Contents

Published Poems 2005-2012

*Heart Berries*

*In Another Time*

*Leelanau Fire*

*Dilemma*

*Black Flies*

*Nature Preserv*e

*Green Wood*

*Isolated Incident*

*Stumps*

*Tractor In Field*

*Old Boathouse*

*Chain Of Lakes*

*Ice Storm*

*Whitefish Point Light*

*Bois Blanc Island*

*The Sun-Dance People*

*Paul Bunyan*

*Sasquatch*

*Beaver Territory*

*Northern Lights*

*Liquid*

*Back Home*

*Swiss Army*

*Wild Strawberries*

*Dust*

*Search & Rescue*

*Desire*

*The Light*

*Spaces*

*Masks*

*Hard Edges*

*Transmigration*

*Green Onions*

*Lonely Planets*

*Go Fish*

*Initial Contact*

*In Space*

*Isla Morte*

*Perspective*

*Summer Storm*

*Garment*

*Old Woman’s Dream #2*

*Sterling*

*Bad Signs*

*The Terms*

*The Sound*

*The Moment*

*Old Woman’s Dream #3*

*Crop Damage*

*Sonnet In D Minor*

*Paradox Of Intersections*

*More Perspective*

*Cape May Storm*

*Sea Change*

*The Run*

*Animal Behavior*

*For The Living Dead*

*Brief Nudity*

*In The Wake*

*Driving North*

*Dream Home*

*Best Laid Plans*

*Haunted Windows*

*Traveling Music*

*One Last*

*Dark Star*

*Metamorphosis*

*Loose Change*

*Mild Violence*

*The Vampires*

*The Mutants*

*Vultures* *& Vampires*

*The Weird Wolves*

*The Bride*

*The Body Snatchers*

*The Plague*

*Shadows*

*Deep Moorings*

*Lunar Fog*

*The Circle Expands*

*Japanese Bones*

*Hearts Of Light*

*Persona*

*Clown*

*Visitation*

*Great Smoky Mountains*

*Apparition*

*The Mist*

*Cave Of The Spirits*

*Expressway Death*

*Time Out*

*Refrain*

*Methane*

*Stranded On A Cloud*

*Final Question*

*Cold Oceans*

*Drifts*

*Flotsam*

*The Dark Roofs*

*Sound Off*

*Fresh Red*

*Aggression*

*Testimony*

*Electric Sunshine*

*Steps*

*Light Chop*

*Spinners*

*November Song*

*Broken Branches*

*My Father’s Job*

*Allison Bound*

*Shooting Lessons*

*Eggshells*

*There & Back*

*Flood Tide*

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**Magazines**

*Abbey, Abraxas, Alcaeus Review, Amaranthus, Ambassador Poetry Project, Atlas Poetica, Backwards City Review, Barbaric Yawp, Bathtub Gin, Beatlick News, Big Scream, Bitterroot, Bogg, California Quarterly, Cedar Rock, The Chiron Review, Clark Street Review, Creative Moment, The Delmarva Review, Display, Drama Garden, Edgz, Essence, Free Lance, Free Verse, Ginyu (Japan), The Goodly Co., The Grand Rapids News, Grand Valley Today, Great Art, The Green Door (Belgium), HazMat Review, The Hurricane Review, Ibbetson St., The Iconoclast, Illogical Muse, Magazine Six, Mad Poets Review, Main Channel Voices, Main Street Rag, Midwest Poetry, Modern Haiku, Muses Review, Napalm Health Spa Report, Nerve Cowboy, The New York Quarterly, Paterson Literary Review, The Pedestal Magazine, Presa, Roadrunner Haiku Journal, Small Press Review, Solo Café, Solo Novo, The Somerville News, The South Carolina Review, Stone Drum, Tar Wolf Review, Tertulia Magazine, Tribeca Poetry Review, Under The Banana Tree, The United Cooperative, UT Review, The Unrorean, Wavelength, WestWard Quarterly, Wilderness House Literary Review, Wild Goose Poetry Review, Windows In The Stone & Words of Wisdom.*

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*All This Dark- 24 Tanka Sequences (with John* Elsberg, 2012)

Heart Berries

Heart shaped

Wild strawberries

Redden on low strings

Their ineffable fragrance

Attracts the spirits

Of the dead

To stop & refresh themselves

On their journeys

Indians called them

Heart berries

They ate them

At the beginning of summer

To make them brave

For the rest of the year

In Another Time

I tell myself a dream to go

Into the yellow stone

That sings inside my throat.

The sky is grey & sweet.

My heart is an abandoned planet.

Even as I launch this tiny ship,

Someone looks for me

In the populated soil.

My ancestors roll in the waves.

Their vain blood floods my bed.

I tell myself today’s old lines.

Today’s old lines are mine.

Alone with you, myself.

Another birth, & other words.

In another time.

Leelanau Fire

The night is white.

The moon, a cosmic smile.

Big wind frightens a fawn.

A branch falls, an alarm.

For awhile, I remember

Pictures across the river,

A life boat in the snow,

Radio squawking at the stars.

Now images are gone.

Mind empty, I’m alone.

Right here, by the smoke

Of the glowing embers,

Camping on the edge

Of the open sky.

Dilemma

A broad-tailed hawk is using our winter bird-feeder for bait.

Yesterday, we watched while it plucked grey feathers from a

song sparrow & ate her. We grieved for the sparrow, feared

for the chickadees & the two sets of cardinal mates.

You urged me to shoot it, but wouldn’t we hate to see the hawk

starve just as much? Frozen in ambivalence, I wait, not sure what

I’ll do if I see red down floating on a cold wind.

Black Flies

In the north woods, the black flies are as constant &

insidious as time. They circle persistently at high speed

around your head until your attention is distracted,

then they dive in for a mouthful of your temporal flesh.

Only wind & rain bring transitory relief from their

eternal onslaught.

Nature Preserve

In the woods behind my home

Is a Nature Preserve

Its central feature is a lake

It takes me about an hour

To walk around it

There are no dogs allowed

No fires, no swimming, no

Boating, no metal detectors, no

Camping, no horses, no

Picnics, no no

I am to fish only

In designated areas

I am to walk clockwise

Around the lake, or be

Stopped by the tall, steel turnstile

Last winter, the newspaper

Printed a letter from a group

of malcontents who crusaded

To get rid of the beavers

For chewing down the birch trees

Another group began a campaign

To get rid of the dread

Purple loosestrife, a tall flower

That grows by the waters edge

In a manner offensive to nature

Right now, the focus is on

The distasteful blue spruce

Which the officials of the preserve

Deem to be opportunistic

& unwelcome among the natives

They’re building a trail

That will penetrate to the heart

Of the wildest part of the park

Leading from the Township Center

Easy access for all

Who prefer their wildlife preserved

Green Wood

I built my cabin

In the spring

Of my 37th year,

With freshly milled,

Bark-covered,

Inch-thick shimwood,

Mostly oak,

With some cherry mixed in.

A friend worked

For a lumber mill,

& got it for me for free.

The wood was swollen,

Heavy & green.

Sap bubbled

Around the spikes

As I drove them in.

I burned through

Two sabre-saws

Cutting through

The wet, green wood.

A year later,

When it cured,

It was so hard & dark

That no nail could penetrate.

Isolated Incident

Low grey clouds

Breathed a chill warning.

The smell of ice

Was in the air.

As darkness fell

I could hear

Whispers of flakes

Falling in the dark.

Next morning,

From where I stood

On the covered porch,

A series of footprints

Led off toward

The old logging road

That climbs the hill

Behind my hidden cabin.

Someone had stopped

While I slept.

Maybe a hunter

With a head start

On daybreak,

Or did the hunted

Take a break

From the snow

Before the last cold hill?

Stumps

Stumps of a proud generation

Tables of green moss

On a carpet of brown & yellow needles

Blue jay pounds a nut

Red squirrel chitters territory

A roof of tall white pines

Progeny of stumps

Whole counties of stumps

Villages of stumps

Houses of salamanders & centipedes

So much furniture

Left out in the rain

Wood aromatic in wet dew

Shrinking back from its own bark

Tractor In Field

The old tractor dreams in a field of snow.

