

5-2021

may2021

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Robert, "may2021" (2021). *Robert Kelly Manuscripts*. 1461.
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MAY DAY

for Joel Newberger

**Hit the ball
back at the pitcher
it will confuse
the enemy with answers**

**2.
the cliffs crumble yes
but not while we're watching
there is a number
deep in every stone**

**3.
so i have come to
teach you how to
dance this footless
figure round the maypole
the fleeing center
that is always right here**

4.

as if there were children
in the house we never see
or a genital smell seems
left on the wind.
all bodies one body?

5.

it snowed last night
up the mountain there
over the river and
the wind wild down here
you shook a tree at me
you chilled my pillow

6.

because there is only you and me
to share one world, one verb,
no room for another, you
are the other

7.

o sea thou eldest spectacle
let me visit thee again,
teach me the truths
that vision's for,
to anatomize the bodiless
and read the minute print
of everything that writes
by moving and everything moves

8.

hear the counsellors
rapping on the door
let them a little in
it's cold out there
or hot dry wind so
be kind s wood
kind as water listens,
every one is a messenger

9.

and every two
a common-law marriage,
let the priest sleep
o be common be
common and be true
the government alas
is our eldest son
a greedy selfish sort
mind of his own

10.

so we drank the morning
and chewed all afternoon
visitors came bearing cakes
small ones from a city
you could taste the population
thick and dark and sweet
there is no night to such a day

11.

**to know the gender of the sun
is all i meant,
reverence for Her difference
light is the mother milk
come drink with me**

12.

**it takes so long to be quick
let me be slow
and let you go
wandering my field
it goes as far as you
feel like walking**

13.

**of course I try
to be a tree
for you to dance around
and you do**

14.

one waits for the day
when we eat no more beasts
and live on light alone
cloud sandwiches
drizzle for dessert

15.

but so long to wait
and even now
breakfast snarling at the gate

16.

so magic is the answer
go on and on and on
the conversation drivels on
and yet you rise
wise from it and carry
wisdom into silence
to let it sing

17.

**how little it takes
to make
and so we do**

18.

**happy May Day
to the fence and the forest
the wool and the marigold
so many challenges churches
circuses scars
so many stars
the dance is us
I say
so go and play.**

1 May 2021

RHADAMANTHUS

**was a judge
looked at a person's
whole life and said
out loud the fate
that life had shaped
for what is to come.
I wonder if he had
a mirror on his wall
when he went home.**

1 May 2021

=====

**When you dance
around the Maypole
you never come back
to where you started,**

**a circle has no beginning
and you are one now,
you become what you dance,
you are your journey,
every day, every step
you make a pilgrimage.**

1 May 2021

SIGNS

for Charlotte

Omens everywhere.
Open the letter
shut the door
sounds like *je t'adore*

and I certainly do.
Everything ca;;s
me to love you.

1 May 2021

=====

**Those Chinese poets
scattered long ago
their poems on the river
of the night we still can read
shimmering on every water.**

1 May 2021

LACRIMAE

1 May 2021

He was lying in his bed, crying. Not waaah-ing like a baby in the crib but silently, no sobbing, silently, as if he no one to be aware of his sorrow, not even himself. From time to time a tear would roll down his cheek. He respected it enough to let it be, not try to brush it away. After a while he drifted off to sleep, wondering what it would be like if all the tears we ever shed left a pale track, trace of their passage on our skin, so everyone could be able to see the sorrows by which we are written.

=====

Examine the hands
of the sleeping man,
have they become
fists clenched against
some adversary,
imaginary because in dream
but where the realest
terrors guide?

2.

What happens in sleep
or what does sleep happen?
I keep calling dream
the last frontier,
so close and no one knows,
knows who rules that region
and who are we when we're there.
And is it one country
or does each have one of their own.

3.

Ignorantia perambulans in tenebris,
the unknowing that walks in the dark,
I dream of being lost in a strange city
never the same one
always the same wandering,
not knowing, though all the thousands
of people round me know
what to do and who they are
and where their cars are parked
and where their house door is
where this street goes.
I am that ignorance
and not just me.

2 May 2021

=====

A pheasant sometimes
struts across the road.
There is no fear in him
but I haven't seen
much of him these days
when fear is our porridge
and bedtime snack. Fox
is always waiting. Wolf.
Bear. Mountain Lion, politics—
you get the picture. Look
at the pheasant instead.
And he can fly!

2 May 2021

=====

The trees just said
the sun is coming up,
only the tree tops
file their report.
And now the lawn
repeats the story
till I begin to believe.
Evidence, then inference.
The earth turns, and yes,
it must be morning at last.

2 May 2021

=====

**Scattered Sundays
of an aching year,
pillbox waking, cars
too loud for the road,
no Mass to go to,
nobell to ring. But light
resumes its ancient
vigilance of our deeds.
Stand on the porch
with empty hands, let
that be ceremony,
let breath be prayer.**

2.

**By now you know that
prayer is a province of its own,
sharpens the will to kindness,
when you love there, forgives**

**you and your enemies at once
so that there are no enemies
anymore. Your deed is prayer
and the prayer does.**

3.

**Enough theology,
the true name of anthropology.
to know the gods is to know
who and how we really are,
enough theology I say,
go out and play, sky-skittles,
pinochle with pines.
Play shapes the world
soft in our shaping hands.**

4.

**Play. Pray.
And tell me more.**

2 May 2021

=====

The soft voice
of those we love
keeps our attention
fixed. We ignore
what is easy to hear.
Only that murmur
on the evening couch
deserves our ears.

2 May 2021

=====

**Watch the primary
colors fade
to pinks and all
the unnamed hues
along the road
from Zanzibar.**

2.

**Where once on time
the yoga of the other
was heard and taught
but the road was wet
went through the sea
and all the colors
washed away**

**3.
on the way to me.
I need that yoga
now, to pour
the intensity of seeing
into what is seen
until all the colors
of what we are and mean
come fleshing back
and we are ours again.**

3 May 2021

=====

The calm of now
stands under my fear.
Crack the stone
he said and I am there
or split the bark
in wood in water
I am there he said
and those who knew him
see him still. Fear
ebbs away, there is
no distance, hardly
time at all, it all is now
all over again.
Stand on this stone.

3 May 2021

HERE

**is a cribbage board
a game I don't know how to play.
Here is a milk pail and I have no cow.
Here is a hat and I still have a head
but the hat's too small,
or the had's too big.
Here is a love letter in Finnish
I cannot read, just the shiny
red harts pasted over all over it--
but whose heart is it or are they
and is it really meant for me?
Here is a Japanese fan but no heat,
here is a platter of food I can't eat,
battered beets and beef liver,
here is an ocean and I can't swim,
here is a sky and I can't fly--
isn't it all too clear by now
whose fault everything is?**

3 May 2021

=====

**When you wear amber lenses
the blue slips away
and things get a little clearer--
blur has blue in it,
and colors tend to sneak
into one another, make
shadow or shine it nothing firmer,
o let me take these glasses off
and see the glory of natural confusion.**

3 May 2021

=====

Come with me
came with him
in the soft
green shell around
the hard shell
engraved around
the fruit of the core
just soft enough
to chew: walnut,
European culture.
the king's tree,
queen's misery.

2.

An island is a slippery thing
even when the jags jut out
blac granite from the sea.
The sea comes from all sides in

to hold it in place, lave its loss
of larger, feed its shorebirds,
ospreys, fish crows, us.

3.

I was born on one
and can't forget,
big or small, minnow or sturgeon,
ut surged its way to stand still
and still I dream that it
with me will sail away.

4.

My uncle had a tugboat
my uncle had a war
my uncle was a Mason
my uncle said his prayers in Hebrew
my uncle was a Welshman
and let me read his books,

my uncle was a garbage man
my uncle was police.
My island was a busy place
but let me go.

6.

