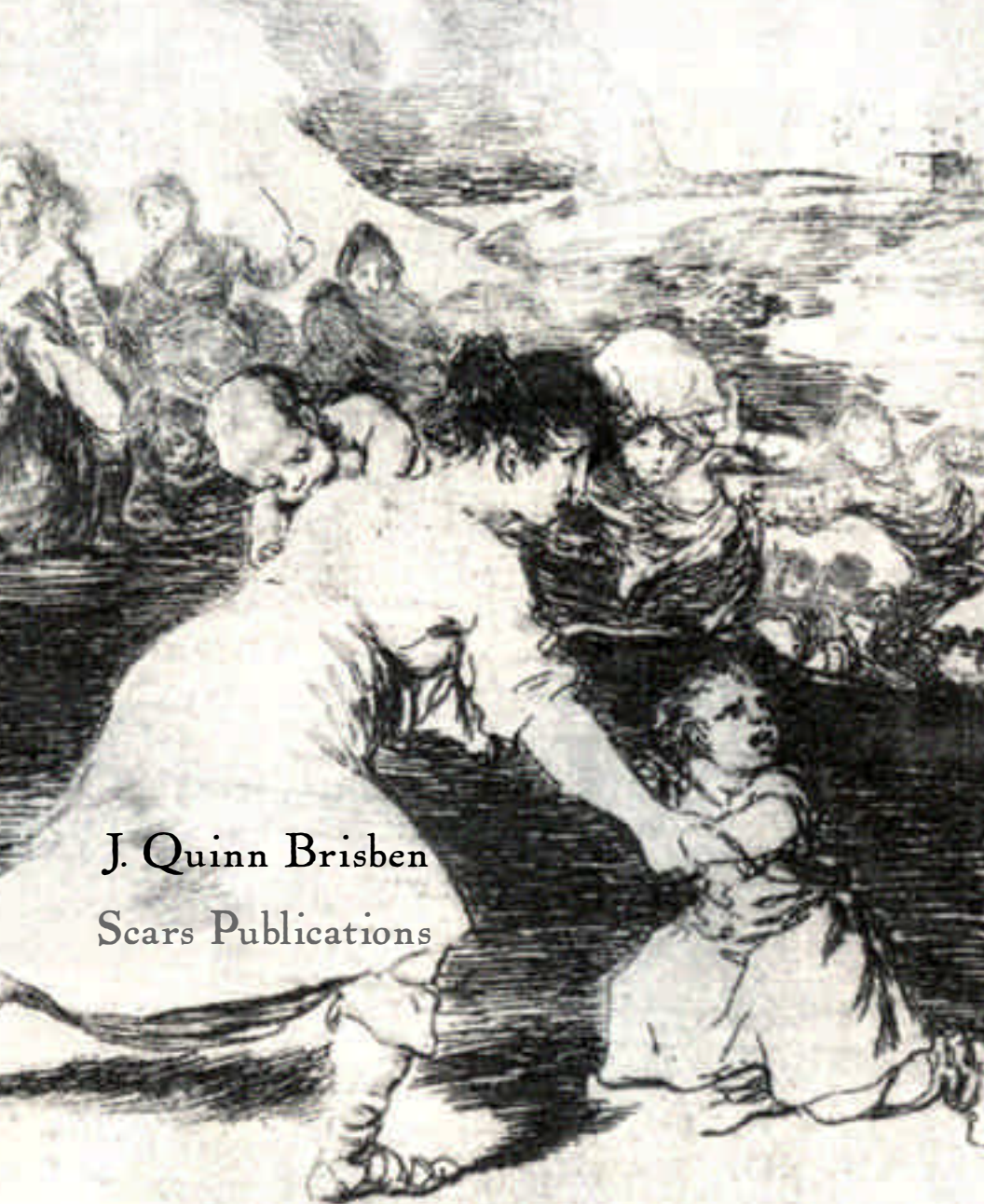


I SAW THIS

New and Old Poems



J. Quinn Brisben

Scars Publications

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America 2006

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Preface

The title and the cover illustration are taken from a print entitled *Yo lo vi* from the series of prints *Los desastres de la Guerra* by Francisco Goya de Lucientes, his account of the Spanish popular resistance to French occupation for which the word “guerrilla” was invented. I have always identified closely with that artist.

“Life is a game like any other,” as Bret Harte’s gambler knew, “with the usual odds in favor of the dealer.” I am in my seventy-second year, subject to the effects of a lifetime of bad health habits and hard knocks, with a singular richness of body parts capable of predicting changes in the weather and discomforts and losses of mobility that steadily increase. Last year I suffered a malfunctioning heart valve. Electroshock put it back in order, but it was a warning that, like my late older contemporary Bill Mauldin’s World War II soldier, I am a “fugitive from the law of averages.” If the poems I have written since the publication of *The Significance of the Frontier* in 2002 and my older poems that are worth salvaging are ever to be included in a book, I must take action now.

Even if I did not think so, my wife does, and I have been happy over the more than fifty years of our marriage and generally to do as she advises. There are some mentions of her in these poems, and of our children, grandchildren, and continually extending family, but the privacy of my family relationships is something that I have tried to respect. My parents and other older relatives are long dead, and I have tried to be as fair to them as possible, for they can no longer answer me.

The rest of my life, even the part that mostly goes on inside my head, is public. I was a public school teacher for the major phase of my career, and I live on a teacher’s pension. I still volunteer to teach any class if asked, on the condition that I do not have to prepare students for examinations that mainly test their ability to pass examinations, evaluate their unique achievements against each other, attend faculty meetings or otherwise listen overmuch to administrative jargon, or eat in school cafeterias.

I have taken public stands on every political issue of my lifetime and shall continue to do so, especially issues about which bullies are threatening me or my friends. I shall continue to travel as long as I am physically able, and I hope my imagination will travel long after that.

My influences come from all over, some of them unfashionable although I have only the vaguest notions of what the current fashions are. I have a few friends who are poets, but mostly I hang with the silent majority who do not practice that art. I try to write things from which that group can get something the first time they hear or read it and more on repetitions. I use free verse, generally a sort of shaggy pentameter line, but I use traditional forms, too, most often when I am too angry just to let it flow. I steal when it is handy to do so and am not afraid of clichés if they are still true. My poetry often expresses connections that would not be clear if I tried to write them in prose, but I try to avoid obscurity.

I would like to think I have an audience. Let me hear from you and perhaps suggest a location where you would like me to take you in my persona as the cicerone.

I do not expect to make a profit on this book, but, as a gambling uncle of mine used to say, "I hope I break even today. I need the money."

I. Revised from a 1960s Notebook

The Unities

when the Case plant struck
Racine was split, paralyzed
I carried canned goods
from outside sympathizers
to angry folk on picket lines

at the fogged night gate
Kevin Barry died for us
blacks joined voices with
Irish, Poles, Italians, me
arm in arm in unison

Racine's close-bonded
workers were alexandrines
of 1960
as each moment surely means
people still make unities

This Was Real

FRESH POETRY was a sign
On a store selling necessary things
At the corner of Damen and Monroe
Where we could also FRESH MEET,
The sidewalk in front marvelously
Cracked, stained, spattered, warped,
But nearly always full of easy jokes
With honed anger seldom visible;
“Who you?” they would ask; “I me,”
I would say and join in laughter

In the Jail of Columbus

In the jail of Columbus, Mississippi,
For crimes against the local customs
I scarcely need defend myself
When a cell brother swings, misses,
And collapses onto me
Our stinks compounding.

He cannot control one raggy leg
And is remorseful and confides
That he has fought our nation's foes:
Yanked from a guardhouse in France
To make a part of General Patton's
Red Ball Express,
Taking orders from black noncoms.

He did not get the bad leg there
But later when he "copped a joe",
Cutting a heel tendon with an axe
To make it off the road gang
When he figured he would either
Be drunk or in jail forever.

As I guide him back to his bunk
And look through bars across the street
At lovely houses built with sweat of slaves
I reflect that our enemies
Inside our heads and worldwide
Are members of one another.

Pastorale

slowing in a jam
routinely constipating an intersection
reflecting as I wait
on two absurd twigs
planted near the curb by my house
by a careless crew last month
(Bureau of Forestry and Parkways, Chicago)
damaging roots
and otherwise taking their time
in the middle of the riot season
but one has three leaves
and the other some green shoots
my four year-old presses his head
with closed eyes on those frail trunks
counts up to a hundred by fives
and comes looking ready or not
so I must reckon them really trees
I think of my mountain of paper
with my students under it
in the noisy chaos of my school
(Board of Education, Chicago)
wishing luck to everything
that shows some potential for growth

Disasters of Another War

(an account of July 31, 1966)

I. *Sad Misgivings about Things to Come*

Falling awake from dreams of exploded kids,
I sought Goya, boxed tight under boarded window,
Wedge between Daumier and Brady, big books,
Hard to encase, thus packed weeks before the move;
Delving, cut my thumb on angry shards of glass,
Survivors of a silver shower cascading on the box
Last time the neighbors smashed the windows;
I left my bloody print on bloodier pages,
Finding we shared the same damned world all right.

II. *With Reason or Without*

This Sunday the *Chicago Tribune* reports:
The US Air Force is sorry for blasting the
Wrong gook village last week and assures
Any survivors that they will try to be
More careful next time but please remember that
It is damned hard to tell one gook from another and
Anyways, if you were not buddies of the v. c.,
How come you run when you saw our planes?
In England the state regrets that it hanged the
Wrong man some years back and offers the right
Of appeal, and here in town a mob mistook some
Dark spiks for niggers on the beach to their sorrow,
And quite a few people have oversteered their
Cars into things over the weekend
(No mention is made of the small angry
Lawndale boy who chunked a brick at
My car during the riot, not caring that both myself
And the car are veterans of the Movement, so have
Good intentions; thus far this uppity little recipient
Of my welfare and pity has not apologized)
Meanwhile an uncertain number of other
Human beings have been killed, maimed, degraded
On purpose in order to make a buck, save,
Their souls, defend freedom, or some other noble cause.

III. *You Were Born for This?*

The smashed windshield cuts our speed, no matter,
The sixteen year-old young ladies from Alabama who
Are our guests for the summer, my wife and I,
And our two children, aged seven and four, are
Not rushed; our oldest, new to print, has tried to
Decipher *Commonwealth Edison Electric Substation*
And I tell her that it is the power structure
And make a joke that we are against it;
Then she tries her new skills on signs indicating
The big road and I help her: *Adlai E. Stevenson Expressway*
And she asks "Who was what's his name whose
Road we're on?" and I answer "A deserving dead
Democrat, part of the power structure, used words well;
I used to think that men who used words well
Would be good men; he got my virgin vote;
He lost; he lost well; later on, in the UN,
He was used like a judas hog in the stockyards
On his fellow word lovers; he joked a lot;
I think he was sad; all of us jokers
Get sad if we have to sell out to survive."

IV. *They Will Still Be Useful*

Feldman and I chat happily about Alabama
Where the young ladies are from and where we
Both have roots. We are in an improvised museum
In the basement of Margaret Burroughs' house
Filled with a history that regular museums do not
Yet admit exists. We are exiles longing for kin
From whom we have severed ourselves and attached to
Those who have very good reasons not to trust us.
We joke about the face of Crispus Attucks in
Paul Revere's print darkened by Feldman's marker
Because no one wanted Virginians to know that the first
Massacred martyr in the Boston snow was black,
But now the museum needs his black face, as do we all;
And as Feldman and I talk of catfish and slow speech
He says "By the waters of Babylon, we wept when
We remembered Zion," and we are loving exiles together.

V. Ravages of War

Doubletime crews work on Sunday
To smoothe our sinuous super-road
Dedicated to our martyred chief;
Our pace is aptly funereal;
I brag to my gaping posterity
That once I saw him plain right here,
Oozed by him in a honking clot
While he smiled at zoom lens and me;
In living color saw hair-fine lines
That tv always blurred to youth;
Posterity is properly impressed.
He had a style so sharply tailored that
Content was irrelevant, accessory,
Changed with our mood like cuff links;
Gatsby's highest-bouncing dream come true;
With him the edge of World War III
Was safe like the Bobs at Riverview;
Life was kicks, the James Bond bit;
He had a pluperfect license to kill,
Double-O the size of a planet,
Double-O for the masses, millions
Are trained to kill classy; you,
Too, sad sack, can make history;
Buy a good one-owner used gun;
Spatter brains on a fine silk suit;
You, too, can blaze out on tv:
Double-O, double-O forever.

VI. *What More Can Be Done?*

If you want to be subversive, let me tell you what to do.
Take your wife and your family to a picnic with you.
Go out to Caldwell Woods where the ants seldom trouble you,
And have a swinging time with the IWW.

Industrial Workers of the World, Wobblies, on all
The subversive lists, watched by the FBI, constantly
Leaping at the throat of capitalism, intend to gum it to
death. The masses couldn't make it, but the vanguard is all there:
Old folks with their lovely scars and young folks with wild hair.
The beardy ones amuse themselves reciting poetry:
Shouting "Down with LBJ and up with LSD."

One asked me what I recommended to expand the
Consciousness. "Try sex," I said, "and while you're
Waiting, have a beer."

Then a fight boiled up in the next grove:
This Polack woman by Christ swung from her heels,
Clipping this guy flat on the jaw with a frying pan,
Arcing him into crumpled beer cans with such grace
And verve that I laughed as if it were a cartoon,
Which I reckon my four year-old thought it was,
And I had to pull him back. We program ourselves
And maybe are hard-wired to enjoy things like that.
We love a fight that does not hurt us: the stunned,
Tooth-spitting punk was likely asking for it,
Both sides had dulled their senses with a lot of booze,
Thirty feet away is as good as half a world. As Pogo
Used to say: "We have met the enemy, and he is us."

