SOME POEMS

by Joe A. Oppenheimer

Wednesday, September 7, 2016
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*To be titled The Lovers of the Lost II for the second printing. The title is currently tentative.*

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**Some Poems, by Joe A. Oppenheimer**
POST RETIREMENT POEMS
Erosion

Time passes, dunes shift.  
Sea pounds, retreats, pounds  
trees on the coast-land  
torn down, disappear  
from seasonal gales.  
Soon no one can see  
or even describe  
the land that once was.  
Yet did we not love  
playing on that beach  
now lost to what is?  

Could I tell a soul  
what we talked about  
at breakfast? How we  
lived hours writing,  
reading on the sofa?  
Were the hours so strong  
as to blow away  
all those fine details  
fleshing memories.  
But their skeletons  
can still bring me joy  
and grief.

d4: Thursday, September 8, 2016
LOOKING HOMeward

Memories now cued
by old scar - slit knee
slid on sand, biking
on forbidden hill.

My mind’s old skin sees
mostly mother’s labors
in her kitchen or
knees down cleaning floors.

Long view: lost lilacs,
loosely looped over grave of
forgotten father.

d2: Thursday, September 8, 2016
REMTES

Jay was ‘old reliable’
in the shipping department.
Been with them 38 years.
Never missed a day of work.
“Remarkable,” said the head
of personnel, announcing
Jay’s coming retirement.

We threw a party where Boss
gave him an oak rocking chair
“Truly well earned,” he declared.

When asked, “What will you do next?”
Jay announced, “I’ll study remotes.”
We laughed. It was a good joke.
His wife said his days were filled.

So he’d know where they were,
Jay bought a basket for all
the remotes. But days, weeks passed
and the basket of black tools
was slowly gathering dust.

In the office we wondered
what Jay was doing at home.
When asked he had his alibi:
remotes on which dust accrued.
His wife accepted Jay’s lone
long presence in the rocker
in front of the video
and audio equipment
which remained on the ready
but never on.

May morphed into December. Jay
turned his oak rocker to face
the west window. Then he
picked up one of the black wands,
blew off the dust and pressed ‘Mute.’

“Silence seems a better fit
to be with remotes,”
were the last words he spoke.

And over time what Jay saw
outside that window appeared
ever more distant, ever
more beautiful.

d3: Thursday, September 8, 2016
Blues Become a Spate

How am I to revive
again to be strong
after winter’s freeze
while waiting for birds’ song?

Were I a rock
or floating ice,
were I less dead
or could be born twice

you might say the year goes round,
winters’ doldrums but repartee,
were the freeze not striking the heart itself
so blues are caught clairaudiently.

As my rumination floods
the mind and all its weight
leads me to weave and bob
till my blues become a spate.

Then I can feel my will melt
my work at windmills tilt
and watch the days’ wasted time,
from where I lose my lilt.

D4: July 4, 2016

1/ Rhyming words taken in order from end of lines of Denise Riley’s “Death Makes Dead Metaphor Revive”
WAITING ROOM

Grey is the space
she painted pink,
then framed.
Grey the faces of those
who reside in the great
waiting room.

Two sit, back to back.
The far, a man
painted grey
head and shoulder,
reading a grey tabloid;
in front, a vacant stare
from a withered
grey woman
looking at you.

Brown drips from
the two-sided wood bench
the artist gave
a yellow splash
to remind us of
the impossibility of sun
in these despondent souls.

A background pink,
surrounds the greys,
sitting colorless
below a black window
a small rectangle
high on the wall.

Is that how
the painter escaped?

d5: Monday, July 4, 2016
Skins of Trash

Hunched over, out of breath
inside a heavy wool coat,
boots crunching on the snow,
how could he know

what more was in the half-
filled bags hanging below
his gloves or how many
more times he would carry

sacks of rotting berries,
skins of bananas, food
scraps, and memories
from a now lonely kitchen

in which they had so often
danced, laughed, and left
together to read
on the couch or better.

Wind whipping his worn face
while past days mauled his mind,
he wondered how many
more nights he would
take out the trash.

D6: Friday, July 15, 2016
MORAL POINT OF VIEW

Pulling my leg
off you said
wouldn't hurt
a spider.
So you did.
Then let me go.
My webs were never
symmetric after that.

Smashing my mother’s
head with a rock
was not immoral
from your point of view
since she was
a common river rat.
But then where
could I get milk?

Shooting my friend
in the zoo when he pulled
out the boy who fell in
was the right thing
to do for we are
but apes and
how could you
know his intent.
I am alone now
but the crowds
have grown.

Hooding and keeping
me sleepless, pulling
out my finger
nails was to lead
you to information
I did not have. It ended
but the pain
ricochets endlessly
within the folds of
my mind.

d3: Thursday, September 8, 2016
TOURING

Working part time
dreams can unravel.

Sundays, in
uniform,
at locker
grabs his tools.

Pushing brooms,
mopping floors
picking scraps.

Moves through doors,
departure
gates some filled
some unused.
Men’s rooms dirty
urinals, sinks
need cleaning.

Throws papers
in barrel,
saves ‘Travel’.
Always saves
‘Travel’ to read.
Leaves airport.

Has a week
of his dreams
of travel
in his pocket.

If working
other days,
he finds no
‘Travel’, and
he is stuck
condemned to
the rut of
his one room.

Those times, cleans
but without
the escape
of the mind,
the week drags
on forever.

d6: Monday, July 25, 2016
Flying to Berlin
reading pages
reality and art
confused
confusing
phrases.
An over-read paperback
cultural history
thick as family lines,
broken many times,
until seven hundred
unnumbered pages
fall out from its
split splines.
Pages disappearing
with justice appearing
imagined and extolled
on its jacket
and in chapters
far less strangely planned
than Berlin.

The defaced
disappearances
displacements
dissolvings
of family,
inheritance,
and Reich
replaced
by glass domes
river walks
academic talks,
thick tomes
explaining the past.

What is past
passed morphed
into little
bronze plaques
“Israel Schwartz
zu Auchwitz
am Erst Juli,
Vier und Vierzig’’
und so weiter . . .
even ersatz
concrete coffins -
perfect for hide and seek
make Berlin’s holocaust
museum a child’s
playground.
The book
sold millions.
Evil does.

Germany had no tourists
when it was ashambles;

Berlin reads stranger than fiction.

Poems.wpd

Page 9
WHERE THE WILD THING WAS

Perhaps you would have walked on
but I stopped at the long line of black jewels
each outlined in tan dripping off the white
stripe rolling down his long back.

He’s hugging the rock, absorbing
life-giving warmth. His tongue darts
as I sit observing nearby. Fondness
grows as could only come from boy to snake.

My shirt becomes his litter to his new home.
Then we both avoid my mother
and other members of my Eden.
Dinner-time he goes in my sock drawer.

Morning came – shirts, pants, socks all for school,
but my wily serpent is no fool.
He has set himself free. Principal
Hirschbeck later summons me to speak
to my upset mother on the phone.

Something is dreadfully wrong,
like a siren in my ear I can hear
Emergency! Hurry home!
Even the principal says “Go!”

Flying home to fiery fury
there’s mother, eyes rolling, in a fit
A snake under your bed!

He’s not lost! He’d only roamed!

We’ll have no snake in my house!
Stops my celebration.
Even Rumpelstiltskin
in his moment of anger
couldn’t lay a finger on
my mother’s madness. She spits
it out once more: No reptile in our house!
It goes out the door!
And, LET IT BE KNOWN, in the future,
leave nature’s wild alone.

d8: Thursday, May 5, 2016
CIGARETTE BREAK WHILE ON ACTIVE DUTY

Loan me another fag.
I need another drag.
The sheer sear of the smoke
tells me I’m still alive.

d2: Tuesday, May 3, 2016
“Like the chain they cut off Chang’s bike
they cut off the days of his life.
So I’ll slap you again,
even harder for him.
I say what you learn in school is all rot.
Don’t call a man evil whom you know
not.

Now listen, your grandfather, . . . ” her
mind
begins to roam, worried who all could
hear
words spoken in her home.

Then softer . . .

“That story you say
all flows from that lock
police broke away
in front of his shop
from Chang’s treasured red bike
before he left that night

then grabbed him too – they pinned him
like a hog – made him carry a sign
I’m peoples’ enemy number one
nothing but a capitalist running dog.
Men and children stoned him then
by the lemon tree in town.

It was your aunt Yu-lung
who alone one day sang,
   My father is a good man,
   a Communist too!
right in front of the police station.
   But like the lock,
they cut him down.
Then they sent her home with the bill
for the bullet they used to kill . . .
her father.

My man, father’s father, you called
a poisonous weed to be walled
off and be cut from our tree
only so you could be free,
to say yours is a family
accepted by authority.

To this I say, ‘Lies can’t set you free.’
Beware the cable cutter.
Chang only asked if democracy
could perhaps make life better.”

Chains Cutters

d7: Thursday, April 21, 2016
**SHARED TRAITS**

When I went there to pee  
I swear I could see me  
looking back from a  
silvered glass on a wall.  
Standing there tall  
in dress uniform looking back  
at myself straight as a tack  
hair cut short, full of sass  
and ambition on the far silvered side  
so distant as to be only inside.

At a moment I reached  
to button my coat  
and straighten my tie  
but found they weren’t there.  
I said softly for comfort  
but loud enough for me to hear  
*You’re lucky you’re still here.*

But then another guy came  
and all could see there was no wall,  
no glass. Just a cold wet me  
rain soaked, wind chilled  
and I shook behind the big tree  
where I’d snuck for privacy.  
I swivelled the chair, wheeled away  
then found I could no longer say  
how I once stood straight  
and never understood  
why or what brought me down.
GEOGRAPHY

Coordinates
How often
my fingers
unfold the maps
and my index taps
her coordinates
and my eyes wet
as I contemplate
the trip I never take
but always envision
to the cemetery
green and grave
of my long ago
battered mother.

Directions
When she said, “Do you ever . . .”
it so set me off
into my own head
I never heard her finish.
I knew what I dread
often . . . even this morning . . .
when I inquire
“How far away
is the town Santa Fe?”
and consider how long
would be a drive to retrieve
my long gone children.
Siri's response
of days and hours
doesn’t jive with the eternity
I would need to regain my life.
PIE FACTORY

Far above steeples
floats mongrel mankind.
Far below condo rooves lies
a filthy factory of pies
converted now for the homeless.

Six starved souls sit in a spare space
without windows, somber,
sometimes sheltering the penniless.
Each with pen paper personhood
searches for what one knows not.

The heavy man with double chin
“They named me Pious like the Pope.
My father worshiped his decency.
Now look. I have left him no hope.”

Elderly, big and black
proudly wearing a Texas cap
he speaks with foreign sounds
suddenly ends, shutters eyes.

