

THE GESTALT PRISM



IX JOHN XAVIER XI

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GESTALT
PRISM

JOHN XAVIER

*“...to rectify the immorality of the action by the
purity of our intent.”*

Molière

PREFACE

Given the infinitude of creative possibility, there's no end to the sense of discovery that doing art can provide us. But one can also engage in novel work that's trivial in its inventions and this can be far less satisfying than accomplishing something truly radical. Having written ten collections of assorted poetry now, or nine, or eleven depending on whether you include my lost collection and/or the one solely of haiku, it's of course inevitable that I'd be treading already trodden ground. But that is true of all poetry that's ever been written to some degree; no matter how original it is, a literary work can only be defined as poetry to the extent that it participates in something common to everything that is, in any way, poetic. Poetry, just like every other kind of activity, is a type of partaking in *something*. We can call it "the ideal" if we so wish; the ideal of poetry, like the ideal of ethics or science or whatever. Unlike certain perverse interpretations of Platonism though, said ideals are not particular forms of superimposable specificity but rather continuums of freedom incompatible with actual incarnation. So the ideal of poetry is not some individual poem, no more than the ideal of truth is an individual fact. What we're talking about rather is a kind of fidelity to general principles. And the novelty and creative potential the art of poetry provides is encompassed by the exploration of what can be done in the service of said principles.

So I make an effort in my own work to invent and try new things but, at the same time, I don't worry (And have never worried) about being novel with any kind of artistic anxiety; I am perfectly content to write something well-crafted even if it is conventional in sentiment or form. Because doing well is its own reward, even where one cannot claim to step foot on fresh soil; imagine for example visiting a jungle and not enjoying the extraordinary biodiversity on display because someone else had already seen it! Some people can fetishize novelty the way others fetishize traditionalist criteria but the genuine spirit of artistic exploration is not linear; the need to go relentlessly forward is a mindlessness akin to that of a lifeless projectile. And as for me, I'm all too glad to go back and forth; sometimes testing the borders of art and sometimes enjoying the limits of an established game.

Where I've maybe made some strides in originality in this collection have been relatively minor but interesting perhaps to the more meticulous future students of my posterity. One is in self-awareness. I'd say most of my poetry collections have recorded some kind of sustained self-reflection since this is an activity I've not only been naturally inclined towards but have also long felt to be a moral obligation. In fact, being aware about our own motives and actions is more self-duty than it is even a consideration of others and poetry of course has a long history of poets using their work to examine themselves (I won't use the popular term "interrogate" here since this is a rather egregiously abused metaphor in post-modernist circles whose anthropomorphic application has become, at the time of this writing, a thing now apparently confused with literal action via blind semantic drift) Because poetry is fundamentally grounded in awareness, and even a radicalization of increasingly expansive awareness, the confessional turn of the twentieth century and the older penchant for inward observation are not surprising. I wouldn't say that the internal reflection I've done through poetry is the work of mine I'd place the greatest emphasis on, in fact I'd say my best poems tend to address the world more often, but not exposing the mucky parts of my own psyche would be a form of dishonesty which would mar my body of work. Because if I could "successfully" pull off the impression that I was entirely wise or tranquil, then all the virtues of my art would now be in the service of some fraudulent persona and, though baring certain flaws is naturally uncomfortable, trying to fabricate a legacy *that* thoroughly dishonest is more so. I can interpret Keats' statement about truth and beauty in a way that makes it appear correct to me but doing this requires the acknowledgement that beauty is fundamentally holistic and not fragmentary; after all, would we judge a painting by the merits of the minutest textures individually or would we judge it by the cohesive unity of these? While some brushstrokes can demonstrate special virtuosity, there are unassuming brushstrokes that can be essential to some greater complex so it's absurd to demand omnipresent virtuosity. Actually, virtuosity itself is most successful when it is used to accent or punctuate.

More to the original point though, I've consciously made an effort in several of the poems in this collection to write with self-revealing candor. On that front, some small gains would seem to have been made. Elsewhere however, I've focused on more technical and aesthetic considerations. A good example of this would be the interspersed haiku sections (Interspersed since I'm sure that short sequences of haiku will be preferable for certain readers not as enthusiastic about the genre as others and because if any particular haiku resonate with anyone, they can be more

easily sought out again via shorter titled sequences) Most of these were written simply with the goal of writing a good poem but some involved the added attempt to explore the limits of poetry at the substratum level. It seems to me that while certain words have unique aesthetic merits ('Hierarchy' for example, being by itself aesthetically satisfying and etymologically interesting) and that poetic qualities already emerge at the point of combined words (Wallace Steven's "tragic gestured" being a good instance of this) still these poetic elements do not function at the level of whole poems. Haiku are close enough to this lower boundary however that one can explore what is possible here by writing deliberately minimalistic haiku; that is to say, haiku where the minimal expression of an independent poetic construction might be articulated. Only a few of my haiku were concerned with this but what I'd surmise from my casual experiments here is that poetry can stand on its own at the point of a singular observation but that anything less than this will feel fragmentary. What, after all, is the least form of awareness? A thought or a sight or something similarly self-contained. So, an aspect of an event.

Being conscientious regarding one's observations of oneself or the world involves no fundamental difference and although our biases will often congregate around our own obstructed self-awareness, we can be just as blind when it comes to other people and events which arouse passions of interfering irrationality. When we can't see what's in front of us, this is either caused by an inadequate means of perception or because we don't want to confront something unpalatable. And that's true no less of creative writing. If we're enamored with the idea of ourselves as a great writer more than being actually capable with words, we'll inevitably be unable to perceive the deficiencies in our own work. Similarly, if we allow prejudice to distort our view of the world, any literary work we do involving an overlapping description here will be tainted by the falsity we've allowed. Honesty *is* quite demanding. The more we work at it though, the more natural it becomes and the easier it is for us to sustain. For myself, I've found writing is actually one of the easiest ways for me to cultivate honesty; the leisurely freedom writing provides is a perfect place to begin to question oneself and the world. Doing so, we can gradually clarify what genuine honesty actually requires. The game here, so to speak, not just providing some insight into life in general but becoming part of the fabric of our lives. And I'll say this too; life can be lived poetically beyond the *writing* of poetry. Whatever sensibilities art gives us, these become entirely ours.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Adam Smith's invisible hand gave me
An invisible middle finger
So now I'm giving it back to you

Congratulations all around;
We will be enemies forever, myself the
Despised poet, hideous in his
Audacity, and you the cool archons
Of literature, unamused

In truth I know how petty that sounds but
It's fun to tease the blind, so consider
These just some mean-spirited
Pranks by the local obnoxious jerk

I could resist opening my
Mouth and be thought wise and stoic but why
Should I disguise my foolishness?
How pathetic is it
To want to seem impervious
When there's nothing in
All of creation which is like that

Well, I guess I do have to acknowledge the
Martyrs then; unlike you
Economists they are truly humbling

AUTUMN HAIKU

Door cracks in the hall
Golden like fire –
Inside, the last light

A burst of crows
Over the busy street –
Turquoise sky

Red blackberries
Too late to ripen –
8 dreary months ahead

Sitting not unlike
Paintings of Buddha –
The disheveled panhandler

Goosebumps flaring –
Your soft skin,
Braille for my fingers

Stripping wire –
A nest of copper
But no egg

Beautiful horror –
Joy for human beings,
But the insects of autumn?

In swaying shade –
Chasing each other, two
Squirrels on a tree

Large stones
Embedded in grass –
One crow each

Parked SUV –
The spot misaligned,
Arm resting on the window

Patient crows –
A young boy climbing
On his dad

Notices on doors –
A carpeted hallway
Full with ghosts

BLACK MARLIN

No fish is meant to be caught; they are not
Things such that they should be used
But some more than others exemplify this by special
Enormity and grandeur

How the wild tenacity has cast itself into
An almost metallic form; the shining underside
Versus the dark roof of the creature
Evoking a fragment of the tension the oceanic animal
Articulates in its violent urge to live and swim
As it speeds through a boundless realm

If there were a physiognomy of pure freedom,
Where would we find a better avatar of this in the world?
Polished as it is, a biological missile

We cannot follow the fish to its destination
So instead there are some of us who ambush it and take pride
In their interception, smug obstacles
To the last, who will frame their tokens of that
Above a mantelpiece and brag about it to their guests over drinks;
Unhaunted by the superfluity of their actions and the void
Now in the continuum of events which the fish
Would've occupied, the invisible vacuum
Multiplying in the cascading non-occurrence of encounters;
A life, however bestial, the trophy hunter cannot
Themselves author something equal to

Some will insist though that the whims of human beings
Are no less crucial to the music of creation

Can any of these though truly justify the sport of destruction?
If we are to be a higher expression of nature
Mustn't we express higher creativity? To descend to
Ruin as a pastime; what is that?