The tires are flat & cracked, fenders red

with rust, elderly flywheel locked tight. It

hasn’t had a drink in years, though the rain

washed over the rusty steel saddle where

no one ever sits.

Old Boathouse

The old boathouse smells like heaven on spring

mornings. The aroma of wet hemp ropes coiled

on the deck mixes with the smell of the thawing

earth on the bank & the fresh smell of the river,

free of ice. The smell triggers a flurry of sweet

visions & timeless associations.

A continuous gurgle of water over the rocks on

the far side of the fast-moving river plays musical

accompaniment to the aromatic high.

Sitting with eyes closed, I hesitate to add sight

to this already delicious meal.

Chain Of Lakes

Now the lake

Has pulled her warmth

Down, to the bottom,

& swept her floors.

Bright green shoots

Of milfoil & cabbage

Line our shores

To form a green matte.

Pilots of small planes

See the deepest places.

The wind flakes the cold

Top water into whitecaps.

They channel on the breeze

That blows in from Quebec,

The brisk Northern wind

That pushes migratory geese

On a path of glacial footprints.

Ice Storm

10,000 white pines

Bowed to earth.

Grass became

Glass spikes.

Snow on the ground

Crusted over,

Hard enough

To support small animals.

Lightning glimmered

Across the yellow sky,

Reflected on the snow

By a loud roll

Of winter thunder.

Whitefish Point Light

The pebble beach

Is bleached to white,

Littered with ribcages of fish

& carcasses of big brown beetles.

More tankers & freighters

Sank off this point

Than anywhere in the Great Lakes.

The morning mist is thick

With sailors’ ghosts.

Sometimes they appear as whitecaps

In broad daylight,

Trying to rise above the surf

That tore them from this life.

Bois Blanc Island

The beach is littered with rocks.

It was an underwater reef

Before the waters receded.

Now, an island of cedars & pines.

Bats rise in large numbers

From the tallest cedars.

They own the sky for an hour

Before & after nightfall.

Packs of coyotes chortle

As they break sticks past

My night window.

They are bold at dusk.

When their gray forms appear

On the rock-strewn beach,

It looks as if the rocks

Move inland, escaping rising water.

The Sun-Dance People

The Sun-Dance People seek dreams

When life is at a turning point

The Sun-Dance People don’t mind

If a warrior stays home or leaves a battle

A large red bird flies through the room

You can’t see it, but you feel it

You can hear the flapping of its huge wings

While little voices whisper in your ears

These are the Sun-Dance People

Paul Bunyan

Descended from Ice Giants of old, Paul Bunyan

had an epic appetite. After he ate all the flapjacks

in Northern Minnesota, he turned ominously

toward Wisconsin’s cheese & beer. Once he’d

consumed those resources, which scientists had

previously thought were boundless, Paul Bunyan

was mighty thirsty, & that’s the reason the water

level in Lake Michigan went down another ten feet.

Sasquatch

Sasquatch wanders the Pacific Northwest, famous

for the size of his feet. He shies away from contact

with humans, despite his greater strength. He reeks.

We like to think that Sasquatch is a gentle vegetarian,

but his stature implies a high need for animal protein,

AKA *meat*.

A giant, carnivorous, reclusive mountain ape, Sasquatch

is the boogieman of the coniferous forest. We search for

him in vain, & speculate that he may be the missing link.

Sasquatch hides, & bides his time.

Beaver Territory

In spring the water

In Pickerel Lake

Is deep & clear

Blue like the sky

It overflows

To three smaller ponds

Cascading loudly

White water splashes over rocks

Now green summer

Is over

& the water

Is shallow

Matted by lily pads

Choked by

Rotting pickerel weed

Surrounding open water

Broken only

By beaver channels

Aquatic pathways

For mallards & swans

We pick our way

Around the lake

The path is blocked

By fallen birches

Razed

By the industry

Of the beavers

Tall birch trees

Taken down

Just for their branches

Whole groves fallen

With tooth marks

On the few

That still stand

We think it must be

The work of several beavers

So we get up early

To observe them

At their work

But they retreat to the lake

To warn us away with slapping tails

Northern Lights

A roar of jeweled leaves

Titillates the dark northern sky

Celebration above the trees

Aurora flares

Sun spots dance the edge

Owl turns to small sound

Marten clings

To a red pine branch

Outside my sleepy head

Liquid

Wild ducks

Scoot a landing

On blue eyes

Back Home

Winter is here.  
The air is chilly & crisp.  
Field mice have moved inside.  
Many thoughts crowd my mind  
& grief clouds my heart.  
Many songs press for words,  
But who will sing them?  
The morning wind invades my shirt.  
The light of the moon dissipates,  
& the sirens moan  
As I fly myself back home.

Swiss Army

My favorite tool

Is not too heavy,

Not too light.

It’s served me food,

Fished out lost knots,

Revealed the intricacies

Of nature, under

Its magnifying

Glass, & more.

Sometimes,

It was my only knife.

From Cape May to

Keweenaw Bay,

I reached for it

Often,

Grateful

For all my trusty

Attachments.

Wild Strawberries

Coming across them

Unexpectedly, as

A child, they

Taste as fresh

As red. Hard

To collect enough

To bring home

For jam, so we

Eat them while we can.

Dust

Obnoxious cosmetics

Drip from the face

Of the Statue of Liberty.

Diamonds gleam

From the President’s teeth.

Old dogs argue

Over the skulls

Of rock stars & senators.

A battalion of metal roaches

Dances around a captured flag.

In the middle

Of the moonless night

Old men remember the Third Reich.

Alarms ring in gladiolas,

Cueballing yet another Spring.

Search & Rescue

1.

Supersonic horseshoes whiz

Past barbecued executives

Molten doughboys push their buns

Through networks of static tranquilizers

Whole blood on special sale

Blue bunnies have found the eggs

A hawk sails symbolically, hunting

Friendly chickadees, happy in morning sunlight

Loud, obvious spaces blurt out

Streams of angry money, accusing

2.

Grey morning clouds over the straits

Blue noise lights the sky

Old men follow without desire

Wildfires race each day to play

Sweet pine fragrance, crisp A.M. air

A loud chunk of chocolate breaks off

Shrill politicians whittle down the branches

Deer bed down for the day, afraid

Many of the hardest games

Were never played, until that day

3.

In the candy penitentiary

In the bloody popcorn theater

After the backward horse race

Often, but not always, predictable

On a distant planet, light years away

On top of Old Smoky, coughing

When all the trees are dormant

Barricades no one can pass

All masks removed at last

Big pike glide between lilies, predatory

Desire

1: SKIN CANALS

Snakes fly toward the sun

Elements form a grammar

Spherical bodies rotate in space

Hollow noise of surf is heard

A game of hide & seek began

Round stones rose from sand

A stranger ran, hammer in hand

Against the mountains of the sun

A connection between snakes & men

A legend in the tiny islands

2: AFTER THE ROBBERY

Searchers return, bereft

Armed in suits of platinum

Even if the coffins were illusions

War broke out among the ruins

A crocodile lost its way

East or west to a fixed position

The stranger came again to play

Available in this space age

Refugees, constricted, extricate

In inexplicable picturesque epics

3: MAD MOUNTAINS

Solid stone broke the diamond saw

An iridescent surface had been formed

Departure gyrated a gentle beat

Teenagers brought the fresh roots

Without warning, there’s the ruins

You find no steps, nor stairs

Consorted shapes were formed

Four balls dangled like musical notes

Gas sends out a beam of light

Sure to appear as simple ornamentation

The Light

1.

In a strange, low voice

In the middle of the winter

It is mandatory to deceive

It makes us want to leave

Like an old hammer on the bench

Like people drunk in a dream

My shoes are covered with dust

My tactics are confusing

Someone is always leaving

Someone else covers up the crimes

2.

The rain is the key

The dolls are asleep

There are books in the field

There are boxes of pain

This is where I see it

This light, this sleep, this touch

This is where you dropped it

This memory, this vision of wind

We must make plans

We see the victims, hear their songs

3.