Harold, with hair as gray,
opens his mouth, has something to say
voice stutters, soul quakes,
lips quiver, body shakes.

Determined, finally gets out,
“Why so many whites angry
even their whole pa-pa-party
hates us ba-ba-blackmen?”

A slim brown woman chimes in,
“We all choose but what does that mean?
My aunt was a da Vinci as I am.
We stand with our feet astride.”

On the side, a regular remarks
so soft not heard, “We’re lost.
Unseen. Uncared. Can’t you see
we ought to be scared?”

Slim wonders why
the pagans didn’t die
death the Christians didn’t win
and who was Saddam Hussein.

Stutterer with effort pronounces,
“Sa-Sa-Saddam was bad, but Caligula much worse
He’s my fav: put his own si-si-sister in a hearse.
Whom did he pronounce was god?”

“Evil is as noble was. To be
a member of nobility,”
Slim adds. “One must be
raped by 3, just like me.
The da Vincis all are.”

I find my voice through
this babble thick,
“Pick up your pen.
Let us begin to write
for even with these troubles,
perhaps the Earth’s the right
place for love.”

d6: Saturday, April 16, 2016
BUDS

Sprouting leaves,
floral buds.
Cherry blossoms –
in December.

I have passed too many years
to perceive them bold –
so distant
from a foreign spring.
Lost adventurers born
to death before their time,
frozen in the coming clime.

An old man’s obsession
for protection
against the winters foreknown.

My children see
in this ephemeral display
this last harvest warmth
– indeed, in the identical tree –
just another surprise
gift of joy.

Their innocence carries
acceptance without fear
of the near, the visible,
an embrace of
seasonless beauty.

Who has the better vision
may not be the question.

d5: Saturday, April 16, 2016
THE COOL WARMTH OF HER SHADOW

My harvest done, the first of the red leaves floated
down through forebodings of cold winter
along an unknown path.
I turned, looked back
toward the crossroads where
minutes ago my daughter and I
joyfully embraced and imbibed the moment.
There she shared hopes, projects, plans, dreams,
then left walking expectantly toward an opulent
summer garden laden with a distant, yet foreseeable harvest.
Only a cool warmth from her shadow lingered over our meeting place.

d.4: Friday, April 15, 2016
Joe A. Oppenheimer
PUNCTUATING POET

Youthfully he utilized the period. 
Exclusively. Finalizing exclamations! 
Thoughts crafted completely 
encapsulating truthful certainties!

Until experience led 
him to commas, pauses . . .

illusions, liquid delusions, 
confusing turbulences 
creating run-on passages.

Finally he created a word mountain 
so frighteningly high 
he could see far and wide 
and spy even the dreaded end of the line.

(A point he meant to keep unreachable 
by a stealth d e c e l e r a t i o n 
and an open hyphen -

 d4: Monday, March 14, 2016
VOICES

In a plush armchair
edging toward sleep,
old words waft to me:
Children weep, elders say

Zwei Fahrkarten -
einfache nach Amerika —
tickets - one way.
I straighten up
stare at TV.

The tube stares straight back; speaks to me:

Where will you run to Old Sinner Man?

To the Bat Cave and Captain
America if I can.

So many brown shirts,
so many guns. Look!
There, see Trump’s crowd
thugs screaming loud.
Guns in hand.
Now what to do?
Where will you run to
old Sinner Man?

I'll run to Denmark if I can.

But Danes take trinkets from refugees.
They won’t want an old Jew who flies!
So where will you run to old Sinner Man?

Is there no place to be?
Is there no peace for me?

Trump leads me to crazy flight.

Trump’s next words float in the night:

I’LL BUILD THE WALL —
(Even if no one wants in.)
I’LL BUILD THE CAMP —
(Leave the bill for Jews to pay.)
DON’T LYCH BLACKMEN –
(We’re peaceful, it’ll all be play.)
ELECT ME COMMANDER —
(Then the games really begin.)
TOMORROW'S FINISHED FLOORS

Sadly, your tomorrow is my today
and my tomorrow is our travel day
home to a loss of deserted sand and azure surf
walks in a paradise
of tropical dreams.

Set for tomorrow? I'd say not.
When we arrive
will the walls be painted?
the floors finished?

the groceries arrived?
the new cell phones in the mail?
Or is all lost
and dust
as in the evaporated
dregs of a rather
polluted glass of water?

And your tomorrow, Steve,
have you calculated all
the evaporated
figments
it will contain?

d2: Thursday, February 4, 2016
SATURDAY CYCLING FOR SUGAR

A slow morphing golden
sweet spun sugar sunrise
awakens. Sarah silently sits up.
Saturday. Slipping my book
aside we enter an awaited moment.

Wordless happy hugs,
monkey faces at the changing table
glee of a coming bicycle ride.
A reign of silence ensures
we escape our sleeping home.

Sarah sings nonsense in her seat
wheeling through the dozing barrio
of East Austin
to the Sweetish Hill Bake Shoppe
in search of bear claws.

I watch for potholes, speeding trucks,
pedaling past any danger
that could snatch
my prized babe
in her yellow seat
and disallow her future flight.

d3: Sunday, December 20, 2015
**CHRONOGRAPHY**

Blonde chick with long flowing hair
riding on rails under Gotham.
Pen clipboard elegant air
graceful hands, legs brush with mine.

Standing she sketches a week’s new horaire
*Mon . . . Fri* all blanks no time
Calligraphically under *Wed*
  *Walk (poop)*
  *Play*
  *Food*
  *Walk (bag)*
  *Bed*
then carefully on top line
  *My Dog’s Week.*

Her calendar brings to mind another day.

Kids out at play. Hour’s set.
Suddenly it’s time children get
home for supper. It’s ready. It’s hot
but they haven’t got a sense of time
while the game’s still on.

Dogs, the young, what should they make
of our chronography?

Once London and Sheffield
could not agree on quarter to three.
Washington and Baltimore
had quarrels over quarter to four.
Each town could define
its own hour and time.

  It didn’t take Einstein to say
time was relative in that day.
  Trains forced us to rein
in our minutes, our time.

So why be surprised
when a child neither blinks
nor quits her game
when hearing her name
being called at dinner time.
GRAMMATIK COUNTY FAILED ARREST REPORT #1222015

(Log it as a case of wreckless writing
words and phrases fighting
properly written reality.)

Offender left the screen
last seen scribbling wildly
racing through lines,
avoiding grammar signs
hugging the center at times.
Her route – rarely linear –
disconnected from destination
avoiding all manner of punctuation
littering fragments and capitals along the way
leading rhetoricians and plebeians astray.

I had no choice but to take chase.
She had to be restrained.
Righteous usage must be reclaimed.

(My transcript tells all:)

Do you know where you’re going?
Can’t say I do: just toing and froing.
Froing? Such slang! Are there no rules to your road?
Can’t say I’d follow ’em: I’m no grammar toad.

What reason or rhyme is there for your erratic words?
Reason gave way to rhyme – to make things finer
use rhymer add rhythm to avoid a kludge.

Kludge? Whoa! Who are you to judge? There’s no coherence to the
story you tell!
Incoherence fits my writing well.

Are you writing under the influence?
The poet writes as the muses sense.

Down on your knees, I’m taking your keys!
You’ll have to pry them from my cold dead fingertips!

[I try to pry, for the chaos must end.]
You leave me no choice! I revert to a pen!

. . . Suspect sped into a suddenly black screen.

d6: Sunday, December 20, 2015
**Tick-Tock**

Abdul counts last clip, last round then starts counting minutes down.

Paul in blood on the floor playing dead – for God knows how much more.

Abdul sees a twitch by the door Paul takes a hit in the head on the floor.

Gig’s up, assailants know. it’s time to let their own vests blow.

Mildred mumbles while at the phone, 
*God, bring my Paul safely home.*

Adi screams at his TV
*No, not my Abdul, don’t let it be be!*

Two clocks tick, two clocks stop. Two parents’ hearts torn apart.

d4: Wednesday, December 16, 2015
Biography – Chapter One

Door
open
to bedlam –
sis on the floor
father stands tall
over her. Stop father
stop!
But still more hard kicks come
till I walk up to him and say,
quiet as the falling leaf,
sure as a dagger of death,
belly to belly,
Kick her again
and I will
kill you,
Dad

.  

d.4: Wednesday, December 16, 2015
BIOGRAPHY IN TWO SONNETS

Family Album

My mother — her oils, sketches, nudes, landscapes
My father — his absolute certitude
My mother — her soups, puddings, cookies, cakes
My father — his self presumed rectitude.
My mother — her friends, garden, flowers, fears
My father — his business, money, power,
My mother — her laughter, smile, cringing, tears
My father — his needs, demands, force, glower.

Last Shot

Seeing
Mother
bleed, he
could choose
to run
or fight.
The son
chose flight.

Now look, my father lifts the heavy case
Watch he swings it – knocks down mother
See her blood ooze from those cuts on her face?
They force me to choose: protect or other

road – Too little time to think, just react.
His violence tattoos me for life. A fact.

Her screams: his dreams.
DREAM HOUSE

[BUBBLES]
Water rushes over rocks
leaving breathless bubbles’
sunlit surfaces
ballooning busily with life
pursuing chaotic paths.

[DREAM HOUSE]
Mother dreams over sudsy
dinner dishes
planning pies paintings
and a home to be
in Chilmark – without him.

[FUTURES]
Water crashes down rapids
following laws unknowable
in forms unforeseeable
for it has no mind
but goes always to the sea.

[PAYNTINGS]
Mother’s dreams float
beyond furious fists
imagining he will die
and then I can live again.

[DESTINATIONS]
Late diagnoses soon say
it is not he but she.
A day dream shimmers and floats
glittering bubbles have their moment
like waters flow to the sea.

d7: Monday, November 30, 2015
DEAR MOMMA

Dear Momma,

Have I not written
since I left with the sailor
for the land of honey?
I was seventeen.
You stayed so far away
in Peru – so gone, my past.
Away. So long – so far – the hurt.

Today I am sixty-eight.
How old would you be?

Did I promise
to write and share my days?

But then the last light’s
shards come.
I tire and fall asleep, out here,
on the street.
Though I said I would write
about what I eat, I see, I do –
I don’t.

I do not do so much, Momma.
I eat what I find. I see the world
from my perch on the city’s corner.

When I was new here,
I had a son,
Hector.
He served in a war
and now belongs.

He can not find his mother,
with no address –
nor can I find him.

We are dead
leaves blown far from
your tree
scattered brown
awaiting winter to become
one with the cold ground.

I will write more often, Momma.
We can call more too.
I hope peace found you.