There is nothing noble in gratification for its own sake

By genuine consideration however, the reality
We find ourselves a part-of is enriched through subtle insights
And there is no longer a desire to do harm to anything

Here the planet itself is like a wondrous garden; each element
Involved in it, placed perfectly in the whole;
It matters not whether you attribute this to a divine hand
Or the power of blind eons because either way
There's a pre-existing degree of harmony and our choice is simply
Whether we add to this or impede its adamant progress

To loom like a shadow over a kingdom; humanity has
Long indulged its ego in this
But doing so is to stumble into unseeing

What we devalue in any other, we also devalue in ourselves

BUDE-AST [IS/WAS]

A response poem to Solmaz Sharif's 'Customs'

Both the being and the unbeing belonging together,
Feet and footprints in the soil of an
Unfamiliar country: Home

There is the (not dear) omega, the dreaded end
Premonition in all things but that
Isn't where we're from

Because there is no terminus for the
Endless birthing source so we
Should not grow weary with the thought of dying

Other habits are at work, a culture
Among the immortals, bizarre but energizing;
And ours, however ultimately

Allow the living to be entwined as saplings
Growing oddly entangled, their
Joy so green it {shines even in eclipses}

CAULIFLOWER TORMENTS

Break the cauliflowers' legs
So each cauliflower begs
Hung on their little cauliflower pegs
According to the cauliflower regs

Weeping said cauliflowers moist
But it was their own cauliflower choice
So if they want down from the cauliflower hoist
They ought confess in a cauliflower voice

It matters not how cauliflowers' feel
We are not here to make a cauliflower deal
So if silent, let the cauliflowers peel
Either way, all end up a cauliflower meal

CEMENTED RIFT

Let us gaol then, you in eye
By the route to the outrageous hostiles
Seizing awed fits and bellowed rueful-quijs

End debts, shell half; no dumb minion

Owed kaftan, my kaftan! Our tearful fib is done;
The core few stroll the null of sparring day
And, I might ask, pained tendons, flawed-waltzes
If ladled prophets had ideal kings
Due knot cogent ill, unto that could knight

Tired! Tired! Born in blight;
Has virtue left man? Past smiling always

Justice may linger in brief squeeze
Withstood, by pondered wind tour, they
Thoughtful shah though, awesome obscene parlour
One lie less endures, you blue mad

Fat as know pantries, furred all mid the hung
Lake of skin, up lewd ilk, bound again AWOL

Aplomb, shut he, palatably moot

CONSIDERING I AM NOT AN EXEMPLAR IN FORGIVENESS

always Always good,
The letting go of grievances;
To breathe a fumeless air again,
To rinse ourselves
Of our very own poisons

yes Yes, the setting aside of warlike thoughts,
Whether determined or indulgent,
Is healthy, is wise, and
Though there is a cost in the unsatisfying now
Here we are prudence incarnate;
Our supposed sacrifice like that of a gardener
Struggling and sweating shortly
But in comparison to the one who doesn't,
The one who, themselves
Harder than raw earth, never opens their fist:
Well, we will reap something will we not?
And they, who gave nothing,
Must receive that much worse in return

gentle Gentle comes the true conqueror,
A lord by established right;
Undeclared via unknown depths of power,
Vanquishing the arena itself,
Their hand as such is not compelled
By injuries or slights, they
Reign through their own freedom
Above the arrows;
A sky over every kingdom

DIESEL THERAPY

The above is a term used to refer to the practice of shipping convicts by bus to far away destinations as a form of coercion in the corrections system.

You might go across the country but not really;
All that scenery outside your cage
Just as flat as film celluloid, a visible echo
Perhaps of a world that still exists but one which
You are not a part of – and though
These try to sneak into your heart in pieces
Via the phone calls and the letters, they
Are always mere limbs of effigy
Cobbled from the memories of dreams

Life is not unlike a prison for many and prison
Is not unlike freedom for some, or
At least a liberation with respect to
Various obligations; and a life
Spent in some dreary unrewarding job
Will be a great cost – imagine your one span of time
Swallowed up in a hateful way or maybe this
Requires no imagination

Will your transport break you? What would
Strive to seduce you slowly into
Abject compliance, the program itself
Enjoying a seafood buffet
And *you* are the haplessly cooked crab
Snapped open with a briny crunch

Your belief in your self-worth is the shell of you
Antithetical to adversarial hungers;
Worn down as we all must, it's only a question of time
Once sufficient pressure is applied since
You can *only* keep holding out
If you're willing to completely give up

DISCOURSE

If even the freedom fighters are dishonest,
Freedom will die

And dignity and social justice too
Suffocate when the atmosphere fills up with fraud
Because it's so utterly delicate

Truth, I mean

Regardless then of how good your intentions are,
Blocking out unpleasanties
Will only adapt these to darker places
And, swollen with the shadows,
They will return strengthened in their war
Against the light

With the armor you gave them, with the weapons
Of your own making, relics

Revealing the infidelity in you to your
Own cherished ideals; you
Want democracy? That's something but this

Is not the same thing as

Never having to face an opposition;
Therefore we should be careful where we draw
The lines here, the chalk we hold
Could very well
Outline our own corpse

DUSK OF SENSIBILITY

Just prior to France's revolution
But after the death of Johnson,
Art was purged of all confusions
While Truth slept fast in London

In the void of that vacant doctor
On and on Donne's bell still tolled;
A clang quick to rouse a monster
As liberty soon was much in vogue

Another type of medicine adapted,
Citizen concerns for civil hygiene;
Where physicians *had* been hapless
There now the cure of the guillotine

Reason, in art and life, is this cruel,
And never bends to tender hearts;
As whips toughen those they school
Their touch, where a twilight starts

EIGHT AND A HALF

Control and out-of-control and the
Question of control

Let the director work, that procrastinator
With his delicate sensibilities
And a life crafted out of fantasy

Where the whip lands and the witch dances,
There the loins are throbbing and
Control is a part of that and so is all his
Irritating equivocation;
But he's smart enough to flatter the money
And that's got him this far at least

Which is rather far indeed

Not quite where the rocket ship would take him
But then he'd have to bring a crew
And how will he decide
Between all the people in his life?

This is a man of supreme indecision so
An ordinary man in that regard

Despite his exceptional talents and charms
He is rather mundane in many ways;
An everyman oddly enough
Fending off the dialectical materialism of his critics
While hoping for a holy cure or an
Audience with *ad hoc* curates

Nine months it takes on average to be born
So, we must admit, Guido is close

END JAMB

meant, when to do it when
to not: now? no
the moment pass
-ed

engine bent a whim
sickle thing
sly sing off a sentence or whirred
even, like salami

tits the opposite
of punk
-tuation; the deaf in it
nest of that

and gem binned
semantic wise as wail
all most meaning
-full but jest stopping

short, a dim in itching
return from
wit was planted; the phrases
coined in jammed mints

EPISTEMOLOGY

A star in the left eye, the white supernova
Beneath the shut lid besieged
With the rim-blue light of morning;
Phlegm in my throat,
Art in my mind like a weed however
Beautiful, sinister in tenacity

The air at this voracious hour is a gelatine,
Transparent but still
Off-putting

Compositions like Hiroshige, like Magritte
Arranged with *chiaroscuro** deference
To good order, empty spaces
And the suggestion of something grand but left
For the imagination

Reality has impeccable lines, nature is
Fastidious in technique
With no trace of any kind of uncertainty in its
Creations, the whole structure
Of the thing, the thing itself if "of it" we can
Speak, transcendent
And humbling though it does arouse
Jealousies on occasion

Wherever the fever draws us, this
Portrait of fire will belch us out the chimneys of
Tradition into bitter ash

Because in the end, it's all astrology;
Ink in the folds of cerebellum
Languid with the apathy of Alzheimer predators
And this, even though
Death is the maestro of legalese

A day of knowing is coming, a terrible day
For many but now
Dawn is nothing but a lame rumor
Even children laugh at

And the traffic of stupidity just keeps increasing
And maybe only a violence of
Inhuman magnitude will ever stop it

* Obviously Hiroshige and Magritte are not chiaroscuro so maybe the poet is doing something else here?