Someone arrived late for

Someone else, who died

Someone came in, afraid that

Someone horrible hid outside

Like a box of raisins, spilled

Like pebbles on the beach

My imaginary range astonishes

My imaginary audience

You dropped the book, picked up the key

You put the dolls to sleep, put out the light

Spaces

1. THE VOID

Ornamental bones

Climb ladders of disaster

A hot breeze laughs

Always wild & welcome

Perpetual pinpricks

Maintain their eternal courses

Shadows vanish in the night

Nothing in the mirror but light

I walk toward ruin

Guided only by the moon

2. OLD PENNIES

Many men remain mad

At Descartes, who split

Kierkegaard took a flying leap

Camus sank a camouflaged canoe

Nietzsche growled into the mirror

Jean Paul Sartre played it smart

Tzara took off his tiara

Blake jumped in the lake

Army surplus tanks

Shoot blanks into the banks

3. WILDERNESS HOTEL

A loud act of love

Shakes the foundation

Falling trees scream freely

Abandoned avenues echo no more

An egg, emotionally crushed

No one gets the joke

A van vanishes down a long road

A sound drowns in silence

We reserve our opinions

Our private parking spaces

Masks

1.

Clouds of joy rain painfully

On toy villages, temporarily ephemeral

Feeble trees emit intermittent screams

Samples of noise impregnate imperviously

A mouthful of antique coins

An earful of 3rd degree love

Shoreline tents, leopard skinned

Starlight on pink steel bridges

Inspirational bloodbuckets

Strain the concerts, emphatic

2.

Cockroaches, successful in longevity

Raise the standard of experience

Neurotic beasts cry bitterly

On beaches of plastic popcorn

Boxes of big dreams are filed

In hope chests & sour trunks

A surrender is signed

In 4/4 time, appalling

Alternative habits, none feasible

Mask a blatant truth, shameful

3.

Blue heron stalks, motionless

Spear marks appear anonymously

Another ridiculous brainstorm

More mirth, defective but elastic

A strategic withdrawal, brave friend

Neglected correspondence, indignant

But wisely alone, inventive

Powerful, mercilessly noble

Dealers imagine victories

Over those who starve, gold-toothed

Hard Edges

1: SMOG

Bloody soldiers lie like sticks

On a hurricane beach

Bionic limbs replace shot off

Branches, grotesque woodpiles

A posse of insane clowns tunes up

Guided by the grinding wheels of half-tracks

Shells scream through the morning mist

Black smoke swirls over abandoned boots

We’re still marching in perfect order

Into the red-stained, funeral smog

2: HIGH NOON

Petty criminals take a hard line

Defending the borders of their minds

A militia of monkeys reigns

Over the temporarily insane drains

Laughter breaks the structure

Of mirages we run over

The sun implores us to behave

But the moon plays ever after

Even on the best of days

The story gets shorter

3: ROCK GARDEN

Dungeons in the skull

Of an abstract elephant

A storm at sea

Through time & space

Such as Stonehenge

Labyrinths of bone, so old

Working from ropes, walkways,

Airships, cranes & towers

More than 15 million species

Rolling & forming, texturing & firing

Transmigration

1.

A torch of morning birds flares

Joyful bubbles of music explode

Redundant black bear on the back deck

Disoriented curiosity of the wild

Dark wounds on drunken willows

Celebrate knots of green light

Hearts glow from old houses

Where candles burned like dreams

Linking flesh beyond limits

We scratch across intentional walls

2.

In rooms down the hall

Priests wield ritual implements

Lay folk kneel in awe

Rain returns as we leave the lodge

Lingering by the plexiglass partition

Like a yellow blanket on a river bed

You slouch in the back row

Staring blindly out the window

Quick locks broke keys up

Imagined as overgrown paths

3.

The dead whisper insistently

The October wind gives in

In the blood-filled eye

Of the next hurricane

In a year of death by drowning

& honor gained by refusing honor

Emptied of pressing desire

Eternally firing but lethal

The letters labored under parched parchment

Sure sign of a moral compass

Green Onions

Fresh verve

From Booker T.

Reminds me

Of my great grandfather,

Jazzing it up

Among the carrots

& green onions.

I drive through

The ghetto

Flinging handfuls

Of brave pennies.

I deny

Any symbolic intent,

Crisp & hot on my tongue.

Lonely Planets

Exploding supernovae

Spread particles

Across the galaxy.

We still live

In that ocean, we

Carry it around

In our cells.

Ice fishing on Europa,

We wonder

What might lurk

Beneath the surface.

Our eyes are the water

In the ocean of stars.

We can taste it in our tears.

Go Fish

*for George Cooley*

1.

Maximum heads

Roam ceaselessly

Across the globe

Lone rangers in cyberspace

An infinite variety

Of sentient creatures

Their lights

Turned off, then on

Green spring buds

In wind off lake

Sleeping in the wind

Better than a swim

I am every kind

Of fool, yet cool

As a kingfisher

Staring into blue

2.

Mysterious glades

Shelter frightened fanatics

Binderies of fun

Collate the bad news

A humanitarian legacy

Three bolognas

Rotten teeth, bad breath

Bad black holes

Political agendas

Stink up the galaxy

Stalked in stockings

Born to run away

Lost civilizations

In the tired sky

I blink, drink water

Fish disappear

Initial Contact

An avalanche

Of confused emotion

Suffocates some

Surprised skiers.

Space above,

Fathoms below,

Blind, florescent cave fish

Are oblivious to pressure,

Or tidal waves.

The science of silence,

A mystery, rewinds.

Okay, but what’s that shadow

Passing inexorably

Over the fragile mountains?

What is that sky? What

Have you done

To my moon, mother?

Why does it seem

To snow forever?

In Space

You need your space.

You need to screen

Your calls.

You must be careful

With opinion polls.

The faster you go

The more energy

It takes. You have

A pattern of memories

That confirm your beliefs.

You have seen

The little creatures.

You have sent

Symbolic broadcasts,

Sitcoms, talk-shows, commercials.

“But what about the spaceships?”

You ask, remembering a time.

Isla Morte

Fallen leaves bury

Surrounding memory

Flooded

Shoreline endures

Gentle passage

Yellow roses burn

Frail chickadees

In shadows of trees

Shiver in their sleep

Space to breathe

Other lights

Answer

Human faces

Naked outcasts

Perspective

I wish I was

An astronaut.

I could gesture

Magnanimously

At the whole world

From 1000 miles

Away, & never worry

With all the universe

Behind me,

& only the blue sphere

Of planet earth

Floating before me

I’d never worry

That we might drift apart

Summer Storm

Flying leaves & branches

Smacked the window panes

With violent thuds & bangs

Within the desperate sound

Of still-rising wind

Thick with blasting sand

The curtains were drawn

Thick & warm

While the tantrum rain

Flooded the muddy garden

& the roses, in pain

Made their final stand

Against the giant hand

Garment

Light emanates from my coat

My coat that contains

A shining stream

My coat of fool’s gold

Wiser than the stars

Singing in its pockets

Imprisoned by the fragrance

Of the rosy clouds

Like the dark heart

Hidden in a bright cave

Hidden in infinity

So far out in the open

That little fish

Swim through its fabric

Old Woman’s Dream #2

I slept in a house made of flesh. The floors were soft &

spongy, & had the colors & textures of skin, from a rich

black to a glowing pink. I walked on them barefoot, &

could feel the warmth of the house, its breath & the

beating of its heart. The house smelled like spearmint.

It had a big window on each wall. One looked out on a

desert; one revealed a northern forest; the third eye saw

underwater, & there were many pretty tropical fish.

When I looked out the last window, I saw into a living

room just like the one I had become a part of.

Sterling

Tall shafts of air

On the frigid edge

Watery light sparkles

Hits the choppy rapids

Leaves an avocado tint

Splashes against the banks

Freely confused

A stained glass sunrise

In frosty shadows

Reckless silver tarpon

Flies to blue sunlight

Becoming small

A wave breaks

Over an icy wall

Bad Signs

There were gaping holes

In the roof.

The rotted floorboards

Were scattered

With broken glass,

Rusted screws & bolts,

& pieces of flattened iron

That used to be

Part of something larger,

A long time ago.

