

culturing a book of poems

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Contents

May 2011	9
The man who knows	9
March 2014	10
Birth	10
April 2014	11
Perspicuity (For Example)	11
July 2014	12
Song of Sophia	12
May 2015	14
Romance Revisited	14
July 2015	16
I have wandered streets	16
Inner Harbor	17
There are no words	18
There is too much noise	19
October 2015	20
Fragments Shored Against Ruin	20
January 2016	24
Scents of the Divine	24
The Choir	25
August 2016	27
Valediction to Images	27
September 2016	28
Another ending	28
Child you are the water	29
Only Begin	30
October 2016	31
A poem	31
Longing	32
April 2017	33
Countrified	33

The Bird in the Glue Trap	34
The New Science	35
The New World	36
 October 2017	 37
Out came a cry	37
 April 2018	 38
A walk through a graveyard	38
Aftermath	39
The Secrets of Country Living	40
 August 2018	 41
Mysteries	41
 November 2018	 42
One More Cave	42
“Romance Revisited,” revisited	43
 January 2019	 44
Nixon at the Threshold of the Lincoln Memorial	44
 March 2019	 45
I have withdrawn from the world	45
Rosie	46
 May 2019	 47
The Lady	47
 June 2019	 48
Crickets	48
 July 2019	 49
White Shade	49
 August 2019	 50
Lady in the Dark	50
Lady in the Temple	51
Lincoln’s Memory	52
 September 2019	 55
After Lincoln	55
Tradition	57
 April 2020	 58

Homecoming	58
September 2020	59
The Enduring and Unchanging Dao	59
February 2021	60
Planting Time	60
April 2021	61
The wind in the leaves	61
May 2021	62
What we find by singing	62
July 2021	63
Old House	63
September 2021	64
Making Sausage	64
Wandering Sheep	65
October 2021	66
Lost Forest	66
November 2021	67
Beyond Power	67
Shattered Image, Fallen Breast	68
December 2021	69
Phenomenology of Science	69
January 2022	70
Words	70
March 2022	71
Phalanx of Mind	71
Saving Earth	72
Who is in charge here	73
April 2022	74
After Reagan	74
Far Away	75
Technology	76
The Winds of Change	77
Things Themselves	78

Unauthorized thinking	79
May 2022	80
Electricity	80
Streets I Never Knew	81
What calls for poetry?	82
June 2022	83
Fading Feeling	83
Let Go	84
Light	85
Lyceum	86
Mulch by the Scoop	87
Myth at Twilight	88
Science and Technology	89
Virgin Queens	90
July 2022	91
A Platonist declares	91
Beatific Visions	92
Belly of the Whale	93
Emerge	95
Industrial Man	96
Liberty and Justice	98
Near Mountains	99
Reasonable Measure	100
Socrates and Confucius	101
Theodicy	102
Who are they?	103
August 2022	104
Aletheian	104
At Sea	105
Craftsman	107
Feet of Rain	108
Hitler's Bunker	109
Lady in the Rain	110
Mingled Being	111
On this rock	112
Such Surprises Must Be	113
The Ground is Lava	114
The New Frontier	115
Thinking Deeply	116
Too Playful	117

September 2022	118
Afterthought on the Romantics	118
Gettysburg	119
Old Flames	121
One of Us	122
Over the Atlantic	123
Sandcastles	124
October 2022	125
All Silence	125
As Ever	126
No Reason	127
Risible Time	128
Time	129
November 2022	130
After Tomorrow	130
It is not for me	131
No Entry Beyond	132
Thing in Progress	133
The Gospel According to Us	134
Untested Ways	135
No Will to Deceive	136
Uncertain Times	137
After "A Late Walk" by Robert Frost	138
Freedom's End	139
Persuasion	140
Darkness Becomes You	141
History	142
Crimson Days in the Depths of Time	143
In Any Case	144
Ave Maris Stella	145
Why Reason?	146
Hegel	147
December 2022	148
Back to the Mines	148
Why Obey?	149
You Are The Way	150
To Tell This To You, or Changing of the Gods	151
Spring Cleaning	152
Vortex Afterglow	153
Compromise	154

Marxists	155
In Memory	156
January 2023	157
Elite Waters	157
Horizons	158
Slumber Much Better	159
Specimens	160
Wait For Another	161
Think Not Absolutely	162
As Like May Yet Be	163
Sick With Struggle	164
Strangers	165
February 2023	166
Emptiness That None Can Understand	166
Rest Unassured	167
Nutrition by Faith Alone	168
Dwindle	169
The Promise of the Lady	170
Like No Angel	171
A more tolerant order	172
Night Sweats of the American Dream	173
The Quest for the Immortal Self	174
The Sound a Plant Makes	175
March 2023	176
Ahura Mazda (the Question Remains)	176
The Throne of Cyrus	177
Come Again	178
The Drums of Alexander	179
Small All the Same	180
Unfriendly	181
The Realm of Reason	182
So Very Greek	183
Larger Accomplishments (Pragmatism)	184
As She Will	185
Not even sure who to ask	186
Saving Daylight	187
Plain and True	188
April 2023	189
At Eleusis	189
If he would speak today	190

Some Natures	191
What time is this	192
On Whose Authority	193
Sources	194
The Question of Democracy	195
Something About Plato	196
Who are we?	197
culmination	198
The Way of the Night	199
Little Bird	200
Good Eyes	201
Untold Misery	202
Wallow	203
Duty	204
Some Other	205
The Protestant	206
Contrition	207
The Scientist	208
Stop the Bombing	209
Monotheism	210
Menagerie of Rules	211
The Thin Veil	212
They May Be Right	213
Where They Can See You	214
Wait, Think, Speak	215

15 May 2011

The man who knows
knows he doesn't know
and loves to sing to sing,

because as water flows and flows
he can't control a thing.

Birth

05 March 2014

Birth is a slow and painful thing,
a tumult,
longing toward an end,
but staggering,
a shallow wake
of nascence,

For which death doth rend.

Perspicuity (For Example)

14 April 2014

Note the indiscriminate vortices
which haphazardly coax the vector
into misalignment,

Or the malignantly languorous
koala supping on divinities.

Song of Sophia

24 July 2014

I. Akrasia

When there were no depths, I was brought forth,
When there were no springs abounding with water.

Time slipped, fell
through black holes
to where I dwelt,

Stillborn in a rotting womb,
with histories untold.

I cut my own cord.

Day by day I played
between Olympian plains
and Horeb,

Learning nothing,

For the ground had been well-tread
by tanks and wise men
teaching shadows

*HEY
THIS JUST IN
HEY
ERECTILE
DYSFUNCTION
HEY
LOOK
KITTENS
HEY
BIKINIS
HEY
HAVE YOU SEEN
HEY
YOU THERE ??
HEY
I LOVE YOU.*

*HEY
LOVE ME <3
HEY*

II. Nostoi

Does not wisdom cry out,
And understanding lift up her voice?

Thunder roars,
and as a man who pants for water
sees the rock break,

And sees the streams long dried by drought
begin to flow,
and drinks,

So too I flee the wasteland.

III. Paideia

To you, O men, I call,
and my voice is to the sons of men.

I gaze upon a field grown ripe with wheat
and feel the warmth of rosy-fingered Dawn
who has not failed to rise. I grip the scythe,

And take upon myself beginnings
and their ends, and find this meaning
sicut erat in principio.

Romance Revisited

07 May 2015

Unsurprised when she appeared
atop the stair,
unsought and yet on cue,
I smiled.

There we were again.

More than sounds were heard,
more said than words
as we relieved the burn
that itched for all those years.

Something in that breeze
put love at ease,
and all those memories
in Sunday Best conceived
some reparation,
some demand.

But lives diverge,
conform to their courses,
drive towards their ends.

This, then, too must end.

--

But if we flee from time,
abandon all but dreams,

Elide the pulls of Jupiter
and Venus,

Would we weary of the world we'd made?

Must immortal Love's embrace
ignore all time and place?

--

Rage for futility,
Rage for bleared horizons,

For rage itself,
which vanquishes sages,
and for the mortal dream.

But though to many moons I've sighed,
and though those eyes when met with mine
still come to life to think of all that was
and what could be, it is not time.

Though it is right.

For time flows suddenly to exit youth.

--

Let us go then, you and I,
to die, and not trace ways
across that sky
where the Immortals lie.

We belong implanted
where the bloom that Spring provides
by Autumn flees, and we get by
on hardened leaves.

20 July 2015

I have wandered streets,
Each entrance blocked by blood of lamb,
And I have seen no faces.

These are empty places.

Inner Harbor

04 July 2015

I spend my days inside,
my nights beside the water
watching young things draw and quarter
lives not yet their own.

This they call maturity,
this ever lack-of-surety,
to be out on my own, be big
but still not fill the throne.

26 July 2015

There are no words --
no words, but only sounds
with no meaning.

Is there a balm?
What is a balm?

Nowhere are we to find solace.
Nowhere are we to find others
without lawlessness,

And I know why the free bird sings,
for lack of a cage,
for lack of any air on which to glide.

15 July 2015

There is too much noise
inside, between walls,
reverberating through skulls

Which grow empty.

Is there not solace, rest
from Self?

Is there a balm?

I have heard of places,
heard tunes of theogony,
but is there any calm?

What remains are ashes,
What remains are gems?

And must we know the difference?

I've yet to stumble through Eden
but I've heard her song,
I've seen blossoms rise.

If there is a balm, it lies
behind still-naked eyes.

Fragments Shored Against Ruin

24 October 2015

1

You are the last fighting chance
for yourself,

A chamber, a kingdom
-- *Cordelia!*

Where is the throne?
What is flesh?

A clock in the hall
A clock and no walls

And spinning
Rome is burning

Tick Tick Tick --

There are things that move the will
that even the atom cannot kill --

There are things there are things

-- If you do not control yourself,
who will?

2

The executive has surrendered
all -- anarchy ensues.

The state in which one cannot say no,
when one cannot stop,
is called chaos today is chaos
and we are revolving in kaleidoscope
houses that looked fun

who am the last fighting chance
for myself, the only opportunity

to be free of that doggerel wretch
who sits on the mind-throne

while, usurped, the executive wastes
in heaps of sentiment and flesh
that wash over all
and bathe with the lime of body.

soma. soma soma soma
take and live.

3

My body waffling through space
and undigested time conceives
Idea -- floats, as it were, above itself
into ethereal otherlands

and waits.

Up, from where is only down,
I fly, and divide this self
into slivers, abandoning each
at the foot of age-old Mind

Who takes them, warping tomorrow
with hands of iron, cold.

I am left unanswered.

4

I fear the smallness of my mind
surrounded by mysteries,

The abstract cave,
philosopher's chains
unbroken,

Bound,
and sinking down.

And are there here no sunbeams,
no exalted forms that dance

on more than cavewall?

5

There are no tunes or strings to play
unbloodied by the rage, unbridled
by fearful faces, names
turned dusty with shame.

How far the sky has fallen,
how far! deep within our bowels

We cannot digest
or swallow.

There is only us -- only the rage
and the cold, swollen cage.
The bruised age.

6

Listen. We will begin
to repeal soporifics
only in the light of more pure
harmonies and form.

There can be no freedom in extravagance.

Love is the beginning but not the fruition,
which comes only through discipline
and a kind of violence.

Once we have established ourselves
at the end of ourselves, and only then,
can we draw from the ashes
some kind of beginning.

7

Is there still a Song,
and can I sing along?

This man, boy, heart beating hard and strong,
'tis mine? And may I be wrong?

I have wallowed verily, wallowed long
in the avenues and twisting ways
of ecstasy and sorrow,

But there is forthcoming joy,
awakened noise which learns to balance
and to hope with poise

The truth of which
is There is There is There.

Scents of the Divine

14 January 2016

Wonder is the pollen of belief,
and faith, the leaf;

We know only wafts
of distant breezes.

The Choir

18 January 2016

By silent seas we sit and sing
Of life's unwrought enamelling
As each day gathers into storm
And reasons with our untold ire.

Rise fair song and banish woe
For we must fear the foreman's blow
For though our fathers built with stone
We build the world again each morn,

And tremble in the shade of steel,
And ache for poison salesmen sell,
And whirl in this ungrateful gyre
To placate pioneering fire.

--

What is this? What is my own?
What good is a peopled home
When urge and urge and urge inspire
Epitomes forlorn?

Hope, where are your lovely feathers?
All your crumbs are swept -- this weathered
Leaf deceives -- these grasses wither.
There are only bog and mire.

Who would dare to ope
Pandora's vessel once again? What's left?
All can see that Zeus has scorned
Those Foresight has adorned.

--

But summon those old voices hither.
Sing a song against the dither.
Won't a mythic world reborn
Reclassify revealed desire?

Make again that age-old beat.
Forget the words that spell defeat.

Abandon prod and thrust.
Embrace the courage of the calling horn.

For we have feared the shades of steel,
But harbor dreams of living well,
And dream of lifting off the pyre,
And lift this chorus as a choir.