ESOTERIC GUIDANCE

Those who keep secrets live longer
And this maybe isn't
Just a matter of practical consequence
But rather a deep interest of
Teleologically high office regarding
Such business as the soul

When the well is plundered dry, is it
Not abandoned? Why
Linger in a desert where strangers hunger
And thirst, since the worst of
Human kind finds doom in every sign?

Exhume the mind and each dull hue
Will burn as bright as an
Acetylene blue in skies now chasm
Like the mouth of Metatron;
Tunnel to
The fundamental
Truth

But that's why he was chastised
In heaven, exposing
So much; this is quite unlike
The mystical *one*

Leitmotif with mystery the
Quote unquote revelations of holy writ
As if the edge of elucidation
Was itself the desired thing, the tension between
Not being on the wave
Or the surfer falling off: consider first
Hashem's ulterior motives

Like the father, the children are brought up
To take over the family trade

And in the cultivation of infinitude,
There must exist
Unfathomable depths or the
Roots of immortality won't have really
Sprouted yet

While those who aspire to be
Wholly extrovert,
Betray their Lot as spiritual eunuchs

EZRA'S ANTISEMITISM

should not be minimized but the neo nazi
who tried to claim the poet
as his own needn't be given that
if possible

i believe ginsberg, i do because
despite his own incentives to prevaricate
there is a sadness in ezra's later statements and
fascism doesn't allow sadness;
in fascism, sadness
must be drowned with anger

obviously, ezra was their ally once, caught up in
a romantic crusade against
the hierarchy of capital and corruption
but there's also a record
of his words in the sobering wake
of this, the ruins

speak and maybe they admit
a folly proven in destruction, maybe

i am not an ezra scholar but
that is my suggestion to those who are
interested in the truth

he could have genuinely repented

FAIR APPRAISAL

How the world appears is always in conflict
With how the world is; the how
Of brute actuality

Now obviously I know *this*, being
Able to articulate it with so much facility but

Still, I am too quick to judge others;
Hydrophobic almost
In the baptism of justified blame,
Like my sense-of-self was
Some advanced
Synthetic material, designed in a Swiss lab
To be impervious to accountability

We are the cashiers of our own lives, confronted
With the converging queues of
Events and people, each as much an equal
To us in their own greedy insistence,
So holding oneself
Responsible has to compete
With *that* and
The hideous chore of this;
Here our rewards are simply too
Oblique to measure

Plus I myself have an artist's ego, that dirigible
Unique to unimposing skies where
Hurricanes solicitously refrain to tread
While the scissors of fate
Pause with indulgent curiosity

What is pride? A mask of green flies
Jostling over my placid face

The curse
Of an abundant confidence
Because, in my heart,
There is no space for the dissent of others;
And maybe this predetermines the rest,
The polite superficiality
Born of an impassible gulf
Only vaguely
Present; a quality lingering
Behind the irises

Honesty is usually
A gruesome search party,
Strolling where
The terrorist detonated their suicide vest;
Scraps of human meat, childish
Meat, flung against
The blasted walls and everywhere a new
Quiet horror to absorb, except
Here you are
Both terrorist and victim

So it's easier to be clinical, an examiner

Of the cellular structures of sampled epidermis,
The vegetative principles
Governing an unknown animal body

Everyone prefers
Playing doctor to playing patient
Because the purpose of
Pretending is to escape real life and
In reality we are, all of us,
Grappling with our own sickness;
The first step
In our convalescence though,
Acknowledgement

What is the truth of my private condition?

I am still a listener at least
So that part of me holds on and I
Am always on the edge
Of more, so I can look there,
To my horizons

Mirrors themselves, a resemblance
Dawning on disassembly

FORTUNE TELLER

A prophecy for coins, a dirty palm
Offered to the skepticism
Of a modern street and the bemused crowds
Needing nothing
But lurid entertainments

Anything can be disgusting if you are
Disgusting enough, the eye
Open like a door to the bedroom of your relatives
Caught in a frozen and unflattering coitus

Like that, you yourself grotesque;
The obscenity of a basic existence extending
Its unwelcome body into
This already hostile universe; please if you
Could just restrain yourself
Because no one
Wants to share their dinner party
With you, yes no one

I predicted it, I told you so and
All I asked was that you pay me in the
Blood of Christ

First of all, if you could notice how this poem
Began with a disembodied hand
And then relate that to its most obvious
Reference and find, like someone
Shucking corn, the relevance of this to
Your own life, if you will

Zion exists in the grey folds of your brain;
A calcification, for morticians

GEIST DES WALDES

And there I am on trails
So wonderful at dusk and folklorish like
Ancient Germania

Down the cliff beside me, great
Grandfatherly trees, dignified with mossy beards
And the attentions of spiralling vines,
Gladden my tired heart
While the sky above lies divinely nested,
A celestial robin's egg

I am alone in nature's cathedral, left to admire
Exquisite things authored by
Plans so imperceptible they become
At most dim suggestions
For those willing to descend into the depths of time
And ladle out some draught of mystery

Nothing in this place goes unreclaimed; new life
Everywhere offering
Lessons in subtle form and silent
Wisdom

I belong here and with such ease

Hiking joyously in the last light of sunset as
Darkness follows at my heels

GLUM HAIKU

sunlight falling
on the laden branches –
hanging moss

leafless trees
leaning in all directions –
moths scattering

a dying forest –
keeping to popular trails,
they do not see

of paths, trees –
those of us who are
taken of that

money dwindles –
the last light of dusk
no less luminous

like molten gold –
my forcing my books
down others' throats

the grape, my soul –
my own mouth
an entrance to hell

deserted island –
bottled messages we find,
just our own

hopeful words
in another's ear –
dew on a spider's web

dingy rooms –
nothing grows here
except slime, dust

piled books
I may never read –
silverfish housing projects

when the pen runs dry before
the words are finished

no rain –
the lashing wind
in darkened streets

where the dead gather,
things at least grow there –
not here though

when the seed splits open
there needn't be soil

ocean waves and
a crowd of people in waves
and a lost hand _____

finding a red box
with secret compartments –
all empty

summer ending
sooner than expected –
a window shut

GRIM HAIKU

sunflowers tilting
every which way –
autumn looms

glasses broke,
I'm broke –
daylight shortening

running out –
the toilet paper
before the shit does

wasting it –
the last summer,
a draining sink

counting coins –
ugly and scuffed up,
zero shine

drifting garbage –
still frolicking, the winds
as summer cools

friends again –
my blanket and I
as the nights grow colder

under the bed,
beneath the cupboards –
pubic tumbleweed

more than usual
as the noose tightens –
old coffee grounds

paying rent –
the stapled receipts
vaguely fatalist

insomnia –
the cold pale moon,
a glowing cloud

morning arrives
in a few hours –
but the crows before

beside the empty road,
a moth fluttering
in the dark

so nice and quiet
and well kept –
a cemetery

flossing my teeth,
a little blood –
but what's that?