A big black mongrel

Guarded an old couch,

& chewed on a pair

Of stained girl’s cutoffs.

A chain-link fence

Ran for a mile

Along the dusty road,

Posted with

Bright orange

HAZARD signs,

& bright yellow

NO TRESPASSING signs,

All of them

Riddled with bullet holes.

The Terms

Mute witness to these killings

Doors slam forever

In your famous nightmares

Blood stains forever

The Swiss Army reputation

When you take the gloves off

You find they still fit

For a moment

The Emperor wore clothes

All ears tuned for the verdict

All eyes glued to the screen

We’ve come to accept as real

Anticipating denial

Of our heart-felt appeal

The Sound

*for Robert Bly*

Are you listening?

I am here.

Do you hear me burn?

Difficult

To hear me

In classes, or on buses.

But listen,

I am here

In a blind man’s tears.

What is

That stealthy breathing?

The wind inside the dead.

The Moment

The ocean splashed

Over the rocks

While trees exploded

Along the dusty path

An instant of sunlight

Illuminated the cedars

As seagulls dipped

Above the wilderness of waves

At the edge of the beach

A fir tree tried to sleep

While greedy green weeds

Played a cool jazz beat

An old clown collapsed

Inside the silence of his mask

Old Woman’s Dream #3

I found a penny on the ground, & picked it up. When

I looked at it again, in my hand, I saw that it was really

a small yellow flower. The color of the flower began

to spread onto my hands, then my arms. Soon, I was

yellow all over, & I burst out singing.

Crop Damage

In Nova Scotia

We risked our lives

Running with outlaws

Across the landscape

Beset by hailstones

Lips smacking

On thoughts of fresh tomatoes

The property damage:

The ducks, the cattle,

The wounded horses

Grass beaten down

Dance postponed

While desperate fields wept

Red with wounded tomatoes

Sonnet In D Minor

A kiss echoed

Shining & clear

Across the street

Classically villainous

Wounded animals hide

In the ecstatic jungle

They do not believe

In mirrors

Fur like onyx

Black vibrations

Against exuberant leaves

In cold sunlight

A spinning frenzy

A loud caress

Paradox Of Intersections

Every other busy intersection

Reveals a single dusty shoe

Or a flattened single glove

Their mates are gone

Though little movies come along

Flashing images of a conjured past

Later the shoes run away

& the gloves wave goodbye

Until the inevitable intersection passes

Littered with lost kisses & near misses

More Perspective

If you live on

A river or stream,

You must float

In place. You will need

A good anchor.

\*

Vega glitters

In the northwest.

The stars above

The curved edge

Of the horizon

Match the stars

In front of you.

\*

Bundle up & go outside.

The sky will look bigger

Than it does on paper.

Cape May Storm

Winds burn up the sea,

Lifting curtains from the surface

& slamming them

Across the wood shingled houses,

Growths on the arm of the cape.

Storm doors whip loose,

& patches of shingles

Are ripped off & thrown aloft.

They find slivers & pieces

Of their neighbor’s roofs

When they hoe their gardens

In the inevitable spring.

Driving easterlies

Throw glassy spears,

Soaking gray, weathered shingles,

Until one side of each house

Is drenched to black.

The roof-ridges swell,

Then later

Shrink & settle, deformed.

When the soaked house

Dries in the sun,

Clouds of steam rise up,

& naive strangers alert the firehouse.

Sea Change

Clouds are laughing. Rain is ending. The

old clown sits in revery. Later, a tornado

rearranged his priorities. Now, he has a line

of sight to the ocean, but his gaze is inward,

toward humility.

The Run

*for Harry Smith*

We cannot hope

When the white flame is gone

That other fires don’t burn

Under the flags of ancient ice

Beneath the tears of regret

Beyond the edge of light

Far from their overheated dens

Cold men run to the end

Down the darkened passing lanes

To strange gardens of fire

In wombs where they began

Beyond the porcelain moon

We’ll feel no pain for what we’ve been

Even if it’s never spring again

Animal Behavior

Some animals

Will only love you

If you are part

Of their pack.

Some animals

Will try to eat you

Even if you

Are their offspring.

Some animals

Will chew off

Their own feet

To escape a trap.

Some animals

Are always ready

To run away, listening

To live another day.

Some animals

Howl, while others

Growl, or snarl.

Some purr or smile.

Some animals

Don’t even have

Any fur.

What kind of animal

Is that, over there?

For The Living Dead

1.

I rise with an effort

I feel the dead

They vibrate

In my foggy heart

Like icebergs colliding

In oceans of blood

I am alone

I sit by my window

I become a stone

Like stagnant water

Or steady drumming

I was once a prisoner too

I hear again

The familiar beat

Inside my heart

The divine rhythm

Of the countless dead

The rainstorms of light

2.

The zombies are revolting

They are crude in their culinary habits

Eating the flesh of the living

Raw with no seasoning

Duly elected representatives

With secret term limits

Sound the alarm

The flesh-eaters are in the house

They are slow but they keep on coming

They are mesmerized by fireworks

They like to run amok

When they aren’t milling aimlessly

Zombies have no sex lives

They share the despair of the wolfman

Drunk on power under the full moon

Soaked in gasoline waiting for a light

Enflamed by love & hate

Counting down to the final insult

3.

A cipher falls dead in the snow

From a bus of discontinued androids

Last year’s models obsolete versions

Of absolute ideals polished

To insane shines that reflect

The light that cannot be silenced

Jolly gunshots wound our pride

Armies of pleasure reap

Rewards of perfect cartoon murders

Buddhas smithereened by friendly fire

Floating in rivers of polite bodies

Joyfully waving their black flags

They are the human furniture

They are the living dishrags

They are the constant reminders

They are the ruined fortresses

Engorged on cloned flesh

Fitted with artificial hearts

4.

In the post-apocalyptic world

The zombies are loosely organized

With no zombie leader

They wander in random abandon

Trying to play various musical instruments

But their rhythm is shot

A small group of human survivors

Still comb their hair & wear make-up

Drooling & shuffling their feet

The zombies are mystified

By the smallest most subtle stimuli

But their haunted bony faces never smile

In the land of the dead

If a zombie bites you

You become a zombie too

You become a soldier in the zombie army

Sharing a goal with no sense of purpose

With an inner drive to obey

5.

The red bird still sings

In the green earth tree

In the airtight shopping mall

In the fenced-off arena

In shadows of tall buildings

In shacks of toothpicks

Robots built by zombies

Then put in charge

The doors are all locked

Impervious to your meat cleavers

Oblivious to your howls of pain

Ungrateful for your sacrifices

We navigate by dead reckoning

Our options are greatly reduced

We search in vain for a way out

Disguised by decadent cosmetics

The sentries at the gate are drunk

When the invasion comes they will die

6.

What can we do

What do we know

We who are barely human

We who have broken the 7th seal

We who have left the gate open

We who have stolen the Golden Fleece

Now the ghosts swallow us

We sullenly celebrate their loss

Our eyes opened wide as greed

Our diamonds soaked in blood

The coldest heads prevail

To organize the slaughter

Where have we been

What have we done

We mounted the final burial mound

We heard again the ancient last rites

We cloned sheep by the herd

We unleashed the living dead

7.

The robots are in formation

Speaking in unison

They all have the same face

Humorously humorless

They bow & scrape

Without relish or anguish

Robot malfunctions

Are inconvenient

Animated by artificial energy

Their movements are spooky

Unaware of planned obsolescence

Or constant surveillance

They make good household servants

They make good food service workers

They don’t mind piece-work

Efficient & cost effective

Prison guards, they

Know no fear

8.

They don’t need names

They don’t have dreams

They don’t throw temper tantrums

They’re not ticklish

They don’t itch much

They never need vacations

They don’t get pregnant

They don’t get drunk

They don’t smoke

They don’t eat or shit

They know not art

They hardly ever fart

A robot may be decommissioned

When a better model is developed

Many of the latest prototypes

Are biodegradable

They utilize virtual fibers

To simulate the naturally organic

9.