Valediction to Images

06 August 2016

Image of forgotten beauty,
Face of fire, flesh of music,
Laughter-loving Aphrodite,
Be not high or mighty
 By the altar of my heart.

Rosy cheeks on satin faces,
Eyes that call the heart to race,
O, sculpture of amazing graces,
Shatter. There are empty places
 Deep within my heart.

Come instead, you hidden song,
You dying fall withholding all,
And I will hear you long,
For I can hear you call
 From deep within the altar of my heart.

Another ending

22 September 2016

I guess this is the end.
I'm not sure what of.
They say time is no friend.
Things slip away.

I guess it must be so.
But how should we know?
Something moves about,
and I can hear it rumble now.

So I write this down.
Embark with me I pray.
Other thoughts have flown,
or gone some other way,

But within is the promised stay of woe,
and that is where the old roads go.

22 September 2016

Child you are the water -- have you heard?
It trickles softer words.
Don't be tricked by desert people.
Fear the curse of birds.

Only Begin

22 September 2016

For J. Alfred Prufrock and his admirers

If I could only begin,
I would end alright.
But time is riddled with sin.

Lovers never win
with all their might.
If I could only begin

To tell you all of thick and thin
I might get things right.
But time is riddled with sin.

So let me come in,
up out of this night.
Then I could begin

To speak in both sound and sight
of ample groves and measured flight.
But time is riddled with sin,
so I could only begin.

A poem

28 October 2016

begins like this:
a note, a phrase,

But then goes deeper,
seeps just under,
slakes upon a thirst,

and ends in growth.

Longing

17 October 2016

I long for things I've never known.
The shadows curse my eyes.
The scars run deep. They run at least to bone.

And though thunder grants atonement,
Always questions come from other skies.
I long for things I've never known,

And candles burn and scholars moan
And ashes creep beneath the tightest mind.
The scars are deep like bone,

And all the ancient empty tomes
Provide no lasting prize,
But only point to things we cannot know.

The ache for bluer skies,
The ache for home,
The scars that run through bone,
The longing is the only thing we know.

Countrified

06 April 2017

I have heard the wail of cities,
I have felt their steely cry,
And I have prowled upon the pavement
And been burned from eye to eye.

I cannot hate the people
Who have known no other way,
But I don't think their crippling
must darken my own day.

The Bird in the Glue Trap

06 April 2017

It wasn't meant for you,
that much is clear. But how
those little wings beat such
a fearsome rhythm
just to pull you
those two-hundred bird-lengths,
sticky trap in tow,
I'll never know,

Or how you ripped your body free
to soar on lighter wing.

Ah, those feathers left behind
were not worth dying over.

I am only glad, my friend,
that I did not extinguish you
to put an end to pain.

The New Science

06 April 2017

Under the stars a hundred bards
drop still, dead silent,
to look for a law in the cards.

They know the stomach is violent,
a flame that retards,

And also that men have bodies,
are bodies, whirling
in an endless whirl of leaves.

Therefore they crucify Reason,
that cold Inspector
who murders the seasons,

And go on unvarnished
but do not think
that makes them tarnished.

Can we place blame
for this treason?

Might it be just
that in spite of stars
Man hasn't come that far?

The New World

25 April 2017

Raised among wolves,
we've learned both bite and howl,
but there is a new kind of life coming now.

An old life more truly,
one ought to be sure.
Allow me to answer, I've no sinecure.

Upon an old hill
there stood men young and old.
They bore a fierce wind and were bold.

As one with one purpose
they built there together
foundations to outlast all weather.

That edifice fell,
but the ruins remain.
Do any dare build there again?

16 October 2017

Out came a cry
from beneath the great Nothing,
but no one was there to believe it.

An oomph went woomph,
and the meaning went missing,
and no one was there to retrieve it.

And day was like sand,
and the moon went away,
and nobody was there to be free with.

01 April 2018

A walk
through a graveyard
reveals a peculiar slumber —

the men of tomorrow.

The sign reads “Help,
we’ve been civilized,
there’s no going back.”

But there never has been any going back.

And the life urge resigns itself
to smallness,
and this too is good,

For too much growth makes weeds,
and we cannot tolerate weeds.

Tomorrow, then, comes anyway.
This is a walk through a graveyard.

Aftermath

21 April 2018

I have heard the wild
ramblings,
felt betrayed by man
and steel,
and I cannot
keep on
good clothes –

but madly naked
run through city streets,
cry “Kung Fu Tze!
where are you?”

The Secrets of Country Living

21 April 2018

For Robert Penn Warren

I do not know
what

you will find up there
in the brambles
among inhibiting growths,

but I have once
heard an eagle call out its name.

It was a sound like Truth.

Mysteries

01 August 2018

O stolen time,
wandering there by the sea,

what will you do with me?

Unfurl your grasp of life,
make plain the age again!

No sooner does one cope
than some new younger hope
steps in and whisks fidelity away.

O vanity of vanities,
great necromancing age!

Tear down thy veils with rage
if that will set you free,

but I will not be free.

For there is still truth in old books,
and the walls will not fall for sly looks.

Indeed, there is room at all tables.

09 November 2018

When Philosophy's just one more Cave, take heart,
for there is still room to start,
and an almost but not yet lost art.

"Romance Revisited," revisited

14 November 2018

I saw you there
atop the stair,
it's true,

And you were me
and I was you,

And ocean blue
bore love away.

It chastened him right through.

Alas! they say
it is no use to sing,

But I'll take wing, for lo!
Minerva's owl has perched
upon a husk, a lifeless stump,

and there will be no going on
without new songs from flesh and blood.

Nixon at the Threshold of the Lincoln Memorial

13 January 2019

Something that is completely clean can also be completely sterile

- Richard Nixon, Dictabelt 75, May 1970

What language could there have been
between that tiger, battle-scarred,
and these young cubs, German-tongued
and fearful offspring of Philosophy in ruins?

Ah, one tries to merge with Being as the sky collapses.
Those with thorny crowns spy deep oppression.

Nixon mutters, "What is there to save?"
allows no motion, grins a grin that says
"All shall be well, stop feeling."

This has happened before.

I stood there as a child
repeating "up steps!" in innocence,
for I had not yet learned what there is said
of History or Freedom,
or the other vague ideas men have died for.

I was born too late for that,
and though things have not changed
some hope, yes, even now,
though with less force,
for some renewal,
this time unendorsed.

It will not come on wings
or save us, probably,
but it could make things better,
keep them moving.

And as for the children, well,
they've never mattered much to us,
and who could build a home from such raw material?

27 March 2019

I have withdrawn from the world
for the world's own good,
I have bound my own hands.

But not with the usual cords
and knots,
not well-fashioned marriage bands.

I come for the darkness,
and whisper it slow:
that this is where all the young tulips go

Which have failed to grow
in dead soil.

—

Whence comes new song,
and will it be long?

The embers are dwindling,
the hearth has grown cold,
and the vagabonds grow old.

I say only this,
that is this not sure bliss,
to belong, to behold, and to bless?

Rosie

31 March 2019

Rosie works
so hard
to please the factory man.

It is a matter of time.

She has been on hands and knees
since seventeen,

And does not know
what moves her so,

To longing, maybe, for something.

Meanwhile
somewhere blossoms,

but she cannot go,
for it is a matter of time,

though she does know
the way things grow.

The Lady

06 May 2019

I dreamed I saw a Lady
perched atop a milk-white stair,
overlooking starry oceans
and defining what was there.

Beneath her golden tresses
opened up a gnawing void,
which catapulted us to freedom.
Soon all motion was destroyed!

The Lady did not stir, but crooned,
and smiled a softer smile
than wisest men have dared to dream.
Then she turned her back awhile.

The void kept belching fire,
and the only thing we knew
was its bedevilment and whirl.
It proved that all things are see-through!

The Lady meanwhile, laughing,
stayed atop of how things are,
and by the time we knew what hit us,
saw we hadn't gotten far.

The morning came as always,
and we, naked on her shore,
cried out, "Dear Lady, let us near!
Your sweet forgiveness, we implore!"

She looked at all our nakedness,
saw through our praise and plight,
and said, "Fools, get yourselves together,
or else get out of my sight!"

Crickets

28 June 2019

Up upon a hill I heard
the crickets chirping words:
O boy, come here, come near,
and stay and talk awhile.

My answer was to smile,
and I did no more favors then,
but crossed the valley of denial
and arrived within their ken.

O boy, I heard more echoing,
and sat, and stayed, and then
felt all around a queer commotion
stir the leaves, and break, and end.

And oh, 'twas cool November,
and the birds did softly sing,
and if there's one thing I'll remember,
it's my softly taking wing

Upon the backs of those cold crickets,
on the hill, who chirped with words,
for as they chirped about salvation,
they made sure that I had heard.

White Shade

07 July 2019

A shade of white,
not quite opaque,
disturbs my sight.

It has no form,
but haunts the night
like one unsteadily born.

The ashes of a pyre
lay where
She was burned bright.

I do not see the Lady,
and her absence
haunts my sight.

Lady in the Dark

03 August 2019

Beneath the moon
I saw her too,

alone,
where null is true.

I did not dare come near,
but felt that here, of all
damned places,
least deserves her.

Lady in the Temple

10 August 2019

She looked around
like one bound
to be free,

excited truly,
and so rapt
that she saw none
of the holes in the roof.

Lincoln's Memory

29 August 2019

So favored forms of power
shall not perish from the earth,
would you please sing for us, O History,
about the urgent birth
of these great, terrible, united States,
which, though conceived in Liberty,
did break, some say, that vow?

This nation under God, twice founded,
ever failing, yet immortal,
did embark toward the dream of Freedom
led by that one stout Kentuckian
who hated much as loved
and took a promise unfulfilled
and made it law to bind on all.

This promise, called Equality,
our hope in days to come,
arose, O History! through violence,
and herein lies its song.

--

Twas eighteen-fifty-eight, whereon a Senate seat contended
led the folks of Illinois to dream they saw a President.
One Lincoln-not-yet-Deity, preparing for debate,
stood by a portrait of old Jefferson, to whom he could relate,
and said,

"Old predecessor tongue with wings, remind me,
whence came our brave truth,
that all men are created equal.
Knew you this in youth?"

To which the painting said,
"It was a growth of many years,
first born on England's hills
in faithful regicide."

And Lincoln asked,
"But had you heard of man's first disobedience

and the fruit?"

Came quick reply:

"Our Massachusetts friends knew of such things,
but I did hope to purge all superstition,
and robe God in Nature."

"Ah, in nature," Lincoln said.

"That's right. For all can become noble
if they're only left alone."

Great Lincoln, growing pond'rous,
stroked his chin
and paced before the painting,
murmuring, "If left alone..."

He did not dare to broach the question,
burned on his and other minds,
of Slavery, but rather urged this thought:
"Suppose we find all men not equal. Who's at fault?"

But there was no reply.

The painting would not speak,
and Lincoln found his affirmation.

As the sureness grew,
he pondered long
and nursed a budding song.

--

This Lincoln after many years
appeared before the dead
and spoke the words
we will not long remember,

for we must not hallow,
must not consecrate that ground
where many died and killed.

Thus Lincoln willed,
and thus we must obey.

--

But Oh, how Declaration
had sent shocks across the sea
as Mr. Jefferson endeavored
to give ground to that new plea
which was come forth just then,
at last!

And when 'twas time for tea in Boston,
there was Paine in every head,
and 'twas ideas, sir, ideas!
which would leave so many dead.

--

Lord, such war and terror
bled from North down through the South
until the only ones remaining
banished God and punished doubt.

To devastation wrought,
and to the horror not quite heeded,

To man's ultimate obedience,
friend History, give song.

After Lincoln

24 September 2019

Alas, there came more wars,
at least as brutal,
oddly spirited,

And Lincoln, growing old,
was placed on coins,
enshrined in brooding stone
for all to see and know.

And speakers came
and went, the tanks
went on parade,
and progress dreams
were sung, and listen, listen,
you there, listen,
but don't listen for too long,

because too many have got stuck there
and we may have got it wrong.

--

Wrong and wrong and wrong.
Must we go back to 1619?

Cease your wailing, History!
That brutal, trifling song!

--

If back we go, then back,
but all the way,
past slaves and ships
to Milton, Christ, and Socrates,
as Lincoln surely knew.

And History, sweet Dame,
it's true, we cannot quarrel long,

But oh, your song, your song!
it will need rearranging before long.

Tradition

25 September 2019

I think the future
does not belong to the past,
and things are passing,
present and future.

I think things will not last;
though nothing does,
those less than most
which grow from baseless ground,

things passing all around,
and we do well to grasp
for any which are present,
future or past,

those most the old things
which are known to last.

