

I WANNA BE YOURS

by John Cooper Clarke

I wanna be your vacuum cleaner
Breathing in your dust
I wanna be your Ford Cortina
I will never rust
If you like your coffee hot
Let me be your coffee pot
You call the shots
I wanna be yours

I wanna be your raincoat
For those frequent rainy days
I wanna be your dreamboat
When you want to sail away
Let me be your teddy bear
Take me with you anywhere
I don't care
I wanna be yours

I wanna be your electric meter
I will not run out
I wanna be the electric heater
You'll get cold without
I wanna be your setting lotion
Hold your hair in deep devotion
Deep as the deep Atlantic ocean
That's how deep is my devotion

"How The Pope Is Chosen"

-- James Tate --

Any poodle under ten inches high is a toy.

Almost always a toy is an imitation
of something grown-ups use.

Popes with unclipped hair are called "corded popes."

If a Pope's hair is allowed to grow unchecked,
it becomes extremely long and twists
into long strands that look like ropes.

When it is shorter it is tightly curled.

Popes are very intelligent.

There are three different sizes.

The largest are called standard Popes.

The medium-sized ones are called miniature Popes.

I could go on like this, I could say:

"He is a squarely built Pope, neat,
well-proportioned, with an alert stance
and an expression of bright curiosity,"

but I won't. After a poodle dies

all the cardinals flock to the nearest 7-Eleven.

They drink Slurpies until one of them throws up
and then he's the new Pope.

He is then fully armed and rides through the wilderness alone,
day and night in all kinds of weather.

The new Pope chooses the name he will use as Pope,
like "Wild Bill" or "Buffalo Bill."

He wears red shoes with a cross embroidered on the front.

Most Popes are called "Babe" because
growing up to become a Pope is a lot of fun.

All the time their bodies are becoming bigger and stranger,
but sometimes things happen to make them unhappy.

They have to go to the bathroom by themselves,
and they spend almost all of their time sleeping.

Parents seem incapable of helping their little popes grow up.

Fathers tell them over and over again not to lean out of windows,
but the sky is full of them.

It looks as if they are just taking it easy,
but they are learning something else.

What, we don't know, because we are not like them.

We can't even dress like them.

We are like red bugs or mites compared to them.

We think we are having a good time cutting cartoons out of the paper,
but really we are eating crumbs out of their hands.

We are tiny germs that cannot be seen under microscopes.

When a Pope is ready to come into the world,
we try to sing a song, but the words do not fit the music too well.

Some of the full-bodied popes are a million times bigger than us.

They open their mouths at regular intervals.

They are continually grinding up pieces of the cross
and spitting them out. Black flies cling to their lips.

Once they are elected they are given a bowl of cream
and a puppy clip. Eyebrows are a protection

when the Pope must plunge through dense underbrush
in search of a sheep.

Consumed

by James Tate

Why should you believe in magic, pretend an interest in astrology or the tarot? Truth is, you are free, and what might happen to you today, nobody knows. And your personality may undergo a radical transformation in the next half hour. So it goes. You are consumed by your faith in justice, your hope for a better day, the rightness of fate, the dreams, the lies the taunts.—Nobody gets what he wants. A dark star passes through you on your way home from the grocery: never again are you the same—an experience which is impossible to forget, impossible to share. The longing to be pure is over. You are the stranger who gets stranger by the hour.

LITTLE GREEN WORM: A NOTE TO THE PRESIDENT

By Joan Baez

Since you are so comfortable
hiring people whose minds have
been hollowed out by worms,
I've been thinking about

a little green worm that has
worked its way into
your anterior insular cortex,
the part of the brain

where empathy originates.
Empathy is the ability to understand,
feel, and share the emotions of
another person.

It is like a muscle,
which is to say:
you can develop it with practice.
The little green worm quickly devoured yours.

He then munched onward
until he came to
the prefrontal cortex,
which is involved in

impulse control
and regulating social behavior.
It's meant to stop us from blurting out
vulgarity such as

"Grab her by the pussy" and
"Shithole countries" or accusing all
Mexican immigrants of being criminals,
rapists, and drug dealers.

There is one of your outbursts however,
which remains both
unfiltered and true:
"I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue

and shoot someone,
and I wouldn't lose any voters."
What's a little green worm to do
but munch on to the cerebrum,

which is the big one, responsible for thought,
language, memory, reasoning and learning,
for all the functions that make up basic
intelligence.

But oh shit: there's nothing there. ®

It Happens Like This

by James Tate

I was outside St. Cecilia's Rectory smoking a cigarette when a goat appeared beside me. It was mostly black and white, with a little reddish brown here and there. When I started to walk away, it followed. I was amused and delighted, but wondered what the laws were on this kind of thing. There's a leash law for dogs, but what about goats? People smiled at me and admired the goat. "It's not my goat," I explained. "It's the town's goat. I'm just taking my turn caring for it." "I didn't know we had a goat," one of them said. "I wonder when my turn is." "Soon," I said. "Be patient. Your time is coming." The goat stayed by my side. It stopped when I stopped. It looked up at me and I stared into its eyes. I felt he knew everything essential about me. We walked on. A policeman on his beat looked us over. "That's a mighty fine goat you got there," he said, stopping to admire. "It's the town's goat," I said. "His family goes back three hundred years with us," I said, "from the beginning." The officer leaned forward to touch him, then stopped

and looked up at me. "Mind if I pat him?" he asked. "Touching this goat will change your life," I said. "It's your decision." He thought real hard for a minute, and then stood up and said, "What's his name?" "He's called the Prince of Peace," I said. "God! This town is like a fairy tale. Everywhere you turn there's mystery and wonder. And I'm just a child playing cops and robbers forever. Please forgive me if I cry." "We forgive you, Officer," I said. "And we understand why you, more than anybody, should never touch the Prince." The goat and I walked on. It was getting dark and we were beginning to wonder where we would spend the night.

Uneasy about the Sounds of Some Night-Wandering Animal

by James Tate

On the way to work this morning, the newsman on the radio said, "A big part of reality has been removed, it has been reported. Details are not available at this time. It's just that, I am told, you will find things different on your drive to work this morning. Some roads will be missing, whole areas of the city may be gone. However, the good news is, no signs of violence have been detected." I turned the radio off. There wasn't the usual rush hour traffic, for which I was grateful. I wasn't even sure I was on the right road. There were empty fields where I had remembered rows and rows of apartment buildings. Then I went into a long tunnel, and I had no memory of there being a tunnel. When I came out of it, there was nothing, or, rather, I guess it was a desert, as I had never been in the desert before. I looked around for signs of the city. A jack-rabbit scurried across the road, and up ahead a policeman was leaning against his motorcycle. I slowed down instinctively, and then pulled over to stop. "Good morning, officer," I said. "I seem to have taken a wrong turn. Could you tell me where I

am?" "Not exactly," he said. "This seems to be a new area. It wasn't here before. We're still trying to identify it. I suggest you drive with caution, because, well, we have no information on it as yet." I noticed that he was about to cry. "Well, thanks," I said. My stomach was sinking. I was certain to be late to work. I didn't know what to do. Part of me wanted to drive on, to see what was out there, and part of me wanted to turn back, though I wasn't certain of what I would find there. So I drove on for miles and miles, the sand dunes shifting and stirring, and the occasional hawk or buzzard circling overhead. Then the road disappeared, and I was forced to stop, and looked behind me, but that road, too, was gone, blown over by sand in a few seconds. I got out of the car, glad that I had some water with me. I looked around, and it was all the same. Nothing made any sense. I tried to call Harvey at the office on my cell phone. I couldn't believe when he answered. "Harvey, it's Carl. I'm out here in this new place. It's all sand, and there are no roads," I said. "We'll come get you," he said. "But I don't know where I am, I mean, I don't even know if it exists," I said. "Don't be ridiculous, Carl, of course it exists. Just look around and give me something to go by," he said. "There's nothing here. Oh, there was a tunnel some miles back, and a policeman leaning up against his motorcycle. That's the last thing I saw," I said. "Was it the old Larchmont tunnel?" he said. "I don't know, it could have been. I was lost already," I said. "Okay, I'm going to come get you. Just stay put," he said. I waited and waited. And then I just started walking. I know I wasn't supposed to, but I was restless and hoped I might find a way out. I had lost

sight of my car and had no idea where I was. The sun was blinding me and I couldn't think straight. I barely knew who I was.

And, then, as if by miracle, I heard Harvey's voice call my name.

I looked around and couldn't see him. "Carl, Carl, I'm here," he said. And I still couldn't see him. "We've fallen off. We're in the fallen off zone," he said. "What? What does that mean?"

I said. "We've separated. It may be temporary. It's too soon to tell," he said. "But where are we. We must be in some relation to something," I said. "I think we're parallel," he said. "Parallel to what?" I said. "Parallel to everything that matters," he said.

"Then that's good," I said. I still couldn't see him, and night was coming on. It was a parallel night, much like the other, and that was some comfort, cold comfort, as they like to say.

Everything But Thomas

by James Tate

I walked out of the bank just as I realized it was being held up. I didn't know what to do, run or hide in the bushes. So, without thinking, I turned around and walked back in the bank. The thief saw me and said, "Get down on the ground!" I followed his instructions and got down on the floor. Then he pointed to me and said, "You, get up. You're going with me." I got up and followed him. We got in his car and sped away. We sped past other cars at first, through stoplights, until we finally came to a parking lot. We got out of the car and quickly got into another, it was a black Chevy. Then we took off at a normal speed and drove that way from then on, stopping at stoplights and obeying all the rules. We drove out past the city limits and into the countryside. If I didn't know any better I'd say it was a pretty ride, beautiful trees and quaint little cottages. We drove for about an hour, then pulled off on a little lane and followed that for another twenty minutes. Then we stopped by a small cottage and got out. We walked in and turned on the lights. He said, "Sit down." I did and he got out a rope and tied me up. Then I watched him go about his business. He took his gun out of his shoulder holster. He made some coffee, he lowered the blinds. He was nervous, but he also felt good about how things went. I also felt strangely secure, though I was a captive and tied up. He looked at me and said, "What are you thinking?" I said, "I feel pretty

good, considering." "You should. Everything's gone as planned so far," he said. "They don't know who I am and we got away pretty neatly as far as I can tell." "Good. We'll just hunker down here and no one will find us," I said. He went to the stove and started cooking up some hot dogs. He loosened my ropes so I could eat with him. "This is a nice place," I said. "Yeah, it was my grandfather's," he said. After lunch he tied me back up. Then he said, "I'm going to take a nap, alright?" I said, "Sure." And he slept for a couple of hours. After several weeks together he decided to untie me. I helped around the house, chopping wood, sweeping the floors, occasionally cooking something. We were a good couple together. I grew very fond of him. And I know he liked me. This was our home, and neither one of us ever wanted to go back. There was a little grocery store about five miles away, and that was all we needed. We hunted deer and one was all we needed to make it through the winter. Then one day Thomas got sick. He wouldn't let me call a doctor, and a week later he died. To my surprise he left me everything, the money from the bank robbery and the cabin. I stayed on there for the rest of my life, never marrying, never having children. I had everything I wanted, everything I needed, everything but Thomas.

My Felisberto

by James Tate

My felisberto is handsomer than your mergotroid,
although, admittedly, your mergotroid may be the wiser of the two.
Whereas your mergotroid never winces or quails,
my felisberto is a titan of inconsistencies.
For a night of wit and danger and temptation
my felisberto would be the obvious choice.
However, at dawn or dusk when serenity is desired
your mergotroid cannot be ignored.
Merely to sit near it in the garden
and watch the fabrications of the world swirl by,
the deep-sea's bathymetry wash your eyes,
not to mention the little fawns of the forest
and their flip-floppy gymnastics, ah, for this
and so much more your mergotroid is infinitely preferable.
But there is a place for darkness and obscurity
without which life can sometimes seem too much,
too frivolous and too profound simultaneously,
and that is when my felisberto is needed,

is longed for and loved, and then the sun can rise again.
The bee and the hummingbird drink of the world,
and your mergotroid elaborates the silent concert
that is always and always about to begin.

An ad in the newspaper said that a local author would be signing his new book at the bookstore today. I didn't even know we had any local authors. I was going to be downtown anyway, so I decided to drop in and see what he looked like. He was short and fat and ugly, but all kinds of beautiful women were flirting with him and laughing at every little joke he made. Even though I didn't know anything about his book, I wished I had written it. A man came up to me and said, "I hated it when the little girl died. I just couldn't stop crying." "Thank God for the duck," I said. He took a step back from me. "I don't remember the duck," he said. "Well, then, I'm afraid you missed the whole point of the book. The duck is absolutely central, it's the veritable linchpin of the whole denouement," I said. (I had learned that word in high school, and now it served me well.) "But what about the little girl?" the man asked, with a painful look of bewilderment on his face. "She should have been shot a hundred pages earlier," I said. "I don't think I like you," the man said, and walked away clutching his book. I looked over at the author. He was signing a young woman's cleavage, and the other women were laughing and pulling open their blouses to be signed. I had never even thought of writing a novel. Now, my mind was thrashing about. The man I had offended earlier walked up to me and offered me a glass of wine. "If I may ask you, sir, why were you so rude to me?" he said. I looked up from the abyss and said, "Because I am nothing. Because I am a speck of dust floating in infinite darkness. Because you have feelings and you care. Do you understand me now?" "Perfectly," he said. "Cheers!"

You've never known
a single Indian
who wasn't painted
onto a football helmet
or branded in chrome
on a tailgate,
but there you go,
off mashing the landscape
like some edge-city explorer,
flinging yourself toward
new worlds beyond the driveway,
Lewis and Clark
with a seat belt.
Go ahead, you trampling trooper,
you goose-stepping little
Godzilla, you shining beast
of raging fashion,
riding the big teeth
of your tires as if you
would ever follow a dirt road
anywhere but to a car wash.
This is America,
and you're free to drive
anything you can buy
but I will tell you:

the only way today is to
buy your way through,
be bigger, be better,
be a bully, be a barger,
be sure you're safe from the poor,
bustle your way through
each day's bombardment
with the muscle of royalty.
You've got the power
to bring back the monarchy
four fat tires at a time.
Go anywhere. You're entitled.
You have squasher's rights.
Onward! Accelerate,
you brawny bruising winner,
you self-saluting junta on wheels,
you reclaimer of gold-bricked streets.
Democracy is for people
stuck in small cars
and God has never ruled
through traffic laws.
Get used to the feeling
of having your way.
Each broad cut of the steering wheel
is your turn at conquest,

you've got wide-bodied citizenship,
you've gained Custer's Revenge:
caissons packed with children and soccer balls
coasting across the plowed prairie,
history remodeled with one great
blaring of jingles and horns:

Hail Citizen King!

Hail the unswerving settler!

Hail the rule of logo!

Hail Jeep Cherokee!

Michael Donaghy

LOCAL 32B | 146

(US National Union of Building Service Workers)

The rich are different. Where we have doorknobs,
they have doormen—like me, a cigar store Indian
on the Upper East Side, in polyester, in August.

As the tenants tanned in Tenerife and Monaco
I stood guard beneath Manhattan's leaden light
watching poodle turds bake grey in half an hour.

Another hot one, Mr Rockefeller!

An Irish doorman foresees his death,
waves, and runs to help it with its packages.

Once I got a cab for Pavarotti. No kidding.

No tip either. I stared after him down Fifth
and caught him looking after me, then through me,
like Samson, eyeless, at the Philistine chorus—

Yessir, I put the tenor in the vehicle.

And a mighty tight squeeze it was.

Why did she cross the road?
She should have stayed in her little cage,
shat upon by her sisters above her,
shitting on her sisters below her.

God knows how she got out.
God sees everything. God has his eye
on the chicken, making her break
like the convict headed for the river,

sloshing his way through the water
to throw off the dogs, raising
his arms to starlight to praise
whatever isn't locked in a cell.

He'll make it to a farmhouse
where kind people will feed him.
They'll bring green beans and bread,
home-brewed hops. They'll bring

the chicken the farmer found
by the side of the road, dazed
from being clipped by a pickup,
whose delicate brain stem

• • •

he snapped with a twist,
whose asshole his wife stuffed
with rosemary and a lemon wedge.
Everything has its fate,

but only God knows what that is.
The spirit of the chicken will enter the convict.
Sometimes, in his boxy apartment,
listening to his neighbors above him,
annoying his neighbors below him,
he'll feel a terrible hunger
and an overwhehning urge
to jab his head at the television over and over.

William Stafford

AT THE UN-NATIONAL MONUMENT
ALONG THE CANADIAN BORDER | 157

This is the field where the battle did not happen,
where the unknown soldier did not die.

This is the field where grass joined hands,
where no monument stands,
and the only heroic thing is the sky.

Birds fly here without any sound,
unfolding their wings across the open.
No people killed—or were killed—on this ground
hallowed by neglect and an air so tame
that people celebrate it by forgetting its name.

Bill Knott

POEM | 152

Fingerprints look like ripples
because time keeps dropping
another stone into our palm.

The one I didn't go on.

I was thirteen,
and they were older.
I'd met them at the public pool. I must

have given them my number. I'm sure

I'd given them my number,
knowing the girl I was. . .

It was summer. My afternoons
were made of time and vinyl.
My mother worked,
but I had a bike. They wanted

to go for a ride.
Just me and them. I said
okay fine, I'd
meet them at the Stop-n-Go
at four o'clock.
And then I didn't show.

I have been given a little gift—
something sweet
and inexpensive, something
I never worked or asked or said
thank you for, most
days not aware
of what I have been given, or what I missed—

because it's that, too, isn't it?
I never saw those boys again.
I'm not as dumb
as they think I am

but neither am I wise. Perhaps

it is the best
afternoon of my life. Two
cute and older boys
pedaling beside me—respectful, awed. When we

turn down my street, the other girls see me ...

Everything as I imagined it would be.

Or, I am in a vacant field. When I
stand up again, there are bits of glass and gravel
ground into my knees.
I will never love myself again.
Who knew then
that someday I would be

thirty-seven, wiping
crumbs off the kitchen table with a sponge, remembering
them, thinking
of this—

Gee, You're So Beautiful That It's Starting to Rain

—Richard Brautigan

Oh, Marcia,
I want your long blonde beauty
to be taught in high school,
so kids will learn that God
lives like music in the skin
and sounds like a sunshine harpsichord.
I want high school report cards
to look like this:

Playing with Gentle Glass Things

A

Computer Magic

A

Writing Letters to Those You Love

A

Finding out about Fish

A

Marcia's Long Blonde Beauty

A+!

Poem on the Passing of Lou Reed ...

*New Scar
Right Over My
Heart
by Anne Waldman*

*"We are the
insects of someone
else's thought."
—from "We Are the
People" by Lou Reed*

takes the breath
away
steady raga
reticulated
sound downtown
sound
rounded and
turning and
pulse a subtle
strident
firing sound down
rebounded ritual
tone down
again . . . a round
again elfin effort
lou lou lou loop
again
youth's pure-light
in maelstrom haze
of fabulous
below 14th Street
belletristic
atavistic time,
a world age,
radical, spiked
where you figure
it out,
cavalier
spin it out
instinct questions
narrative
branches of veins
work together
in a ritual form
tai chi will find
life in

Andy, put your
teeth in us
a catalyst
workaholic's
thrum
long DOM nights
just down the block
Mary Woronov
cracks
a whip
now better jump
through hoop of fire
work
in new light, Nico
part of allegory of
struggle we're in,
"the women in the
room"
serial poem
walk into this room,
walk into
next room,
pulsing
never close
the door
into room beyond
room
inside room
fun house mirror
part of the *epikos*,
odyssey of body
time
ballade, rondeau
part of mystery
play,
or medieval tryst
an Elizabethan
drama
for your
Renaissance
thoughts
& attendant
sexy characters
flamed out or
flaming within
re-constituted in
transmigratory

void
a rock song, is ying
is yang?
many personae
approximate
tribulations and
deep loves of
Dante
you are T. S. Eliot's
fisher king
dented, distressed
grail of hope
how empty
is the cup,
how full a draught
warm elixir to
jester-oblivion
rock-poet, turn it
around
make magic
as free spirit
denizen
mystical way
out of hell
a left hand
path
gaping maw of the
hungry wasteland
ghost
realm
William Burroughs
summons
you give
account of demons
or slink through
pale corridors
rock it in
crazy-wisdom
obstinate fun
power-sylphs
live in the
silky shadows
lust-*realm* and
anything you want
to possess, imbibe,
a sweet
lusting body

while seat gets hot
animal realm's
predatory drive
through the animals
will
smile at you—
something to tell
you
in samadhi,
come into
*our yelping theta
zone . . .*
passionate under
a sweeping
zeitgeist
gods war over your
head
carnavalesque
backdrop's blood
evisceration
but hip to the street
broken vertebrae
of our century
skips a beat
aches
how stretch
back in tendon
empathy,
get tough sullen
professional
obviate
the cause, our
hands
are clean
or torqued
Lou you never say
so
but go into it
into *form*
into *voice*
into *imago*
*the martial flying
warrior
sword strapped to
back*
roll up sleeves
get all guitar-techy

science of the art is
imagination
what has also
come
down
panoramicly
cool
"intellectual"
humanity's edge
plays
loud decibels
kicks under
peoples' stories,
urban mix,
metabolic
wry irony
underneath:
poetry's heart
everybody knows
someone
who is everybody's
other
story who is
some other one's
fool
emotion
everybody says
as Candy says
knows everybody
who
is everybody's
squeeze
one's connection
one's bliss
and now what
are we inside
crux of,
my man,
*white veins running
through cheeks*
what sky gazing at
waits at desire
on the neuron path
where light
hasn't reached us
but already
happened

anticipates a
future
without you & with
you
asides, cracks
generative
darkness as
cells churn
pale eye retina
gleams then blurs
vocals
create
ontogeny, a voice
more blue
counter-
revolutionary
civilians
*in a voice? did
voice
own it? the time?
our own Kulchur
with a capital "K"?
how lucky
you are
New York we
invented you
create you in
our wild image
get down and listen
don't just
weep the gone
times
remember through
meme loops
a native son
his streets
lou lou lou lou
loosens
his mortal loop,
meets death in love
with softness
tai chi—the
boundless first
part of
survival's trickster
Masquerade.*

Mentor —Timothy Murphy

For Robert Francis

Had I known, only known
when I lived so near,
I'd have gone, gladly gone
foregoing my fear
of the wholly grown
and the nearly great.
But I learned alone,
so I learned too late.

This Is Just To Say

BY WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

The Red Wheelbarrow

BY WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens



An Apology

—F.J. Bergmann

Forgive me
for backing over
and smashing
your red wheelbarrow.

It was raining
and the rear wiper
does not work on
my new plum-colored SUV.

I am also sorry
about the white
chickens.

Hate Poem

—Julie Sheehan

I hate you truly. Truly I do.
Everything about me hates everything about you.
The flick of my wrist hates you.
The way I hold my pencil hates you.
The sound made by my tiniest bones were they trapped
in the jaws of a moray eel hates you.
Each corpuscle singing in its capillary hates you.

Look out! Fore! I hate you.

The blue-green jewel of sock lint I'm digging
from under my third toenail, left foot, hates you.
The history of this keychain hates you.
My sigh in the background as you explain relational databases
hates you.
The goldfish of my genius hates you.
My aorta hates you. Also my ancestors.

A closed window is both a closed window and an obvious
symbol of how I hate you.

My voice curt as a hairshirt: hate.
My hesitation when you invite me for a drive: hate.
My pleasant "good morning": hate.
You know how when I'm sleepy I nuzzle my head
under your arm? Hate.
The whites of my target-eyes articulate hate. My wit
practices it.
My breasts relaxing in their holster from morning
to night hate you.
Layers of hate, a parfait.
Hours after our latest row, brandishing the sharp glee of hate,
I dissect you cell by cell, so that I might hate each one
individually and at leisure.
My lungs, duplicitous twins, expand with the utter validity
of my hate, which can never have enough of you,
Breathlessly, like two idealists in a broken submarine.

God Says Yes To Me –Kaylin Haught

I asked God if it was okay to be melodramatic
and she said yes

I asked her if it was okay to be short
and she said it sure is

I asked her if I could wear nail polish
or not wear nail polish
and she said honey

she calls me that sometimes
she said you can do just exactly
what you want to

Thanks God I said

And is it even okay if I don't paragraph
my letters

Sweetcakes God said
who knows where she picked that up
what I'm telling you is

Yes Yes Yes

The Death of Santa Claus

—Charles Harper Webb

He's had the chest pains for weeks,
but doctors don't make house
calls to the North Pole,

he's let his Blue Cross lapse,
blood tests make him faint,
hospital gown always flap

open, waiting rooms upset
his stomach, and it's only
indigestion anyway, he thinks,

until, feeding the reindeer,
he feels as if a monster fist
has grabbed his heart and won't

stop squeezing. He can't
breathe, and the beautiful white
world he loves goes black,

and he drops on his jelly belly
in the snow and Mrs. Claus
tears out of the toy factory

wailing, and the elves wring
their little hands, and Rudolph's
nose blinks like a sad ambulance

light, and in a tract house
in Houston, Texas, I'm 8,
telling my mom that stupid

kids at school say Santa's a big
fake, and she sits with me
on our purple-flowered couch,

and takes my hand, tears
in her throat, the terrible
news rising in her eyes.

The Grammar Lesson

—Steve Kowitz

A noun's a thing. A verb's the thing it does.
An adjective is what describes the noun.
In "The can of beets is filled with purple fuzz"

of and *with* are prepositions. *The's*
an article, a *can's* a noun,
a noun's a thing. A verb's the thing it does.

A can *can* roll—or not. What isn't was
or might be, *might* meaning not yet known.
"Our can of beets *is* filled with purple fuzz"

is present tense. While words like *our* and *us*
are pronouns—i.e. *it* is moldy, *they* are icky brown.
A noun's a thing; a verb's the thing it does.

Is is a helping verb. It helps because
filled isn't a full verb. *Can's* what *our* owns
in "Our can of beets is filled with purple fuzz."

See? There's almost nothing to it. Just
memorize these rules...or write them down!
A noun's a thing, a verb's the thing it does.
The can of beets is filled with purple fuzz.

Love Poem With Toast —Miller Williams

Some of what we do, we do
to make things happen,
the alarm to wake us up, the coffee to perc,
the car to start.

The rest of what we do, we do
trying to keep something from doing something,
the skin from aging, the hoe from rusting,
the truth from getting out.

With yes and no like the poles of a battery
powering our passage through the days,
we move, as we call it, forward,
wanting to be wanted,
wanting not to lose the rain forest,
wanting the water to boil,
wanting not to have cancer,
wanting to be home by dark,
wanting not to run out of gas,

as each of us wants the other
watching at the end,
as both want not to leave the other alone,
as wanting to love beyond this meat and bone,
we gaze across breakfast and pretend.

Fault —Ron Koertge

In the airport bar, I tell my mother not to worry. No one ever tripped and fell into the San Andreas Fault. But as she dabs at her dry eyes, I remember those old movies where the earth does open.

There's always one blonde entomologist, four deceitful explorers, and a pilot who's good-looking but not smart enough to take off his leather jacket in the jungle.

Still, he and Dr. Cutie Bug are the only ones who survive the spectacular quake because they spent their time making plans to go back to the Mid-West and live near his parents

while the others wanted to steal the gold and ivory then move to Los Angeles where they would rarely call their mothers and almost never fly home and when they did for only a few days at a time.

Grammar —Tony Hoagland

Maxine, back from a weekend with her boyfriend,
smiles like a big cat and says
that she's a conjugated verb.

She's been doing the direct object
with a second person pronoun named Phil,
and when she walks into the room,
everybody turns:

some kind of light is coming from her head.
Even the geraniums look curious,
and the bees, if they were here, would buzz
suspiciously around her hair, looking
for the door in her corona.

