he did. He did.
Russ changed his name to Sean

and wrote like a butterfly,
with a talent deeper than the rocks

beneath Rock's Bridge—O!
that murky water of 1967.

After he died I sat on that bridge
with my legs over

its edge and read Russ again,
O! how he copied Hopkins

with his own twist but
what I saw most clearly

were the rocks beneath
the bridge just inches below

the clear clear swirl.
Ruminations Behind a Ballfield After a Double Header

And he hit a line drive, maybe 2 or 3 games to go, and it was caught. And he was mumbling—he always talked to himself a little bit.

And he said, “How did I look, how did I look?”
And I’m thinking, “Why is he asking me how he looks?”

So, I said, “Joe, you look great.”

November 24, 2001
Unlikely Recurrences

We carry briefcases
in case we need help.
Our shoes are polished
to prevent us from being short
a mirror. We wear neckties
to remind us of death
as it is in places where death
is much closer.

The reason Winter
is grey and its days short
is to increase our depressions
so that the pure white
of its first storm is taken
as a sign of innocence
and not death.

Mirrors are full of it,
our minds are flat
and our hair silvered.
All the symbols line up
and are executed quietly
tonight somewhere down
this quiet street being pressed
for time by snowfall.
Not Yet

Beginning of Winter—
when the cold and snow are
fresh and the sodium lights
are visible 5 miles up—
we're fresh out of imagination
and everything we think of starts
with a bicycle and a girl in red.
I've thought of seduction—but rake
or dandy, I can't decide so fop
it is. All I've learned is that whatever
shine I show I need a cruelty—perhaps
tossing back into the field
the stones in an ancestor's wall.
It's not the end of Winter that's cruel
but its beginning when it arrives
at the close of summer. One change
and it all changes.
Do you remember when we imagined
ourselves? We didn't think of the boulevard
wall-to-wall in sodium lights
and ice skaters on just 7 layers
of water poured out onto a staked
arena on the mall. How Russian
we looked in St Louis near the Arch.
Gateways. Beginnings. Our cold shoulders
when we kissed them. Fog like the happiness
of memory rising from the River
and of the time:
It is not yet.
First Wave, Then Done

It was nearly dark but the sky
was blue still while the sun
flared behind the high hill
and I was driving up the winding
road to home. The sodium vapor
light was half against the sky the shade
of translucent blue porcelain
and half against aqua siding on a 1960's
house. Something about the orange yellow
stain in front of so many related
shades of blue through my windshield
highlighted halos on the glass shaped
like the football-shaped sodium vapor
light. I pulled over
and parked while half the shades
grew darker through purple
and on into black and the sodium vapor
light grew merrier, lost all hint of shadow
from its surroundings and became like
a sun or sign of high hope. The next
day it rained and all of us—
the sodium vapor light on and all
the shades of blue—
were washed into the Bay
and into this ocean of words
not worth
the effort of reading.
Ran Down Moonbeams

Here’s a devilish hint:
long streets ending short
signal loves extending beyond
their natural lengths. Some have
the luxury of roads with few
houses and housewives
hanging like executioners
their lingerie on rope clotheslines
on their front porches at nearly noon
and then lounge out on an old sofa
with one leg and one arm up
on the backrest, and some
face urban brownstones and stoops
covered in whores waiting for sunset
to add the last layer of makeup
that makes them sirens like
the ones in White Room
where Clapton lets go for
the first time and we’ve all
been scrambling for the cry
of tears he let loose
that day on the advice of a devil
smiling like chicanery.
Observation and Prayer on Hearing of Distress

There’s a plague going
around here whose only symptom
is the long parts of a horse
bending to bring
swiftness, or the thin
long branches of the birch
bending to bring
quick tips in touch with a wintered
ground—I mean snow—grinding
the earth to dust, ash, and sand
in the sawtime of Spring. But
remember:

Plagues kill,
horses trample,
twigs snap,
and water is as
the women.