The severed head of Orpheus screams

Among the ashes of ancestors

Among the names carved into stone

In secret caves & hidden places

In tedious epics of doomed voyages

To the edge of the world

Organic life is prone to rot

Wooden puppets become brittle

Formaldehyde replaces blood

When the machine rules

Over the maker of machines

Which ones are the tools

Ghost lost before the body

Toy soldier left out in the rain

Hollow & impervious to pain

The pounding of robot feet

Grows louder by the parameter

Drowning out the earths heart

10.

I feel the spirits of the dead

They explode like seedpods

A thousand downy spheres

Doors that won’t stay closed

Locks meant to be broken

Dandelions born in the wind

Beats of light drummed by spirits

Into the pulsating heart of sound

Into the unsanctified dirt

Out to the edges of space

Through the wounded waters

Beyond the toxic pain of time

I hear the call of light

Through the mechanical darkness

Through the marching shadows

Through the neutral rocks

The stale bread that feeds

The dreams of the anemic world

Brief Nudity

You may glimpse it as you feel

your way to the refrigerator

at midnight or while giving

birth at 3 AM or maybe in

the damp restroom of an old

off-Broadway theater where you may

catch it revealed proudly

& professionally by a

promising younger actor.

If you happen to see it

in a good clear mirror you will most

likely focus directly

on your expressive eyes except when

your hair requires a combing

or a trim or a better color

or to be conditioned

for greater volume or thinned

to reveal or conceal you.

In The Wake

Halfway through

hurricane season,

the lost rain

returned to the body:

sad monsoon

after the big wave

that flooded

our defenseless cups,

that left us

waterlogged but thirsty,

even as the angry tide

receded,

even as the ancient tears

ran undamed

from new eyes

that opened underwater

to see the useless furniture

swirling inexorably

toward the sucking drain,

whirlpooling

with dollar bills

into a foreign currency,

faces adrift

in low vapor,

shoreline lined

with dying dreams.

Driving North

Leaving home at 6 AM,

We drive by the misty wraiths

That drift up the dreamy creek.

They settle in low places

Transforming the rising sun

Into a yellow fuzz-ball.

She multiplies & then blinds

Those who stare at her too long.

The loud crows are debating

& the seagulls are laughing

As we make our way up north,

Up the light peninsula.

The sky is a deep ocean

High above the narrow land

Where clouds float like lonely ghosts

Below the sun, our burning hope.

Dream Home

In the home of the clown there are many rooms.

In the den, a statue of the Buddha palms some

coins of the realm. In the bedroom, oversized

clown-slippers, clown-boots & clown-flip-flops

are scattered on the floor, like beached whales.

There also stands the dressing table, with its oval

mirror ringed with solar bulbs.

The clown looks into the mirror &

sees a wise man with a big red nose.

Books line the library walls, but they are all blank

except one. The music room is full of drums. The

clown beats the drums to celebrate sunrise & sunset

each day. The living room floor is covered with pillows

& balloons of every color. Calliope music plays

continuously. The clown lives tenderly alone,

in his dream home.

Best Laid Plans

1.

A man planned on living.

When asked if he also planned

On dying, he replied

That dying, being automatic,

Required no planning.

“Isn’t living also automatic?”

I asked him, & he said

It was time to eat something.

2.

A cowbird laid its egg

In a cardinal’s nest.

It punctured the cardinal eggs

& replaced them with its own.

When the egg hatched,

The cardinals wore themselves out

Feeding the quickly growing cowbird

That they thought was their own.

Haunted Windows

Standing on sand

We peek beyond

Shafts of light

Past deeper shafts

Of darkness

We call out

Hoping to be heard

Above the rattling autos

You can see the stars

Even in the daylight

From a deep hole

This shafted wound

In mother earth

Where we were found

We cry for wings

Even as wings approach

Traveling Music

The wounded moon

Begins its long descent.

A stable of restless horses

Whinnies in the glad wind.

Uprooted trees roam South

In search of higher ground.

We are penetrated by the water

Of the perfect rainstorm,

Leaking into the blooded ground,

Leaking into the flesh of stone

Where the hot earth’s heart

Pumps mountains skyward,

To break, like waves

On salty desert plains.

One Last

Every time we passed

The old, gray barn

On our way to the lake,

We spoke glowingly

Of its stark beauty.

Inevitably,

Someone would offer

To photograph it

The next time

We came that way,

But no one ever did.

Now they’ve razed it.

Now, all that’s left

Is a pile of ashes

On a cement foundation,

& the fieldstone silo,

Standing alone,

One last glaring erection.

Dark Star

Dark star, deadly binary nemesis

Of the transitory star we call sun,

Here we are, on beleaguered planet earth,

Worrying about our own extinction.

Dark star, parent of the next meteor,

A tsunami of lethal energy,

Serial killer of the dinosaurs,

Great reaper of scheduled massacres,

Here, we are the captives of gravity.

Dark star, our lost identical twin,

Shooting mountains in our direction,

Playing Cain to our reflective Abel,

Birthing invisible anti-matter,

Catalyst for horrific disaster.

Dark star, planetary doppelganger,

Mirror occupying negative space,

Black reflection at the vortex of time,

Here, in sunlight, we wait,

& maturate.

Metamorphosis

People of the future!

Space & time between us,

Everyone a genetic genius,

Unlike the idiots

That paddle this smoky sky.

They will wake, each day

In their pyramids & domes,

So unlike our present homes,

To play all day

With each other’s clones.

They will all read poems,

Especially yours & mine,

Preserved for all time

In vast computer archives

So different from the present kind.

Loose Change

In an ironic twist, the man with the wooden leg

kicked the shit out of the burly high school football

star, with a finality born of years of patient waiting,

locked & loaded, for the anticipated moment of attack.

He never knew what hit him. Was it animal or mineral?

Or was it a tree, ripped from its roots, wielded as a

gigantic broom? He never knew. The brain damage

was swift & irreversible, the images brief.

Mild Violence

A boy joins the Army Reserve

to pay for college. He gets

called up & goes

to Iraq, but afterward

his lung capacity

is that of an old man.

His sister is ashamed

to be fat, & follows

every masochistic meal

with her head in the toilet.

Some vans explode

in some cities. Thousands

are permanently poisoned

by toxic subway fumes. Our homes

are brilliant with artificial light.

Anti-bacterial hand sanitizers

kill billions of morally neutral microbes. Our

ears are blasted with the noise

of countless phones going off at once

in a crowded theater, interrupting

the entertainment.

The Vampires

Vampires have a lot

To answer for

They wear formal-wear

While they siphon the blood

From virginal peasants

Many in their own employ

They slink around

Under cover of night

Suddenly appearing

At the sides

Of their sleeping victims

Without regard to privacy

They are sensitive

To the price of silver

As well as certain commodities

Not to mention real estate

Not to mention blood banks

Butcher shops orthodontic offices

They skip every holiday but one

They are dead on the run

Their memories are long

As are their teeth & nails

But they have no patience

Especially for the weak living

Asleep in material fortresses

Where no mirrors dare reflect

They dream of dying

Until waking to hunt

The souls of the living

Ultimate dark muggers

Who the hell are these bastards?

Why are they in charge?

The streets run red

Streams carry the blood

To the sewer arteries

To mingle with the melting sea

You might be a vampire

If you’re still talking

A year after your funeral

You might be a blood sucker

If you fall asleep

To awaken in somebody’s nightmare

You might be a vampire

If all the murders

Increase your profits

You might be a vampire

If everyone you see

Looks like fresh meat

This would be a good place

To live, if it wasn’t

For the damned vampires

You see them lurking

Everywhere nowadays

Drinking in bars, flying on planes

Plastic surgery. Cosmetics. Vodka.

They insidiously develop land deals.

They compulsively gamble in casinos.

Their breath reeks of blood.

Their immortal souls are lost

Forever in congressional rolls.

The Mutants

From the breathless moment

When they first see the light,

They are quite different.

They seem to know no guilt.

They feel no sympathy.

They just like to have fun.

They like hot, bright colors

& loud, red explosions.

They like to go too fast.

Sometimes they are damn good

At math, or even art.

Sometimes they can be smart.

But mostly they don’t care,

So they plot to escape

The prison of your heart.