September now –
the unhappy novel
almost done

dusk in eyeballed crowds;
a soft language
unknown

sandwich boards
brought inside –
their last employee

missing pages –
a thin sketch book,
abandoned drawings

one big gumbo –
too many chefs but
edible enough

bench at dusk –
the talking shadows
tinted by grass

sleep, the unneeded,
as a dry tongue
unfurls now

sore but alert –
a crumb of eye crust
for each corner

disloyal body –
every five minutes
adjusting in bed

competing boys –
the girl's attention
at a campfire

edge of dreams –
nostalgia itself
a mosquito swarm

where'd I put that?
and the things
I never held

abnormal,
not wild enough –
the man in the mirror

HOW TO DOUBT YOUR OWN PESSIMISM

There isn't a trial in this world
That can defeat a genuine Zen monk

When I look at my troubles these
Are simply a mirror for my attachments;
If I listen to myself, I am told
That it's really not a problem to die

To live in disgrace is no big deal
But only an ugly face on an inflated balloon

Stop blowing. And then it all shrivels
Up and flops to the ground

Control being the inward truth lost
In the outer, a carnival of

Fun house mirrors and you say
"That's what I look like" quite obliviously

So laugh at my most depressing
Poems, they aren't

Half as cataclysmic as they try so hard
To seem, but deeply lesser things

I MUST GET TO NINEVEH

There's no more joy
And delight now also; a deprivation,
Like music, all-too-tedious

Where a thorn draws blood, there your
Passage has been marked, these signatures
Yoking you to that chance
Locality, articulating in the wilderness'
Own muted way, a kinship
Remembered only by added artifice

Intestines identical to city streets, bones laced
In their vaults of pink flesh
Where the gold-leaf of saints has no
Place and the people are the yellow of grasshoppers
Vying in dry pastures

Cu-nei-form of clay until the Lord's crown
Brought forth an empire of
Sacred banquets; much as a river flows
The words of delinquent priests
Hocking whatever popular god was in season, though
Always subordinating myths to politics
But, let the living eat the dead;
Allow the owls of the desert to spread their wings
In the blue tinge of starry darkness

Though I might delay in taverns
And the establishments of the human cuisine
It is only the contrivance
Of delay; a means to suppress
My unsatisfied fullness but, every evening
The dust of the road leading out of town remains
In its taunting cloud and I know, one day,
I must get to Nineveh

IF YOU CAN

Trust, genuinely trust,
Then surrender holds no shame

Every step, backwards or forwards,
Another closer to the palace

I'M FINE, ARTIST UNKNOWN, OIL ON CANVAS, 3.1 M X 2.2 M

The firefighters are in full gear, and solid and composed not just emotionally But by artistic arrangement. The way a Rousseau might be, Although less surreal; rather art deco-ish actually. They are crowding Into a small white bathroom, one indicative of a bachelor suite And this consists of a mirror and sink and toilet, with little in the way of personal Effects, a fairly generic bathroom then, depicted in a slightly unrealistic manner. No, not really an art deco painting to be fair. The similarity limited to How the figures relate to one another spatially. The bathroom itself flat, Bland. Come to think of it, the palette and style are reminiscent of Otto Dix; Or at least that one painting he did of the pudgy doctor. Except The firefighters of course; the contrast there between the pale pastels, However off-white, still circling around the drain of whiteness, and the yellow Reflective bands on the tan fire jackets and the black fire helmets is striking. There is no energy though in the way they are standing around; they seem baffled Almost. Or nonplussed maybe. This is just another call for them, after all. And the cause of their showing up is unclear but in the bathtub Below these life-sized firefighters, the three fully-bodied and the one peering Into the bathroom from its open door, there is a man with skin almost as white As the porcelain of the bathtub itself, and more white than the tiling Behind him, who is lying up to his chin in the red-stained water. And his paleness Has its obvious source in the implied bleeding and implied suicide and all this In the lower fourth of the frame, giving him that much more contrast With the looming firefighters. But there is a defiance in his eyes, even with The obvious tiredness and the clear urge to die, which explains the awkwardness Perhaps of the emergency responders, who are not acting in accordance With standard procedures so this must be some sort of dream, real or not a thing Dreamt up by the artist, and there is no way to tell if the artist identifies Themselves with the suicidal man, the intention of the painting lost by its being Joined to the anonymity of the painter. Considering the title though It's clear that the dying man has halted the aid of the firefighters by refusing this And they are, however briefly, flummoxed and so we have an expression Of deep determination. There is something rather amphibian in how content The man is to lie in his own blood, the red water awfully bright, because clearly He cut himself quite a while ago and he's been there, waiting so impatiently For death to fulfill its half of the bargain. Feeling he's owed that at least.

INHABITANT

Could it be that, somewhere on the clotheslines
Of the past, what we hung up
Wasn't just another persona, but rather
Our genuine selves
And so the intensified void we find
In the closet today is indeed
Explicable that way?

The houses we live in are things of rotten memory
And wishful memory, tucked away
In the corner of some cul-de-sac where the
Fingers of strangers are
Banished with metaphysical rigor

There's nothing to worry about as we do the dishes
Before sitting down to eat
Which dirties the dishes and then after
Washing these dishes
Before having another meal
And the continuity
Of this endless cycle remaining

Perfect

Absolutely perfect

There's a rotary phone on the table that never rings
But you could call someone if you wanted to

Pushing the lawnmower over your grass,
The chlorophyll scent in the air
And the noise overwhelming
Whatever little vermin happen to get caught
Errantly in the blades and no
Evidence of carnage is left behind

There *is* music coming from the garage though
Which you can't identify
And it's your garage but you didn't
Put it on, *for the life of you*

A mystery like the thing in the mirror that
Looks your way whenever you
Summon up the courage to gaze at it

And how is it even possible that this isn't you?

JUXTAPOSE

As it was in ages past
The truth of the age is rage;
Anger, that blessed
Beast, which breathes its fire over
Everything, because this
Offers the easiest blindness;
Bliss of the thoughtless path and eyes
Smudged over with ash,
If only it could last!
Alas, this would give us something to
Die for, a morbid metaphor
Around which the dancing lich
Could feel free,
But such a spree is doomed
By its own necessitated tombs
And so we are
Left bereft, travellers on
A cliff that clefts
The land and sea, no means to
Enter that other world
Where the waters whirl, so wrath
Can remain
Only where we refrain to
Ask if we are really
So innocent ourselves and
Above repentance?

KEEP AWAY

Algorithms do not like certain subjects
And they will censor you
If you so much as reference these

It is not enough to be on the right side of a
Controversy, the algorithms
Are too cautious for that; if they find the flagged words
In whatever it is you are trying to say,
They will divert the eyes
Of users away from your offending speech;
Now you are *persona non grata*

This digital world is not much concerned with nuances
Since the complications of these
Defy the mindless efficiency that's so
Straightforward, preferred

Computers and law firms are working together
Today to stamp out problematic
Conversation and

That's wonderful I suppose but what about
Addressing all the ugly stuff?

For example:

LABOR MARKET

Subtract the duration of your bones
And muscles as components,
Blood as fuel, and
The cost-benefit-analysis of sustaining
Average exploited human life:
When that's complete
You will know exactly what you are worth
To the voting-shares owning
Insanely rich
Investors who control whatever company
You work for and who've no sense
Of you as a person

Hypertrophic stomachs devoid of sweat
Who digest what the dumb limbs of the body politic,
Handy men and women
Just looking for a leg-up on despair,
Make or sustain
With all the gross expectation
Of the truly ungrateful

Life owes them everything:
Even what most intimately belongs to
Someone else

Parasitizing the wage serf's toil while also
Looting their pension funds
The embezzled spoils crackling like
Tesla coils these
Horrifically selfish, breast-shrivelling-babies
With abominable ambitions

Are, in the jaws of tamed and abused Justice
(Muzzled now by an embolism of bankers
And other financial myth-makers) the inedible gristle

Impossible to chew so they'd get
Spat out immediately anyways, and fall
From their pretext trials in
Splatter patterns of golden parachutes gently
Gliding into luxurious retirement
So that, even if the mercenary prostitutes
Of the corporate media have
At this point been forced to rouse themselves and
Feign outrage, everyone
Soon goes back to bed and sleeps happily
On the mattress of other's pain

Welcome to the grave bazaar!
A pseudo-anarchical theatre of suffering
Where the majority of offerings
Are disguised suicide pacts, so slow you won't
Notice the life being drained out of you
To feed the greed
Of humanoid mosquitos

It's liquidity you see, everything is reduced to
Liquidity and, when it
Comes to people, this always means
Some kind of bloodshed,
However sanitized and discrete

LANDS OF TIME AGO

We've gone down into the
Molten core of the Earth together,
Engineers inside
A groaning submarine

These memories though don't touch us anymore;
Like aged photographs
Encased in dusty glass they stare back,
Lifeless relics to the last and
Whatever electricity once existed between us
And then, has died a ghostly death
Leaving behind only
The flatness of the image

There is no art in duplication,
No volcanic epiphany to astound the mind
Hitherto complacent

And so like the incisions of petroglyphs forgotten
On some weathered rock, our paths
Met and marked out different tangents, but stagnate now
Upon the steep mountain
Of an eternal unbecoming; tectonic principles
Churning ground like an old man's spade
While he's lost in thought
Among the autumn of his garden

Vistas are we perhaps; expanses of conjoined continents
Divorcing by the silent millennia of inches

LATE HAIKU

Flapping wings
In the thorn bush –
Vanished when I near

Spray painted rock,
Pink and shaped like lungs –
Green weed erupting

Askew signpost –
Wide grey pavement
Snaking too

Autumn hued ivy
Drowning the grey wall –
Lone hummingbird

Telephone pole
Splattered orange, blue –
Pollack *oh-mahzh*

Suburban street
Under a blasting sun –
Port cranes ahead

Angry golems –
Rusted sculptures
Glaring over barbed wire

Fanning myself –
Autumn heat catching
Me off guard

Fumes of flies
Breeding in the dusk –
Television static

The gleam of sunset
On paired bus wires
Against the blue sky

Night life –
Flat neon woven
With lively shadows

Sky blue dress –
Her body effortlessly
Cruel with beauty

Closed bookshop –
Volumes on the shelves
Commuters

Luminosity
Metastasizing –
The darkness archaic

LD

After all these years
You're still the one I think of most

The few times
You arranged for us to be
Alone together,
As happy as I've ever been and yet
I just let it unravel like
The rope of an anchor plunging
Into the sea

I mean, you had a boyfriend;
A fighter-jet navigator if I recall and
What was I?