I love you. Lillian.

d4: Wednesday, November 11, 2015
LEAF
(a haiku)

If the leaf left now
still would we all wonder how
it could stay so long.

d1: Wednesday, November 11, 2015
COOL POETS

Some cool poets demand
to deal with the real
not with what
school preachers and teachers
sermonize, or things – left
in a late light lurk –
picked up and poeticized.
The real – told straight –
strike the heart
clear the world
of sin. Everyone, sing
rejoice, Hallelu!
(But we devils –
grab our gin and hold our thin
goblets to toast June
Bacchus and Jazz –
hope that soon those cool
angelic poets will die.)
CALL AND RESPONSE

They were lying there, in the tent during the hot midday rest hour. In the morning, the seven strapping youths had shown their bravado by refusing to admit that they couldn’t swim. He had to pull each of them, one by one, out of the lake so they wouldn’t drown. He had pulled the seven strapping youths out of the lake so they wouldn’t drown. He imagined he was their hero. For a moment. Then came their questions:

You. Mister. Are you Christian?

    No Jewish.

You a Jew?

My Dad says Jews got horns.

And a tail.

Yeah, they got funny feet.

They be the devil.

You got a tail?

    You saw me in my swimsuit. did I have a tail?

I didn’t see none.

Don’t mean nothin.

He still could got one.

You got horns?

    No.

Can I feel?

    What?

I wanna feel if you got horns.

Me too.

    I don’t have horns.

I gotta see.

Ma says you can’t trust Jews.

    I saved your sorry asses this morning.

Let me feel.

    OK.

I can’t feel nothin.

Me neither.

Does that mean you don’t got horns Mr. Joe?

d3: Monday, October 26, 2015
TURNING AND TAKING

The lamp turned out
the stars
And the cellar door broke
the wind open
While the drain drank the very
last of the water.

d3: Friday, November 13, 2015
arrive – we soldiers from the base’s ski rescue team
arrive – Morning, winter light slants
off a holy mountain’s snow banks.
Our proud soldier-faces absent fear
tethered to DOD’s cold weather gear
No war-paint-battle-seeking here.
We’d take skis and the chair,
save officers’ hot drinks over there.
Then, high fives and bravado,
confidence, smiles on show.
America’s finest, strong and fit
each porting first aid kit, serving
country proud and fair
come to find a Peace Corps pair
lost in whiteout in the trees
before exposure bodies freeze.
Realists ordered to save idealists:
the worthy lost. They help villagers tossed
by poverty, drought, disease.
Take one day off to do as they please.
What would you expect of them –
without the steely discipline
of military men?
But it’s all so bad! Do-gooders – pussies – lost in snow.
On top the team ski, search and shout
holler, scout about.
One says, ‘Sir it’s cold’
CO responds, “Let’s be bold:
‘Halt for chow!’

Our pause won’t hurt them any how.”
One private protests, “But it’s frigid! Entirely too much
for them.”
The lodge can shield our rescue team –
We enter, grab soup and steam, imbibe
deadly porridge of assorted dusty grain
leaving lost do-gooders out to gain
the biting chill to their bone.
A private begs to search on his own.
The officer snorts, “Soldier, sit down.”
Then a smoke, and a drink
until CO says, “OK men, let’s save those candy-asses!”

Here’s a scene for you. The soldiers look
in horror over the snow bound ground
till one private shouts, “Found!”
In ice white we crowd around
see two bodies embracing tight.
A candle’s light reflects in snow
a last breath came minutes ago.

We had our warm winter gear.
We had our soup, cabbage, beer –
our chops, cakes and cheer. Spent hours
leaving the cold. Enough time
to paint our crime. Away from
which we each then canter
reviewing clues of what we are
trying to avoid inhaling all
this laden air.

* (with a nod to Gwendolyn Brooks’ *The Lovers of the Poor*)
d5: Monday, October 19, 2015
THE NEIGHBOR

Neighbor’s moving.
But not by choice.
Kids’ll move her out.
Pack her up. Take her out of state.
To one of their towns.
Repotting a plant.

Will she take root?

Neighbor’s things. Boxed
Piled for charity.
Pictures off the wall. Photo albums.

What are photos stripped of memories?

She’s moving, but not her dog.
What will happen to the mutt?
She walks him. Cleans his messes.

Neighbor’s leaving home.
Daughter died in the kitchen.
Husbands in those beds.
A son married – in the yard.

Moving to a retirement home.
Brochures. Fancy dining.
One room. Private bath.

What’s a new place without ghosts?

d7: Friday, April 15, 2016
GODS ON FACEBOOK

“When were you born?”

received 27 likes on Facebook
even before Jesus could answer,
“When Mary conceived me deity.”

Shiva didn’t like my question
she claimed it disrespectful
coming from such a minor god as me
but like all others liked
the response from Jesus.

Mary, who friended Jesus
could, of course, not see my question
nor his response.
Besides, Mary’s sense of time
and birth is so pedestrian
she could never conceive our conception.

Just the other day
Zeus and Athena updated their status
from dormant to research.
Digitalizing left old timelines
renewable pursuable –
Now we see comments
and supplications
of long deceased believers.

It seemed all liked the change
but then Mephistopheles raged,
“Dormant doesn’t exist – dead is dead!”
to which Jahweh said,
“You old devil, what’s wrong with your head?
Only Nietzsche is dead.”
Which was liked by all
and shared by many.

But the devil gets last likes
when he shares human fights
over whose god can deliver peace
or help Maggie pay her lease,
or rescue Gladis pleading Jahweh
to hide her last affair with Jay
or answer any two-bit call
scrawled on paper,
stuck in a wall.
He oft comments
what we know,
“We’re impotent
and so can do nothing.”

Happily we gods are democratic:
all of us big and small
share timelines and find
that we don’t mind
entreaties of man
begging us to do what they can
not
and praising us no matter what –
as if they forgot
who created whom.

d.4: Tuesday, October 13, 2015
HORIZONS

Once a great explorer,
my neighborhoods shrink.
My children – in Kansas City,
now a foreign land –
beyond my ability.

Would that were all –
I have lost the birds' call;
trees have no name.
Though branches embrace
my heart the same
familiar as forever.

I greet my mountains now in 
clouds, without horizon,
devoid of deer, pine,
burbling brook,
garish wild flowers.
Clouds only reflect closing colors
of the occasional sunset.

My universe – smaller rooms,
lessened furniture.
Still, I inhale the sunrise with coffee
and marvel at the nonsense called news.

d.7: Monday, August 24, 2015
ON THE 7th DAY

On the ramp off 95
Stood Ben, an old ex GI
Working cars for some change or more
Still hurting from the shock of war.

Ben learned to walk around
Sirens still wailed air raid sound
Mothers cursed endless war
While politicians swore
they would bring peace.

Only slowly did we find
what the gods had designed
defined our species and our fate
gave us war, locked the gate
gave our brains to understand
what would be the future of man.

At the moment of copulation
that allowed for Ben’s gestation,
the British Museum was shipping
their ancient Greek shields for safe keeping
from Nazi bombs.

We marched through Iraq, Iran,
Cuba, Laos, Vietnam
Dominica and Lebanon,
just to name a few
before Ben was old enough to do
his service.

Human aspirations
for peace between nations
and other fabulations
conflict with man’s desire
for power, wealth to acquire
the need to lift ourselves higher
than our neighbors.

Politicians break their oaths
Mothers bake celebratory loaves
for sons who wear Battle clothes
while Mars grows fat as he is fed
from both sides battle dead

While Ben still in a crib lay
hundreds of tailors were paid
to stitch thousands of uniforms
all too soon bloodied and ruined
by bullets and shrapnel.

Yet even now, each 7th day,
done with begging off 95
for coins and bills to stay alive,
Ben goes somewhere to sit and pray:
All mighty, and loving one,
Shalom, Salam, in any tongue.
Grant us peace! Spare our young!

But she has long gone
deaf to prayer.

Humans came to teach
if we wanted peace
we should all come to pray
that the Gods remap
those genes that bring combat
and drives we can’t control.

Tuesday, May 5, 2015, d4
Hello all you Coppers out there! Time for you to get on the air. Call in; tell us your concerns; Let’s make our enemies squirm.

Hello, John, from St. Flair? What you got to share?

Copter in the air
klieg lights: police.
Man dead on stair
tried to grab my gun
when I went to stun
the bastard.

Thank you Sargant
I guess you learnt
that would be best
to keep from the press.

Next in, Flynn, from Alex, VA. What you got for us today?

Crazy as a black loon
we thought she’d swoon
when we shackled and
shocked her but
she fell. Died. Might as well
try to keep it off the books.

Sounds like mighty bad luck there
hope her death don’t scare up some
protest nuts sayin’ you didn’t take care,
like happened where Martin Brown’s from.

We got us a first time caller
from way South in Florida

What they doin’ in my hood?
And how they could
sell that African Arab clown
Osama to be my President?
Just seems don’t nobody care.
Whole country’s goin’ blow.
I’ll take mine off the air
and turn the radio low.

Monday, April 27, 2015, d7
My roots, long intimate with their soil
and the worms and moles that slowly
worked their way toward
the heads of Pontius and those other heroes
who burned my ancestors for their warmth
we whose underground, loving touch brings us sustenance
will endure those humans who would bring us down.

The heads of Pontius and those other heroes
who burned my ancestors for their warmth
we will endure those humans who would bring us down!
My roots, now intimate with the soil
and the worms and moles that slowly
work their way toward
those whose underground loving touch brought us sustenance.
Trying to Shelve Adam Z!

I. The Joy of Eating
Too sick to celebrate
but well enough
to eat what’s on my plate
I chewed on food for thought
and realized that such pleasure ought
to keep the poet at bay.

II. Career Choice
The laugh scared the poem away
and I was not sorry.
That must be why
I became – an accountant.

III. Adam’s Reprise
Under sheets and in the dark
threats of flames begin to spark –
envy, greed, lust consume us all as fuel
taken in as tyrants’ fools
leaving ashes on scorched, deserted plain
belying humanity with self-inflicted pain.

Saturday, April 4, 2015, d. 2

1/ Three little verses inspired by putting away Adam Zagajewski’s poems.
PHOTOS

Yesterday or some time ago
he set the screen to show
a rapid glow of pixels
shifting like clouds in the wind
through the lace of his life
photos documenting –
heres and theres
thens and whens.

Yesterdays and other times ago
he would recall, if slow, those
places faces walks talks
laughs and sorrows
fish farms ponds fronds
barns beaches
bikes hikes bustling business buildings burbling babies
and other snappy scenic stoppers.

Yesterdays and other times ago
slip slow into an undefined mist.
Arthritic fingers no longer
hold down shutters,
mow down keys.
They rather miss the mark.
Neurons no longer spark
to put word to pics to tie
something to someone
no longer
identifiable.

And the shots still scroll
and will
until
someone
pulls the plug.

d. 7, Monday, April 27, 2015
Early spring morning, cold, East of the Med Sea
in the land where Abraham, and the first temple used to be –
where God sent Jesus, Joseph, and Abraham,
just hours from Jerusalem.