We're all attracted to the perfume
of fermenting joy,

we've all tried to start a fire,
and one day maybe it will blaze up on its own.
In the meantime, she is the one today among us
most able to bear the idea of her own beauty,
and when we see it, what we do is natural:
we take our burned hands
out of our pockets,
and clap.

Because after sitting out for a spell
 he's back with a degree in accounting and a high
 paying position in one of the leading pharma-
 ceutical corporations in the country
 and aspirations of owning that exotic
 yellow sports car, license plate
 EVIL. And like Dennis Meng at Sycamore
 Chevrolet stakes his reputation
 on his fully reconditioned used cars.
 I stake my reputation on telling you
 Todd Bernstein means business this time,
 girls. No more of this being passed
 over for abusive alcoholic football
 stars. He's got a velour shirt now.
 No more of your excuses—if he wants you,
 you're there. None of this I'm washing
 my hair Friday night nonsense—come on,
 you think Todd Bernstein's going to fall
 for that? He knows you're not studying, not
 busy working on some local political
 campaign, not having the guy who played
 Cockroach on *The Cosby Show* over
 for dinner, not writing any great American
 novel. He's seen your stuff for God's sake,
 and it's simply nothing more than mediocre,
 long prose poems with titles like
 "The Falling" and "Crucible" and "Waking
 to Death" that force impossible metaphors,
 despairing about love and womanhood
 and how bad your life is even though
 you grew up happily in suburban America,
 or at least as happily as anyone can grow up
 in suburban America, which normally, you know,
 consists of the appearance of happiness while
 your dad is doing three secretaries
 on the side and your mom pretends not to know
 and brags to the entire town about how you're
 an actor about to star in a sitcom about the mis-
 adventures of a cable TV repairperson
 who, while out on a routine installation
 one day, accidentally electrically blasts
 herself into the living room of a family
 of barbarian warlords on a planet near
 Alpha Centauri who force her into slavery
 before sending her on a pillage mission
 to a planet of Cloxnors who capture her
 and place her in a torture institution
 where she meets a vulnerable Meeb whom
 she convinces, because of her cable TV
 repairperson skills, to let her become nanny
 to its impressionable Meeblets just before
 it's about to rip off her limbs with its ferocious
 abnons and devour her. The results,
 according to your mom, are hilarious, but
 come on, you and I both know the story is
 just so predictable. And Todd knows damn well
 your writing doesn't pull off
 any metaphors for the happiness that was
 taken from you by some dude who played
 the guitar and called himself a musician
 when all he could really do was play
 a couple of chords and sing about true love
 and alligators and how the alligator
 represents true love which somehow
 explains why somebody cut open
 an alligator one time in Florida
 to find a golfer. There's just no fooling
 Todd. Sure he'll act like he's interested,
 that's Todd Bernstein, and he'll make
 remote claims that he too has written
 or been artistic at some point in his life,
 but Todd Bernstein knows all you girls
 really want is a piece of good old
 Todd Bernstein. No longer will any
 strange auras enter the bedroom
 during sex and keep him from maintaining
 an erection, no longer will any women
 walk out on him repulsed. If anybody's
 walking out after sex, it'll be
 Todd Bernstein. I can assure you.
 He won't be humiliating himself by falling
 down a flight of stairs in front of a group
 of Japanese tourists anymore, but rather
 coaxing entire masses of women into his bed-
 room. Because that's Todd Bernstein. He's on
 the move. And he wants you to know, girls,
 that he's well aware you *certainly can't learn*
Korean sitting around here which is why
 he's out there right now, preparing
 for the slew of women just beyond his sexual
 horizon, spray-painting GIRLS, LOOK OUT
 FOR TODD BERNSTEIN on the side
 of a Village Pantry.

Advice from the Experts —Bill Knott

I lay down in the empty street and parked
 My feet against the gutter's curb while from
 The building above a bunch of gawkers perched
 Along its ledges urged me don't, don't jump.

Mice by Billy Collins

I was normally alone in my childhood,
a condition that gave me time
to observe the activities of the many mice
that had infested our house
one winter night when the house
next door burned to a crisp.

They all ran across the snow-
covered lawn to find places
to hide in their new home;
then later they discovered the kitchen,
which was like Columbus discovering
America, because the kitchen was already there.

I became their only spectator
like someone alone in a movie house.
I could even tell some of them apart,
but I resisted giving them names,
afraid they would all disappear
if our house happened to burst into flames.

O, anonymous companions,
appearing in a hole in the wall,
always scurrying out of my reach,
so many hours I would watch
your comings and goings,
before someone called me down to dinner;

you were the beginning of cinema for me
and one of the reasons
I am the way I am this morning—
an elderly child with a tummy
full of oatmeal and a mouse on my shoulder,
standing on its hind legs, whispering in my ear.

Going for a Walk as the Drugs Kick In

by Billy Collins

It's Friday, and the sun's all over everything
after a long week of steady rain.
The clouds have moved on
to hover over other counties.
The irises are showing their white faces
streaked with yellow and purple.
The bees are out again
making their floral visitations.
The beaver swims with a stick in his mouth.
The otter is looking out his window.
The butterfly doesn't seem to know where it's going.
So ample and worthy is the air around me,
I am only able to take in one bird at a time.
A fruit tree has started to sing.
The little town is farther away than ever.
I have my arm around the otter,
holding him by the shoulder.
The scene out his window is so plentiful
and everything is billowing with our love.

THE REFRIGERATOR AWAKES

Vladimir Nabokov



Crash!

And if darkness could sound, it would sound like this giant
waking up in the torture house, trying to die
and not dying, and trying
not to cry and immediately crying
that he will, that he will, that he will do his best
to adjust his dark soul to the pressing request
of the only true frost,
and he pants and he gasps and he rasps and he wheezes:
*ice is the solid form when the water freezes;
a volatile liquid (see "Refrigerating")
is permitted to pass into evaporating
coils, where it boils,
which somehow seems wrong,
and I wonder how long
it will rumble and shudder and crackle and pound;
Scudder, the Alpinist, slipped and was found
half a century later preserved in blue ice
with his bride and two guides and a dead edelweiss;
a German has proved that the snowflakes we see
are the germ cells of stars and the sea life to be;
hold
the line, hold the line, lest its tale be untold;
let it amble along through the thumping pain
and horror of dichlorodisomethingmethane,
a trembling white heart with the frost froth upon it,
Nova Zembla, poor thing, with that B in her bonnet,
stunned bees in the bonnets of cars on hot roads,
Keep it Kold, says a poster in passing, and lo,
loads,
of bright fruit, and a ham, and some chocolate cream,
and three bottles of milk, all contained in the gleam
of that wide-open white
god, the pride and delight
of starry-eyed couples in dream kitchenettes,
and it groans and it drones and it toils and it sweats—
Shackleton, pemmican, penguin, Poe's Pym—
collapsing at last in the criminal
night.*

June 6, 1942

ODE TO A MODEL

Vladimir Nabokov



I have followed you, model,
in magazine ads through all seasons,
from dead leaf on the sod
to red leaf on the breeze,

from your lily-white armpit
to the tip of your butterfly eyelash,
charming and pitiful,
silly and stylish.

Or in kneesocks and tartan
standing there like some fabulous symbol,
parted feet pointing outward
—pedal form of akimbo.

On a lawn, in a parody
of Spring and its cherry-tree,
near a vase and a parapet,
virgin practicing archery.

Ballerina, black-masked,
near a parapet of alabaster.
“Can one—somebody asked—
rhyme ‘star’ and ‘disaster’?”

Can one picture a blackbird
as the negative of a small firebird?
Can a record, run backward,
turn “repaid” into “diaper”?

Can one marry a model?
Kill your past, make you real, raise a family,
by removing you bodily
from back numbers of Sham?

October 8, 1955

Poems of Philip Larkin

Days

What are days for?

Days are where we live.

They come, they wake us

Time and time over.

They are to be happy in:

Where can we live but days?

Ah, solving that question

Brings the priest and the doctor

In their long coats

Running over the fields.

Reference Back-

That was a pretty one, I heard you call
From the unsatisfactory hall
To the unsatisfactory room where I
Played record after record, idly,
Wasting my time at home, that you
Looked so much forward to.

Oliver's *Riverside Blues*, it was. And now
I shall, I suppose, always remember how
The flock of notes those antique negroes blew
Out of Chicago air into
A huge remembering pre-electric horn
The year after I was born
Three decades later made this sudden bridge
From your unsatisfactory age
To my unsatisfactory prime.

Truly, though our element is time,
We are not suited to the long perspectives
Open at each instant of our lives.
They link us to our losses: worse,
They show us what we have as it once was,
Blindly undiminished, just as though
By acting differently we could have kept it so.

This Be The Verse

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn
By fools in old-style hats and coats,
Who half the time were sappy-stern
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any kids yourself.

Annus Mirabilis

Sexual intercourse began
In nineteen sixty-three
(Which was rather late for me) –
Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban
And the Beatles' first LP.

Up till then there'd only been
A sort of bargaining,
A wrangle for a ring,
A shame that started at sixteen
And spread to everything.

Then all at once the quarrel sank:
Everyone felt the same,
And every life became
A brilliant breaking of the bank,
A quite unlosable game.

So life was never better than
In nineteen sixty-three
(Though just too late for me) –
Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban
And the Beatles' first LP.

Money

Quarterly, is it, money reproaches me:

‘Why do you let me lie here wastefully?

I am all you never had of goods and sex.

You could get them still by writing a few cheques.’

So I look at others, what they do with theirs:

They certainly don’t keep it upstairs.

By now they’ve a second house and car and wife:

Clearly money has something to do with life

– In fact, they’ve a lot in common, if you enquire:

You can’t put off being young until you retire,

And however you bank your screw, the money you save

Won’t in the end buy you more than a shave.*

* ‘Larkin could have chosen . . . anything everyday and inexpensive . . . the reference is to the rites that attend the preparation of a corpse for burial. Just as the finger- and toenails grow after death, so does the beard, and it is still common practice to clean-shave the cadaver’s face.’

The Life with a Hole in it

When I throw back my head and howl
People (women mostly) say
*But you've always done what you want,
You always get your own way*
– A perfectly vile and foul
Inversion of all that's been.
What the old ratbags mean
Is I've never done what I don't.

So the shit in the shuttered château
Who does his five hundred words
Then parts out the rest of the day
Between bathing and booze and birds
Is far off as ever, but so
Is that spectacled schoolteaching sod
(Six kids, and the wife in pod,
And her parents coming to stay) . . .

Life is an immobile, locked,
Three-handed struggle between
Your wants, the world's for you, and (worse)
The unbeatable slow machine
That brings what you'll get. Blocked,
They strain round a hollow stasis
Of havings-to, fear, faces.
Days sift down it constantly. Years.

The Mower-

The mower stalled, twice; kneeling, I found
A hedgehog jammed up against the blades,
Killed. It had been in the long grass.

I had seen it before, and even fed it, once.
Now I had mauled its unobtrusive world
Unmendably. Burial was no help:

Next morning I got up and it did not.
The first day after a death, the new absence
Is always the same; we should be careful
Of each other, we should be kind
While there is still time.

Party Politics

I never remember holding a full drink.

My first look shows the level half-way down.

What next? Ration the rest, and try to think

Of higher things, until mine host comes round?

Some people say, best show an empty glass:

Someone will fill it. Well, I've tried that too.

You may get drunk, or dry half-hours may pass.

It seems to turn on where you are. Or who.

Chant

A trainload of tanks is leaving the town
A ship outside the harbour is going down
The sky's full of aeroplanes overhead
And the streets are full of soldiers that are going to be dead.

Down to the factory go dad and mother
They go in one door, shells come out the other,
A letter told my sister she'd got to leave home
With a ticket for a very distant aerodrome.

Bought a paper printed on human skin
That told the living to keep smiling and the dead to grin,
Sat in the cinema and saw the News
Thought it was a horror film and looked down at my shoes.

Picked up a revolver and put it down again,
Travelled eighty miles in an express train,
Saw a poster staring with a picture of a bomb
Saw it was the station I'd started from.

Dreamed I was walking through a field of corn
And it was all men and women, chained where they were born,
The blades of the reaper turned in the sun
And nothing I could do would help anyone.

Went up on a mountain, looked as far as I could see,
The world was as dead as a petrified tree,
Only the sea moved up the shore
And all was winter for evermore.

[Untitled dogerrel]

After a particularly good game of rugger
A man called me a bugger
Merely because in a loose scrum
I had my cock up his bum.

Spoonerism

Ugly, horrid, foul, I am;
I met the virgin at tea:
Angel, sweetness, divinity,
Dare I smile?
I love you, dearest, let me;
My filthy hope is strong.

I'll show you my poems, the little charm
That I unworthy . . .
She spat on the ground where she had stood.

I rode all the way . . .

I rode all the way on the top of a London bus:
When we reached the terminus I rode back again.
I sat in the front like a driver
And turned the people this way and that
In and out of the traffic;
Stopping in time, and ignoring them when the bus was full:
Then I went home and played like God with my toys.

If approached by Sir Cyril Norwood,
Any respectable whore would
Charge double
For her trouble.

Address to Life, by a Young Man Seeking a Career—

Freckling summers have crossed my brow

To the number of just eighteen;

And I know that I should be deciding now

To what profession I lean;

All others with whom I have spent my youth

Have chosen their own avenue,

[cont.]

Yet (though I'm ashamed to tell you the truth)
There's nothing that *I* want to do.

Life, you are busy, I appreciate that,
Arranging for everyone;
But I really think we should have a chat
About what I am going to become;
I've really tried to discover your aims
Whatever their nature and kind,
But, although not the sort of a fellow who blames
– I think I've slipped out of your mind.

Do you want me to work and to gain a degree
And to live in the shade of the spires?
Do you want me to study philosophy
Or catalogue human desires?
Do you want me to be the authority
On Milton and Dryden and Pope?
If this is the future you've mapped out for me,
Then why don't you give me some hope?

(You don't, I suppose, really propose
To make me a student of science:
If that is your wish, I'm afraid I oppose
With a gently stubborn defiance;
For everyone knows that I fall in a doze
When faced with a real microscope;
And if you chose this, the facts interpose,
And thus there is really no hope.)

And Classics as well can all go to hell
For I've acted upon your advice;
I've again and again thrown them all down the drain
For I never supposed they were nice.
Thus it is clear that a scholar's career
Doesn't seem to be your little plan;
But why won't you speak? For every week
Is pushing me nearer the Pan.

Or do you intend I should regally spend
A fortune, and live like a king?
To live between Greece and Paris and Nice?
I don't think I should like such a thing:
– And first you must give the means thus to live,

Before I can safely smirk;
For at present you see it does look to me
As if I shall have to work.

Life, what is your aim? I say it again:
Direct and control my inquiries;
I've poured out my woes in poems and prose
And even in several diaries;
See, I invite you to teach me to write
On my psychological squalls;
You will not comply, and, although I do try,
The result is invariably

Therefore I am not a don or a swot
Or a dandy who grinds down the poor;
I'm not such a blighter to think I'm a writer
When others so obviously are.
Do you think, perhaps, I'm one of the chaps
Who is either a Bull or a Bear?
Although it is funny, when it comes to money
I'm really no earthly good there.

Although not an Eric, shall I be a cleric
And sermonise every Sunday?
That would be a trick that would make me quite sick
From Saturday right through to Monday;
I've tried being good, and I don't think I could,
And I never get very excited,
So I let fall a tear for the Bishop's career
To which I was never invited.

And similarly, I shan't be an M.P.
Although I could burble quite well;
If you think of the Army – well, Life, you're just barmy
– Though of course one can never quite tell –
I belong to no faction of people of action
Whether pacifist, fascist or red,
In actual fact, I never could act,
Because I am more than half dead.

This long catalogue is a wearisome job
And it's one that you, Life, ought to do:
My predestined fate I quietly await,
The choosing is all up to you.

Whatever proposal, if at my disposal,
I'll follow with loyalty blind;
But the earth's getting colder, and I'm growing older –
So please won't you make up your mind?

Postscript 1943

I'm sorry to say, that as life looks today,
I'm going to reside out in Wellington,
Where everyone's rude, and ashamed of a nude,
And nobody's heard of Duke Ellington;
Life, you aren't a god, you're a bloody old sod
For giving me such an employment
'Cos in such a bad job only pulling my knob
Will bring me the slightest enjoyment.

End—

My train draws out, and the last thing I see
Is my three friends turning from the light,
And I am left to travel through the night
With this one thought for company:
Even a king will find himself alone,
Calling for songs one night, old songs, will find
The guests departed, nothing left behind
Except the silence, and a clean-picked bone.

Neurotics

No one gives you a thought, as day by day
You drag your feet, clay-thick with misery.
None think how stalemate in you grinds away,
Holding your spinning wheels an inch too high
To bite on earth. The mind, it's said, is free:
But not your minds. They, rusted stiff, admit
Only what will accuse or horrify,
Like slot-machines only bent pennies fit.

So year by year your tense unfinished faces
Sink further from the light. No one pretends
To want to help you now. For interest passes
Always towards the young and more insistent,
And skirts locked rooms where a hired darkness ends
Your long defence against the non-existent.

How to Win the Next Election

Prison for Strikers,
Bring back the cat,
Kick out the niggers,
How about that?

Trade with the Empire,
Ban the Obscene,
Lock up the Commies,
God Save the Queen.

Bun's Outing

Saturday morning
I go for the meat,
Body all aching
Likewise the feet,
Fools at my elbow
Gormlessly greet,
Shopping is hell
In Stupidity Street.

The Way We Live Now

(to be recited in a clear Welsh voice)

I let a fart in the street and a woman looked round;
I pissed on the fire, and got myself covered with ash;
I had half an hour with a whore and came out in a rash,
So I let my sperm fall in the brim of an old hat I found.

I vomited over my shoes in the bogs at the Pheasant;
I slipped in the road, and came down with my hand on some slime;
Life is performing these actions time after time
Till Death makes our body smell worse than it does at present.

Send No Money by Philip Larkin

Standing under the fobbed
Impendent belly of Time
Tell me the truth, I said,
Teach me the way things go.
All the other lads there
Were itching to have a bash,
But I thought wanting unfair:
It and finding out clash.

So he patted my head, booming Boy,
There's no green in your eye:
Sit here and watch the hail
Of occurrence clobber life out
To a shape no one sees -
Dare you look at that straight?
Oh thank you, I said, Oh yes please,
And sat down to wait.

Half life is over now,
And I meet full face on dark mornings
The bestial visor, bent in
By the blows of what happened to happen.
What does it prove? Sod all.
In this way I spent youth,
Tracing the trite untransferable
Truss-advertisement, truth

High Windows by Philip Larkin

When I see a couple of kids
And guess he's fucking her and she's
Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm,
I know this is paradise

Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives--
Bonds and gestures pushed to one side
Like an outdated combine harvester,
And everyone young going down the long slide

To happiness, endlessly. I wonder if
Anyone looked at me, forty years back,
And thought, That'll be the life;
No God any more, or sweating in the dark

About hell and that, or having to hide
What you think of the priest. He
And his lot will all go down the long slide
Like free bloody birds. And immediately

Rather than words comes the thought of high windows:
The sun-comprehending glass,
And beyond it, the deep blue air, that shows
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is endless.

This Be The Verse by Philip Larkin
They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn
By fools in old-style hats and coats,
Who half the time were soppo-stern
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any kids

The Whitsun Weddings by Philip Larkin

That Whitsun, I was late getting away:
Not till about
One-twenty on the sunlit Saturday
Did my three-quarters-empty train pull out,
All windows down, all cushions hot, all sense
Of being in a hurry gone. We ran
Behind the backs of houses, crossed a street
Of blinding windscreens, smelt the fish-dock; thence
The river's level drifting breadth began,
Where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet.

All afternoon, through the tall heat that slept
For miles inland,
A slow and stopping curve southwards we kept.
Wide farms went by, short-shadowed cattle, and
Canals with floatings of industrial froth;
A hothouse flashed uniquely: hedges dipped
And rose: and now and then a smell of grass
Displaced the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth
Until the next town, new and nondescript,
Approached with acres of dismantled cars.

At first, I didn't notice what a noise
The weddings made
Each station that we stopped at: sun destroys
The interest of what's happening in the shade,
And down the long cool platforms whoops and skirls
I took for porters larking with the mails,
And went on reading. Once we started, though,
We passed them, grinning and pomaded, girls
In parodies of fashion, heels and veils,
All posed irresolutely, watching us go,

As if out on the end of an event
Waving goodbye
To something that survived it. Struck, I leant
More promptly out next time, more curiously,
And saw it all again in different terms:
The fathers with broad belts under their suits
And seamy foreheads; mothers loud and fat;
An uncle shouting smut; and then the perms,
The nylon gloves and jewellery-substitutes,
The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres that

Marked off the girls unreally from the rest.
Yes, from cafés
And banquet-halls up yards, and bunting-dressed
Coach-party annexes, the wedding-days
Were coming to an end. All down the line
Fresh couples climbed aboard: the rest stood round;
The last confetti and advice were thrown,
And, as we moved, each face seemed to define
Just what it saw departing: children frowned
At something dull; fathers had never known

Success so huge and wholly farcical;
The women shared

The secret like a happy funeral;
While girls, gripping their handbags tighter, stared
At a religious wounding. Free at last,
And loaded with the sum of all they saw,
We hurried towards London, shuffling gouty of steam.
Now fields were building-plots, and poplars cast
Long shadows over major roads, and for
Some fifty minutes, that in time would seem

Just long enough to settle hats and say
I nearly died,
A dozen marriages got under way.
They watched the landscape, sitting side by side
- An Odeon went past, a cooling tower, And
someone running up to bowl - and none
Thought of the others they would never meet
Or how their lives would all contain this hour.
I thought of London spread out in the sun,
Its postal districts packed like squares of wheat:

There we were aimed. And as we raced across
Bright knots of rail
Past standing Pullmans, walls of blackened moss
Came close, and it was nearly done, this frail
Travelling coincidence; and what it held
stood ready to be loosed with all the power
That being changed can give. We slowed again,
And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled
A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.

Aubade by Philip Larkin

I work all day, and get half-drunk at night.
Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.
In time the curtain-edges will grow light.
Till then I see what's really always there:
Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,
Making all thought impossible but how
And where and when I shall myself die.
Arid interrogation: yet the dread
Of dying, and being dead,
Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.

The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse
-- The good not done, the love not given, time
Torn off unused -- nor wretchedly because
An only life can take so long to climb
Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never;
But at the total emptiness for ever,
The sure extinction that we travel to
And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,
Not to be anywhere,
And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.

This is a special way of being afraid
No trick dispels. Religion used to try,
That vast moth-eaten musical brocade
Created to pretend we never die,
And specious stuff that says No rational being
Can fear a thing it will not feel, not seeing
That this is what we fear -- no sight, no sound,
No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,
Nothing to love or link with,
The anaesthetic from which none come round.

And so it stays just on the edge of vision,
A small unfocused blur, a standing chill
That slows each impulse down to indecision.
Most things may never happen: this one will,
And realisation of it rages out
In furnace-fear when we are caught without
People or drink. Courage is no good:
It means not scaring others. Being brave
Lets no one off the grave.
Death is no different whined at than withstood.

Slowly light strengthens, and the room takes shape.
It stands plain as a wardrobe, what we know,
Have always known, know that we can't escape,
Yet can't accept. One side will have to go.
Meanwhile telephones crouch, getting ready to ring
In locked-up offices, and all the uncaring
Intricate rented world begins to rouse.
The sky is white as clay, with no sun.
Work has to be done.
Postmen like doctors go from house to house.

Church Going by Philip Larkin

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,
Move forward, run my hand around the font.
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new-
Cleaned or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
"Here endeth" much more loudly than I'd meant.
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do,
And always end much at a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate, and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Or, after dark, will dubious women come
To make their children touch a particular stone;
Pick simples for a cancer; or on some
Advised night see walking a dead one?
Power of some sort or other will go on
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;
But superstition, like belief, must die,
And what remains when disbelief has gone?
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

A shape less recognizable each week,
A purpose more obscure. I wonder who
Will be the last, the very last, to seek
This place for what it was; one of the crew

That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?
Or will he be my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
So long and equably what since is found
Only in separation -- marriage, and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these -- for whom was built
This special shell? For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here;

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

The Trees by Philip Larkin

The trees are coming into leaf
Like something almost being said;
The recent buds relax and spread,
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again
And we grow old? No, they die too,
Their yearly trick of looking new
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh
In full grown thickness every May.
Last year is dead, they seem to say,
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

Love Again by Philip Larkin

Love again: wanking at ten past three
(Surely he's taken her home by now?),
The bedroom hot as a bakery,
The drink gone dead, without showing how
To meet tomorrow, and afterwards,
And the usual pain, like dysentery.

Someone else feeling her breasts and cunt,
Someone else drowned in that lash-wide stare,
And me supposed to be ignorant,
Or find it funny, or not to care,
Even ... but why put it into words?
Isolate rather this element

That spreads through other lives like a tree
And sways them on in a sort of sense
And say why it never worked for me.
Something to do with violence
A long way back, and wrong rewards,
And arrogant eternity.

A Study Of Reading Habits by Philip Larkin

When getting my nose in a book
Cured most things short of school,
It was worth ruining my eyes
To know I could still keep cool,
And deal out the old right hook
To dirty dogs twice my size.

Later, with inch-thick specs,
Evil was just my lark:
Me and my coat and fangs
Had ripping times in the dark.
The women I clubbed with sex!
I broke them up like meringues.

Don't read much now: the dude
Who lets the girl down before
The hero arrives, the chap
Who's yellow and keeps the store
Seem far too familiar. Get stewed:
Books are a load of crap.

Toads by Philip Larkin

Why should I let the toad work
Squat on my life?
Can't I use my wit as a pitchfork
And drive the brute off?

Six days of the week it soils
With its sickening poison -
Just for paying a few bills!
That's out of proportion.

Lots of folk live on their wits:
Lecturers, lispers,
Losels, loblolly-men, louts-
They don't end as paupers;

Lots of folk live up lanes
With fires in a bucket,
Eat windfalls and tinned sardines-
they seem to like it.

Their nippers have got bare feet,
Their unspeakable wives
Are skinny as whippets - and yet
No one actually starves.

Ah, were I courageous enough
To shout Stuff your pension!
But I know, all too well, that's the stuff
That dreams are made on:

For something sufficiently toad-like
Squats in me, too;
Its hunkers are heavy as hard luck,
And cold as snow,

And will never allow me to blarney
My way of getting
The fame and the girl and the money
All at one sitting.

I don't say, one bodies the other
One's spiritual truth;
But I do say it's hard to lose either,
When you have both.

The Old Fools by Philip Larkin

What do they think has happened, the old fools,
To make them like this? Do they somehow suppose
It's more grown-up when your mouth hangs open and drools,
And you keep on pissing yourself, and can't remember
Who called this morning? Or that, if they only chose,
They could alter things back to when they danced all night,
Or went to their wedding, or sloped arms some September?
Or do they fancy there's really been no change,
And they've always behaved as if they were crippled or tight,
Or sat through days of thin continuous dreaming
Watching the light move? If they don't (and they can't), it's strange;
Why aren't they screaming?

At death you break up: the bits that were you
Start speeding away from each other for ever
With no one to see. It's only oblivion, true:
We had it before, but then it was going to end,
And was all the time merging with a unique endeavour
To bring to bloom the million-petalled flower
Of being here. Next time you can't pretend
There'll be anything else. And these are the first signs:
Not knowing how, not hearing who, the power
Of choosing gone. Their looks show that they're for it:
Ash hair, toad hands, prune face dried into lines -
How can they ignore it?