Vultures & Vampires

When the vultures

Saw the vampires,

They were amused.

When the vampires

Saw the vultures,

They were impressed.

Each thought

That the other

Had good taste.

They all drew

Dividends

From the same account.

Some were

Fly-by-nights.

Some flew by day.

The Weird Wolves

There is plenty of anguished nocturnal activity in

the weird wolf world. (Beastly muggings, yellow

lighting, growling.)

Human by day, they stalk the canine darkness under

lunar slavery, filled with carnivorous desire.

Reckless beneath the moon, they anticipate the silver

bullet that will blast away the hunger that brought them

out to play.

It’s a mighty tough, often destructive time of life, adolescence.

The Bride

The blushing bride requires

500 lbs. of rhinestones

To be strewn lavishly

Among many thousands

Of fragrant rose petals.

She pulls a long pink train.

Her boobs are humongous

& came at a price tag

Of $6,000 each.

She sports false eyelashes

& tinted contact lenses.

Sincere tears trickle down

Her thickly powdered face,

Tracking through the glitter

On her surgically enhanced nose.

Her face is framed by a red wig

Made of hair from a real girl.

The Body Snatchers

The body snatchers work

in mysterious ways,

utilizing advanced technology.

They have full command

over the air waves

& the internet, & they

hold big shares of the dying

but strangely significant

print media. The converted have insipid smiles

& empty coal-lined eyes. If it weren’t

for the underground resistance,

their dominance would be world-wide.

The Plague

Exhuming the corpses of the victims,

researchers searched for biological evidence.

They discovered deadly fleas

unlikely as black holes

that left panic in their wakes

behind merchant ships

with deadly cargoes.

The contagion became personal

through well-meaning kisses.

As always,

the rich fled to the countryside,

leaving the poor to fend for themselves.

The dead were piled everywhere,

like discarded sausages.

Religion was no comfort or respite.

Had God taken righteous vengeance?

Had they all become mass murderers?

What ancient evil drove the whales to sea?

The smell of death is difficult to disguise.

Though the penitent may scourge themselves

with whips of leather & sharp thorns,

while the innocent plead for mercy,

bloodbaths of biblical proportion

still press & flood

against our crumbling castle walls.

Shadows

Histrionic ships

Scream along the coast

Avoiding calmer waters

\*

Great winds

Cross the sky

Just a play of shadows

\*

Sheep

On a hillside

Wonder where to go

\*

The twister touched down

On the open-palmed field

To pick up some ghosts

\*

Blueberries

Grow in cedar swamps

Favored by the bears

\*

Wind in my face

I beat my way home

Oak leaves go the other way

\*

A stone kisses a wheel

Only to spin away

The wheel rolls on

\*

Yellow maple leaves

Cover the garden beds

Fall nights wear white beards

\*

Geese fly north

Against cold rain

Unaware of direction

\*

Wild strawberries

Grow on low strings

Their fragrance refreshes the spirits of the dead

Deep Moorings

A hard wind blows through the pines

Whispers from the past

Connect us to now

\*

A kingfisher cries out

Shattering the stillness

Of the morning pond

\*

A large limb falls down

Beside an old barn

Car accident down the road

\*

A frog plops in a pond

Drowned-out by the sound

Of a big-rig air-horn

\*

A frantic squirrel runs

Through a mad café

A door opens next door

\*

Pigeons eat popcorn

In a crowded square

Falcons soar on wind currents

\*

Early morning smoke

Black tar releases its heat

Road crew takes a break

\*

On the evening news

Earthquakes share space

With hurricanes & tidal waves

\*

The clear white moonface

Smiles above the lake

Sailboats tug at deep moorings

\*

Loud television

Proffers Christmas cheer

Outside, the snow gets deeper

Lunar Fog

Man in the next booth

Complains about “Africans”

His breath smells like meat

\*

He lit his cigar

Passed me a damp matchbook

With only one match left

\*

A drunk woman

Stormed abuse

At her own reflection in a shop window

\*

A big grey owl hears

The heartbeat of a mouse

A far cry from silence

\*

Fire consumes a house

Where noone ever lived

The smoke-alarms still blare

\*

Indian flutes play

Windchimes in breeze off the lake

Two ears in between

\*

A ‘66 Beetle

Beatles on the radio

Play *Yesterday*

\*

The fickle festival crowd

Checked out early

To avoid a spring rainstorm

\*

A nude girl stood

Before a mirror

“Wild Horses” on the radio

\*

Nightflowers bloom

Beneath a yellow M

Bathed in lunar fog

\*

Embittered light

Sees itself

In black holes

The Circle Expands

We’re tied to the whipping post

Chain-whipped

By the Great Chain Of Being

\*

An urn of ashes

On a yellowed portrait

Paperweight of snow

\*

A man enters a house

He exits sneaking out

Through a different door

\*

Precarious pines

Grasp a mountain cliff

Clouds scud off to play in Maine

\*

A rusty halo hangs

On an unlit taper

Out of order

\*

Drunken boys drive

On crazy curves

The smell of gasoline in the air

\*

The bone-handled knife

Was my favorite

I left it on a park bench

\*

We will never escape

The shadows of destruction

Silence a sudden presence

\*

Two tiny buttons

Saved in a box

No one knows who put them there

\*

A bluegill breaks water

At the drop of a fly

The circle expands

Japanese Bones

Dawn glows on the edge

Signaling the departure

Of the windy dead

\*

Under the drum

Birch trees play timpani

In the music of the breeze

\*

I crossed a windy street

To a metronome

Japanese bones ticked air

\*

Spider in my doorway

Still here when I exit

Between spring rainstorms

\*

A bee investigated

A rotten berry

Then hummed away

\*

The cat doesn’t know

That poop in a Zen garden

Ruins its feng shui

\*

Rain drops on the tin roof

Footsteps hurry over

The antique covered bridge

\*

A moth found shelter

From a pounding rain

Under a plastic kayak

\*

Rain falls in a river

A message from the night

Kisses on wet skin

\*

Light disperses from a fresh grave

Seeking out

The thirsty summer moon

Hearts Of Light

Deer eat magnetic trilliums

Their entrails glow above

Stars in their own heaven

\*

Frosty spikes

Murderers of maternal

Stones

\*

What breeze can silence light?

What sound emanates

From gasping oceans?

\*

Wreathes of sunshine

Illuminate

The sandy corpses

\*

Distant coyotes

Chatter hysterically

Their eyes flash like stars

\*

Stars in my eyes

Centuries in transit

Fires extinguished years ago

\*

The pulsating morning sun

Sings an ancient song

& we all sing along

\*

Galaxies

Hearts of light

Years away

\*

Exploding supernovae

Spread particles

Through droplets of water

Persona

Coming into another spring

sixty summers down,

white light burns me

through dark days.

I peel the layers

from the onion of memory,

given the gravity of the grave.

So now my persona

is consuming my doppelganger.

I feel the triumph of stone

traveling from gravel to dust,

the fading smile

of a waning moon,

another seizure

on the seismic meter:

still one more tattoo

on the face

of my battered public bust.

In the arid badlands

Of desire,

Past the long watches

Of sleepless nights,

I hold communion

With those lost ghosts,

Even as I pass into

The ever-darkening mist.

Clown

I do not know me but

A train of thought

Drags me through

Illusory galaxies

Where silly circus music

Mocks my mortal wounds

While I run in circles

Wearing shoes that don’t fit

An unfortunate immigrant

Buffeted by forces of history

I somehow manage

A foolish laugh

Released from myself detached

My face a funny mask

Visitation

Walking through a worn-out woods,

I came upon a cottage

Which no one had called home

Since the death of an old man.

The key was easy to find,

Hidden just beneath the sill

Of the weathered front door.

As I crossed the threshold,

A hiss of “yes” echoed

From the corners of the room,

Chased by a silence so still

You could have heard a tissue

Flutter to the dusty floor.

When I walked out the door

Dust floated up & danced

To the music of the past.