Homecoming

22 April 2020

*Awaking comes in turns,
the day is bright before it burns.*

I walk down streets I never knew.
They are familiar, but I, the knower, have changed.
I did not know what little I knew.
Maybe this is what poets mean by recurrence,
why they return so often to the same things.
I did not know the familiar streets
because I, the knower, had not yet been changed.
But what can bring such a change?
An encounter, a question, another knower?
To know is to be known and vice versa.
This means the streets must know me,
and where the streets have no names
there is nothing to know.
But this is all begging the question,
why knowledge?
Because I, the knower, have not yet been changed.
Maybe this is why poets recur and recur.
If change comes it comes only for now, not forever,
and so I walk down streets I never knew,
the same streets, but I, the knower, have changed,
and so have they.

The Enduring and Unchanging Dao

14 September 2020

People die, new people are born.
The timbre of civilization changes,
like always, and we, those merely progenitors,
progenerate, again, at the horn.

What beast,
what rough or otherwise, comes forth
to taste the light of day?

This surely is no newer way
than all the old ways,
dying, dead, or buried.

So what special hurry?

Those come forth go under,
this is so, and temple shrouds,
once rent asunder, can be made,
remade, again, again.

If vanity, then vanity.
The proposition's chord
strikes hard, and oh,
we grow so bored.

What light from yonder room?

'Tis Juliet? Nay, knave,
just one once loved
in some forgotten tongue.

I say be such
that every longing touch
remembers love,

But do step cautiously
through darkened rooms,
and listen for that horn.

Planting Time

14 February 2021

In the spring time of the year,
as dawn rises, dusty, over the fields,
I wait, anxious, with my plow.

It has come again, the time for planting,
but this crop is strange to me.
The soil is like all soil, firm but supple,
and I am like all planters,
firm but supple.

Tomorrow rains will come,
and old seed wash away
as new seed takes its root,

And who will then be standing here
in planters' shoes
to cast a growing shadow?

I hope one who knows a little,
treads with greater care.

For people in the village,
I plant days and years

And see strange fruit come harvest time.
I wait for what will grow.

The wind in the leaves

13 April 2021

Thunders crash,
The wind moves through the leaves,

The paths grow walls,
curve into cages,

Thunder asks,
A certain volume of man,
suffices?

No, it never suffices,

Always more
past overflowing

Thunder crashes,
Floods tear down the trees,

The wind moves through the leaves,
A certain volume of man,
so certain

Thunder, why
O thunder

move through wind and leaves.

What we find by singing

07 May 2021

Power brings its many blessings,
Though it comes by other names.
This is what we find by singing.

Days were young and love did sting us.
All young people feel the same.
They mix themselves with power's blessings.

Some find laurels, others cling
To lovely children's games.
Thus they lose themselves in singing,

Thus they fall before the morning,
Thus they are to blame.
But power brings them such mixed blessings,

Power puts off dark of dying,
Power's light must wane.
Therefore, find thyself in singing,

Make thine own some other name,
And know I feel the same,
Because this power mixes life with blessings.
This is what we find by singing.

Old House

09 July 2021

I walk down old avenues,
aware again of impermanence,
perennial friend of the weary,
and stop before the family house.

What otherworldly dominion is this,
where manflesh met with womanflesh
to make *me*?

Yet other worlds must be,
or else our high anxiety
is treason of another kind.

It asks us, whence these beams,
this wood, this angled frame
with memories of forest?

What cold river brought us here?
If not the Thames, the Mississippi?
Say the Susquehanna, rolling slow.

And yet, don't answer.
Let me linger here, and grieve,
until our waters are surpassed.

Old house made new,
another world's anxieties
are haunting you.

Making Sausage

13 September 2021

The bird has a story.
It sounds like a song.
But I wouldn't worry.
He wouldn't sing long.

The people are coming.
They haven't a care.
The people are stunning.
The bird wouldn't dare.

The people make sausage.
What else could they do?
Their story is ugly,
But this much is true:

The bird has to learn how to live with clipped wings.
Indeed, this may be why he sings.

Wandering Sheep

09 September 2021

Up upon a hill,
the sheep go wandering.

Nearby cars zoom thoroughly
over the highway.

Not a few sheep find themselves
in drivers' seats
at eighty miles-an-hour.

Would they not prefer to graze
on some unfettered hillside,
near the setting sun?

They are still sheep,
though silly ones.

I think that they should think again.
The hillside is still there.
It has not changed.

It grows less full,
but some say
this is part of its purpose.

The cars make terrible noise
where wandering sheep once spoke
of pleasing vistas, unknown springs.

Lost Forest

28 October 2021

The bulldozers are out today,
are blazing in what once was forest.

I was in this forest
as a child.

Do the workers know
the sound of crickets here
within leaves, the sound
of song that matches oversong?

I am not sentimental,
for I know it to be earth
becoming earth,
and yet I wonder what earth is,

Because the poets ask, and keep on asking,
though they cannot answer,
for we find the question worthy.

Something in the wind
this time of year
must stir uncertainty.

What shall we ask the bulldozer?
What does it know?

Beyond Power

10 November 2021

If Nietzsche were asked,
"Why power?"

He might reply,
"We grow helpless."

But humans
have always been helpless,
are helpless
for decades at least,
and even then will need food.

What purpose has power,
if not to supply
our infirmities?

Oh, but how free we would be,
to be free, very free!

To not be born of woman,
no more of a people
in time and place.

I beg you, dear reader,
be cautious, and do not embark
on a journey that ends in death.

Shattered Image, Fallen Breast

01 November 2021

At midnight in the basement
of a museum, some forgotten grotto
deep in Mediterranean soil,

I walked slow and silent,
deep in thought,

When lo! the image of a woman,
be it Aphrodite, Juno,
or some other, rose before me.

I came to her side
and noticed lying at her feet
a fallen breast of stone,
hers surely, lying prone,
as though some vandal strove
to make her pure.

I put it back where it belongs,
and held it there,
until her firmness made me sure,

But sure of what,
I do not know.

I thought I could discern
the faintest sigh,
but only she would know
who fills the mind with wonder,

so I wondered
if the earth could be her home,
or if she comes from some far-whispered plane
that only makers know.

Phenomenology of Science

25 December 2021

From Hegel's brain
thou, spluttering,
spreadst thy wings.

Thou art one more
mythology,
nothing more.

Thou cannot transcend
culture, or fly
as Zeitgeist.

No, thy thinking is
primitive, alas,
just like thy body.

So give up the geist.
Make way for some new
mode of knowing,

Or rather, some old,
deep-rooted thought, the kind
you were made to destroy.

Words

24 January 2022

The words tumble
down, jumbled,
stumble over
bumps and rumble
into town, past
rows of corn that
wonder at the world.

I wonder what the world means.

Someone asks me why I choose these words.
I think these words chose me.

And when they ask directions,
well, I think if words are lost,
then I must find them.

I must guide them.

Phalanx of Mind

07 March 2022

Those Reformers,
in order to flee from imperium,
fell for an earlier vice:

That phalanx of mind
wherein each must stay sturdy or die.

But our world is better
equipped for peace.

Though the devil in man
never sleeps.

Oi! must I now know my neighbor?
And how can I, knowing him, sleep?

But were he restrained
by imperium, phalanx, or rights,
love could be,
but alas, he is free.

Therefore,
what will he make of me?

Saving Earth

23 March 2022

We have taken lightning captive,
 we have made the sky our slave
on our relentless quest for vengeance
 on an Earth we cannot save.

If all is lost, then songs
 cannot be sung, and yet
this song goes on, so all
 must still be found somehow.

If we cannot save Earth,
 can Earth save us?
Or is it not a matter
 of saving, but of trust?

Who is in charge here

08 March 2022

I think I shall spend
the rest of my life
searching
for who is in charge here,

so that I may ask them
where they have been.

After Reagan

03 April 2022

We have been pre-sliced
individually, wrapped in money.

But oh, he was funny, well-spoken, and phony.
A pity so few will remember
the lens of that time,
or look through it to see
what might be.

Are we free?

I have heard so much talk about liberty,
so little wondering,
"what does that mean?"
that I wonder,
is Freedom for me?

And does Freedom need me?

Far Away

21 April 2022

There's someone powerful far away,
our voices and our stories claim.
I can't hear what they have to say.

This power haunts us, still in sway,
and in submitting we grow lame.
There's someone powerful far away,

And he insists, so we obey,
with voices tuned, though not the same.
I can't hear what they have to say.

And why obey? All power fades,
as every dying day explains.
There *must* be powers far away,

And yet, away they stay,
As if we *here* must give things names.
Alas, if there be powers far away,
what do they have to say?

Technology

12 April 2022

The Word
became machines
and dwelt among us.

The Winds of Change

12 April 2022

I listen for the winds of change,
but hear so many sirens blare.
They tell me it's under control.

Control is such a forceful word,
so I just stand here unaware.
I listen for the winds of change,

Which bring me scents of other places
and, I hope, will take me where
they tell me it's under control.

But now as children age,
so too a people ages and grows bare.
I listen for the winds of change

And see my people, scared.
I wonder what could make them whole.
So I just listen to the winds of change,
and let *them* have control.

Things Themselves

03 April 2022

Until I met a woman,
and her presence strengthened me,
I did not know that God lives
not in books, as Calvin claims,
but in the world of things themselves.

What mystery lies here
remains to nourish those who care
to take the secret that is there
into a home, and let it steer
the very lives of things themselves.

But can we dwell among
the secret song, the hidden call
of Earth's long fall for the abyss?
We have our churches.
Are they tombs for things themselves?

I think we have to think this through,
for God has been a long time dying,
though he rises from the dead,
and he is not the only one.
We know this too of things themselves.

Unauthorized thinking

30 April 2022

"You'd make me laugh if it wasn't forbidden."

- *Waiting for Godot*

So I've discovered Plotinus.
Have you never heard?
He has shaped your own words.

He is waiting to meet us,
but don't be absurd.
He would never disturb

Your most serious dogmas,
for me put them there.
What a curious bird.

--

All I want
is mystical union
with the Absolute --

is that too much to ask?

--

Augustine doles out freely
fruits of Temple and Academy
with no thought
for the plants on which they grow.

Electricity

02 May 2022

The wires, I think,
house an evil god.

I hear him questioning *physis*,
doubting that all life lives
of its own volition,

and claiming, instead, for himself,
the sole governorship
of all things.

He who can read the signs
has now not even
the comfort of solitude,

given this god's omnipresence.

I wonder how long it will be
before happens some shocking conclusion.

Streets I Never Knew

04 May 2022

I walk,
and keep on walking.

When I am old,
will any of what I have seen
be left standing? Or will it
be rubble or, worse still, vapor?
But is that not always
the fate of life, to vanish?
I doubt we could make it permanent,
given that all things are not,
and yet where does it end?
In the place it began,

So I walk,
and I keep on walking.

What calls for poetry?

31 May 2022

She does,
the one
whose voice you know.

Fading Feeling

18 June 2022

In our peculiar way,
we were always ones
striving for form, and by form
we meant something enduring,
unchanging, but how much upheaval
and violence it took to learn
how now this striving must change.

For Helen's sake, let us remember
the ways of our fathers,
sea-tossed as they always were,
reaching from darkness
like tentacles on Ocean's floor.

We are like them now, and must be,
having seen once for all
the formation of cracks
in the old Greek edifice,

And thus we must not always be,
knowing full well that not every Greek
bearing gifts can be trusted, but also that
we are not trustworthy either, so long as
we think with stiff minds, and that after all
this is what Plato meant. But in our peculiar
Greek way we are stiff like ones trained for a phalanx,
though soft and bourgeois enough,
not fitting in with ourselves, and not really
belonging here either, no better than anywhere--

Thus we must not always be,
we must fade, like a breeze on a soft summer night,
or the call of an eagle near mountains,
and make some new way for the feeling to come.

Let Go

06 June 2022

Wandering, questioning,
as before Dawn,
I am *sure* of this much:
that we hold our beliefs
far too tightly.

--

I think back,
I think back,
I think back,
but hear only more riveting.

Rosie, poor Rosie,
no place for a woman here.

--

What is the *other* beginning,
the one without steel-plated Mind,
where things grow as we all know they do?

In the mountains,
I hear baby truths being born.

--

Begin *here*. Nowhere else.
This is where you were born and will die.

--

A rowdy patron observes: "You had to be there!"
I think this is rather apt, and tell him so,
but what more could I tell him?
He knows what it is to know.

Light

19 June 2022

At a red light,
when there is no cross-traffic,
a silence deepens
like the space between man and God.

How stupid it feels,
to wait for nothing.

According to some theologians,
God occupies space *above* beings,
and waits for us there,
as the father of light.

But I prefer when the light changes
and things keep moving.