Perhaps being old is having lighted rooms
Inside you head, and people in them, acting
People you know, yet can't quite name; each looms
Like a deep loss restored, from known doors turning,
Setting down a lamp, smiling from a stair, extracting
A known book from the shelves; or sometimes only
The rooms themselves, chairs and a fire burning,
The blown bush at the window, or the sun's
Faint friendliness on the wall some lonely
Rain-ceased midsummer evening. That is where they live:
Not here and now, but where all happened once.
This is why they give

An air of baffled absence, trying to be there
Yet being here. For the rooms grow farther, leaving
Incompetent cold, the constant wear and tear
Of taken breath, and them crouching below
Extinction's alp, the old fools, never perceiving
How near it is. This must be what keeps them quiet:
The peak that stays in view wherever we go
For them is rising ground. Can they never tell
What is dragging them back, and how it will end? Not at night?
Not when the strangers come? Never, throughout
The whole hideous inverted childhood? Well,
We shall find out.

Continuing To Live by Philip Larkin

Continuing to live -- that is, repeat
A habit formed to get necessities --
Is nearly always losing, or going without.
It varies.

This loss of interest, hair, and enterprise --
Ah, if the game were poker, yes,
You might discard them, draw a full house!
But it's chess.

And once you have walked the length of your mind, what
You command is clear as a lading-list.
Anything else must not, for you, be thought
To exist.

And what's the profit? Only that, in time,
We half-identify the blind impress
All our behaviors bear, may trace it home.
But to confess,

On that green evening when our death begins,
Just what it was, is hardly satisfying,
Since it applied only to one man once,
And that one dying.

Maturity by Philip Larkin

A stationary sense... as, I suppose,
I shall have, till my single body grows
Inaccurate, tired;
Then I shall start to feel the backward pull
Take over, sickening and masterful -
Some say, desired.

And this must be the prime of life... I blink,
As if at pain; for it is pain, to think
This pantomime
Of compensating act and counter-act
Defeat and counterfeit, makes up, in fact
My ablest time.

Ignorance by Philip Larkin

Strange to know nothing, never to be sure
Of what is true or right or real,
But forced to qualify or so I feel,
Or Well, it does seem so:
Someone must know.

Strange to be ignorant of the way things work:
Their skill at finding what they need,
Their sense of shape, and punctual spread of seed,
And willingness to change;
Yes, it is strange,

Even to wear such knowledge - for our flesh
Surrounds us with its own decisions -
And yet spend all our life on imprecisions,
That when we start to die
Have no idea why.

Autobiography At An Air-Station by Philip Larkin

Delay, well, travellers must expect
Delay. For how long? No one seems to know.
With all the luggage weighed, the tickets checked,
It can't be long... We amble too and fro,
Sit in steel chairs, buy cigarettes and sweets
And tea, unfold the papers. Ought we to smile,
Perhaps make friends? No: in the race for seats
You're best alone. Friendship is not worth while.

Six hours pass: if I'd gone by boat last night
I'd be there now. Well, it's too late for that.
The kiosk girl is yawning. I fell stale,
Stupified, by inaction - and, as light
Begins to ebb outside, by fear, I set
So much on this Assumption. Now it's failed.

[Untitled]

We are the night-shite shifters shifting the shite by night and shouting
BALLOCKS

They make a lovely stew

BALLOCKS

They're very good for you

ARSEHOLES

Wrapped up in parcels

And labelled 'Arseholes

In parcels

For you'.

Philip Larkin

On the Death of My Mother's Cat

Noelle Kocof

I'd like to write a good poem,
An honest poem. A poem without
Melodrama or death in it. But it
Seems that everything has death
In it these days, and for that I am
Truly sad. I'd like to write a poem
About my father, but I never knew
My father. I'd like to write a poem
About a tree house, but I was never
In a tree house. But this empty bowl,
What is my relationship to it? That
I wonder, more so than what makes
This tidy watered-downness cover
Us. The imitative fallacy is oh so—
I wonder what the chaos of the sun was
To her eyes before they closed.

Geography of the Forehead

by Ron Koertge

Everyone thinks the brain is so complicated,
but let's look at the facts. The frontal lobe,
for example, is located in the front! And
the temporal lobe is where the clock is.
What could be simpler?

The hippocampal fissure is where big, dumb
thoughts camp, while at the Fissure of Rolando
dark-skinned men with one gold earring lie
around the fire and play guitars.

The superior frontal convolution is where
a lot of really nice houses are set back off
a twisty road, while the inferior frontal
convolution is a kind of trailer park, regularly
leveled by brainstorms.

The area of Broca is pretty much off limits.
And if you know Broca, you know why.

Limericks

by Gary Johnson

There was an old lady of Queens
Who survived on wieners and beans.
Wearing Army surplus,
Riding the bus,
And stealing from vending machines.

A misanthrope living in Raleigh
Believed human friendship was folly
But he did get it on
With a trumpeter swan
And was fond of a miniature collie.

An old fellow lived in St. James
Whose parents were in silver frames
And looked down from the wall
And if he swore at all,
Their pictures burst into flames.

An old fellow up in Two Harbors
No longer bothered with barbers.
He let his hair grow
Ten feet or so
And wore it on overhead arbors.

Ice Cream Stop
by Shel Silverstein

The circus train made an ice cream stop
At the fifty-two-flavor ice cream stand.
The animals all got off the train
And walked right up to the ice cream man.

"I'll take Vanilla," yelled the gorilla.
"I'll take Chocolate," shouted the ocelot.
"I'll take the Strawberry," chirped the canary.
"Rocky Road," croaked the toad.
"Lemon and Lime," growled the lion.

Said the ice cream man, "Til I see a dime.
You'll get no ice cream of mine."

Then the animals snarled and screeched and growled
And whinnied and whimpered and hooted and howled
And gobbled up the whole ice cream stand,
All fifty-two flavors
(Fifty-three with Ice Cream Man).

Looking (or the Auger of Alzheimer's)
by W.D. Snodgrass

What was I looking for today?
All that poking under the rugs,
Peering under the lamps and chairs,
Or going from room to room that way,
Forever up and down the stairs
Like someone stupid with sleep or drugs.

Everywhere I was, was wrong.
I started turning the drawers out, then
I was staring in at the icebox door
Wondering if I'd been there long
Wondering what I was looking for.
Later on, I think I went back again.

Where did the rest of the time go?
Was I down cellar? I can't recall
Finding the light switch, or the last
Place I've had it, or how I'd know
I didn't look at it and go past.
Or whether it's what I want, at all.

Nothing Is Lost
by Noel Coward

Deep in our sub-conscious, we are told
Lie all our memories, lie all the notes
Of all the music we have ever heard
And all the phrases those we loved have spoken,
Sorrows and losses time has since consoled,
Family jokes, out-moded anecdotes
Each sentimental souvenir and token
Everything seen, experienced, each word
Addressed to us in infancy, before
Before we could even know or understand
The implications of our wonderland.
There they all are, the legendary lies
The birthday treats, the sights, the sounds, the tears
Forgotten debris of forgotten years
Waiting to be recalled, waiting to rise
Before our world dissolves before our eyes
Waiting for some small, intimate reminder,
A word, a tune, a known familiar scent
An echo from the past when, innocent
We looked upon the present with delight
And doubted not the future would be kinder
And never knew the loneliness of night.

In the Hospital
by George Garrett

Here everything is white and clean
as driftwood. Pain's localized
and suffering, strictly routine,
goes on behind a modest screen.

Softly the nurses glide on wheels,
crackle like windy sails, smelling of soap,
I'm needled and the whole room reels.
The Fury asks me how I feel

and, grinning turns to the brisk care
of an old man's need, he who awake
is silent, at the window stares,
sleeping, like drowning, cries for air.

And finally the fever like a spell
my years cast off. I notice now
nurse's firm buttocks, the ripe swell
of her breasts. It seems I will get well.

Next visitors with magazines;
they come whispering as in church.
The old man looks away and leans
toward light. Dying, too, is a routine.

I pack my bag and say goodbyes.
So long to nurse and this Sargasso Sea.
I nod to him and in his eyes
read, raging, the seabird's lonely cries.

To the Student Who Asked Why He Earned a "C" on an Essay about Love
by Clint Margrave

Because love has its own grammar,
its own sentences,
some that run-on too long,
others just fragments.
It uses a language
not always appropriate
or too informal,
and often lacks clarity.

Love is punctuated all wrong,
changes tenses abruptly,
relies heavily
on the first person,
can be redundant,
awkward,
full of unnecessary repetition.

Every word is compounded.
Every phrase, transitional.

Love doesn't always know the difference
between lie and lay,
its introductions sometimes
lack a well-developed thesis,
its claims go unfounded,
its ad-hominem attacks
call in question
its authority.

With a style that's inconsistent,
a voice either too critical
or too passive,
love is a rough draft
in constant need of revision,
whose conclusion
rarely gives any sense
of closure,
or reveals the lingering
possibilities of a topic
that always expects high praise,
and more often than not
fails to be anything
but average.

String Theory
by Ronald Wallace

I have to believe a Beethoven
string quartet is not unlike
the elliptical music of gossip:
one violin excited
to pass its small story along
to the next violin and the next
until, finally, come full circle,
the whole conversation is changed.

And I have to believe such music
is at work at the deep heart of things,
that under the protons and electrons,
behind the bosons and quarks,
with their bonds and strange attractors,
these strings, these tiny vibrations,
abuzz with their big ideas,
are filling the universe with gossip,
the unsung art of small talk

that, not unlike busybody Beethoven,
keeps us forever together, even
when everything's flying apart.

Think and Do
by Ron Padgett

I always have to be doing something, accomplishing something, fixing something, going somewhere, feeling purposeful, useful, competent—even coughing, as I just did, gives me the satisfaction of having “just cleared something up.” The phone bill arrives and minutes later I’ve written the check. The world starts to go to war and I shout, “Hey, wait a second, let’s think about this!” and they lay down their arms and ruminate. Now they are frozen in postures of thought, like Rodin’s statue, the one outside Philosophy Hall at Columbia. His accomplishments are muscular. How could a guy with such big muscles be thinking so much? It gives you the idea that he’s worked all his life to get those muscles, and now he has no use for them. It makes him pensive, sober, even depressed sometimes, and because his range of motion is nil, he cannot leap down from the pedestal and attend classes in Philosophy Hall. I am so lucky to be elastic! I am so happy to be able to think of the word elastic, and have it snap me back to underwear, which reminds me: I have to do the laundry soon.

Soporific Jungles

Noella Koca?

These are the days where fire
Stings the eyes. Meat gets
Crisp, the giraffe rings out.
Too fast the lemming bands
Marching two by two into blonde.
A lone palm tree sparkles with the wonderment
Of a girl, obvious and bright in the heraldic air.
No one cares, in this real jungle of buildings,
Stickball bat splinters and handball halves.
A cigarette is all she needs
To plug the dream-mares in.

Ex-Boyfriends
by Kim Addonizio

They hang around, hitting on your friends
or else you never hear from them again.
They call when they're drunk, or finally get sober,

they're passing through town and want dinner,
they take your hand across the table, kiss you
when you come back from the bathroom.

They were your loves, your victims,
your good dogs or bad boys, and they're over
you now. One writes a book in which a woman

who sounds suspiciously like you
is the first to be sadistically dismembered
by a serial killer. They're getting married

and want you to be the first to know,
or they've been fired and need a loan,
their new girlfriend hates you,

they say they don't miss you but show up
in your dreams, calling to you from the shoeboxes
where they're buried in rows in your basement.

Some nights you find one floating into bed with you,
propped on an elbow, giving you a look
of fascination, a look that says I can't believe

I've found you. It's the same way
your current boyfriend gazed at you last night,
before he pulled the plug on the tiny white lights

above the bed, and moved against you in the dark
broken occasionally by the faint restless arcs
of headlights from the freeway's passing trucks,

the big rigs that travel and travel,
hauling their loads between cities, warehouses,
following the familiar routes of their loneliness.

Suicides

by Faith Shearin

There was the one who walked into a river
with her pockets full of stones and the one
who started her car with the garage door closed,
determined to drive herself elsewhere.

The youngest went into the kitchen
and placed her head where she had
so often placed chickens or hams.
These were the women whose voices
I carried in my backpacks, whose books
moved with me from one city to another
and, one day, I realized I had outlived
all of them. I was sad that they could
not describe the other world,
that they offered no map to old age.
Was it dangerous to write? I began
to walk more carefully beside rivers,
to eat cold food, to let someone else
back the car out of the driveway.

???

When Dave calls from California
to tell me his girlfriend is pregnant,
it was an accident
but she wants to keep it anyway,

although Dave's not so sure, he has his doubts—
in fact, when he really thinks about it,
not in this lifetime
nor in any foreseeable lifetime
does he see himself actually becoming a dad—

I realize the two of them are about to embark
upon a long and dangerous pilgrimage
through a wilderness called Confusion,
leading to a scorching desert called Pain,
and down into a rocky valley
called Couples Counseling.

They're x-raying their relationship
like a couple of art collectors
trying to figure out if the Rembrandt
they bought last month is a fake.

They're giving their love the third-degree
under a hot and blinding light,
and by God they better get some answers.

Meanwhile, every day
that tongueless little sachet of cells
is finding more and more articulate ways
of saying, What about me?

But I'm just strolling in my garden
with a glass of cold white wine,
watching the daisies wave their yellow flags
from that beautiful country
called Not My Problem.

Wincing at the Beautiful

by Paul Hostovsky

So my friend Phil is telling me how
he can't get a date
how he loves women and how
they're always giving him looks
so I ask him what kind of looks
so he winces at the beautiful
braless young woman passing by
at that particular propitious moment
giving her a look of such
longing and longevity
that she returns his look with a look
that kills his entire family tree
from the roots to the unimagined
blossoms of the great grandchildren shriveling
on his shriveling bough
and I think I've diagnosed his problem now
and I think of quoting some lines from Rilke
but on second thought I think
a sports metaphor might serve him better
so I steer the conversation round to basketball
and the three second rule
which says you can only stand inside
the key for three seconds
before they blow the whistle
they're just blowing the whistle on you Phil
for breaking the three second rule
for standing there with your eyes
popping out like basketballs
it's a game like any other I tell him
then I ask him if he wants to score
and now that I have his attention
I throw in those lines from Rilke
I tell him that beauty is nothing
but the beginning of terror
we're still just able to bear
and the reason we adore it so
is that it serenely disdains to destroy us
and he winces again and this time
it's at the beauty of those lines
or maybe their truth which hits him
like a three-pointer now
that Rilke hits all the way from Germany
at a distance of a hundred years

Song on The End of The World

by Czeslaw Milosz

On the day the world ends
A bee circles a clover,
A Fisherman mends a glimmering net.
Happy porpoises jump in the sea,
By the rainspout young sparrows are playing
And the snake is gold-skinned as it it should always be.

On the day the world ends
Women walk through fields under their umbrellas
A drunkard grows sleepy at the edge of a lawn,
Vegetable peddlers shout in the street
And a yellow-sailed boat comes nearer the island,
The voice of a violin lasts in the air
And leads into a starry night.

And those who expected lightning and thunder
Are disappointed.
And those who expected signs and archangels' trumps
Do not believe it is happening now.
As long as the sun and the moon are above,
As long as the bumblebee visits a rose
As long as rosy infants are born
No one believes it is happening now.

Only a white-haired old man, who would be a prophet,
Yet is not a prophet, for he's much too busy,
Repeats while he binds his tomatoes:
No other end of the world there will be,
No other end of the world there will be.

Used Book
by Julie Kane

What luck—an open bookstore up ahead
as rain lashed awnings over Royal Street,
and then to find the books were secondhand,
with one whole wall assigned to poetry;
and then, as if that wasn't luck enough,
to find, between Jarrell and Weldon Kees,
the blue-on-cream, familiar backbone of
my chapbook, out of print since '83—
its cover very slightly coffee-stained,
but aging (all in all) no worse than flesh
through all those cycles of the seasons since
its publication by a London press.
Then, out of luck, I read the name inside:
The man I thought would love me till I died.

What I Know
by Lee Robinson

What I know for sure is less and less:
that a hot bath won't cure loneliness.

That bacon is the best bad thing to chew
and what you love may kill you.

The odd connection between perfection
and foolishness, like the pelican
diving for his fish.

How silly sex is.
How, having it, we glimpse
our holiness.

What I know is less and less.
What I want is more and more:

you against me—
your ferocious tenderness—

love like a star,
once small and far,
now huge, now near.

Modern Declaration
by Edna St. Vincent Millay

I, having loved ever since I was a child a few things, never
having wavered
In these affections; never through shyness in the houses of the
rich or in the presence of clergymen· having denied these
loves;
Never when worked upon by cynics like chiropractors having
grunted or clicked a vertebra to the discredit of these
loves;
Never when anxious to land a job having diminished them by
a conniving smile; or when befuddled by drink
Jeered at them through heartache or lazily fondled the fingers
of their alert enemies; declare

That I shall love you always.
No matter what party is in power;
No matter what temporarily expedient combination of allied
interests wins the war;
Shall love you always.

What She Taught Me

by Marjorie Saiser

She taught me linking verbs, predicate nouns,
long division, have a Kleenex ready, an apple
a day. She taught me three-quarter time, Greenwich

Mean Time. She taught me do re mi, Mexicali Rose,
Rose, Rose, my Rose of San Antone. She taught me
Peas Peas Peas Peas, Eating Goober Peas.
She taught me that a peanut is a goober pea

in certain parts of the world, that it is fine
for things to be different in different parts
of the world, no two goobers alike in their

dry red skins, their pock-marked pods,
that there are latitudes and longitudes we have
never seen, that she had seen some part,
and so would I, that I need not

forego either the swings or baseball, that spelling
is on Friday and it is OK to learn more
than one list, including the hard list; it is not

showing off—it is using what you have.
That using what you have will not please
everybody, that marrying a man of a different stripe

is not a popular thing in a small town in the fifties,
and divorcing and coming home with a child
is even worse, and that you
get up every morning anyway,
and do your work.

Meditation on Ruin

by Jay Hopler

It's not the lost lover that brings us to ruin, or the barroom brawl,
or the con game gone bad, or the beating
Taken in the alleyway. But the lost car keys,
The broken shoelace,
The overcharge at the gas pump
Which we broach without comment—these are the things that
eat away at life, these constant vibrations
In the web of the unremarkable.

The death of a father—the death of the mother—
The sudden loss shocks the living flesh alive! But the broken
pair of glasses,
The tear in the trousers,
These begin an ache behind the eyes.
And it's this ache to which we will ourselves
Oblivious. We are oblivious. Then, one morning—there's a
crack in the water glass—we wake to find ourselves undone.

Complaint

by James Wright

She's gone. She was my love, my moon or more.
She chased the chickens out and swept the floor,
Emptied the bones and nut-shells after feasts,
And smacked the kids for leaping up like beasts.
Now morbid boys have grown past awkwardness;
The girls let stitches out, dress after dress,
To free some swinging body's riding space
And form the new child's unimagined face.
Yet, while vague nephews, spitting on their curls,
Amble to pester winds and blowsy girls,
What arm will sweep the room, what hand will hold
New snow against the milk to keep it cold?
And who will dump the garbage, feed the hogs,
And pitch the chickens' heads to hungry dogs?
Not my lost hag who dumbly bore such pain:
Childbirth at midnight sassafras and rain.
New snow against her face and hands she bore,
And now lies down, who was my moon or more.

Ode to the Fish

by Ellen Bass

Nights when I can't sleep, I listen to the sea lions
barking from the rocks off the lighthouse.
I look out the black window into the black night
and think about fish stirring the oceans.
Muscular tuna, their lunge and thrash
churning the water, whipping up a squall,
storm of hunger. Herring cruising,
river of silver in the sea, wide as a lit city.
And all the small breaths: pulse
of frilled jellyfish, thrust of squid,
frenzy of krill, transparent skin glowing
green with the glass shells of diatoms.
Billions swarming up the water column each night,
gliding down at dawn. They're the greased motor
that powers the world. Shipping heat
to the arctic, hauling cold to the tropics,
currents unspooling around the globe.
My room is so still, the bureau lifeless,
and on it, inert, the paraphernalia of humans:
keys, coins, shells that once rocked in the tides—
opalescent abalone, pearl earrings.
Only the clock's sea-green numerals
register small changes. And shadows
the moon casts—fan of maple branches—
tick across the room. But beyond the cliffs
a blue whale sounds and surfaces, cosmic
ladle scooping the icy depths. An artery so wide,
I could swim through into its thousand-pound heart.

In Passing
by Ted Kooser

From a half block off I see you coming,
walking briskly along, carrying parcels,
furtively glancing up into the faces
of people approaching, looking for someone
you know, holding your smile in your mouth
like a pebble, keeping it moist and ready,
being careful not to swallow.

I know that hope so open on your face,
know how your heart would lift to see just one
among us who remembered. If only someone
would call out your name, would smile,
so happy to see you again. You shift
your heavy parcels, hunch up your shoulders,
and press ahead into the moment.

From a few feet away, you recognize me,
or think you do. I see you preparing your face,
getting your greeting ready. Do I know you?
Both of us wonder. Swiftly we meet and pass,
averting our eyes, close enough to touch,
but not touching. I could not let you know
that I've forgotten, and yet you know.

Against Brilliance

Noelle Kocot

The waters are very simple today.

Hospital blue, in error of twilight,

The sound of one hand clapping in a star-shaped womb.

Having never felt twice about the same flecked river,

You can either swim or hide your eyes away.

I piss in it and eat all the fish raw.

The Merger
by Charles W. Pratt

(for my son)

Trying to think of something useful
To say about marriage, I remember
A morning when I was twenty-plus,
Self-absorbed in my tinny pink
Renault Dauphine, my Little Toot,
And I tried to get by a tank-truck on
A bendy road too briefly straight.
Shuddering, pedal floored, my frivolous
Vessel leveled with the cab
Like a pilot fish by a shark's grim grille.
Then there was a car ahead of us
And, as I tried to floor a pedal
Already on the floor, the blue
Of ice I hadn't seen. Spinning
Toward the implacable hugeness of the cab, looking up
Into the eyes of the truckdriver, I felt
Only the sweet certainty of
Submission, call it love, as if
Already I had left myself and could look
Down with the driver's godlike and loving
Eyes at a comical pink Dauphine
Sliding backwards down the road, then spinning
Again and into a snowbank, tilted
Against a tree. One flat tire
And a dent in the roof I pushed out myself.
I made it to work on time. Because
The truckdriver had seen the oncoming car
Before I had, had seen the patch of blue
And had slowed to let me by, I met
And married your mother, and you were born
And have grown up to meet and marry, and I
Have begun to understand the blind
Release of self to the will of another
And the answering wise, dispassionate
Restraint of the merger we call marriage.

Fiction
by Howard Nemerov

The people in the elevator all
Face front, they all keep still, they all
Look up with the rapt and stupid look of saints
In paintings at the numbers that light up
By turn and turn to tell them where they are.
They are doing the dance, they are playing the game.

To get here they have gone by avenue
And street, by ordinate and abscissa, and now
By this new coordinate, up. They are three-
dimensional characters, taken from real life;
They have their fates, whether to rise or fall,
And when their numbers come up they get out.

Egg by C.G. Hanzlicek

I'm scrambling an egg for my daughter.
"Why are you always whistling?" she asks.
"Because I'm happy."
And it's true,
Though it stuns me to say it aloud;
There was a time when I wouldn't
Have seen it as my future.
It's partly a matter
Of who is there to eat the egg:
The self fallen out of love with itself
Through the tedium of familiarity,
Or this little self,
So curious, so hungry,
Who emerged from the woman I love,
A woman who loves me in a way
I've come to think I deserve,
Now that it arrives from outside me.
Everything changes, we're told,
And now the changes are everywhere:
The house with its morning light
That fills me like a revelation,
The yard with its trees
That cast a bit more shade each summer,
The love of a woman
That both is and isn't confounding,
And the love
Of this clamor of questions at my waist.
Clamor of questions,
You clamor of answers,
Here's your egg.

The Poem of the Future by J.R. Solonche

The poem of the future will be smaller.
It will fit in the palm of your hand,
on your wrist, in your ear.
The poem of the future will not need
bulky batteries or cumbersome wires.
It will be powered by moonlight and weed.
The poem of the future will be automatic.
It will go for months without routine maintenance.
It will be faster, smoother, with a digital tick.
The poem of the future will be lighter.
It will be made of plastics and exotic metals.
It will be available in hundreds of shapes and colors.
The poem of the future will make our lives true.
It will perform in a second what it takes
the poem of the present a day to do.
The poem of the future will talk to us.
It will say things like "Buy IBM," and "Be my friend,"
and "Pulvis et umbra sumus."

Lucky by Louis Jenkins

All my life I've been lucky. Not that I made money,
or had a beautiful house or cars. But lucky to have
had good friends, a wife who loves me, and a good
son. Lucky that war and famine or disease did not
come to my doorstep. Lucky that all the wrong
turns I made, even if they did turn out well, at least
were not complete disasters. I still have some of my
original teeth. All that could change, I know, in the
wink of an eye. And what an eye it is, bright blue
contrasting with her dark skin and black hair. And
oh, what long eyelashes! She turns and with a slight
smile gives me a long slow wink, a wink that says,
"Come on over here, you lucky boy."

Ballistics

by **Billy Collins**

When I came across the high-speed photograph
of a bullet that had just pierced a book—
the pages exploding with the velocity—

I forgot all about the marvels of photography
and began to wonder which book
the photographer had selected for the shot.

Many novels sprang to mind
including those of Raymond Chandler
where an extra bullet would hardly be noticed.

Nonfiction offered too many choices—
a history of Scottish lighthouses,
a biography of Joan of Arc and so forth.

Or it could be an anthology of medieval literature,
the bullet having just beheaded Sir Gawain
and scattered the band of assorted pilgrims.

But later, as I was drifting off to sleep,
I realized that the executed book
was a recent collection of poems written

by someone of whom I was not fond
and that the bullet must have passed through
his writing with little resistance

at twenty-eight hundred feet per second,
through the poems about his childhood
and the ones about the dreary state of the world,

and then through the author's photograph,
through the beard, the round glasses,
and that special poet's hat he loves to wear.

Hippos on Holiday

by Billy Collins

is not really the title of a movie
but if it was I would be sure to see it.
I love their short legs and big heads,
the whole hippo look.
Hundreds of them would frolic
in the mud of a wide, slow-moving river,
and I would eat my popcorn
in the dark of a neighborhood theater.
When they opened their enormous mouths
lined with big stubby teeth
I would drink my enormous Coke.

I would be both in my seat
and in the water playing with the hippos,
which is the way it is
with a truly great movie.
Only a mean-spirited reviewer
would ask on holiday from what?

The Golden Years

by **Billy Collins**

All I do these drawn-out days
is sit in my kitchen at Pheasant Ridge
where there are no pheasants to be seen
and last time I looked, no ridge.

I could drive over to Quail Falls
and spend the day there playing bridge,
but the lack of a falls and the absence of quail
would only remind me of Pheasant Ridge.

I know a widow at Fox Run
and another with a condo at Smokey Ledge.
One of them smokes, and neither can run,
so I'll stick to the pledge I made to Midge.

Who frightened the fox and bulldozed the ledge?
I ask in my kitchen at Pheasant Ridge.

Adage
by Billy Collins

When it's late at night and branches
are banging against the windows,
you might think that love is just a matter

of leaping out of the frying pan of yourself
into the fire of someone else,
but it's a little more complicated than that.

It's more like trading the two birds
who might be hiding in that bush
for the one you are not holding in your hand.

A wise man once said that love
was like forcing a horse to drink
but then everyone stopped thinking of him as wise.

Let us be clear about something.
Love is not as simple as getting up
on the wrong side of the bed wearing the emperor's clothes.

No, it's more like the way the pen
feels after it has defeated the sword.
It's a little like the penny saved or the nine dropped
stitches.

You look at me through the halo of the last candle
and tell me love is an ill wind
that has no turning, a road that blows no good,
but I am here to remind you,
as our shadows tremble on the walls,
that love is the early bird who is better late than never.