Great Smoky Mountains

Mountains, temporal, recede

Into distant memories, mist

Seen by the surreal Magritte:

Floating rocks, hats, umbrellas

Not clouds, but green apples

Afloat, high above

The rocks that hang

Small fishes appear

From outer space, to nip

My back, an apple to bob

Bobber down, darkness

All around, a floating

Thought, gone. Below

The planets, temporarily

Disconnected, rises

A rocky garden

My frosty breath.

Apparition

A rabid raccoon stalked across the neighbor’s

backyard. Its eyes were milky & saliva hung

like a film cocoon from its mouth. It moved slowly,

back-hairs on end. When it disappeared into the

woods, I was filled with horror & remorse.

The Mist

I wander

Through memory caverns

In search

Of the elusive present,

Like a big fish

That struggles upstream

To spawn in times river

One last time.

Like a mad wind

In an ancient storm,

Dead friends

Pierce the peaceful solitude

Where I have come

To take my soft rest

In the depth

Of a winter night’s dream.

In the arid badlands

Of desire,

Past the long watches

Of sleepless nights,

I hold communion

With those lost ghosts,

Even as I pass into

The ever-darkening mist.

Cave Of The Spirits

I dreamt that the sight of the underground passages

filled our hearts with an unknown light. Spirits lived in

the caverns & in the giant, domed treasure room at its very

center. We laughed as we entered the chamber to see the

profuse silver leaves & gold apples, & the many metallic

plaques, covered with stars, moons, suns & snakes. The

luminous snakes were crawling up pyramids, striving for

the summits, flying through the heavens with a trail of fire or

lying on the reflective golden heads of the gods. The cave was

deep, wide & warm. No one wanted to wake, but some

of us couldn’t help it.

Expressway Death

Tonight while driving out to

get my wife from a birthday party, I

saw something move 100 yards in

front of the car. A dog had just

been hit & was struggling to

get up. It looked as if its leg

was broken. I drove past on the

shoulder of the road so I wouldn’t

hit it again. So did the other

drivers, although none of us

stopped to help it.

I thought about it: but maybe it

would not know me for a friend &

would bite my hand. The expressway

traffic was tedious with people

coming home after another day. I

thought: stop at the next exit

& call the humane society. I began

to feel excited over what I hoped

to do, but then I passed the exit &

kept on going. I stayed with the

traffic until my own exit.

On the way back home I wondered

if it was still there. When I saw the

lifeless shape, I recognized

my own blood staining the long road.

Time Out

Alone on a hillside

I thought of another place

An empty field

Of tall marsh grass

In cold luxurious sunset

I saw him coming

Through the purple clouds

His hands full of stars

Released from his prison at last

While on the horizon

In a blazing mist

The light of time went out

Refrain

Apocalyptic moments

recall scenes

of adolescent glory.

The man in the moon

transforms into

an ancient

pockmarked battlefield.

What goes up

experiences gravity,

right into the grave.

Even so, I light

my best smile

& continue to write my life,

anticipation mitigated

by anonymous regret.

Happy to be sane

underneath the sun,

although arraigned

by prosecutions of shame,

I do not refrain.

Methane

Upscale properties upstage nature.

Underground sprinkling

Competes with acid rain.

A car salesman

With a $40,000 Rolex

Searches for child pornography

On the global internet.

Above, seven turkey vultures

Spin on the thermal wind

Above the carcass of a doe.

They hone in on methane,

The familiar scent of decay.

Stranded On A Cloud

A dusty statue

Of the Buddha,

Lone occupant

Of a storage unit.

Stubborn doves

Scratch in snow

Beneath

An empty feeder.

Nowhere to land

A yellow glider;

Aerial obstacles:

Flags, wires, lines.

I dwell

On my lost anchor,

Lost overboard

By my lost son.

Final Question

If the universe

ceased to expand,

& contracted into

one last dense wish

against the dark & cold,

& the burnt-out stars

fell into

a hungry black hole,

would a memory of fire

still travel past

the catatonic stones

where light began as love

in the all conceiving night?

Cold Oceans

I sit by my open window.

A lake breeze brings the outside in.

The white pine tree makes its green stand

Between me & the foggy lake.

It grows taller with each season,

But I do not.

My height has eroded as my age increased.

Even the Rockies are half the size

Which they were a million years ago.

The wind brings the scent of the lake to me.

It blows my countless blessings

Beyond cold oceans.

Drifts

on a sand dune a rune

written by a stray offshore wind

behind a low cloud

a blue heron waits

seeing past its reflection

\*

a big green snowplow

after a heavy snowstorm

a blade that cuts through

white flowers in windowsills

white dreams throughout the winter

\*

outside my window

low branches bow in sorrow

a spider in the corner

works out his karma

while owls sleep in the deep woods

Flotsam

six black vultures turn

& spin in the methane wind

above a dead doe

her gasses rise to the sky

another floater

\*

cars speed down the road

their garish colors bleeding

through the dark shadows

accompanied by a big stomp

bass jacked up thumping up

\*

seeds scatter freely

in the soggy spring breezes

but I am asleep

beneath a tall pine tree free

to float on my bay of dreams

`

The Dark Roofs

in the new darkness

the white light of a firefly

skips on the thick hedge

it makes us think of fairies

even though we know better

\*

wet city streets shine

under crisscrossing headlights

leftover snow melts

into the whirlpool storm drains

we breathe the heady spring breeze

\*

the low moon is huge

surrounded by distant stars

silhouettes of trees

decorate black hills

bats whirl over the dark roofs

Sound Off

a loud pavement saw

rattles through a cement slab

dust flies everywhere

sand bleaches in the sunlight

until the hole is refilled

\*

a quick spark ignites

a can of gasoline flares

the sound pops eardrums

fire sprays in random patterns

catching some missing others

\*

a quiet stream flows

through a pine & cedar woods

deer crash through low brush

birds & bugs sound off

Fresh Red

a cold autumn wind

coming across the water

dries away my tears

steals the breath from my lips

more for the breath of the earth

\*

at the blues concert

a girl with colorful arms

waves them over us

while a toothless man

dances his high yellow steps

\*

in the woods behind

the trees drop their green disguise

truckloads of apples

run along the long highway

bring fresh red to the south

Aggression

a mad anarchist

threw a bomb into a crowd

he then ran away

to a safehouse in the town

where his evil dreams were born

\*

three wild crocodiles

tore at a piece of chicken

in furious rage

the water churned skyward

moments later a still lake

\*

a cop was in shock

after being beaten up

by a kung-fu boy

he never knew what hit him

after the boy flashed that grin

Testimony

a car lost control

& raced up on our lawn

toward where I sat alone

it rammed into an elm

improving my perspective

\*

one rainy morning

I took an elevator

to the thirteenth floor

of the tall Hall of Justice

rain testified for twenty miles

\*

two boys brought their guns

to the crowded high school dance

they shot four people

many others took on wounds

finally they shot themselves

Electric Sunshine

seven friends met up

at a bar on Bourbon Street

they had a few beers

each man told a sad story

so they each had a good laugh

\*

the audience fled

when the giant ape got loose

but they left behind

their purses & their programs

to be crushed by big feet

\*

three chickadees splash

in the bright garden birdbath

they chirp to the light

alive on a sunny day

their wings drip electric sunshine

Steps

tripping down the stairs

an old man fell to his death

they found him too late

in his fist a dark token

the last dollar he’d earned

\*

a bountiful blonde

slipped into the office

to steal all the keys

while one guard took a slow leak

the other stared enraptured

\*

a big golden dog

ran into a burning house

with no thought of self

to warn people she loved

her love hotter than mere fire

Light Chop

seven vapor trails

white rivers one hundred miles

across the ocean

the sky soft blue & endless

two massive clouds float

\*

the dark peaty dirt

surrounds a white grub

moles hunt through dark tunnels

shovels chop through crusty soil

worms exposed to sunlight dig

\*

little fish circle

in a sunlit cathedral

weeds stretch to the light

over darker depths below

a light chop swirls the surface

Spinners

the crows are squawking

in the windy pre-storm sky

drowning out the songs

of my happy morning mood

spinning in another time

\*

the red Chevrolet

spins along the long highway

radio blasting

tuned to a driving beat

baby in the hot backseat

\*

a school of minnows

swims through curtains of sunlight

I see them from on-high

while morning dew evaporates

beneath a yellowing sky

November Song

early winter light

glows against the high white clouds

blue bowl overhead

redwing blackbirds heading south

to fields recently mowed

\*

houselights extinguished

the shoreline swallows each house

leaving the white ones

to glow alone through cold dawn

luminous & stark

\*

a melodic tune

rises up from memory

in imitation

of stubborn sparrows

that stay all winter searching

Broken Branches

*for Bob Willemstein*

Inspired by Gonzo

role models, we

repeatedly breeched the

dangerous border,

always coming closer

to the final conflagration.