A jobless writer who hadn't even
Written anything yet

Plus I was young and stupid;
Yet I kept hoping
You'd tell me one day you were
Breaking up with him;
Because you
Were exactly what I wanted

But then I never said this
And we lost touch
While time continued on

Years later however we briefly
Reconnected
But by then you'd already
Started a family
With the same man you were with before;
Of course married now

And I knew, finally, my moment
Was gone

Whatever more we might have had, I hope
Your life has been a joyful one

And that, although I didn't say it,
You knew
You were special to me

LITERARY TESTAMENT

When I die I want my work to thrive;
A thing freely available
To anyone who desires to read it, not some
Guarded treasure hoarded by an
Affluent intelligentsia

As long as they don't alter my text or
Insert some hideous foreword
At the front of my books, any foreword really
Since they're all interruptions, then they
Have my blessing to give away
Copies of my book for free, physical or digital;
And if my estate has a problem with this,
Know they've exposed that they're
Just loathsome
Squatters on my legacy

I will not delight in subsidizing anyone's
Passive income when I'm dead;
Let them write their own books if they want to
Try and live that way

Why should these hazard less than I did?

Of course I cannot claim ownership over
Any of my inspirations;
Each good word was a divine gift
Of which my sole claim is temporary custody
Over a small part of the commonwealth

Because true literature is born
From orchards planted by past artists;
So, in the spirit of solidarity,
Let these few creations belong to all
In the ancient pact of civilization

LONE

It takes two *not* to tango
So I have had many partners

In my solitude, the women
I wasn't intimate with

Are just as culpable in our
Mutual disassociation

Sure, if I had asked more
Of them out, I would've dated

More, shared more memories
And experiences but

They could've been less shy
Themselves, maybe

Being more direct in invitation
Though I understand

Their reasons too and don't
Begrudge them, life

Isn't easy for most of us and
When it comes to being truthful

There's no one to fill our place;
Honesty a "by ourselves"

MAYBE YOU LIVE IN A WORLD

But I inhabit a parable
Where comedic errors thwart even
The simplest endeavors

There's no grandiose tragedy in my life, nothing
Immense enough to make me
A sympathetic protagonist, but rather
Minutia of a rather trivial kind that weirdly
Succeeds in halting
The machinery of enterprise
By ridiculous accident

Like grains of sand inside some subtle gear
Upon which the whole factory
Was contingent

And it takes a devious power to
Harden pharaoh's heart

Though I'm owed nothing, not even death,
I might still like to know
Whose hand it was that interfered with the
Scales of my life and why, unless
It was only to test my moral dimensions,
In which case the the whole business seems a bit obscene;
As if my faults were not
Long ago exposed
That these minor sabotages
Had to continue

Did anyone learn anything when I didn't try to defraud
The owner of the credit card I found
Despite my current financial pressures?

Because I didn't

What ludicrous bait, unworthy of any satanic license;
And the absurd misunderstandings,
Likewise beneath any cosmic accusing or
Exoneration, just a lot of
Worthless trouble for all involved

Cursing though requires the passion of hatred,
So I am not cursed, but then
What is it?

These low-intensity tribulations, the tedious game
Drawn out past any degree of
Reasonable enthusiasm, as if there was
An obligation involved;
Yet I see the lives of others and, while many have it
Much worse than me, what number among them
Is interfered with as I am?

My fate, destiny, whatever it is, seems to have
Casino-like odds; a gremlin penchant
For spoiled progress

A mystery that, well... actually
Forget it

I take back my request for understanding

Whoever or whatever it is
Can keep the motive for its petty designs
An eternal secret; I shouldn't
Inquire into something so perversely frivolous

Of power *that* basic, there is perhaps
Only a dog of a plea to make

"If you could please just stay out of my light"

MEDIA RES

I.

Headlights briefly slicing up the black
Window in bright triangulations;
Auras of passing traffic, the ghastly blue a
Sudden presence, searching almost
And the window a barrier
Between myself and a tertiary exterior:
Me, my body, my apartment, the world outside

Like an action figure in plastic packaging
I am still technically new, but
This newness doesn't hold back the obsolescence that
Began at the singularity of creation;
It's irrelevant to be new when the imprint
Embedded in the unseen part of you no longer
Speaks to anyone, the language
Itself forgotten or excised
As part of the civilized program of
Obliterating the past

Since you were not there at the beginning
You will not be there at the end

That I am *now* is a kind of Dedekind partition;
Infinity itself divided into a before and
After me, in both directions
The endless expanse of my nonbeing
However concrete I may feel in this moment
It's as ephemeral as anything else;
Maybe my reflection
In the mirror *is* my real self

A trick of light, my true essence

II.

One can imagine the bulging circus tent
Billowing at the end of summer, the roller coaster
Already shut down for the season
While the carnies have a famished air
About them, and there isn't
Really any desire to gaze into those gaunt faces
Because you're only liable to find something familiar,
So you pay for your ticket with haste
And head inside not quite
Sure what you're going to see and of course
It's less impressive the closer you look
But the mirrors cannot be sneered at because
Doing this you are simply
Confessing to self-repugnance

Malice is the forefather of our anger
And this from the corpse
Of our own beauty; a trauma of carrion flies
Pixelating the dead as a matrix
Composed solely of ones and zeroes

III.

Could the algorithm of the rain drops that
Gather at my window tell me
Something of future droughts? No?

Then what is the difference separating this
And any event we capture
On concocted circuitry? Although there is
The illusion of less crudeness, still our attempts to
Preserve anything are all ultimately futile
Which suggests then that
There's still some kind of lesson
Humanity has yet to learn: *here*

Movement rearranges the universe however
Inconsequentially, but no matter
The disorder of the game board's pieces
The setup remains the same
And the goals of the players, competitive or not,
Must abide by the old parameters;
Your children need never
Place flowers in your rifle barrels,
Freeze these at the instance of an execution
And the flames are better and brighter

Life is a vacation away from your real home
While your honesty is the bullet
In the chamber of the revolver pressed against
Your temple, like some casino machine
We-who-are-tired return to it *over and over*;
Except the jackpot offers nothing
But to be ogled by vultures, until due time
Or else there is the dream pitfall of becoming
Another demigod, the gulf between divinity and the
Cloying madness of schizophrenia though
Not all that great, once more
These dreams cannot survive waking

Like an antenna in a storm, the signal garbled
Due to atmospheric interference;
And although there is not a whole lot we can do there
This is what we are erected for, the truth
Surrounding and permeating and just irrefutable:

Fear is the incomprehension of the dying

MENTAL HEALTH LURKERS

Psychologists and psychiatrists are species of spider;
To the extent I've personally known them

What I mean is, they wait; they only ask the
Most perfunctory questions while
Doing nothing to ensnare themselves in the details
Of your life and hoping you
Will fall into one of their own webs

It's a question of footing:
Preferring their stable strands of silk, these
Congenial arachnids
Are consummate with patience

Against mistakes, against responsibility
And certainly one only becomes
Interested in the pathologies of the mind due to
Private acquaintance with these, the
Cornucopia of pharmaceutical ads in *Psychology Today*
Shouldn't be dismissed as just
The business of doctors prescribing drugs