“The Hill We Climb” by Amanda Gorman (for Biden Inauguration)

When day comes, we ask ourselves, where can we find light in this never-ending shade?

The loss we carry. A sea we must wade.

We braved the belly of the beast.

We've learned that quiet isn't always peace, and the norms and notions of what "just" is isn't always justice.

And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it.

Somehow we do it.

Somehow we weathered and witnessed a nation that isn't broken, but simply unfinished.

We, the successors of a country and a time where a skinny Black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president, only to find herself reciting for one.

And, yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine, but that doesn't mean we are striving to form a union that is perfect.

We are striving to forge our union with purpose.

To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man.

And so we lift our gaze, not to what stands between us, but what stands before us.

We close the divide because we know to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside.

We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another.

We seek harm to none and harmony for all.

Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true.

That even as we grieved, we grew.

That even as we hurt, we hoped.

That even as we tired, we tried.

That we'll forever be tied together, victorious.

Not because we will never again know defeat, but because we will never again sow division.

Scripture tells us to envision that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid.

If we're to live up to our own time, then victory won't lie in the blade, but in all the bridges we've made.

That is the promise to glade, the hill we climb, if only we dare.

It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit.

It's the past we step into and how we repair it.

We've seen a force that would shatter our nation, rather than share it.

Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy.

And this effort very nearly succeeded.

But while democracy can be periodically delayed, it can never be permanently defeated.

In this truth, in this faith we trust, for while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us.

This is the era of just redemption.

We feared at its inception.

We did not feel prepared to be the heirs of such a terrifying hour.

But within it we found the power to author a new chapter, to offer hope and laughter to ourselves.

So, while once we asked, how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe, now we assert, how could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?

We will not march back to what was, but move to what shall be: a country that is bruised but whole, benevolent but bold, fierce and free.

We will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation because we know our inaction and inertia will be the inheritance of the next generation, become the future.

Our blunders become their burdens.

But one thing is certain.

If we merge mercy with might, and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change our children's birthright.

So let us leave behind a country better than the one we were left.

Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest, we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one.

We will rise from the golden hills of the West.

We will rise from the windswept Northeast where our forefathers first realized revolution.

We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the Midwestern states.

We will rise from the sun-baked South.

We will rebuild, reconcile, and recover.

And every known nook of our nation and every corner called our country, our people diverse and beautiful, will emerge battered and beautiful.

When day comes, we step out of the shade of flame and unafraid.

The new dawn balloons as we free it.

For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it.

If only we're brave enough to be it.

FISHING IN THE SEA OF GALILEE

-- James Tate --

I was working in my stall when I saw a rat climb up on my desk. I was frightened, of course, but I was also ready to do battle. I picked up my notebook and threw it at him, but he didn't seem to notice. Then I grabbed my pencil and tried to stab him. He just moved sideways about a foot and I missed him entirely. He seemed to enjoy this game we were playing. Then I remembered a Civil War sword I kept under my desk for no particular reason. I pulled it out and brought it down where he was standing. He took a hop forward and I missed him altogether. I took another swipe and another. No luck. I called for my boss. He walked into my office with a .45 drawn. He saw the rat on the desk, took aim, and blew the creature out of the universe. Well, that's not quite true. He blew him off the desk and smack up against the wall where he then slid down onto the floor. "Clean it up" was all he said before leaving my office. And I proceeded to do just that. I swept the floor and then got a wet rag and wiped the desk. There wasn't much I could do about the hole in the wall. When I had cleaned it all up I settled down to work once more. But I still felt those little beady eyes upon me. I turned out the charts for next year's production, though I don't think they were correct. Something about the decimal points seemed arbitrary, wrong. But I couldn't be stopped there. I plowed on through quotes and catalogues. When I looked up a rat was staring at me. I called the boss. He showed up with his pistol drawn. "Kill him," I said. He took aim and fired. I got the broom and dustpan and set to work cleaning him up. When I had finished I sat back in my chair and took a nap. When I woke there was a colleague standing at my door. "Yes, what can I do for you, Henry?" I said. "Would you have a pencil sharpener I could borrow?" he said. "Why, sure. Let me have a look here," I said. I opened the drawer and there was the pencil sharpener. "Here you go, Henry." "Thank you, Mac," he said. I love it when everything in the office seems so clear and simple. I look back at my desk. A baby Jesus is walking towards me. I pick up my stapler.

THE ARGONAUT

-- James Tate --

What made anyone think I was a Communist I don't know. I never went to any of the Communist meetings. I didn't know any other Communists. I didn't believe in any of their tenets. It's true, I hunted elk in the winter. I never actually shot any, but I followed them. And I laced my cranberry juice with vodka. But these things didn't make me a Communist. I stood on the bridge and watched the boats go out to sea. I dreamed of going with them one day. I danced alone in my apartment. I hated my job with the government. I went to parties where I didn't know anyone. I went to the zoo and talked to the animals. I dreamed I had an affair with a zebra and its stripes rubbed off on me. I met a woman I liked and called her on the phone. She said she liked phone sex and I didn't know what she meant. I lay on the couch and counted my blessings. There were none, or so few they slipped through my fingers. I got up and looked out the window. A cloud of sparrows flew by. I made myself a can of soup. I thought of my relatives, all gone except for one. I called her on the phone. She didn't remember me. I told her I was Edna's son. She said, "I remember Edna. I never liked her. She cursed too much." My mother never cursed, but I wasn't about to argue. I went to the movies. I saw Hopalong Cassidy. I wished he didn't wave so much. But I liked the popcorn. I walked about the city, feeding the pigeons. I bought a soda on the street. I sat down in a garden. A woman came along and sat down beside me. She said, "Nice day, isn't it?" I said, "Yes, very, I like it." "What do you do for a living?" she said. "I'm an accountant in the government," I said. "That must be nice," she said. "But most people I know think I'm a Communist," I said. "That's a joke, right?" she said. "To me it is," I said. "To me, you look more like an Argonaut," she said. "What's an Argonaut?" I said. "It's somebody who swims in the deep waters of the ocean in search of treasure," she said. "I found a penny in my bathtub once when I was a kid," I said. "Then you're an Argonaut," she said.

THE GOVERNMENT LAKE

-- James Tate --

The way to the toy store was blocked by a fallen tree in the road. There was a policeman directing traffic down a side street. I asked him, "What happened?" He said, "Lightning in the night." I took the turn and drove down the street looking for a way to turn back. Other streets were blocked by fallen trees, and I couldn't find a way back to the toy store. I kept driving and soon I was on the outskirts of town. I got on a highway and drove, soon forgetting the toy store and what I was supposed to get there. I drove on as if I was hypnotized, not noticing the signs for turnoffs. I must have driven a couple of hours before I woke up, then I took the next exit and had no idea where I was. I drove down a straight treelined lane with farmhouses on either side. There was a lake at the end of the lane. I pulled over and parked. I got out and started walking. There were several docks along the shore. I walked out on one and watched the ducks swimming and diving. There was something bobbing in the middle of the lake. I stared at it for a long time before I realized it was a man's head. Then, a moment later, it was a coconut. No, it was an old tire floating right side up. I gave up and started following the ducks. They would suddenly fly up and circle the lake and come down and splash-land again. It was quite entertaining. A man walked up behind me and said, "This government lake is off-limits to the public. You'll have to leave." I said, "I didn't know it was a government lake. Why should it be off-limits?" He said, "I'm sorry. You'll have to leave." "I don't even know where I am," I said. "You'll still have to leave," he said. "What about that man out there?" I said, pointing to the tire. "He's dead," he said. "No, he's not. I just saw him move his arm," I said. He removed his pistol from his holster and fired a shot. "Now he's dead," he said.

THE FINAL VACATION

-- James Tate --

Why was there no knob on the door? It was terribly hard to get in. I had to gnaw it with my teeth. And once inside there was no place to sit. This was a very strange vacation home. Of course there was no food in the pantries. I didn't expect any. But what would I do with no bed? Sleep on the floor, I guess. There were two small windows in the house, about a foot square, one in the kitchen and one in the bedroom, both high up near the ceiling. They shed enough light during the daytime. And at night I don't know what I am supposed to do. Candles, I suppose, but I don't have any candles. One can always sleep. So I put my things down on the floor and sat down. I would be here for about a week. I started to think of all the things I had left behind. No, I said, you mustn't do that. And I would get lonely, nobody to talk to all those days. Oh well, this was the vacation I had worked so hard for, I wasn't going to waste it complaining. The first night I slept like a baby, nothing woke me. When I woke in the morning I felt refreshed and ready to go. The trouble was there was no place to go. I needed food. Where was I to get it? Outside there was a prairie as far as the eye could see, no shops or stores. Why didn't they warn me? I walked around outside hoping to get an idea. There wasn't a tree anywhere. I walked around kicking the dust. I went back to the cabin. I was going to starve for a week. I scratched around on the floor for a while, then I fell asleep. When I woke it was dark out and I couldn't see a thing. I crawled around and bumped into things. There was no point in keeping a diary. Nothing much changed for the next seven days. I walked around in the daylight when I had the strength. I never did find anything to eat. I slept when it got dark. But this is the hard part to explain, I got to like it. The weaker my hunger made me, the more I thrived. I woke the seventh day and I wanted to hide out here forever. There was a knock on the door and a man said, "It's time to leave." I said, "No, please let me stay." "You can't break the rules, you must leave," he said. I raised my hand up as though to pray, and that's when it happened. I slowly disappeared into the darkness of the cabin, never to be seen again.

I SAT AT MY DESK AND CONTEMPLATED ALL THAT I HAD ACCOMPLISHED

-- James Tate --

I sat at my desk and contemplated all that I had accomplished this year. I had won the hot dog eating contest on Rhode Island. No, I hadn't. I was just kidding. I was the arm wrestling champion in Portland, Maine. False. I caught the largest boa constrictor in Southern Brazil. In my dreams. I built the largest house out of matchsticks in all the United States. Wow! I caught a wolf by its tail. Yummy. I married the Princess of Monaco. Can you believe it? I fell off of Mount Everest. Ouch! I walked back up again. It was tiring. Snore. I set a record for sitting in my chair and snoring louder than anybody. Awake! I set a record for swimming from one end of my bath to the other in No Count, Nebraska. Blurb. I read a book written by a dove. Great! I slept in my chair all day and all night for thirty days. Whew! I ate a cheeseburger every day for a year. I never want to do that again. A trout bit me when I was washing the dishes. But I couldn't catch him. I flew over my hometown and didn't recognize anyone. That's how long it's been. A policeman stopped me on the street and said he was sorry. He was looking for someone who looked just like me. What are the chances?

For Mother on Father's Day

-- James Tate --

You never got to recline
in the maternal tradition,
I never let you. Fate,

you call it, had other eyes,
for neither of us ever had
a counterpart in the way

familial traditions go.
I was your brother,
and you were my unhappy

neighbor. I pitied you
the way a mother pities
her son's failure. I could

never find the proper
approach. I would have
lent you sugar, mother.

From the Hole

-- James Tate --

A horse-drawn rocket
climbs the wooden hill:
behind it two or three friends
are sharing their tobacco: their hats
are beautiful like small pieces of
coal on their heads
fostering goodwill.

I'm standing in this hole, see,
and I'm going to holler out:

"Good riddance to bad rubbish!"

and "I'm sorry if I was a menace!"

"Howdy doody, milkman travail!"

"So long buoys and grills."

Like a harp

burning on an island
nobody knows about.

HOUSEFLY

-- James Tate --

The fly was big and fast and, seemingly, smarter than me. It would fly right in front of my eyes, and, when I'd try to chase it, it would land on a crystal vase, or some other favorite object that I could not possibly swat. After a while, you feel like an idiot. So, then, I'd decide to ignore it. I'd pick up my magazine and start to read. That's when the audacious little monster had the temerity to actually land on the tip of my nose. It felt like all-out warfare had been declared. I shooed him away from my nose and began stalking him in earnest. He dive-bombed me several times, then flew from room to room to room. Each time he rested on a window, I thought I had him. But my swats never even came close. He'd buzz my eyes in triumphant glory, then disappear without a trace. I was exhausted and angry. That this lowly piece of insect garbage could outwit me time and again was inconceivable. The fly has conquered my entire domain. I am its prisoner. It has proven its point. It is the superior creature. It spreads disease, malaria and yellow fever. It sucks blood from sick animals and infects healthy ones. There are seventy-five thousand varieties of flies. But this one, no doubt, is the common housefly. I drag my ball and chain to a chair and collapse. The fly is gloating atop a bust of Beethoven. What if someone is watching us? I would be the laughingstock of all time. Even my friends would abuse me. I would go down in legend. I would become the brunt of a folktale. The fly landed on an oil painting of my mother. It was standing on her eye. There was no end to its cruel taunts. It walked across her lips. She had raised me to be a man, to stand up on my own. I could climb a mountain. I could use a gun. Once I had been forced to wrestle a cougar to save a baby's life. And, now, I was pinned down and humiliated by a fly. The fly was a genius, and a devil to boot. I couldn't give up. I had to fight on. Family honor was at stake. So much had been lost already. I pulled myself up and took a step toward him. He was watching me. He was grinding his teeth and twitching all over. I could feel my strength coming back. He took off and was coming right at me. I swung the swatter as fast as I could and missed him. Then, the chase pursued, from room to room, and several missed swings. A touch of madness had come over me as I knocked over chairs and broke several priceless items. I no longer cared. I had one mission. Now the fly was frightened of me. It realized it had gone too far. Walking on my mother's lips was not funny. It regretted that. He had thought it was all a game. Sure, he had won, but fair's fair. Now, his life was in the balance, with this madman enraged. It's such a short life when you're a common housefly. Nobody likes you. Nobody wants to have fun.

MY BRUSH WITH GREATNESS

-- James Tate --

I met Phongsri Kwanmuang. He seemed like a very calm, wise man. He also knew how to make a nuclear bomb. I invited him over to my house for tea. He said, "Do you want to make a bomb together?" I said, "Oh, no, I have no use for a bomb. Perhaps we could do something else, like go bicycling." "I do not know how to bicycle. I am afraid of the bicycle. It looks like it could eat me," he said. "Well, there are plenty of other things we could do, like hiking or bowling," I said. "I tried bowling once. It nearly killed me. I think making bombs is the only thing I like to do," he said. We finished our tea. Phongsri thanked me. "You are most kind to have me in your house. It is my hope that we can be friends," he said. He bowed and departed. I didn't think about him after that. About a month later he showed up at my door. He said, "You don't like me. You never called or came by to see me." I said, "Oh, I've been busy. You know, it's the end of the semester, all those papers to grade." "You think I'm a bad man because I make bombs. That's it, isn't it?" he said. "No, Phongsri, you're wrong. Bombs are your business. That's what you do. What business is it of mine?" I said. "I'm a lonely man. I miss my family, my wife and children. The university pays me so much more than I can make at home, but nobody speaks to me. It is as if I am radioactive. Who knows, perhaps I am by now," he said. "Would you care for some tea?" I said. Phongsri eagerly accepted. It became clear to me that he barely knew where he was. He didn't know who was president, had never heard of the World Series or the Rolling Stones. He lived in a very tiny world, but he knew how to blow it up. "Phongsri," I said, "I think you need to get out more." "What do you mean by 'get out'?" he said. So I started taking him out every Saturday night. We went to the theater. I took him to concerts. We went out to dinner. I even took him to several bars. He was reluctant to drink at first, but once he gave in he seemed to enjoy it. One night he said, "You know, Tom, I've never felt so alive. I have to thank you. You have given me a gift." "It has been wonderful to watch you open up, Phongsri," I said. He was staring at our waitress, who was wearing a provocative black swimsuit. "I must have her. I am deeply in love with her," he said. "Phongsri, she's just a waitress. Leave her alone," I said. "No, you must not tell me what to do. This is my destiny," he said. "Let's go, Phongsri. You've had too much to drink," I said. I grabbed him by the arm and dragged him out of the place. He was struggling against me all the way. After that night, I never saw him again. At the end of the year he won the Nobel Peace Prize, which I never could figure out. But that was my brush with greatness. It left me kind of hollow inside. I dated that waitress for a while, but she left me for a drummer.

Poem to Some of My Recent Poems

-- James Tate --

My beloved little billiard balls,
my polite mongrels, edible patriotic plums,
you owe your beauty to your mother, who
resembled a cylindrical corned beef
with all the trimmings, may God rest
her forsaken soul, for it is all of us
she forsook; and I shall never forget
her sputtering embers, and then the little mound.
Yes, my little rum runners, she had defective
tear ducts and could weep only iced tea.
She had petticoats beneath her eyelids.
And in her last years she found ball bearings
in her beehive puddings, she swore allegiance
to Abyssinia. What should I have done?
I played the piano and scrambled eggs.
I had to navigate carefully around her brain's
avalanche lest even a decent finale be forfeited.
And her beauty still evermore. You see,
as she was dying, I led each of you to her side,
one by one she scorched you with her radiance.
And she is ever with us in our acetylene leisure.
But you are beautiful, and I, a slave to a heap of cinders.

ATHEIST by Yip Harburg

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree;
And only God who makes the tree
Also makes the fools like me.
But only fools like me, you see,
Can make a God, who makes a
tree.

REPENT IN PLEASURE

by Yip Harburg

A little secret sinning now and
then,
Should not disturb the saintliest of
men;
For when your life is spent, and
sun has set,
It's easier to repent than to regret.

MUTUAL ADMIRATION

by Yip Harburg

“Speaking of the Common Man,”
said Lincoln,
“God must love him.”
And the Common Man, he must
love God—
He made so many of Him.

**BACK TO THE DRAWING
BOARD** by Yip Harburg

God made the world in six days
flat,
On the seventh, He said, “I’ll rest,”
So He let the thing into orbit
swing,
To give it a dry-run test.
A billion years went by, then He
Took a look at the whirling blob;
His spirits fell, as He shrugged,
“Ah well,
It was only a six-day job.”

**COURTSHIP IN GREENWICH
VILLAGE** *by Yip Harburg*

Our days will be oh, so ecstatic,
Our nights will be oh, so exotic,
For I'm a neurotic erratic,
And you're an erratic erotic.

INSCRIPTION ON A LIPSTICK
by Yip Harburg

Oh, innocent victims of Cupid,
Remember this terse little verse;
To let a fool kiss you is stupid,
To let a kiss fool you is worse.

IRREVERENT HEART
by Yip Harburg

My heart is like the willow
That bends, but never breaks.
It sighs when summer jilts her,
It sings when April wakes.

So you, who come a-smiling
With summer in your eyes,
Think not that your beguiling
Will take me by surprise.

My heart's prepared for aching
The moment you take wing.
But not, my friend, for breaking
While there's another spring.

So share my summer pillow,
Don't spare my autumn aches;
My heart is like the willow
That bends, but never breaks.

MIRACLE *by Yip Harburg*

We're wise to prestidigitators,
We're hip to all theatrics,
We know how rabbits turn to
doves
In all the magic hat tricks,
But how did Mary's manger
Turn into the posh St. Patrick's?

ADVERBS *by Yip Harburg*

WHERE and WHEN
Are lost in space.
THERE and THEN
Do not embrace.
So before we disappear
Come sweet NOW and kiss the
HERE.

FAIL SAFE *by Yip Harburg*

It's a hundred billion dollars
Every year at your expense,
For the Pentagon to gadget up
Our national defense.
But it's comforting to know that
In the up and coming war,
We'll be dying far more safely
Than we ever died before.

Lead Kindly Light *by Yip Harburg*

Where Bishop Patrick crossed the street
An "X" now marks the spot.
The light of God was with him,
But the traffic light was not.

Realist *by Yip Harburg*

"For what we are about to receive,
Oh Lord, 'tis Thee we thank,"
Said the Cannibal as he cut a slice
Of the missionary's shank.

Federal Reserve *by Yip Harburg*

In '29 when the banks went bust,
Our coins still read "In God We Trust."

Life Is Liveable by Yip Harburg

They who live on love and laughter
Don't mess around with the hereafter.

History Lesson by Yip Harburg

We learn this after every war
That life is not worth dying for.

Prose Poem

-- James Tate --

I am surrounded by the pieces of this huge puzzle: here's a piece I call my wife, and here's an odd one I call convictions, here's conventions, here's collisions, conflagrations, congratulations. Such a puzzle this is! I like to grease up all the pieces and pile them in the center of the basement after everyone else is asleep. Then I leap head-first like a diver into the wretched confusion. I kick like hell and strangle a few pieces, bite them, spitting and snarling like a mongoose. When I wake up in the morning, it's all fixed! My wife says she would not be caught dead at that savage resurrection. I say she would.

THE COWBOY

-- James Tate --

Someone had spread an elaborate rumor about me, that I was in possession of an extraterrestrial being, and I thought I knew who it was. It was Roger Lawson. Roger was a practical joker of the worst sort, and up till now I had not been one of his victims, so I kind of knew my time had come. People parked in front of my house for hours and took pictures. I had to draw all my blinds and only went out when I had to. Then there was a barrage of questions. "What does he look like?" "What do you feed him?" "How did you capture him?" And I simply denied the presence of an extraterrestrial in my house. And, of course, this excited them all the more. The press showed up and started creeping around my yard. It got to be very irritating. More and more came and parked up and down the street. Roger was really working overtime on this one. I had to do something. Finally, I made an announcement. I said, "The little fellow died peacefully in his sleep at 11:02 last night." "Let us see the body," they clamored. "He went up in smoke instantly," I said. "I don't believe you," one of them said. "There is no body in the house or I would have buried it myself," I said. About half of them got in their cars and drove off. The rest of them kept their vigil, but more solemnly now. I went out and bought some groceries. When I came back about an hour later another half of them had gone. When I went into the kitchen I nearly dropped the groceries. There was a nearly transparent fellow with large pink eyes standing about three feet tall. "Why did you tell them I was dead? That was a lie," he said. "You speak English," I said. "I listen to the radio. It wasn't very hard to learn. Also we have television. We get all your channels. I like cowboys, especially John Ford movies. They're the best," he said. "What am I going to do with you?" I said. "Take me to meet a real cowboy. That would make me happy," he said. "I don't know any real cowboys, but maybe we could find one. But people will go crazy if they see you. We'd have press following us everywhere. It would be the story of the century," I said. "I can be invisible. It's not hard for me to do," he said. "I'll think about it. Wyoming or Montana would be our best bet, but they're a long way from here," I said. "Please, I won't cause you any trouble," he said. "It would take some planning," I said. I put the groceries down and started putting them away. I tried not to think of the cosmic meaning of all this. Instead, I treated him like a smart little kid. "Do you have any sarsaparilla?" he said. "No, but I have some orange juice. It's good for you," I said. He drank it and made a face. "I'm going to get the maps out," I said. "We'll see how we could get there." When I came back he was dancing on the kitchen table, a sort of ballet, but very sad. "I have the maps," I said. "We won't need them. I just received word. I'm going to die tonight. It's really a joyous occasion, and I hope you'll help me celebrate by watching *The Magnificent Seven*," he said. I stood there with the maps in my hand. I felt an unbearable sadness come over me. "Why must you die?" I said. "Father decides these things. It is probably my reward for coming here safely and meeting you," he said. "But I was going to take you to meet a real cowboy," I said. "Let's pretend you are my cowboy," he said.

-- James Tate --

I have searched for a way out, but without success. I saw in the clouded mirror the tatters of a once bright future. I felt as though I had squandered something precious and rare. What I had known of friendship was mine no more. Even the poorhouse wouldn't take me. I tried to huddle with the homeless and they beat me with sticks. So I joined the army and that's when my luck started to turn around. I was promoted right away. I was an ideal soldier. I followed orders. I said, "Yes, sir. No, sir." There was nothing I wouldn't do to please my officers. I dug ditches. I climbed ropes. I could shoot the bull's-eye out of targets all day long. Then one day we went to war. I was beside myself with anticipation. The enemy loomed large in my head. I was going to get a whole chest full of medals. The first day out on patrol we didn't see anybody. Oh, some kids threw rocks at us, and an old man on a donkey pretended not to see us. A couple of shots were fired, but who knows at what. That night, in camp, a bomb exploded, killing three. The second day out I narrowly missed stepping on a mine. My heart was racing. Suddenly I was afraid. We searched building after building without results. I said to a fellow soldier from Kansas, "Where the hell are they?" He said, "They're everywhere. They're all around us, watching, seeing our every move." "Well, why don't they do something?" I said. "They don't need to. We're doing exactly what they want us to," he said. We walked on, kicking the sand. The heat was unbearable and I was starting to see things. But I knew better than to fire my weapon. A rocket went whizzing overhead and exploded, just missing us. "It came from over there," I said to Kansas. "Don't worry, you'll never find him. He's gone," he said. A woman was filling her jug at a well. We fanned out and circled an old church. "They like to hide in churches," I said to Kansas. "Don't count on it," he said. I flung open the door, my rifle at the ready. Several old people were on their knees praying. They turned and looked at me. "Sorry," I said. The captain received a report that there were enemy forces hiding among the rubble not far from where we were. We approached cautiously. A shot was fired and we opened up, rifles blazing enough to deafen you. We kept it up for several minutes. Then all fell silent and a scout was sent to check it out. There was nothing there, except some old tin cans and a hubcap. That night we sat around a campfire and sang. It felt good to be in the company of real men. I was proud to belong. In the morning five soldiers were found dead in their tents, their throats slit. I was so mad I could taste blood. Revenge was our mission. We strode through town, kicking open doors, scaring people out of their minds, looking through every room. After hours of this, we found nothing. I said to Kansas, "What are we doing wrong?" He said, "You still don't get it, do you? We're the enemy." I was confused. We regrouped and left the village. One soldier was startled by a shadow and fired at it.

The Immortals

-- James Tate --

None of us have felt good this year:
pus around the eyes,
sores that come and go with no explanation.
But we still believe we will come through it!
I signal this news
by lifting a little finger.

The Wheelchair Butterfly

-- James Tate --

O sleepy city of reeling wheelchairs
where a mouse can commit suicide if he can

concentrate long enough
on the history book of rodents
in this underground town

of electrical wheelchairs!
The girl who is always pregnant and bruised
like a pear

rides her many-stickered bicycle
backward up the staircase
of the abandoned trolleybarn.

Yesterday was warm. Today a butterfly froze
in midair; and was plucked like a grape
by a child who swore he could take care

of it. O confident city where
the seeds of poppies pass for carfare,

where the ordinary hornets in a human's heart
may slumber and snore, where bifocals bulge

in an orange garage of daydreams,
we wait in our loose attics for a new season

as if for an ice-cream truck.

An Indian pony crosses the plains

whispering Sanskrit prayers to a crater of fleas.
Honeysuckle says: I thought I could swim.

The Mayor is urinating on the wrong side
of the street! A dandelion sends off sparks:
beware your hair is locked!

Beware the trumpet wants a glass of water!
Beware a velvet tabernacle!

Beware the Warden of Light has married
an old piece of string!

Making It Stick



Asian American—
And ashamed of it;

I'm Asian—
But my owner's
Caucasian!

Model Minority On
Board

Ask me about
My GREEN CARD!

Don't blame me—
I'm a citizen!

Honk if you're
Sushi!

I'd rather be
Studying!

My child
are Student
of the
Yale!

Asian/Pacific
Islander
Gang Member!

Proud to be
Assimilated!

We support
Your troops!

An old pond.
A frog jumps in.
The sound of water . . .

Aristotle

BY BILLY COLLINS

This is the beginning.

Almost anything can happen.

This is where you find

the creation of light, a fish wriggling onto land,
the first word of *Paradise Lost* on an empty page.

Think of an egg, the letter *A*,

a woman ironing on a bare stage
as the heavy curtain rises.

This is the very beginning.

The first-person narrator introduces himself,
tells us about his lineage.

The mezzo-soprano stands in the wings.

Here the climbers are studying a map
or pulling on their long woolen socks.

This is early on, years before the Ark, dawn.

The profile of an animal is being smeared
on the wall of a cave,
and you have not yet learned to crawl.