Early spring morning, cold, in the past present or not at all
no longer on the green line but within the wall
somewhere specific between here and there
now reportable only as nowhere.

Early spring morning, cold, sun peeking in the East.
Ari stands guard with his Uzi beast
loaded. Two dogs, just in case
meaning his mind can adjust,
not race, when problems come up.

Early spring morning, cold, still shadows where she walks,
Hajar – knows what to say but not to talk
Hebrew. Under her black abaya Hajar’s mound grew
heavy, threatening, and out of view.
Up at the checkpoint now.

Ari sees the bulge, points and asks in his tongue
what under there might be slung.
She says, My baby! I am in labor.
Begs for help, asks for favor,
But he does not speak, Arabic.

He barks for her to raise her gown
she only understands the frown.
Ari calls his seargent over
Moshe speaks, in Arabic – Raise
your smock! which she – for a man
– certainly can not.

Feel my belly - is what she said
Don’t! orders Moshe, If it’s a bomb we’re dead!
She screams in pain, turns around
takes some steps; kneels on the ground
prays to Allah for his help.

Late spring evening, cold, sun sets.
Behind a burned out vehicle she steps,
delivers now without flair
her baby boy gasping for air.
Again she prays, Allah, mercy.

Late spring evening, cold, some poor Arab
screams,
Bastards! Don’t you see! It’s just what it seemed!
The mother cries demanding care
The babe needs help but it isn’t there.
Ari, Uzi loaded, and with dogs

watches the infant gasp and die
goes home to forget, forgive and try
to understand the reason why
occupation
is still imposed on this
woman’s nation.

Then celebrates freedom at his Sedar.

Tuesday, April 14, 2015, d. 7
Leisurely, Lowell looked
   to history to see
   blasphemy, dancing
   merry round
   Morton’s Maypole.
Robert listened to pilgrims’ prayers:

Pray, God – come, feed us bullets.
   Sharpen our blades!
Lead us, oh Endecott,
   our Gilgamesh,
let our Puritans,
   save sinners’ souls
or slit sinners’ throats
   to celebrate you, our God.

Come, kill blasphemers,
   dancing savages.
Grant us now our new Israel!
   Our Lord, our Gilgamesh.

Only you can save
   our daughters
from tyrants’ raping,
   tyrants’ taking.

Pride us with holy guns
   grant us land to
   distant waves,
   and furs forever.

God listens, Gilgamesh comes.
   He too rapes daughters
   slaughters sons.

Still now hear us, fools,
   still begging once more.

And half a world away – but
today loudly printed
on papers’ pages –
foretold by Prophetic poets –
come God’s new children
   out of the desert.

Blades unsheathed.
   Pray all to God.
   Send us bullets.
   Sharpen our blades.
   Deliver our Gilgamesh!
   Murder immodest maidens
dancing bout modern Maypoles.
   Bleed unveiled blasphemers,
   here in holy Levant.
   Let your blood seep
   in sands silently
to be drunk by our Prophets.
   Save our daughters.
   Hear our voices
dear Daesh, our
   Gilgamesh.

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1/ Robert Lowell wrote a trilogy of one act plays: “Old Glory.” The first of these is *Endecott and the Red Cross* which takes place around 1630 in Puritan Massachusetts. The play reflects history: Endecott, governor of Massachusetts, slaughters native Americans participating in a festival near a trading post run by Morton. *Gilgamesh* is a narrative poem (almost 4000 years old) reputed by some to be the beginning of Western literature. In many of its versions, people pray to the gods for relief from an awful tyrant. The gods answer the prayers by delivering Gilgamesh, a giant, mighty warrior. Everyone celebrates his arrival, eventual victory, and coronation. But Gilgamesh also turns tyrannical and the populace turn to pray for relief again.
TOUCH

Every day, he feared he would forget the valley’s gentle contour, the precise beauty of its bare slope and he hoped all the water in the lake

would pass through his inkwell so he could write words to bind the scene in his mind.

Yet he knew even were all the water behind the dam

to turn to ink in his pot he could not capture the valley of her back nor the silken vee of her bent leg and the hill that was her hip that he could never see

under the covers. So always before nodding off, he took to tracing it with his finger as, beside him, she slept.

Joe A. Oppenheimer – d.5
Tuesday, January 12, 2016
ODE TO A GANNET

Screeching
her lament
so transparent
in its horror –
freezing walkers
in their tracks.

To Australia
he has flown
non stop –
two thousand kilometers –
just to mature.

They all do.

Seasons pass.
They return
to mate one of their own
west of Auckland.

They all do,
if they can
make it.

Eyes so fine
he sees fish
in the brine
from a height
unseen with our sight
then falls for food.

They all must;
they all do.

He dives for fish
like a rock
that clocks
100 k per hour
into the sea –
into the surf.

They all dive,
to stay alive.

Years pass.
Eggs hatch.
Over time
oceans scratch
away eyelids.
He goes blind
yet hopes to find

They all must.

He hits the rock,
breaks his neck,
she flies
to his side
screeching
her cry from day
through night.

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LINEAGE

A slip of skin
under the scope
revealed the kin
ship lines evolved
from great 18th
century art to
cinematographer’s
start of the cut
in the first scene.

d. 2: Tuesday, December 2, 2014
ADDICTIONS
What good is a clock if it shows the wrong time;
What purpose a cig machine when it is stuck?
“To clean us as addicts!” spouted the sage.

“Force us to pen a new line;
notice the moment in time
or speck of clean air;
push us to turn a new page

then pluck the joy of living,
from that instant lying there!”

d. 3: Tuesday, December 2, 2014
THE SLEEPER

It is night
and I wander
the tubes,
tunnels
carried along
malignant
in the red tide,
the flow of life.

It is night
as you embrace
exercise sweat
together,
praying for
new life and more.

I sense you conjoined.
She asleep
unaware that I
roam your interior
undetected. As Hades
checks the gates, it is I
who unlock them
for your arrival.

My surreptitious army
gains strength
as you sleep.
They are nourished
as you eat.
You become my strength,
your flesh is my bait
to accrue my recruits.

I multiply a million fold
yet remain under cover,
attacking, destroying
dreams, hopes, prayers,
exchanging your plans
for my promises
of pain and death.

d. 5: Sunday, November 23, 2014
MEMORY CHIPS

To say today
was full of luck
would be to say
too little – or --
to whittle those
redwood glory
trees to chips
too small
to see.

Instead:
Champagne!
Parade!
Party too!

Or perhaps
just a smile
will do –
to file today
in my bank
of best
memories.

d. 3: Tuesday, December 2, 2014
(upon hearing that I don’t have to have a biopsy for bone cancer)
PICS AND TRICKS

Like the rabbit in the hat
the kid at the show
 grew up – watched it all go.

The “Ooh’s,” the “Ahh’s” –
 but where’s the trick when
the rabbit reappears?

Then Will left the stage
 and slipped out, snuffed,
gone – nary a shout.

Like Leslie who went early –
 just disappears.
“Poof,” no longer here.

Next came Herb
all alone. Here
one minute, then gone.

Still people noticed.

It wasn’t magic anymore
 for me when friends
 disappeared so easily.

I looked for signs –
 found only bright lines –
 boundaries, as it were
 between is and isn’t
 here and not,
 I on the inside
 hat on the out.

Until I slipped my disc
to the doc, who
 when opening the pic
 quietly proclaimed,
as if on a cue,
“This? This will kill you.”

d. 4: Monday, November 17, 2014
(upon being told I’d die of bone cancer)
Ives

Here comes music -
a band round the bend
Can you tell the tune,
An anthem – then –
but now – a march
– a joke?
A honk from a truck
or some brass's
violence twisting a tune
now marooned
in a key we can't
understand any more.

There's an echo of Bach
in that beat,
or is it the local rag caller
in the fracas in the street?

Now someone's singing
How Dry I Am –
and listen: Dixie!
That's Sweet Bye and Bye
on the piccolo: it sounds
sung by a pixie. All that
cacophony brought by
waves in the sky.

God bless me!
Now we can hear
the music:
They are playing
finally,
Rock of Ages.
Isn't it beautiful?

d. 3: Friday, October 31, 2014
GALLERIES

When affection fades
and the photo is taken from
the sun-drenched wall,
evidence of its erstwhile presence
remains.

One’s eye, less binary
than arm’s impulsive snatching,
stays practiced
and
when repetitiously passing the wall
strays upon the darkened rectangle
and sees the inconstant objects,
or indeed, nothing,
or yet at times – memories:
a past no longer enshrined;
or even only
a fading shadow:
to paper anew.

When youth fades
even more gradually than affection
or the paint on the wall
or the shadows of its shrine,
one wonders where, and what youth was;
and what paper has caught its penumbra
and where now can one find its fading.
For we walk by
walls of time but once,
first hoping to chose –
but often being but given –
a surface on which our shadow is cast.

Those memories emblazoned
on the hidden surfaces of chance
are our art galleries,
our museums.
And so youth passes in part
to the walls of parents
as would a Matisse or a Van Gogh.

d. 4: Tuesday, October 7, 2014
Walking, down the beach, 
listening to voices 
long lost 
from summers past:

“Hey, Joe!” 
a dear dead 
friend calls out

as I stroll 
on the sands 
toward where 
she always 
planted their 
umbrella.

Random perturbance - 
synapses recall 
images, sounds, smells.

Barnacled boulder 
half submerged 
in waves – 
both caught by 
red setting sun; 
tall clay cliffs 
tower above; 
we play till 
dinner time.

Smells of low tide 
come to me 
even as 
the surf rides high.

I turn back, 
discover 
today’s footprints 
already 
washed away.

d. 6:Thursday, September 11, 2014
TERRITORIALITIES

The dog peed
on each of the trees.

The big blonde
sat at the water fall
and tried to find

words which
would let her
possess it.

d. 2: Monday, September 29, 2014
Now

26 diag and blood
dripping at the door –
color red hi - tech
what ever for.

Press the vol-up
cover-up
hide the violence
on the next floor.

Ad:
An old two fer'
seen before
So chan down
to parts of town with cop cars
and death in bars -
Reality:
not your cup of tea?
Press vol-up cover-up”
stop the angry “Gotta getta”
from the real boy
whose last toy was
a Biretta
semi-auto.

Ad:
Jumping Jacks.
Just Do It!

Chan-up
next scene:
returns to clean
the technicolor drops
on the TV screen
to go with
a plot twist.

New silence below
permits vol-down low
with the quiet of the moment
in your part of town

As if in your head
mute –
were possible
outside the remote
in your hand –
and could bring back
peace
in your home
even now
as when
you, a boy, slept
with unbarred
open windows,
till tomorrow.

d.3: Saturday, October 4, 2014
CHILDHOOD

When the thunder rolled over
and the storm cleared –
scared, we’d sit,
and do
damage checks.