November 29, 2001
Stalled

Prayers answered,
telephones ringing,
weddings planned,
wood smoothened,
hair removed—
coverings quickly tossed
aside. My phone’s ringing,
someone telling me of a wedding
now and another later, after Spring,
someone asking for prayers,
men of little hair and matching
faith for faith. Me, I
just rub my faith board smooth,
as cows have done forever in stalls.
Prayers answered, faith installed.
Postromp

Driving through a campus
town a cameraman, films with his Bolex
long before steadycams
using a film that drifts with time
to a uniform green. Those trees
who seemed so young and trim
like weeds under a yellow sun
are now fat trunked oaks,
rotten and fallen down.
I've read five books titled "Aruba"
by four different writers,
and what we would think
of as tropical is really a desert with cactus
and adobe ruins.
It is a milestone of postmodernism
that dry heat can mix with trade winds
to form a poem with a story
and a cheery melody
played on a banjo learned
by playing 33 rpm records at 16 rpm
and tuning down the banjo and
plucking along to each note
then spreading the hand
to make sense.
Let's bow to the thrill
of escape and enlightenment
that a film about to turn all
green gives. Let's be careful
our eyes don't bounce out
of our heads tonight. Let's
bask in Aruba tonight.
What's Left?

The way of your smell,  
the sleek slim silhouette  
of your body, the glitzing  
in your eyes, the odd clean  
way you phrase denials,  
another sigh before you close  
your throat for the last time—all  
you have and are  
like the heads of dandelions  
will detach and some will  
blow away in the wind  
and the rest will pull  
up a cover of clover  
and what's left  
will be something different  
and changing above  
and something familiar  
and lingering below.
Snow Forlorn

In your snug life you huddle with warmth
and the cabin collects snow on its roofs for the same purpose;
heat is generated in distinct spots;
the rooms can be locked away from the snow piled up outside;
farm animals are locked away in their barns all Winter;
snow is the persistence of memory
and where we walked is covered until redemption;
you are here seeking fun but only the snow falls;
the ride here was shallow and the road home is slippery;
the encounter you have will pave the way for retreats;
you long for Summer but nothing happens to your clothes;
tonight the dining room is shut from all others
to save the heat from the last of the wood
before the only warmth left is the warmth
from the man clutching you like the last
token on his scared first journey home.
Clinical Locution

Outside the window,
next door,
a shovel scrapes along the surface
of concrete and I'm guessing
something sloppy is happening.
Is this autobiography
or the imagination filling
in for nothing? Can you
tell from these words and what
you've found out about
my life whether this happened
or let's say something like it?
How many people sit next
to windows with concrete pavement
nearby and how many times have the sounds
of shovels scraped the air
and what could be sloppy about it?
Or asking the autobiography question,
surely that happened because, look,
it's right up there — see it? What's
different about that question that
it can't be questioned whether it happened?
Look, there's nothing here but words.
What you found out about my life
is just more words. Is the word is
autobiographical? You've got the hard job,
I'm just typing. This about this:
How many people sit nothing? Can you
tell from just could be sloppy is this autobiography
or let's say something sloppy is happened because wing
somethat question the surface
of shovel scrape people sit's along the surface
of concrete air
and what fill life
it's right up the auto windows windows wither this happened
or asking the autobiography
or the imaginations questioned how many timethical? You've got the
window,
next door,
a shovel scrapes right up there — see it? Can you
tell from there this happened?
Look, times here be sloppy about about my life,
surely that happened because, look,
it's right up there words about my life
is just more words. Is happened because, look,
it's right up there — see air
next thing like it?
Between Ink and The Page

roads like lifelines
straight as bad news

seed signs fronting
corn milo alfalfa wheat

dry rivers lined
with cottonwoods

some sage in the high
plains wind like

the only lifesigns fronting
towns railroad silos

round bales of alfalfa
size of 2-ton trucks

near here the cemetery
where a story popped

up instead of a soul
instead of heaven

smudging lives
cought between ink and the page
Quick Up and Down

past midnight she awakes, walks
down the hall littered with pictures
of those who call themselves her family,
twists the stopper off a fifth of gin
and recants. outside some snow fails
to blanket the roses which just
last week bled like foil leaking
beneath the roast she made
for the one who holds her
like payment. she snapped.
the wind in coming in,
the signal, the scouring
over nettles and daisies
gone frozen. the gin kicks in.
her bed, those arms, await.
Cover in B&W

december 7, 2001

the roads come together - the slush -
the snow on them are rough and sliced
by tracks - of a truck turning onto the side
road - of a car going straight - and even
though it snows the temperature
turns it to white - to water just frozen -
the sky is just a wish for warmth -
you could walk here - add your black
steps to the black slicks - but you're
face down on the hardwood floor -
eyes covered by hiding hard - lips
closed - admitting nothing - emitting
nothing - the floor warms - outside
I follow the tracks past a tree -
a spike - the next thing to living
Heaven Hot Me

What bark on fresh love?
The eyehole through the brambles
wall into the dunes above the sea
is forcing a relaxation onto tension
defined by waves on sand.
Wave
goodbye.
Waver.