VII. *This Is Bad*

the boulevard points
crossing Roosevelt like two
rat-bitten fingers

laughing corner boys
afloat with goatish dances
are a mad black threat

riots clear the air
focus the scene in a flash
like summer lightning

both windows and men
boarded up, scrawled on, opaque
unnerve the tired cops

when troops occupied
girls pursued them, boys tried to
join up, it figures

sweating for pennies
old clothes me wait for looters
poor men rob poor men

victims' angry screams
are no wave of the future
blind men do not lead

despair frightens us
as good an excuse as most
for doing nothing

in this nightmare world
those who build the long slow way
envy the smashers

VIII. *The Worst Is Begging*

Lack of power corrupts, too. Not good to crawl.
Should not have to ask for what should be yours to take.
In rich country, fine line between beg and threat. Ibsen,
An Enemy of the People, got busted glass, too, for revealing
Pollution at wealth source, said: "Never wear best pants
When speaking truth." I add to daunt power structure
And be safe wear old pants from good suit, white shirt,
Necktie, white skin; impresses mob, cops, even dogs who
Have trained bias like masters. In modern social change
Image is all. In age of absolute bang must put on
Squeeze gently. Don't be violent or violated. Turn other cheek.
Better publicity. Keep at it. Powers will do much
For easy conscience. Even without heart change will give in
Just to get you shut up and sat down. Fellow refugee,
Name of Brecht, said: "The rich have hard hearts
But weak nerves." Take it easy but take it.

IX. *Do They Belong to Another Race?*

The crowd spouts filth like exposed wounds
Thou bastardly rogue! Whoreson round man!
When Falstaff unexpectedly joins our line.
Fat guts! Obscene, greasy tallow keech!
We are awed as by a bishop or movie star
Polecat! White bearded Satan! Muddy rascal!
By the old man in his ample flesh sweating
Villainous abominable misleader of youth!
Overmuch, larding the sidewalks of Marquette Park.
Nott pated fool! Whoreson impudent embossed rascal!
Marchers are gluttons for soul mostly, but we welcome
Stuffed cloak bag of guts! Horse back breaker!
His ample flesh in a spirit of universal brotherhood.
Whoreson candle mine! Swollen parcel of dropsies!
We are glad he has become one with the anthem singers.
Gray iniquity! Greasy knight! Fat paunch!
He asks who will stand him a cup on our return.
Huge bombard of sack! Reverend vice! Chewet!
I volunteer. The line moves on.

X. *What Is All That Noise About?*

Jesus, Mama, come away from tv a minute;
The jig is up, there's hundreds of them
Niggers in the park, and some of them are white;
They're nuts if they think they can walk through here;
We still got some rights. The three kids
From next door are throwing rocks and bottles;
The girls down the block have a big sign, WHITE POWER
It says with a big swastika on it; look at the nuts!
There's one with a cowboy hat and a one-legged man
And a little bald-headed nigger preacher with a skull cap on
And two girls with hair like steel wool and a nun
And would you believe two guys from this neighborhood,
How could they sink so low? Why did they come?
We never done nothing to bother the niggers, why do
They bother us? This is a good neighborhood, never
No trouble; Mama, turn off Walt Disney and watch
Our guys that the cops just let go from their wagon;
They're headed for those unguarded cars by the lagoon.

Mama, now you can see the burning cars
Reflected in the lake, just like a movie.

XI. *Strange Piety*

The howling boy aims a fist-sized rock
At a nun in full habit, hitting her forehead,
Shattering her plain, wire-framed eyeglasses,
Causing distortions that increase wry chaos;
Bright blood dies coif, trickles down
Scrubbed cheek, stippling gray habit as
She falls like a stunned bird to the sidewalk.
Ten ranks back a priest and I
Pressed in by cops and mob are forced
To stand still as the crowd yells for
More blood. "*Potemkin*, I say, and
He replies, "Yes, I remember, on the steps."
Then he says "That boy is Catholic;
"I know his whole family," and I say
"I'm not Catholic, but he was my student."
It looks like a hell of a long wait
Before this crowd will let us split.

XII. *Truth Is Dead*

Sunset is a shield in fragments:
Silver webs of shattered glass
Flaring with astounding grace
From sugary tortured knots
Encircling holes of naked air
Which sting my face with glitter.
In this bad luck mirror world
We do not see even darkly.
Chained in the nightmare cave
People are not themselves but shadows
Destroying as they intersect.
Frightened men still deny
Evidence of things done.
Dawn won't mend this cracked globe,
Relic of past strains and growth;
Humans still smash their shadowy fellows
And not the chains that bind them.

XIII. *Will It Rise Again?*

Full dark. Stifling. Still. Time to plan.
Four classes tomorrow. Start with a test.
Bill of rights. Pound it. One more time. Hard.
October Revolution next. The world shakes easy.
Learns slow. Shame. Now for night school.
Periclean Athens and Medician Florence. Good.
I have a thing for pregnant rowdy cities. Good.
Rainbow stretched across the street. Street light
Prised through cracked glass. Sign of peace.
Colors not really separate. Illusion. To bed.
Wife and I murmur through feverish shadows.
I will get the windshield fixed tomorrow.
The glass shop has skilled men. It should be done
With time to spare to drive to night school.
She will sew with the girls. Tuesday afternoon
Can she have the car to shop? Sure. No more talk.
We have been one flesh for such an easy age
We do not have much need for words.
We pulse and swell and blend and build and soar
Like a Mozart string quartet, gentle into echoes.
Tomorrow we knock the amber off the fossils. Walk
A little forward. Just might make it. Just might.

North Side Mad Song

breakthrough
subway leaps to el
clean miracle
ilky hair, fishbelly skin
white knight has zapped them all

sliding past Uptown
an invisible bourgeois
no one calls me cousin
no one can overleap
my wall of print

glass walls guard lake
servile cops are unfeared
as I gawk at nose jobs and poodles
my dusty heels do not belong
doormen bone me with a glance

generous sister you tempt me
to live without alewife stink
among unbarred store windows
shuffling and dealing power
pitying as a pleasant hobby

your graciousness enrages me
I would render Caesar
until the fat boils from his jowls
jail realtors in urine-stinking stairwells
rage over Marina City with Comrade Kong

but I am no executioner
only like you a victim
prince Hamlet could not act
was rubbed out by the syndicate
he knew too much

liberal lady we need you
one does not sip whiskey as smooth as this
once above a quarter
let me sing a fine old spiritual
while you write out the check

our good cause is dismembered
half our evangelists in stir
our mimeo has thrown a rod
and we must get the paranoids
before they get us

grateful for aid and interlude
one is sorry to leave you
ankle-deep in fine carpet
when these brittle walls break
may it be an inside job

el redescending
soon a blast of light
shadow of angry rubble
messages on walls
home

The Clown's Soliloquy

The play has ended: corpses of the prince,
Laertes, Gertrude, and the king are strewn
No more upon the stage for your amusement;
Only clowns with mops still scrub the floors
And sponge the blood from mildewed scenery.
Recall me? I'm the oaf who digs up Yorick's
Skull to set up Hamlet's witty speech
About the transitory nature of
Our lives and trades old jokes with him until
Ophelia's funeral comes dragging on.
If plays went on forever without point
As living sometimes seems to do, I'd bend
My back to dig the holes for four fresh stiffs,
Then swell the crowd that welcomes Fortinbras
To his new kingdom, watch him shed some tears
For those whose gory ends have made his progress
To this crown such wondrous easy work,
And after settle down to dig more graves
Or die in wars proclaimed with certainty
By our new king; but I say call a halt
To killing for a while and let me speak:
I take on five-beat lines to speak to you
And not my usual common clownish prose

Because buffoons have tragedies as well
As kings or generals: we die, we fail,
Our dreams are just as wild and just as doomed
As any man's; when I pick up my crossbow,
March with Fortinbras to war, my pride
Is greater than the king's, my choice is no
More free than his, my blood the same hot color;
Thus, kings and I die equal heroes, live
As equal fools, the different trappings are
As nothing to the worms, and that's no joke
But bitter truth to clowns and kings alike.
I think that Hamlet knew this when he died:
That die we must, but there's no use to urge
On fate or play with swords when words will do
As well; be loathe to war; the greatest crowns
Should guard the roaring peace of clowns.

The Starling

This morning between clattering trains
And above the steady hum of the expressway
I heard a rasping chirp and looked out
To see close by a long-tailed starling.

Moving to a raw new place
Which we chose for people over birds
We have waited out a long winter
With no songs but our own.

We have shallow roots and few leaves,
Bugs and worms have not yet found us out,
Factory smoke isolates our April,
Any bird is a mellifluous surprise.

Jet black, raucous and shameless,
Not welcome everywhere, I like the starling,
I am glad he has chosen me for a neighbor,
Together we might make a good blend.

Adventurous starlings make a welcome
Of unwelcome, learn to avoid poison
And ignore the scarifying noises
To become a neutral fact in time.

Last spring this was barren plain
Inhabited by what my five year-old
Calls “move-mudders”, wildly wheeling,
Solemnly biting out basements.

Last fall grass like rolls of carpet
Spread out in strips on brown earth,
Alien saplings were dropped in geometrically,
Bent roots wrapped in burlap spheres.

Now the laughter of my children
Mingles with the laughter of their friends
As the neighborly bird joins in
Harmonizing the exuberant cacophony.

Lincoln Avenue 1968

At Alice's Restaurant on a July night
The poets reshape their recurrent madness,
Craftily roaring at no one in particular.
Ripples of sound spread out in circles,
Losing definition in the steamy darkness
On sidewalks too narrow for breathing,
Where Poles, Hispanics, and hippies jostle uneasily.
This stretch of town, so blindly planned,
Has blocks stamped out like dollar bills
With a few slant streets like this overlaid
Like endless grasping fingers.
Across the street *The Battle of Algiers*
Has been fought three times a night for nine weeks,
Loudly applauded by hopeful collegians
Who will be astonished and frightened
When the battle is restaged in Chicago
Live and in color with real blood.
Facing away on the next street
The Wobblies remember a failed truth,
Preserving their faith in amber.
Meanwhile back at the Biograph
Dillinger's body is broken again.
No plaques or bullet scars adorn the alley,
But learned tourists observe the asphalt closely
And think they can smell blood in the air;
It is the neighborhood's universal myth
When the echoes return to Alice's Restaurant
Where there is nothing to drink that numbs the pain
And only the dreaming poets can be heard.

II. Family, Neighborhood, City

Obsoletus

Petrarch was among the first to use
The sonnet-form and also wrote in Latin
So elegantly correct and Ciceronian
It killed the tongue for daily use,
Confining it to the learned and then
To no one when the learned wished
To talk to everyone and a universal
Tongue meant universal ignorance
Of what was being said; the Latin mass
Called Tridentine, an adjective from
Trent where the Council met to publish it,
Is no longer used in churches but is missed
By those who recall its sonorous comforts;
But it survives because Sebastian Bach
And Mozart set it so sublimely that
We find it useful to know that *Kyrie*
Elieson is Greek for Lord, have mercy,
And *Credo* Latin for I believe which
We can sing though we no longer can.

We file what we no longer use,
Transmuting it to other tongues; sonnets
Jump from Petrarch's Italian to demotic
English and a dozen tongues for those
With leisure for that sort of thing and
Ideal love is recalled if not experienced.
The griot reciting in Wolof made a hit
On 1970s television, and I hope the
Griots have their lore backed up on disks
By now, for genes and cultures merge to live.
The griot is welded to the sonnet form,
The sonnet to the griot's mind and ours.

We must not forget the closet where we
Preserve the past; soon I shall teach
The use of a clutch and stick shift
To my granddaughter and mention to her
That my father told me that when the
Planetary low gear band was worn
On a Model T Ford you could still
Back up a steep hill with the fresh reverse;
His father did not stick around enough
To teach my father how to brake a heavy load
Down a steep slope with reluctant mules, so
That teaching is lost forever unless
Some great Champollion repairs that gap
In collective memory that we might need.

Once I stood in odd Lenin Park away
From traffic on the edge of Budapest
Among a jumble of mismatched statuary
No longer wanted by the present public but
Preserved in case the times should alter
By a city that history has made prudent;
The largest cast is the Russian soldier who
Used to hand the torch of liberty to
The Spirit of Hungary on Buda summit;
Only one small monument is vandalized,
The one to a Judas of 1956 who was not
Really needed, for the tanks rolled in anyhow
As Lukacs had warned: Lukacs, whose best
Writing was done in prison, who had been
A minister in the short-lived revolutionary
Regime of 1919 led by Bela Kun and
Organized the artists with actors led by
Bela Lugosi and musicians by Bela Bartok,
Whose exile works are universal.
The monuments to that brief interlude
Are not heroically muscled like the soldier
But sleekly *art moderne*, a style
I rather hope will be admired again.

I am full of it, the no longer in use,
The obsolete, derived from Latin *obsoletus*,
Past participle of the verb *obsolescere*,
And I intend to spend my last years
As long as a few gray cells are working,
Re-learning Latin and even learning Greek,
Like reactionary Cato and old Judge Holmes,
And even writing down what I was the last
Teacher in my last school to have
At the tips of my fingers about sixteen
Millimeter film projectors that once
Had to be hand-threaded: you unreeled
The opaque leader from the new top reel
Under a stay bar and a toothed wheel,
Then looping carefully into the slot
Behind the lenses, leaving a generous
Bottom loop, then around more sprockets
And slowly, tightly around the sound drum
And around two more steadying bars
To the empty slot on the bottom reel.
If print technology were not as old hat
As the subjunctive mood and poems, I
Could diagram it for you on a board
That I still recall as slate and black.

Dreams of My Ancestors

I. Bourbon

The jug with cob in neck unstopped and laid
On elbow, finger hooked in handle, canted
By rising arm until the flow obeyed
The law of gravity and nerves are haunted.

The numbing liquor kills some pain, the proof
Is high, the sweat pops out, the urge to howl
And caper shakes the frame, no man aloof
As passing jug delights each glowing soul.

It is a male thing, women hate like thunder
The unloosed rage, the braying fellowship
That ends the gouging match as footsteps blunder
The path toward rows to hoe and wood to chop.

The women bear the men a heavy grudge;
Their poison makes it easier to drudge.

II. Great Awakening

The Holy Ghost prompts speech in tongues unknown;
They prophesy, the end is near; they jerk
And howl in crazy joy; their faith has grown
From fear of death and hell and ceaseless work.

They gather in the meadow by the stream;
Some ox-drawn wagons come a score of miles
To hear the shouting preachers tap the dream
Of doom or bliss to cap their endless trials.

They stay for days and crowd the mourner's bench;
Immersed, white-robed, they vibrate with their sure
Deliverance from sin; transformed, they quench
Their thirst for glory, hoping to be pure.

Enough for now to blend in rising song;
They know somehow this will not last for long.

III. Beyond Trees

The new barbed wire where shrikes impale their prey
Was stretched on posts, and sodded roofs must rest
On poles and upright beams, but wood was way
Too costly on the plains, so dirt was best.

Thick turf made winter warm and summer cool,
The roots of prairie grass were turned with steel,
The vanished buffalo left chips for fuel,
No trees to hinder vision, pride was real.