“Are you OK?”
“Yes, are you?”

Again and again
till we knew
we really were.

As the lashing winds
gave way
to calm
we’d prick our fingers
and make our blood promise:

“We will never
   . . . be like him.”

Over and over again.

And then we’d swear our
further oaths:
to stop each other if
   . . . to never let those
tempests come again.

But they always did.

Later, in our minds
they came back
forever uninvited –
clouding childhood,
children, parenting,
and then
finally
   . . . blocking
the light

of the sun.

d. 3: Friday, September 5, 2014
The whole summer passed wrapped in shrouds
as if clouds blanketed sky and no rains
fell and heat scorched the brains
of friends and smiles were lost for the season.

Without the waters and sun of summer
colors of fall were done being bright
and leaves were brown when in the grey
winds of shortened light they hit the ground.

Even the winter proved cold: without the white
bright fluff of snow that tends to let smiles
glow even as temperatures stay below
our comfort zone.

Only in spring did flowers begin to
blossom: crocuses breaking through
men’s glowers; pinks and reds
hinting from brown beds some joy ahead.

And as the earth ended its latest orbit
news came to the fore – the trip had been spent,
as much as we call a year, meant by us for living,
but rent by us in mourning.

The time lost to our minds
by his dying;
focused on how
his brain’d
rained blood,
on how he’d neither
been sick nor old,
and no one foretold
he wouldn’t live any more,
nor how
we could go on
without
forever more.

d.2: Monday, June 30, 2014
Kate pauses, yawns, stretches, wonders what she’s missed in the new New Yorker.

Her plot’s been stuck — she can’t decide: should he live or die? If he’s not to live is it by murder or by suicide?

Her villain, hot on his trail, has picked the spot for her foul deed.

It’s just that Kate has not yet decreed his fate when her tooth acts up again.

Going for aspirin Kate bangs a toe just so against the rocking chair’s runner and thinks, He should die!

Stops for a cup of coffee so bad, that even her tad of sugar didn’t cure. — His unfair death would not be worse than the burdens that curse my path.

At which point her wife phones, “Let’s dine alone, spend the evening home. I’ll buy some wine, cook your favorite fish, which will taste fine after other delights prime our appetites.”

Bitter java downed, Kate turns round back to her plot: lets her villain rot in hell, and her victim live a life well into old age.

d.8: Monday, June 23, 2014
Desert Home

Sparkling for kings, pearls and diamonds reds, blues, greens decorate the dawn – my place is set with shiny things.

Thirstily I drink the jewel like drop of dew settled on my new emerging pink.

Sun rises up promising my petals responding to yesterday's rains stretching out to grab the rays they know will arrive on the canyon floor.

I feel the faint hop of a jack – a swift flow of air from a diving hawk that lifts it as prey.

The iron in the red sandstone glows deep as rows of rocky columns, domes and rounds above my home – my small desert crevice – are painted by a light that rose only to bestow me with all the beauty I blush to think of.

Sunlight comes to help create my progeny. And now a single bee arrives but too soon. I am not yet open.

A stag comes close. Its nose checking if I can be his dessert. But my many sharp thorns deter him.

Now the sun delivers even down to my hollow, and I open ever so slowly to receive its warmth.

Then just in time, another bee comes to take my gift of new life to the hedgehog cactus across the mesa.

d.5: Monday, June 16, 2014
May-ree Mack, Dressed in Black

May-ree Mack,
Mack, Mack
all dressed in black
black, black
Silver buttons
buttons, buttons
up and down her back.

Gimme a nickel, gimme a dime.
Mother’s been gone a real long time
can’t see joy, music, or jive,
filling the house like she’s alive.

Easter candy on the grounds.
Ghosts chanting – hear their sounds.
short old songs
stretching times
jumping grandsons
sing Ella’s rhymes.

And she never came back
back, back
After fourth of July
lie, lie.

He asked his mother
mother, mother
For fifteen cents
cents, cents
To watch the elephants
elephants, elephants
Jump the fence
fence, fence

Went to the river, couldn’t get across
Ella’s music fresh with loss
singing with spirit mothers bore
all for chil’en she bought music for.

He jumped so high,
high, high
He touched the sky,
sky, sky

Song ends now, new one comes.
Easter’s gone. Time moves on.
Sing me a song again, Ella
like you used to do.

You'll sing a song, I'll sing a song,
we'll sing a song together.

Dulce Dulce, ... CLAP CLAP CLAP.

d.5: Tuesday, May 13, 2014
SHADOWS

As she lay dying
mother said
“when the moon is full,
glance and wink;
then will we meet.”
I do so, still,
if the night is clear.

Is she there or here
in mind or sky?
Those questions no longer
linger in my heart:
others there lie.

The full moon
all too soon wanes
behind a shadow
of earth’s reality.
Again, mother is gone.

Now, clarity
fades, replaced by
a restless quest
for why and what
kept you tied
to a penumbra of marriage
and family life
so often laced
with violence
dished out at night.

Times’ passing hides
the lunacy of what
must have been
inside, though I imagine
some topsy turvy love / hate
sealing fate.

Earth’s shadow grows;
the full round turns
to finger nail.
And slowly disappears.

I reject the love / hate glue
that tied you – replacing it
with imagined fears
that left no exit

Then with quietude:
a fortnight
of solitude,
unburdened by
these speculations.

The circle hanging
comes around once more,
high, bright,
in the black of night.

I wink again.
Now, only sky
is clear.

d.6: Tuesday, May 13, 2014
COULDN’T YOU HEAR ME LISTENING?

I.

Listening is what we all now do.
Wire split in two, going from apparat to ear,
permits us not to hear.

Tuning our world to perfectly canned: bumpless, grimeless forever timeless.
Lock out bums’ lives.
Block out strangers’ jives trying to greet from the street, with a stray request – like a cat crying to be let in.

I’ll try to listen.

II.

I was glad to see you three came and sat next to the table I was at.
I wanted to overhear your stories.

There was your greeting. But then lips closed; voices died; phones came out; thumbs went wild.

Time passed. She laughed; the short guy sighed.
Then a “gotta go.”
Phones in.
Out you went.

Couldn’t you hear me listening?

III.

The fat man sitting in the back talking on his phone.
Wading in philosophy, suddenly exclaimed:
“I don’t care about legacy.
It’s too late.
The eulogies’ll be great, but people will step over my body before it gets cold.”

He needed to know I was listening.

I stood. Loudly stated “I hear therefore I am.”
But there he was: buds in his ear.
I hollered but still, he could not hear.


d.7: Friday, April 4, 2014
WARrior SPECIES

The candle
gulps
and recovers
its small altitude

after
hearing
of man’s attitude
regarding killing.

Why is blood ever so thin
copulation’s child
can’t win
a reprieve
from our next war?

d.2: Friday, April 4, 2014
YOU CAME

Love, love
    I,
    your mother,
        hung your cave with roses
        For joy and celebration.
        more than half a century ago.

Life, life,
    you,
    my son,
        came so deformed
        I had to tear down the blossoms
        when I saw the life I gave was too small

    for
    you to
        grow beyond boy or leave
        as a self. I thought
        I’d grieve my every day.

But Love,
    we
        as one,
        taught each other, brought each other
        so much joy, so much light
        our cave is always hung with roses.

d.3: Monday, April 14, 2014
BLOOD

Blood thick
as chains
forges
links between slave and free –
victims and executioners.

Blood thin
as water
flows
between us mongrels
defining a species
formed in the main
by random copulations.

How else to explain a cargoed cousin
fleeing the certainty of death camps
endorsed
by her loving Father?

Or swapping war stories
between other cousins –
Mengele’s assistant and the Director
of denazification
– traded in front of joint grandchildren?

d.1: Friday, March 28, 2014
How

How can I paint the sky
if I can not see?

How can I sing the song
if I can not hear?

How can I taste the wine
if I can not smell?

And how can I tell you sorry
if I can not love?

d.6: Tuesday, March 11, 2014
LITTLE POEM TO HISTORIANS

Behind me always
there pushes a rat
to see if he can provoke
the killer in me.
Every now and then
the flea on the rat jumps.
And the rat says,
“Quick, kill to affect history.”
But ’fore he can call forth
this little bit of humanity
that tiny something inside me dies
and I think of fried
rice and carrots, diced
and spiced, and music
and wine. To which I reply,
“Now, now, now darling
let’s just laugh and cry.”

d.3: Tuesday, March 18, 2014
PROSE WORDS

For those who would propose some words be restricted to prose may I list clothes and chose these and those fingers and toes.

This and that dog and cat whine and chat stand and sat

But why stop there when there is hair and Claire and fair and dare?

Indeed, without an end in sight I could go on all night and yet never find the light that could delight those that might propose the word list for prose.

d.1: Friday, April 4, 2014
IN THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE LIVES

[With nods to Mary Ruefle Madness, Rack, and Honey (pp. 8-9), “And in the best of all possible lives ... beginning and ... end are the same: in poem after poem I encountered words that mark the first something made out of language that we hear as children repeated night after night, like a refrain: 'I love you. I am here with you. Don’t be afraid. Go to sleep now.' And I encountered words that mark the last something made out of language that we hope to hear on earth: 'I love you. I am here with you. Don’t be afraid. Go to sleep now.'

They say beginnings and ends are the same. Like a refrain: “Sleep now, love you.”

Don’t they mean What comes round, Momma? That’s what I think.

Eliot fought Frost but Robert knew.

Steps you took can’t lead to the same end as ones never traveled except in some crazy poetic image in your mind, Momma.

Each walk you walked mattered: moved me and you to some new place of pain with losses not regained. Places when seen cracked rear view mirrors leaving shards. We bleed.

I could show you all the spaces between paths not taken and where I’ve been. I’d just grab a gun and plan your end like you’d me begun with never an “I love you.” Sleep now, Momma.

d.6: Wednesday, March 19, 2014
CANYONS

Gushing from childhood fissures
created by violent quakes,
ink glistening in moon light.

Words didn’t flood the paper
but feed flowers’
sweet fragrances.

From memory
Storm clouds grow.
Rains eat fertile soil
unsettling roots
dropping trees
leaving sharp edges

hard rocks naked
exposing their
colored striations.

Faster, words flow
slicing steep canyons
on the page.

Pleasant images banished,
traditions challenged,
truths uncovered

Revealing a poetic
but limited vision:

reflecting rhythms
of inner thought.

d. 6: Wednesday, April 2, 2014
The photo albums fall apart; 
snaps lie randomly 
unpatterned at my shoes.

I pick up a faded one – 
a high school hall 
with stairs, yellow tiles on the wall 
green linoleum on the floor 
exteen age girls strutting 
their stuff. Duck tailed guys 
acting tough 
in the late 50's.