The best thing to do with the sea
is look at it, pray to it, talk to it, listen.
Try not to cross it--
look what happened to us when we did.
Try not to do much more
than swim in it reverently
respectful of seals.

6.

Come with me he said
I will show you where the walnut grows,
I did and he did, a big old tree
beside the summerhouse

squirrels kept sneaking
the green nuts in, soft green outside
like many a friend, so many
layers to get through
to what is on the inside
as we used to say
as if the core of anyone
is a planet with its own geology
and all you get to know
is islands, islands.

4 May 2021

=====

Suddenly everybody
is very old.
The kids are 35
and buying furniture,
young wives are writing their wills.
Some say there is beauty in antiques,
I'm not so sure. *Moi*,
I am a roll-top desk
stuffed with books and manuscripts,
can I interest you in me?

4 May 2021

=====

**Too many white cars
too many liars
do we need to have a law
to rule the shine of things?
It's all different anyhow
except when it's the same.
And then we really complain,
you mean it's Tuesday yet again?**

**Yes, but still too many
white cars, too many signifiers.
The earth is one square
on a vast chessboard
and we don 't know
what piece stands on it
if any does, and what
our move is or what game we play.**

**So maybe listen to the liars,
they may have a plan,
and white cars look good
as they flash through the trees.
Don't think what's in them,
don't think their thoughts.**

4 May 2021

NOX NOVA

for Austin Carder

Lorca took the bus
to Kingston, got off
took one look around
and started crying,
got right back on,
went back to New York
a city where I was born
but in his honor
keep calling *Nueva*.

2.

He had a cottage
in these mountains though
I've never found,
somewhere west of Bearsville
maybe, and maybe the ants
in his house remember him still
because his words sound
so close to forever.

3.

**His brother taught
in the school I went to
but I didn't know him
but I didn't study Spanish
I read Spenser and Malory
and didn't know them either.**

4.

**So how do we know
what we know?
The people we meet
the books we eat,
the trees leans towards us,
and memory is our Mare Nostrum
we sail back and forth in
constantly at home,
never finding the straits
that lead us to the open sea.**

5.

So how do we know?

I met Max Ernst at MoMA

he didnt know me,

I remembered Hans Richter

my teacher, how the made

a film If Duchamp

playing chess on a rooftop,

chess on a rooftop,

chess on a rooftop

and the whole city trembled and swayed

and in my innocence I called it singing.

6.

At Lama Norlha's monastery

I often sat with Leonora

but never talked about Max,

we talked about art and Spain

but mostly about Buddha and Mexico,
the city where she was heading,
where once H.P. Lovecraft's
lover lived, and I didn't know him too.

7.

We know what we know
because we make poems
and songs and movies and paintings
and intricate collages where black
does all the colors, or is it white,
we;ll never know
what we know,
that's why surrealism is the only way,
way to truth, way to know what we know.
only what we make up is so.
I won't say true I won't say lie,
all we know is what is so.

8.

I never found his cottage
because I never dared to look,
I see it in my mind's eye,
near one of those preposterous
symmetrical hills north of Margaretville
(a town I love because it says
my mother's name), hills
that look like humans made them
and i hope they did, and Lorca
as in an old snapshot on his porch
(he thinks of it as a terrace)
on a low stool watching some deer
invade his overgrown lawn
looking for apples.
He watches them and remembers the sea.

9.

I tell you
how it told me,
little pictures
of nothing special,
Breton in Quebec,
Ernst in Midtown,
maybe the night in Paris
when Lorca slept with Edouard
and everybody thought he was a painter.
I guess that was before the Catskills,
and Edouard too was crying as he
remembered.

10. Intermezzo

Turn a manifesto inside out and it becomes an invitation, an initiation into the cavernous interior of what we know, miles and miles of Mammoth Cave running under the innocent ancient hills. Turn a theory inside out and it comes to you and licks your hand, growls at

your enemies, sleeps at your feet. This is what I've been trying to tell you all along, back when I was the stream that eased past your house, back when I was the mail some well-meaning clod dared slip through your door, back when I was the sunlight on that girl's coppery hair, don't claim you don't remember. It is as simple as your mother complained, explained, turning night into day. Turn the day inside out and find *Nox Nova*, the new night, the night we have to manufacture, yes, hands are part of it, scribbling, scrawling, scratching, sculpting, make the new night for all its wealth of dream, urgent silences, gulfs from which new beings come, rise like ospreys from the waves, the sea that can;t be seen.

11.

O landscape hidden

in a public room

I peered through the knothole

and whispered

to his secret little flame,
the live blue in the dross of it,
I stood outside
and marveled at the great blank wall,
yes, and prayed to it,
blessed by its welcoming emptiness.

12

Cathedral up the boulevard
trees overhead--
who can tell the difference?
If a cardinal is a red bird
that rules on the branch
a priest must be butterfly
on Rittenhouse Square--
another city when you turn
the inside out,
the word we mean just
means more real than real.

13.

Leonora had been everywhere
and listened to the chanting here,
here is where the music
always is, here is better than wine,
here takes you by the hand and leads you in.

14.

Olson leaned out the window
and called,
his wife was sick,
he needed help.
Hermann Broch
was walking by,
heard and hurried
off and brought back
groceries and some cash
and neither knew who
the other was.

This is the secret history of art,
the road that runs past truth.

15.

Soupault on his knees
in church

Adorno safe on 12th Street
the city has so many fingers
always room for one more ring.

16.

They came here to help
the victims of our schools
busy with what should
be called *inducation*,
force-feeding infants
with facts and theories
until they can parrot them back.
But they came to save us from that.
Unpack the alphabet!
Liberate the door!

17.

Ig it's almost time

what is it now?
That's what every
rebel yells,
Jarry standing in the crowd
speaking very very slow.

18.
Here is the question
no one can answer:
Who was I
before you spoke?
No one knows
but the poem tells.

4/5 April 2021

=====

from/for Mairead

So there I was in Ireland again,
\badgers scrabbling for worms after rain,

**the mud as thick as barley malt
and all I had done was dare
to go to sleep and wake again,
the sea no wetter in the chilly rain,
a seal looking at me the way you do.**

5 May 2021

STONESONG

for Maggie, on her birthday

Ledges

layers.

Strata

streets.

Streets of hard time

run through our soft space.

Spaces.

So many rocks are all about between.

The old word slips inside the new.

That's how I know it's you.

2.

Bread in one hand

stone in the other.

Jesus said be careful

which you give.

Which you ask for.

Which you try to eat.

3.

Bring me my cloak of adamant,
bring me my stalagmite sword
I am a crystal cavern I am dark
I run beneath everything you know

4.

I heard her sing so
and I believed.
I brought the little crystal
to add to her immensity,
more always wants more.

5.

Wings not much use down here
do it my way
belly whopping up
grunniunon swarming
out from a sea made of stone

6.

Do not touch the flame
the flame's to see by
and whom do you see?
Interpret the shadow
inside the words you speak.

7.

For in every word
there is sunshine and dusk,
an east and a west,
there are shadows
some lead onward and some lead back,
every word, *e vero*.

8.

Which is why water is so thick sometimes
you have to add lemon to drink it,
because transparency
is the most crowded lens of all.
These are not paradoxes,

these are the crumbs
of Jesus's matzos at the last supper--
religion went into the ground
and grew the earth.
They call it theology
you call it geology
and you are right
o I pray that you are right.

9.

It's full green spring
but it's not warm yet
the pansies in the window box
are blooming just like 1942
when there was a war
that needed them to hold
a moment's peace before
a child's frightened eyes,
no Messerschmitts overhead.
Spring but not warm yet
but dandelions (lion's teeth)

behind the house, blue
ajuga in the Triangle,
that's the sum of my report;
now back to you.

10.

It can't all be about the other
or the other will turn out to be the self—
and where will limestone be then,
and the Kingston anticline
and the lines on your palm
and the touch of a leaf brushing by.