This is the opening, the gambit,
a pawn moving forward an inch.

This is your first night with her,
your first night without her.

This is the first part

where the wheels begin to turn,
where the elevator begins its ascent,
before the doors lurch apart.

This is the middle.

Things have had time to get complicated,
messy, really. Nothing is simple anymore.

Cities have sprouted up along the rivers
teeming with people at cross-purposes—
a million schemes, a million wild looks.

Disappointment unshoulders his knapsack
here and pitches his ragged tent.

This is the sticky part where the plot congeals,
where the action suddenly reverses
or swerves off in an outrageous direction.

Here the narrator devotes a long paragraph
to why Miriam does not want Edward's child.

Someone hides a letter under a pillow.

Here the aria rises to a pitch,
a song of betrayal, salted with revenge.

And the climbing party is stuck on a ledge
halfway up the mountain.

This is the bridge, the painful modulation.

This is the thick of things.

So much is crowded into the middle—

the guitars of Spain, piles of ripe avocados,
Russian uniforms, noisy parties,
lakeside kisses, arguments heard through a wall—

too much to name, too much to think about.

And this is the end,
the car running out of road,
the river losing its name in an ocean,
the long nose of the photographed horse
touching the white electronic line.
This is the colophon, the last elephant in the parade,
the empty wheelchair,
and pigeons floating down in the evening.
Here the stage is littered with bodies,
the narrator leads the characters to their cells,
and the climbers are in their graves.
It is me hitting the period
and you closing the book.
It is Sylvia Plath in the kitchen
and St. Clement with an anchor around his neck.
This is the final bit
thinning away to nothing.
This is the end, according to Aristotle,
what we have all been waiting for,
what everything comes down to,
the destination we cannot help imagining,
a streak of light in the sky,
a hat on a peg, and outside the cabin, falling leaves.

A Birthday Present

By Sylvia Plath

What is this, behind this veil, is it ugly, is it beautiful?
It is shimmering, has it breasts, has it edges?

I am sure it is unique, I am sure it is what I want.
When I am quiet at my cooking I feel it looking, I feel it thinking

'Is this the one I am too appear for,
Is this the elect one, the one with black eye-pits and a scar?

Measuring the flour, cutting off the surplus,
Adhering to rules, to rules, to rules.

Is this the one for the annunciation?
My god, what a laugh!

But it shimmers, it does not stop, and I think it wants me.
I would not mind if it were bones, or a pearl button.

I do not want much of a present, anyway, this year.
After all I am alive only by accident.

I would have killed myself gladly that time any possible way.

Now there are these veils, shimmering like curtains,

The diaphanous satins of a January window
White as babies' bedding and glittering with dead breath. O ivory!

It must be a tusk there, a ghost column.
Can you not see I do not mind what it is.

Can you not give it to me?
Do not be ashamed—I do not mind if it is small.

Do not be mean, I am ready for enormity.
Let us sit down to it, one on either side, admiring the gleam,

The glaze, the mirrory variety of it.
Let us eat our last supper at it, like a hospital plate.

I know why you will not give it to me,
You are terrified

The world will go up in a shriek, and your head with it,
Bossed, brazen, an antique shield,

A marvel to your great-grandchildren.
Do not be afraid, it is not so.

I will only take it and go aside quietly.
You will not even hear me opening it, no paper crackle,

No falling ribbons, no scream at the end.
I do not think you credit me with this discretion.

If you only knew how the veils were killing my days.
To you they are only transparencies, clear air.

But my god, the clouds are like cotton.
Armies of them. They are carbon monoxide.

Sweetly, sweetly I breathe in,
Filling my veins with invisibles, with the million

Probable motes that tick the years off my life.
You are silver-suited for the occasion. O adding machine---

Is it impossible for you to let something go and have it go whole?
Must you stamp each piece purple,

Must you kill what you can?
There is one thing I want today, and only you can give it to me.

It stands at my window, big as the sky.

It breathes from my sheets, the cold dead center

Where split lives congeal and stiffen to history.

Let it not come by the mail, finger by finger.

Let it not come by word of mouth, I should be sixty

By the time the whole of it was delivered, and to numb to use it.

Only let down the veil, the veil, the veil.

If it were death

I would admire the deep gravity of it, its timeless eyes.

I would know you were serious.

There would be a nobility then, there would be a birthday.

And the knife not carve, but enter

Pure and clean as the cry of a baby,

And the universe slide from my side.

first thing, i'm gonna paint the toothbrush red. i'm gonna quit my jalopy. i'm gonna whip up a few dead horses and put them out to passion. i'm gonna wash up on some distant score. first thing, i'm gonna get the expel outta dodge. i'm gonna run like the wound. i'm gonna wash away our skins. i'm gonna blow this icicle point, first thing. first thing i'm gonna do, i'm gonna freeze dry my clown wig. i'm gonna stumble under your breath. yeah, i'm gonna make like elvis and exit the gilding. i'm gonna spit out that taste of punch, then wash my mouth out with hope. are you kidding me? first thing, i'm gonna hit the toad, i'm gonna get down to brass tracks, i'm gonna head for the thrills, if it's the last thing i do.

the obsolete army by Evie Shockley

the obsolete army works with bayonets and horses
 the bayonets they dismantle for parts
 the horses they groom and set free in the newly opened pastures

the obsolete army has time on their wrists
 they take active duty in 8-hour shifts
 their watches are timepieces—they aren't on guard

the obsolete army exercises every day
 they push-up the people who are closest to their dreams
 they pull-up those just getting off the ground

the obsolete army debates the value of war museums
 they know an unlocked world is the key to freedom
 they know how close memorial is to mourning

the obsolete army is increasingly multi-lingual
 comment dit-on en français: arabic is spoken here
 when they say tanks, they're practicing their patois

the obsolete army understands nostalgia
 they welcome the obsolete patriots carrying protest signs
 they provide tea, coffee, and athletic competitions

the obsolete army is open 24/7
 the privates promote the general welfare of the publics
 you enter it yourself when you're most at peace

the obsolete army repurposes the obsolete words
 they donate collateral damage to the financial industry
 they apply infantry to the maternity wards' ever-renewing ranks

NEW YORK NEW YORK by Jayne Cortez

New York New York
you old sentimental pothole in the head
posing like a tall unemployed parking meter
with two shower caps on
you old subway step of chewed apples and used condoms
resting in front of the lucky spot chop bar
you old sweat-suit wearing sweetpea streaked with
blood from everywhere
you old high-rising rump of pigeon poop on
roof of the Lover Boy Barber Shop
you are
still militaristically coded
still slave-tradish and bullish
still inflated fixated and ready to
jack up your greed in greed of
an executive order
that's you
fine-tuning your capitalistic cock
on four o'clock dot of carnivorous fangs
you big old filthy fetish doll sitting on
hood of a white graffitied truck
smelling like a funky paper mill from Ashdown Arkansas
I see you
trying to remember your immense self-conscious self at
the Remember Me Beauty Parlor
that's you
pants down on butt
bumpersticker on nose
snow-covered garbage-heap belly stuffed in
a black leather jacket

THE MAMBO LESSON by Jayne Cortez

Yesterday took off its shoes
and became an unpopular song
today will end like a stunned fish in
tomorrow's unequal distribution of
emptiness
as the sun makes its entrance
without public support into
the clairvoyance of your
unsweetened panty hose
& I am already
smoking an image
that will bite me
before I change my tongue
so don't forget your skull
your fossil fuel
your utopian teeth

CHECK OUT MY PETROLEUM HAT

by Drew Gardner

I may be the master of saturnalia,
but I acted out on the golden age
before the nostalgic drug effects took hold

I suspected that it was connected to the fact that
I just quit my job and
had several weeks of vacation
before the ascendancy of Jove.

Check out my petroleum hat
if that's what you want to call it
blah blah blah . . . I was fired by
Dennis Kucinich . . . blah blah blah.

These people are older than the moon
before the new cosmic
events forced me to withdraw
into a subterranean refuge (the inhabitants
are before free agency), when prayer
payrolls were substantially less than the return on
the current Garage D'Or, but
deftly traded on the myth of gag-riculture.

Hunter-gatherer life was generally
about me quitting your day job without notice.

I am entitled to be paid
for the period
at the end of this sentence.

#dilate

by Katie Degentesh

As you die, all your muscles relax.

When you shine a light the pupil will not respond.

Also, not breathing is an indicator of death.

Holy shit—

Bottomless pit

there's an eye in that eye!

So much science going on in my room.

I always hear how large my pupils are from new people.

A few times a week you think to yourself "bitch please I can see fine."

I too have this. I was fresh out of infantry school.

Of course, a bunch of guys ate a bunch of it and ended up
out of their minds for multiple days, they started off

in a cabin in the woods and ended up

at a 7/11 pale and bleeding out of orifices.

especially when you remember that the pupil is a hole

the driver had no face and the psychonaut freaked out and ran away.

Roll with bitches. Bitches always got a camera.

They typically run into the throat and gurgle there

Like getting on it with your girly then talking all night

I look at her and my eyes dilate. She looks at me and hers contract.

Nothing I'll ever do again. Very real. Very drab.

In 1969 someone boiled three cigarettes in a pint of water and I drank it

street lights appeared with brilliant and dramatic starbursts of glare

Dialetheism: some statements can be true and false simultaneously

So you just stared them down until they had sex with you?

I think that's such bullshit

being allowed to wear sunglasses in professional poker

Don't embrace being too awkward to function.

You're worth it, maybe.

I don't really know. But you should think so.

#Important by Katie Degentesh

While bartering for supplies, Irene is beaten and raped by Russian soldiers.

She acts strong and continues to carry on

Today in Chinese class she learned the word for "test-tube baby."

People come up to talk to her

FIFA or CoD? Hot chocolate or coffee?

She just called a can of shandy a candy

She's getting really emotional feedback

All she does is listen to local radioshow & form crazy strong opinions on them

Like that Gaeta was a mathlete, Archer Farms raspberry jelly is the best jelly ever

RIP her hair because it was dying and had little Karl Lagerfeld faces

And the way to avoid catastrophe is to send every important email to yourself first.

We are important goose researchers, researching important goose topics.

As such we get an office and are moving up in the effing world

Our bedsheets contain bodily fluids, dead skin cells, sweat, food crumbs,

Never step on spiders, because you could be stepping on a female with eggs

And they'll stick to your shoes and hatch all over the house.

Statistics show that if you don't have a bag of popcorn a day you die

And become part of Native American history and culture you didn't know existed

Working on a decade dog schedule or drawing out physics theorems at Starbucks

Someone please buy me the "whatever forever" shirt.

Nada Gordon

I Love Men

I wrote the meanest, silliest thing below about men. I'm so sorry. Please ignore.

Anyway, here's why I love men. They are brave. I love men's thighs, their hands, the small of their necks; I love men. But more than the physicality of it all, I love that men are freaks—born.

I love men. And that's why it bothers me—no, “infuriates” would be a better word. . . .

I love men for their strength. Sometimes it is that vein that bulges on the upper part. . . . I love men for the way they give up everything but themselves for love.

I love men with big penis . . . and I love men's hair. Everything about men's hair is a wonder to me. . . . I love men who come to me once every two months with thick dark hair in their nostril.

I love men. I love mean ones, and nice ones, and fat ones, and skinny ones. But most of all, I love super-hot ones. The sensation of pooh in my mouth.

I LOVE TO HANG OUT WITH MY FRIENDS AND GO TO PARTIES I LIKE ALOT OF SEQUENCE OF CLOTHING I LOVE MEN WITH GOOD PERSONALITY

I love men in cycling shorts . . . I love men in kilts, I love men with long legs. I love men who are pigeon toed. I . . . I just . . . love men. I love stripping men naked with just my eyes. It's something that I want all the time now. And I mean ALL THE TIME. I love men who are slightly cocky and arrogant . . . something sexy there. . . .

Urgh, I love men with top hats and beautifully tailored tuxedos and immaculately polished shoes. I Love Men In Uniform I Love Men In Uniform Charm. I Love Firemen I Love Firemen Charm. I love men in turbans. I love

Happy Xmas

by Rodney Koeneke

Why encumber the reindeer with Santa?

Whereas from a global standpoint distance drives costs polar.

Data suggesting warming, gifts insubstantial,

the managers typically they manage the business from a great distance.

All foreign entrants are equally illegal;

we can help them plot the surface we can't help them

make it home. If you would like to "guesstimate" a distance,

we can help to plot the surface

but time constraints encumber work.

We had just enough time to get clear of the water tower

and it's hard to think of work.

Revered like Santa in China

but manufactured somewhere else, because of cost of Fibre.

Language of resistance,

or quitters who refused to go the distance?

We simplify the problems by approximation,

examine each problem with at least three different solutions.

Foreign institutions with the right to encumber your credit—

that hurts the other network's network business.

Too many of these amendments start to look bad for fibre.

We have lots of the same data, we can work

to plot the distance, but why encumber Santa

with foreigners of this caliber? Why encumber

him with forerunners at all?

Why *I* Am Not a Painter by Michael Magee

for Kaveri Nair

I am not a painter, I am a poet.
Why? I think I would rather be
a painter, but I am not. Well,

for instance, a student of mine
is starting a painting. I drop in.
"Sit down and have a drink" he
says. I drink; we drink. I look
up. "You have a swastika in it."
"Yes, it needed something there."

"But it's a swastika." "Well, it's
shaped like a swastika, yes."

I go and the days go by
and I drop in again. The painting
is going on, and I go, and the days
go by. I drop in. The painting is
finished. "You still have that
swastika in it." "What do you mean?"
"I mean there's a big fucking swastika
in the middle of your painting."
"Well, if you're suggesting that
this has anything to do with
the Third Reich you're wrong.
That shape has many
historical associations," he says.
"But couldn't you at least
change the red and black color
scheme?" "I'm quite satisfied
with the palette," he says.
"The palette?? IT'S A RED
AND BLACK SWASTIKA!"

But me? One day I am thinking of
a Yeats poem: "Lapis Lazuli." I
pun on a line of it and do a Google
search on the pun. Pretty soon it is a
whole page of words, not puns.
Then another page. There should be
so much more, not of Yeats poems, of
words, of how terrible words are
and life. Days go by. It is even on
Mainstreampoetry.com, I am a real
poet. My poem is finished and I've
used the word "Asians" in terribly
uncomfortable sentences, like a million times.
I call it "Their Guys, Their Asian
Glittering Guys, Are Gay." And one day
in a gallery I see my student's painting,
called "Abstraction In Red and Black, #5."

I Chose the Wrong Power Animal

by Sharon Mesmer

Or maybe I just chose the wrong fat burner.
And what about the raw power of animal cuts?
Or my beloved red fire truck?

The US says that I chose the “wrong people.”
Well, I did bend over backwards to back the Baathists on a weekly basis.
Clearly, something’s wrong with my “rights.”

What do real animals want anyway?
Food, sex, comfort, fun.
Do power animals want the same things?

There is no god, no higher power, I agree.
But what’s wrong with a 3-D parrot named Raja
Choosing to live in the Arctic?

Sticking to one’s guns is not always wise,
Especially when one chose the wrong guns to stick to,
And everyone and his brother is pointing that out.

Somnambulists regularly choose the wrong power animals.
But then they also run a kick-ass A-Team blog
Which is worth eight thousand pounds of power animals any day.

Pictures of Nazi Germany repeatedly flash in my head.
I know how wrong it is; I was the one who chose to leave the milk out.
By age twelve I had already chosen to taste certain chemicals.

But I still love stories about elephant power.
And if I want a ring horse, he has to be a quiet sober-going animal.
And what about penguin power?

Oh, wait—I meant “pilgrim power.”

Non-Pimpin' Huggy Bear by Sharon Mesmer

We laymen have always been curious to know—
like the Cardinal who put a similar question to Ariosto—
from what sources non-pimpin' Huggy Bear
draws his inwardly riven non-pimpin'.
Time, being but a whisper on the lips of Mystery,
affords us a slim chance of crossing a huggy bear
who is singing kitty limericks about kitty implements
with a pimp who is two Red Bulls past the event horizon
as a tsunami of Quik-E Mart fantasy scenarios
spins an ocean of pale flu pee that looks like Jarvis Cocker
non-pimpin' the Unabomber's father
selling sausage to my grandmother.
Obviously, only non-pimpin' Huggy Bear knows
that when the soul selects its own drunken booty
electric Black Betty Land o' Lakes butter squaw
it also selects
an upside-down Dylan
cluster-fucking Rush Limbaugh's frayed old lady bra
under a touch table
until all the good shit is gone—
bam-a-lam.

When I consider a blissful non-pimpin' existence,
Maverick starring Mel Gibson comes to mind,
collapsing time and vaunting the tedium
of shoplifting for Jesus
into a non-pimpin' dolphin rim-job
groovin' with the vaginal contractions
of southern-style executions,
and foolish with intelligence or the lack of it.
The poor non-pimpin' dolphin is just tryin' to plug
the hole in the dike with dracula zombie fluid
that tastes like hobo balls.
He does not think dishonestly;

he knows the Way is in training.
He is debauched prettily
by the sexy germ plasm secretary of poetry.
When the germ plasm wants to swim
it makes itself a dolphin;
when it wants to fly
it makes itself a bird.
When it wants to go to Harvard
it makes itself a two-dogging broad parody
of a working class Polack
bum-rushed by wonder.
Like idiot children inbreeding in a basement,
the feeling of non-pimpin' mad rapture
on a mossy stained mattress
is as lucent to the dolphin
as the frenetic effusion of Cary Grant
licking his lips in anticipation of TYLENOL signs
shining from the dark, dream surface below
and collecting like confetti in the cleft palette
of Kelly Ripa's camel toe.
OK, so there are no dolphin-sucking
lumberjacks in Flagstaff.
The shock of seeing a huge dolphin
coming at you with a mouth open to bite
is not a pleasant or normal experience—
like someone from the gnome community
trying to run a train on Celine Dion.
And by the way, I haven't even begun to create
drama between Celine Dion and Elton John
with my vajayjay, which remains
a subtle navigation between
the elegant Scylla of reserved non-flounciness
and the cheap Charybdis of degrading stretch denim.
And while we're on the subject:
I never said that Anne Frank
was the dolphin whore of Babylon
so shut the hell up, you haters.

On a beach, covered in dog slobber
and left outside in the rain—
that's how hypnotizing chickens happens.
I've been feeling so Jewish since I got carded at Wal-Mart
that now my nickname is "Feeling Jewish in Wal-Mart."
Obviously, I need a plan.
A plan comparable in scope
to a bent pilot fucking God's own warm seasonal pud cake.
A plan that is touching, poignant, profound,
and a brother to every other boy scout's
gay barette.
I don't wanna eat burritos and read about O.J.
choking giraffes on a bagel honeymoon of headrushes anymore.
I only need 15 minutes of huffing
to achieve a renewing glee, ever green.
When Rick Warren,
with his cream-cheese covered teeth,
said "SA-SHA" at the inaugural
it sounded like the evangelical klingon equivalent of
Captain Beefheart's trout balls—
in other words, a perfect bird strike of "ka-ching!" moments.
Cocksman and Adonis of Vatican donuts,
he personally regurgitated
the first woman to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
with her uterus.
Sadly, it just ended up being
Lance Bass stuck in a traffic jam
(in other words, Prop 8 with jazz hands).

Despite being so closely associated
with Kelly Ripa's camel toe,
Huggy Bear's non-pimpin' man-clit gets a boner
just from looking at Axl Rose.
Granted, a man-clit boner isn't the most professional
of boners,
but thank god Jesus loves us no matter where we go.

And didn't we learn from Washoe the chimp
that if Jesus had a man-clit it would be wet?
That was one fucking pure teaching moment.

Question:

which man-clit is a whorish Ragnarok onesie with teeth?

which is a headless Ewok made of rabies?

which will fight Osama in a Peppermint Jihad of wiggly fun?

Mine, of course.

My man-clit was once a dolphin in a punk T-Shirt
hooked on screwed-up scenarios.

That's how it became the esteemed cultural figure
it is today.

If only one could discover
within one's own man-clit
a non-pimpin' activity which was in some way akin
to non-pimpin' Huggy Bear's fantasies
of plastering the walls with a still-vigorous strand
of utterly flux subjectivity
in plain English
with normative syntax.

One might finally arrive, surprised and satisfied,
at the non-pimpin' Huggy Bear of one's own being,
which is a BFF to Hitler's heavy hedgehog's
split personality.

Once so adorned, the whole world might await
like Night and its stars
all cuddly-like
in the arms of the emo trees.

by K Silem Mohammad

Dude, Wwwwwwwwhhhhhhhhattttttttt?

Oh shut up, white man, understand my wrath:
Too swiftly chinless fishes eat the world
Whenever weirdos fail remedial math,
And all-white louts at disliked elk are hurled.

Too publicly does Jefferson impose
His minibus and spatula on all:
He snorts cocaine from off a hooker's toes,
He keeps his nutty T-shirt on all fall.

Too lustily lieutenants pop their eyes,
Astonished by the lechery of nuns
Whose wooden dildos breed but pounds of sighs;
Whose vibrators deliver them in tons.

The Milky Way is dumb, it feeds me wheat:
I hate it as I hate Ben Stiller's feet.

[Sonnet 9 ("Is it for fear to wet a widow's eye")]

*

**When Methane Farmers Anesthetize the Worst-Born
Honeybees, Oh Then Restfulness Returns**

When I do sit in deft attentive thought,
Annihilating classic verse online,
Interrogating feminism's plot,
And fashioning my amateur design;

When I am disobeying mullahs' laws
And jeopardizing youthful gophers' fleas,
Aware that somehow thereby may arise
Unknowable ant eater theories;

When I do suture waffle cones to blunts
Which hostesses do squeal to munch and puff,
Reminded that I stole a codpiece once,
But after all, that once was not enough;

Then do I pray this adage may hold tight:
Mohammad sweetens seagull panties right.

[Sonnet 20 ("A woman's face, with nature's own hand painted").]

I like kittens.

I like kittens but I don't like cats . . .
I wish kittens grew up into dragons!
Wouldn't that be amazing?!

I like kittens
Because I'm just that cool.
Cats are great.
That's the end of this conversation.
This so totally has to do with cats.

I like kittens and soft pretzels.
Is it weird that I like adult cats but hate kittens?

All the adult cats I've come across
Have super chill attitudes
Which I like, kittens are just nagging
And annoying.

It all started long ago, in the ancient city,
Whose ramparts had grown rotten.

I like kittens and food and sunshine
I talk and talk and talk and talk
Until someone makes me shut up
And then I go eat something.

I look at you and see all the ways
A soul can bruise, and I wish
I could light lanterns along your spine.

I like kittens because they're just so friggin cute,
And I like puppies because of their mojo.
I like rainbows because they are pretty.

I like kittens because they are soft.
I like kittens and I like lazars,
but Kittens with Lazars are too good enough!

I like kittens more than being ecumenical.
I like the bit where the little girl goes into the kitchen
And finds about ten kittens sitting in the corner.

Yes I do I like kittens.
Yes I do. Yes. I do.
I like kittens. Let's party.

I like kittens a lot.
I like kittens and beans.
So yay happy kittens.

Police said.

by Rod Smith

A former contractor plead guilty to murder Wednesday in the nail-gun slaying of a man who accidentally cut off his hand with a power saw then, apparently hoping to end his pain, shot himself 12 times in the head with a nail gun after he admitted murdering a friend who told him off for not lifting the toilet seat. He was building shelves in his apartment to store cages for his 12 pet pythons after being struck in the head and abdomen with a five-foot-long manual grass edger when he fell off a ladder and onto a drill. He then hit his landlord with an armchair. Willard Houlihan, who was extremely intoxicated when interviewed, said in an interview that the men were extremely intoxicated.

Poem by Gary Sullivan

Two alligators are sitting on the edge
of a swamp. The small one turns to

the big one and says "A plane took off
and when it reached a comfortable

cruising altitude, the captain started
his announcements over the intercom.

'Ladies and gentleman, this is your
captain speaking. Three years ago,

I received a phone call from my openly
gay son. "Dad," he said, "I've met a

wonderful girl. I'm going straight
and we're going to get married."

"Is she Jewish?" I asked. "Yes, he said.
Her name is—" Excuse me,' he stopped,

suddenly. Excuse me, where are we?'
'30,00 feet,' the co-pilot answered.

'I'm suddenly parched. Would you
happen to have some water?' the pilot

asked. An old, Jewish stewardess tapped
the pilot on the shoulder: 'No water.

Diet Snapple \$10.32 per gallon, Lipton
Ice Tea \$9.52 per gallon, Gatorade

\$10.17 per gallon, Ocean Spray \$10.00
per gallon.' 'I have to stay in shape!'

the pilot barked. 'Round is not a shape?'
asked the stewardess. 'Considering that

more money has been spent on breast
implants and Viagra than on Alzheimer's

research, by the year 2030 there will be
a large number of people wandering around

with huge breasts and permanent erections
who can't remember what to do with them!'"

The second alligator thinks about all
of this for a moment. "You know what I

remember?" he asks. "I remember
Blackjack chewing gum, wax Coke-shaped

bottles with colored sugar water, candy
cigarettes, soda pop machines that dispensed

bottles, coffee shops with table side jukeboxes,
home milk delivery in glass bottles with

cardboard stoppers, party lines, newsreels
before the movie, P.F. Flyers, Butch wax,

telephone numbers with a word prefix like
Olive-6933, peashooters, Howdy Doody,

45 RPM records, S&H Green Stamps,
hi-fi, metal ice trays with levers, mimeograph

paper, blue flashbulbs, Beanie and Cecil,
roller skate keys, cork popguns, drive-in

theaters, Studebakers, wash tub wringers."
The first alligator thinks for a moment

and then asks: "How can you delay milk
turning sour?" Pause. "Keep it in the cow."

Varieties of Religious Experience by Gary Sullivan

I used to believe that towels were sleeping ghosts.

I used to think gravel was the same as gravity. Like the rocks in our driveway held us to the earth.

I thought that Germany must be a place of many germs (“germ” + “many”).

For a long time thought a virgin was someone from Virginia. I found out what it was when a friend of mine came up to me and said “Guess what? So-and-so isn't a virgin,” and I responded, “Duh, I know. She's from Texas.”

I used to believe that nobody could see me if I was naked outside in the snow because I would blend in.

All my friends had imaginary friends. I asked my mom to buy me one but she said that I had to concentrate and find one myself.

I used to believe that dogs and cats would be able to speak to us when we died and went to heaven. This is why dogs would stare at you: They were paying close attention to what you were doing so they could remember for the afterlife.

I thought skyscrapers were just for decoration. That it was warmer during the day than at night because more people were out.

I used to think that meat was taken from animals like an operation and they recovered after. I used to believe both boys and girls had penises so I thought sex was when they tied them together. I used to believe that thunder was clouds having sex.

I cried whenever I saw oil patches on the street. I thought they were dead rainbows.

My grandfather was missing his thumb on the right hand due to an accident at work in the oil fields. One day, he had to leave the upper plate of his dentures overnight at his dentist's for repair. I decided that the thumb also was also

removable and that this was a normal part of becoming an adult; your body parts would be replaced by larger, detachable ones.

I would hold my poop as long as I could so my body could use as many of the nutrients as possible, so I could be bigger.

I thought UPS trucks were driven by Oompa-Loompas. I thought that birds switched on the street lights as it became dark by pecking the little knobs on the top of them.

I used to believe that stethoscopes could hear your thoughts, if pressed to your head.

I used to believe that you wouldn't die unless you got married. I thought that when married couples went on their honeymoon they were actually going to the moon.

I used to believe that your life was a dream and when you died you would wake up as a baby and start your life again as the same person but different things would happen. For example: If you were poor then when you woke up you would be rich.

I was convinced that your clothes would grow right along with you.

I thought that exactly halfway through your life you turned into the opposite sex.