I slip into that hall so many years 
in its future – perhaps it no longer exists. 
But I hear the buzz of voices, 
laughter, shrieks of girls. 
I smell the stale odor of the gym, 
taste forbidden reefers, and sharp mint 
of Wrigley's cover ups.

Neither the voracious appetites 
of wars nor time 
had eaten into our roster. 
Those most likely to succeed still were. 
We all had bright futures.

A curly blonde is being introduced to me 
on those stairs - 
carrying her binders 
stacked at her waist 
making her breasts appear 
prominent above the books.

Below her red calico skirt ended high enough 
to promise something to someone 
Lucky enough to massage those calves.

Then, so slow that though 
you looked every day 
no change could be seen 
and you never could say you saw 
blonde turn to gray to white.

And love aged so unlike 
its sudden bursting 
like that of spring 
that surprises when 
like thunder it arrives.

Rather it happened like a fruit ripens 
with sweet nectar and aroma. 
In such slo-mo 
that though you searched every week 
for change, you could not speak 
of love's deepening 
nor can it be seen but by memory.

d. 7: Friday, October 11, 2013
SERVING TEA IN AN 18TH CENTURY MINIATURE

Until paper turns to dust
I am my master’s tea servant.
He is off canvas – unseen.
I am but thin black lines.

Color has been given only to my shoes.

She who did not sign her name
drew my frame with
gay blooms and black vines.
They imprison me.

I shall protest my state.

To My Master

For centuries I have served you tea.
Never have I heard gratitude.
Rather, I am caught in servitude’s dark.
Miniaturized as one of Orient’s multitude,
a slave you command to serve your tea.

“No mess, girl! Tread quietly!” you bark.
You see me but a cartoon without dignity.
After all these years you know not my name,
nor do you ever consider to set me free.

I shall protest once more!

To My Creator

You, with the power to create a universe
as God, have drawn me a slave –
yet pretend to art’s neutrality.
Giving color to flowers and now
I even envy
the lowly shoes on my feet.

You drew me bound and bland
to blend as ochre
into the paper
as if I,
a woman,
am to disappear –
Wall paper
for life’s passings by.

Where is my blade
to cut the heavy vines?

D. 7: Thursday, October 3, 2013
Mirror, mirror, on the wall
e-calendars tell it all.
Counting days gone
and still to come,
marking holidays for cheer,
reminding us - the doc at four,
hear Mozart. Fix the door.

Mine showed Labor day falls on my friend’s birthday. I hoped he would live till then.

It has reminders on some days
to pay attention in different ways.
Now mine says “Get the gift for Jean” –
Just before her birthday on Halloween.

But in Feb it once again said she was dead since 2010.

And then come birthdays,
with its electronic ping,
a pop-up says “Call.”
But there will be noone
to answer the phone ring.
and I could only recall
passings marked in other ways –
reminders that have become
an index of my days.

Follow the index entries and I arrive at holes.

Turning to the page the index cites
I find a hole in the text.
Like a line of a poem once remembered
now lost forever.
Take Jean, we used to share most everything
but now to whom to say ‘did you see that?’
when the batter swings.
Or who to tell the good idea
or discuss the why of market downs.

d. 5: Friday, October 4, 2013
EKPHRASIS
(A verbal description of a piece of art, which itself could be imaginary.)

Mother, seated to my left.
We ate formally, unless
we were blessed
by my father’s absence.

On the wall, behind her
an impressionist landscape:

fields of corn and green;
a farm house in back
red tile roof, three birds
flying
black in a clouded sky.

But most important a mauve swath
with streaks of tan
(perhaps a road, perhaps heron)
starting lower right, sudden
swing left
through the field,
rising above it
past the farmhouse
to nowhere in the corner.

“Road” I say now, and some days then.
But I am not sure.
Often it seemed a heron.
I watched both over the years.

d. 7: Tuesday, March 18, 2014
ENDINGS  
Friday, June 29, 2012

Birthdays pass.  
I don’t count their number. 
And lately, with them, 
funerals 
that mark ends.

And in the box 
we see friends 
and brothers 
and eyes that look up 
while ours gaze down

Until quietly it turns 
around. And their brown 
orbs are up and 
just beyond 
I would see a cloud.
SHARING

Frowning.
Hand in hand.
Walking.
Even though
they're not
talking –
and don't
like life or
each other.

d.2: Sunday, June 24, 2012
KEY LIME PIE GREEN AND COOKIE CRUMB CRUST BROWN

How many ways can seven days
be spent with key lime pie green
cookie crumb crust brown

on hospital walls and flooring tiles
as it all comes down
to these God-like between

difficult questions
that no one mentions
as part of friendship’s forever?

How many acts can doctors’ facts
justify in the name of love,
family, friendship, and mercy

Does it include the move to remove
the ventilator, respirator, and more
and take my friend forever like gods?

Then, how many good-byes can I
speak, waiting for a response
that can never come?

d. 5, Wednesday, January 8, 2014
Lucky Retirement
Friday, September 6, 2013
(published in Faculty Voice, Oct. 15, 2013)

Can’t believe I’m retired
now, not in ’67.
Then, being sent to heaven
was the USN option.

How did I retire instead
of dying on that hospital bed?
We had no meds in boot camp.
Those supplies went for Nam’s dead.
Lacking paper in the stalls,
we wiped our shit on the walls.

Why’d I get to retire when
all my company was sent
to the USS Liberty
only to be blown up at sea?

How could I retire when
others lost their entire
fortune, forced to become
greeters – days spent in some
K-Mart, Wal-Mart nothing place
wearing a fixed smiling face?

The dice were nice
when they rolled for me.
Friends say, ‘you deserved it.’
Others? ‘The bastard’s lucky.’
SELF-PORTRAIT

Yesterday, hanging the gallery’s room:
I began with ‘Bordello Salon’:

a gauzy oil – thin blue,
salacious pinks. Women nude and bold.
Entry wall, solo. “Charmy beckons!”
critics will see she surely invites –
“Enter the bawdy! Escape the cold!”

Next I hung pomegranates: open,
lush, painted boldly exposing their
flamingly fertile flesh
bright with full painted lips
as she brushed her portraits.

Final task: hanging her
last self-portrait, alone
on the short, white, half wall.

There’s Em’lie in a chair.
Her face a mound of pinks –
no eyes, no mouth, no ears;
her thick paints webbed spidery –
paints cracked and crushed by years.

“You too ugly,” I did say,
“Why’d she paint it that way?”

Turned ’round and saw it hanging there:
her early self with brazen brown hair,
inviting hips, and firm bosoms bare,
fetching smile, rimmed in red,
opened robe on a chair.

Between these so many
years apart, what was lost?
her loves, her sons, her art?
Those years stole all beauty.

With my bra, now I stand
hitch and straighten before the mirror.
Just like hanging paintings
for show: alignment, fit, must be so.
Lipstick, enticing red, now to paint,
my lips – a shadow faint
thin: no place to begin.

What’s her age in the first?
Really ninety one?
I’m also old
nearly spent,
nearly –
done.

I too once bared my breasts
for loves, my man, to touch
my son to take my milks.

Now? All gone – wars and death
lost to the grasp of time.

My hair, once black and thick
now thin and grey and white.
My red paint stick, brassiere –
These? But for whose delight?
Whose eyes? There’s no one here.

Featureless fleshy face
stares back at me –
a picture
best kept
out of
view.

d. 9: February 11, 2014
THE GOOD PASTOR'S WIFE TO MARKET

The good pastor's wife to market
in her long black Buick,
to buy lobster and salmon
for ladies’ luncheon
from church and choir
and bourbon for self.

Pastor New speaks well
so down the road well worn
she plods looking again to the cloth
for the froth on her broth.

Once model, and torch singer,
with loves hot and strong
sizzling and morally wrong,
one now lost but never gone long
from her mind.

Preacher Two good, and kind
but soon illness she finds
gives him an unbalanced mind.

The long finger of time
gives passions moderation while
Amanda searches for moral foundation.
And marries her first churchman.

Amanda still lunches the ladies
on cheese, fish and meat,
and salads green
though now between
in the good pastor’s home
she sips bourbon unseen.

She gives up clubs for choir,
drugs for teas with ladies
who never aspire
to night clubs, or cat walks.
Who’d rather listen to pastors’ talks
in the bosom basement of the church.

The kids grow and they leave.
From his last fall she grieves
– alone in their home
still with a dream of the love
who had long ago gone.

Her family grows to five
They teach their three to be
joyously alive
free in thought
respect to all who ought
to be treated decently.

On Facebook Amanda looks
finds love lost in her mind’s
synapsis has wife and family,
which taps into her loneliness.

But then her companion
runs out of life
and the good pastor’s wife
considers anew the road to stride.

There’s address and phone.
Blues singer calls but unheard
puts it down quiet, alone.

Amanda grows old, infirm,
but stays the course
of ladies for luncheons
but without parson to hear
and nothing to say.

d. 3: Thursday, October 3, 2013

Poems.wpd
My mind is full of doubts
Like the head
of a dandelion ripe
to be blown away
always. Though
I know
I can calculate
and two
and two
is always
four.

And full of surprise
like a child’s eyes
that Momma’s
still there
after each
peek-a-boo;

And when building so tall
with blocks
just to see
so easy
it all
fall
down.

I still wonder why
after I
built a house
calculating all
putting in
cement,
2x4’s
a roof
a floor
it doesn’t
fall.

So with wonder fear surprise
as we go over the rise
back home from a day
away
we find
the house
stayed whole
again
today.
LAST DAY AT THE OFFICE

The last day
he didn't stay
till quitting time -

handed in his key.

To the library
Went his cartonned books.

Awards and photos?
Going home.

Research logs, notes?
Being thrown

out by paid help.

As with his old
reprints, paper.

His laptop
was all he'd packed.

He turned his back.

Pulling stuff on a dolly,
he wondered what was ahead
in the little time between
the terminus and life led.

He only felt the loss
leaving the parking lot.

d. 3: December 4, 2012
MEETING PLACE
(published, Chronogram 12/2012)

On the mug
my mother held –
where birds she loved
flew
under the storm
painted in grey,
over blue spruce, green pine,
and brown earth –
for years
she and I
almost touched
on its rim.
Our hands
almost joined
on its grip.
Then careless,
I let it slip
and shatter.
With no where else
to rendezvous,
we’d never
be together
again.

Friday, September 28, 2012
WAR ON TERROR
(Friday, September 28, 2012)

Grey haired lady
by the dairy –
phones in ears:
  can’t hear
my “ ’Scuse me!”

I touch her
shoulder
lightly,
bringing
“Oh, please, God!”
With a prod
I move
her basket.
She yells,
“Go away!”
I do:

A terrorist
escapes
in the local
Safeway.
SOME PROSE POEMS
**TRIAGE**

Military hospital: Baghdad October, 2003

Then the citizens
who choose leaders
and choose them again
to bomb
so some there
in Baghdad 2003
triage.