11.

It is good to keep distances.
The world is a haiku maybe
but each syllable of it
takes a long time to say—
I think we're still in the first line
or maybe, maybe,
in that glorious amorous silence

between one line and the next.
There magic lives, seams in the rock.

12.

Strata from the outside
look like smooth lines
an idle child has written on the wall.
But what would I know about children
except I've never quite forgotten
how to be one, sort of, maybe--
you know better, being even older,
tell me, child, did you make the rock?

13.

Not warm yet
but the trees are flourishing,
bristles sprouting on men's chins,
men chin, men chin,
sounds like a Midwest city
or a place in Olf Cathay,
teh land that Coleridge

**(three syllables if you please)
knew so well, the last one to.
Did I mean one, two...?
He was the first of the three-name poets,
one stratum squeezed between
baptism and family names,
no wonder mountains stand so strong,
time streets histories rock
hands hugging them together.**

14.

**Or am I the wrong tree
in the right garden?
Could be. I am no wishing-well
to throw your pennies in
though I wish you well
with all my amethysts,
sober-stones that can speak
every word spoken,
hold your ear gently to the rock.**

15.

**Only fools think clouds don't talk
and not just rain.**

**I have seen you looking up
past all the fathers and mothers,
all the others of the world
to see the almost substance-less
paradigms of truth
written with humid breath alone
across all we can see of the sky.**

16.

**So if anybody asked me
who you are
I would likely
in my pompous way reply
she is one who stares
at the ground and sees the sky.**

17.

**Of course that wouldn't be enough,
and also it rhymes, which makes it
seem like a lie candy-coated.
Though some say that rhyme
reveals the inner clandestine
marriage between things,
things and people and places
far apart in meaning
but intimately close in being.**

18.

**The wonderful thing about language is
you can never tell how much meaning
comes from writer and how much more comes
from inside the reader,
the regal words between them
laughing up their silken sleeves
inside which infinite caverns reach.**

6 May 2021

EXPLORERS

Freud and Peary
of the Antarctic
born the same day.

What does this say
about time? The sun
does not fail us,

rises when she would,
when we should.

Look around you
then look the other way.
In, out, till evening comes—
darkness, ink, write it all down.

The obvious is never
obvious enough.
So be glad to be gone in the going,

**in, out, west, south,
Oedipus among the penguins.
everything turns out to make sense
which is close enough
for most of us to truth.**

6 May 2021

=====

**Is color just an inference
from how things make us feel?
I hope that Goethe's right,
and light is really there
and sheds its colors one by one
until the world is various and clean.**

6 May 2021

“we are in an unedited situation”

—Austin Carder

Dust across the indoor prairie
passes for human thought. Spirals
abound. Hard to write what
does not say so fast its English name
if it ever even has one. Parched empires
slaked by mere breakfasts. Wake!
my nephew cried and married Turkish.
Baptism to deathbed it's only language
all the way. Some people think
that things are really there. Here.
But for good or ill, we are only spoken.

6 May 2021

=====

for Charlotte

burning tree above me
it lives by fire
and its leaves are not consumed.
The car is cool though,
green as the leaves
and cool gentle breeze
walks through the window
open just a sliver
to let the world in.
Could this be now
the way a mountain is?
Or did it mean a fountain?
What fables words tell,
include you as you fall
down through them
bravely listening.

2.

This morning I do not want
the continuous, I want
pearls on an invisible string,
want footsteps, staircase,
Viennese. The steps
are horses' hooves
and it is morning. Bells
annoy the hooded crows,
rooks, doves and shadows--
hard to see with all that music.

3.

Once there was a beginning
and twice an ending came.
Three times is the charm they say
so I'll wait here she said
until all the ending starts again.
She lay on her lawn
prone to love the loping rabbits.

4.

See how strangely
truth comes to town,
in wet clothes
carrying a flame.
Call it a church
so don't pay taxes,
make the whole harbor
holy water, wave
the Torah to make the wind blow,
make up truth as you go along—
it's always there,
waiting to be made.
That's what cities are for.

5.

Read Olson and Augustine
till you believe. Nothing
more accurate in all higher
mathematics than your street address,
o sacred numbers

change them at great risk.
Once they gave a new number
to my house so now I have
two places I call here.

6.

You'll say I'm scraping the barrel
but the barrel is gone,
winey oak and old, it tumbled
over the falls with no one in it,
bobbing down the rapids,
I watched it till it met its mother
river water and was home.
All I have is what it left
faintly on my fingers,
I kick them and say more.

7.

Cantinflas was a comedian
remember him?
cunning awkwardness

was his sly trick in trade.
And why do I mention him now?
Why do you suppose?

8.

I don't mean to sound snarky
but the leaves are very new
the clouds are few
it's hard to be solemn as an overcoat
even though the day is chilly
and I have translated so much
and so long from the dim
Late Latin of my sleep.

9.

An oriole
heard yesterday
by woman
told me tell
love is a call
in the sky

hear, Now.

Right now.

10.

What are we as a people?

We stand in the doorway

making sure we have our keys

before we go out, pocket

after pocket we survey, 'check'

we say but we have never

been there before, dark after dark

and still no keys? What to do?

Go back inside or leave forever?

Or just go out and leave unlocked

and hope the house will still be here

if we ever remember to come home.

11.

Because pockets are caverns in our now,

in the tenuous geology of our day,

which way we walk or rest,

what's hidden in them now,
mini-flashlight, *komboloía*,
handkerchief. Wallet. Keys.
And all the dust of our travels
and something more--the memory
of our hands and what they've held,
it's like a gospel to go in theorem
so many minders of your truth--
so keep one pocket empty always
and sometimes tuck your fingers
gently in to feel what is to come.

12.

So now it;s turned
continuous--can't have that,
go back to those beads,
feel one then let it go,
take another, then another,
don't let your consciousness
imagine some smart string

to sling them on, no,
one and one and two
is just another one again.

13.

A woman took pictures of women
but dreamed one night about a man.
He stood with his back to her
facing the sea. So she became the sea.

14.

That's what I mean,
the answer embedded in the question.
The smell of food cooking
nourishes something in us
that the food can't feed.

15.

We plan an expedition
for the day. We will go
and walk across the street

to see some blue new flowers
I have never seen but you
saw yesterday and showed
a picture of them on your phone.
Or have we seen enough already?

16.

That damned pale car
is parked again among
the trees a furlong off,
our trees I want to say
because trees mean to belong
only to those who see them,
climb them, talk to them,
gratefully accept their fruit.
Trust me, I have plausible
theories about everything.

17.

Disconnect! Liberate!
Let the next

be new.

The sun is brighter now
but the air no warmer.
Is this the same day as today?
Only if you insist.

18.

So there's my Vienna
for you, my love,
steeple and kids whirling around,
waltzes and czardases and
who knows mazurkas,
soundless this morning
so as not to disturb you,
your face so beautiful
on the satin pillow. Vienna?
Athena? A beauty in you
that wakes me the whole world.

7 May 2021

LOOKING FOR

The beak was bronze
the book was brown
hidden in a corner
dried out by time
the print too small to read/

2.

A house is a tumulus
left by an ancient population
yourself five years ago
or more, or less, the winds
of time don't care.
You'll never find yourself in there.

3.

The beak shines still a little
what is it really
handle or hook
you're half-afraid to pick it up,
a bird stiff as an umbrella
with its folded wings,
the print too fine
for the words it carries,
whispered into the dust,
every word a foreign language.

4.

The leather spine has fallen off,
dimly gold stamped in
Les Langues du Monde.
The book I'm looking for
nowhere to be found.

5.

That;'S an oldish way of saying it
but saying's on the old side too.
Mostly we stare at things
and wait for them to speak.

6.

Of course we belong to the house.
Man sounds like Moon.
Sun sounds like Nun,
a holy woman married
only to the One.