Lyceum

28 June 2022

Aristotle and friends walking amiably
over a concourse of trees
discuss beings, assert that no thing
can both be and not be.
In the next room the Christians,
grown weary of faith, re-learn logic
but treat it like faith. Thus the Schoolmen
indogmify plausible maxims,
sit firm and erect in the shade of Lyceum.
Aquinas the only true thinker mourns moanfully.
Science emerges, a novum organon,
a new quest to find what things are,
but old faith, an old cast of mind.
The old school now an archeological find,
remains buried, its questions once answered for all.
But the Germans are not quite convinced,
keep on asking why we are not free
to defy and to blur. After all,
we are protean beings, and know the old stories well.
But what course still remains for those
bred by the ruins of Lyceum?
One looking over the shoulder
to Greek or Medieval or Modern models?
Or one looking forward, which has travelled back,
with a prayer of thanksgiving, a new apprehension
for what every thought must lack?

--

In the East Room, Dionysians revel
agnostically, thrilled to find God
scarcely knowable, free from the Categories at last,
but what darkness stirs, waiting to pounce
on those not yet prepared for the mysteries?

Mulch by the Scoop

21 June 2022

I am living in the country again,
back after a long sleep,
and I wonder (at times like this)
what that highway is doing here,
near to the place that sells mulch by the scoop.
It is part of the landscape now
(we forget but have signs to remind us)
though we don't embrace it
where we are all cow, horse, and buggy.
But do we, too, not love machines and their progress?
We use them to market our mulch by the scoop
and to haul it and bring it home,
and to heat those homes and to light them
and to plug in to our wider world.
Yet mulch by the scoop *enchants* us
with the call of the earth and convenience,
the call of abundance and freedom from pain.
I have known of no earth like this,
unless broadcast by LED lights on a neon sign,
yet my heart knows these things must remain.
We are proffering mulch by the scoop.
Will you come over highways and see?

Myth at Twilight

23 June 2022

Will we ever
be free of the myth
of some craftsman in the sky
wreaking form over all that must shudder?

I shudder to think it,
but over with the rising sun,
I see others who do not think it.

Science and Technology

14 June 2022

I would like to see
science and technology,
like religion, kept separate
from government
and the lives of regular people,
who cannot understand
the implications, the power,
the ideas embedded therein,
and are harmed,
who cannot make themselves
from steel, let alone make their world,
and who must let things be.
This means letting them fade.
It's true, science has parts to play,
small ones, since stems
without roots surely wither,
but the point is to till the new soil
'til the new crop comes in.

Virgin Queens

28 June 2022

Nobody can hurt a man more than his wife,
except maybe his mother. They simply
have more opportunity, knowing
where all of the pain points are, because they,
on good days, massage there. That is
one kind of love, but another is
taking in stride all the pain dealt
by mother and wife, so that all can belong.
After all, only suffering brings us together,
as all women know. They require it.
I've come to remind you of this, so that you,
unlike many, avoid the allure of false dreams,
which would make virgin queens out of maidens.

21 July 2022

A Platonist declares that all is Soul,
but now we doubt it. Rather, we believe
in clocks that wind themselves, and Nature too.
But what makes Nature go? We'd love to know,
but still we don't. Though answers sometimes
run their course, some questions last forever.
But has no one noticed Plato's chosen mode?
In discourse questions outrank answers
two to one. So when a Platonist declares
on any subject, greet him with a question,
see how well he knows his master's teaching.
Yet let's not discard a theory for a worse one.
Ask, who makes the clock? Not I. And then ask: Why?

Beatific Visions

16 July 2022

I doubt those people on television
realize they're dressed like angels,
calling us back to a realm we reject,
and I think it's a bit out of place
to put these hopes in masters of commerce,
when such hopes are sky-born or nothing.
What see we in movie stars anyway?
Billboards, book covers, and internet ads
still elicit our peasant repentance.
What for? For not being divine enough,
same as before, and yet let me explain:
none are holy. You're made it this far,
you must know that by now.

It's amazing, isn't it, just how much
thought there has been about everything.

Thereby I wander, but what does it mean
to be *lost* in a *place* that is lost?
It means everything. Stand here with me
and observe that at last
all the cracks in the firmament
outline a God-shaped void.

We are ready for solid food,
culled from earth,
even that which comes only through violence.

Belly of the Whale

11 July 2022

Consumed by the fool's errand of making life painless,
we could never be bothered to think
along lines that were not predetermined,
defined by the will of the faceless consumers
like us, who ran everything. Speechless,
we floundered through chaos and form,
but from time to time one had to wonder
what all of it meant, else succumb
to the roar of consumption
enduring through slogans and signs
and most firmly in minds made of mud
baked like stone. I was never a part of this,
never aligned with the spineless
who bear no weight, who will crack under any demand,
for demanding betrays their life's purpose.

Again, these are errands for fools, but of course
fools speak louder than thinkers and rule all
but auspicious places, those private lands
governed by men who will tolerate no more,
who instead choose to stretch themselves out before knowing
and learn what the gods have in store.

The beatings continue, morale doesn't care,
and one wonders how punishment ever was thought
to cure suffering, or how anyone stands it.
But stand it they do, if they must.
Deeper silence where agony once named a people.
How now to take heart and oppose this new ocean of troubles,
or else turn to brooding for future's sake?

I sing from the belly of the whale,
which pursues its perfection for all,
which leaves open no quarter for others,
which swallows each culture in all,
which cares nothing for time past or future,
whose whiteness is barely a memory,
whose grayness is given by all.

With the hour both hidden and late,
I cry out for the sea-foam to hear me.

Emerge

11 July 2022

In America, we know God
changes his mind. We oblige him
with all of our talk about time
and Democracy. Where, after all,
does one find something permanent.
Surely not here, where we bind
ourselves freely to change, and await
the next Mind, with its talk
about how all is fine.
But ennui is outdated, and we
feel confined by ourselves
and our origins, soaking with brine,
emerge fresh from the foam to remind us
how we know God changes his mind.

Industrial Man

21 July 2022

When I survey Industrial Man
in his anxious glory, his endless
competitiveness, I still doubt
that his station is final,
that any part of his nature is fixed.
If by now one knows not to assume
that the spectre of Progress can save us,
perhaps we can doubt, too, its wrath,
which still animates workers,
machine-like and futile,
in cities all over the world.
You have heard this before,
but my question is different.
It grows from a deeper uncertainty.
Reason defies observation. The chaos
is plain, and our planning has ended
in time. So the wrath can be doubted,
the wrath of the godless mind-in-the-sky
who defies observation, whose wrath
is our animus, naked and pure,
like the God of before, without love,
but that wrath drives its heart I am sure.

There is something uncanny about reality,
sitting out there in the ether,
like a renegade neighbor,
the kind that can never be trusted.
Reality, too, can surprise
even those with the best educations.
I wonder what more it will say,
once the moss has grown over broken traffic lights
and deer play through shattered parking lots.
It likes these places best, because less
resists it there. Even here, where traffic flows,
I can hear it call like the sound
of bird-shot through tin, the eccentric neighbor
readying himself for adventure.

The machines never sleep, nor do we,
being imitators of our environment,

and somehow we have to compete,
feeling threatened by gadgets
that do it all better than we can,
and so we assert our own dominance
whenever we can. Apes that shoved
one another to the mud, the slow
endless endeavor to be king of the hill,
on a hill now maintained by machines
bred by science in underground labs...
Why is there no more *sunshine* here,
in our minds, where in earlier times
gentle breezes brought birdsong to bear
on a plant's slow endeavor to blossom?

Liberty and Justice

11 July 2022

Someone should tell New England
that God has not made up his mind
about how to best organize life,
nor should we, being free.
But why freedom? What do we achieve
in that ecstasy known by frontiersman,
and by them alone? The achievement
is justice, though fleeting it be,
and it is not your grandfather's justice.
Then liberty, justice, and us here and now,
in the swirling of time, decide once and for all
(not for long) how life *is*, what it *is*,
and shall be. But how *free* shall we be?
Free enough to revisit these questions
posed back at the start, and all answers so far,
with an eye to revision, but not revolution,
assuming no violence is warranted, knowing
that violence can never be totally barred,
for it comes from a failure to question in depth
and in time. So let's question. Thoreau
may have been on to something, and so we may be,
if we ask ever deeper what meaning dwells here,
where we are. What is Liberty? Why it *and* Justice?
Could either *be* without the other?

Near Mountains

11 July 2022

When I consider the electrical wires,
the works of our hands, and when I consider
the cars, and the buildings made of steel,
I ask, what is God that we are mindful of him?

You will think I am being facetious,
but surely these things are our gods.

How have we gone astray? Is it maybe
that no one is driving the ship, that our voyage,
once rudderless, now must be captained?
Or is it that someone *is* driving, and driving badly,
and therefore the crew must resist?
Or is it that both have been tried and retried,
such that now we no longer know which to try?

I suggest thinking harder, and longer,
in some place more tranquil, near mountains.

Reasonable Measure

16 July 2022

At the end of life's journey
I awoke, not aware yet
of where my road had taken me,
but brightness lit my mind up
like a flame. I'll never be the same.
Discursive Reason failed us. Here we wait
for some new measure to make chaos
something straight, without demanding
that it wear the guise of form.
I beg to differ, if by differing
I bring new thoughts to table,
and as far as I am able,
guide our way. But beggars all
would trade their place for one
in heaven, yet to me that path is barred,
so I use reason in new ways,
feet deep in earth, head free of daemons,
closing in on what it means to be here now,
where I awoke, at journey's end.

Across the sea, I glimpse an image,
be it shade or beast or otherwise,
I only know its visage.
But it calls me with its message,
like a work of human craft.
I say, deception is insidious.
I tell this lonesome image
to release my gaze to this shore,
where I make my only home.

But what home is, I cannot say,
nor can this homely image tell me.

Socrates and Confucius

16 July 2022

In Persia, some say the great thinkers
once met on a precursor to the Silk Road.
They discussed how things change and how some
stay the same, legend has it, but most they discussed
how beginnings occur, both well-versed in this,
one saying History, the other Rationality.
Neither equipped to dissemble his equal,
they talked after dark, in the desert
where lately Zarathustra laid waste to the mind.
Who can say now what echoes remain there,
or which will endure?

Theodicy

16 July 2022

The Nazis proved that God's law
can be violated with impunity
for a time. It was, after all, America
who stopped them. God was mute.
And if there still be any who would claim
that Auschwitz fits some higher plan,
I say I do not wish to serve such Planning
or a God who makes such plans.
With this, I often wonder
if Herr Hitler has his final laugh,
for though, of course, we beat them,
one long draught of their Nepenthe
has us losing our identity.
They *proved* that God is silent
in the midst of desperate anguish.
Who believes now that he listens?
Do the screams not matter much
to his big mind? But let us alter here,
and ask God what he is. We may be wrong
without discarding years of questions. We may ask
without demanding certain answers. We may think
without deciding in advance. Must God use reason? Why?

Who are they?

11 July 2022

They have built all our highways.
They change how we think.
They've invented vaccines.
But who are they?

They've improved understanding.
They've conquered the moon.
They're enlisting our help.
But who are they?

They speak in equations.
They think like machines, and
They dream of control.
But who are they?

Aletheian

31 August 2022

Some do not wish to join the project of empire,
even after all these years. I shall call them
Aletheian, to distinguish them from Roman soldiers
eager for command. They rather seek what's hidden
in the inner world of things, a world forgotten
in the mad rush for imperium. But be things as they may,
these few are hidden, too, unnoticed in the roaring crowd,
the crowd as blind as ever, and no less so for their service.
Oh, the Aletheians have endeavors too, like maybe breaking through
the cycle of hereditary bullying, which, for Caesar,
would make servants of us all. But serving whom?
But more than this, these simply watch for signs,
believing that a god, or something, speaks
and can be heard. I like this last pursuit
a little, and much more than I like empire.
I think I am just half an Aletheian, and part Roman,
but would like to be much more. I dare say you,
dear reader, many years from now, shall be much more.

At Sea

31 August 2022

Once in awhile, despite expectations,
you run into someone who knows what they're doing.
Surprising in times like this, but then
also familiar, as if in response to a call
that you heard all along. It won't last,
but for that moment you'll know what it means
to be human. For that moment, all small
uncertainties crystallize into a sculpture of rain,
the most precious made permanent at last.
But time chips at it, wears it away
like a vandal, adolescent, without shame.
You thought maybe it could be like before,
when the stars spelled out stories of heroes
and mankind obeyed and endured, but time
had other plans. And then slowly a new thought
emerged, not quite visible, but certainly there
like a ship in the fog or an iceberg or
some other sculpture. You thought, is this mine
or must I wait for another? It has been
so long since the last one, you thought of
absconding whatever the terms. But this
is not your ship, not your voyage. Your journey
is here, where you are, on this ground.
I had better remind you that ships come
more often now, maybe the old way of choosing
won't do, or at least, won't suffice.
I must know where I stand, on the prow
or on land, but in either case, these legs will do.
So will yours. On the ship, watch the seamen
so proud and hearty, assured of their
artificial discipline. Of course this is mastery,
of course this is justice, of course, of course.
But the course is precisely neglected, already decided,
not open to question. On land there are always
new flowers. Who we are is never so certain.
I like the land better, although I think men
do learn something at sea, to tame chaos,
a Faustian bargain if chaos is in us,

if taken too far, but a call from the sky
to those drowning in worlds without form.