No, it's propaganda aimed directly
At the psyche of the reader;
Here the larger spiders hunt the smaller ones

Me, on the other hand, I'm a *slug*
Slimy in my odd imperviousness to ambush

MODEST BLESSINGS

Even in the hard times, the rough days,
Where everything feels like it's
Sliding off a precipice

Their surprise arrivals, a gentle spontaneity

And you're tired and ready
To let it all collapse but, right when you're
About to pull the trigger on your life,
Maybe they'll appear;
And isn't it strange you want to go on again?
Now, with that little scrap of hope
You're like a different person, someone
Eager to get into the ring

An invisible thing, a trivial updraft
Can be all the difference between soaring or not

So even apparent misfortunes
Can hide some transmuted benefit and
The separation between them is,
Oddly enough, often the
Merest inclination in attitude, these
Occasionally deciding the whole direction
Of a life, everything

Coming back to some trivial detail
You happened to notice

MORE HAIKU

Apple peels –
However careful,
Lost flesh

Teal bar soap –
Frothy lather,
Red dish

Spectator to
Friday night antics –
Fellini-esque

Downstairs music –
The live band
Shushed by my fan

Not flowers –
A blue nitrate glove
Draping them

Pink dusk
Retreating from
The sides of skyscrapers

Pale dusk –
The “A” frame
A seagull’s perch

Dark purples and violets –
Mountains grazing
Twilit clouds

Bus stop trees –
The bark stripped off
Pointlessly

Two days from now –
Twenty two years since the
Twin towers fell

Coffee drips –
In this black liquid
My reflection

Rashes, cramps –
Body and mind race to
See who quits first

Where the wood
Was broken –
New life

NO [DUST] NO [MIRROR] NO [SELF]

Government agencies will subsidize my existence
But they won't buy my poetry, which is
Rather aggravating to me; the two being so
Intricate from my
Own mangled viewpoint

Am I worthy? Everything I see in myself says [Yes]
But the world says [No] and
Doesn't offer up a decent explanation

Of course I know the world is wrong but
I've long suspected that its posture here isn't even
All that honest; that it's just
Pretending not to see my talents to satisfy
Some other purpose

Sadistic? Maybe. Profound? Maybe.

And obviously my desires are the real source
Of my frustration and if I would simply
Become a [buddha]
That would solve the whole mess
But I don't want to be a buddha, I want to
Remain human still, writing
Of the ordinary human experience with only a little
Extra genius to salt this

Whether I die or live must be equally unimportant
In a materialistic sense, the cosmos
Its own selfish thing, busy
With childish malevolence across the bewildering
Playground of its extinctions

Another possibility is that this burlesque is
Itself a kind of divine authorship;

The narrative of my life
J u s t i f i e d in the councils of heaven as an
Artistic enterprise, a species of
Immortal machination
However absurd that may be

There is no higher education than this, to be
Tutored by the flog of the universe
And permitted insight into all your deficiencies out of
An overabundance of wisdom

Surplus with wisdom, its poverty soon becomes apparent

Which means, unlike many: *successful*: people
I am granted some fragment
Of the truth, privileged really in the

Most [meaningful way]

ON ADAPTATION

The shark drowns on dry land;
Their strength sapped
As completely as that of Samson's
Shorn of long hair

Because, whatever
Creature anyone is born to be,
The limits of this are
Not ours to decide and we
Must make do
With hobbled natures

Should we become
Stupid beasts then? Our lives
Devoted to education and the lofty
Question of what it means
To belong to some environment?

Either way we remain links
In the chain of stupendous dying
And philosophy itself
Just another Darwinian trick

OR GRAIN OF SALT

A response poem to Evelyn Lau's 'A Grain of Rice'

90:

Urban in environment, the city seeps into
The mind a thing less concrete
But equally grey and the manifold neural paths
Are not unlike the gleaming streets
Where rain has spread out its pooled mirrors
For the reflection of less electric
People than ourselves, though maybe we are
Only the aftereffect of hidden forces and nothing more
– it is a kind of oracle, this world
Telling us that this or that is true and being so
Assured but providing
no evidence

180:

The prose in your brutalist stanzas can be cold
As when recounting some horror
From a picaresque youth punctuated by its casual
Nightmares; but there is heat too, heat
Feeding on the slightest twigs of experience the
Flames that crack open the dead
Trees of this world and, out of that burning bark, slither
The soft bodies of gentle newts; creatures
Of no particular violence

270:

V_____ is far from New York but they are
United by the same sprawling continent
And so it's interesting that
Updike, sophisticated Updike, has played so large
A part in your life; a distance greater than
Paris to Baghdad but far less
It may be said, in terms of cultural topology

360:

I was talking to Don at MacLeod's once and I
Compared your work to Andrew Marvell's
And I saw the recognition in his eyes and knew that
He understood me exactly; baroque
Like late renaissance ironwork crafted for a king,
Your words so often mannerist;
A rhetoric leftover from Cromwell's England, thought out
In the twilight of the revolution
While living in a monarchy restored

PAPER UMBRELLAS

Plans we make with friends and loved ones, thwarted
Without malice but indifference like
A soldier from a purely geographic place
Barging in, ransacking the living room, even kicking
Their feet up on the coffee table
And grinning because what the hell are you
Going to do about it?

The rifle is the teeth of your mistakes;
Push back too hard and
This beast bucks and guess who gets fucked?

You are the bullseye the universe can
Use for target practice at any time, sporadic
In a midnight-infomercial way;
The casualness of your demise or just
Some thread of happiness snipped short by a pair
Of Moiraic sewing scissors
Beyond your most fiendish preparations

Ultimately all our fortresses are mere umbrellas
And paper umbrellas at that; things
That offer more reassurance than guarantee,
Impotent against the true onslaught
Chaos retains at its own odious disposal

Life, life is similar to walking downtown where
The sky is lightly overcast with death

We live underneath that grey haze, unable to
Effect it in any way and so
We must content ourselves, however dubiously with
Minimal protections and only our
Practiced face and
Sense of resolution to lead us

On, to sustain our faith

In ourselves, the best we can do is
Get going with our far-from-immortal business
And not indulge too many useless delays
Wondering when the storm will crack open or
How hard or how long

At best we can withstand a drizzle, hiding
Beneath our paper shields
Unfolding at the touch of the first drop

PRE-TENSE

Everything I write is an affectation;
Less self-expression than
A thing devised for the purpose of some
Inscrutable hunger

These words themselves are layered over
Truth, a sheath to guard oneself
From the cut of one's wielded blade, and no matter
How deeply I delve into
The reality of any matter, there is only
A dry abandoned skin
Of another departed viper

Reality is not profound, since such
Can only exist at a distance

Now, in the constant immediacy of the present,
The whole world is fully accomplished;
Thoroughly here

Desire manifesting itself completely as desire
And youth as youth and age as age;
Whatever might be considered imperfect in this
Is the imperfection of
Arbitrary standards because
Incompletion has no actuality by itself;
It's just an emptiness of
Meaningless expectations

When the egg goes unhatched, *that* fulfills that

Vacant spaces in the tableau of time
Colored in, fleshed out
From their waiting eschatology of darkness
And added up as indifferently as

Assembly line objects
Piling in their designated bins

The divide between the natural and artificial,
A myth itself constructed
While also elemental to our own being

QUILL OF EROS

Warmth of a body, flesh pressed up close
As the two are knit together
And the names of the once separate
Dissolve into the noise
Of a background no longer of
Any significance

Teach me your darling ecstasy like
Snow crystals ending their journeys in the air

The canvass of a wheat field
Where we renew ourselves into some
Unfathomable creation
That's never been seen before;
Seamless in the way
Dreams tumble through the
Uneasy mind; sorcery so effortless
It's utterly baffling

And that's after the epiphany
Has absconded with the comforts of
The venerable ignorami;
Not knowing is sometimes all one needs,
Life's fruit requiring no science to
Imbibe the pith and juice

The lover like a grove of wild mangos
Available in excess but
More gorgeous as a secret

Though the world will always try to trespass
On our passions, grimy with its
Impositions, we need not concede a
Single argument, and can
Be just as obstinate as alchemical

Ambitions, yielding nothing
No matter how much
Force is brought to bear

Ardor is the ink of living: the ink
With which we divide
Space and time into the loose chapters of
Manuscript autobiographies

But when you die
What will you have written there?