We make the house
the house makes us—
sounds like a children's game
and we can't grow up.

7.

I was looking for a book in Latin
to lend a friend, Ausonius
on his river but I found
a Bible instead. Same language,
different river. Rivers.
Come, wash yourself clean.

8.

So it doesn't make sense
to look for what you have
or thought you had. Looking
is a quest and should be saved
for the unlikely, the distant,
the absent, the never happened.

9.

Looking for something
you don't know what you'll find
don't know what you've found

and it's always too dark to tell.
It's like going to school again,
that time where we all sat around
discussing books we hadn't read
the right way at all, not at all.

10.

So I shouldn't have bothered looking.

If the book's so smart

let it find me.

It can read itself

in perfect dark

better than I can

with all the watts.

I look out the window and realize

state law requires all vehicles

to use headlights even in daytime.

And now I know why.

The mind of a driver is always dark,

like someone reading a missing book.

8 May 2021

=====

**What would you say
to the crow on the lawn
if you really believed in yourself?**

**I can't tell, but I do know
how we would reply:**

**Call, call, you find out
who you are and where
everything is by calling,
you walk in darkness
blinded by light, call
to find your way and listen,
call until the answer comes,
call until you know, call, call.**

8 May 2021

YS

I hear the birds
but no birds fly by
it is another kingdom
where they live
highly away from me
alone sailing an ocean of their own
tell me please the names
for places like the ones
in which they dwell
so well so quickly
wading the wind. piercing
the equinox dancing solstice
always going always coming by,
they are queens and kings
of all I do not see, I am left
to look around and see
the quiet things that stay with me.

8 May 2021

=====

Stepping over the sleeper
to get to the door.
he only seems to sleep,
and if he smiles
who will be
your Jordan then
to cleanse the leprous
lesions of your private thought?
Be out, be open!
The public fancies shrivel in plain sun
or else turn into strategies
of art or governance,
two comparable animals,
cherish as you go.
But what if the sleeper wakes
when you're overhead
and laughs? A miracle indeed
to giggle at the sky

and what might be in it.
You surely remember the song:
Spread your folly
thinly over
all you see,
let it ripen
then bring it to me?
Because your lust is
the dust on the face of things,
surfaces of things
and you haven't even gotten
to the door yet
or opened it
onto the savannahs of calm sleep.

2.
Choose to be able,
hold it all in.
you are an old songbook
found in a Lutheran church—

o why do people
still bother with an altar? —
the pages crackle
when you try to sing.
Because your mind is filled
with everything that used to be
plus what you think you want
plus shiny glimpses of right now.
And you are mostly everyone.

3.

Sometimes the cadenza
goes on so long
the orchestra has passed away
before the soloist is done.
You know what I mean.
You have seen the ocean
where the river swells in
and the tide is always swaying,
saying, and you have too much
love to listen clearly.

But you do hear.

4.

Repeat after me:

**I am not the structure
of something else.**

**I am the radical instance,
the isolate energy
trapped in a walking thought.**

**Stroll along the boardwalk,
interview the sea,
shiver when the wind blows,
you didn't come all this way
to snooze in some hotel.**

5.

**But why are dreams
so angry sometimes?
Don't they read the Bible
down there in the dark.**

**forgive your enemies, leave
vengeance to the Lord?**

I'll translate it for them yet again:

Mein ist die Rache redet Gott.

**Everybody has a native language
but where went mine?**

Why were books louder than my mother?

Forgive me for bringing

my own problems in--

after all who am I to begin with?

6.

**Sometimes spots on the lenses
won't rub off. Sometimes**

**the outside is really in between
you and the legendary real.**

**Slowly slowly the forest walks,
fifty years to climb this little hill.**

I hope I helped

by leaving it alone.

7.

Slowly slowly
then be here.

The dream was slow
to let me go.

We must discuss some time
what role the body plays
in ordinary conversation.

(Eagles over the Hudson,
vultures over the recycling,
crows everywhere, how gods
do bless the air we breathe)

the body, I insist, has its say,
not just by wriggle and squirm,
gesture and cough and yawn
but by the very words themselves
breath squeezes out of us.

Shall we talk about the body then,
or is that too close to the skin?

8.

All this came about
because I needed a place to sleep
and the place I found
was on the floor and near a door
so everything tumbled out of that.
Everything begins in dream.
Dream is our Genesis
and day's our Exodus
and so we march right on
across the deserts of what seems.
All we can do is tell
each other what we saw
or thought we saw
but only language can be sure.

9.

**But who was that
sleeping on the floor?
Between me and the door?
The borderguard of course,
our old friend the gatekeeper,
sleepy angel at Eden's portal,
all of the above. His smile
told all, put me in my place
while he let me into his, its,
theirs, the unmeasured
world every door conceals.
And here we are in what I found.**

9 May 2021

====

**Digit means
we counted
on our fingers
and why not?
How many things
do we really need?
A stolen cabbage
and a cooking pot
enough for me.
And that makes three**

9.V.21

=====

Sometimes you need a chaser
after something strong,
little giggle ensemble
at the end of *Don Giovanni*
or the sometimes rhyme
to close a Shakespeare play,
light up the heart a little,
go back out into the day,
there's always a river flowing by,
sky's wide open over The Globe.

9 May 2021

HOW TO READ

Every poem
implies an ocean,
has to stand there
right on the shore,
every word of it
wet with its salts.
Stand there with it,
look up at the tumult
birds inflecting the sky,
then look down and feel
the surf of meaning
wash over our feet,
our skin. Sometimes
the feel is all.

10 May 2021

ORNITHOLOGY

Skitter up the sky
young sir, your beldame
preaches. You can
go anywhere and why.
We learn from mother,
father watches
his mind on something else.
The sky is your mirror.
Know deep. Know high.

10 March 2021

=====

But it was to be
such a long parade
the music meant,
block after block
through reverent crowds.
Do they have blocks
there, in that ancient
city where music lives,
refuses to emigrate,
always comes home?
All cities have streets,
o proud Damascus,
but few have blocks
those fabulous intersections
that home us in and break
the habits of mere continuity,
O I grew up on one
and you did too,
that's why we could marry,

**we are quarried
from the same geometry
doesn't matter how many
miles away.**

**At every
corner the music pauses,
the trumpeters look
boldly up the side streets
hungry for their sound.
And then march on,
some of the crowd
keeping pace if they can
along the dense sidewalks,
never let the music
get too far ahead,
there is such hunger in hearing
and thou must be fed.**

2.

I'm trying to handle
a slippery fact,
music is always going,
always going away,
Lessing's *Nacheinanderkunst*
the sonorous celebration,
art of one thing after another—
Beethoven practices repetition
to help us onward, passes
the palms of his sound
touchless over our eager forms
like Dr. Mesmer's passes
again and again until,
until we really feel.

3.

The sacred geezers
knew how to go on,
songs nowadays

too short to do much harm
and no good at all.

I am on the geezer side,
maybe I'm of geezer kind
myself but time will tell.

4.

Now I'm supposed to annotate
all the great composers.

Then learn to fly
into the rainy sky
of this ordinary today--
I whisper so the frogs won't hear,
they have no ears so hear so well.

5.

All I meant was
I try to sing
to all the children on the moon

waiting for their mother sun—
that's us devoid of music.

And I can't play!

But I can blither on and on
sometimes so long you'd swear
you could hear some meaning
in what I say, in what I hum.

6.

I woke at six
to write this down,
at seven yawned
and wondered
whose side is
sleep really on
and is waking up
just one more dream.

7.

There, that's something said,
rather familiar but neatly dressed,
a Cambridge tie around its neck.
I'm trying to be humble
one more imposture,
I can't move through the crowd,
the music's losing me far ahead.
So I'll go back to bed and dream
those far blue hills that Mahler wept.