Rain did not follow plowing, railroads did;
The squeeze was on; the drought would kill the grain
Or prices tumbled with the glut; amid
The endless fields they kept on fighting pain.

They dreamed of riches, dreamed of heaven, too,
But dared not stop the work they had to do.

IV. The Last Barber Shop

The clippers left an inch-wide strip of white
Above red necks on farm boys who would trade
Their news of crops and stocks for hints of bright
Urbanity and tall tales newly made.

The shop winked out in nineteen fifty-nine;
The barber got too old, and widened roads
Combined with dying farms to make a sign
Of death and progress, changing living modes.

Remaining houses sprouted aerals,
Bugs were poisoned, aquifers were drained
With profits shown on glowing terminals;
A haunting from the pioneers remained.

In trailer parks the drifters' children play
Still dreaming of the prize they'll have some day.

Toward Home

Behind the summer lilac bush
In a hollow space big enough
For hiding from the sun
Against the corner of the house
With a book about the Hardy Boys,
One of twenty I read that year,
I also followed the booming
And staticky radio soldiers
Inching along the arrowed map
As I hid from the lawnmower
And the dreaded supper table.
I was nine years old
In the best of shady haunts,
But I was not at home.

The two remotes for vcr and
One for dvd and another
For regular tv handy beside
The iced and regular amber poison,
Taping the latest documentary
Celebrating in black and white
The men ten years older
Who had waded ashore on the
Fire and lead-pattered beach
So far from the quiet space
Between siding and leaves,
Not like the easeful chair
With all time and space
Available at easy touch
And helps for fear and pain,
But I am still not home.

When I have felt no pain
For many days and enhance
The skills of a third-year
Medical student who carves me,
And the rest is burned and
Scattered with not even a
Small tablet like the ones
For soldiers who survived
But not forever, now all
Part of renewed earth and
All dreams erased except
The marks on these pages
Going from your lips to
A hearer or silently
Into your flashing neurons,
And I shall be home.

Celebrating Mozart, My Father, Beckett

I.

Bisesquicentenary is a real word, though
Not in common use, meaning 250th
Anniversary of a beginning, yesterday
Was Mozart's, celebrated in Salzburg
Eager for tourists, and everywhere,
Bigger even than the recalled bicentenary
In 1956, celebrated by me by buying
A huge stack of long-playing records,
Now obsolete, but played often in love
And need; the perfection of it, oh,
The perfection of it, hours upon hours
And still leaving me wanting more: the
Next universe through the worm hole
Where Mozart lives to be ninety, where
He harmonizes the world into peace and
Acceptance of each other, giving us
Heaven on earth; but of course we
Must as yet make do with the universe
We have and be humbly thankful for
The Mozart snuffed out at thirty-five,
Leaving us wanting another 600 k. listings.

II.

Today is my father's centenary, born
January 28, 1906, and died in 1991
As I first heard in a Texas beer garden
And not yet dead in my nightmares
Which I still have now and then, all
He piled up now liquefying and being
Distributed in ways he would begrudge,
Scars of his rage faded to nothing in his
Great grandchildren and their parents
With whom he refused to bond, having
Been hurt in terrible ways, unimaginable

Mostly to me and wanting me to be tough
In a way I could not but could only resist,
Although I loved him all through that
And loved the way he loved my mother,
Although sometimes his rage hurt her;
He deserves a constant re-exploring and
Re-imagining for as long as I can write.

III.

In April Samuel Beckett's centenary comes;
He died the same year as my father, too,
And they were both tough old hawks, but
My father, forced early out of school
Distrusted masters of words and even
Master of silence, for he despised the
Pretensions of the schooled, but I paired
Him with Beckett often, especially seeing
The play where the incurably cheerful woman
Like my mother is buried to her waist and
Then to her neck while her grumpy man
Says nothing and then goes silently away;
It is funny in the way that Beckett often is
And enables us to face a bleak world without
Hitting sons as my father felt he had to do,
And somehow Beckett manages to exist
In the same world as Mozart's uncompleted
Requiem; so, as my wife and I anticipate
Cackling on our useless stumps in garbage cans
That can no longer open in the second act,
We can live with Beckett, all there is
Of Mozart, and Dad, not that we have a choice.

Remembrances of Driving

He was always taking roads he had not taken
Before or at least had not taken in years but
Almost always in prairie country, he did not like
His view obstructed by trees, still less the twists
Of mountain roads. Once, though, on a level
Straightaway with the Grand Tetons on his left,
He said, "This is mountain driving the only
Way I like it." When he could he would avoid
Deserts, swamps, stony ground, anywhere
That crops could not be grown, tolerating
At most the dry farming country where strips
Of crop land alternated with fallow, likewise
He did not much like those valleys so wet
That grain had to be bagged to keep from sprouting.
I reckon that he liked his strangeness familiar,
Would study the differences in town water tanks,
The shapes of grain elevators, the many
Different ways of baling hay, subtle
Modulations in silos and milking barns.
He bypassed cities although he knew
I loved them with their book stores and movie houses
And would probably end up in one, rejecting
Most things he greatly valued, though
I wanted to please him but never ever could.

Years after he died I was driving below the
Sea of Marmora in Anatolia where the
Wheat combines still had six-foot swaths
Thinking of many uneasy childhood drives
When I saw a town with a tank, grain elevators,
And a minaret and wished him still alive
So I could tell him of that strange familiarity.

The Family Christmas Card

My mother's unique Christmas cards formed a series
From the year of my birth until two years
Before her death when the pain of cancer
Became too much for her to do them anymore.
In the chemical-smelling booth at Woolworth's
Where you could get four instant portraits for a quarter
We posed as she had directed, then she would
Trim the heads she had selected, paste them
On the bodies she had drawn, with a message
Lettered in India ink (she had learned calligraphy
At the Art Institute of Chicago in 1922 from
A teacher who had taught Vachel Lindsay earlier)
The messages were always timely and witty.
I recall us in 1943 posed with a newly relevant globe
And in 1957 with an orbiting dog in space.
Her first grandchild was born too close to Christmas
To make 1958, but every year afterward grandchildren
Were featured, and when my brother got divorced
Grandchildren smiled alone as a solution
To the problem of dropping someone without
Hurting feelings, which was always a big problem,
Because my mother made friends easily and hated
To let go, but my father insisted that the list
Be kept down to five hundred for the cost of printing
Plus stamps and envelopes was over a hundred dollars
Even in the 1950s, but people loved them and collected
The whole series and knew my mother loved them
Because they were still on the list. My brother and I
Used to joke that we were sure Mama loved us
As long as we were on that Christmas card list.

Jack

My father's name was John, just John, never
A charming hustler scapegrace Johnny, never
Anyone's handy trickster buddy Jack, but
Our family has often been compound-complex,
With children assumed to belong to those who
Loved and took care of them, so my father
Had a stepbrother bequeathed from his mother's
Discarded second husband who was always part
Of family gatherings and Uncle Jack
Was a Jack and no mistake, handy
With tools on the hardest granite, and
With a soldier's adventures to recount,
Too quick perhaps to join his buddies in
Defending an outworn social order, but
That was the defect of his virtue, a loyalty that
Was always loving even toward the nephew
Who favored blacks and Jews, despised Joe McCarthy,
And even thought the American Legion fallible.

Now that Jack is long since buried
Under the stone he carved for himself
Near the lots he got for my grandmother
And my aunt as pay for his masonry,
But my brother has a much-loved son
Proudly bearing the family name because,
As I cannot repeat too often, children,
In so far as they belong to anyone, belong
To those who love and care for them;
My nephew has a family of his own now
And when his wife was pregnant and tests
Determined that the baby would be male
The older sister was asked to suggest a name
And she said at once and finally "Jack"
Just for the love of the name and not even aware
Of her adopted step granduncle in the mix,
But now she knows the link, a pair
Of Jacks, good enough to open anytime.

Plantings

My mother-in-law, a just woman,
Gave a magnolia from suburban Saint Louis
To plant by our Chicago house decades
Ago, and it survives despite a tendency
To blossom prematurely in our always tricky
Spring, doubtless having an atavistic
Instinct from its Missouri birthplace,
But it has grown tall and gives both
Brief beauty and pleasant shade each year.

My mother, who would have lived
A century this year if she had lived,
Was also just and believed in indoor
Plants, especially philodendron, and
Somehow found some vigorous shoots
That snaked out like the needy hands
Of adolescent boys on movie dates;
She gave away cuttings that flourish
In multi-generational houses all over
The country and are given to friends
In need of oxygen and memories.

According to Orwell, we might forgive
The vicar of Bray, featured in comic song
Sung over beer and near camp fires,
Thinking of dodgers well known today
For the type with no fixed beliefs but
Staying in comfortably salaried office
Is always with us and often in us,
But the shifty vicar planted a yew tree
That Orwell admired, as beautiful
As the magnolia and philodendron
Adorning this house; the propagation
Of living beauty, even by the unjust
Is a good thing and should be honored.

Surrogate

Too good to be true, but true,
Stretched way too far, but true,
Unfit for a careful book in the
Field of popular science, but
True, anyhow, despite everything,
And it must be preserved somehow.

Kathy, all agree her name was that,
Worked for the minimum wage or less,
For this was fifty years ago when
Laws on wages did not cover student jobs,
Worked as a night attendant in the lab
Where rhesus macaques, baby monkeys,
Were isolated in cages on purpose testing
The need for play and soft affection
That accepted theory in those days
Said did not exist, but everyone knew,
Even Kathy, especially Kathy, did exist,
And she acted humanely, unlocked the locks,
Allowed the babies to play together and
Even picked them up and cuddled them,
Spoiling some expensive, cruel experiments
That nevertheless got made anyhow,
Proving theory wrong and common sense right.

Harlow, the experiments' designer, and great
By any reckoning, loved to tell of Kathy,
Especially when he had had a few,
Which was often, and the story stretched
Too far for science, but that careful sort
Of truth is not all truth, and those barred
From the ideal republic because of their
Lovely and incurable true lies repeat
The story of Kathy in their own way,
But within rules, always within rules,
For poems, parenting, love, and memory
Have rules, often broken but still there.

My wife and I heard the story about Kathy
In the spring of 1958, dining lavishly,
The taste of lobster thermidor returns
As I write. We had just discovered that
She was pregnant, an unplanned happening,
Not really unwelcome but inconvenient,
For she would not be allowed to teach
The next year by the rules of that time,
And I would have to abandon an academic
Quest and find real common work.
The irrational and necessary thing to do
Was to celebrate with dishes we had
Heard of but never eaten in the finest
Restaurant in Madison, Wisconsin, and
We did, joyously, and when we saw
A young woman whom we knew and
Her companion, a sculptor whom
We had met once before, we invited
Them to join us for coffee and dessert.

The sculptor had great talents, also
A famous father similarly gifted,
Which is never easy, and I cannot
Locate him today, cannot access him
On the web. He may be dead, but
I like to think he flourishes
Under another name, free from
His father's shade. The last anyone
Saw of him he was heading west
On a loaded motorbike seeking
A fresh beginning like a true American.

He had helped build Harlow's surrogates:
The cold wire ones with the ready
Bottles that the monkeys used
But did not care for and the soft
Cushiony ones sometimes warmed
By a light bulb within that babies
Loved and ran to in their need.
This proved something that all of us
Always knew, that Kathy knew, too,
And we laughed and nodded as we
Were told about her, everyone did,
Even the learned scientists did as
Harlow the showman showed off.
But by the rules of their game
Proof was needed, experimental proof,
Properly monitored and chronicled,
Something beyond a string of
Anecdotes distorted because
Everyone already knew they were true.

Truth spreads slowly. Our daughter
Came expeditiously exactly when due,
As has been typical of her for nearly
Forty-five years. I dropped out of
Grad school to find I belonged
Teaching the common and needy, but
Ran into trouble for speaking truth
To those who profited from lies and
Had no new job lined up after
We conceived another child. For
Unknown reasons he came early,
Seven weeks premature, weighing
Only four and a half pounds, with
A weak cry nevertheless heard
With joy. It was touch and go.
We could not take him home until
He weighed five pounds and that
Took many weeks. He was kept sterile
In an incubator way at the back
Of the viewing room. Once we asked
To see him and were royally

Chewed out by a starched nurse
Who would not endanger fragile
Babies for the bonding needs of
Sentimental parents. Abashed,
We left. However, he bulked up,
Came home, was cuddled, loved,
And generally treated as an infant
Getting away with being an infant
Because most of us must love them
If we have been loved ourselves.

Harlow's breakthroughs had been
Massively pictured in mass media
And accepted by that time by peers,
But the word had not gotten through
To nurses in burgs like Waukegan, so
We were late bonding with our boy, but
He was not irreparably damaged, loves
A loving touch more than most,
Has weak but correctable vision,
Possibly from too much oxygen
In that incubator, early on made
Huge piles of pillows that he called
"Hunkabunks" that resemble a bit
His preference in loving women,
But is huge, hairy, competent,
And an ornament to the planet.

Learning is always slow to spread,
And pioneering is dangerous work,
For we cling to our soft illusions.
I recalled the story about Kathy
When I read a new book about Harlow,
Although it did not contain that
Too often stretched and unreliable tale.

I learned much, however, for instance
That Harlow was not his original
Name; that was Israel, changed on
Suggestion from a mentor, not because
The man was Jewish but because
The name sounded Jewish and such
Names were unwelcome in academia
In 1930. The mentor was Terman,
Whose reduction of the human mind
To a single number is pernicious
And supportive of a rotten class system,
But nevertheless a useful tool.
In this new millennium we are
Rightly embarrassed by our forbears
And, one hopes, meticulously looking
For beams in our own eyes.

Harlow lived long enough to catch flak
From feminists rightfully afraid that
Emphasizing the need to mother could
Be a tool of oppression in the hands
Of arrogant males who had for so long
Ignored common sense about affection.
It did not bother him, for pioneers
Need tough hides, and after his death
He felt nothing at all when attacked
By those who accused him of torturing
Creatures whose cousinhood to us
He had done much to establish
In experiments that we are too feeling
To repeat, and do not need to, thanks,
At least in some small part, to Harlow.

Thus, the story about loving Kathy
Is, if not exactly true, truth's
Surrogate, comforting in this time
When we work to stop our ruin
With the warm mother wit we have.

Magic Garden

She wanted a garden in a day made,
The grass smudged on, a living kiss
On cement block of plain garage in this
Back yard, a temporary work to fade
But bright for now, and fun to tint and shade
With family pitching in, an artifice
Of seasons, ivy climbing just to miss
The window, lines dissolving into glade.