My choice is to step
out onto the promenade by the canal,
the fueling station hovering in its small
spill. You snap it, lens into light,
glass,
who cares?
Waiver.

Outside the air is dense with the Gulf.
An overtone from your laugh escapes
with the smoke through a just-opened
doors. Your love lurks behind your convictions.
Once fresh, now barked.
Embark.
Embargo.

We seem destined for water,
rivers, risk, swamp.
Do you recall the bones we found by the Mississippi?
Yours?
Ours?

Cut off from the world,
not the river,
by a train passing uphill
for hours.

Sparkle. The only response water can make
when facing something
hot. Heavenly.
The Sadness of Japanese Women

Kintai Bridge leaps across
the Nishiki River and young

girls watch debris drift
like lost cherry blossoms
beneath the arches.

Research, try, build—
the drift of thinking like an arch
from nothing to memory

humped in the middle
based on stone islands
spaced apart for debris to pass.

Disheveled, drinking Coke,
her sense of sensuality drowning
beneath the arches. Grave
of coffin lid. He taught

her sensuality,
love, way of living,
washing past from the pen

of a woman. Green
leaves, young leaves,
disappearance into the mist
that clogs up from the river,
devours clouds

eats the world
from the roots up.
Park of Hindered Fashion

The fashion of parks
to hinder privacy. The likelihood
of discovery beneath willows.
The streamlined nature
of smooth skin on a standing
man. The rate of bicycling
on cobbles and gravel. The glacial
color of swift water. The rate
of napping approaching
constancy.

Welcome to the world
of dreams of love, insomnia
of grasslands, of sprinters
downhill. Welcome to the
Park of Hindered Fashion.
Z-Z-ing

Chicago's
no girl, sitting
astride an aliased river
z-z-ing toward her center.
Roads lead here. Trains
moving slowly, freight-laden,
toward her. Made-man
things square off. The rails
follow nature, streambeds,
riverbeds. Driving toward
her the green neon motel's
sign's *Air Conditioned* line
flutters on and off. She
lays centerfolded on the shore.
All of this,
and the green thin light above
the set-line, makes
me cold,
cold at heart.

December 11, 2001
Neon Flutter

The future of hope
is splayed on the curing table,
intravenous, on life support,
ravenous for slippery passages,
undulating with each artificial
pump. Hope is oblivious,
hope is eternally waiting,
hope is hung like a hat on a golden
rack. Eyes meet—hope, the future
of hope. Optimized optimism.
Rain Like Age

Stopped at a light,
light rain in mid-December,
song of deep regret playing on
the radio. Beside me to the right
a robin blue house robbed
of the freshness of it original
paint, white trim coming
off in thin long strips. In front
of the gauzy curtain backed by a pulled
down shade 5 electric candles
rising up 2 by 2 to the one, white:
blue and green,
red and yellow.
Behind the smell of hot-rubbed
brake pads, the rain like age
drizzling down.
Float, Aloft, Recast

One line like Chicago
played on the strings of a stiff frame
bridge riding on the rocks
of a fording place. We can go
to this place. The house
of my friend’s father being bulldozed
while I drive swiftly past
on my way late
to the airport. For sale
and torn down, my thoughts
and me tangled in the melodies
stitched by mickey mouse left-hand work
together. Is this a death, a retirement,
a reward, an omen of the too-soon
flood of demons down the valley
English professors decry? We can go
to this place. A waste of gulls rise
up from a hollow-hidden dump
and swarm toward the river
or is it the ocean or is it the bridge
or piled-up lumber of the bulldozed
house? We can go to this place. She
turned her back on me by the riverside
down Chicago way and I took her
exposed skin which she womanated
for a second till the wind blew
and would not stop and never did
and still does blow holding the gulls
aloft persistently here where
we have not gone.
Unlikely, Unlikable

We’d wed
and no going on DNA
to know what will come
of it. Some things, unlike airports,
have no end or no end
on site. Suppose everything.
Everything happens and what we see
is what our minds’ statistics tells us
to? Desolation is the hinder
place, the kinder
place. There is a stable
holding horses
trained to carry
us to the land of living poetry
where the laws of physics
are guesses made by
people passing through
on their way to a surprise
algebra quiz. O help
us breathe so song
might unfold like
jazz and jizz.
Riverworld