10 May 2021

=====

Each time of day
has a spiel of its own,
a game to play,
a song to hear.
Let me be simple still,
make nothing up,
say just what I hear.
What could be fairer,
further than that?

10 May 2021

THE VIEW FROM PORKOPOLIS

Across the river in Kentucky
I'll feel right at home
away from the stolid Yankees
who made Ohio such a bore,
all schools and businesses.
Give me over there, not quite
Rebel and not quite South. mild
breeze wafting warm tobacco,
wise farms and towns like Dwarf,
and Weed way up in the hills.

10 May 2021

KABBALA ON THE SOFA

mercy at the door—
that's the way to
be good again
good as you were before
you chopped that tree
in Gan Eden, the tee
fell down, became a town
now you have to open the door.
see who's on the street outside.
Because there are streets
and things gave names.

2.

Wash the alphabet
with copious floods,
then pan for gold
in the stream that runs off.
You know how to do it,

don't look at me,
I'm only good at remembering
a before b, b before c.

3.

Easier to write than read,
easier to speak than listen.
This is where alchemy comes in,
rubs our noses in it until--
until what we just can't say,
I haven't read the day so far ahead.

4.

Help all, hurt none, tame your mind.
The whole religion fits in one line.
Kabbala and alchemy helped us get there
but it took a man to sit on a stone,
sit beneath and tree and see.

5.

Back to the sofa
where we make love
in the quietest ways,
peel our differences apart,
sink our sameness in.

6.

Every word a hidden law
we have to utter o reveal,
speak and be silent until
the letters speak, spread
out and lock across the sky
and let light comes through.
a shapely light prone to our need.

7.

Build your palace
grand as you please
there'll always be
a rat in the scullery.

**The rat means meaning
and you can't enjoy all this
because the meaning of it
keeps sneaking through--
what good is an Olympic
swimming pool stained by an idea?**

8.

**Kabbala means to make
the best of what you have,
your true family hidden in the word,
the god hidden in the breath.**

9.

**In the last days of all
a woman will stand at the window
and in the softest voice
call tomorrow up over the trees.**

10/11 May 2021

=====

**I wanted to subtract
seven from everything,
a number too sacred
to let out on its own.
So the years kept running
backwards, and the books
tried to keep pace, so soon
enough we're at the start
again, and no word said.
Suddenly we know
what numbers are for.**

11 May 2021

LES {ERDUES

Sometimes you have a choice.
You can give up
what is gone,,
the lost thing,
lost one,
and rest deep inside
the strange peace
of knowing you will never.

Or you can hold tight
and never let go,
live with the pain
until the wound
becomes a word,
a word that speaks your name.

11 May 2021

=====

Nowhere is the *power of the other* clearer than in poetry.

Poetry is the art of using other people's words (your mother tongue, the language you are given from birth onward), using other people's words to say your own mind, sing your own song.

The beauty of poetry has a lot to do with the fact that we don't make up the words (don't be angry, Jim, you're the exception that proves the rule), we don't ,make up the words, we ,make up the silences between them, the voluptuous silent spaces in which they dwell or sigh or dance. We hang and hook and nail and prop the words together somehow and hope for, hum for, the best.

But we don'tmake them up. The words I use are always yours to begin with.

11 May 2021

Talking
with the trees—
their way of walking —
tells the listener
what kind of story
he should offer
from his own life,
where he has gone
and what he found
standing there.
Upright and strong.
What did their
ancient fixity
tell him that he could repeat,
spreading the news?

11 May 2021, Caremount

=====

In the parking lot
I hear the purring engine,
driver asleep at the wheel,
the active verb called idling
is going on, intransitive
so far, a dormant car.

2.

What is he dreaming?
His breath is regular,
I see the little rise
and fall of his bosom,
all I can see of it,
his peaceful face.
Does the engine's song
invade his sleep?
Is he quietly coasting along
(another intransitive)
through the marshes of Norfolk,

**the herd lands of the Cevennes?
Or does he dream
he is the car himself
shmoozing with other of his kind
in the parking lot
or going swiftly stately
wherever cars really go?**

11 May 2021. Caremount

CONDITIONAL

As if
or not
a burden
to behold
to be held
as if there were
something to see.

2.

That was the aria
now the drama begins.
what if the singer
hadn't even bothered
to look out the window.
What if the meadow
no sheep and no shepherdess
where would the storyline go?
Who would be the hero then,

no gods and no men--
can a cloud sing?

3.

Not exactly but a tree can.
Are there trees where you are?
Then listen soft, sometimes
the leaves all talk at once,
chattering children
almost drown out the parent voice,
long legato of the wood itself.

4.

This is what happens
when you wake from no dreams,
you're stuck with the sheer
lesions of grammar all
too clear in morning sun.
What if and as if and maybe besides.

5.

Now bring a truck
with a cherrypicker
and a man up on it
fixing a light atop a pole.
Instantly a city starts to unfold.

Sumus quod facimus

we are what we do.

Didn't Seneca say that or somebody?

6.

She closes the window
goes to the door
calls the cat for tiffin.
Turns on the telly
wonders what country she's in,
paces the floor
closes the door
goes back to bed
to become some more.

7.

But all the while she sleeps
the television by itself
is throwing images all round the room,
some of them stick, will be there
when she wakes again
in half an hour, half clear,
shadows on the wall.

8.

It's never easy to escape
the thing we think.
What if and as if,
sudor mentis who said that,
thoughts are the mind's sweat,
wipe them off, chill and let
the mind do its proper work,
run your body for you.
Sleep sleep sleep.

9.

Don't look for them,
the Latin quotes are all made up,
insolent imposters like the rest of us,
us words I mean,
the things we say and dare to mean,
stumbling from one sleep to another.

9.

When I was a little boy
the president said
the only thing to fear is fear itself.
Now the opera is moving
close to its finale,
a massive chorus in costume
arrayed front of Notre Dame,
each singer potent
each in their own register
howling their personal fears
loud as they can and lo!

**by the composer's magic
is all turns into music,
harmonious, courageous,
the heart at peace.**

12 May 2021

=====

Long lines sweep away the dust of what you mean
and leave the clean surface of what you ate.
This is the secret Homer knew and all those
who came before and counted syllables till
they reached the truth. Do we have some
numbers left?

12 May 2021

THE LETTERS

Leave me alone with the language

a little and let the little birds of it
sing to me of my loves and losses
a;; through the sacred alphabet.
I think I'm speaking English
but it is speaking me.

2.

In dream just now
I ran across an empty street
to a row of shops arrayed
along a seemly sidewalk
an one big store The Source
its windows showing nothing
but green walls whereon
eight-foot long chains of seaweed
dried brown stiff angular
hung straight down. The wall
should have been blue.
As it was they looked like scraps of of ordure,
offal, bark

on a gaunt lawn, litter
on a golf course. I wanted blue.
No idea why I'm bothering
to tell you this, blue, as if
the whole sky were not enough for me.

3.
well-dressed friendly people,
few, moved along my sidewalk too.
A civil quiet city with few words--
or were those clean streets
the language I could walk?

4.
Trees are busy now
finding rhymes for every leaf,
but even a single leaf means
enough to get the conversation started.
The tall liriodendron (so0called
tulip tree, not sure it likes that name)

is full of foliage now at last,
last to put its summer costume on.
Or am I seeing things again.
Must go out and over and inspect.
Must do something with these words.
Must go. Too far away to tell.

5.
I thought it was a song
it was a house
the letters chanted
one by one
the names of every room
I ever lived in
every friend who came
to visit or linger
or maybe still is here,
somewhere near,
hard to see right now,
song has its shadows too.

6.

**Hide a letter
in a word, hide
a word in a sentence,
the sentence in a story,
the story in a book.
Shove the book on a shelf
and feel safe for a while.**

7,

**I am Alpha and Omega
Jesus said.
I think he meant
we are all the letters in between.**

8.