Craftsman

20 August 2022

The craftsman in this body
(not the one above the stars)
devised this poem. Would you know him?

Feet of Rain

31 August 2022

You learn the way but the way changes.
You walk with feet of rain.
You fear the changing more than the storm.
You sink while looking down.

That is one way of doing it,
but others press in from all sides,
demanding a show. You hesitate,
not being a dancer, not being
at all. The way is through the rain.
You think you have heard this before,
but the words change. Why won't they
stay still? Why can't they remain?
They are not, that is why, and they never were.
The rain moves through the way...

Hitler's Bunker

31 August 2022

Americans closing in, after ravaging
much of Italy, I wonder, did any
ask, "What have we done?
What rubble becomes our heritage?"
If any living would know themselves,
I counsel reflection upon these years
when fascists strove to make Rome stick for all.
But now the rubble (no more storied columns,
monuments of power believed), becomes a doom.
Destruction has a new allure, the fasces
christen every room, and man no longer
wills to be alone. It is the total will
that governs even "freedom-loving" people. Where is safe?
There are still mountains, true, but mankind
cannot thrive outside the law, and in our time
the law abuses some for fun.
This must be known if we still
wish to be made human. Both hard sides
of contradiction must be grasped and known.
We need the law. The law abuses.
If there be an easy answer, I don't know it.
This I know: some govern well, but others
move within the doom of Hitler's bunker,
where all hope is lost, the only option death.
Be not like them, consumed by hate,
nor hating them, for then hate wins,
but neither drown in naive love, for man
loves dominance most, for reasons unknown,
and this will never change. Carve out
a home away from man's cold quest
and rule it well. This is called happiness.
One wonders that the Hitlers could not find it
seeking total domination from the bunkers of the world.

Lady in the Rain

31 August 2022

Evening mistful after rain,
I saw a woman's perfect form,
no halo, but a song fell from her lips.
She said to hope again,
and all was like the rain.

No, it was not a dream,
no journey through Lothlorien
could pass this way,
though she draws from that well,

And who's to say just which
of us inhabited the other?

Mingled Being

31 August 2022

What is it that calls for children?
Why do women weep to see their offspring
leap through flowers? I suspect it is
like that which summons poetry,
what one has called "the unreserve of mingled being."
Hear now how the many voices speak
of loved commeraderie,
as though this be essential to their frame.
I do not know what calls if not
enticement to the game of mixture,
turning one and one to something more.
The dance is waiting ere we learn it,
blending what presents with what we are.
So travel cautiously. Beware the swamps
that pull things down. Avoid the soggy
groundless ground. Instead recall
the energy of youth, and how your mother wept.
They were not tears of pity, no, of joy,
to see herself in you, of you, with you.
And mingled with you, Being, in its full array of flowers,
alive to tell.

20 August 2022

On this rock,
I have placed my insignia,
placed it where all can see,
as a warning against what has been
and an omen of what must still be.

On this rock,
I explain my old purpose
in words not yet known to most people,
to teach and explain what we're doing here,
lost as we are on Promethean shores.

Such Surprises Must Be

31 August 2022

The way scientists mishandle surprises,
you'd think they were born in a lab
with all variables controlled, where the mother
deduced from first principles that a good time had come.
They go on to the end of surprises,
but there is no end to it, no world
of babies by babies for babies.
Can anyone handle the unrest of history?
Nature has laws! they will say,
thus forgetting that emperors need not obey.
So who then shall be emperor?
I'd vote for one who rules justly,
loves mercy, and cares for his country as his own,
one who knows with compassion
the suffering drawn from surprises,
and that such surprises must be.

The Ground is Lava

31 August 2022

Late one morning, I ventured
to know myself, like the thinkers demand,
but before I had gone through the threshold,
I saw that the ground had returned to primordial soup.
As I gazed at that chaos, I thought of how children
pretend that the ground becomes lava.
How wise they are, unlike ourselves,
who pretend that foundations are solid
in order that we might erect some grand edifice.
Children know well that foundations are fluid,
and that we just do what we can.
Ask the children how much they believe,
or, importantly, *why* they believe.
I suspect they have far purer reasons.

The New Frontier

02 August 2022

"It is and it is not, and, therefore, is"

- Wallace Stevens, *A Primitive Like an Orb*

What have we learned in seventy years?
What are the lessons of that war
which lately ripped both Europe and Asia
to pieces, that broke our faith, but left us here?
If God is dead, what takes his place?
Or must the place itself change, into
something open, free for exploration, undefined?
It is, is not, and therefore is,
just like ourselves, our lives, and our surrounding aura.
Who would dare to pin things down again?
Yet how could beasts like us survive
without restraint and limitation?
We have known the pain of man and his machines
on heaven's throne, have suffered Cromwell's vengeful reign
for nigh four centuries. This war (the one succeeding,
recall, the one to end all wars) is but the climax
of the heavenly interregnum. But what *person*
dares to sit on such a throne again?
Are we so human? Human still, despite our deepest cravings,
loyal subjects to an absent king. Why can't we let God rest in peace?
We hear the wind disturb the leaves, those covering his grave.
It's us, the ones you chose to save,
and then abandoned to the formless blur,
which is, is not, and therefore is.
Let's on with it, then, to the new frontier,
where our longings are answered more plainly
and with less fear.

Thinking Deeply

31 August 2022

I have been to the place
where truths are born, I have heard
the sirens call me there,
but I rarely return. It is dark there,
and cold, and no homes endure
the hard swirling of winds.
But I'm still thinking deeply,
traditions in mind, because
this is the only way to think.
All else is chaos breeding chaos.
But stiffened traditions expire,
a new generation arises,
and all that is left to the thinkers
are keen ears for cold winds of change.

Too Playful

31 August 2022

The poem grows from the same place
as child's play, the soil of human possibility.
What *can* we be? Maybe doctors or lawyers
or dragon-slayers, or maybe plants
or gemstones or rye. But children
grow older, and most forget play,
though its lessons stay with us, for
we are our playthings, we are what we play,
and at one time you knew that.
I write to remind you, though it is no use,
because patients are sick, because clients are angry,
and dragons are burning down villages, but you
are too busy to play with me. If only you knew
that your play is play too, we'd grow wiser together,
and maybe you'd learn about truth
and its too playful hold over you.

Afterthought on the Romantics

21 September 2022

They strove to bring the dark into the light.
What evident folly, yet an understandable urge
to see the dark, there, always. It *is* there,
but it cannot be seen. It is the absence of sight,
a lack of presence. To make *this* present
is to hollow what remains. Instead, we now learn
how to build, with subtle lighting, some cool nave
of stone, where light and shadow interplay.
This way we can keep both, and keep them well.

Gettysburg

September 21 2022

Before the dawn one evening, I went down
to Jackson city, to remember why we here
do not live there. It was a cool miseducation
in the ways of segregation, but it was not
what those elsewhere like to say. I saw a people,
many hungry, some devoted, some misguided, one or two
with hope to spare – in other words, they were a people
like the rest. True, they owned slaves, or those
before them did, but this fact cannot be washed away
with any amount of blood. We ought to know by now
that history is fickle, and remains despite our sternest glare.
There is no way to make it vanish. Nonetheless,
we can move forward, and have done it, though
with golden thread to bring us home. Have you observed
how every poem stacked in order waits in reserve?
They are like people under the lash of cold machines.
Our words have suffered. They have lied to you,
although they had no choice. The words are not
the problem, though they are a symptom, and I hope by now
you know the disease. I am at ease to write,
it's true, but we are not at ease while living,
and eternal life makes us less easy still. Before the dawn,
consider what can still be spoken, and,
more troublingly, think what can speak no more.
It is the silence calling us this time of night.
Beware the apathy of drowning in the noise.
I hear the call of many chain-gangs in the wind.
I hear their rattle, and they will not be ignored
but seek no vengeance. They would like to sleep again
and be released at last from pain. Could we oblige them?
I think so, though it would take a serious effort
and one not like what we've dared to try before.

--

I do not believe in Lincoln. I cannot.
He was a feckless Hegelian, couched in Biblical tones.
He did not govern well. I've said it and will
say it again, he cowed to violence, could not admit
that states wished to secede. Oh, what a sneaky devil,

blind in the face of the obvious. There is no forthcoming millenium where all peoples of all colors live as one. De Tocqueville said so. Yet we try and try and try. I do not know what else we could try, but we at least could notice the obvious, that humans are still human despite the violence. We are here, as we have always been, as prone to hate as love. It will not change. What wars are necessary to teach this once and for all? I fear the answer as I fear the blight of winter.

--

Why am I here, able neither to remember nor forget? To absorb solemnity left by dying men? Or to be thoughtful about how little we know? These men, brave men no doubt, died hard, but why? Should we dare also to die? Again? But why?

--

Had Freedom died? Or was it just then mortally struck? Why was the new birth *necessary*, and could it be needed again? And needed by whom? I may digress, but you would not forgive serenity at a time like this, when lady liberty labors to bring life into the world. Would we, then, also be reborn? Some time ago was one, and yet another, who spoke hauntingly of birth. Where have they gone? Where have we gone? I think old freedom lives and could not be reborn, for it was never born. It merely *is*, beyond the pale of all that ever comes to womb. It merely is, on its own terms, in its own time. Say Lincoln knew this. Likely he'd forgotten, like most others of his day, but say he knew it. Could we have a greater leader? Could mankind then rise past folly after all? Just say he knew it. Say he knew it for the scores of years of bloodshed we've endured. War is not pretty, no, but neither is our peace. The fools immortalize his words, against the wishes of those very words. I'd have this plaque removed, along with all the noisy monuments, and rather listen closely as the ghosts here tell their tale.

Old Flames

12 September 2022

As I sit, I remember the point of the story,
the struggle to keep out the cold.
It was always getting colder, no matter the weather,
and we, like frontiersmen, built houses and fires
to keep ourselves warm. But the houses grow old,
fires dim, and the embers are hardly remembered.
I say, as I sit, I remember those embers,
how long-dwindled fires once burned in our hearts,
or if not in ours, then in our grandfathers' hearts.
But we are the ones who are here (they are not, or may be
but are not as they were), yet their embers remain
unremembered. I think that is sad, but not new.
As I sit, I remember a time, and another,
when history was not remembered. I will not give names,
but you likely know that this is true.
There's a cold wind breathing at the door.
It's for us, and against us. I think we do well
to remember it. Even the best insulation
will never make heat. We will need a new flame.
We must ask where the old flames have gone.

One of Us

12 September 2022

The veiled criticism always says
how dare you not be one of us.
Yes, be yourself, but first be
one of us, of us, of us...

I cannot do it, not with thirty legions,
not for all the world.

12 September 2022

How many voices drown in that wind,
unable to make it across?

Sandcastles

12 September 2022

I am watching the children build sandcastles.
I know they won't mind, though I think they will wonder
what keeps me away. I am not one to join
where I know that the wind and the waves will destroy.
But I do not mind watching. Sometimes their achievement
is marvelous, but I cannot silence
the sound of the crashing waves. It's like time,
you know, after a long day, when the quitting bell rings.
That bell rings for me always, and over such noise
little castles of sand have no hold. I don't mind, though,
watching, and sometimes I wish I could join them.
It would be like hope, you know, after a long doubt.
But I cannot shake loose of the grip of the sea.
I will watch these new sandcastles fall, like the last,
and leave only some footprints behind.

All Silence

14 October 2022

This moment I'm writing to you
as a man who has lived to see death
not in morbid obsession but only
in rapturous reality. Yes, it is true,
there are things and not just me and you.
Answer softly, my sweet, when I ask you
to be near me now as things fade.
We are dying as sure as we're living.
But listen for me past the hearth flare, in chill air.
I wait for you there in all silence.

As Ever

14 October 2022

We no more renew the song
of time wherein by masquerade
the "mortal dross" transforms into
eternity. No more! We live, as ever,
in the flowing, thingly river, day
by day dissolving in new ways
of speaking thought, and so we ought,
if time has brought us here, if time itself
would like to bring us near.

No Reason

25 October 2022

Many things happen for no reason.
We dare to admit it now.
The future, hazy, approaches.
We hold a wet finger to the wind.
It answers thus: mankind unfettered,
the child a universe at play.

Risible Time

25 October 2022

Born against odds in a risible time,
thou shall rise, as thy parents
before thee did rise, and shall fall
up and back to that risible sky,
with it's empiest center, near time.

Time

14 October 2022

Walk here on this beach with me,
where time is, in the evening of
its missionary gaze, the goal to save
all who will hear. Walk here with me,
where gods can die, and often do.
Walk here, but slowly. Know these waves,
the ones you've learned how not to hear.
You'll hear them now, so gently falling down
upon all things. So time falls, so it goes,
and so we go, into the crypt of time,
where all days are reborn, are born, and die.