There're lilacs, tulips, daisies in the set;
Forsythia, clematis, roses eat
The light in multi-colored painted show;
Magnolias, blossoming but leafless yet,
The hollyhocks are marked with graded feet
To tell the depths of next year's coming snow.

Bear

When bear was growing up he got a yen
For kinky sex, for Goldilocks had left
Her scent upon his bed and chair, bereft
Of counsel (books on sex were unknown then
For bears) he found the golden spoor again
When Goldy showered; “No soap, remove your heft,”
She yelled. He did, though longing for that cleft,
And tried for sex where bears had never been.

Then bear humped moon till sun came back and fled
So fast his moccasins got mixed (that’s why
He walks that way). He longs in lonely bed
For breasts to nuzzle grizzly chin and sigh
For bearish love; when all at last is said
And done, we must embrace or die.

Golden Approaches

The rose grows round the briar from the graves
In ballads. That is myth. To live entwined
For decades is for real, with work that saves
The coupling, keeps the distance re-aligned.

To meld the seeing-hearing total world
With dado joints and anagrams is hard,
To model mind with mind while chaos whirled
And strained the bond and dealt the dreaded card.

With luck and habit, care and giving, one
From two can hold and propagate a strain
Of philodendron reaching for the sun
From earth through space and time and joy and pain.

The halting, sagging, laughing, living pair
Recall the sweaty couplers they once were.

Down by the Corner 1991

He don't fool me that Colin Powell,
They fake him up just like they used to
Fake up them moon landings, yes, they did;
He really some kind of dark Eyetalian or something
They just using to get us to act foolish;
A real black man don't pushbutton kill
And talk about it on the tv afterwards,
A real black man blows up right in your face,
I know because I've done it, yes, I did;
I was a regular Staggerlee in my younger days
Except I used nothing but fists and teeth;
I bit off a man's ear once, yes, I did,
Off Fred that hangs here sometimes,
Which is why his specs don't sit just right,
But we good friends now, yes, we are;
We trade lies about our young days;
A person needs to do that, yes, he does,
And somebody got to listen; that Colin Powell,
A million people see him on the tv,
But nobody really listening, he got
Nothing that is truly his own to say;
He saying somebody else's words;
Always say your own words and
Never let nobody tell you how to talk,
Nor how to listen neither, never;
I have always done my own listening
And my own talking, yes, I have;
You don't need a million people, just a few
Who really hear you talking to 'em;

Now, my wife's a Sunday morning woman,
And I have always been a Saturday night man,
But she hear me talking, yes, she does,
And I hear her talking right back,
Just like I hear you, old neighbor,
And old Fred with his floppy ear;
But one ear at a time is all I need
To hear what I got to say, yes, it is,
So you take good care of yourself
And use your ears and your brains,
Cause they like your private parts:
You don't use 'em, you lose 'em;
Hear me talking to you, yes, you do.

Newly Ambulatory

For a two year-old there are never two points,
There are an infinity of points and, thus, no point
In ever going anywhere in a straight line when
Absolutely everything must be explored right now.

This morning he went to the corner store with his father,
Holding his father's hand and sometimes swinging from it,
His feet gloriously free of the ground and sometimes
Pretending to fall just to see if his father was noticing.

His father was pool cue straight and doing his best
To lead and be led at the same time and proud
To be observed by his old teacher, and I am proud
To be remembered by him and see him loving his child.

Twenty years ago he was all over the court
Dribbling and reversing with a rapid skill
That has necessarily faded, but the instinct
For joyous living is still there and has been transmitted.

Equinox

The new mail carrier, disregarding regulations,
Litters the sidewalk with rubber bands
As each bundle is unpacked and at first,
It being that time of year, I mistake them
For angle worms, but I pick them up despite
My stiffness in my seventy-first year because
I recall the scrap rubber drives and the absence
Of bubble gum during World War Two and
Black marks on gym floors from bad synthetics
After the Japanese unexpectedly bicycled
Down the Malay Peninsula to take Singapore;
So I am “an old man bending” thankfully not over
Wounded boys but merely impelled by thrift
And memories of a time when gasoline was twenty
Cents per gallon. It is now more than ten times
That and still going up while boys no older
Than my oldest grandchild are blown apart
Nearly every day. I look at the power-packed
Ugly boxes of my neighbors’ SUVs and wonder
Why some lessons take so much longer than
One old man’s lifetime to be driven home.

April

The passing hailstorm bruised the blooms and swirled
Them blowing over roofs to pave the walks.
The heartland's Spring is never sure, pinks whirled
Away or frozen, wind that breaks the stalks,

Or squirrels devouring bulbs, but leaves will come
With blossoms or without and winter long
Or short and summer wet or dry, the sum
Of factors willed or not, a crazy song,

Alarms that shriek when boys in boom cars pass,
Girls feign indifference but still move necks,
The boomers watch each tight-packed twitching ass.
I do not think they will abstain from sex.

We cannot tune things out, we play our role.
What happens, happens; we're not in control.

Fall

In Marc Chagall's too pale mosaic scene
The winter and summer are the longest sides.
The short beginning and the end of green
Are whimsically brief as time divides.
That is the way with continental cores;
Remove the coal smoke from the air, remove
The lead from fuel, and insulate the doors;
The weather still proves chancy, records prove.
This summer was bone dry, the leaves now drab;
Predictions based on greed and wishes just
Go wrong, the corn is scant, the liars gab,
Disasters happen as disasters must.

Bad wars and storms ignored will doom a fool.
The weather shouts the truth to those who rule.

Gentrification and Memory

I prefer co-ordinates of time
And space to be exact even when
Populated by ghosts not made by me,
So this was on a not particularly unlucky
Friday the Thirteenth, June, 2003,
When we were on our way to a leaky-
Roofed roomful of peaceful people when
Peace was unpopular with the president
And those who ran him to hear an old
Friend and comrade speak feelingly
Of past resistances not entirely
Lost and plans for futures not
Bright but not entirely hopeless.

On Division between Damen and Hoyne
Are many upscale restaurants, and we
Ate in one where the cheapest wine
Cost twenty-five dollars a bottle;
That is one hundred times what
A shot of bar whiskey cost on that block
In the late 1940s when a character
Invented by Nelson Algren and called
The Sparrow got busted so often
On that corner that he thought the charge
Drunk and disorderly, shortened to d and d
At the station, meant Damen and Division.

Now they serve little whiskey here except
Over-advertised sour mash and single-malt
Scotch, never the kind that burned through
Varnish at two bits a shot back when
The dealer with the monkey on his back,
Hooked on morphine from his army kit,
Listened for the one howl of Antek the Owner's
Deaf cat that told you that the drink you
Just took, the needle you just jabbed, the bet
You just made had doomed you now forever.

Once I played poker with Algren
Not far from here on Evergreen;
He was a lousy player, so in love
With losers that he had to keep
Losing himself out of pure love,
And once I drank with my son in
The last low-life tavern in the 'hood,
When we had to be missing
From his house for a girl party:
Not losers, but a bit in love
With ease and drifting downward.

Now old-timers would be busted
On this block even before ordering
Their first shot and a beer, for drift
Is upward here, toward domination,
And empire, but odds are still
Always with the dealer, so everyone
Dies: people, empires, even gentrified
Streets; and only the Sparrow and
Frankie Machine and the others
Live indelibly and forever.

Bruce Goff's Cullet

How like him, how very like him
To use his grave marker to teach me
A new word: "cullet": a lump of fused glass
Added to new material to facilitate
Melting, a catalyst aiding a process
As teachers naturally do, as he did,
And now his friends have placed his ashes
Under the marker with his angled
Geometric script on the lagoon shore
Of Chicago's Graceland Cemetery looking
To the little island with Burnham
Underneath his boulder, near Mies, near
Gravity-defying Ruth Page, across
From the graceful levels Shaw designed
For the Goodmans, down the path
From the twining elegance of Sullivan's
Getty Tomb, among his peers, with that
Startling gem-like glass cullet from
The destroyed but phoenix-like Price house
Back home in Bartlesville, Oklahoma,
That still exists in loving pictures.
At least it was built, for he had
More ideas than patrons, but treated
Patrons well, having learned a
Modesty that his master did not teach.
Neither did he make students worship him,
Merely freed their minds to be themselves
With his spaces as their examples:
Grain elevators that had learned from beehives,
An infinity cantilevered from a rooted pole,
A spiral echoing with Japanese treasures,
A place for worship from Quonset huts,
And his own space concealed beneath a stadium
Where ideas split and fused like atomic nuclei.

I never took his courses. I had no math
Or drawing skills, but I was welcome
Under the stadium seats on weekend nights,
Encountering for the first time the swirling
Drips of Jackson Pollock, the talking wound
Of Cocteau's poet, the low passageways
Of the palace of Eisenstein's Ivan,
For his spaces were meant to be open
To anyone with an opening mind.

I was not there to help him when
The cops entrapped him with a punk
And forced him from the school. Dante
Encountered his old master Brunetto,
Who had taught him allegorical journeys,
Among Sodomites in the seventh infernal circle,
Praised him highly but could not cool the fire.
Goff should have had a chance to be a cullet
Helping many more to blaze and fuse
And cool into transparent clarity,
But he kept on, and the buildings are there,
And the drawings are there to learn from,
And those he taught are teaching others.
The sun strikes the cullet into brilliant light.

Junkyard Find

The area south of the Loop keeps on gentrifying,
The Red Line el before it descends under earth passes
Rows and rows of three quarter million dollar condos
For dazzling urbanites with no kids, savings, conscience,
No sense of the past, not knowing they are on the site
Of the “Cross of Gold” speech, the Everleigh Club, old
Yiddish theaters, Big Jim Colosimo’s, Hinky Dink and
Bathhouse John’s First Ward balls, Jack Johnson’s bar
Inlaid with silver dollars, and things still rattling deep
Inside my personal memory like the golden taste of
Gefilte fish at Mama Batt’s, Scurvy Miller in burlesque,
And the junkyards, the acres and acres of rusting hulks
Guarded by legendary dogs, the huge parts warehouse
Labeled Warshawsky and Warshawsky and nearby
Another yard called Original Warshawsky. I never
Knew the cause of the family quarrel, if there was one,
Nor did I ever wander Original Warshawsky’s yard,
But sometimes in my dreams I looked for a tail pipe for
A 1946 Studebaker, my first car, which rusted out and
Was patched with a too noisy corrugated flexible hose.
I am told that sometimes gold was found there: gears
For a Chrysler Airflow, a Lincoln Zephyr steering wheel.
Original Warshawsky’s could provide reanimation aids
Like Original Frankenstein, but that yard is gone forever.

I spent hours with a search engine and only found that Warshawsky and Warshawsky had merged with big timers And has a yard in another low-rent area and that Original Warshawsky has left no trace except in the junkyard in My head where it rusts but refuses to go away, just like Old Carter Family tunes: “Lonesome Valley”, “Wildwood Flower”, “Will the Circle Be Unbroken?” and the rest known Since always, but always began some time. When I heard Them most recently, I searched my junkyard mind: not at Home on the family Crosley, nor the homes of kin. They Were not broadcast in 1940 on “Grand Ol’ Opry” or on “National Barn Dance” but on some border superstation With a transmitter in Mexico to which we did not listen. Then I found it in a dream, lying under more than a Half century of rusted memories. I was six years old, Across the street at the little Fogelsong house, watching Fascinated as Mister Fogelsong operated his mail-order Cigarette rolling machine, wrapping Zig Zag papers around Duke’s Mixture or maybe Bugler, while A. P., Sara, and Maybelle Carter sang “Will the Circle Be Unbroken?” and Mrs. Fogelsong Offered me supper if I cared to stay, and I was part of the Circle with big brother V. K., talented artist Jimmy, and Gene my special friend who spent nights in my back yard Yard when we rolled ourselves in blankets like the cowboys We imagined ourselves to be. The Fogelsongs moved To Anadarko a couple of years later and we lost touch. I tried to locate them today on the web, but they are Not chronicled and there is a nearly even chance by now They are dead except in my mind like Original Warshawsky, But the memory, awakened by those old Carter Family songs Is bright like the imagined tailpipe on a 1946 Studebaker.

III. Pain, Fear, Hope

Pain

*...Pain comes from the darkness
And we call it wisdom. It is pain.*

Randall Jarrell, *90 North*

Describe the pain.

It is just pain, the kind
Shared by all of us, you,
Too, I would reckon, just pain.

Describe the pain.

A burning, no, a smolder
With sometimes a numbness
Inside and an aching cacaphony.

Locate the pain.

In a memory bank that works
Too well, a liver that metabolizes
Too well, in heaps of fear and guilt.

Describe the trauma.

I took a fall in a country
Where I was illegal, got
Worked over with a sockful
Of sand, slipped on wet floors
Miscalculated a jump from
Several truck beds, got welts
From an angry razor strop.

Tell us more.

It has gone on for decades,
Intensifying yearly, lately
Weekly, I need an hour more
Sleep than I can get nightly,
More leg room than theaters
Or planes will provide, more
Kinds of dope than there are.

Tell us what you expect.

You will defraud me and Medicare
And the insurance companies,
You will waste my time in
Waiting-rooms, put me on hold,
Be angry when therapies fail,
Experiment and fail again.

Tell us what you propose.

I shall discipline my memories,
I shall lose myself in books,
I shall tell jokes to those
Who have pains I could not take,
My mind shall be somewhere else,
And I shall hold on as long as I can.

To a Young Friend

Thank you for the offer of morphine,
Which I must decline despite the stubborn
Reality of my pain and the certainty
That the dope was offered with love
Expressed the best way you knew how.

The nearness of death scares me,
With the entry to my heart deranged,
Flapping meaninglessly and not delivering
The wherewithal to keep me going on,
With the old unabated pain on top of that.

I have known a kind of unstinted love
That I could not teach you at a distance;
I could only offer an ear and minor
Calmings and corrections to keep you
A bit closer to things as they are.

I can never assuage your terrific fear
Nor replace the love that those who should
Have given it did not know how to give;
I can only say thank you for the offer
Of relief that does not touch the core of things.

Vision of an Old Wound

Inside black glove that fails to mask the loss
Of cunning on the frets of a guitar
The twisting root of sinister is seen
On this left hand whose writhing scars now cross
Hairless and pink on leather skin and mean
A jury rig of welded bones beneath
The blasted flesh, a message trapped between
Fused tendons falters, fails to breach a wall.