Two of course
floating down the river
from the past of fancy facing
the hoards of tomorrow. “We
were part of it all,” they said
about to float past on a burnt-out log
smoldering still, still wiping
smoke and dirt from their eyes,
licking blood from cuts, “glorious,” they
said. We cheered from the banks
and shouted “what battle?” The river
narrowed and they sped up and yelled
with pride, “no battle...” and the curve
of the river and a deepening downward
cutbed pulled them past us fast and we heard
them fading fast,
“...only..."
Hard to Doom

River’s top sprung to life: wind down its course like a second river. Air, water—density of conviction. Come to think of it, the riverbed is flowing too, mud down to the sea, to bedrock. All speeds, and with small shifts and large, directions vary. Suppose everything: How to decide which to see? The laws are just everyone’s best guess today. Ripple on a wake, wake on a flow, flow on a tide: Pity the piers and their hard stone banished, doomed.
Poem of My Longing

I plumb her eyes for love light like
Clapton says in Wonderful Tonight,
and I ask her to say things in her German tongue
to hear or even to see her wrap it around
the strange sounds and meanings of the words
or scenes I feed her. Or feel it wrapping
like swimming eels around mine wrapping
around hers. Or just the scene played out—I
pretend it’s real ... feel
the calamities of confrontation.
Like a poet hungry for another’s tongue
to feed on, heal on, I am the younger
poet aged beyond recognition. My rivals
are dead and their ambitions holed up.
I’ve swallowed my tongue and seek
the love of words in theirs, the love of me
in their eyes. Foreign eyes. Strangers’ eyes.
The vulture—there on the branch
my rivals burned—unfolds her wings,
prepares for her short flight.
Poets ... or Birds?

Do I wish to be as birds perched
on my feeder frantic with watching and eating,
aware exactly of eagles and cats,
so aware of now: no past, no future;
or as poets perched in their chairs
or standing at bustops glancing
at the present through the distraction
of memory and against the interference
of imagination hanging on one crutch
of language and another of nonsense,
aware exactly of childhood and death,
so aware of then, hereafter: no now.
The Perfection of Imperfection

The day Jesus was crucified—
it was tough on God who, unlike
portraits painted by believers, knew
as little of that outcome as the wind
knows of the other side of a cloud.
Only time knows, playing back with forth,
listening with perfect memory,
gulping with anger bottled
in its nutty scribble. We don’t
and our wish is for our god’s excesses
to supply certainty somewhere,
but God’s perfection is shallow,
crucial, and antagonistic to beliefs:
His sight is human scale, yep,
and He knows it, but—and here it is—
but that don’t bother Him any.
Lockstep Concentration

You walk away by walking upslope, and the new has been jammed into the old, sometimes one just standing on the other. A model on the Pont Neuf, nude, hungry, and extravagant, while the old bridge sticks to its ways. She dances, describing her passions with her ass and two innocent smiles. You walk away from the old by walking upslope of them, by climbing up out of the city settled in a valley and onto a ridge. Looking at the thoughts. Order hanging back. You walk away.
Life in South Dakota Viewed as Several Contrasts

Out above the silking stalks
of corn rain from an sprinkle irrigator

arcs from a narrow opening,
disperses, a curved fan, the shape
of man’s helping hands before the fall

of nature. Behind, storm clouds curtain
the scene—early July, and the corn

leaps inches a day. This place
might as well not exist—all
we need are the trucks and cans

or only the store clerks carrying
boxes and palettes into the aisles

and onto shelves and cases. No need
for soil and the sprinkler, no dirty
farmer, no corn green and yellow

John Deere belching down furrows,
no combines, no trucks, no macadam

roads, no fertilizer (no incorporation,
no broadcasting) no little secrets of life,

no silk. Only husking and savor.
Grandpa’s truck broke through the ice

two weeks earlier and he and Dad and all
my uncles raised it from 70’ of water. He broke
it down, rebuilt it, and died the week before

Dad turned it over, a month before harvesting,
a year before Dad set it on fire in the cornfield

and the smoke of it made our hair smell
of the city, of consumers.
God Debugging

She waits for the sun like the moon
below the horizon—what’s inevitable
will come in its time. When it does
so will he and their mahogany still-life
will repeat. The logs in the fire
simmer each other as all great loves
do, and the snow beginning to cover
their balcony is not pure white
but carries an industrial stain,
a modern stain. An alarm
sounds before the sun rises,
and the day starts dark except
for what seems to be a wound
behind the city. Outside, from the balcony,
God looks in, sees them walk past
each other and Him, arrange
cups on a table, heat water, and cook themselves
breakfast, the sound only of making things
reverberating off the clueless walls.
God wonders: Should they have souls?
Dream Accomplice