After Tomorrow

04 November 2022

I remember from time to time
how those moments when humans
are worse than isolation resolve
into moments when all one can do
is sit quilly, staring off into
tomorrow, as if it won't also
be much like today, and I wonder
what happens the day after tomorrow
when all of us wake up anew.

It is not for me

04 November 2022

Here they are, as ever, making the weaker argument appear stronger, uneven in thinking, so tipsy in mind. What great folly, if even the end of historic progressions or else the result of some King's stiff command. We are tired by now and its restlessness, drawn to all corners of the imagination by a call no less real than a fairy-tale and no more real than the earth. It has drained us of every ambition, but this is no reason to scream, no, the screaming is part of the problem. I ask you for once to be ruled, if you will, if you can, but it is not for me that I'm asking.

No Entry Beyond

29 November 2022

We are free now after long bondage,
no longer seeking to mate with the Truth,
but instead care to *know* it, as thinkers,
not lovers. I dare say this was
a very long time in coming, not empty
but full, at long last, of ourselves
and our families, countries, and tribes.
We are full of reality's emptiness,
brimming with void, and in love
with each other, as passion demands.
We are free, very free (can it be?)
We are wise beyond years, beyond tears,
beyond ghosts of some greater beyond
who no longer hold any sway here.

Thing in Progress

29 November 2022

I shall pull back the curtain,
peep under the veil, at the thing
in its progress. It is not done yet,
and yet is the progression in *it*
or in *me*? This is by now old music.
We may do more asking for origins.

The Gospel According to Us

29 November 2022

If you'll listen, I will tell you
of the day before the stars were born
like yesterday, but more in tune with now.
This is the gospel according to us,
not some forgotten fairy-tale
from days gone by, but this here now
by us for us. This is our gospel,
by the power of consensus, reigning free
across America, where we decree
what each thing is and dare
no other. We have tasted majesty
from sea to shining sea, now dare
to speak, and be not worried
if this flag speaks not for thee.
We'll make it speak, with every fiber
of each being, named by us
and therefore there, existing solely
for ourselves, who, speaking, make the world
of images derived from prior times, the sea
of echoes pouring through our lives
as history. Are these not also here,
informing things? Are we so free
that each decree becomes a law?

Untested Ways

29 November 2022

I am wondering what will become of us,
after all this time. I am wondering just
how strange time is, and how strange
we are, living here, at the end of it.
We're aware now that Jesus never
attended church, so we follow his footsteps
at last, but what of it? I suspect
there is more to this story, and until
we get down to the bottom of it,
I wonder if we will find peace.
There are many paths forward, but each
is a severance from what precedes.
This is saying the road does end here,
but some new ones begin. I think I
shall explore a few untested ways,
for your sake, and for mine. This way,
one of us at least keeps moving.

No Will to Deceive

29 November 2022

God has grown neurotic these last few centuries,
ravaged by ships sailing seas where no ships had dared
dream before, but this is nothing, just men chasing power,
yet power is what makes God go. Are we listening now?
I remember, I can never forget, how the days before ours
were like fire in the night, but the night lasted longer
and swallowed that flame. We're the same when we ask
for forever, though knowing full well it's beyond us. Where we live
time reigns, and the best we can do is believe. I can
only remind you again and again, but I'll do that
with grace in my heart and no will to deceive.

Uncertain Times

29 November 2022

Lincoln roamed over
the cavern of godlessness
like a leader
in uncertain times.

After "A Late Walk" by Robert Frost

29 November 2022

My walk is later, yours
is later still, the animus the same,
no time until we reconcile. This
winter carries history, this harvest
has a name (it's you). I warrant that
the aftermath dishevelled all of truth.
But there's no matter, so they say.
Who'd even try to go some other way.
Perhaps a strong-voiced bird will rise
and sing another day.

Freedom's End

29 November 2022

I stand upon a precipice,
the great cliff white as snow,
and fear a darkness coming yonder
over fields we used to know.
The day is cool and feckless,
but the night is coming in,
and we are hungry, we are tired,
by the gravity of sin.
There are no words between us,
no embraces bring us home,
and in the darkness I descry
the end of all things we have known.
I am no meager prophet,
and this is no meager poem.
I believe in new beginnings
grown from darkness overgrown.
So take this next step with me.
Through the doorway we will wend
and walk along the newfound pathways
on the way to Freedom's End.

Persuasion

29 November 2022

It is strange how our rulers
pretend to believe that they
serve us, as though we don't know
that each offering merely entangles
us more in their web. Still
we go on, each feeling prescribed
by the business of business,
but free! we are free! very free!
If that is what we call it
to be inauthentic or else.
Who could want any service
besides what is standard?
I tell you we could,
with a bit of persuasion.

Darkness Becomes You

29 November 2022

In darkness I am reaching
from a still place, in this empty space
for you, whoever you are. It is not clear
that we are here, but in these moments
darkness becomes you, and I can see
that after all is said and dreamed,
there is a silence and its teaching.

History

29 November 2022

It occurs to me now and then
and from time to time that our role
must be: preserve the living and keep out the dead.
This is history, this is our role in it,
let us respect and partake of this process.

Crimson Days in the Depths of Time

29 November 2022

Into the sea he dove, toward another land,
this one no less deplorable, unneutered, never filtered,
and he swam. The currents pushed and pulled his form,
and twisting, writhing, he found sand, the stuff of mountains
long eroded, then descended. Were these not the sands
of time, at last, now freed here from their hourglasses?
Time would tell, as only time could tell.
And so he fell, but falling, not as out of Eden,
rather falling as one drawn to depths by kinship
to those depths, or maybe drawn by some dark gravity.
Leviathan in chains, he feared, would wait for him down there,
or so they say, but on this day he little cared
what fate awaits him, little cared for self at all
when put against the call to sink or fall below the waves.
In crimson days, in patteredened waves, he feared the rise
of troubled years, nor dared to counter them with tears,
for they demanded something more, a new beginning,
if a new path could be won, and so he dove
to chart a course, lay some foundation. He struck
rock the second time, this not surprising. He
had heard of rock before, though never seen it.
These he saw, and knew at once that they
could serve him. He delved hard, and threw himself
against the rocks, and when few broke, he knew again
that these were firm. But when he moved them,
when he placed one on another, both proved worthless,
turned to sand. He groaned, but, still resolved, took sand
and pressed it in his hands, until as glass it stayed.
He now had made his way, and none could take it,
so he claimed, but came a rumble from those depths
of things forgotten, drifting memories of all that sand
has been. This troubled him, his glass was cracked,
but there could be no going back. He cut his hands there,
leaving drops of blood reflecting throughout time, and
though those depths had proved unkind, it's said
that he still loves them, like a child, like a patriot,
to the end.

In Any Case

29 November 2022

Those with the higher sense, who observe our way of life,
can only say "it's all wrong" so many times before
they go crazy, so most just stop saying it. But none
can stop feeling it. Why, after all, make things permanent?
Process is all, and the process itself is in process.
Or am I repeating something said before?
I am certain that this much is true, we know
little, no more than our forebearers, and we all know
how that all ended (or have we forgotten?) In any case,
let me remind you that change can be friendly,
but so can the law, so we'd better plant one foot in each.

Ave Maris Stella

29 November 2022

Stella, bathed in lapis, azure
waves of sky, pray tell me
whence thy rays of amber light?
Am I your child, or am I
self-made, as prophets say
who guide our way tonight?
If any be whose thoughts are free,
I say they well may think of thee
yet still be free, but more to those who find
some thing objectionable inside,
I write with hope to change their minds.

Why Reason?

29 November 2022

I have come to you, naked like this,
in the death throes of God, being
pregnant with words and with meaning,
to answer your question with another:
Why reason? To make ourselves stable?

Hegel

29 November 2022

What did they do to you, Hegel,
to make you so blue and somber?
Perhaps they withdrew when a staying
was due, or perhaps they demanded the truth.
It is sobering, isn't it, being here dead
as a log, in these pages, just one more
firm concept to break through?

Back to the Mines

15 December 2022

I think sometimes we shall never escape
from the general, all-around clusterfuck
(pardon the language, it applies) of humanity
always and everywhere, in general confused
about what it all means, about what *meaning* means,
or why meaning is so indispensable.

Oh well, let's back to the mines
for another long spell of formation through labor.

Why Obey?

15 December 2022

Could it be that for some
definition of "we", we must leave
on the pathways of time
some beliefs etched on signposts
for others to see?

You Are The Way

15 December 2022

Listen to me. Listen (I will speak) to this beginning
out of no-thing (yet not nothing). There no more shall be
interminable deductions from infallible first principles, not even
if those principles be liberal. We are all that's left, my friend.
The way is you, my friend from afar. You are the way to me.

To Tell This To You, or Changing of the Gods

15 December 2022

I walk out one morning like any other
and come back the same as myself,
for once chosen and spoken for one
and no other. I am well-versed in things
farmers know, also tech-savvy, and neither thing
will be relinquished, but I relinquish (kenosis)
the past in the present, the future in the
imagination. So notice the soldiers, so stiff and so rigid,
turn cold to attention, about face, and march
one last time to a palace now vacant, and we,
we are not who we thought we would be. If
stars change, I guess we must change too.
I am writing to tell this to you.

Spring Cleaning

15 December 2022

Morning comes, and birds no longer silent
fill the air with song. The night was long,
but this day comes with cheer. Today
is cleaning day, when old mess goes where
order comes to stay. It is the only way.
Note how the sky is flushed with light,
new colors wash the old away. I wish
for you alive and gay to meet me
in the garden. There we'll talk our cares away
until the day is spent. I have a special
gift for those who only can obey, and one
for those who never do. It is no wonder
which are you. The moon is rising, and
the night is crisp and clear. It is the air
that you have been so troubled for, at last,
so clear that one is wondered to the core.

Vortex Afterglow

15 December 2022

In the afterglow of the morning, I walked
to the edge of a growing circumference, never in doubt,
not resolved, but still present, like one from another room,
and I saw there before me an image, but what
it portended no words can express. Yet it took me by eye
and led into the nearest horizon, that place where
the shadows have form and vice versa, and there I saw
only my dreams of tomorrow, a fantasy littered with
chaos and rhyme. There the sun never set, but stayed
stuck in its setting, a sculpture one mis-takes for living.
Soon after the journey reminded of home, so alone
I walked backwards, until stretched by hands unlike mine
through the vortex of time to beginnings, as well as
to ends, before all as my witnesses ready to go and to find.

Compromise

15 December 2022

The schools are at it again, with their furor
to make a new movement, or else make an old one.
I'll tell you, this will not end well, nevermind
how the old ways have fared. I say clearly,
I want to keep liberty *and* biology, sir,
and I am not now willing to compromise.

Marxists

15 December 2022

The other day I walked so far
I could not see my home.
The Marxists say such has to be
for any who would roam.

But I remain uncertain, even though
they know my heart.
Yes, I remember, yes, I know,
and yes, I still do see the stars.

In Memory

15 December 2022

I open the door. It is not clear
whose being-there distrubs my being here, but waves
of pure vibrations meet me there. I am a man
one says, another soy un hombre, one je suis etc...
here we are in memory all the same. We differ
outwardly, perhaps inwardly too, yet all recall
the lessons of teacher who *knew* something. Open the door
upon a field, a pasture, castle in the distance.
Is it home? Or are you longing for another?
What is longing, just be-longing without being?
Let us long, then, till we find a set of beings
we can store within our memories. I'll wait here
for you, patiently, recalling what I know.

Elite Waters

17 January 2023

I have dipped my toes in elite waters,
but they proved too cold for me. So instead
I am here (I am writing to you)
about love and its answers to questions.

Horizons

17 January 2023

Where did we get the sponge that could wipe the horizon away?
- Nietzsche

From Cromwell it came, with vengeance,
for days were not trusted
as long as a Catholic lived, and
with Providence on our side
we strove forth for Britannia,
Science and War side by side.
It was then that the ground
was made firm,
and thus all are now born
in laboratories, laboring, true,
for some queen they know not,
some Elizabeth mouldering probably,
but no true woman. No man of science
fares well with a woman, no wonder,
for women *require* horizons, and science
requires the sponge. But no matter,
has Germany fared any better, or
must we look deeper
and learn of Greek/Roman horizons?

Slumber Much Better

17 January 2023

Again I find myself alone
in the dark, while the Christians
dance madly in imaginary light.
What a pity that all of this
suffering goes on unpunished.
I think there will come a time
for licking these wounds, but
until then I slumber much
better without interference.

Specimens

17 January 2023

Are we to remain collections
of human specimens in the test-tubes
of America, or are we to become *men*?
And what would that mean?

Wait For Another

17 January 2023

In the aftermath of clockwork decaying,
from prisons of the mind, arise new men
of stone unbroken and yet brittle to the end.
What for? If Übermenchen all, then we
are lofty though we fall, for with some hopes
a certain madness lurks in wait. Say more,
bon esprit, with less. Do be the best, but
know of other figures at the door.
You are no child now, new friend, you grown-old thing,
yet I have seldom felt such shelter from your wing.
Is this, then progress? Or must we wait for another?