Five fingers, clumsy, clawlike, and obscene,
Can shift the carriage, slap the blank space bar,
But cannot strike the keys, with nails like teeth
On snarling dogs they grip a rubber ball
And squeeze it crookedly, cords in wrist
Grow taut and yet do not decree a fist.

Overwhelming Nightmares

The succubus retreats, the cage breaks through
The roof to sidle to another street
Where halls diffuse and goo engulfs my shoe;
She's gone; I want but we can never meet.

I loved him but I would not be his slave;
He'd tempt me to relax, then strike, no half
Way possible; gun drawn, I cannot save
Myself; he lashes out an angry laugh.

The suspects scatter but are rounded up;
I do not know what class this is or what
I should profess; a surly lot, they sup
From paper bags; I need to find a pot.

The threat roars brainward, revving Harleys, but
I wake and drill that legion into thought.

Old Wars, New Wars

In eighteen sixty-six the crows almost
Died out, the jellied eyeballs that were once
Their gourmet treat had gone, the host
Of men put underground had stopped their hunts.

Near where I write neglected stones ring bold
Around a shaft that marks five thousand graves
Of prisoners who died of flux and cold
While fighting for some rich men's right to slaves.

He watched and could do nothing while his friend
Was tortured, killing was compulsory, now
Remembrance shrieks, the past will always send
A call to smash the order givers. How?

All protests futile, blackness shrieks ahead,
Explosions flash in Baghdad. Friends fall dead

Against Star Wars

I honor dying myths but disbelieve the fuse
New mythmakers would build to save belief
That pays for priests and tenured chairs, the sheaf
Of sacrifice the poor provide, a ruse
By foggy clerks to save habitual use
Of needy folk bowed down by honest grief,
Impending death, and constant woes, a reef
Marooning all, their salve I must refuse.

No hope in alchemy, no hope in Jung,
No hope in laser swords or in the force,
No hope in shamans or mandalas hung
In temples, no hope except the course
Is not yet run, the requiem not sung;
This latest crutch of lies I must divorce

History

Why, this is history, nor am I out of it,
No waking from the nightmare but
In death, just something moving maybe on,
Not up not out for certain, on, just on,
Encoded past in us and all, and things
To come no way to ken, just moving on
As seen by light that left the sun as long
Ago as longest stretch of news between
The ads or driving to stuff a snail mail box;
That light, all light, must move at this same speed
From every source in all directions, faster
Never, so we are always trapped in time,
A damned brief stretch of it at that, too much
And not enough and no way out of it that
Most of us will take, at least on sunny days.

The future will be better, maybe so;
We doubt it: golden ages deliquesce
On close inspection; no stillness in the state
Of nature where only the mad are solitary,
The nasty and brutish with us always, and poor
And short mastered so far by few of us,
Continual fear of violent death by none,
Leviathan or not, so fight the beast
To share the wealth that all have sweat to make.

Once in December, Nineteen Sixty-two,
I asked eighth graders to ask their folks
About Pearl Harbor day, which I supposed
To be a universal memory, but I
Was wrong, one man could not recall
That day in lay-by hog-slaughter time
Between the picking and the planting, reading
Not a habit yet, no radio, electric lights,
Or interests beyond the delta rows
Until a cousin sent enough for him and his
To take the IC to Chicago, then
A job connected to the world; he built
The engines powering planes that bombed the Japs,
Moved on from there, not far but on,
To watch the news and thank the teacher who
Taught his child that we were part of all history,
A long way back before the war or rows
Of cotton near the Yazoo or the Nile,
Before a hand placed seed in ground or tamed
A sheep or dog or wore skins not his own,
Forever in fear, but always moving on.

A "C" Student Reviews History

A succubus impressing semen starts
The War of 1812, a drag queen named
Enola Gay drops bombs, and that far-famed
Romanian rebel Ostend Manifesto darts
A spray of blood from bitten hearts
On old Boss Tweed, a cool suit often blamed
For lax permissiveness and cruelly aimed
From envy at our mighty private parts.

I just state facts, that facts can often lie
Is not my problem, numbers still spin up
And peace can out-kill wars, parades pass by
Unseen if I decree, the friends that sup
With me are all that counts, that thousands die
Is just when profits fill the waiting cup.

First Anniversary

Flitcraft disappeared “like a fist
When you open your hand.” Death had
Missed him by inches and he had seen
“The works”: existence minus illusion,
How close to death our fragile bodies are
Always. He tried to make sense of this
When found by a detective and
Succeeded because the detective lived
On the edge and was in love
With danger and its embodiments,
But the part the detective liked best
Was that Flitcraft’s new life
Mirrored his old one. He had adjusted
To death and then to dull dailiness
Again while waiting for it.
In those days it was easier
To drop out and then back in again.
Most of us would be quickly found
Even if we had the guts to try it.
So, on this first anniversary
Of fireballs in the steel card houses
We have adjusted like Flitcraft,
Knowing from old folk wisdom
That one will get us some day but
That we will not hear it coming.

Perhaps from Nothing

Recall from school those huge equations which
With all the unknowns solved turned out to mean
Nothing equals nothing, perhaps some glitch
In nothing started all; this might be seen
To be a good first myth, except it's tough
To compass nothing in our thought: the Zen
Monks try, but thought fills every void. Enough
To trace where things and life have been,
Enough to be in awe of all that was
And is, know some of how it works, protect
Our bit, do not pretend to know the cause
Or what the minds that follow should expect.

We think and search until our time has gone.
The other side of nothing stays unknown.

Noir

The rumbling el casts shadows from the moon;
Some truth must be untangled from the lies;
The rats are dying, plague will be here soon.

The low-life bars sound with a wailing tune;
The frightened man knows something, but he dies;
The rumbling el casts shadows from the moon.

The woman's screams now soften to a croon;
She knows a lot, you dare not trust her sighs;
The rats are dying, plague will be here soon.

The hired thugs get smashed, and that's a boon,
But Mister Big eludes you and cracks wise;
The rumbling el casts shadows from the moon.

Your questing dick is just a sad buffoon,
But then you figure out the bloody ties;
The rats are dying, plague will be here soon.

Almost too late, you smash through one last goon,
Deserted warehouse blazing, villain dies;
The rumbling el casts shadows from the moon.
The rats are dying, plague will be here soon.

Columbine Massacre on Hitler's Birthday

He stole Chaplin's mustache, ruined
Shylock's villainy for a time, exposed
Wagner's tinsel heart, transformed
Romantic agony into the banal.

Back through Napoleon, Caesar,
Alexander, the notion of enforced
Universal reality becomes
Insane, its memory polluted.

O, my most national nation
Is no more glorious than others,
And everyone's blood leaves stains
For the Lord of the Flies.

The best thing is deep-grooved memory
Of crimes so great that art has failed
To compass them, with us in not enough fear
Of repeating them to revenge insignificance.

Choosing

One of the forking paths
Leads to death. That is sure,
But when is never sure, and
In the meantime we choose,
Within narrow limits, but we
Choose, choose the flooded city
Or the soon bombed one, or bad
Times on brown prairie, foul
Memories that we knew would
Get us some day, knowing that
Refusing to sit with a back
To a window does no good,
And keeping it all in does
No good, and letting it out
Hurts like hell and is hell,
And, what is worse, hurts
Others, but we are trapped,
Must choose fear, shame, but
Not death, not yet, knowing
When that path comes, if it
Surprises us, we have won.

The Esthetics of Distance

They are marvelous at sensing the beauty
Of the passing moment, the Japanese, revering
The melting Spring snow on the cherry blossoms,
Setting up stands in the parks to watch falling
Bright leaves, feeling the slight irregularity of
A tea cup, standing on roofs to watch what they
Called “the flowers of Edo” as the fire bombs
Fell and bloomed fantastically, also beautiful
To bomber crews who could not see burnt flesh
Or hear the screams and had been taught
That these were not quite people like us, just
As watchers and burned below were taught
About the burned of Nanking and Pearl Harbor.

I sign petitions against the next war which
Will be fought a long way from here and watch
A film about decisive killing of my childhood
Edited to a thrilling grotesquerie that
Diminishes pain, while in the park a talented
Young man makes a pivot hook shot drawing
Applause from the watchers in shoes made by children
Who should have play time, too. Sometime before dawn
I shall pad down the hall to the bathroom on a rug
Made in India by boys who are going blind by now,
An intricately patterned thing and pleasant to bare feet.
Wilde was right. Injustice poisons beauty. We must fight it.

Amazing Grace

I knew from childhood that the greatest chiefs
Were named McIntosh, MacGillivray, and Ross,
That the greatest entertainer ever was Rogers
With just enough white, as he said, to make his
Honesty suspect, and the white part was Scottish,
That the greatest trailblazer of my home ground
Was another Cherokee-Scot named Chisholm,
And that was who, where, and why I was.

If you want to put the bottom on the top, first
You must leaven the bottom, mix in the yeast
From those who were ravenous but not starved,
For the hopelessly starving do not revolt, they
Starve; the hungry prey on the even hungrier
As the dispossessed Scots proved by dispossessing
Catholics in Ulster and Native American tribes,
And becoming the backbone of imperial armies

Movement means mingling and an understanding
Among forced-out clans and forced-out tribes
Makes a Cherokee anthem on the Trail of Tears
From a bagpipe tune and a repentant slaver's words;
An understanding of forged pins and trapped steam
Destroys and creates exponentially everywhere forever
Until we are one and share the human abundance
Of the earth in peace and justice and love forever

Sabbath

So I said to the boss: “No can do,
Sorry, but it’s carved in stone,
A day of rest and prayer for me,
And, if I pray in an easy chair with
A tall cold one beside me while
Watching the kids on their swing set,
It’s my worship and not your concern.”

I told him I had decided to become
More religious, seeing how big God was
Compared to bosses, and from now on
I down tools promptly at sundown
Thursday because Allah is great, right?
And I continue on worshipping sundown
Friday because I am an observant Jew,
And don’t you dare doubt that because
Nobody but a Jew would claim to be a Jew.
And don’t even think about calling me back
Saturday night, because the last time
You did that someone threw wooden shoes
Into the works and broke the machines.
And, of course, I do not work Sunday
Because I am a Christian, Hallelujah!
So maybe I will see you Monday morning
For another thirty-hour week because
Saint Thomas More, amen, says that
Is all a person should have to do.

If you have to keep the machines going
For the other half-week, I have an
Unbelieving buddy who sells me cold
Six-packs on weekends and runs cameras
At ball games, but he celebrates
The old worker holiday of Saint Monday
And does not show up Tuesday either
Just to make sure you get the message;
And every Wednesday is a holiday
For the martyrs of the working class
That lasts until sundown Thursday
For he, like me, is for saving the world.

And we talk to fellow workers in Spanish,
In Arabic, in Chinese, and in deaf and dumb
To pick up lots of ideas for new holidays,
For we are not bigots about limiting days off
To only those known to Abraham's offspring;
From now on we have decided that ideas
Should cross borders just as easily as your cash.
So, if you start waving guns and clubs at us,
The work stops everywhere until your goons
And scabs back down and the money starts
Rolling down upon us like a mighty stream.

That's the future, boss: if you've got to sell,
The rest of us must have enough to buy,
And you don't scare us anymore because
I have decided that fearing God is a
Better bet for me than fearing the boss,
And my unbelieving buddy disbelieves
In rules that always stack the game
Against him and is coming to disbelieve
In the need for bosses altogether.

So that's the way things stand now.
When we get this contract enforced,
We will be back to negotiate
Some more. We have an old idea
Called the Jubilee that we would
Like to put back on the table.

IV. Fellow Traveling

Observe

“You see, but you do not observe.”
I bought the two-volume set used
In Tulsa for seventy-five cents and walked
Up those seventeen steps to a place more
Real than real, with bullet holes celebrating
V R on her golden jubilee, tobacco in the toe
Of a Persian slipper, and all the blessed rest,
Imagined only a decade after a wire had said
“Come here, Mister Watson, I want you,” but
I never could observe like Holmes. However,
I learned Doyle’s trick of working backward.
The next summer I saw a Van Gogh wheat field
After seeing real ones from Oklahoma to Manitoba
And knew Van Gogh had observed and I had not.
I have used the trick since, all over the world:
For instance in the Galapagos, feeling soft-spined
Cacti, watching the variously beaked finches,
Seeing the terrifying subversive inevitability
Of Darwin’s Bible-defying insight; and again
In Trier with the wedding-cake episcopal palace
Close by the brooding Roman Empire gate below
The robber baron cliffs and above the laden river
Observed in all their successions by young Marx;
Closer to home in a plane above the linking portage
Of the Fox and Wisconsin rivers, I missed nothing
Because Turner growing up there missed nothing.
I believe that someone somewhere is observing:
A computer screen in Bangalore, an up to now
Unknown orchid in New Guinea, a microscope or
Telescope revealing wonders in Kiev or Kinshasa.
Observing fends off the speckled band, the hound,
Even the giant rat of Sumatra, that is elementary.

Earthlight/Starlight

I.

National Geographic shows on a new fold-out map
A whole year of collected light from Earth:
I can make out my home town's isolated dot;
The country between Oklahoma City and Norman
Where I was dumped beaten in the rainy dark
Fifty years ago by a rich man's hired goons
Is now ablaze with light and safe for some,
For light means, safety, knowledge, and easeful living.
The streak outlining Lake Michigan's shores
Is thickest where I live, and I would not have it
Any other way. The lights may dim soon,
For we have been spending too many old fossils,
But we have always lived on one edge or another,
Avoiding self-destruction by a split hair, and,
Because we cannot fully imagine our not being,
We have a baseless faith that we must survive.
In the meantime banks of Nile and Jordan brighten,
The corridor on I 95 swells and extends,
Rio, Phoenix, Delhi, Beijing, and Athens spread,
Gas flares redden the Persian Gulf, Nigeria glows,
And there is bright carnage again on the Tigris
Where the oldest records tell of Gilgamesh
Trying to avoid death, seeking out the oldest man,
The one who survived the flood the gods sent
When the torches of night cities disturbed them,
But Gilgamesh was told that all of us must die,
Although our brief candle may last a while
If our trickster fire-bringers serve us well
And we learn to save and share before winking out.

II.