We non innocents –
though we may wish to be –
think of Berlin 1943,
the Germans please.

Then there is the choice
to join or not –
much more precise at the time of
Vietnam. Some did. Some did not.

Iraq, Abu Graib,
triage.
Let us all
consider
shame.

Triage
Comes from
trier –
To sort,
sorting,
sorter.

Then the citizens
who choose leaders
and choose them again
to bomb
so some there
in Baghdad 2003
triage.

We non innocents –
though we may wish to be –
think of Berlin 1943,
the Germans please.

Then there is the choice
to join or not –
much more precise at the time of
Vietnam. Some did. Some did not.

Iraq, Abu Graib,
triage.
Let us all
consider
shame.

Triage meaning
to select, sort
on conditions
of severity

But why sort?
To save lives?
To help our
fighting force?
No contradiction, padre!

Though there we were
in our war on terror –
Bush leading
our troops so
hundreds of
thousands die
in innocence.

Battle field
casualties.

But who sorts?
Who are they?

First are deciders -
Putin – who invades
Bush – who bombs.

Then apologists
like Richard Pearle
and Negroponte:
rats: props of power.

d. 3: Thursday, May 8, 2014
Notes to self in Kenneth Arrow’s Social Choice and Individual Values

1. 1967: first read scribblings
   A. (p. 23) A social welfare function is the translation rule from individual to societal ordering.
   B. (p. 26) $V \neq f(pr\{v_i\})$

2. 1968: on a reread
   A. (p. 7) Assuming individual values are constant is a problem.
   B. (p. 18) By what definition of market is this correct?
   C. (p. 51) Norm argues $V = f\{v_1, v_2, \ldots v_n\}$.

3. 1970: for classes:
   A. (p. 25) But are these conditions reasonable?
   B. (p. 36) $V_1$ must = $V_2$ for condition IIA to hold — Norm had suggested an alternative formulation, see p. 66. So did Sen.

* Thursday, April 10, 1997. (p. 27) Norm, now 56, stopped here. We were outlining our retrospective of Kenneth Arrow’s Nobel Prize for the APSA’s special volume. Norm failed to follow the logic in the book today. Even with my help, he could not grasp the argument. After teaching from this book since 1971, and brilliant mathematician that he was, things stopped here. We could not go on. Of course, he was terribly upset. I put the book away. We took a walk around the block. He said I should write the essay alone. But after 31 years of friendship, 3 books and 50 articles what could I answer? Putting my arm on his shoulder, I said, “We’ll just do something less formal, more philosophical. It’ll probably even be better. What about it?” We will do this together. *Won’t this also happen to me?*

[p. 63] Tuesday, May 5, 1998. With a sufficient degree of consensus in society the demands on a social welfare function can be met. This gets us to justice and a less mathematical essay!

[Twelve years later] (inside cover) Thursday, April 9, 2009: Teaching Arrow today. As usual, my hand shook slightly, but stopped with the pressure of the fat chalk on the board. The equation in all its rigor didn’t emerge. With nary a hesitation, I tacked windward, and was pleased that the faces of the small troupe of graduate students around the table didn’t reflect any sense of my incapacity. The deceleration of my mind was unsettling enough without the sauce of humility.

**Loss**

A friendship bonds tight
the support one has needed
then without - it’s night.

d. 5: Tuesday, April 22, 2014
F
O
R
C
E
D

As usual, his hand shook slightly, but stopped with the pressure of the fat chalk on the board. The equation in all its rigor didn’t emerge. With nary a hesitation, he tacked windward, and was pleased that the faces of the small troupe of graduate students around the table didn’t reflect any sense of his incapacity. The deceleration of his mind was unsettling enough without the sauce of humility.

A LETTER TO SOME OF MY COLLEAGUES AND STUDENTS:

12/10/09

Today is Faraz Haqqi’s, a recent honors student, last class. He doesn’t know what he is going to do. Today is his professor’s last class. He doesn’t know what he is going to do either. Here it is, last class day of the semester: Fall, 2009 in College Park, Maryland. Students planning their winter break, their visits to family, distant friends, strange places; students applying to law schools, to graduate schools, for jobs; students graduating. Faculty putting books on shelves, rethinking research projects, reflecting on their semester, their good classes, their bad ones.

And Faraz’s professor? He is quietly considering the trip he has taken since 1970, actualizing the dream of a college teaching career: thousands of students that came for a class or two, and moved on. Many nurtured this dream. High school teachers of physics and history, and college professors at Cornell. Professors Lowi and Lewis gave him extraordinary encouragement and helped him do it and Oran Young and Marion Levy, Jr. at Princeton. Students became the fabric of his work, the everyday joy and chore of the years that went by. Gaining their understandings of how to think, how to grapple with life and their own intellects were both the occupation of his hours, and his years. But beyond those thousands were the score of students who stay - in the mind - and episodically occupy some lasting thought, triggering some real affection.

And they come to my mind today, before I go to this, very likely, my last class. I got up early to think back on the steps to today. Today is my graduation day, my day to leave to the rest of my life. No ceremony - I have next semester ‘off’ and probably will only announce my retirement to the University sometime during the Spring. But today belongs to me, and as I dust off my belongings, first in my memories are you - the few very special students who decorate my years and my memories. Like the hundred or so kids in the New York Fresh Air Fund camp who first showed me the joy of teaching, and the kids in DC projects who took extra time to try to master math and let me understand the miracle of helping someone learn, like them you gave me the great joy of these years. Teaching has been partly about the many students but also about the few. You were those few, who, for what ever the reason, gave me the moments of high sharing and personal growth in this career and I thank you.

Some of you aren’t here any more: Janet Boetner for example. Many of us have stayed in touch but for various odd reasons, some of us haven’t: no matter. Still, in my heart, I thank each of you: it was with you that I had my very best moments in this career and for that I will remain very grateful. May you have as wonderful a career as I have had. And, happy holidays!

Time to be moving on. Thanks again.
TWO TYPES OF PEOPLE

I had always claimed there were two types of people: those that pick their noses and those that don’t. We all laughed that last Thanksgiving in nineteen sixty four, when my son returned from his first months in college quite educated in the ways of the world and ready to correct me when I repeated that old saw.

“Not two, Dad. Lots more. There are those who pick their noses in public, and those that don’t. And certainly lots more. We could identify those that eat their boogers and those that don’t. Get my drift?”

He’d learned a bit about how to think, he did.

Clyde didn’t finish getting educated in school. We didn’t have the money to keep him there. The draft picked him up. It happened real fast, in one of the first months of sixty five. I’d called it an early call to duty. But in those days, if you agreed to an immediate two years active, you could get your pick of alternatives.

His Ma and I rooted for the Navy. ’Cause it would be safer. And somehow, we thought we’d won. Clyde thought this would be his ticket back to college.

We don’t celebrate Thanksgiving anymore.

d. 8 - Sunday, January 4, 2015
SOME OLDER POEMS
SUPER HEROES

(d. 3) December 5, 2012

Cartoonists draw Super Carrots to pick up donkeys’ pace;

Motivate Moms to change more diapers, and iron mens’ messy shirts;

Steel Soldiers to deal death swiftly, and then die in foreign dirts;

Determine Dads to work with no stop, so not to lose the race;

But keep Kids from studying. They know a comic when they see one.
3rd d., Wednesday, December 5, 2012

Old man, dead pan.
Past your prime,
pumping iron all the time
everyday a bit lighter
than
yesterday.

Finish in the shower
cleaning your skin, loose
on that tower
that maybe was
unremarkable in every way,
save the old marine
buzzcut:
of now
missing hair,

gray,
as the far faded red field
in the small
dusty blue
and yellow
now ochre
logo
tattooed
to your upper bicep.

“Superman!” it
advertised -
in small -
lived here,
one
perhaps
heroic moment.

Did you leap
tall buildings
to save
a friend
or dream of stopping crime?

Perhaps you thought
you saved Switzerland
from Nazi time
or told old Churchill
of a coming attack.

With such little reality
to hold,
why not
be bold
and proclaim
yourself –
comic man.

COMIC MAN
Ingrained memories of kids
drawing, writing, doodling -
pushing dull pencils, sticks -
on the old pine topped
kitchen table.

Left marks - as
from too hot
pots, and cuts
from too dull
choppers.

MEMORIES INGRAINED

Bringing yesterday
into today.

Until after 30 years
refinishing leaves them
in sawdust
vacuumed –

Amounting to nothing
but newly
glossy surfaces.

December 6, 2012
HALF WAY AROUND THE WORLD

d. 2, Thursday, April 25, 2013

One can travel so far
be so distant
one is gone:
alone in
no where
even with a phone
and email.

Alone in one’s mind.
Friends’ wrinkles, eyes
can not quite be recalled
and distances
make news a shadow
that satisfies nothing.

Half way around the world
is as far as we can go I thought.
So wrong again.

Not quite so distant as my friend Bill.
His death left only regrets.
Once it seemed miles causes fabrics to tear.
But death leaves one in rags of solitude.
Poets should live
till death comes their way.
Do not gun them down
on that day
as a demented soul
who twists his whole
sense of symmetry and form
for a catastrophic norm
of death.

Poets give color to life
with their inked verse
and use of terse
verbiage
doing so little
of material
value.

Poets tell us
nothing
we do not
already know.
But telling it
again,
anev
can make it so.

12/9/80

Poets
(for John Lennon)

12/9/80

In their singular
lack of production
they appear to serve
no function
But give a poor man
a moment of beauty
a penny to spend,
or a torn heart
and he, with a whistle,
a radio, or a word
will turn to art.

Give a poet a pen
Give an artist a brush.
They above all
give to the rest of us.
Do not gun them down.
Put their works around town.

Is not that killer
also one of us?
Does he not help
define our species?
Why not accept him
as the mark
of our humanity?

12/9/80
PROPHECY

Having turned 70 some,
I returned home
from New Zealand’s snow peaks,
to DC’s heated streets.

Home to go
to a wedding,
of an eldest son,
July in Houston.

That night a dream so clear
as to fear it true.

A dream of the party,
now held in the country,
for younger Rob
to show his beautiful lady
to friends and family.

Then I feared could I
call my friends by their name?
Would I mix them up
when they came?
And would I know
Rob’s lady’s name
when she arrived wearing a rose?

All danced and sang, drank and ate.
My friends from college days came to stay.
Herb and Fred. All to celebrate.
And Howie. They wore ties,
jackets, though we never did.
Our ties were woolen, tartan and thick,
like my mother used to give me.

Bill never came. I wondered why
he used his heart attack to die.
A doctor, so he knew
symptoms, but told his wife, a lie.

Herb spoke; he brought a book
“Tools for Happy Wanderings”
all about taking care of the old.