Was your heart ever true?
Or did you live in fear of your own desires,
A tyranny within the body no doubt
Echoed from without;
If the soul is a palimpsest, still
This life is not

Yes the hourglass, ever dwindling;
Permanent ink regardless

RECOMMENDED

I can count how many times I've suggested
A book to a friend
On a single hand maybe but...

Why is that?

Don't I care about these creations? Don't I
Want to see them flourish?

Maybe it's mostly habit yet, even if that,
It's still embarrassing because
There's a kind of ingratitude here, a laziness
Suggestive of my selfishness; this
Unwillingness to inconvenience myself in
Even so small a thing

And what would other desert dwellers say to
Someone who kept an oasis secret?

However, mine is not a monopoly on apathy and as
Much as I am not absolved of
Blame, there are many I see who stay
Silent too
And decline the chance of
Advocacy and
Leave their favorite written works to
Fend for themselves

But must this library within our hearts
Remain unspoken for?

I could tell you about some amazing books I've read
And it would be so trivial, so easy

RED HANDSHAKES

If I pay my taxes, and I do,
I am paying taxes to murderers

The regime of the world is
A single cruel machine where ethics

Remains the luxury of the masses
And the ones who aren't killers

Greatly enjoy their delusions. But
Even the most innocuous of labors add

To the powers of cold assassination;
Quiet bureaucrats and tanned farmers being

No less the mechanisms of war, though if you
Say so you soon get labelled a bore

Society is a citizenry making a deal; the ones
Who are squeamish, outsourcing

Their debt of brutality to others while
These carry on with the dreadful things that

A vicious era needs done; bloodletting
Being foremost among them

SECULAR KARMA

In endless antebellum, the dreadful peace
Without reprieve, as silence itself waxes insidious;
Herald to the belated reckoning

Where the enemy's armies still lie beyond the horizon
Nevertheless their shadows imprint
Our skies each sunset, silhouettes of a coming
Conquest draping the arctic twilight in the cold promise
That there will be no escape

And yet we wait, a grievous lull full of worry;
Its own kind of torture tethering us
To an arduous future like some monstrous birth
Swollen in a distorted earth

But we too were spawned for slaughter, our infancy
Indifferent in its damages and eager

For whatever was available to satisfy itself;
To digest the individuality of opposites
In the service of one's own body, a captured industry
Set upon the business of serving our regime by
Means of appendage loyalty

So too us; another's prognosticated flesh

SEVENTEEN HAIKU

Mylar balloon –
Just garbage now,
Crumpled by the rain

One sprung weed
In the bare gloom –
Skytrain overpass

Elderly man –
Picking sage sprigs
Through chainlink fence

Landscapers
Finishing their day –
Brightly overcast

Concrete bridge,
Vanishing wings –
Pigeons probably

Dead, the brown heads
Of white umbellifers –
Macabre bouquets

Charcoal mountains
Wrapped in misty clouds –
Infinite wall of white

Cumulus textures –
Their polymorphic shapes
Above the downtown

Construction crane –
Red beams against the sky
Motley blue, white

Antique lawn chairs –
Green spilling pots,
Leering orchids

One yellow leaf
Fluttering against
The car's windshield

Blue evening –
Pale microscopic
Eye floater

A tiny dog
On ungulate legs –
Finches switching trees

Sparrows, robins, bees –
Not just human beings
Busy at day's end

Discarded vase –
Knock off? Treasure?
Either way, too heavy

Heritage homes
Lined with old trees –
Leaf fall at dusk

Before dawn –
Almost silhouettes,
Those waiting for a bus

SIMULACRA

Ingenious in dishonesty, that is
Not even unfaithful
To reality but restless

Through unconscious sense,
A mind of labyrinth
Constructed by the dead fathers

Piled now to unholy heaven;
There are the quaint concessions
We make to morals

Though despite their obsolescence
But that's still modernity
In all its wisest legions keeping

The game on track, a wager
Such that truth will never prevail
Because it doesn't bluff

Yet suppose the hourglass won't
Run out of sand;
Must we lie forever?

STATELESS

A poem written for CSIS

Jesus suggested
No father would give his son a snake
If they asked for a fish

But when have I asked for a snake?

And it seems as if
I've made do with snakes
For quite a while now; and this despite
Not demanding much in
The way of fish, really the fish
Could be quite modest

So I no longer feel as if I am a citizen of
Any country; I feel as free
As the disowned, a mercenary who
Grew up without a
Fatherland or motherland

Yes, I have not starved; admittedly
The charity of serpents
Has kept me all this time but I grow tired
Picking my teeth with their bones

These thin bones remind me of my own

And I am kept thin for purposes
Unclear to me, although
The most obvious ones still don't make sense

Shall these bones live?
Don't ask me, tell me because

As strange as the lands beyond the borders
Of this country look, this too

Has always been a stranger's country
To me, a place I do not
Consider myself welcome in

Where an author's work is offered up, there a
Literary heart cannot help but be loyal

I do not pretend to be truly good
Since selfishness has
Long circulated in my blood
But do I do much
Injury to others, such that I deserve
The animosity of anyone?

And if I have an enemy, where are my friends?
Because I will, if I must,
Make do with an *enemy of my enemy*

THEY/THEM

It would be a lot simpler
If everyone had the same pronouns

Then there's no judgement,
No implied partiality

And it bypasses all the hassles of
Having to navigate the snarls of preference

But would anyone else find
This to be an acceptable compromise?

Probably not. Most people
Want to distinguish themselves from

Most people. There's nothing
Flattering in having commonality with all

But what if we truly set aside our egos
For a moment; for me, I think

It might not be too awful to give up
My he/him for a they/them

UMBRELLA'D AMBUSCADE

A response poem to Don DeLillo's 'The Silence'

Flaring open like some appendage fringe
Around a reptile's head,
The spines of the device diverge in a
Supernova of circumference

What do we call it when our protections
Drain our strength from us?
Like frail warriors trapped in armor,
The burden of these
Proving exhausting and our
Prowess *slowly*
But surely diminishing

What survives an ordeal is greater for it
But those who never face
Adversity will certainly wither away

In desiccating comforts death
Dwells in luxury even before extinction

UNDONE DONNE

Not as in Anne and him, as he said
But under the tonnage of ashamed death
A crumbling clod, not even
Returning to the main as each piece,
Fragments of a heart, are
Divided among their brigand triad

A wit of valid diction in the foreboding morning
While the dawn in dunce-like redundancy
Adds its insistent solicitations
To the apparition of a concubine Gaia

Stained, appalled at the wronged church's
Imagined order and the screaming
Mandrakes, torn from the dirt like late schoolboys
From their warm beds;
As thirsty as the amorous flea for its
Sanguine lover, this
Cavalcade of cruel sighs which
Hasten on a wicked spirit

Ungainly as a shrouded camel, stumbling
Through deserts of metaphysic

UNREALIZATION

Everything suddenly in one's own possession

Autumn: amid the falling leaps
But clad in sunglasses as if hanging on to August;
The golden breeze, suffusing modal trees,
Supreme in all tranquility

How enormous the armor of this joy!
Kernel in the firmament where
Canine clouds run, like buoyed Samoyeds,
Dashing above the CGI sun;
And antipodal to that of course, seas
Quixotic and pelagic, though
The dialectical too produces new antitheses:
Zebra striped shadows
Beneath these rippling shoals

And here I am, straddling the conclave of
Such elements, composite too
As they enrich each other and I them;
I wave at a woman and she likes that, her frown
Transforming into a simile

A southern moon between her lips,
The sea wall of my mind
Where happy thoughts parade, unafflicted by
Any factual intrusions and so relaxed
This feeling as light
As plastic, utterly unwearying

This outlook a kind of mono-layered clothing
Perfect for the prevailing weather

USHER

A red fellow landed on me;
A frantic thing with fluttering wings

And when I picked him up
And let him crawl across my hand

He took umbrage at this and
He quickly took off again, settling

On my shirt once more; unmindful I was
On my way elsewhere

Still I was patient with him;
Still sympathetic until

Gently, I did send him away, because
Gently makes all the difference

VOGUE HAIKU

Summer's last rays –
Crow feathers strewn
Across the grass

Tentacled shadows
Swallowing the oval track –
A pool's chlorine scent

Smashed, graffitied –
Their alley mirror
Dull of course

Driveway cracks
Filling with grass –
Idyllic evening

Tall stalks of corn –
An unkempt old house
Next to new mansions

White alabaster Mary –
Fuchsia flowers
At her feet

White alabaster Mary –
One tentative moth
Seeking her ear

Late summer –
Gentle, a breeze as
If the world was floating

So immense –
The distant mountains
As the aphid lands on me

Undulating –
The green mass of leaves,
A tree at evening

Old mountains –
Rounded with eons.
Beasts furred in forests

Chill breeze –
The first despite
Warm lingering light

Curious wasp –
Nothing in the clover
But growing shadows

WE WILL LIVE UNDER TOWERS

Forever the small things in their shadows,
As we behold the weight above
And wonder

That it is ours though, this lot below,
Who can argue?