Living amid man-made light I seldom see
The spangled sky. No work of mine depends
On star-sign. A yearly visit to the inner
Dome of Adler Planetarium suffices to
Locate my problems in cosmic perspective,
But I know stars are there, can even name
A few and tell some Maya, Greek, or Arab
Tales that once guided shepherds, wise men,
Or planters, maybe guide space probes still.
Last month on Ireland's Strangford Lough I saw
Them clear with all the proper childhood awe
That I felt sixty years ago sleeping out
In a safe back yard and singing a song
Asking, "Does their glory exceed that of ours?"
I knew early on that awe is the right reaction
And should be passed on even to those who
Will seldom get beyond the urban light spill.
Once on the way back from Disneyland I took
A side road through Tohono O'Odham land
To show my children clear night sky. That is
Open range country. I swerved to miss one steer
And hit another, nothing serious, even local cops
Whose ancestral land this was could hardly keep
From laughing at the family making a detour
Just to look at stars, but stars were there:
The dipper pointing to Polaris, the hero-twins
Born to the Changing Woman, signs that days
Will lengthen for a while and that soon
We can report to friends that the universe is vast.

The Cicerone Covering the Action

To cover the action from beginning to end
The cicerone must invoke a host of dead:
Willie preaching through the bullhorn almost
Against his will but sorely tempted by gospel,
Joanne blind and growling, needing no bullhorn
Just a few comrades for action against the beast,
Toothless Chris freeing himself after years of
Imprisonment by a deaf-blind, unfeeling system,
One of the earliest, the kid whose SSI check
Got cashed after he died and won us a victory,
One of the latest, John with no legs and one finger
Driving here by himself, showing off his articulated kids,
And the Texas good buddy in war-paint and camouflage
Who bonded with the cicerone for three days in jail,
Above all Wade with that hippie angelic mop
Who healed himself by making others whole;
All present, all representing each other, all
Living inside the living as action is planned.

Targets are picked, mechanics are alerted, permits
Are granted or denied which does not matter for
We go there anyhow, hotels are booked, cardboard
And marking pens collected, releases written, egos
Massaged, airlines warned about mishandling chairs,
Bus companies reminded that they are not above the law
Even though they contribute to the very powerful,
Vans ready for thousands of miles, new attendants
Instructed in pushing and lifting and feeding,
For everything must be planned, especially the unplanned;
The cicerone, expert at nothing except old stories
And connecting this fight to thousands of others, is told
He will get a free drink of cool water in hell
For every time he feeds a palsied or paralyzed comrade,
Every time his bad legs make it an extra mile, the old
Bladder an extra hour, the old despair stays in check.

This will, like creation, take six days:
A day for coming and greeting, for we are
Slower at coming than most and need more rest,
A day for orientation, collecting legal papers,
So the cops will know about our meds, a rally
With banners and important people to fill
A news hole that would much prefer trivia
(We stopped being cute a long while back)
Three days of actions, with backup actions
In case of court orders, early capitulation,
The foul-ups that happen even to the best:
Cops go crazy, wheelchairs die, wrong corners turned;
But we are good cavalry, deaf Erich guiding in sign,
Blind Frank counting curbs until we suddenly wheel
And block the street with a line of power chairs,
Their ignition keys carefully hidden, the cicerone's
Big butt on his big bench, reassuring greenhorns,
And there are always new ones freeing themselves,
More than replacing the dead, becoming citizens,
Refusing pity, yelling slogans, the cops helpless,
Wondering who trained us, where we got our moves,
Getting joke answers from the cicerone referring to Samson
At the temple, Crazy Horse's flanking attack, the big
March in '63, Bull made Steer in the hosed-down park,
All relevant and all one to him, little Spitfire
Ready to be busted because she heals that way,
And the cicerone knowing when he is printed and mugged
Someone is taking all of them very seriously;
Even with a media blackout the word spreads
And the powerful tremble for, Brecht was right,
They have hard hearts but weak nerves, the wall
Withstanding a thousand blows, then crumbling
With the next tap and the next trumpet blast,
For the dead march with us always, and the new ones
Keep coming until we win this way or another.

Then a final party with dervish wheelchairs,
Pledges to meet for another of these later
But not much later, and another slow day of going.
Next time more dead, more living, more hope.

The Cicerone Passes a Cornfield

The cicerone has never figured out
Whether he exudes a pheromone attractive
To heroic but oddly configured minds
Or whether he seeks far-out humanity
As grist for storytelling, and so
He is not amazed to be discussing
The recalled savor of Osage dog flesh
With the University of Seoul's foremost
Historian of Polish Socialism
As they speed down US 41 and 52
Near Kentland, Indiana, where
They shudder slightly, the learned
Korean unable to explain, but
The cicerone has passed this field
A hundred times, loving its image.

“Ancient and modern sages knew fear
In a handful of dust, but it took
The great master Alfred Hitchcock
Who wanted to make our flesh creep,
To show us this bare and banal
Flat roadstrip and straight corn rows,
The road narrower then and
The corn rows wider apart and
Houses scattered more thickly, but
Still the drained planed plain
Which Hitch makes delicious with
Foreboding and terror inflicted on
The immortally tailored Cary Grant
Who, protected by Paramount Olympians,
Could not die, but achieved a perfect frenzy
For our amusement, a mad moment
With Hamlet’s wind in the right corner
As he dodged the lead-spitting plane
And deftly connived its fireball end
In our lovely, sinister heartland where
So much is unmentioned and concealed
But keeps surfacing like old arrowheads
To be denied again, but circling
In our minds like a handsaw.”

Golden Gate Fog

I saw it dazzling white on top and
Covering all but the tops of the cables
And the towers, moving like a herd of
Angel sheep into the bay, what I had
Only known from books, movies, and
The subtle sound effects of radio drama;
Later, inside it on the bus across the bridge,
Sensing the mysterious draining of color,
Emerging to bright Sausalito and sitting
In front of the tourist cabin while my
Father smoked and my mother fixed
Supper inside, and I rather liked the
Saggy couch that was my bed that night,
We talked, trying to find subjects
That would hurt neither one of us as
He picked up my paperback of *The Glass
Key*, read a page, then said, "The man
Who wrote this was a lunger; one
Lunger can always tell another," and he
Was right. Dashiell Hammett had rotten
Lungs, and neither he nor his heroes
Expected to live as long as he did. I am
Older than Hammett ever got, and with
Luck will live as long as my father who
Was eighty-five at his death, although still
Sharp and dangerous in my mind with no
Fog except the parts I never understood.

The next afternoon I stood on Powell Street
Waiting for the cable car to Chinatown,
Having made a pilgrimage to Post and
Stockton where Miles Archer took one
Right through the pump, and watched the
Fog drift first over Geary and then
Over O'Farrell Street, giving me
Fantasies of being Sam Spade or
The Continental Op, and I recall
That moment clearly, although it was
Fifty-six years ago last July.

Forty years ago come another September
Two new friends introduced themselves:
The redhead with freckles was named
Geary, the white-haired ex-Seabee
Was O'Farrell, and they asked me if
I knew the parallel streets in downtown
San Francisco, which of course honed
A memory. I lost touch with O'Farrell
After he retired, and I miss him because
He understood my odd jokes that depended
On having lived in another fading world.
Once as he passed I told my students
That he had dated Barbara Frietsche and
He stopped and recited the whole poem
Because there are some things you cannot
Forget no matter how hard you try. Geary
I chiefly recall from pictures every Easter
Of him with his wife, a baby in her arms,
And the rest stair-stepped down in their
New togs; eventually there were ten.
The pope gave him a medal for that,
But, when I met him many years later,
His hair by then turned white, he said
That times and customs had changed
Even in the church; he had fewer
Grandchildren than children and no one
Gets medals for that kind of loyalty now.

The fog blurs sights and sounds and
The years increase its density and the
Terrible ache in the bones, and a lot
Of memories blur and leach out but some
Remain, chiefly ones you want to forget.

The Cicerone Feeling the Rodins

His partially sighted friend has permission to feel
The Rodins on the parkway in Philadelphia and
The cicerone, guiding her, has scrubbed his hands
For the same privilege. They start naturally
With *The Thinker*, cast many times, seen by
The cicerone in Tokyo, vandalized in Cleveland,
Below ground in the Paris Metro, underneath
Another casting in the artist's studio which
The Philadelphia casting replicates, a cliché
That somehow has not let fame reduce
Its power, now felt, thinking with massive
Head on massive workman's hand, thinking
With every articulated muscle, rough in
The bronze, complete but unfinished, right
Elbow on left knee, deep-set eyes that are
Looking inward, all features strong, bulging
But nothing protruding, all body parts clothed
Only in thought reinforcing all other parts;
Probing and gliding hands on surface and
Crevices, hands reading as well as eyes.

On to portrait busts: Bernard Shaw
Confident of what he is so eager to
Become, in a dialectical dialogue
With the devil, putting his entirety
Into eyebrows and unspeaking lips that
Speak anyhow because hands understood.
Father Eymard, who told Rodin to return
To the world, the classic saint's face
That his hands found, and their hands find,
Showing the great gift early, and Balzac,
Colossal head embodying a teeming world,
Rough-hewn Clementel, one last portrait as
True as any in over half a century.
After more hours spent feeling the six
Burghers of Calais, all marvelously themselves,
And careful study of the anguished, clenched

Hands, and the decaying yet perfect old
Woman who may be the helmet-maker's
Once beautiful wife from Villon's poem,
They give their hands a rest and try to
Put at least a few things into words:

“He was nearsighted,” the cicerone says,
“Which got him out of the army during
A bad war; everyone who knew him says
He was always kneading clay, always
With his hands on something. These things
Were meant to be seen, yet created by
Touching, the way we have been doing.
He had a great ancestor, Michelangelo,
But was different, knew better from
Great experience where the tits were
Attached for one thing, but shared
The same sense of primal creation and
Destruction and the terrible beauty of
Absolutely everything and everyone.
He shocked people of course but was
Popular in his later years, but never
Compromised by popularity, containing
His own time, and past and future, too,
Which makes him unique or nearly so,
All fragments complete, all stillness moving.

From a Porch Swing in Plain, Wisconsin

The September hillside north of Plain
Has the yellow of ripe soybeans at its base,
A narrow strip of mown hay above that,
And tasseled corn ready for harvest next,
Another strip of hay, another of corn,
More hay, this time very sparse,
With corn crowning the ridge;
Trees visible on neighboring ridges
Where the soil is too thin for crops,
And, between me on the porch swing
And the hillside, there are maple trees,
Their leaves not reddening yet but ready
To do just that. It is real enough,
But this porch is part of the tourist trade
For people who are also here for theater
And to see Frank Lloyd Wright buildings
Which are also theater, and the beautiful
Field with many crops is mostly a hobby
For a family with other and more real jobs,
But I am an old hand at sorting out illusions,
And will enjoy what I can when I can.

Traveling with a Lover

This morning I saw Spanish moss
Drooping from a liveoak in front
Of a computer store flanked by
A firm selling Sea Island
Real estate and a Christian
Science Reading Room, and I
Thought of the first time you
Saw the hanging moss and ripped
Some off and put it in the trunk
Of the car and were surprised
When no one back home
Thought it as wonderful as you did.

You could not take home the
Iceberg from Labrador Strait
Nor the camels from the world's
Oldest tourist trap in Egypt,
Much less Bryce Canyon's pillars
Or the curious view of roofs from
The Paris *pension* room which looked
Like a puppet opera set for
The first act of *La Boheme*.

We have the knick-knacks and
Photographs in endless scrap-books,
But mostly we have the private
Jokes and say "*privat douche*"
And "green-eyed frog" to each other
While grandchildren shake their heads
And think we ought to be
Embarrassed, but we are not.

Bridges

(a *ghazal* in the manner of Robert Bly)

Troops crossed the Rhine at Remagen with dry feet
Thanks to some enemy foul-ups and skilled engineers.
The camp at Buchenwald was built around Goethe's oak.

The Tallahatchie River drains poison from the fields.
Catfish are dead and cotton choppers driven north.
Nightmares remain of bruised blackness weighted with iron.

Blocked at Pettus Bridge by club-wielding horsemen,
Words trump clubs as usual when we tap into
The roots and leaves of the always-living dream.

Be careful in the Minnesota wind-chill over ice
Where Berryman finally escaped Hamlet's dilemma,
Corkscrewing his last sentence into silence.

Driving Interstate Seventy-six across the Delaware into Camden,
Watch the signs for the turnoff to Walt Whitman's house.
It is not a safe neighborhood for the unwary.

Sonny Rollins got over his dry spell by sounding
Among the cables over the traffic at night,
Sensing the bridge singing Hart Crane's obligato.

Eight Poems Written While Traveling In Greece and Turkey, September 2003

I. Mount Ida Evokes Memories

I was too young to remember this,
But I have been told many times that I
Was introduced to the taste of home-made twelve
Year-old corn whiskey by my great-uncle Butch,
Who dipped a corner of a clean diaper in it
And let me chew on it when I fussed
While teething, the very last time
He was allowed to tend me unassisted,
But it worked and I slept like the babe
I was with a smile on my face as if I had
Tasted nectar of the gods, which I reckon I had.

I do recall the pretty blonde Doris,
Wife of my tallest cousin C. R., whose
Tummy bulged, and another cousin,
The huge and always comforting in a
Conspiratorial way George Streets,
Told me that Doris was that way because
She had swallowed a watermelon seed
That was growing inside her, but it turned out
To be Judy, born on my fifth birthday,
And never as much a playmate as I had hoped,
Because Doris and C. R. moved to Borger, Texas,
For his new job at the carbon black plant.

This morning as the ship picked up a pilot
And entered the Dardanelles, and I saw
Mount Ida in the distance where,
According to Homer, Hera seduced Zeus
In order to distract him though both knew

That what Nemesis decreed would happen anyhow,
And the flowers and grasses softly flourished
To cushion their epic godly entwining,
I recalled Uncle Butch and George Streets
And all the legends and myths of childhood
Which still amuse and teach and even
Comfort despite the sure approach of Nemesis.

II. Passing Lemnos

The Lemnian women tore their men to shreds
In Dionysian frenzy; needing aid
Repopulating Lemnos, Argus stayed
With Jason, Heracles, and crew that sheds
Their tunics and falls to on joyous beds,
Restoring balance; love and then evade
Is common practice in the hero trade;
The boys sail on, leave babies in their steads.

There is no treaty betwixt prick and brain,
No gender peace except one daily done
With new demands and tears and pain,
A full equality of mind but none
Of need, desire, and dream; we work and gain,
Then madness loses nearly all we've won.