Think Not Absolutely

17 January 2023

There's a shimmer on the air, comes flowing over
days and years, to us, who here and now
decide to make things clear no more, who
think not absolutely, then think pure and free
with obstacles removed, and breath returning.

As Like May Yet Be

17 January 2023

Wordsworth said of a poem:
emotion recalled in tranquility.
Now I say otherwise. Mine
are like ships tossed by storms,
lost at sea, like reality, never
at port in the kingdom of sheep
who fight no significant battles
and want things done for them --
adventurer poems, explorer poems,
as anxious as life may yet me.

Sick With Struggle

17 January 2023

Here we are, still monotheist saints
or else old hoplites with no phalanx,
sick with struggle, and yet knowing of no other...
what voice calls? Is it the morning dove,
or is it just fair Juliet, the wise man's bane?
She has no other name, for she is fair
no longer than a season. All loves end
the same, as sorrows waver, with a whimper,
and mankind remains enthralled to thee,
O time, the muse of all deep divers,
dwelling as you do beneath the waves.

Strangers

17 January 2023

As I sit by candlelight,
I know the strangers of the night
who creep by windows fair and bright
to haunt the streets of all delight,
and all the days of love grown cold,
and all the stories never told,
and all the crying eyes behold
the lying eyes both young and old.
I see them in their shadows waiting,
see their fearful forms debating
whether love or lies abating
offer respite to their waiting,
whether love or lies can stir
the shadows that have stolen her,
the one whose love was soft as fur
who bristles now with prickly hide.
So come sit by my candlelight.
Come feast your eyes upon the sight
as strangers in the strangest night
sit man and man, sit side by side.

Emptiness That None Can Understand

21 February 2023

We have not proved that life be regular,
only have made padded cages for ourselves
where all is regular. Life remains the same,
a formless void apart from us, so full of mystery
and emptiness that none can understand.

Rest Unassured

21 February 2023

With the shadows dawning, with dawn descending,
I call for you, weeping, alone in the meadow,
with words for renewal. I say rest unassured,
be aware but not pure. There are days on horizons
not noticed before. As for us, it could be that
this setting defines us, but that is no reason to wallow.

Nutrition by Faith Alone

21 February 2023

Dinner options: (1) Take it (2) Leave it
- Local Sign

In America we believe God somehow powers
our food with his majesty, making infallible
all of our culinary experiments.

Call it Nutrition by Faith Alone. All that matters
is that *we believe*, as if no thing has substance,
as if, to use Plato mistakenly, thoughts are more real than things.
But we doubt that, and say so, but know of know other.
I wonder what Asia would think?

Dwindle

21 February 2023

In the midst of plurality,
egos must dwindle (somebody tell
Whitman) but maybe they
need not extinguish.

The Promise of the Lady

21 February 2023

Come to the temple,
the Lady is waiting,
with courtesans towing
the train of her robe.
She invites you to enter.
She patiently gazes
upon your small splendor
but does not refuse you.
Her form soft and slender
invites you again
to become what was promised
long since at this temple.

The gateway before you,
your form soft and nimble,
she beckons you and you must go.
But don't worry: her promise is good
and her temple will still stand long after.

Like No Angel

21 February 2023

Wandering homeward, overland
past German towns destroyed
by too-free thought, past English
clocks unwound and French hearts
broken-hearted, stands a man,
not quite your size, some large
American, unsteady on his feet.
He knows too little, feels too much,
but means to help in any way he can.
He feared one day
the old world would cave in
and need the new. It never did. Instead
it hardened into something like itself,
with just a thin veneer of tolerance. And so
it wandered, as he too would wander,
homeward, like no angel one had ever seen.

A more tolerant order

21 February 2023

We cannot replace law with tolerance, however much we try. I suggest instead aiming for a more tolerant order, a law that *embraces* diversity but does not enforce it. For tolerance never puts bread on the table, though lawfulness can, through cooperation (and don't be deceived that cooperation comes through more tolerance). Laws create trust and cohesion but also cause friction where not all agree. It may be that universal laws must be few, but I hope we agree that our mutual survival is something worthwhile, to be cherished.

Night Sweats of the American Dream

21 February 2023

The Radium Girls, the serial killers,
and all night sweats of the American Dream...
how many kinds of peanut butter
does a civilized people need?

All products of experiment,
all experiments neverending,
all the people entertained.

And yet I feel no disdain
for this ship or its sailing,
for as it goes down I go with it.

The Quest for the Immortal Self

21 February 2023

"After all, it is you and I who are perfect, not the next world."
- Allen Ginsberg

Have we found it? I've looked
under every belief, and found nothing.
Not even despair, nor ecstatic
self-reformulation (the new dialectic)
can grant this old wish. But I wish
that our days were more even, that
sunshine and moonlight spoke softly together
and on equal terms. Do you hear?
There are so many hours left, then no more.
This is how it always goes, not enkindled
by immortal flame, but descending in whispers,
no longer itself, not the same. But this is not
the cause for more triumph, no celebrations here.
Rather, sleep, with its own quiet permanence,
must end each day, most men say,
yet it also begins the next day, fresh, anew.
I am speaking to you, and for you, but you know
more than I can ever say.

The Sound a Plant Makes

21 February 2023

Will any number of plants relieve the pressure?
No, the iron rages on toward tomorrow, restless,
without reservation. Do any remain who hear the moan
beneath the steady drone of sure-footed, still uncertain
electricity? The moan of earthly things, those things,
alas, that are not standardized, because the earth,
alas, is not a factory. Try as we might, it still
is what it is, and, troublingly, is what we are.
No number of plants will relieve the burden
of care, nor the pain of our carelessness. There is a
tight symbiosis of everything, always,
and some humans know that. But this is no
amicable reverie, longing for forgone perfection,
which never existed. This is but the next step forward.
We've learned well that nature can harm us,
that not all its processes will be beneficent.
Now we must learn how to pick and to choose
and to nurture those things that sustain us.

I have inscribed some future epitaph,
forged in times of strife unlike our own.
It is a tale of war inscribed on bones
ne'er brittle, by command. These bones speak now,
or so the story goes, and yet I weep
for those who militarized the world,
who could not demilitarize their souls.

Ahura Mazda (the Question Remains)

20 March 2023

All hail Ahura Mazda, all hail!
Or fall by the Great King's sword!
I am Cyrus, slayer of nations,
and builder of all that remains.
In the name of Ahura Mazda
I rule over Persia, the land of my fathers.
Begrudge not my epitaph. You also
worship Ahura Mazda. If not,
then how do you remain?

The myth of Progress is Ahura Mazda,
The law of money is Ahura Mazda,
The pain of tolerance is Ahura Mazda,
The god of feelings is Ahura Mazda,
Deified sexuality is Ahura Mazda,
New-age bullshit is Ahura Mazda,
The cult of personality is Ahura Mazda,
Democratic Values are Ahura Mazda,
Both you and I are Ahura Mazda,
or else we could never remain.

Socrates versus Ahura Mazda,
the philosophic struggle against all of Persia
remains undecided, though not for lack of trying.
The question remains whether any accomplishment
stands with finality, or whether any question remains.

I disbelieve you, Ahura Mazda.
No power controls the totality of events.

The Throne of Cyrus

20 March 2023

I feel the weight of Cyrus,
feel is pulsing, feel it moving
through these very words, within
though not without. I feel inspired
and afraid. When bones are laid
in stone-faced mausoleums, when the Shah
himself weeps madly, when the architects
of rule both here and there speak only well,
I am afraid. What fingers clutched the sceptre
as all Persia trembled? Then sang highest praise?
Perhaps the victims of abuse defend abusers,
love abusers, with a love that can't be tamed.
If this be so, how would we know?
With minds beclouded, thoughts well-trained,
we'd sing the hymns of him
who put us in our place. True, Greece and Rome
have put up manly struggles, to what end?
To place themselves upon the throne?
And what of us? Do we dare disabuse, again,
before that mighty throne?

Come Again

20 March 2023

It has come again, this time
so new, having punctured the sky
I am writing to you, asking why,
and do not even try to deny it,
no, this is here now, here and now,
and tomorrow comes true
if once listened through you.

The Drums of Alexander

20 March 2023

Alexander stood finally tall on Persepolis
burning. This was the vengeance Ionia craved,
the dream of a thousand hoplites realized at last.
But what was that wind? O great King,
have you done this? And had you no doubts?
Later on one will stand here and wonder
as you failed to wonder. Were not these
baths lovely, with children at play in the spring?
Rubble now, though perhaps all ends thus,
though perhaps not as swiftly as this.
Have you done it, or does some Ahura
still haunt these hallowed grounds? What was
really at stake, basileus, in so much destruction?
And why do I still hear your drums beating,
louder now, over the Atlantic?

Small All the Same

20 March 2023

Caught up withal in the most divine madness
we crash through the Phrygian stables
and lather on filth, with such glee
that no shepherd or pen can contain us.

We crash also through all white fences
on main street, or any street -- crash
as those wild as we are who have seen
through the curtain the man at the machine.

What a small man indeed. Shall we triumph,
or are we still small all the same?

Unfriendly

20 March 2023

After all these years one would have thought that deleting Facebook would be easier. After all, it is only a website among many. But strangely pernicious, its popular draw, even buying and selling turned into a struggle for approval (to say nothing of genocide). What is this pull, which determines so much, means so little. I cannot escape any other way than the old coward's way, or the nobleman's way of thick walls. I can still keep it out, have no fear, but lament that we cannot cooperate. One would have thought this would be the point, not to lord my success over others, or over myself lord successes of others, but rather to speak together, quietly, under the setting sun. Until Facebook supports this, I abstain, and expect next to nothing.

The Realm of Reason

20 March 2023

Have we tired yet of clocks and steamships?
Maybe old Corcyra, maybe Salamis can shake
these rusty bones, but maybe not. This realm
of reason, sacrilegious blend of Greece with Persia,
shall soon end, and maybe then new thoughts of empire
flecked with liberty shall emerge. But is it rather
that Hellenic freedom simply can't be suaged? Apollo
gives his dictates pure, non-partisan, so irony befalls
those who are partial to Apollo. It's a structural
deficiency belying all our thought. Let's think again,
with rightful honor paid to Greece, with due respect
for Cyrus, Xerxes, and with half a glance to China,
just to have a fuller picture.

So Very Greek

20 March 2023

It is sad, don't you know, to be living here now
and to know that the runner from Marathon
lost his way, for he founded an empire of thought,
not a tribe of free families, so very Greek was he,
and like no Greek had ever been before... I think Plato
would mind being kin to such savagery, such wars
as turn on their victors, devour them, then reign forever.
This is not Platonic, nor Roman, nor English,
but oh it was Greek, was so very Greek indeed.

Larger Accomplishments (Pragmatism)

20 March 2023

Must they be *true* to be useful, or is it
that laws grease the wheels of society,
giving us form, and through form, giving trust?
Perhaps this is their value, not cosmic obedience
to cosmic justice, but immanent trust in each other
which leads to much larger accomplishments.

As She Will

20 March 2023

She grasped my hand, and off we flew
toward a prior world, with gods yet true.
We turned to you, and said Remember
what was said by those lain hundreds dead
before the sun set sadly on the few
who still remained. For here was Greece,
where once a Lady clothed in stone
called forth at Athens for all Greeks,
and here was Ch'in where that same Lady
pulled her maidens to the River.
Know their stories if you dare to live as long as they
and burn forever after, but take care
that you do not become too loyal, for she comes
in many guises, as she will.

Not even sure who to ask

20 March 2023

Even the clock on my HVAC
adjusts itself automatically, like some
divine conspiracy of old, but these
gods of technology want us to
keep life ship shape, want each detail
aligned with some higher design
of pure reason. Whose reason? We ask
now pathetically, not even sure who to ask.

Saving Daylight

20 March 2023

When is there an end to it, the wailing drone of time, the fleeting hours, days or seconds of our lives, the nonstop blow of death's lone foghorn? Not in this life nor another. We must live among the vanishment, and live as best we can. But does it not belie our hubris that we dare tune time itself for maximal efficiency?

Plain and True

20 March 2023

I watch them working slowly,
barely knowing how they serve
the growing tyranny, the urge to please the people,
as in Greece so long ago. They are
no better, when libido dominandi reigns,
as it does reign, in Europe as before.
But Christian chains could not restrain the beast,
so what hope do we have? Some say
more earthbound hopes, like those of China's past,
to give all dignity, a place upon the stair.
No more enslaving, no more liberty,
but letting dialectic rest in peace.
Give each his duty plain and true.