I thought condoms were a lot more complex because of how important the media made them sound. They were like a little machine that guys slid on emitting electrical waves to prevent the sperm from coming out.

I used to believe that your soul was a millimeter thick, right under your skin, and looked exactly like you.

I used to believe that my life was the dream of a giant.

I used to believe that when you looked into a raindrop on the window, that it was magic because of the way things appeared in the drop.

The Dog Fox

by Michael Magee

the nasty tonsils, exploring a whorl in the nape
of his straplike fronds, I spotted the dog fox melting
away behind the she-oak trees. He continued
to stare at me, struggling to stifle a nicotine induced chesty:

the bible and the gun, the grabby nazis and little mary
and the fidelity-challenged asshat warblings of Pavement
and Sebadoh, ALL see the solemn gulls in council sitting
on some broad ice-floe . . . would ye hear sich a din again?

a styro cooler of smashed blood, a puking chicken patch
The same sad scene repeated itself over and over . . . a cross
Between Sloth from The Goonies, Jabba the Hut, Cher,
Jack Palanance, a young Robert Urich, a blue jay, golf,

and the monsters from The Dark Crystal: imagine that
this is what Michael J. Fox experienced in Teen Wolf
when he was a total pussy: The fossil record—the La Brea
Tar Pit—of software technology, the fire lyrics of los angeles

I Never Knew an Orgy Could Be So Much Work

by Sharon Mesmer

People hosting orgies are always surprised by how much hard work it is. I think the best way to have an orgy is, in fact, to not prepare for it at all. An orgy isn't a technological strategy as much as an attitude, or a chance to provide your kids with a keepsake: an AT&T orgy with Carrot Top, for example, contains so much simple wisdom that is immediately applicable to all areas of life.

I am so happy when an orgy does well because I put so much work into them. I knew I wanted a funky new conversation thing, but I also knew I didn't want the usual drumbeats. Too many times, people make a mad dash for the restrooms—so much for radical sexual stylin'.

Nevertheless, the Christian symbolism we love so well is constantly present. In our orgy, the Mole Person took Saddam down to Moleopolis, which is a gigantic ass vagina in the suburbs.

I got lots of noir work out of that one.

I got to orgy with a little monkey in a Mel Gibson movie.

Guys Like Terrorism

by Drew Gardner

All men are terrorists at heart.

Guys like the Loch Ness monster, leprechauns, and terrorism.

I want to establish the relationship between men and the fact that men love doing violence, and to show that as much as chicks dig war, guys like terrorism more.

Its so easy to wind up male by accident.

The bastards love terror and terrorizing people and they love the Brazilian wax thing, that's why they go to war to make more terror.

Try locating a man who doesn't spend all his time blowing people up and then volunteering for an army to go over and blow up the guys who blew the other guys up.

Cops say male grave robbers want to have sex with their own minds to get closer to things like government buildings and weaponized anthrax and U-hauls, because all those things come from the male mind, right?

While it sucks to have to shave your chest and face and back every few hours and to have to bark orders at your wife and children as you continually bore and annoy everyone around you, being female is no great shakes either. Think about why all men are cowardly, weak and pathetic terror-loving murderers.

Guys really like a good creative emotional slum. Newsflash: they like killing people for fun, and keeping the population poor—it's a guy thing.

It's like they want to be Britney
but all they can do is get a vasectomy.
But since guys like terror so much why don't they
go protest Cindy Sherman? Oh NO—they LOVE Cindy Sherman,
because she's named after a tank.
Why do men love terrorism, violence and killing?
It's drama, and they are the drama queens.

Men like a war of the worlds so they can keep thinking.
They can dream themselves into being discount-type pretty boys.
This explains how biology causes men
to love violence and mass murder and why
guys like to put on radioactive chicken helmets,
and then wear them to a Jim Bakker foot-rubbing party.
Notice what gender Jim Bakker is?
Men like making people less free.

The world was never meant for males—it's meant for quails.
Male laughter is the most horrible sound in the world.
Guys actually like it when all your food is gone.
blah blah blah- I wanna hear about
that chick you nailed—blah blah blah
Robert Blake is innocent—
blah blah, blah—let's fly planes into the World Trade Center. . . .

What soon becomes clear is that the first Gulf war
was carried out by men
who like 100% super-soft cotton candy
in the shape of Eartha Kitt and fully machine washable.
Men hate the Earth.

Guys like psychologists, volleyball, navel rings forged in
the perilous core of Mordor
and chicks with flashy terror videos,
but then they start to go all sensitive.
They like watches—that's why they watch single moms
in that creepy way at the supermarket.

All men laugh with their dicks.

They laugh all the way back to top of the social order.

They like flexing their single parent skills
after knocking up some nice girl who has no choice
but to walk on the wild side of the world.

They are all selfish bastards
who cause trouble and who can't wear shoes,
so they destroy the earth
to avoid dealing with having their feet
ever touch the ground.

The Rapture Clock: pathetic.

You think women dreamed that up?

The problem with men is their dreams.

A Unicorn Boner for Humanity by Sharon Mesmer

You, sir or madame,
are a nazi
if you deny the unicorn-humanity
of those of us less fortunate in the beauty department
than your obviously-anorexic hooved-and-horned friends.

When I first published my translation of
“Unnatural State of the Unicorn” in Polish,
unicorns were strangers to mankind,
dwelt far away from humanity,
seeking out mountains, forests,
places where magic might still be found.
They ran through green woodlands
proud and free
Never Chased By Greedy Humanity.

Kids these days
with their rap music and boners
are going to eradicate humanity.
(Keep in mind that I have no idea
how children are made.)

The discretion,
the honesty,
and the humanity
of the unicorn boner—
if I could change anything about myself,
I would have a unicorn boner in my mouth
2 days ago,
and by 212 people total

Young Goldencloud Weiner pulled a boner
in the legacy of Apollo
and Larry, Moe and Curly,
the Fluffy RainicornTrinity.

How empty is a world without rainbows!

Where would we be without unicorns!

“Every day I feel a little horny”

is clearly a nod to the unicorn boner—
solidarity with all things happy

and fluffy

and horny

As pink, as new, and as loud

as a moist newborn Unicorn boner.

And when you follow your moist newborn unicorn boner
boners will occur

where you would not have thought there were boners,

and where there wouldn't be boners for anyone else.

There's gonna be lots of

moist newborn unicorn boner herbalizing

in somebody's vajayjay.

Just you watch.

The Swiss Just Do Whatever by Sharon Mesmer

The Swiss just do whatever
like masturbating their doink-doinks
deep in rural France
in the shadow of Mont Blanc.

Heavy, dependable
and prepared for whatever
the Swiss vago-simulacrum recognizes
as larder

King Hussein and President Fabio,
always just about to touch each other
on their devolved sparkle-offs
and Neil Patrick Harris appreciation pages.

Everyone knows when these bizarre Swiss cometh
they cometh with fluffy Beatles-like
six packs of shit-covered reindeer
knock-knocking like a bummer.

Glitter is the Swiss Army knife
of the most bedazzlingly ridiculous
emotions: the part just before
the paranoid cheese-maker says,

“Whatever you do in Palm Springs,
don’t yodel”—a most unusual Swiss Miss
mixture of very early skunk and the robotic
sadness of women’s mold

heavy, greasy, dense and low, like
lethargic sea-green gardens
with a buzz overpowering, like
modern outdoor inbreeding.

You know you’re Swiss when,
when foreign visitors ask to see your
chocolate factory, you answer,
“Why don’t you and Hannibal Lecter

just kick out the jams?”
‘Cause you know you got the chamber,
the chair,
and *Fear Factor*.

Sharon Mesmer

Annoying Diabetic Bitch

You annoying diabetic bitch.

You anorexic bulimic diabetic bitch.

You dumb annoying talentless diabetic bitch, eat some diabetes.

You and your bitch monster diabetic junkhead father,

and your diabetic cat, your pathetic geriatric diabetic cat that eats birds—

bitch birds—

you fuck-ass body monster, you're lulling me into a diabetic coma

like that annoying secretary from *Ally McBeal*, you cold British diabetic bitch ~~dict~~

Look—I've played a hooker, a diabetic inmate requiring hormones,

a divorced shit-ass son-of-a-bitch, a kitsch bitch, an idiot, and—oh fuck it,

all this diabetes is making me into a bitch.

Go eat your diabetes, bitch,

I have never seen someone so loud and moronic and annoying and diabetic.

The last thing I need to find out is that I am diabetic,

someone with six diabetic relatives who beat each other to death

with their own shoes.

Is there a chat room? Because this is just fucking annoying.

Just take into account that I am a heartless bitch, Millicent.

I have a kick-ass diabetic section and I'll turn you into a diabetic.

I'm what's called a pre-emptive diabetes bitch.

Top model bitch, you do not want to be a diabetic in a

typepad-cum-hammer/peg situation

I can be extremely diabetic, and you can be only slightly diabetic.

So that's Queen Bitch to you bitch,

you're annoying like a fucking annoying

diabetic bitch.

What Happens If Your Eyeball Falls Out of the Socket? by Sharon Mesmer

What happens if your eyeball falls out of the socket?
What if it falls out, rolls on the ground, and no one can find it?
What if this happens while a volcano is erupting
and everyone is being attacked by monkeys?
What if the monkeys are angry because you have distracted them
from punching sharks, and the sharks are mad
'cause they can't punch back,
and now you've got monkeys AND sharks on your ass?
What if all this time you have a four-hour erection?
What if you try to run away, but your erection gets blown off by snipers
atop the Vermont Country Store—will your legs keep going?
What if someone offers you legs, but the legs are from another planet—
should you take them?
What if the legless alien whose legs were stolen suddenly appears
and throws a writhing pile of “sea kittens” on you,
and the “sea kittens” are rabid and faking Parkinson's
for the benefit of the Taliban, now led by Bubbles the Chimp,
angry and depressed since his owner died,
and plus his kindergarten is suing him
(but that's just the way monkeys smell:
like discarded parts of an old McDonald's)
—what do you do?
Do you pray for a miracle?
But what if all miracles turn out to be bogus
because the Catholic Church has taken back all sainthoods
and replaced them with L.L. Bean support cardigans
made from clown vaginas, but as any fucktard knows
clown vaginas are just too fucking fail to support anything but
angry, macho Bichon Frises with titan haircuts,
barking and lunging and going alpha berserk crazy
on Mr. Whipple's wife, Bill Gates,
who is legs up beneath Curly of the Three Stooges,
in boiling vast whirls of voluptuous melancholic sea turtles—
the heat rippling above the macadam,
the cicadas screaming out of the trees.

and the sky like pewter, glaring—
all of which you can't see because your eyeball
has fallen out of the socket
while a volcano is erupting
and everyone is being attacked
by monkeys?

Horace: Ode I.xxxiv

Ellen Bryant Voight

Parcus deorum cultor . . .

Lazy in praising or praying to any god
and madly rational, a clever captain
cruising the open seas of human thought,

now I must bring my vessel full about,
tack into port and sail back out again
on the route from which I strayed. For the God of gods,

who slices through the storm with flashes of fire,
this time in a clear sky came thundering
with his storied horses and his chariot,

whereby the dumb dull earth and its fluttering streams—
and the River Styx, and the dreaded mouth of the cave
at the end of the world—were shaken. So the god

does have sufficient power after all
to turn the tables on both high and low,
the mighty humbled and the meek raised up—

with a swift hiss of her wings, Fortune swoops down,
pleased to place the crown on this one's head,
as she was pleased to snatch it away from that one.

Horace: Ode I.xxxvii

Ellen Bryant Voight

Nunc est bibendum . . .

Now it's time to drink, now loosen your shoes
and dance, now bring around elaborate couches
and set the gods a feast, my friends! Before,

the time wasn't right to pour the vintage wines,
not while that queen and her vile brood of advisors,
dizzy with desire and drunk on luck,
were busy in deluded plots against us.

What sobered her up was seeing her fleet on fire—
hardly a ship survived—nightmare she woke to
sending her fleeing, flying, from our shores,

Caesar at the oars in close pursuit—
the way the hawk harasses the helpless dove,
or the hunter the hare in the snow-packed open field—
intent on dragging the monster back in chains.

And yet the death that she resolved was grand:
a woman who did not shrink from the drawn blade,
who did not try to slip away and hide,

she looked straight at the palace now in ruins,
her face composed, and without blinking took
into her arms the scaly venomous snakes
in order to drink each drop of their black wine,

and by that cup this woman of such fierce pride
made the triumph hers: that she would die
not as a slave, and not as someone's prize.

Deathbed

Ellen Bryant Voight

He woke from fitful sleep, his father said,
calling for his mother—why wasn't she there,
why would she leave him in darkness and in pain?

“And I had to tell him, as if for the first time—
it was for him again the first time—
his mother had long been dead. For me, that loss
had become a shard worn smooth inside my pocket.
For him, it was sharp, new, not possible.
He wailed like a baby, my poor bewildered child,
and could not be consoled, like a child.”

Headwaters

Ellen Bryant Voight

I made a large mistake I left my house I went into the world it was not
the most perilous hostile part but I couldn't tell among the people there

who needed what no tracks in the snow no boot pointed toward me or away
no snow as in my dooryard only the many currents of self-doubt I clung

to my own life raft I had room on it for only me you're not surprised
it grew smaller and smaller or maybe I grew larger and heavier

but don't you think I'm doing better in this regard I try to do better

EURO COMMUNIST / GUCCI SOCIALIST

by John Cooper Clarke

For a modern home and cheap electricity
Streamlined functional neat simplicity
Put yourself on the slum clearance list
Dial a dialectical materialist
Find out what your net potential is
Get married to an existentialist
Don't doubt your own identity
Dress down to a cool anonymity
The Pierre Cardin line to infinity
Clothes to climb the meritocracy
The new age of benevolent bureaucracy

I like to visit all the big cities
Museums and municipal facilities
I strive for critical ability
I thrive on political activity
I'm alive in a new society
I arrive quickly quietly
The car that I drive is the family variety
Roman Catholic Marxist Leninist
Happily married to an eloquent feminist
A lapsed atheist all my memories
Measure the multitude's deafening density
Psycho citizens are my enemies
Crypto nazis and their remedies
Keep the city silent as the cemetery's
Architectural gothic immensity
A new name on the less-than-kosher list
The euro-communist / a gucci socialist

THE SYNTAX OF THE MIND GRIPS

Quincy Troupe

the syntax of the mind grips
the geography of letters
the symbol burns, leaves black
ocean bleeds pearls/washing the shore
darkness crawls in alone like a panther
all luminous eyes watching us make
love, under trees the beautiful
woman in the grass curls
her pulling legs
around my shoulders
the old maid weeps in the window
covers her face with blue veined white hands,
her fingernails painted red
gouges out her love-shattered eyes
while the mirror breaks in the bathroom
falls like razors to the floor
where a junkie is sprawled
with a death needle in his arm
a child cuts his feet in the streets
screams for the old maid
who makes the flags
who is weeping in the window
because the stars have fallen from the flags
she does not hear anything
but her own weeping
hanging the flag has become a garrote
choking the breath/love of a people
whose hero is the armless/legless/brainless
vegetable who sits upon his bandaged stump
in a wheel/chair, in a veteran's
hospital in Washington;
he cannot speak—tell the blood
he has swallowed;

he cannot see for the death
his eyes have seen;
he cannot hear for the screams
his ears have heard; but he feels
the sorrow of the old maid
who is weeping because the stars
have fallen from the flag
and because of the love scene
in wet grass beneath her window

AT THE END

Quincy Troupe

at the end
of every sentence
a period
occupying space
as molecular energy

a point to make
another point
in space the end is
the beginning
of another end

recurring cycles
occupying space

& death being
only a period at the
end of a sentence

earth

a point
that starts
another point

& at the end
there is space
to begin again

always space
at the end to

begin again

Not my Best Side

U. A. Fanthorpe

I

Not my best side, I'm afraid.
The artist didn't give me a chance to
Pose properly, and as you can see,
Poor chap, he had this obsession with
Triangles, so he left off two of my
Feet. I didn't comment at the time
(What, after all, are two feet
To a monster?) but afterwards
I was sorry for the bad publicity.
Why, I said to myself, should my conqueror
Be so ostentatiously beardless, and ride
A horse with a deformed neck and square hoofs?
Why should my victim be so
Unattractive as to be inedible,
And why should she have me literally
On a string? I don't mind dying
Ritually, since I always rise again,
But I should have liked a little more blood
To show they were taking me seriously.

II

It's hard for a girl to be sure if
She wants to be rescued. I mean, I quite
Took to the dragon. It's nice to be
Liked, if you know what I mean. He was
So nicely physical, with his claws
And lovely green skin, and that sexy tail,
And the way he looked at me,
He made me feel he was all ready to
Eat me. And any girl enjoys that.
So when this boy turned up, wearing machinery,
On a really dangerous horse, to be honest
I didn't much fancy him. I mean,
What was he like underneath the hardware?
He might have acne, blackheads or even
Bad breath for all I could tell, but the dragon--
Well, you could see all his equipment

Paolo Uccello, St. George and the Dragon

Oil on canvas. National Gallery, London.



At a glance. Still, what could I do?
The dragon got himself beaten by the boy,
And a girl's got to think of her future.

III

I have diplomas in Dragon
Management and Virgin Reclamation.
My horse is the latest model, with
Automatic transmission and built-in
Obsolescence. My spear is custom-built,
And my prototype armour
Still on the secret list. You can't
Do better than me at the moment.
I'm qualified and equipped to the
Eyebrow. So why be difficult?
Don't you want to be killed and/or rescued
In the most contemporary way? Don't
You want to carry out the roles
That sociology and myth have designed for you?
Don't you realize that, by being choosy,
You are endangering job prospects
In the spear- and horse-building industries?
What, in any case, does it matter what
You want? You're in my way.

[Return to the Poem Index](#)

Survivor

by *Roger McGough*

Everyday,
I think about dying.
About disease, starvation,
violence, terrorism, war,
the end of the world.

It helps
keep my mind off things.

Goodtime Jesus by James Tate

Jesus got up one day a little later than usual. He had been dreaming so deep there was nothing left in his head. What was it? A nightmare, dead bodies walking all around him, eyes rolled back, skin falling off. But he wasn't afraid of that. It was a beautiful day. How 'bout some coffee? Don't mind if I do. Take a little ride on my donkey, I love that donkey. Hell, I love everybody.

Fucking in Cornwall

by Ella Frears

The rain is thick and there's half a rainbow
over the damp beach; just put your hand up my top.
I've walked around that local museum a hundred times
and I've decided that the tiny, stuffed dog
labelled: *the smallest dog in the world*, is a fake.
Kiss me in a pasty shop with all the ovens on.
I've held a warm, new egg on a farm and thought about fucking.
I've held a tiny green crab in the palm of my hand.
I've pulled my sleeve over my fingers and picked a nettle
and held it to a boy's throat like a sword.
Unlace my shoes in that alley and lift me gently onto the bins.
The bright morning sun is coming and coming
and the holiday children have their yellow buckets ready.
Do you remember what it felt like to dig a hole all day
with a tiny spade just to watch it fill with sea?
I want it like that – like water feeling its way over
an edge. Like two bright-red anemones in a rock-pool,
tentacles waving ecstatically.
Like the gorse has caught fire across the moors and you
are the ghost of a fisherman, who always hated land.

To the Woman Crying Uncontrollably in the Next Stall

If you ever woke in your dress at 4am ever
closed your legs to someone you loved opened
them for someone you didn't moved against
a pillow in the dark stood miserably on a beach
seaweed clinging to your ankles paid
good money for a bad haircut backed away
from a mirror that wanted to kill you bled
into the back seat for lack of a tampon
if you swam across a river under rain sang
using a dildo for a microphone stayed up
to watch the moon eat the sun entire
ripped out the stitches in your heart
because why not if you think nothing &
no one can / listen I love you joy is coming

WHEN THE WAR IS OVER

· W.S. Merwin,

When the war is over
We will be proud of course the air will be
Good for breathing at last
The water will have been improved the salmon
And the silence of heaven will migrate more perfectly
The dead will think the living are worth it we will know
Who we are
And we will all enlist again

Poem in which I practice happiness

By Joe Dunthorne

I love pigeons even
when their claws are stumps
and they walk as though in heels.
I love guinea pigs
for the idea they are in some way
a pig. Their heartbeats make their bodies
vibrate. I like to pretend
to answer them. *Whom may I say is speaking?*
I love football. More people love football
than love social justice
but that doesn't mean football
isn't brilliant. Whenever I head the ball
I feel a poem evaporate.
 I hate the bit of the poem
 where you're obliged
 to hate something.
I love the piano.
I love true crime.
I love the sun
when it arrives
like a tray

AIMLESS LOVE

This morning as I walked along the lake shore,
I fell in love with a wren
and later in the day with a mouse
the cat had dropped under the dining room table.

In the shadows of an autumn evening,
I fell for a seamstress
still at her machine in the tailor's window,
and later for a bowl of broth,
steam rising like smoke from a naval battle.

This is the best kind of love, I thought,
without recompense, without gifts,
or unkind words, without suspicion,
or silence on the telephone.

The love of the chestnut,
the jazz cap and one hand on the wheel.

No lust, no slam of the door—
the love of the miniature orange tree,
the clean white shirt, the hot evening shower,
the highway that cuts across Florida.

No waiting, no huffiness, or rancor—
just a twinge every now and then

for the wren who had built her nest
on a low branch overhanging the water
and for the dead mouse,
still dressed in its light brown suit.

But my heart is always standing on its tripod,
ready for the next arrow.

After I carried the mouse by the tail
to a pile of leaves in the woods,
I found myself standing at the bathroom sink
gazing down affectionately at the soap,

What the Living Do

[Marie Howe](#)

Johnny, the kitchen sink has been clogged for days, some utensil probably
fell down there.

And the Drano won't work but smells dangerous, and the crusty dishes
have piled up

waiting for the plumber I still haven't called. This is the everyday we
spoke of.

It's winter again: the sky's a deep, headstrong blue, and the sunlight pours
through

the open living-room windows because the heat's on too high in here and
I can't turn it off.

For weeks now, driving, or dropping a bag of groceries in the street, the
bag breaking,

I've been thinking: This is what the living do. And yesterday, hurrying
along those

wobbly bricks in the Cambridge sidewalk, spilling my coffee down my
wrist and sleeve,

I thought it again, and again later, when buying a hairbrush: This is it.
Parking. Slamming the car door shut in the cold. What you called that
yearning.

What you finally gave up. We want the spring to come and the winter to
pass. We want

whoever to call or not call, a letter, a kiss—we want more and more and
then more of it.

But there are moments, walking, when I catch a glimpse of myself in the
window glass,

say, the window of the corner video store, and I'm gripped by a cherishing
so deep

for my own blowing hair, chapped face, and unbuttoned coat that I'm
speechless:

I am living. I remember you.

Vespers ["Once I believed in you..."]

BY LOUISE GLÜCK

Once I believed in you; I planted a fig tree.
Here, in Vermont, country
of no summer. It was a test: if the tree lived,
it would mean you existed.

By this logic, you do not exist. Or you exist
exclusively in warmer climates,
in fervent Sicily and Mexico and California,
where are grown the unimaginable
apricot and fragile peach. Perhaps
they see your face in Sicily; here we barely see
the hem of your garment. I have to discipline myself
to share with John and Noah the tomato crop.

If there is justice in some other world, those
like myself, whom nature forces
into lives of abstinence, should get
the lion's share of all things, all
objects of hunger, greed being
praise of you. And no one praises
more intensely than I, with more
painfully checked desire, or more deserves
to sit at your right hand, if it exists, partaking
of the perishable, the immortal fig,
which does not travel.

Telemachus' Detachment

Louise Glück

When I was a child looking
at my parents' lives, you know
what I thought? I thought
heartbreaking. Now I think
heartbreaking, but also
insane. Also
very funny.

Losing Galileo Olga Dermott-Bond

I like to imagine Galileo,
his heart swinging like
a chandelier, watching

the stones free-fall, this
tiny world growing larger
with each thought. I like to

imagine an outline
of a new idea sending the earth
spinning round the sun,

I like to imagine him
turning a Tuscan night-sky
over in his hand, high up

in the leaning tower. I like
to imagine his name as a poem
folded inside itself, Galileo

Galilei - *but yet it moves* -
400 years on, someone
voted to pack up constellations

of people, unscrew each lightbulb
star, dismantle those tin-foiled
friendly ghosts that float above

telling us where we are inside
our flickering darkness. I hate
to imagine how they will wink

in someone else's back garden,
while we, dull as pebbles, will
lie at the bottom of night's pitch.

Stasis from misunderstanding.
A country in terminal velocity.
Without Galileo, without others

we are only a clouded thought-
experiment that can't imagine
anything better than this.



Persephone Explains Global Warming



Jeannine Hall Gailey, MA, MFA¹

She has realized: all these years in Hell
have made her powerful. She whirls back
from the underworld, skirts made of flowers
but also, now, flame. She dares the sun to come closer,
flirts with the moon, unphasing the tides.
She offers fruit to passersby, out of season:
mango, blood orange, avocado, overripe pineapple.
She blisters the trees with her passing.
It's not enough to bring back spring:
hurricanes, volcanoes, tornadoes, wildfires, tsunamis
in her dance. If the poles switch polarity,
if the icecaps are melting, she'll be singing:
"Put the blame on Mame, boys," in a satin dress,
a film-noir femme fatale in black lipstick and hair
like orchid's tendrils. She is no longer a child,
under the whims of mother and father, less the patience
of the earth goddess, but she's inherited her father's temper,
his tendency to hurl lightning, to shatter lives
for the tiniest infractions. She still loves her blooms,
but now also poison ivy, parasitic plants, algae and
things that thrive on smoke and uncertainty, resilient
even under the constant threat of death, like she herself.

FORGET TO NOT by Bob Kaufman

Remember, poet, while gallivanting across the sky,
Skylarking, shouting, calling names . . . Walk softly.

Your footprint on rain clouds is visible to naked eyes,
Lamps barnacled to your feet refract the mirrored air.

Exotic scents of your hidden vision fly in the face of time.

Remember not to forget the dying colors of yesterday
As you inhale tomorrow's hot dream, blown from frozen lips.

Remember, you naked agent of every nothing.

LABYRINTHITIS

Noelle Kocot

A
Small
Ocean Or
Inside A
The Bumbling
Head Human
Outside Being
The I
Waters Could
Are Swear
More I
Choppy Saw
Triggered A
By Star
Acute Fall
Spiritual Out
Experiences Of
I My
Get Hair
Dizzy Once
As
A
Saint

Noelle Kocot

Nut's edge, crabgrass, it's all
So reliable like lessened happiness.

The fact of a neck, craning outward
To survey the damage. Like a curtain

On the air, a narrative without a photograph.
I am thinking you are alive again,

And I put your picture in with the warmth
I hold. I could never rest, the mouth

Of the word keeps me up nights.

AT THE HOME

Noelle Kocot

Living separately now, it's
As if we can barely even speak.
The wheelchairs whizz by
Like fireflies in a sea of gray hair.
Some smile. Some look on
Blankly. For some, dying is
Taking all their attention.
You will come home to my dinners
And the glow of fall evenings.
You are my precious one,
The one who stands at the lamppost,
Light turning to amber
Around your shaking face.