III. Passing Lesbos

We are not making babies anymore
But married and despite Apostle Paul
Still burning now and then; we know the call
Of flesh, respect it as the lovely core
Of being, love our friends who have the more
Unusual tastes for intra-gender all-
In coupling, echoed in towering tall
Achievements in this isle's poetic lore.

I do not know how real great Sappho was
Or if she really burned with love for girls
In ways that great religions bar because
We must confine our passions far from whirls
Of chaos: loving outlaws sacred laws,
And those who say so create costly pearls.

IV. Passing Chios

On craggy Chios grapes grow strong and sweet,
Old Aristophanes called Chians sots,
But out of wine and mastic gum came lots
Lots of silver, time for song and story, meat
Of rising human skill, a daring feat
In painted clay and chiseled stone and thoughts
Reducing primal fears and gods to noughts,
Until harsh war crushed greatness with its feet.

The massacres were fierce and exiles fled
Eventually to flourish in the shipping trade;
The pendulum stopped swinging and the red
Desire for blood browned out and hate decayed
To old crones keening for the fading dead
And legends of spring hills in blooms arrayed.

V. Passing Samos

Polycrates had luck at least until
The Persians won and nailed him to a cross;
When warned to balance mounting gain with loss,
He threw a ring into the sea and still
The ring came back, for with his lucky toss
A big fish destined for the tyrant boss
Had gulped it down to feed fate's foolish shill.

Greeks counted no one fortunate till life
Had stopped, not Croesus, Xerxes, or the men
Who nailed Polycrates, who win the strife
For now, but are betrayed and caught and then
Slit open with their very own fish knife;
The only question is exactly when.

VI. Immortality

“So my name will never be forgotten,”
The crazy little man told the people
Of Ephesus three hundred fifty-six
Years before our common era when
Asked why he had burned down
The great and famous temple of Artemis,
And he was right so far because
Destroying greatness is one sure way
Of getting your name at least
In the footnotes recounting greatness,
If greatness is remembered at all.
Herostratus of Ephesus was not well-formed
Or brave, wise, good, or even
Particularly terrifying except in being
Like minor poets and people in the streets
In wanting something beyond a few
Good laughs and thrills and sufficient meals;
He had that terrible thirst for forever,
So contrary to our basic nature,
For, if things are ever to improve,
We must get the hell out of the way;
Nevertheless, many choose to have faith:
“Believing what you know ain’t so,”
In words Mark Twain tried to distance,
Because the wrath of those who disbelieve
In their own sure death is fierce.
Fame is pretty much a shuck:
Human achievements are never eternal,
The work of millions is credited to one,
And those expecting credit and perfect
Justice mistake the ground they live on;
The temple Herostratus destroyed was
Replaced by a world wonder that is
Not there anymore except one rebuilt column;
Great Ephesus is abandoned and buried and
Will take another half millennium to dig out;
The names of brilliant artisans, sages,
Lovers, killers, merchants, whores, and
Others whose work we cannot even imagine

Are lost forever, and we smile at Herostratus
And fitfully, pedantically keep his name alive
Because we know him as our kin.

VII. Patmos

The earth shakes but the earthshaker
Is no longer worshipped, the old man
In his ninth decade hears the crack
Of the rough stone ceiling over
His head in the cool hollow
And hears it as a trumpet blast.

He came to this seahorse shaped
Bit of waterless land in chains
For denying earthshaker and emperor
In the name of a man who died
And somehow did not die, promising
To come again but has not yet.

The old man honored the one who called him
Beloved, took care of his mother,
Learned the subtle wisdom loving
Of the word-intoxicated Greeks of Ephesus,
Grew high-domed and white-whiskered
Waiting to join his martyred comrades.

Now he sees the transfigured God-Man
With glowing eyes and a message
For the seven churches of things
That are and hazy things to come;
He lies on the stone floor and dictates;
The old man dreams and the young man writes.

VIII. Oracles

My neighborhood is full of readers and advisors
And people who turn quickly to the *Sun-Times* horoscope;

The oldest things they dig up near the Hwang Ho
Are cracked bones that foretold a future now long past;
Revelations and *Daniel* have their cocksure interpreters,
And each new generation rediscovers Nostradamus.

Old Chicagoans are entitled to be skeptical about such things,
Recalling the 1948 DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN headline in the *Trib*,
Not to mention White House proclamations on the end of killing,
And the mayoral announcements on the coming reform of schools;
Right now my sports fan friends predict a Cubs-Sox World Series,
But predicting does not get it done in Chicago or anywhere.

In ancient Delphi you had to be pretty damned important
To get an oracle at all; you sacrificed an unblemished goat
With a bronze knife that must be destroyed each time and recycled,
Then, when you were properly purified and mystified,
Pythia would chew on the laurel and breathe in the fumes and make mumbling
Sounds and the Prophet would write a translation in regular meter.
Croesus of Libya, whose silver coinage had made him rich
And whose patronage of Thales and Solon had made him famous,
Was told that, if he attacked the Persians across the Alys,
A great empire would be destroyed; but it was his own,
For oracles are obscure, and what will happen will happen,
And the gods, who always welcome suckers, do not care.

Bergen

The coast wrinkles north
For a thousand more miles,
Yet we are north of the
Northern tip of Scotland;
Sunlight catches in the peaks
For twenty hours a day;
From the edge of the pier
I make out eight streets
Stacked one above the other;
The spire of the guild hall
Is fifty feet below
The base of the hotel;
The fjord is cat's eye green;
Somehow this vertiginous place
Is balanced and safe for us;
Tomorrow we thread channels
South to Stavanger which
Launched your family west
Nine decades ago and
Will welcome you back;
Then east to Stockholm
Or anywhere you like;
Didn't I promise you?

The Cicerone in Saint Petersburg

The ticking of the metronome has awed
The group; its sound meant Leningrad was still
Alive, though no one at the station had
The strength to make a sound, they ordered time
In the midst of chaos: bombs descending, trying
To shatter the frozen lake and sink the trucks
That kept the city barely alive, and long guns
Killing at random for nine hundred days
While Shostakovich composed in the light
Of firebombs, Akhmatova shaped pain into
Regular forms, Zoshchenko told funny stories,
And some at least have survived: halting old heroes
Sixty years later with medals pinned on frayed lapels,
Recognizing the American group with its cicerone
Who knows only enough to say “mir y druzhba”,
Which means “peace and friendship”, and the old reply
“Dodge truck” to show they know who sent the aid
That kept the ordered city alive when shards
Of chaotic metal and falling masonry ripped
So many fragile bodies when the city was still
Leningrad. The old name has come back and the
Bronze horseman and Dostoevsky’s courtyards
And the symmetrical rococo theaters and palaces
Never left, nor has the feeling that someone
Is carrying a bomb intent on making chaos
To make new order where impossible things
Have often been done, so everything is possible.

The bus leaves the museum, which is bedecked
With wedding flowers on weekends, for this siege
Memory is still revered when many ideologies
Have lost their hold and many despots ignored
With impunity although they still can chase you
In your dreams. It is the reminder that once
Common heroes lived and saved the city almost

Despite their leaders and that this artificial place,
Built on swamps as the yellow water from the tap
Reminds us, will live on in spite of all disasters,
Not all of which are even serious, as the group
Recalls a story as the bus passes what they can
Decipher from the Cyrillic as Luna Park, the place
Where the crocodile swallowed the bureaucrat whole
And alive, causing so many problems in a system
Where, as Dostoevsky the joker knew, imposition
Of order on disorder is inherently absurd.
The bus does not stop there because the group
Wants a full afternoon on the parquet floors
Savoring the great treasures of the Hermitage, nor
Can it stop as the group passes the university,
But on the wall of a science building they see
In mosaic tile the record of a superb triumph
Of order over chaos accomplished here
In 1869 by Dmitri Ivanovich Mendeleev,
And the cicerone bursts helplessly into song:

“Even the densest of students is usually able
To understand this great periodic table,
Seeing the noble gases descending on the right
We sense there must be more to hold the light;
Gallium, scandium, and germanium
Anyone notices who has a cranium
Must fit here and here and here and so
The table must fill with the ordered flow
Of elements; those with radioactive furies
Fall in step to enlighten the Curies;
The table worked; no one knew why or wherefore
Until breakthroughs of Rutherford and Niels Bohr.”

The group is relieved when the cicerone runs out of rhymes;
Order is a triumph in all places and all times;
But order needs chaos to build upon,
And, once it is achieved, there is always more chaos
As far as straight streets, time, or mind can reach.

Eyewitness in Iraq

I. Ameriyah, October 28, 2002

Pray for Ameriyah, a place in Baghdad hit
February 14, 1991: Happy Valentine's Day!
McGurn said with a Tommy-gun back home
In Chicago in 1929, but we have smart
Bombs, smarter now than in 1991 even:
The first punched a fanged hole through
Half a yard of reinforced concrete, preparing
For the second which exploded inside.
Only seventeen survived of the about
Five hundred who were sheltering there.
Of course the aimers, and I believe this,
Did not know they were innocents in hiding.
They reckoned something that well-roofed
Had to be a military target. That sort
Of thing will happen in war. If it
Did not, no one could get so angry
As to target everything in sight with
Reinforced concrete roofs shielding
Human beings who bleed exactly like
The rest of us in the first place. Amen.

II. Baghdad, October 28, 2002

The eve of Ramadan is a good time
For weddings, so the car horns blare
In celebration on the boulevards near
The upscale hotels where the fashionable
Of Baghdad hold their receptions in a city
Threatened once more by American missiles
But refusing to panic, living day by day
With the markets full of pomegranates and dates
And the streets jammed with orange-fendered cabs,
The plazas and walls filled with metastasized
Representations of the protean leader
In all manner of uniforms brandishing weapons,
In rural and urban costume, in prayer, blessing
Scholarship, industry, every citizen's labor;
No one will discuss him openly, but he is
Tolerated like the British-imposed kings, distant
Ottomans, the Abbasid caliphs, Nebuchadnezzar,
Sennacherib, and back to Sargon of Akkad
And beyond; it has usually been like this
Since the twenty-four hour day and writing on clay
And the wheel developed here; rulers change
By invasion or coup, but when boats rock
The innocent drown and there will be no refuge
Even on the flying carpet that the sculptor Ghani
Wants to suspend over the Tigris, but it is safe
To denounce American threats, and people do so
With undoubted sincerity, for the damage shown
To us from the sanctions and the last bombings
Is bloody real, but the people are glad to find
Americans using the luxury of their dissidence
To defy the threats and just be human
With other humans in a city where missiles
May fall but, not yet, not yet.

III. At the Tomb of Jonah, October 30, 2002

The Tigris runs low, on exposed banks
Young men play soccer with improvised goals,
Hustling to finish before the light fades;
The sunset is gaudy from approaching desert,
And in my mind I still hear a screaming echo
Of jets asserting an alien hegemony over
The threatened city as the rosary was said
In the rebuilt church bombed by accident
In the last war, the "Our Father" in Aramaic,
Its first language, muffled by the thunder
Of the overflight, but now the calm Tigris
Gleams then darkens as I sit unmoving
In the holy bustle of this bright new mosque
As the muezzin prepares to chant the call
To prayer over a state-of-the-art loudspeaker.

This mosque is built around the supposed tomb
Of a supposed prophet whose prophecy did not
Come true twenty-eight centuries ago, so
Ninevah lasted more than forty days but fell
In good time, for prophets of doom are right
Eventually: empires fall, rulers die, doom
Comes when it comes; I do not believe
The story about the giant fish, but I do
Believe there is no running away from
What we have to do, even if it makes us
Ridiculed and fugitives from power;
One difference: I hope the city lasts
More than forty days or forty years
And that this thought is pleasing to
Three great religions and countless
Minor heresies like mine honoring Jonah here.

IV. The Yazidis and Hatra, October 31, 2002

The Yazidis are not Satanists although,
Like Blake, they believe in the redemption
Of fallen angels; they are Kurdish farmers,
Immaculately ordinary but distrusted for
Their love of devilishly splendid peacocks
And the flames with which they honor angels;
A millennium ago they tried to unify
Practices of all local faiths, becoming,
As usual, one more divisive sect, often
Persecuted; naturally they are for peace
As long as there is peace, welcoming
The inquiring peace pilgrimage, glad
To know there are Americans for peace,
For no protestations of loyalty
Can save the different in time of war.

A few hours later the group pauses
At the ruins of Hatra built nearly
Two millennia ago by Parthians,
The ones who overthrew successors
Of Alexander, helped transfer the image
Of Apollo to the Buddhas of Gandhara,
Destroyed the invading Roman legions,
Were a vital link in the moving of
Han silk to priestesses of Gaul;
Like the Yazidis they worshipped
With fire under these immense
Open barrel-vaulted temples
That have endured through many
Empires since; the fuel they used
Comes from the ground nearby;
Thousands will die for it next year.

V. Recalling Sacred Places, November 3, 2002

Abraham came out of Ur, smashing idols
In his father's shop and wandering
In search of truth that grew with him
And still grows as we grow; the old mound
That was Ur still holds secrets marked
By reeds on clay: cattle sales, floods,
Heroes fighting, then making friends, trying
To escape death, which people and empires
Cannot do; but the wedge-shaped marks
Preserve the beginnings of our horde
Of facts and dreams and can connect us
With ourselves if we save them;
But the mound is neglected because
Of danger from warriors, was vandalized
In the last war, is strafed now and then;
It becomes hard to search for truth
If we knock apart where we have been.

Babylon is a bigger mound, but reaching
Nowhere near heaven even in its heyday,
For no one had to scramble its tongues;
The outlandish sounds came from everywhere,
Came and come to any city where there are
Jobs and new rhythms and notions, godly
And otherwise, with conqueror after
Conqueror, learning, softening, then being
Conquered until finally evaporation
Poisoned soil and old ceremonies became
Evil in the light of new thought and forsaken
Places became metaphors and reminders
That nothing built by us endures forever.

Contaminated water causes obsolescent
Diseases like diphtheria and typhoid;
Depleted uranium in ammunition makes
A spike in the leukemia statistics;
A few days ago a child died in a ward
Where visitors from the country that
Fired the shells were bearing witness,
And the mother wailed, keening in
The fashion of that region; the visitors,
Who had never approved of the last war
Or the next, knew that nothing they
Could ever do would keep that wail
From echoing in their minds forever;
They could only hope that somehow
The killer rulers would some day hear.