The letters brought me finally to you

the way all roads wind up at the sea.
And they really do--
it's up to us to walk the right way.
It didn't take too much--
two lifetimes of hard work,
a phone call from the Himalayas
and we were one.

9.

Because I insist
we are an alphabet enough
to say all that must be said
and sing the rest.

10.

Back in France Rimbaud knew
the alphabet was made of colors
and named a few. Up to us
to identify the rest, the curious
lilac tint of Q, the cardinal crimson R.

11.

**The bible got the story wrong
as usual (and not by accident).
The Tower of Babel--all the tongues
of humankind, all the words
in all the languages of the world
strewn about the plain of Shinar:
they were, they are, the bricks
they used, we use, to build
that perfectly successful tower
that reached, reaches even now,
the loving heaven that wants us,
wants us to sing and tell,
no sin ever in saying so.**

12.

**Up the aisle
in sacred vestments clad**

**the world steps slow,
reverent, the garments
are made of words
that wed us to our meaning.
The world stands before the altar
of every blessed thing
and hears the first instruction:
Speak now and forever be at peace.**

13 May 2021

====

**Just now
you wrote
and the ink
was still wet on the page
when it was then.**

[dreamt] 14 May 2021

=====

**Remember vinyl—
you flipped the record over
to go on.
Nothing ever complete
without the other side.**

14 May 2021

=====

**The industry
lies awake at night
pondering new songs
pandering to every generation
in order to control
what sells as music.
But everything says
Listen to me--
the enemy of business is reality.**

14 May 2021

GREEN MAN

1.

Woke before music
and the word was out.
*Sunshine is enough for
you today the sun said,
marry me, go back to bed
standing up outside,
breathe deep the odorless
perfume of my air.
this light, my hair.*

2.

I was the Green Man once
stumbled out of the trees
to seize a maiden as per script.
But I deflected expectations,
left the girl alone, fell to my knees
and sermonized the swale

until the willful pagans around me
got weary of my sober rant
and trotted off. The girl though
did look back at me and smiled.

3.

That's how I left religion
and became a priest of sorts.
No one knows how long forever lasts
but I put my bets on language,
meeting each new day with words
until you'd swear they never stop.
And why would they?
And why would I?

4.

Stairs are difficult
for little children and old me,
nothing on the level anymore.

**But the empty box
still has crumbs inside.
And so we make do with philosophy.**

**5.
What did I do wrong?
Grew old.
Guilty as time.**

**6.
It doesn't do to talk about these things,
it scares the neighbors.
They think a cynic lives next door
and doesn't even keep a dog.
Not normal and not nice.
So I turn off the lights at midnight
and speak politely to the dark.**

7.

Sorry, this is turning
out to be my story
and who wants that?
The little I know of it
bores me already,
let us move on to other things,
the other is the only living story.

8.

Or am I there already
or beyond,
fallen one the other side of other,
where the palm trees
glitter with icicles
and wolves weave books?

9.

Sometimes it lets me think
sometimes it lets me say.
I call it poetry but they
say Oh it's just today.

10.

Walk through the mirror
just like Cocteau,
walk through the mirror
and find myself at last.
Speaking backwards,
writing with my left hand
learning smart new tricks.
But love does not show up,
love never turns back,
always flows from inside out,
even in a mirror
the heart is at the core.

14 May 2021

TRUTH TELLING

**When the truth becomes a lie
true feelings told
in a strategy of intent
even the speaker
soon loses the sense
of difference between
what is felt and what is said,
the insolent rhetoric of want.**

2.

**The trees again—
the trees want nothing,
which is why they stand
so tall, so long, bear fruit
are useful even when they fall,
the trees want nothing
so we can learn to trust
everything they say.**

3.

I keep coming back to trees,
they say in summer
what we have to sing all winter.
I looked at the blankness
and it said “pomegranate seeds”
and I felt one, sharp sweet in my teeth.
Things start happening
when you hear what you see.

4.

Don't tell desires.
Spare the world
the discomfort
of explanation,
the obvious truth
on every branch
Leave it to the lilacs to explain.

5.

Ah, morning,
you sweetest fable.
I walk down the dark hill
to meet you at the stream
where everything
is quietly quickly now,
so I can climb back home
to tell you honestly
what you already know so well.

6.

Truth in telling
all I mean
is all i mean.
Out the window
I see someone
walking through the trees,
someone the color of leaves.
Light tells the truth.

15 May 2021

THINKER

Above the sea he sits
throned like a bronze
dolphin over a fountain
in the market square,
old Italian city.
But this is no city,
no Renaissance.
This is now.

2.

Sea can mean
ocean or mean lake,
he sits above
whichever it is,
lording it over
whatever he think it is.

We think
the oceans

he thinks,
we think blue lakes
all over the land
and silvery slim creatures
come swim in them.
But we are bronze.

3.
Men are the metals of earth
he thinks, and women
the stone from which
the ores we were are quarried.

4.
This is called thinking.
Soon he forgets all that
and looks down at the water.
Does water talk too,
the way trees do, and birds?

5.

Any minute he'll be thinking some more
but now he's at peace for a while
trying to hear what water tells.

Whales and ships and sharks
he thinks, and there he is,
thinking and not listening.

No wonder he's wrong about
so many things. It's hard
to get a man's attention—
the water keeps waving up at him.

15 May 2021

=====

Sunday bright
the motorcycle Mass
the grey-haired children
roar their liturgies
through the trees and down
the road, Everybody
has his (and I do mean his)
idea of music. Of worship.
Of being free.
Don't be free around me
I want to cry, but that's
just mean and typical
of me, I do some blatant
worship of my own.

16 May 2021

=====

**When you dare
to think about it
everything is
a sinking ship.**

**Except the sea.
Believe the sea.**

16 May 2021

WEST

for Tamas Panitz

**The stone on the steppe
rolled slowly west.**

**That's all that history
seems to retain. Rivers
and the names of gods,
a few kings, and here
and there even a queen
who led us on.**

2.

**Who is this us
of whom I dare to speak?
Flemings, Tatars, Ethiops,
Irish with soft feet?
They all came west
far as they could, can,**

and when there is
no further west to go
bend a knee, crook
your elbow and go in.

3.

Yes, west is down there,
where the sun sets
into the surfaces of things,
dragging the colors with her,
leaving now and then the gleam
along the last edge of our difference.

4.

So people build cities
to hide from the west,
go and live in houses
to avoid really going in.

**But not even I can hide
from in, and I can hide
from most anything.**

5.

**Once we went to magic
once we went to church
once we sat on benches
watching children play in the park.
Nothing really worked.
Antique motorcycles
roared past coughing
on their way to Tartary.**

6.

**Once a helicopter landed
on this very field
and the president stepped out.**

**We knew then there was no escape,
the public smiles of old men
like lesions on the lower sky.**

7.

But there is hope.

**Those indoor birds the books
flutter their million wings around us,
airing out gloomy chambers,
singing things we did not know were songs.
O the languages of books,
so many languages in a single tongue,
so many Englishes in English,
A thousand books sleeping on their shelves,
a jungle full of paradox and life.**

8.

Jonah interviewed the whale--

**that's what the story is about,
you have to be inside a thing
to have any idea of what it means.**

9.

**The Magyars stone kept rolling west,
along with the Hunnish, the Celtic,
all the Namelesses,
we silly bowling balls of destiny,
tumbling, the noise
of their clatter and rumble
is called history. Better off
inside the amiable whale.**

10.

**When you drove a truck
out of the west you must
have passed a place where
once I stood, marveling
at mosquitoes buzzing out of the snow,**

and I looked up and saw
there is nothing higher than I am--
then I came down.

11.

Strange to think of what
was in the truck,
fifty years of other people's
poetry you were lofting
east to an a passionate lunatic
who cherished these shadows of speech
and kept them safe.

And there you were at the wheel
full chambered yourself
with ten thousand poems
of your own to come, and be,
flutter loud in the minds to come.