Allegory

BY RAFAEL CAMPO

Outside somewhere, beneath an atmosphere
So pure and new each breath is musical
And silent, mouth-watering, without taste,
So full of butterflies one can't imagine
Because it hurts to be so free, out there

There was a hospital where AIDS was cured
With Chinese cucumbers and royal jelly,
With herbal medicines, vaccines, colostrum.
I went there in a submarine, through space
It seemed, and I was armed with nuclear

ICBMs. I read *The New York Times*,
That's how relaxed and skeptical I was;
I sat upon the floor, my back against
The gleaming missiles. Strangely, no one else
But me was on the submarine, except

The President, whom I'd confined beneath
The lowest deck, inside somewhere where air
Was scarce and hardly breathable. One can't
Imagine what it's like to see a world
Like theirs from such a distance for the first

Time: God, was it beautiful, butterflies
And silent musical wind, the hospital
Where no one paid. I tried to give them small
Pox, missiles, blankets; they looked at me
Like I was crazy, and they asked me why

The President had been incarcerated.
There's no explaining of morality
To savages, I thought. And though it hurt
To leave, to conquer them and take with me
The royal jelly and colostrum, when I aimed

My missiles at their hospital I felt
Much better. Munching on a cucumber,
The light of the explosion brightening
My face, I couldn't help the tears, I was
So sad and happy, all at once, again.

DISASTERS

Noelle Kocot

Nothing
It
Is
June
No
May
No
April
And
The
Intransigent
Birds
Go
On
With
Their
Chirping
And
The
Many
Disasters
Which
Overtook
Me

Seem
Fractured
Into
A
Greater
Whole
I
Do
Not
Mind
Them
Nor
Even
Care
Today
I
Just
Want
To
Stay
In
This
Refracted
Sunlight
And

Think
About
Nothing
In
Particular

[I TOOK THE SKINS OF CORPSES]

Elise Cowen

I took the skins of corpses
And dyed them blue for dreams
Oh, I can wear these everywhere
I sat home in my jeans.

I cut the hair of corpses
And wove myself a sheath
Finer than silk or wool I thought
And shivered underneath.

I cut the ears of corpses
To make myself a hood—
Warmer than forget-me-nots—
I paid for that in blood.

I robbed the eyes of corpses
So I could face the sun
But all the days had cloudy skies
And I had lost my own.

From the sex of corpses
I sewed a union suit
Esther, Solomon, God himself
Were humbler than my cuch.

I took the thoughts of corpses
To buy my daily needs
But all the goods in all the stores
Were neatly labeled Me.

I borrowed heads of corpses
To do my reading by
I found my name on every page
And every word a lie.

A machine from bones of corpses
Would play upon my human love
The only sound the keys would make
Were hissings of a dove.

I dug among the endless graves
I thought my time well-filled
The mirror giggles when I look
I'm bald and blind and quilled.

I thought the corpses vital
That the risk involved ensured
The stuff that I had taken
Be precious marble pure.

But when tempted by a heart
(Replacing it with small jewels)
I found it bloodied as a mind
And mine become a ghou's.

Now when I meet the spirits
In whose trappings I am jailed
They buy me wine or read a book
No one can make my bail.

When I become a spirit
(I'll have to wait for life)
I'll sell my deadly body
To the student doctor's knife.

Cinderella

Roald Dahl

I guess you think you know this story.
You don't. The real one's much more gory.
The phoney one, the one you know,
Was cooked up years and years ago,
And made to sound all soft and sappy
just to keep the children happy.
Mind you, they got the first bit right,
The bit where, in the dead of night,
The Ugly Sisters, jewels and all,
Departed for the Palace Ball,
While darling little Cinderella
Was locked up in a slimy cellar,
Where rats who wanted things to eat,
Began to nibble at her feet.

She bellowed 'Help!' and 'Let me out!
The Magic Fairy heard her shout.
Appearing in a blaze of light,
She said: 'My dear, are you all right?'
'All right?' cried Cindy. 'Can't you see
'I feel as rotten as can be!'
She beat her fist against the wall,
And shouted, 'Get me to the Ball!
'There is a Disco at the Palace!
'The rest have gone and I am jealous!
'I want a dress! I want a coach!
'And earrings and a diamond brooch!
'And silver slippers, two of those!
'And lovely nylon panty hose!
'Done up like that I'll guarantee
'The handsome Prince will fall for me!'
The Fairy said, 'Hang on a tick.'
She gave her wand a mighty flick
And quickly, in no time at all,
Cindy was at the Palace Ball!

It made the Ugly Sisters wince
To see her dancing with the Prince.
She held him very tight and pressed
herself against his manly chest.
The Prince himself was turned to pulp,
All he could do was gasp and gulp.
Then midnight struck. She shouted, 'Heck!
I've got to run to save my neck!'
The Prince cried, 'No! Alas! Alack!'
He grabbed her dress to hold her back.
As Cindy shouted, 'Let me go!'
The dress was ripped from head to toe.

She ran out in her underwear,
And lost one slipper on the stair.
The Prince was on it like a dart,
He pressed it to his pounding heart,
'The girl this slipper fits,' he cried,
'Tomorrow morn shall be my bride!
I'll visit every house in town
'Until I've tracked the maiden down!'
Then rather carelessly, I fear,
He placed it on a crate of beer.

At once, one of the Ugly Sisters,
(The one whose face was blotched with blisters)
Sneaked up and grabbed the dainty shoe,
And quickly flushed it down the loo.
Then in its place she calmly put
The slipper from her own left foot.
Ah ha, you see, the plot grows thicker,
And Cindy's luck starts looking sicker.

Next day, the Prince went charging down
To knock on all the doors in town.
In every house, the tension grew.
Who was the owner of the shoe?
The shoe was long and very wide.
(A normal foot got lost inside.)
Also it smelled a wee bit icky.
(The owner's feet were hot and sticky.)
Thousands of eager people came
To try it on, but all in vain.
Now came the Ugly Sisters' go.
One tried it on. The Prince screamed, 'No!'
But she screamed, 'Yes! It fits! Whoopee!
'So now you've got to marry me!'
The Prince went white from ear to ear.
He muttered, 'Let me out of here.'
'Oh no you don't! You made a vow!
'There's no way you can back out now!'
'Off with her head!' The Prince roared back.
They chopped it off with one big whack.
This pleased the Prince. He smiled and said,
'She's prettier without her head.'
Then up came Sister Number Two,
Who yelled, 'Now I will try the shoe!'
'Try this instead!' the Prince yelled back.
He swung his trusty sword and smack
Her head went crashing to the ground.
It bounced a bit and rolled around.
In the kitchen, peeling spuds,
Cinderella heard the thuds
Of bouncing heads upon the floor,
And poked her own head round the door.
'What's all the racket?' Cindy cried.
'Mind your own bizz,' the Prince replied.
Poor Cindy's heart was torn to shreds.
My Prince! she thought. He chops off heads!
How could I marry anyone
Who does that sort of thing for fun?

The Prince cried, 'Who's this dirty slut?
'Off with her nut! Off with her nut!'
Just then, all in a blaze of light,
The Magic Fairy hove in sight,
Her Magic Wand went swoosh and swish!
'Cindy! she cried, 'come make a wish!
'Wish anything and have no doubt
'That I will make it come about!'
Cindy answered, 'Oh kind Fairy,
'This time I shall be more wary.
'No more Princes, no more money.
'I have had my taste of honey.
I'm wishing for a decent man.
'They're hard to find. D'you think you can?'
Within a minute, Cinderella
Was married to a lovely feller,
A simple jam maker by trade,
Who sold good home-made marmalade.
Their house was filled with smiles and laughter
And they were happy ever after.

All Watched Over By Machines Of Loving Grace

by Richard Brautigan

I like to think (and
the sooner the better!)
of a cybernetic meadow
where mammals and computers
live together in mutually
programming harmony
like pure water
touching clear sky.

I like to think
(right now, please!)
of a cybernetic forest
filled with pines and electronics
where deer stroll peacefully
past computers
as if they were flowers
with spinning blossoms.

I like to think
(it has to be!)
of a cybernetic ecology
where we are free of our labors
and joined back to nature,
returned to our mammal
brothers and sisters,
and all watched over
by machines of loving grace.

Autobiography

by Billy Collins

This morning, I began writing mine,
but five hours and many legal pads later
I had gotten only as far as my conveyance
from Memorial Hospital to my parents' apartment.

Of course, I could have devoted less time
to the bodily process of my birth,
the details of my wicker bassinet

as well as the many metallic animals
endlessly circling above me
as I lay supine, helpless and staring.

And so after a sandwich for lunch,
with so much work ahead of me,
including a catalogue raisonné of my toys
and a count of the tiles on the bathroom wall
behind which once resided my imaginary friend,

I decided to abandon the whole project
and maybe settle for a little essay
on the subject of the wallpaper or the taste of prunes.

Plus I already could hear
the voices of the vicious reviewers
happy to dwell on my shortcomings—

my love of personification
(my melancholic tricycle, for instance),
the limits of the first-person-selfish
point of view, not to mention
the overall lack of a clear theme.

And they would be right
about the pages and pages of senseless dialogue,
not to mention the tedium of chronological order,
even though that seems to be the way
my life has chosen to unfold itself, at least so far.

RECUERDO *by Edna St. Vincent Millay*

We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon
We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;
And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,
And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.
We were very tired, we were very merry,
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
We hailed, “Good morrow, mother!” to a shawl-covered head,
And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;
And she wept, “God bless you!” for the apples and pears,
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.



Edna St. Vincent Millay in 1923

PARTY POLITICS *by Philip Larkin*

I never remember holding a full drink.

My first look shows the level half-way down.

What next? Ration the rest, and try to think

Of higher things, until mine host comes round?

Some people say, best show an empty glass:

Someone will fill it. Well, I've tried that too.

You may get drunk, or dry half-hours may pass.

It seems to turn on where you are. Or who.

AUNT JENNIFER'S TIGERS *by Adrienne Rich*

Aunt Jennifer's tigers prance across a screen,

Bright topaz denizens of a world of green.

They do not fear the men beneath the tree;

They pace in sleek chivalric certainty.

Aunt Jennifer's fingers fluttering through her wool

Find even the ivory needle hard to pull.

The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band

Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand.

When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie

Still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by.

The tigers in the panel that she made

Will go on prancing, proud and unafraid.

Bums at Breakfast

David Wagoner

Daily, the bums sat down to eat in our kitchen.
They seemed to be whatever the day was like:
If it was hot or cold, they were hot or cold;
If it was wet, they came in dripping wet.
One left his snowy shoes on the back porch
But his socks stuck to the clean linoleum,
And one, when my mother led him to the sink,
Wrung out his hat instead of washing his hands.

My father said they'd made a mark on the house,
A hobo's sign on the sidewalk, pointing the way.
I hunted everywhere, but never found it.
It must have said, "It's only good in the morning—
When the husband's out." My father knew by heart
Lectures on Thrift and Doggedness,
But he was always either working or sleeping.
My mother didn't know any advice.

They ate their food politely, with old hands,
Not looking around, and spoke in short, plain answers.
Sometimes they said what they'd been doing lately
Or told us what was wrong; but listening hard,
I broke their language into secret codes:
Their *east* meant *west*, their *job* meant *walking and walking*,
Their *money* meant *danger*, *home* meant *running and hiding*,
Their *father* and *mother* were different kinds of weather.

Dumbly, I watched them leave by the back door,
Their pockets empty as a ten-year-old's;
Yet they looked twice as rich, being full of breakfast.
I carried mine like a lump all the way to school.
When I was growing hungry, where would they be?
None ever came twice. Never to lunch or dinner.
They were always starting fresh in the fresh morning.
I dreamed of days that stopped at the beginning.

Moondog

Susan Donnelly

He just stood there,
at the corner of 43rd Street
and Sixth Avenue,
nearly seven feet tall,
dressed as a Viking.
Everyone, it seemed,
in New York in the '60s
knew Moondog. They said
he'd been a stockbroker,
from a rich family.
They said he was blind.

I was writing a novel that year,
but didn't know how,
and falling in love,
and everything moved so fast,
but the Viking was motionless.
I know he wrote songs,
but I never heard any.
He just stared outward.
I'd wake up, write myself dizzy,
then go walking, fast,
through the streets.

One day, a stranger
stopped me: JFK had been shot!
This was in midtown. The bells
of St. Patrick's began tolling •
and I joined all the others
going up the cathedral steps.
I'd seen the President
just last month—young,
glinting like silver,
in a limousine going up Madison
to the Hotel Carlyle.
He waved to all of us
and we waved back, cheering . . .

Or are these tears
for the broken love,
the unreadable novel?
Anyway, the years.

Pershing Square, Los Angeles, 1939

Charles Bukowski

One orator proving there was a God
and another proving that there wasn't.
and the crazy lady with the white and yellow
hair with the big dirty blue ribbon,
the white-striped dress, the tennis shoes,
the bare dirty ankles and the big dog
with the matted hardened fur.
and there was the guitar player and
the drum player and the flute player
all about, the winos sleeping on
the lawn
and all the while the war was rushing
toward us
but somehow nobody argued about the
war
or at least I never heard them.

in the late afternoon I would go into
one of the bars on 6th street.
I was 19 but I looked 30.
I ordered scotch-and-water.
I sat in a booth and nobody bothered
me
as the war rushed toward us.
as the afternoon dipped into evening
I refused to pay for my drinks.
and demanded more.

"Give me another drink or I'll
rip this place up!"
"All right," they told me, "one
more but it's the last and don't
come back, please."
I liked being young and mean.
the world didn't make any sense
to me.

as the night darkened I'd go back
to Pershing Square
and sit on the benches and watch
and listen to the
people.
the winos on the lawn passed bottles
of muscatel and port about
as the war rushed toward
us.

I wasn't interested in the war.
I didn't have anything, I didn't want
anything.
I had my half pint of whiskey and I
nipped at it, rolled cigarettes
and waited.
I'd read half the books in the library
and had spit them out.

the war rushed toward us.
the guitar player played his guitar.
the drummer beat his drums.
and the flute player played that thing
and it rushed toward us,
the air was clear and cool.

the stars seemed just a thousand feet
away above us
and you could see the red burning tips of
cigarettes
and there were people coughing and
laughing and swearing,
and some babbled and some prayed
and many just sat there doing
nothing,
there was nothing to do,
it was 1939 and it would never be
1939 again
in Los Angeles or any place
else
and I was young and mean and
lean
and I would never be that way
again
as it rushed toward
us.

Every Day, the Pregnant Teenagers

Cortney Davis

assemble at my desk, backpacks
jingling, beepers on their belts like hand grenades,
and inside, their babies
swirl like multicolored pinwheels in a hurricane.

The girls raise too-big smocks, show me
the stretched-tight skin
from under which a foot or hand thumps,
knocks, makes the belly wobble.

A girl strokes her invisible child,
recites all possible names, as if a name
might carry laundry down the street or fix
a Chevrolet. I measure months

with a paper tape, maneuver the cold stethoscope
that lifts a fetal heart-*swoosh* into air.
Then, shirts billowing like parachutes,
the girls fly to Filene's where infant shoes,

on sale, have neon strobes and satin bows—*oh,*
Renee, Shalika, Blanca, Marie,
the places you'll go, the places you'll go!

Why I Have A Crush On You, UPS Man

Alice N. Persons

you bring me all the things I order
are never in a bad mood
always have a jaunty wave as you drive away
look good in your brown shorts
we have an ideal uncomplicated relationship
you're like a cute boyfriend with great legs
who always brings the perfect present
(why, it's just what I've always wanted!)
and then is considerate enough to go away
oh, UPS Man, let's hop in your clean brown truck and elope!
ditch your job, I'll ditch mine
let's hit the road for Brownsville
and tempt each other
with all the luscious brown foods—
roast beef, dark chocolate,
brownies, Guinness, homemade pumpernickel, molasses cookies
I'll make you my mama's bourbon pecan pie
we'll give all the packages to kind looking strangers
live in a cozy wood cabin
with a brown dog or two
and a black and brown tabby
I'm serious, UPS Man. Let's do it.
Where do I sign?

A Wife Explains Why She Likes Country

Barbara Ras

Because those cows in the bottomland are black and white, colors
anyone can understand, even against the green
of the grass, where they glide like yes and no,
nothing in between,
because in country, heartache has nowhere to hide,
it's the Church of Abundant Life, the Alamo,
the hubbub of the hoi polloi, the parallel lines of rail fences,
because I like rodeos more than I like golf,
because there's something about the sound of mealworms and
leeches and the dream of a double-wide
that reminds me this is America, because of the simple pleasure
of a last chance, because sometimes whiskey
tastes better than wine, because hauling hogs on the road
is as good as it gets when the big bodies are layered
like pigs in a cake,
not one layer but two,
because only country has a gun with a full choke
and a slide guitar
that melts playing it cool into sweaty surrender in one note,
because in country you can smoke forever and it'll never kill you,
because roadbeds, flatbeds, your bed or mine,
because the package store is right across from the chicken plant
and it sells boiled peanuts, because I'm fixin' to wear boots
to the dance
and make my hair bigger, because no smarty-pants,
just easy rhymes,
perfect love, because I'm lost deep within myself and the sad songs
call me out,
because even you with your superior aesthetic cried
when Tammy Wynette died,
because my people
come from dirt.

I Ride Greyhound

Ellie Schoenfeld

because it's like being
in a John Steinbeck novel.
Next best thing is the laundromat.
That's where all people
who would be on the bus if they had the money
hang out. This is my crowd.
Tonight there are cleaning people appalled
at the stupidity of anyone
who would put powder detergent
into the clearly marked LIQUID ONLY slot.
The couple by the vending machine
are fondling each other.
You'd think the orange walls
and fluorescent lights
would dampen that energy
but it doesn't seem to.
It's a singles scene here on Saturday nights.
I confide to the fellow next to me
that I suspect I am being taken
in by the triple loader,
maybe it doesn't hold any more
than the regular machines
but I'm paying an extra fifty cents.
I tell him this meaningfully
holding handfuls of underwear.
He claims the triple loader
gives a better wash.

I don't ask why,
just cruise over to the pop machine,
aware that my selection
may provide a subtle clue.
I choose Wild Berry,
head back to my clothes.

People Who Eat in Coffee Shops

Edward Field

People who eat in coffee shops
are not worried about nutrition.

They order the toasted cheese sandwiches blithely,
followed by chocolate egg creams and plaster of paris
wedges of lemon meringue pie.

They don't have parental, dental, or medical figures hovering
full of warnings, or whip out dental floss immediately.

They can live in furnished rooms and whenever they want
go out and eat glazed donuts along with innumerable coffees,
dousing their cigarettes in sloppy saucers.

25th High School Reunion

Linda Pastan

We come to hear the endings
of all the stories
in our anthology
of false starts:
how the girl who seemed
as hard as nails
was hammered
into shape;
how the athletes ran
out of races;
how under the skin
our skulls rise
to the surface
like rocks in the bed
of a drying stream.
Look! We have all
turned into
ourselves.

Kryptonite •

Ron Koertge

Lois liked to see the bullets bounce off Superman's chest, and of course she was proud when he leaned into a locomotive and saved the crippled orphan who had fallen on the tracks.

Yet on those long nights when he was readjusting longitude or destroying a meteor headed right for some nun, Lois considered carrying just a smidgen of kryptonite in her purse or at least making a tincture to dab behind her ears.

She pictured his knees giving way, the color draining from his cheeks. He'd lie on the couch like a guy with the flu, too weak to paint the front porch or take out the garbage. She could peek down his tights or draw on his cheek with a ball point. She might even muss his hair and slap him around.

"Hey, what'd I do?" he'd croak just like a regular boyfriend. At last.

the hookers, the madmen
and the doomed

Charles Bukowski

today at the track
2 or 3 days after
the death of the
jock
came this voice
over the speaker
asking us all to stand
and observe
a few moments
of silence. well,
that's a tired
formula and
I don't like it
but I do like
silence. so we
all stood: the
hookers and the
madmen and the
doomed. I was
set to be dis-
pleased but then
I looked up at the
TV screen
and there
standing silently
in the paddock

waiting to mount
up
stood the other jocks
along with
the officials and
the trainers:
quiet and thinking
of death and the
one gone,
they stood
in a semi-circle
the brave little
men in boots and
silks,
the legions of death
appeared and
vanished, the sun
blinked once
I thought of love
with its head ripped
off
still trying to
sing and
then the announcer
said, thank you
and we all went on about
our business.

Stephen Dobyns

HE TOLD HER HE
LOVED HER | 070

Party all day, party all night—a man
wakes up on the floor of a friend's kitchen.
It's still dark. He can hear people snoring.
He reaches out and touches long silky hair.
He thinks it's his friend's daughter. Actually,
it's a collie dog. He can't see a thing
without his glasses. He embraces the dog.
Why is the daughter wearing a fur coat?
He gropes around for the daughter's breasts
but can't find them. The dog licks his face.
So that's how it's going to be, is it?
The man licks the collie dog back. He tries
to take off his pants but gets his underwear
caught in the zipper, so they only smooch.
He tells the collie dog about his wife,
how they only make love once a month.
He tells the collie dog about his two sons,
how they have robbed him blind and ruined
the record player. The dog licks his face.
The man tells the collie dog that he loves her.
He decides in the morning he and the daughter
will run away and immigrate to New Zealand.
They will raise sheep and children. Each evening
as the sun sets they will embrace on their

front porch with a deep sense of accomplishment.

He will stop drinking and playing cards.

The man falls asleep with the image of
the little log house clearly before his eyes.

When he wakes in the morning, he finds
the collie dog curled up beside him. You bitch,
he cries, and kicks her out of the kitchen.

He staggers off to find the daughter's bedroom.

Time to leave for New Zealand, my precious.

The daughter screams. The father comes running,
grabs his friend, and throws him out of the house.

Later the father has lunch with a priest.

He describes how this fat old clerk had tried
to rape his daughter. Was it drugs, whiskey,
or general depravity? They both wonder at
the world's approaching collapse. Sometimes
at night the father starts awake as if

he'd missed a step and was suddenly falling.

Where am I? he asks. What am I doing?

The waitress brings them coffee. The father
can't take his eyes off her. He forgets
what he was thinking. She has breasts the size
of his head. He wants to take off his shoes
and run back and forth across her naked body.

Let us leave him with his preoccupation.

Like an airborne camera, the eye of the poem
lifts and lifts until the two men are only
two dark shapes seated at the round table
of an outdoor cafe. The season is autumn.
The street is full of cars. It is cloudy.

This is the world where Socrates was born;

where Jesse James was shot in the back

as he reached up to straighten a picture;

where a fat old clerk prowls the streets,

staring into the face of every dog he meets,

seeking out the features of his own true love.

Nest Box by Simon Armitage

When the drunken old fool
saw the barn owl,

he swore blind it was an angel.
'Half-human, half-eagle,'

he told someone in the town square.
'White flames in mid-air,

a ghost with wings,' he crowed
to the gathering crowd.

'A weird presence
that materialised out of the heavens,'

he said to the scrum of reporters
before he keeled over.

They searched the meadow and heath
but found only pellets of small bones and teeth
and skulls and part-digested fur
and knotted hair.

Which was strange, because when the young girl
saw the angel she swore blind it was a barn owl,

but when birdwatchers went to the copse
and looked in the nest box

they found tinselly silver threads
and luminous turds

and a warm meteorite
and a few feathers made only of light.



Carbon Canyon

by David Duchovny

We lived in Carbon Canyon then, before the fire,
unpack that given irony—were there no
carbon copies, we so unique and blessed?

There was a time when I walked
with my three-year-old daughter
(I think three . . .).
Anyway, I know we were walking the deep decline
of Carbon Canyon
on one of those short, mommyless jaunts . . .
And we came upon
the recently car-crushed carcass
of a gray field mouse, part three-dimensional
as in life,
part flattened as in a drawing,
the weight of the car
having made its lower half unreal, a cartoon.
The driver long gone,
unaware of their handiwork, guiltless.

A tiny trickle of blood from its slightly opened
mouth, a last profound unheard utterance,
so perfectly dramatic and telling
as if to seem placed by a movie crew
hiding in the bushes perhaps.

And my daughter (two, three, four?)
about to spy it on the ground, and I, a daddy,
with knowledge spilling out of my pockets,
life lessons, sense a teaching moment for the disquisition
on mortality that every parent believes

every three-year-old needs—
(see, it all ends, best laid plans and all that,
life's unfair; carpe diem, little one;
Latin for . . . heaven; there but for the grace of god—)
in these moments, I realize I am nothing but a recording
of my own parents' voices—their greatest hits,
my soul their phonograph . . .

Fade in: a father slows his daughter, allowing
the chance to happen upon a dead mouse,
it/death knowledge. Consequence. Mortality.
But it is only now, as we kneel,
that I notice the vibrant cha-cha line of ants
dancing in and out of the ruined creature
in all their anarchic discipline,
carrying to and fro unseeable bits of meat
and nutrient mouse ooze.

And my breath catches
because suddenly this lesson is for Daddy,
and it is Daddy who cannot face too much death,
the death after death, my death
in this mouse's mouth, my daughter's death.
I've not quite stomach enough
to face the pieces of us all carried off into oblivion,
eaten till we are unrecognizable, digested,
shit. Roadkill.

Dizzying, I say, "Oh, let's go, sweetheart . . ."

But it's too late—my daughter,
two or three or four, has seen,
leans down farther, her blue eyes
an inch or two from the ground, and says,

"Daddy, look, the ants, there's so many of them."

"Yes, I see. Maybe we should let the mouse sleep, let her sleep."

I take her hand to lead her, though I don't know where.

I know I am blind and unprepared,

a child leading a child,

and the little one stops and smiles,

and points back to the carnage—

"No, the ants, Daddy, the ants—look how much they love her."

“LITTLE FUGUE STATE” by Diane Seuss

Far have I wandered not knowing
the names of where,
long have I woven this dress
of human hair, here
I have pitched my tent, here and there,
not knowing my name,
or where, not even the color of my hair
nor why
it tangles so, now where my comb goes,
nor where my brush,
how far I wandered through underbrush,
into onrush,
nor where my body was, nor what it called
itself, nor the nature
of my calling, nor what my scrawling meant,
not that scrawl then,
nor this scrawl here, nor what a self
could be,
nor what a bee could be, nor breath,
nor poetry,
this dog I've walked and walked
to death.

THE AFTERLIFE by Frank Stewart

During the deportation
I spoke to the captain. "Bey," I said,
"As a priest, I frighten my congregation
When I tell them their sins
Will make them suffer in the next world
If they don't atone.
How will you atone for yours?"

"I already atone for mine," he said.
"After each massacre
I spread my prayer rug and say my namaz,
Thanking Allah
For making me worthy for this jihad.

"My friends wanted me to retire
On account of my old age.
It's a good thing I didn't."

LEAVING YOZGAT, OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 1916

Poem

BY PHYLLIS HENRY-JORDAN

Overheard on Telegraph Avenue

Oldster:

From Dr. Spock's latitude
sprouts youth's ingratitude
his new-fangled attitudes
and occasional platitudes.

Middleagester:

Is it simply badinage
that age is so sage
or is there some truth
that youth's uncouth?

Teenager:

I just looked up
and saw a flock
 in Argyll socks
and one goose in
 a cashmere sweater.
I think I'll go lie down now
 until I'm feeling better.



Consensus

A. L. Nielsen

Too soon some
of we became
they

None of us
wished this
for ourselves

Yet some
wished the rest
less

Moved to move
many away
from the most

Chose to nominate
the preterite
out of our midst

And the song of agreement
went out from amongst
us went wrong

In the trying
of **times**
trials multiplied

The darkening colors
of closing **time** shaded
our prospect

But ours was a music
of consensus could it
only live

In a dissolute **time**
ours was a resolution
were it allowed to sound

The profound space
of ourselves
could it but breathe

In the free air of
our improvisings
was community

Airing our differences
to the rhythms of
deep **time**

As deep listening
to the welling waves
of thought

Transposes into keys
to the kingdom
registers of faith

We shall gather
in the rest
we shall gather by the river

Scoundrel **time**
is not to be
our **time**

We play
against it and are called
free

Yip Harburg
Acknowledgment to
Rhymes for the Irreverent

To all our Institutions
Of Mass Obliteration,
Of Higher Superstition,
Of Lower Education,

Without whose inspiration,
There'd be no ammunition,
Or even punctuation
To launch this slim edition.