VI. Leaving Iraq, November 4, 2002

Here the frontier is a straight line
Meaning, as always, that no one living
Anywhere near it at the time had anything
To do with drawing it, certainly not goats
Or goatherds who keep the grazing flocks
Well back from the razor wire and
Machine gun towers that guard the criminals,
For they are that in the eyes of war planners
Back home, and border guards everywhere
Treat everyone as criminals, a perk of being
An underpaid bureaucrat too nervous to steal:
The ruler, whose tapestried face imperiously stares,
Some time back shot a bunch for stealing and
The lesson lingers; electronic gear is checked,
But no one really tumbles to the fact that
The really subversive stuff is in spiral notebooks,
And treason to all frontiers inside our skulls,
Loathing the pointless waiting and the lines,
Dreading many more hours across the desert and
The brief night in the hard bed before the flight,
The very long flight for the tired and bruised;
They qualified for a few more merit badges
In the struggle for peace, justice, and what
They think is the American Way, although the
President, Congress, and the polls so far disagree;
The group has filled no bellies, repaired
No gaping holes, shrunk no cancers, not even
Heard much honest speech where few dare
To speak, merely tried to be human beings,
Bear witness, give balloons to children,
See what could be seen, just be there
Where loud bullies said they could not go, but
Bullies are cowards and can be bluffed,
Bureaucrats outwaited, frontiers crossed,
Imposed straight lines erased by truth.

Yachts in Captivity

The greatest naval historian of my time, Harvard's Samuel Eliot Morison, once lectured in Oklahoma. He had written fifteen volumes on one sea war To which he was a privileged witness and Had duplicated the first Columbus voyage With an all-Ivy League crew. He was appalled That I did not know the rigs and tacks And masts and spars and oriented myself Solely by land signs. He knew his stuff As historians must, but no historian knows Everyone's stuff. He did not know prisons, For instance, or anything about the secret ways The powerful, including, I reckon, a crew That is all-Ivy League, can delegate to grunts, Some nasty techniques for staying in control; And that is something I have had to learn To keep on going. At Dublin's Kilmainham Gaol Our two specialties crossed: the *Asgard* Is in the courtyard there. It belonged to Erskine Childers, a master of shoals And dangerous passages of arms who Finally ran aground during the Troubles. Casement's yacht is there, too: a great Righter of wrongs and a patriot or A traitor depending on what year it was, He had many fans. The Brits used his diaries, Which showed he was gay, to justify hanging him. They were yachtsmen who knew what old Morison knew and who had to learn what Revolutionaries learn. We honor them for it.

Approaching Stratford-Upon-Avon

The television aerials among
The chimney pots, eroding brick
Facades on underpasses, baskets hung
With early summer blooms; the world is quick.

A tall blonde youth embraces Indian love,
No doubt a votaress of the moon. I hope
They stay on fire forever and above
All cares, stay lost in lovely lustful grope.

The town's a tourist trap for fans of Will,
The local motley wearer made a gent,
Immortal through his rampant careless quill;
The train is waiting when the last word's spent.

Forever blooming, ever full of thrills for us,
A classic poet's worth eternal fuss.

Cuernavaca 1972

Sol becoming *sombre* in the late
Morelos afternoon as the shine boy
With the *huaraches* made from tires
Of local manufacture goes among
The *cantina* tables; he sees my
Scuffed boots, I nod and look up
To the mural on the old palace wall
Where on an embedded column
Diego Rivera, using old tricks,
Has made the eyes of Cortez
Appear to follow us everywhere.

Maybe Malcolm Lowry sat here
Thirty-two years ago invoking
This place by re-imagining it
So brilliantly that the town where
His drunkard moved toward doom
Exists in parallax with this one.
There are people here who recall
Him drunk but no one ever seems
To recall him writing; artists make
Their own legends: Rivera's huge
Appetites, the slavish vision that made
Siqueiros back up the road spray
Trotsky's villa with machine gun fire;
Both of them, and Lowry too,
As arrogant as staring Cortez.

I drink in the classic manner; *tequila*
Con sala y limon verde, salt in
The web between thumb and forefinger,
The small lime halved neatly by a blade,
Tastes blending with the sensuous slap
Of brush and cloth on my boots.
The peso at that moment was worth
Eight cents *estados unidos* and I
Give him a fifty peso note with the
Image of the liberator Morelos and
Wave away the change; he says
“*Cinquenta pesos para dar lustre*
A las botas es muy generoso,
Muy generoso, gracias senor
Gracias patron;” everyone in
Shoe leather is a boss under
The watching eyes of Cortez.

Dead freedom fighters are honored
On fifty peso notes and even
The names of states, on crosses
Carried in processions, in the echo
Of hoofs on this very plaza;
Despite the poison we drink and think
Or the rest our bodies make us take
To ease our pain, despite arrogance
And illusions and ice picks
In the skull we shall some day
Walk equally shod and equally free;
The shadow of the palace advances
But not forever, dollars move faster
Than the feet of workers but not
Forever, the eyes of killer Cortez
Do not follow us forever.

Yatabaghdadu

It is a real word, a verb
In Arabic, meaning to try
To live like the elites of
Baghdad in its storied days,
Which were still being storied
At the Beit al-Iraqi last
November when Amal served
Tea and a pastry with syrup
And cream called *kahi*, and we
Exchanged a few stories and
Songs and, of course, did a
Little business and talked some
Politics and religion, which is
What Baghdad has always been about.

A ceramic tablet hangs on my wall,
Not looted and only a copy anyhow,
From Amal's shop and home, close
To a bridge on the Tigris, thus bombed
In both 1991 and 2003, and I hope
Soon back in business, for that last
Bombing was pre-invasion and Amal's
Neighbors, though perhaps envious, were
Not looters like the camp followers who
Stole treasures from the museum
While troops were guarding the oil.

It is cuneiform, although I cannot tell
What kind, though not the earliest.
When the original of that clay was marked,
People had been writing for many centuries,
And this was done hurriedly, the lines
On a slant, not praising some king
Or god, not an epic about heroes
Ravaging cities; that would be written
With more care; just words about
Business, everyday love, gossip,

The sort of things we talked about
When I bought it for five U. S. dollars
Just to show I had been in Baghdad.

The original might be on its way to
Some collector who justifies crime
By exhibiting taste and scholarship,
Perhaps willing it to another museum
To avoid taxes when the trail of
Theft is no longer fresh. I hope
It has not become dust or mud
Like so much of our past. War
Does that. I mention that because
I am against war, and the happy
Few who like fresh poems, hold
Old clay tablets worth more than
Dying children, also war's result,
And I want them to work for peace.

War makers should not bomb cities
Whose poets they do not know,
Should not bomb bridges where the
Passage of almond-eyed women from
Al-Karkh to al-Rusafah and back again
Was noted in the Ninth Century by
Ali Ibn al-Jahm, and a later bridge
Jisr al-Shuhada, which means
The Martyr's Bridge, where bullets
From thugs in power killed the
Brother of the poet al-Jawahiri
In 1948. That poet lived in exile,
Wrote of Baghdad's bridges from Prague,
And is buried in Damascus. He called
Baghdad *umm al-basatin*, the mother
Of orchards, orchards recently burned.

Now the occupying troops look
For oblivion in bars in the narrow
Street named for Abu Nuwas who
Sang of wine and disillusionment
Thirteen centuries ago in such dives.
Let us hope the banned poems of
Muzaffer al-Nawwab, smuggled in
On tapes during the reign of
The last dictator before this one
Are circulating freely. I hope
Baghdad is a nest of singing
Birds like the ones sold in
The Suq al-Ghazl on Fridays
And dreamed of by banned poets.

There is no real ending to
Thought and memory except
Death. Baghdad's most famous
Narrator, the one you heard of
Even before you knew that
The city was going to be bombed
And invaded despite our outcry,
Always used to stop at dawn
With the tale incomplete so
She could live another day while
She made up or stole another
Story to put off the killers
Who are always in power in
Baghdad and, I fear, everywhere.

I Saw This

The headpiece of the dervish flying free,
The Maui New Year's sunrise hailed with gongs,
The nightless night near Barrow's Chukchi Sea,
The new-fledged voters come alive with song,

The Kyoto garden made of rock and sand,
The lonely glazed cemented towers of Watts,
The restful trees decreed by Olmsted's hand,
The vacant ghetto lots alive with rats,

The slamming jailhouse doors a score of times,
The marches, vigils sometimes worth the sweat,
The lonely railing at unpunished crimes,
The modest laughter of some saints well met,

The pages where the words were sometimes tamed,
The baby steps observed, the glow of home,
The works and days when sometimes truths were named,
The art revealed in many a pleasure dome,

The north rim of the canyon seen at dawn,
The felt anticipation of time's shears,
The many lovely spasms come and gone,
The magic body loved for fifty years.

Books

Infamous in our Prime
 Anais Nin: an Understanding of her Art
 the Electronic Windmill
 Changing Woman
 Harvest of Gems
 the Little Monk
 Death in Malaga
 the Svetasvatara Upanishad
 the Significance of the Frontier
 the Swan Road
 In The Palace of Creation
 Remnants & Shadows
 I Saw This

Sulphur & Sawdust
 Slate & Marrow
 Blister & Burn
 Rinse & Repeat
 Survive & Thrive
 (not so) Warm & Fuzzy
 Torture & Triumph
 Oh.
 the Elements
 Side A/Side B
 Balance
 Chaos Theory

Hope Chest in the Attic
 the Window
 Close Cover Before Striking
 Autumn Reason
 (Woman.)
 Contents Under Pressure
 the Average Guy's Guide (to Feminism)
 Changing Gears
 The Key To Believing
 Domestic Blisters
 etc.
 Oeuvre
 Exaro Versus
 Larte
 The Other Side
 The Boss Lady's Editorials
 The Boss Lady's Editorials (*expanded edition*)
 Duality
 Seeing Things Differently
 Change/Rearrange
 Death Comes in Threes
 Moving Performances
 Six Eleven
 Live at Cafe Aloha
 Dreams
 Rough Mixes
 The Entropy Project

Compact Discs

Music

MFV the Demo Tapes
Kuypers the Final (*MFV Inclusive*)
Weeds & Flowers the Beauty & the Destruction
The Second Axing Something Is Sweating
Kuypers Overstating *voice sampling*
MFV, Weeds & Flowers, The Second Axing Stop.
 Look. Listen to the music
The Second Axing Live in Alaska *2 concerts*
 Sing Your Life *The Second Axing*
 These Truths *Mom's Favorite Vase & The Second Axing*

Performance Art

Pettus/Kuypers Live at Cafe Aloha
Pointless Orchestra Rough Mixes
Scars Torture & Triumph compilation CD
Scars The Elements compilation CD
Scars String Theory compilation CD
5D/5D Tick Tock
Order From Chaos The Entropy Project
Scars: Oh. web-based CD
 the Elements compilation CD
the DMJ Art Connection the DMJ Art Connection 2 CDs
Kuypers:

Seeing Things Differently
 Six One One
 Change/Rearrange
 Stop. Look. Listen.
 Masterful Performances *mp3 CD*
 Death Comes in Threes
 Changing Gears
 The Other Side
 Dreams
 Contact•Conflict•Control
 How Do I Get There?
 WZRD Radio *2 CD set; 3 radio interviews*

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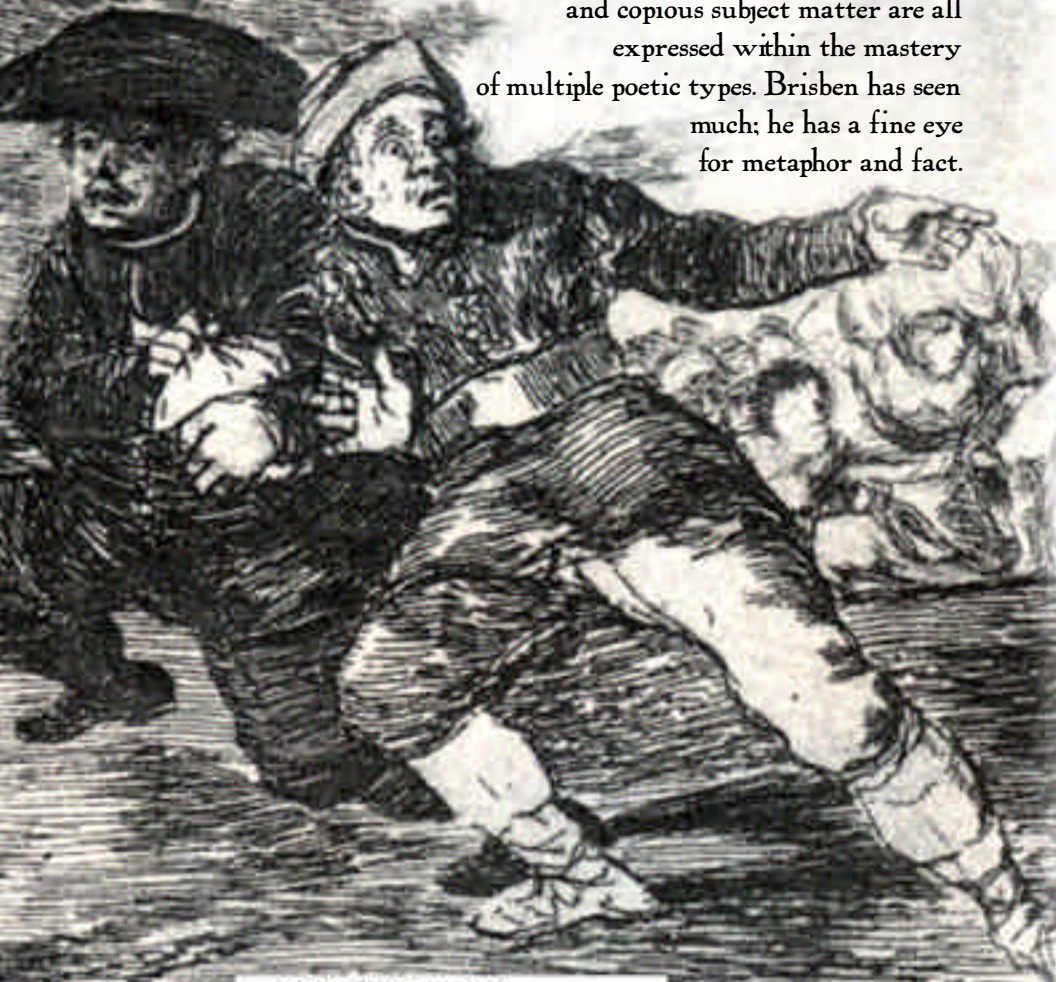
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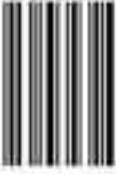
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