Funny, that he would be so bold
as to talk now about our ends.
We know of those wanderings, though
we don’t take care of anyone anymore.
Francie died - years ago – above 94.

I wondered, “Did I lock the car door?”
I left to see: I had the key.
So I turned on the radio
and sat a while. What for?

I don’t know. It was winter then.
Snow lightly falling.
Friends came to bring me home.

I wasn’t sad until I awoke,
home again from New Zealand.

The next night I didn’t sleep.
How could I?

d. 5: Saturday, March 21, 2015
I asked my mother  
to sing her song  
by a campfire  
when I was young.

No. No, no, no, no.  
She cried.  
Not to you, my son,  
Not tonight, by the fire  
in the moonlight.

Before sleeping,  
I watched the tops of trees  
tickling stars so high  
wondering why  
I heard no song that night.

Many years later,  
she was frail and old.  
Not at a fire but in a bed,  
il and cold.  
I asked, “Why was there never  
a time, to sing  
your own song?”

She returned,  
It had been long  
but there was no wrong  
in only singing others’ songs.

Though I could not see  
the reason before she died,  
I still try.
PARADOXICAL KNOWLEDGE

May 15, 1982

A run in a nylon: not just torn cloth -
unstoppable, disastrous, just like
a bleeding juggler vein or poisonous broth:
far too dramatic to be in my life.
Is the great unrepaired disaster but
a wet toilet seat, or a cold coffee
with which I greet the dawn when I rise up?
Or is there unraveling others can't see
Some, clairvoyantly perceive their own souls -
see their needs within without the combat
for truth I experience. But my life's roles
leave me to fear truth like a rabid rat.
One night it receded so far from me,
I felt there could be none: it could not be.
Did you ever see a rag shirt man asleep on the grate of a ventilation shaft at minus eight in the city?

Snow, drifting down covering the town and the top of him, then melting below causing icicles to flow from grey whiskers.

Cousins sleep in cardboard boxes to block the wind as flesh freezes in the city.

“How're ya doin', sir?” in gin talk as you walk by tonight's self-selected victim waiting to ask, “Can ya help me?”

ss by quickly! But ears hear though your eyes can be willed not to focus on the locus of his pain.

On through the crowd toward revolving doors promising warmth for the air in the shaft again tonight. Why does the encounter stick in your mind?
LICHEN

January 26 - March 13, 1982

In our time
days pass
to form years.
We have little
or nothing
save rocks
on which to root
- like lichen:
pushing forever
for warmth
from the too scanty rays
of our sun.

ANALOGUE ENDS:

Would that we had
the patience of
primitive plants
and could measure our success
in terms of the rock splits we
gender for future generations
of oak and poplar.

Our egocentricity leaves us narrower views:
We only see rocks
support
our individual failures.

This is so
even though
we grow
attached
like lichen
to the heat absorbing
stone's solidity -
even while
it denies
us the nutrients
we need to bloom.
IMA HOGG

Big Ima Hogg's
got two mean shepherd dogs.

Daily, each gets only a bone:
keeps 'em vicious when she walks alone
away from home
to the corner store.

On the walk,
she asserts
her place,
yet uses no words.
Her grey face
(like a bomb)
is set to detonate
-- by fear.

But rapists and muggers
won't come near.
Ima brandishes a well
sharpened stick:
she's got deterrence.

Ima's terror -
born
within her.

July, 1981
A SONG SEGMENT
for John Prine
Saturday, May 19, 1990

Suzie's mirror don't reflect the light.
It turned her day into night
in its shiny golden frame.

We get our mirrors from where we can;
some are straight and some are bent.

She got her mirror when she was four.
They were takin' her mother out the door;
Our dad took it off the floor
and said, "She won't need it anymore.

Your mom's always saying: 'It ain't right...
makes my lips seem awful tight -
puts a wave in my straight hair.'"

They come scratched and they come true;
my mirror's mostly blue.

One day Suzie's mirror fell and broke,
Hours passed - she hadn't spoke
She bought a mirror; put it on the shelf
in it she saw a stranger: not herself.

Suzie's world never looked the same
She put her dress in some gas to soak
and stuck a match to light the flame.
All we found was the old gold frame
and mirrored glass which had broke.
GOLDEN Calf
March 13 & 14, 1982 for Bonnie and my children

What do I do - standing
in front of your kitch voodoo,
five legged mask with its metal
eye bulges out front?
Lipschitz, are you just another
Ethiopian Jew?

Supplications to a void
don’t suit my mind:
It has always been so
even before
the first
golden calf.

I pray to a cast primitive
and my wails
and torments
turn to you for witchery.

Epstein,
have your bronze lady pray for me.

You - who omnipotently created her,
froz her pain -
tell her to take mine.
You - who bloodlessly
beheaded
six heroes
to recreate
their exteriors -
tell me:
can we know more
of those we love?
Are her eyes pierced
for pain
because she saw
beyond your six skins?

Is that why
she prays
with her back
to the voodoo man?
No, I pray to no void,
to no God who first played with Job
and then told him, “Question not!”
Our creator orders
this universe
with perversity.
But I rebel.

Like Epstein’s bronze
I anguish
over my powerless state
and watch my loves’
teriors
burn
away.
We come with our own
visitation to your primitive
temples. “Listen ye bronzes!
We created you.
You
must
heed
my cry.”
When Clarity
let her see:
the view was pain.

But now,
murky dusk
obscures and
window grates
aren’t needed.

Mind bars
keep her in,
others out.

Joshua’s men can’t
shout down
ethereal veils:
they don’t shatter.

10x10
solitary,
too small to dance,
too dark to see,
too low to stand.

Jailor? Not needed
Till the sentence ends.
Gardening

You get what you sow,
only in Hollywood
and there
perhaps only before Eden:

without death and weeds.

Just watch a gardener with his many seeds
and all the petro chemical
prophylactics against
his hostile parasitical enemies.

On Earth Day
they say to preserve
the crop the farmer
despoils the earth.

Maybe so.

Gardening since Eden
is an uneven match
only won
in the short run.

1995?
EULOGY FOR THE PREMATURE DEATHS OF OUR CHILDREN

for Joshua and Sarah

Dull noise: a thud.
Too quiet to threaten others far away.
A fall, little blood.
Three hours later noone will see life died here today.

Someone’s toys: a gasoline flood
from a Honda’s tank trickling
blood red gas
as from his gash
from chin to forehead.
A twitch.
Blue shutters close slowly
over his eyes.
“Noone to help?”
the lone witness cries.
Dust sprayed by the speeding cars

closes his wounds
coats
the blued, unblinking stare.
Noone to help but
to cover him
and tow the wreck
and clean the spill
and wave the drivers by.
Let the cyclist die.

II.

Violence of one to another:
the deaths died as we grow older.
From where do they come? Why?
Who is there to help?
Only the passerby.
Yet we wave him on:
don’t even try.

Raise children to fight,
rather than cry
for help.
Raise children not
to stop and kneel
or discover what the
dying feel. . .
only then do we know securely
they would die prematurely
A Hit

Lost in the anachronistic gutters
those spirals filled with flutters:
black traps for catching the soul’s food
coming through the needle
mainlined to the brain.
Once a mass:
now so much junk.
Bach is dead.


Thoughts on Blue

We enter alone.
Even the luckiest of us
only come for the embrace;
sharing it, kiss.

Imagine permanence.

Only to exit
each
one at a time
out the myriad back doors.

D. 1: 1/22/1995
NOT EVEN ALMOST CHRONOLOGICAL

The place of time
in rhythm or rhyme
does not escape the mind.

But time’s orderings
History’s skeleton
our hanger of kings
and pharaohs -
knocked a kilter
to communicate our sensate litter?

How out of sorts
it would be
were it that we
were dead
before born.

Hard to conceive a cosmology
out side of chronology.
Where the end may come first
and the path of time
goes no where -
in particular;
nor helps us
connect the dots.

But not even almost chronological
is the world we hear or read.
Out one mouth
In one ear, then.
But from when
did it come?

Learned so out of line
we make our patterns in
free form time.
To place sense
on experience.

That is the way the world is told to you
not within a time
but without.
BUDS

Fresh leaves and buds
on the trees;
new greens and cherry blossoms
in December. I have passed too many years
to consider it bold:

Merely waste, life spent
before its time,
lost in the coming of winter,
are the hopes of a still too foreign spring.

Yet my children see
in this last harvest warmth
-indeed, in the very same tree-
just another surprise
gift of joy in life.

Who has the better vision
does not seem to be the question.
Is it the old man’s obsession for protection
against the winters which are foreknown,
or the child’s
eye which sees
the beauties
which are seasonless?

12/12/81
ALLEY DEATH

Dying on the street
Blood on his brain
Toppling from his feet
There in the cold rain.

Calling others as friends
they stopped, stared,
took pictures through a lens,
-refused to meet or rally
the pained soul in the alley.

Begging God
he came as barker
to ask goodness from humanity.

But they laughed
pissed
rolled a joint
and passed on.

Both died then
without further attention.

June 23, 1980
WHAT PROSTITUTION OF MORALITY

What prostitution of morality
does inescapable mortality
force upon man?
How many shovels of dirt
may I throw on their graves
and yet not be a grave digger?
Can nothing but dirt
clean
a hand covered with perfumed soap?

And if I threw but one stone
is that not also
murder
if they were killed by stones?
Yet how can I be just –
for to abstain and not prevent
has lent
the murder respectability.

How happy I am that we were so many
who failed their need,
who shoveled their dirt;
for it took hundreds to kill
but two.

So what could you expect me
to do?
And yet why, as we warmed toes by the fire,
did they build a snow palace
to place their bones
and sit down back to back
in their cathedral
begging why of man,
ready to die
of frozen hearts
and limbs?

Were it just the snow
on the mountain
that dug their graves
it would not rankle so,
but titles of hero they will bestow
on we who innocently shoveled
their graves with a bottle of beer
rather than trek through the snow.

Were it not so cold
had the wind not blown
was not the question.
We were but men
who longed for comfort
and ease
or money, as you please.
And so, sixteen heroes were:
Three asleep, and one in a chair
with a blister on his heel:
leaving but six Americans and
half a dozen Turk.

Squander two hours coloring maps
rather than fight the snow;
eat a two hour lunch
when it’s 10 below;
drink a beer
rather than take a tow;
two lost skiers’ fire went out
and they built a cathedral
out of ice.

But we climbed and braved
the bestial blizzard
enough
for them to differentiate us
from the hundreds who
merely watched
and sat idly by.

Another chapter of story book stuff
another day of wasted lives
another death upon the shit heap
called humanity
created more guilt
but no New Man
to lead us to a cross
and pay for our sins
or die for our salvation.

Just two frozen volunteers
to man’s understanding
of his putridness
in the forest of a lonely
mountain once called
Olympus by the Greeks.