12.

How did he learn to paint

so fast the sound of words?
How could he trick the edge of light,
the sacred gleam itself
to lie quiet on the canvas?
Was it some magical pigment,
ochre from the Caucasus
brought with him to the west?
We dare to ask these questions
because we know
there is no answer
to what there completely is.

13.

We mostly live on land,
that suburb of the ocean.
Whatever coast we choose,
the waves are always coming in.
That's how languages began,
talking was a kind of listening.

14.

**This is Sunday
but if it were really Sunday
we'd be coming home from church
hungry for normal breakfast
after sacred communion.
If this were really now,
we would know
the ordinary is the real religion,
loving your friends,
thanking with all sincerity
whatever your food comes from.
So it's my fault if it's Sunday
but not actually Sunday yet.**

15.

**I lay there reluctant to wake up
trying to remember my great-
great-grandparents names
on my mother's side, Kane, Farley,
Fleming, O'Rourke--
am I a Fleming too?**

**Are we really just who we came from, or
where they were
we really are? Isn't it Sunday yet?**

16.

**Long ago an ox
came to the house
and stood by the door,
said I am Abd,
servant of whoever
looks out the window
and sees me
just standing here.
There. We belong
to those who see us.
And everything is a door.**

17.

Closer to now

an alligator
hangs from the ceiling
in a dusty workroom.
Alchemy is all your fault,
the glamor of meaning
bright on the dull crust of things.
In the room the work goes on,
image after image,
word after word. Bruckner
on the turntable, old vinyl.
Te Deum faster and faster
shouting the end, scaring
the owls always waiting in the park.

18.

Then the silence comes.
I'm sorry, I can't tell it
any other way than this,
we are children at our mother's knee
but who among us dares declare

his mother's true name?

West from her womb we carry
sense into the emptiness we hope
allows us a place to sleep tonight.

A new house, new city, same old sea.

Did anyone ever ask you
why leaves are green?

The answer's on the tip of your tongue.

16 May 2021

=====

The plot thins out,
the mid-May snow,
an inch or two,
was only in the dream.
Waking was another matter,
another kind of cold.

2.

There is simplicity in loss.
A glass of water
reminds me of the sea
whose side I haven't seen for
two long years.
The river is a fjord and says so too.
Drink the water. Nibble the now.

3.

My best friend is sad,
the one I love is full of grief.
I don't know how to help.
We look at the river together
I pray there is something to learn,
something that answers us.

4.

I want to be a tree
want to be a river,
want to be anything that stands,
anything that goes.

5.

Simple as that,
me and my trees again--
some day they will let me in,
secret of flourishing,
losing it all then flourishing again.

6.

I went to the opera
stood in the pit
pretended to be a musician
rare instrument, heard
only once, in the last act.
Nobody knew better,
I stood there under all the music,
could see the feet of singers
when they wrangled at edge
above me, everything above me
and the music still goes on.

7.

I live in a clutter of simplicities.
Who is the patron saint of the obvious?
Who will take my sadness away?
Sad sunlight? Gleaming
turbulence of the white water brook?

May 2021 148

**We are children,
we need our box of crayons again.**

17 May 2021

=====

So much light
in the sky
bring some down here,
I want to see
what I'm really thinking,
so dark in me.

17.V.21

=====

No evidence
for it
and yet
the long sad song
begins.

2.

I have drawn
with utmost care
a precise detailed
map of nowhere,

and find it rhymes
with where I am.
Can you hear it too?

17 May 2021

=====

**What does mood
matter?**

**The words
go on and on
all by themselves
scattering gospels
every which way,
balm for all beliefs.**

17 May 2021

BRAVADO

1.

**I'm not as brave
as I used to be.
find myself telling
all sorts of things
to the priest-world
round me, confessing
all my signs.
Songs. Truth
of my matter.**

2.

**Or thought I was
back then
in that other time,
day before yesterday
when I could share
all my guesses,**

whispering them back
to the other-words
that taught me.

3.

But now I know
and knowing is a silent game,
a chessboard with no pieces,
empty as an image I have used before.

4.

So is this an elegy
for tomorrow? No!
I kick the table leg
like any kid and cry
Otherwise! Otherwise!
I am your Bible!
But you are my Torah.

5.

Tea comes in cups—
that is the problem.

We get used to things.

Yes, I am we now,
colonel of the obvious
trying to drag us (us!)
off on maneuvers.

through history and out again,
more Alcuin than Charlemagne.

Tea cols in the cup.

Kisses dry on the lips.

7.

Ache of the obvious

I should say,

from which we groan our music,
stately as Leipzig, wise as Vienna,
dull as Nashville in a passing Jeep.

My prejudices make me strong.

8.

And at the same time weak.
When I was fifteen a friend and I
put our pennies together
and had someone record off the radio
Stokowski conducting Mahler,
the great Symphony No.8
that hadn't been done in America
in decades if ever,
The little flappy plastic disks we got
were not really playable.
Things are our real prejudices,
things we trust
to hold our meanings for us,
our music meant.

9.

I think `i'm getting brave again,
tell the truth till the lies begin,
blue irises blossom by the bathroom wall.
Really. And the real
is sometimes lie enough
to get us started.
Now where shall we go?

18 May 2021, 6 AM

====

The tree over there
is full of everything
it ever said
and kindly lets us listen.
And for all I know
it's listening right back,
helping each other through
the intense articulate silence.
Language is a shadow of our talk.

18 May 2021

= = = = =

Adam left Eden,
Eve stayed behind.
That is almost
the whole story,
every move thereafter
a strategy
to find her again
(science, religion)
or beg her to come out
(music, tales
and all our dances).

Adam lies by the ocean
and thinks it is she,
the great Lake Eve
his life is built around.
Morning. He shivers in the surf.

18 May 2021

=====

**Meritocracy?
Not on my watch.
I only want people
who look good
doing what they do.
The outcome anyhow
is always the same.**

18.V.21

=====

Living cavern
dark among the trees
talk my way in
but I hate the sound
of my footsteps
stomping along,
cracking twigs,
sloshing till I can't hear
the silence I came for.
It is as it so often is:
stand perfectly still
and reach your destination.

18 May 2021

RIDING THE ALLIGATOR

for Lila Dunlap

**In alchemy
a girl can ride
an alligator.**

**I wouldn't recommend
this in the bayou.**

**In ancient Greece
today was the feast of Pan—
you could lie around anywhere
and let him find you.**

**now you have to search
through endless aching streets.
In hopes to find.**

2.

**Think about an armadillo
snouting through the underbrush.
Hear the scraping of his scales
against the green entanglements.**

Now think of something else.

3.

**I liked her album
so a mutual friend
arranged a date with her
for me. But she
didn't show, she had
run off and gotten married
to some tune-soaked featherhead,
left me only with an image.
I've made good use of it instead.**

4.

**That's what I think I mean:
an image, it's mostly enough
to have an image.
Say it in Latin, say it in Greek,
in all the languages anybody speaks
until the image's work is done.
Then close the Bible and go to sleep.**

5.

There must be more than that
I hear you thinking.
I guess you're right,
it's morning already
and I got too little sleep,
I'm trying the fluff out
a nest of words to rest in,
close my eyes and see.

6.

You do it. You
write the next section,
make clear what I can't quite,
dance the images in delight,
make sure that men and women
whirl together in noble ecstasy
whatever I mean by that.

7.

8.

There, wasn't that
if not exactly fun
something more like truth?
The alligator again,
ancient animal with teeth,
with jaw that opens upward,
a paradox among
all our drop-jawed multitudes.
What does it mean to eat the sky?
Ask your local alchemist--
he'll tell you find
your own beast and ride him well.

9.

Put sugar in your coffee
put chicory,
pour half-and-half in
until it's rich enough to eat.
Meddle with the truth until it nourishes.
That is the main instruction,
truth comes only when you use it.