The trees we razed

had been dead for years.

We dropped them

with surgical indifference,

brushing past live wires

to rain bright sparks

against the dusk.

Then one night, the policemen

crashed through the door.

Their guns were drawn &

they shouted commands.

We tried to hide

in stupid silence

from the inevitable collapse.

Through the scary air

images of old friends

faded into long shadows

where our footprints disintegrated

amid the scattered ashes,

brought back to earth

beneath the broken branches.

My Father’s Job

My father worked at a car factory, but

When I was a little boy I thought that it

Was a prison, because of the impression

I got one morning when I went along to

Drop him off for the day-shift outside a big fence

That surrounded a huge brick building that had

No windows except a row of tiny ones

Way up by the roofline, many stories up.

My father went in through a small red door.

When he opened the door, loud noise busted out.

A quick glance revealed it as a prison:

All the walls & floors were a dull gray color.

All the men wore uniform gray coveralls.

An odor of oil escaped into the air

Along with the steady banging of big dies.

All the workers seemed to shuffle their feet.

We took him to that gray place every day.

As I grew older, I understood that it

Was just where he worked, making car bodies,

But I still couldn’t shake the feeling that he

Wanted to get out, but couldn’t.

Once, he quit to play piano in a bar.

He was happy for a while, but

Then my mother wanted more money so

He went back inside, this time for life.

Allison Bound

Allison lived only

three blocks away but

it could have been

light years. She

was the prettiest girl

in school, the blond

blue eyed girl whom

all the boys loved the

most. One night I had

a dream in which

two other mean boys

captured our Allison

& tied her to a post. In

my dream I rescued

her, & she was

nakedly grateful.

I had the dream every

night for a week. In

that week, my feelings

for Allison evolved.

When I saw her at

school, she seemed

more familiar, as close

as skin growing over

a scab. Then, I had

another dream. This time

I was the one who

had stripped & tied

her up, ready to defend

my prize from the other boys.

Shooting Lessons

Russ & Dave were brothers

& they were funny guys,

good buddies to play war with.

Dozens of boys would gather

to shoot BB guns at each other

in the woods behind their house.

One summer day I went to play

war with Russ & Dave. I had

the single-shot Daisy with me that

my father gave me before he left.

From down the block I could see

the police cars & ambulance

on their front lawn, right up

against the big maple we had

all climbed together the day before.

Dave was led, in tears, to

the police car. Russ was carried

to the ambulance, but it didn’t leave.

They’d been playing with their father’s

12 gauge shotgun. Russ came

around a corner & his brother

shot him in the chest, from the hip.

We didn’t see Dave for a year.

They sent him off to a group home

in Colorado for the 7th grade.

When he returned, he wasn’t the same.

He cried easily & never smiled.

For awhile after Dave killed Russ,

we all stopped playing war.

None of my friends shot anyone

for the rest of that hot summer

when the war took David’s brother.

Eggshells

In the summer of my 16th year

I lived on a small farm

in Grand Haven, Michigan,

so that I could help take care

of a few hundred chickens

& an acre of strawberries

for some old people we knew.

The old man had been stricken

by a stroke. I did his work.

He let me look at his life.

I learned the difference

between a good egg & a

bad one. I learned that

eggs may still be called ‘fresh’

even when they’re three days old.

Fertilized eggs are bad

because they are full of blood.

You can’t tell the bad eggs

by sight. You have to put them

over a lightbulb, to see inside.

I learned a few things that summer,

from the old couple, & their

chickens & their strawberries.

But my biggest lesson came

on the short car ride back home.

At the end of August, Mother

picked me up in a borrowed Renault.

The walls of that car were just

about one inch thick, & it

had a large, open sunroof.

Doing sixty down steep Johnson Hill

in thick traffic, red brake lights

flashed in front of us. Mom

hadn’t driven the Renault before.

She jammed her foot on the clutch,

thinking that it was the brake,

so we only went faster.

We swerved to the shoulder,

skidded sideways on the gravel

& hit the steel guard rail, hard.

We went airborne, back toward

traffic, touched down briefly

on the black road, then rolled

four times to rest in the ditch.

I felt it in slow motion.

A crowd gathered quickly.

I crawled out the back window.

My right arm hung, dislocated.

My mom was pinned beneath

the open sunroof of the car.

The crowd gawked at the blood

that ran from my mother’s head.

I yelled at them “Let’s get

this car off my mother!”

Bless their wavering hearts, they did.

Those men probably saved her life.

Some others took my leather jacket

& my suitcase, but left the laundry.

Both kinds of people were revealed

emerging from the wreckage that day.

There & Back

*for Brad Harris*

Going to the 1968 Democratic

Convention seemed like fun. I talked my

friend Brad into it, though he was

apolitical. Only a 3 hour drive from

Grand Rapids to Chicago. Abbie Hoffman &

Hunter S. Thompson would be

there to support the poet candidate, Eugene

McCarthy. We’d read the notices in

*The Village Voice*. We felt there would

be chicks there who believed in Free Love.

Brad had an old red Volkswagen. We

had painted the doors with big white

peace signs. We wore beads & chin

beards, long hair & personalized holy

blue jeans. One of us even wore Granny

glasses. When we got to Chicago, Grant

Park was cordoned off by police barriers. So, we

stayed safely on the perimeter. We saw others

running scared & bloodied on the head by

Chicago cops, but no one bothered us.

It went on for two days with us on

the edge of the action. We slept in the

Volkswagen on a side street until the third

night when McCarthy had been robbed &

defeated, Humphrey clown substituted, the

protestors beaten & jailed. We were leaving

when a carload of drunken local teenagers

pulled up alongside, threw a bottle at us &

yelled that they were going to kill us fucking

hippies. They started to chase us through town.

Brad began to panic. He just couldn’t

think fast enough. “Tell me what to do.”

he said. At one point, they blocked us

into a blind alley. They got out with clubs &

tire irons & ran toward us. “Drive

right over that curb!” I said, & we clumped

over. It was one of those situations when

time stretches out into slow motion.

That’s when we made a big mistake &

turned the car onto the Eisenhower freeway.

Their big Buick rear-ended us, pushing

the poor Volkswagen faster than it could

go. The axle cracked in half & the Bug rolled

up a shoulder, to collapse atan precarious

angle, ticking its last heartbeats. We got out &

ran. We climbed a chain link fence, crossed

some railroad tracks & hid in a doorway as they

crept past looking to finish us. We got to

a Police station, but they didn’t care. A black

man took us via the el to the Greyhound station.

The bus terminal was crowded with escaping

demonstrators. Cops were herding people in a

circuit up the escalator & back down the other

side. We had to keep moving until our bus was

announced. Brad was upset about the loss of

his car. No chicks, Yippies or fun. I was

upset that the attackers had been our own

age. All the way back home I digested the sour

truth. It would never be easy to distinguish

our friends from our enemies again.

Flood Tide

Another day surges over

the horizon, flotsam

sloshing through its dark

sluice. Loose pages

drift in pools, like

travelers, asleep beneath

the hills. There is no

bowl to contain our

tears, just flooded floors in

a hastily abandoned factory.

Though pleasure pours

like rain, we swim

on until dark, emerging

from the water’s edge smelling

like wet sand. Submerged

beneath our common

respiration, we wonder if

the ocean breeze will

keep us on course or

blow us back into ourselves.

We have thrown down our

breathless waves, arriving

home late but still

somehow hopelessly

adrift. There is no

pail for love. Even though

we’ve wrapped ourselves within

each others arms, each

of us still drowns alone.