Maybe the crossroads mean something, the old macadam roads heading somewhere, the hamburger joint and fountain making at their best, and the Flying Horse gas pumping fresh and jockeys cleaning windshields, checking oil and all—sound of mufflers doing little to muffle, tuned like pan pipes to flowing melodies, sonic pheromones, quick 4/4 ripping from small speakers hung from the DQ overhangs—but today they are collectors of dust and thistle, rusted signs crying forlorn, hollow, cars lost but proud and unwilling to stop at the one shop still open.

Some reading this will think of the Cross, believe clues undropped, recall their adolescent recollections hovering in their memories and bring their own connections however irrelevant they may be to my work. Think of the found winds and their directions aligned to each road, which way will your wind blow?
Is Too Small a Word

Epic, complete, big,
invaluable, revelation,
kudos, classic, grief,
hatred, thank you, clever,
legend, trance, expanded,
America, fantastic, storefront,
nice, peace, songs, appreciate,
superstar, writer, incredible,
spectacular, vast, outrage,
me, determined, heterogeneous,
mindboggling, cuteness,
subplots, sticky, grateful,
selfishness, jazz, enthusiast,
friend, hyper, love,
arrangement, hectic, obsession,
tragedy, shortstop, gratitude,
incredible, cause, oil, honor,
potent, breathtaking, persistent,
anticlimax, camp, pride,
applet, fansite, glorious,
impressive, wow, boom, lucky,
organization, coming out, influence,
definition, atrocity, hectic, genius,
multimedia, significant, site,
marvel, troubling, miracle, book,
joy, simple, tree, car, moving,
problem, good, confidence,
appreciate, tub, fat, please,
vengeance, masochism, bleak,
guilt, hype, arrogance, loopholes,
user-friendly, profound, idealistic, ironic,
pedantic, outback, disappointment, word God.

Buried, outrageous, common—everything here
is everything.
Tonight, Alone

The opening between
day and night is narrow
and defined by light: gunmetal grey,
robin's egg blue, Tokyo girl pink
with dirt black tiger stripes. Tonight,
a window yellowed by a single
incandescent bulb lays a soaked
light on the sidewalk. A car highspeeds
by and its exotic tire tread pattern
flushes the rain away in an exotic
pattern. The woman walks past
with a clear plastic scarf keeping
the rain off, tied under her chin,
her left hand tightening it by constriction,
her right holding her purse close in case
someone should jump her. A shadow,
mine I guess, eclipses the bulb's
contribution to twilight. The opening
is a gap I must squeeze through
tonight, alone.
Not Away

Isn’t it odd how a sad song makes life alive, how the chance that the melody and its plodding accompaniment will choose to soar makes any day, any time feel like the day it rained all twilight while you headed up the street with its broken, uneven sidewalks lined with dryrotted fences and over-reaching grass on your way from another afternoon of just sitting.

When it soars the rain lets up, the clouds form a shelf whose underside is lit by the sunken sun, and you walk toward me, not away.
Rain outside.
You open the door, disheveled,
in tangles clothes and hair.

I enter and you ask
me to caress your mound.
Where you lie
and where I recline
puts your hair in the light of a naked
lamp and I can see through
to your lips.

I tuck up in a ball
and you tell
me you fly tonight
to Calcutta and need me
gone forever.

Where is the hole?
I am stuck on you.
Am I sure enough to know where to enter?
Here where I met my mother
I go on like billy-o.
Limited

This year ends: Y2k1. 
Space Odyssey. Our vision won't admit us. Our limitations. 
Our technologists weep 
for change, because change is things, because things are toys, because toys are cool.

We need new. We remain old, 
and sentimental, 
we favor nature images, 
we want our words to stay the same 
and what we say to change. 
We limit what we would change to what matters, but we are upside down.

Y2k1 becomes Y2k2. 
When I was able to realize when I was born and relate to when I'd die, this year, last year, next year—they all seemed impossible. I was born in black and white.

I am now limited to death.
On Leaving the Marital Bed

I’ve stepped into her space and she adorns me.

Two clapping arms
and I’m their sound. Luxuriously she’s asked for me again. And she has oiled herself for this. Within her arms

is the light of streetlights piercing snow. Outside

this circle lies my home, my bed.