Still

These giants, lunar-headed, rippling the stars
In their wakes, will ponder us
Nonetheless; stowaways on their excess
Until fingers, free of awe,
Plunge in rough tirades of wind and
Cast aside the
Nuisance of our being

Forth from the very egg of time, the first unhardened
Brood, there was the opposition
Of magnitudes and a
Supremacy aided by apathy

Younger by generations, they live longer and better

But, even in our eternal insignificance, we
Retain a name from them

Insects

WORD PRESSERS

Intro:

This exposed craft of ours, in the logic gate hive of
A fevered digital marketplace, where
Bits of thought are flung with agricultural
Tedium; it easily drowns out
Our human element
And so it's always good if we can
Remind ourselves of this

I've kept to myself mostly, been quite selfish
To be honest, but still some have
Shown some interest in my work and though I cannot promise
Adequate reciprocation here, I would in fact
Like to say thank you
In my own way, however
Crudely

There are too many to name individually but let me now
Acknowledge a few with apologies to the rest

Salutations:

BOGDAN DRAGOS, I too would like to earn my keep
Through dreams so please, if you
Learn the secret to this, do not hesitate to
Share that with me especially

DIRTYSCIFIBUDDHA, comics and emoticons and consciousness
Bound together in good humored ambition;
Though no doubt some of that discipline is owed to
Your military experience, much is
Clearly the natural outgrowth of your own
Admirable character

ELANCHARAN, those wonderful black and white
Photographs of yours and the
Harbor scenes show the eye of a conscientious haiku aficionado;
And that one with the man holding his hand over
His heart! Works ahead!

FRANK SOLANKI, anyone hankering for a tanka
Or other lanky verse should see Frank first
And, with every social media link imaginable, let them scramble
If they can to add to his ample fans

GRACEOFTHE SUN, you know I tried to post on your
Site once and some foul gremlin of technology
Sabotaged me, or so it seemed, but now let me say how much
I appreciated your early reading of my poems: I wish you
Much success in your poetic career

JUST POETRY, in your backdrop of gems and wizardly avatar, you have
Stuck out quite conspicuously, I must say,
And I compliment you on your robust following as well
As the longevity of your drive

MUSICGUY9988, my poetry gets more notice than my essays so
I am always pleased to see your interest
In those Zen writings of mine; and I wish you well in
Aiding others' meditations

R. THOMAS, there is a jovial mischief in your illustrations
And TMI is delightful in its ragged charm;
I have no children but, though unborn, they should still read your books

YASSY, with minimal adornment you have posted your poetry
These seven or so years with
Diligent experiment and adventurous vocabulary;
I must say, Magnolia Reveries especially
Pleased me with its artful ingenuity

Outro:

Though a gesture need move nothing it can nonetheless
Put a ripple in the heart, and pondering
Such, I hope some slight gratification might ensue
From these trifling expressions
Of thankfulness, but
If anyone else would like to assist me
Please take some time to peruse
The work below

Bogdan Dragos: <https://bogdandragos.com>

DirtySciFiBuddha: <https://dirtyscifibuddha.com>

Elancharan: <https://elancharan.com>

Frank Solanki: <https://franksolanki.com>

GraceoftheSun: <https://graceofthesun.com>

Just Poetry: <https://intellectualshaman.com>

Musicguy9988: <https://relaxationdaily.net>

R. Thomas: <https://wildliketheflowers.wordpress.com>

Yaskhan: <https://yassy66.wordpress.com>

XEROGRAPHY

Lineaments of the letters aligning into
Ligatures of the letters and the bondage of meaning
Lists of the letters auto-generated so that

Approximations-of-text arise,
Semantics magnetized

Hypertrophy in the tongue that sprang forth
Where the demarcation of teeth
Parted: gaps being the basis of distinction in both
Though white *and* black
More than *just* white and black

The interplay, a grey

Horizon where directionality is perpendicular
To purpose; the hieratic, cosmic, the
Demotic, terrestrial

Uncoordinated as creativity is, and that foundational
To the ontology of itself, how opposite
Every act of copying: organized
With utmost order, and columns collated where

Each image is a chimera. of an engine.
Ageless in its machinations,
The ancient maturation. of magic. into machine.
Ur-technology a typography. churning
Out magazines, periodicals as
Mere plethora. of punctuation, since empty now
Its symbols succumb. to the impotence.
Of imitation, analogous and so on

Each reproduction involving some subtle alteration;
A finishing diminishment, limitless

And once you erode away the surface there is
Nothing underneath, no substance
To uncover since what you were invested in was purely
Fascicle, the collective
Agency of words their only power but
Go ahead, say one *by itself*

Write it down

Here has no here *here*, the stone that appeared
Solid, itself mineral and disintegrating
Where the ferrous nature of the matter was
Unctuous-temporality feigning
Permanence: a criterion of no worth

Encompassing of the empty ambling into
Endlessness of the empty and the freedom of void
Edged of the empty auto-inverted so that

Dichotomies-of-text disappear,
Lucidly unclear

YOU DON'T DESERVE TO BE CRUSHED BY THE MACHINE

If not for the work of the wage slaves
This shallow paradise of the wealthy would dry up
And vanish in a generation

They cannot lift the steel bones of their own skyscrapers
Or lay the roads for their smug parades;
Frail in virtues even more than flesh, they leave
All the necessary work to others
While posing in a limelight of command and
Congratulating themselves and their fellow vampires
On the carnage of their ingenuities

Devious, scheming; authors, if that, to unnatural things
Who conceal a simple obvious truth:
A crown adds nothing to those who aren't idle

But the machine, yes, the machine
Belongs to them
And always has and always will;
The soulless nature of its logic, the coercions inherent
To deterministic power, ensures that any age
In which said machinery is held so high
Will burn every root for fuel
And then cry in tantrum as the forests die

Offspring of Midas, enthralled still
With the gleam of their lifeless transmutations;
We cannot rely on them

Instead, let us look to ourselves, fellow laborers
And such in fields and factories
Who have always shared our struggles, who have lived
Through similar challenges and survived
As precariously as we have

The dirt we share is more beautiful than our
Golden leaders

Those office captains with callous-less hands,
Riders on the towers of an engine, are so often ignorant
To the suffering of its inner workings;
Sorrow an abstraction, fatigue an abstraction

Terror
An abstraction

United though, the ordinary people of the world
Are what justify us as a species;
Their bravery comes from eons of sacrifice and even if
Dormant for long periods, can always
Awake suddenly
To shake off foul empires

So open your eyes and see; you are not alone,
And gathered, you are mighty

OTHER BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

1985 and Other Poems – General poetry collection
Acheron – General poetry collection
Aegis Noise – General poetry collection
Alchemist City Stories: Abridged Edition – Short story collection
BIAS - General poetry collection
Essays on Art and Literature – Essay collection
Essays on Philosophy and Culture – Essay collection
Full Circle: A Selection of Haiku – Haiku collection
I, Narcissist – General poetry collection
Koan of the Dog Buddha Temple – Fictional koan and other Zen writings
Literary Reviews - Essay collection focusing on books
Occult Forces – General poetry collection
Political Apocrypha - Treatise on political philosophy
Prae Scriptum - General poetry collection
Selected Poems: 2006 to 2020 – General poetry collection
Selected Poems: 2020 to 2023 – General poetry collection
Society in Hell: Part One – Novel
The Architecton – Philosophical treatise
The Plague Covenant – General poetry collection
Thysus Falling: A Novel About Evil - Novel



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