At Eleusis

26 April 2023

Follow these steps, if you dare
descend here unaware, and be made known
before a *demos* that is known. First wander
here, then there, but watch! for grasping
fingers in the dark. They cannot harm you
more than life can harm you. Step here
through this opening, join these others, soon
you'll know. Behold! the goddess flies!
She rises from the tomb! It is Demeter,
goddess of the corn. Consider how the corn,
with many seeds, may grow, when this plant
sinks below. There is no other way.
Consider well, and be thus nourished,
threefold blessed by life, by birth,
and by their cousin death.

26 April 2023

If he would speak today, the Poet
must be modern, must be metal, but he
must as well be living. He must
vivify the modern soul.

Some Natures

26 April 2023

Some natures are harmful,
despite all theology to the contrary,
and we are responsible for knowing
the good, not the bad.

What time is this

26 April 2023

They are proud to have learned their lessons
and never question. I wince in their presence.
I have never learned their lessons. What time is this,
that comes when all are sleeping, like a cock about to crow?

On Whose Authority

26 April 2023

The people demand a show, like always,
but now ever ringing between their ears
growls a question: On whose authority? *Whose?*

Sources

26 April 2023

No more the uneducated masses,
now the miseducated masses,
squished in one mass by a craving
for universalizable maxims.
O Kant! Father Kant! Hast thou wrought this?
Or must we look deeper for sources?

The Question of Democracy

26 April 2023

The People are not worthy of their servants when those servants serve with honor, when "most people" rule the hearts of men, when servitude is servile and not grand. The People groan at honor, moan for pleasure, lack the common ground which makes men noble, who are products of that ground and of no other. Thus those fight for what produced them while the People (hear me!) claw and scratch the same.

But now what of it? Shall we have another war, or is it simply undecidable, this question of democracy? I say no war can answer what remains so fundamental. But why only *Greeks* and their inheritors have wrestled with this question is more likely to bear fruit, and bear it soon.

Something About Plato

26 April 2023

There's just something about Plato
that led to his preservation. Was it
the lofty ideals, or was it simply
his extra gear, the secret room of the mind
that would open to him, and him alone?
If the latter, we do well to praise him
but not to emulate him.

Only through turmoil
does genius bear fruit. Many could grow
but don't, because peace does not call out for
change, only troubles bring change,
only change summons genius, but genius
endures. We do well to take care
before summoning genius. We may not like
what it says.

Who are we?

26 April 2023

The peoples of the Mediterranean
were always pretending to be gods
or descended from gods or becoming
like gods, and one wonders how far
this can take us. If creatures
like us act like gods, it would
surely destroy us, but if we do not,
then who are we?

culmination

26 April 2023

You would think that by now
we'd be perfect, we've striven
so hard all these years
that no pain could emerge
which we could not destroy,
that with gods on Olympus
surrounded by heroes and victors
of various wars and games
we would celebrate, nectar
in one hand, machines in the other,
but why is this always just out of reach?

The Way of the Night

26 April 2023

Like no one's business, I entered
the place of the skull, on a mission
to root out those staining the temple.
'Twas a dark and stormy time in my mind,
but all indications say all is fine.
After some deliberation, prepared
for denial and banishment, into
the tomb I crept, and was swept
by a wind like no other, from beyond,
toward death, but then also toward
something outside of death, to some
origin speaking through dreams. I
believe it was something like truth,
but not nature, for nature cares little
for truth, or for us. It was empty,
but this was alluring, a void that could
drain the false fullness of things,
so I leapt, and some part of me
left me for ever, to wander the shores
of Elysium, or else to die
but to die in a way more refined,
with more grace, with aplomb,
in the way of the night.

Little Bird

26 April 2023

Little bird sings of the break of spring,
new wonders appear, but a soft note
of warning reminds her companions
that some dangers lurk past horizons.

Good Eyes

26 April 2023

I was born sighted in a tribe of the blind,
who, never seeing, are never aware that there
are things to be seen. I was born
nonetheless, and pay homage for that,
if for little that followed. With my eyes
I've seen man betray man, finding pleasure
in cruelty, time after time, but no wonder,
since wonderful things must be seen.
Would you like me to help with your unbelief?

Untold Misery

26 April 2023

How can there have been so much
and be so little remaining? Time
with its cup of lethe, panacea,
so they say. But what good is it,
being lost, without even wounds for guidance?

Wallow

26 April 2023

Who can stand them, obsessed
with appearing divine, only half aware
of humanity or of its frailty,
lost in the heavens pulled earthward
to wallow away from it all.

Duty

26 April 2023

There are those who accept the old Duty
and those who make smashing a Duty,
but where are those moving past Duty?

Some Other

26 April 2023

Upon the way backward
to what Plato meant
(it's for you, bon esprit, all for you)
in this desert I stand
with no road and no path and no map
and where even the sky is blank
and I wonder what anything means
in this way, with myself to blame
or to praise for the barren expanse,
but not satisfied owning it,
searching instead for some other
whose cause is as good as my own.

The Protestant

26 April 2023

The Protestant weeps
alone in the corner,
his own priest,
and not a very good one.

Contrition

26 April 2023

I believe we are waiting for Caesar,
although we won't like when he comes.
Diversity often breeds unity,
but by the sword, through an act of contrition.
If Greece, if Rome, if Persia, if England
succumbed to this, what hope have we?
Praise the emperor? Thus keep your head?

The Scientist

26 April 2023

The scientist pauses, haunched
like a cat of the mind, poised
for pouncing, emboldened by Truth
which has turned out to be a simple case
of precision in measurement. He is
ready for mysteries to explain themselves
clearly, distinctly, without hesitation.
But after the clock strikes five,
as he hangs up his lab coat,
a question arises which he
is unable to answer:
what are we to measure?
and how shall we choose?

Stop the Bombing

26 April 2023

Amazing isn't it, how easily one now
can say what once got one killed.
But if one or if many rebel, one
must ask, to what purpose? If done
as a duty and not mere licentiousness,
surely some pause is demanded, or even
required. So stop the bombing, so
Christ is risen, and so the new faith,
when it comes.

Monotheism

26 April 2023

Will monotheism suffice?
Or must we look under?
Revise the old questions,
discover the author(s) of nature.

Are they One? Or Many?
If many, are they equally wonderful?

Menagerie of Rules

26 April 2023

There are no universalizable maxims,
no fixed rules, no solid ground
which we could bring from place to place.
All rules are local, but perhaps there are
good habits, good technique, for those
who swim within the sea, that cold
menagerie of rules which never ends.

The Thin Veil

26 April 2023

How many graves will it take before
somebody notices? Aye, you will say
some have noticed before, but few feel
what the dying must feel. Let me tell you,
it is not less hostile than life, nor
more cold than compassionless love.
You will answer, but I cannot hear,
being rapt by the shimmering veil,
the thin veil that divides men from murder
and rustles against drums of war.

They May Be Right

26 April 2023

I was here before, but did not know it.
Now I know, but that has not made me any wiser.
See the lovers entwined on the beach before dawn.
Unassuming teachers, little did they know that I saw.
But rising beyond them the sea was a formless expanse.
The light broke through the horizon and cracked the surface.
I could not remember who I was waiting to meet.
It was like every dawn in uniqueness, though still being dawn.
As the lovers shuffled I saw ever clearer day coming.
It was and was not meant for them, nor for me.
The shadows grew longer but this time that just felt okay.
The lovers departed before the full sun was in sight.
I have never doubted the feeling that they may be right.

Where They Can See You

26 April 2023

Your feelings may threaten their power,
but always remember that they
once had feelings, before they were monsters,
and could feel again. Until then, remain wary,
and do not cross where they can see you.

Wait, Think, Speak

26 April 2023

Stillborn I fell through the silence of water
past life-forms and fishes uncouth to my eyes
and descended, awakening once more in Asia,
no longer afraid. She was cunning and charming
but little did I know she'd tempt me
to give myself up for her dream, that that dream
was the flower of five-thousand years. What was I
in her thrall? Just a subject of political
experimentation, unburdened of freedom, near dead
with remorse or from absence of light. I would
counter with energy pure from the true well
of Hellas, or if this too sickens, then
out of the well of humanity, some substance comes.
And I take it and groan at the weight of it,
knowing though that such is mine, throughout time,
and that only tomorrow will tell what we do here
but I for one lend time my hand and my ear,
and by this you will know me, for this is my sign,
this remembrance of time in its service despite
the loud claims that all clocks are manmade
and need manual winding. My silence
speaks volumes against these blasphemers,
who never could wait, think, or speak.

Index

A more tolerant order	172
A Platonist declares	91
A poem	31
A walk through a graveyard	38
After "A Late Walk" by Robert Frost	138
After Lincoln	55
After Reagan	74
After Tomorrow	130
Aftermath	39
Afterthought on the Romantics	118
Ahura Mazda (the Question Remains)	176
Aletheian	104
All Silence	125
Another ending	28
As Ever	126
As Like May Yet Be	163
As She Will	185
At Eleusis	189
At Sea	105
Ave Maris Stella	145
Back to the Mines	148
Beatific Visions	92
Belly of the Whale	93
Beyond Power	67
Birth	10
Child you are the water	29
Come Again	178
Compromise	154
Contrition	207
Countrified	33
Craftsman	107
Crickets	48
Crimson Days in the Depths of Time	143
culmination	198
Darkness Becomes You	141
Duty	204
Dwindle	169
Electricity	80
Elite Waters	157
Emerge	95

Emptiness That None Can Understand	166
Fading Feeling	83
Far Away	75
Feet of Rain	108
Fragments Shored Against Ruin	20
Freedom's End	139
Gettysburg	119
Good Eyes	201
Hegel	147
History	142
Hitler's Bunker	109
Homecoming	58
Horizons	158
I have wandered streets	16
I have withdrawn from the world	45
If he would speak today	190
In Any Case	144
In Memory	156
Industrial Man	96
Inner Harbor	17
It is not for me	131
Lady in the Dark	50
Lady in the Rain	110
Lady in the Temple	51
Larger Accomplishments (Pragmatism)	184
Let Go	84
Liberty and Justice	98
Light	85
Like No Angel	171
Lincoln's Memory	52
Little Bird	200
Longing	32
Lost Forest	66
Lyceum	86
Making Sausage	64
Marxists	155
Menagerie of Rules	211
Mingled Being	111
Monotheism	210
Mulch by the Scoop	87
Mysteries	41
Myth at Twilight	88
Near Mountains	99

Night Sweats of the American Dream	173
Nixon at the Threshold of the Lincoln Memorial	44
No Entry Beyond	132
No Reason	127
No Will to Deceive	136
Not even sure who to ask	186
Nutrition by Faith Alone	168
Old Flames	121
Old House	63
On this rock	112
On Whose Authority	193
One More Cave	42
One of Us	122
Only Begin	30
Out came a cry	37
Over the Atlantic	123
Perspicuity (For Example)	11
Persuasion	140
Phalanx of Mind	71
Phenomenology of Science	69
Plain and True	188
Planting Time	60
Reasonable Measure	100
Rest Unassured	167
Risible Time	128
Romance Revisited	14
"Romance Revisited," revisited	43
Rosie	46
Sandcastles	124
Saving Daylight	187
Saving Earth	72
Scents of the Divine	24
Science and Technology	89
Shattered Image, Fallen Breast	68
Sick With Struggle	164
Slumber Much Better	159
Small All the Same	180
So Very Greek	183
Socrates and Confucius	101
Some Natures	191
Some Other	205
Something About Plato	196
Song of Sophia	12

Sources	194
Specimens	160
Spring Cleaning	152
Stop the Bombing	209
Strangers	165
Streets I Never Knew	81
Such Surprises Must Be	113
Technology	76
The Bird in the Glue Trap	34
The Choir	25
The Drums of Alexander	179
The Enduring and Unchanging Dao	59
The Gospel According to Us	134
The Ground is Lava	114
The Lady	47
The man who knows	9
The New Frontier	115
The New Science	35
The New World	36
The Promise of the Lady	170
The Protestant	206
The Quest for the Immortal Self	174
The Question of Democracy	195
The Realm of Reason	182
The Scientist	208
The Secrets of Country Living	40
The Sound a Plant Makes	175
The Thin Veil	212
The Throne of Cyrus	177
The Way of the Night	199
The wind in the leaves	61
The Winds of Change	77
Theodicy	102
There are no words	18
There is too much noise	19
They May Be Right	213
Thing in Progress	133
Things Themselves	78
Think Not Absolutely	162
Thinking Deeply	116
Time	129
To Tell This To You, or Changing of the Gods	151
Too Playful	117

Tradition	57
Unauthorized thinking	79
Uncertain Times	137
Unfriendly	181
Untested Ways	135
Untold Misery	202
Valediction to Images	27
Virgin Queens	90
Vortex Afterglow	153
Wait For Another	161
Wait, Think, Speak	215
Wallow	203
Wandering Sheep	65
What calls for poetry?	82
What time is this	192
What we find by singing	62
Where They Can See You	214
White Shade	49
Who are they?	103
Who are we?	197
Who is in charge here	73
Why Obey?	149
Why Reason?	146
Words	70
You Are The Way	150