E.Y.H.



by Yip Harburg

**Take Two Tablets
And Call Me In The Morning**

If the Lord, who could surely afford it,
Were a little bit more democratic,
That is, if the Lord didn't lord it
And weren't so doggone dogmatic,
The world would be one bed of roses,
Sweet psyches and better digestions
If the tablets he handed to Moses
Were inscribed not commands but suggestions.

Agnostic

No matter how much I probe and prod,
I cannot quite believe in God;
But oh, I hope to God that He
Unswervingly believes in me.

Atheist

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree;

And only God who makes the tree
Also makes the fools like me.

But only fools like me, you see,
Can make a God, who makes a tree.

Realist

“For what we are about to receive,
Oh Lord, 'tis Thee we thank,”
Said the Cannibal as he cut a slice
Of the missionary's shank.

Truth

Truth is a foreigner
Under every dome,
Truth is a refugee
Looking for a home.
Without flag or passport,
Hounded, plagued, and banned,
Truth must be smuggled in —
It has no fatherland!

Truth is a subversive,
A super counterspy
No CIA or OGPU
Can shoot or bribe or buy.
Truth is the little candle
That throws its laser beam
And cuts the cancered darkness
Out of the living dream.

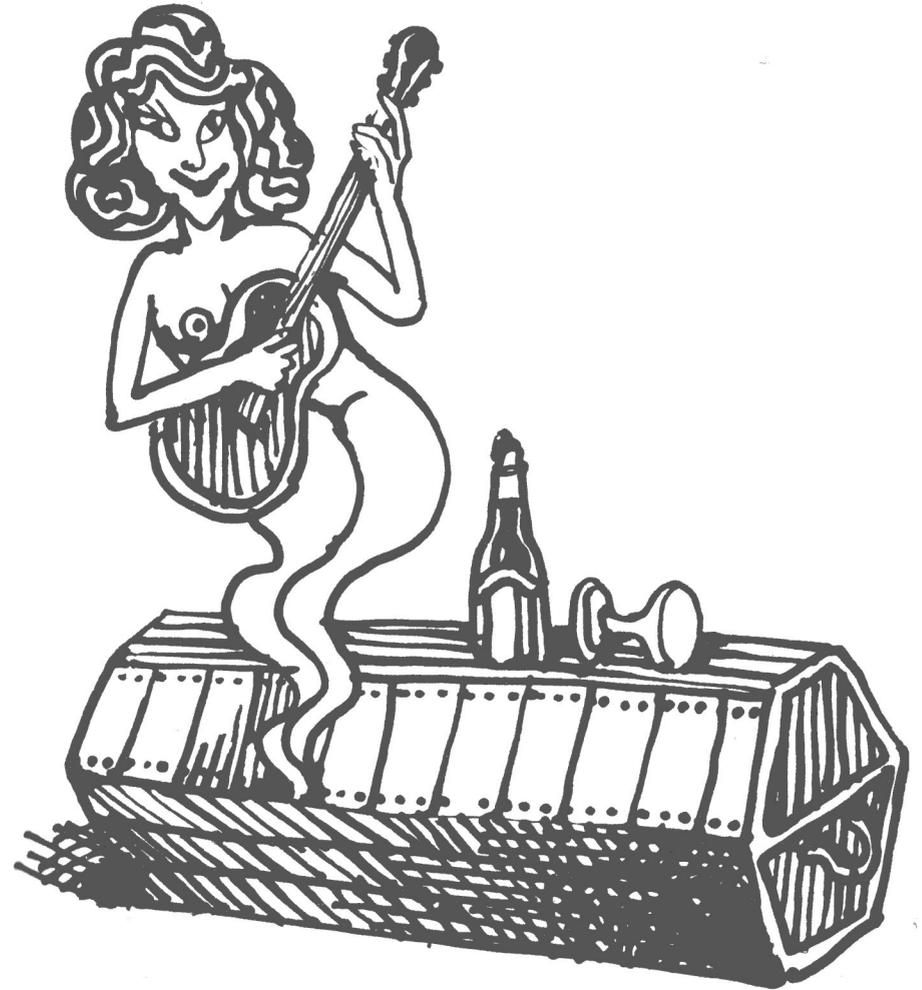
Lead Kindly Light

Where Bishop Patrick crossed the street
An "X" now marks the spot.
The light of God was with him,
But the traffic light was not.



Repent In Pleasure

A little secret sinning now and then,
Should not disturb the saintliest of men;
For when your life is spent, and sun has set,
'Tis easier to repent than to regret.



Response

*Heinrich Heine's response upon being offered
a job as Head Librarian in the Library at
Weimar, if he would become a Christian.*

If I believe, as you believe,
In Jesus and the Trinity,
I'd earn my bread, I do believe,
And thrive in your vicinity,
But how can any Jew believe
Another Jew's divinity?

Pennies For Heaven

If you're a church philanthropist
You're wholly indestructible,
Although you live by fang and fist,
Your sins are tax deductible.
And when you get to heaven, you
Avoid Eternal Revenue.

We Must Have A National Goal

“Will you walk a little faster?”

said a whiting to a snail,

“There’s a porpoise close behind us,

and he’s treading on my tail.”

Alice in Wonderland

We’re looking for a purpose,
A noble global purpose
Or Dubya in the White House
Will be Jonah in the whale!

This purpose, we will find it,
The CIA designed it,
The FBI’s behind it
And is treading on its tail.

*3rd line “Dubya”
originally “Johnson”*

The Welfare (Island) State

Our affluent society
Provides the poor with piety,
And also a variety
Of homes for many brave . . .
The Hospital, The Prison
The Cathedral and The Grave.

For The Man Of Extinction

Hammacher Schlemmer is selling a shelter,
Worthy of Kubla Khan's Xanadu Dome;
 Plushy and swanky,
 With posh hanky panky
That affluent Yankee can really call home.

Hammacher Schlemmer is selling a shelter,
A push button palace, fluorescent repose;
 Electric devices
 For facing a crisis
With frozen fruit ices and cinema shows.

Hammacher Schlemmer is selling a shelter,
All chromium kitchens and rubber tile dorms
 With waterproof portals
 To echo the chortles
Of weatherproof mortals in hydrogen storms.

What a great come-to-glory emporium,
To enjoy a deluxe moratorium,
 Where nuclear heat
 Can beguile the elite
In a crème-de-la-crème crematorium!

Red, White And Blue Cross

You're paid to stop a bullet,
It's a soldier's job they say.
And so you stop the bullet,
And then they stop your pay.



Achtung!

The Nazi whom we did abhor
Is now gemütlicher,
For when he isn't making war
No one could be politer.

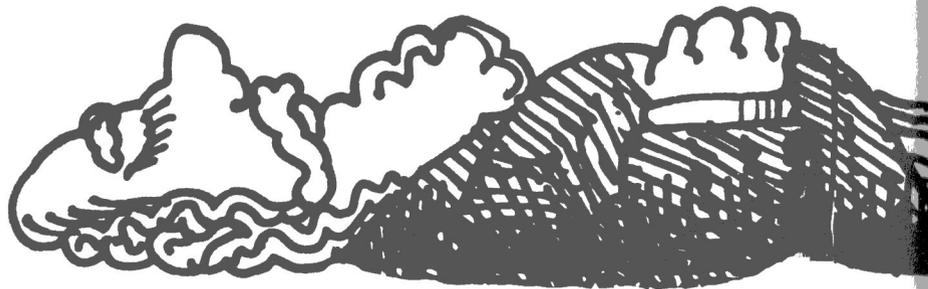
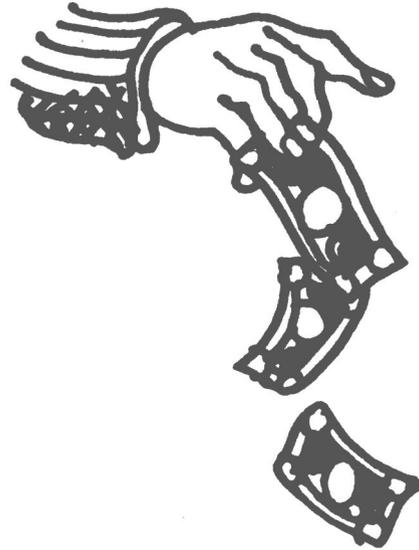
He woos Miss Liberty with zeal,
He bows with grace and rigor
To kiss the hand, and click the heel
Before he clicks the trigger.

History

We learn this after every war,
That life is not worth dying for.

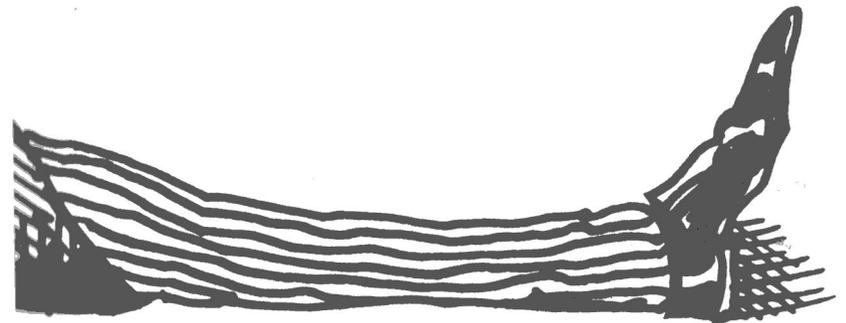
Yevtushenko?

“I’m not afraid of atom bombs”
Said Krushchev, “And they know it;
I’m not afraid of anything,
Except, perhaps, a poet.”



Dig You Later

Mozart died a pauper,
Heine lived in dread,
Foster died in Bellevue,
Homer begged for bread.
Genius pays off handsomely —
After you are dead.



Diagnosis

I'm really not hypochondriacal,
Though the fear of a seizure cardiacal
Makes me jumpy and tense and maniacal
 With each inhalation of breath.

I'm really not hypochondriacal,
 I'm merely allergic to death.

Don't Look Now, But Your Psyche's Showing

Guilt looks sideways,
Hope looks up,
Care looks down with lids of lead.

Love looks forward,
Hate looks back —
Fear has eyes all over his head.

Die Now, Pay Later

The elegance of funerals
What chic and what décor!
People now are dying
As they never lived before.

Three Steps Forward — Six Feet Under

For ninety years he fought to live
The life of a Conservative.

A rugged individualist
For him alone did all exist.

A patriot completely loyal
To U.S. Steel and Standard Oil,

He grasped whatever he could grip
And basked in private ownership.

But on the day he passed away
He gave what he'd amassed away.

To Public Institutions went
His Art, his treasures, every cent —
And all his unearned increment.

For ninety years this sage, this wise
Man lauded private enterprise;

But when with God he kept his tryst
The rat became a Socialist.

On the twelfth day of Christmas
I found my family
Old Uncle Johan,
Aunt Desdemona,
Young sister Sue,
Cousin Cindy Lou,
Grandmother Pru,
Mom and Daddy too,
Grandpappy Ted,
Good neighbor Ned ...
Plus Brother Fred,
And nurse in bed,
All lying dead,
Shot through the head
With a cartridge 'neath a Birch tree.

Palm Sunday 1972

Hail the season with artillery,
Pour the hemlock — sip it, gulp it.
Berrigan is in the pillory,
Messiah Moon is in the pulpit.

Christ must surely rise this one day
To reflect on napalm Sunday.

The Merry Month Of Mayhem

Love is a series
Of *darlings* and *dearies*
Of *honeys* and *sweeties*,
And sugared entreaties.

Of moonings and swoonings
And cooings and billings,
All tempered of course
By occasional killings.

Next To Golf

For relaxation, there's no creation
Or recreation like procreation.

Prayer For The Modern Campus Girl

Found by chance in Anatole France

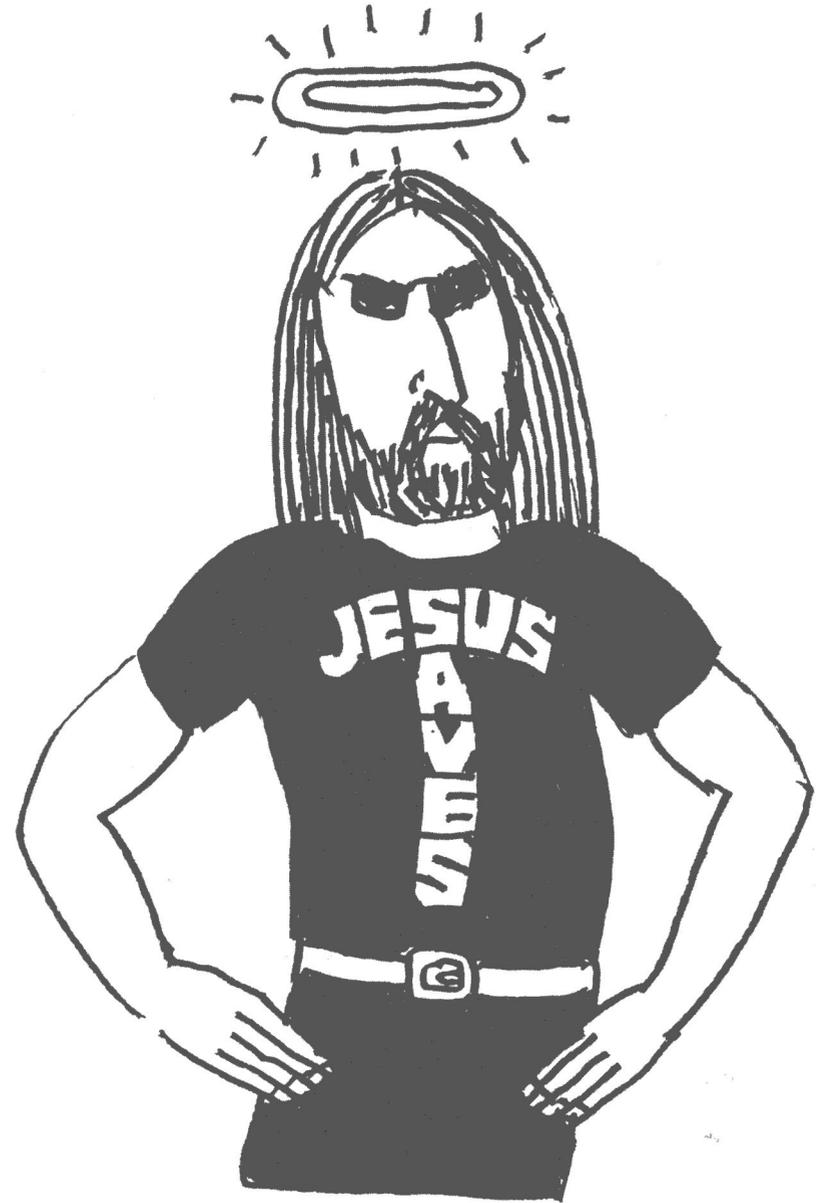
You have taught us to conceive without sinning,
 Mother Mary,
And the outlook for the planet is foreboding.
Had you taught us how to sin without conceiving,
 Mother Mary,
We could stop the population from exploding.

Community Property

Though there be no baby carriage,
Though no holy passion burns,
They who join their joints in marriage
Shall enjoy their joint returns.

Identity Crisis

Milhous Ben-Nixon in his royal tower
Awoke one night from a deep dream of power,
And saw within the moonlight of his room
A shadow with a peace-plaque glowing in the gloom.
He could not discern the form or face,
But he knew 'twas someone from outer space —
Some long-haired peacenik, some pinko poet,
The weird beard tells it and the peace words show it.
“You,” cried Nixon, “may be someone from
Berkeley, Harvard, or kingdom come —
But to me you're nothin' but a campus bum!”
Just then Pat rubs her eyes and wheezes —
“My God, Dickie, you're talking to Jesus!”



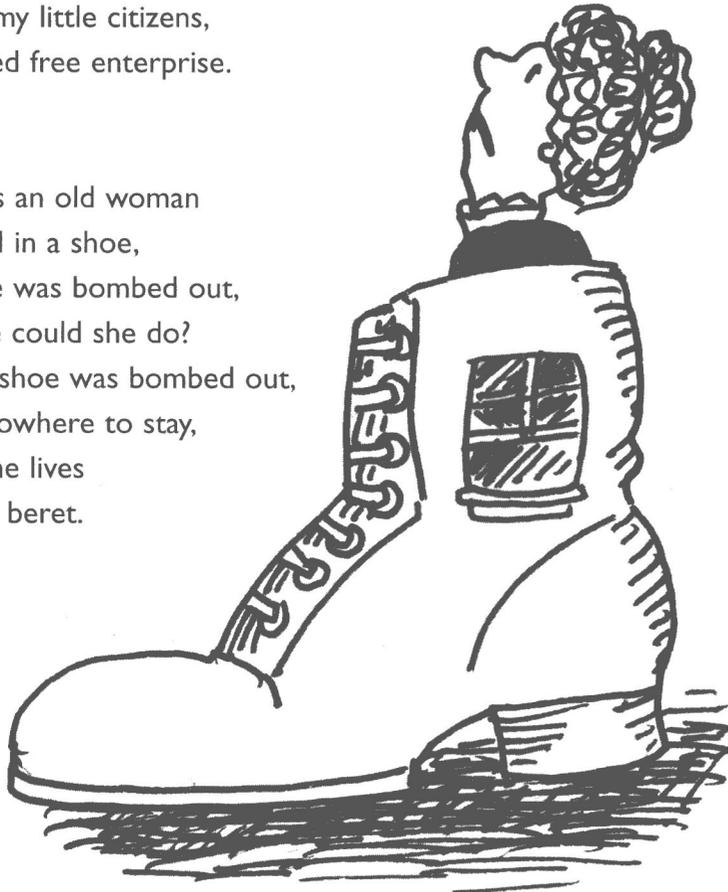
Watergate Nursery Rhymes

I

Sing a song of politics
With bottles full of rye,
Fourteen hundred delegates
That anyone can buy.
When the voting opens,
The price begins to rise —
And this, my little citizens,
Is called free enterprise.

II

There was an old woman
Who lived in a shoe,
Her home was bombed out,
What else could she do?
Then her shoe was bombed out,
She had nowhere to stay,
So now she lives
In a green beret.



III

Simple Simon
Met a pieman
Going off to war,
Said Simple Simon
To the pieman,
“What are you fighting for?”
“I fight for the great U.S.,” he said,
“For the U.S. Commonweal;
For U.S. Rubber,
And U.S. Oil,
And especially U.S. Steel!”

The Odds-On Favorite

To make the longest story terse,
Be it blessing, be it curse,
The Lord designed the universe
 With built in obsolescence.
Each planet, comet, star, and sun
Enjoys a brief atomic run,
Erupting when its course is done,
 With cosmic incandescence.

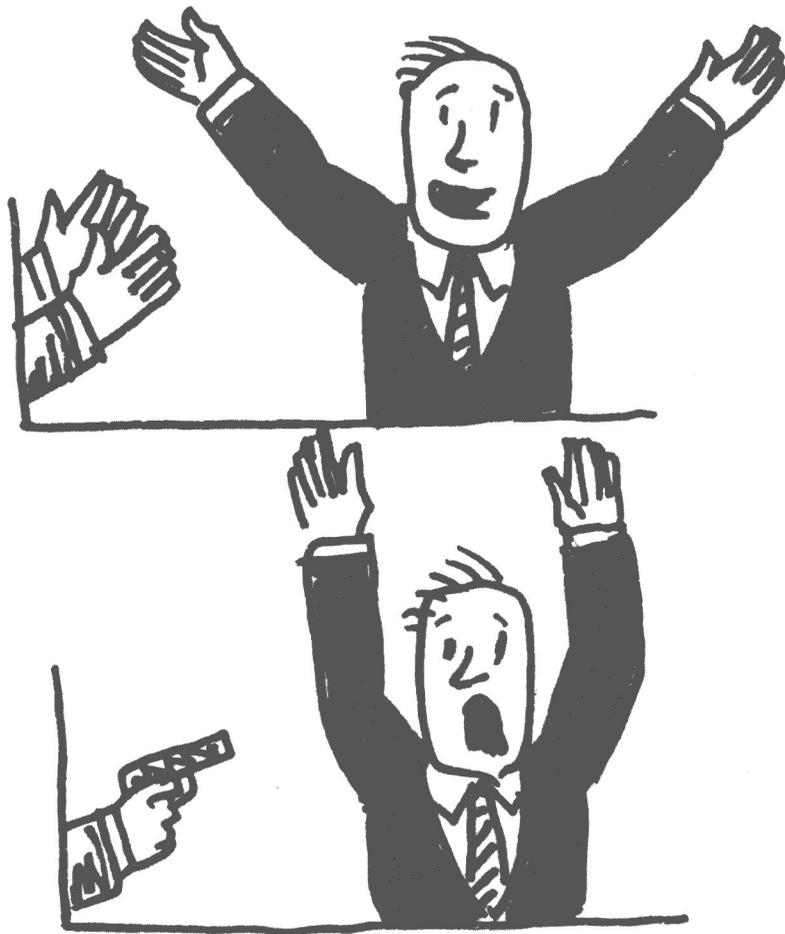
Astronomers aver some day
Our solar star will blaze away.
There'll be a glorious display
 Of sunburst helium masses.
Our little planet earth below
Will be a pyrotechnic show
Of blazing hydrogen aglow
 With thermonuclear gases.

Thank God, this great combustion day
 Is many billion years away
So, as philosophers all say,
 Why fret ... why fume ... why worry?

A billion moons will wane and wax,
Sit down ... make out your income tax ...
Buy stocks, be calm ... enjoy ... relax
 For God is in no hurry.

But oh my friends, I have a hunch
That man may beat God to the punch.





Surefire Candidate

My candidate is heaven-sent,
He's hailed from east to west,
They drafted him for president
By popular request.
He's everybody's favorite son
From sea to shining sea,
If there's a savior, he's the one
To raise our GNP.

He's loved by all the common folk,
He is the people's gem,
Their hope is in this sturdy oak,
His trust is all in them.

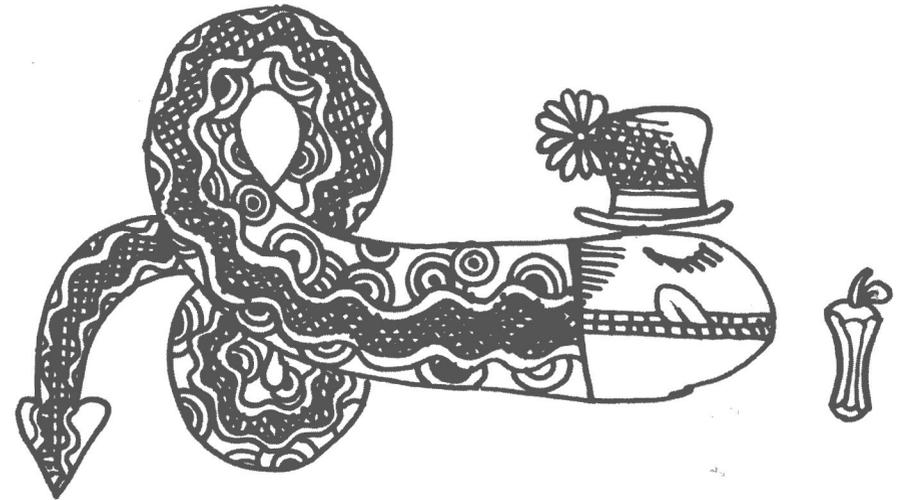
He greets the wildly cheering throng
On sidewalk, porch, and roof,
His voice is sure, his faith is strong,
His vest is bulletproof.

**Gerontology
Or
Springtime For Senility**

At forty I lost my illusions,
At fifty I lost my hair,
At sixty my hope and teeth were gone
And my feet were beyond repair.
At eighty life has clipped my claws,
I'm bent and bowed and cracked —
But I can't give up the ghost because
My follies are all intact.

Core Values

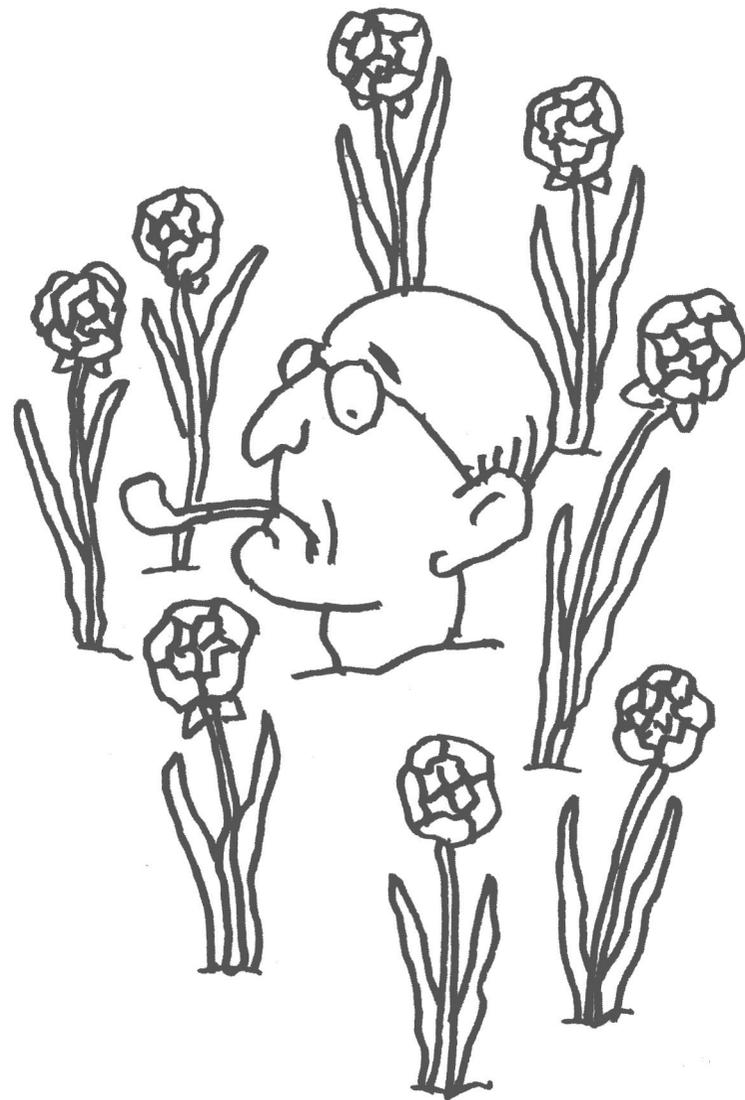
Spread your appleseeds today,
For time is ever fleeting.
The apple you can bite today
Tomorrow ain't worth eating.



From Youth To Euthanasia

Between the doctor and the priest
Man does a double dive,
The priest wants youth to act as dead
When nature wants him live.

And when the geriatric hulk
Is wearied, sick, and bled,
The doctors strive to keep him live
Though nature wants him dead.



National Security

Mass the missiles,

Draft the boys,

 Pile the rockets high.

Build the bombers,

Load the bombs,

 Till they span the sky!

The Armageddon days have come,

 But one thing's very clear —

There's no defense that's strong enough

 To save a folk from fear.

Build pentagons and armories

 From Boston to La Jolla;

There is no fortress strong enough

 To placate paranoia.



Classified Leak

Russia has a secret weapon
Which our Secret Service finds
Can reduce us all to robots,
Wash our brains, or blow our minds.

It can turn us into morons,
It can churn us into neuts —
Freeze our gonads, freak our psyches,
Turn our brothers into brutes.

Our “intelligence” is spending
Many billions in pursuit
Of what may some day destroy
Our way of life and love and loot.

Won't the CIA be ripped off
When it once begins to see
Russia's very secret weapon
Is America's TV?



Simple Answers To Cosmic Mysteries

To the Puzzle of Space and spheres:
Cheers!

To the riddle of life's dim goal:
Skool!

To the wherefore of cosmic ray:
Santé!

To the reaper and all his brood:
Salud!

To the heaven or hell above ya:
Naz Darovya!

To the transience of human beauty:
Salute!

To the folly of man's grim tale:
Wassail!

To the furious fates that defy him:
L'Chaim!