10.

Three beggars are passing
a stained glass window.
It is a Tarot card. Or are they lepers.
They seem to be ailing grieving,
shuffling past a church perhaps
that does not let them in.
I recall a chapel in the woods
in the Chablais, up the hill,
half a mile up the road, in trees,
built for lepers a thousand years ago,

to let them worship God
but keep them out of town.
I wonder why I think about them now--
maybe religion is another kind of town,
city to wander in, confused,
searching for him, Pan, Christ
in all his forms. In the chapel
or in the woods, in the street
or in the book, never stop searching,
never stop wailing at the window?

11.

So many poems in the world
so we desperately need more.

12.

We walked once round
the outskirts of Venice,
on the mainland,
empty fields and here
and there little bungalows

so it all belt like morning
and going to work,
you know what morning's like,
that here-I-am-again feeling
and what are you going to do about me?
I felt I was home, the little canal
purely utilitarian, unpicturesque,
the fields stretching east
to the unseen sea. It felt I mean
the way every poem starts,
space unbound, the air alive.

13.

Pessimism is all very well
for the wealthy,
but we working people
have to live by hope.
ride hope to work and home again,
drape hope above the hearth,
drink hopeful tea
and hope the habit lasts.

One of the three theological virtues
I remember being told,
Hope and Faith and Love--
though they called Love 'Charity'
so we'd leave the girls alone.
Someday I'll know what Faith means,
I guess the other shore of hope.

14.

Not armadillo, opossum.
Not Louisiane, Esopus Land.
Mountain, not lagoon.
Here is always. Charlotte
knew mongooses in India
before she ever saw a woodchuck.
Here is very hard to find.
Maybe the hardest place of all.
No car gets here. But you can't
move an inch without being here.

15.

I think that's what the alligator means.
Or the alchemist, I wasn't listening
too carefully, the image distracted me,
an image that can run
thirty miles an hour on land
for short stretches,
and can open its jaws upward
and who is that riding on its back?
No one, no one at all.
The alchemist has left the room,
his snuffed out Camel still
smoldering in the petri dish.

16.

In Washington Square
I sometimes played
chess on those stone tables.
There, that's enough about me.
Where did you play?

What was the stone you found?

**Did you crack it open
to find the amethysts inside
glittering like alligator teeth.**

**Who did you play with
and did you win or lose.**

**I mostly lost but I was young
and losing is a better teacher.**

**Did you sometimes think
the river was your friend,
maybe your only friend?**

**Beneath Minetta Lane there ran
and still runs a secret stream,
rises from a lobby on MacDougal
and winds a few blocks to the river.**

The only river.

Did you swim in a secret stream?

17.

**If this were your birthday
I'd give you a book,**

the most precious book I could,
a book of blank pages
for you and no other to fill.

A book with magical properties
and you become the alchemist,
The whole world will hear what you write
even though you try to be
secret as the evening breeze.

18.

I sometimes think this world
is a quick misspelling of another one,
one that we'll live in someday
when we get the letters right.
O the letters, the letters,
the time of day and your love's name,
the letters and the subway roar,
the Irish dancers and the grey-slick
beards of Greek monks, the letters,
the cliffs and rivers,
and the moon finally marries the sun.

18 May 2021

THE WOMEN

for Tirzah Brott

**Stiff as trees
the old ladies stood
and so you captured
them with light.**

**It wasn't easy—
their clothes said
one thing, their bodies
something sadder,**

**older, and their pale
faces tried to look
present, plain as a Bible.
But your camera knew,**

knew how to read that
ancient lovely text they are,
women who have come
through the whole world

and now stand waiting
just outside. Waiting,
that's what they're doing,
for you to find them, for us

so one day we too can stand
quietly noble as they are.

18 May 2021

PYRAMID

A pyramid
is the visible half
of an octahedron
buried in the ground.

Follow its *living shadow*
down to that point
as far below the earth
as the pinnacle
of your visible pyramid
is above it

and there, just there,
is the point
the wise science
of those days
had to locate,
find and take
as the lowest vertex

of the octahedron
and project
upward from there
until shadow g\turned
to stone and hit the sky.

If you stand
on or in a pyramid
you are in quiet thrall
to the specific power
spreads upward from that
unseen source.
Observe with utmost care
what it makes you feel,
makes you do.

2.
Pharaoh
wanted to know
where language came from,

**what was the oldest language,
which was the first.**

**So
he had two newborn children
taken from who knows from where
or whom
and had them raised in isolation
from infancy by servants
who were mute.**

**No words did the children hear
until they made noises of their own.
Priests and scientists
listened from beyond the wall
year after year till one day
they heard a childish voice
say *bekos*, then repeat it
as if demanding.**

The listeners hurried to their temples,
consulted books, challenged
far-travelling merchants
until they found someone
who told them, Ah, *bekos*
is the Phrygian word for bread.

So Phrygians came first,
So who are they
the pharaoh pondered,
should he go and conquer them
and thus control
the sources of all speech?

3,
I think he let them be,
took his turn lying in his pyramid,

many still be there
for all I know

**but history is full of lies,
a lie is like a piece of bread,
can't refuse it to a hungry mind.**

4.

**And so the mind must
go down deep
to find that point
from which the pyramid
grows and rises
and comes to us, through us,
on its way to that track in the sky
its pinnacle inscribes
as the stars move over it.
The pyramid reminds us
we live between.**

5.

Hot in here
and stuffy,
sweaty collar,
baby breath.

How come stone
can be so warm,
how can silence
be so loud,

every breath
reverberates,
chatter of bats
in the tunnels,

scraping footsteps
of nobody's feet
until from the screaming
heat you wake.

6.

So now you know.

**I'm sorry to take history away,
you don't need it really,**

**you need a hand to hold,
a word or two, a piece of bread.**

19 May 2021

=====

The miller said to his son
Inherit this
pointing to the millstream,
water wheel, grinding stone.
I have it all
already the son replied
and I still have you.
This is how to make a miller smile.

19 May 2021

=====

Night happens to me,
not just outside.
Massive dinosaurs
squelch through my mud.
History is hissing
on both sides of the mirror.
Something is happening
out there, I can feel it
but it will be lost by morning.
Up comes daylight
to hide reality.

Maybe I'm not awake
enough to fall asleep.

19 May 2021

=====

**My family owned
acreage in Babylon,

the sky grows brighter
even now,

old names clamor
to be recognized,

four thousand years!**

19.V.21

====

Is my mind clumsy
as my body has become,
does my thought
just shuffle along
like my slippers,
do I sometimes topple
against an image
that tears the soft
skin of my repose?
Time has done this
to me, and time will tell.

20 May 2021

=====

Seagulls even here,
and in the tide
the seals of Saugerties.
The sea has come to us,
why travel? Waiting
by the river till the sea
has come for us
leaving only its waves back home.

20 May 2021

=====

**Say more than this,
say more than say
until it turns
into some sort of song,
some sort, don't worry,
music can be boring too,
walks along at our side
not doing much, but being,
being there with us.**

20 May 2021

CROSSING BY DRAGON

for Vesna

Dragons roar
but also whisper.
The word 'folklore'
is a made-up term
meant to assert
the unity of das Volk.
denying the one
original mouth that
first told the tale,
maiden and dragon,
the voice from the well.

2.

Folklore also roars
and that means war.
Dragons guard bridges

**and bridges are strange things,
leap over boundaries,
leap over all that flows
on its own slow broad
way to the sea.**

Why would you cross over?

**What is this glamor
of the other side,
far shore, always, always
the shimmer of the other.**

**The lover looks at the river,
thinks: Why go over?**

Stay here with me.

3.

**Even up here we
can hear the sea whisper.
There are seals in Saugerties
a few miles north of us
even further from the ocean,
130 miles from the open sea.**

Our river is a fjord,
its mid-channel
flows steadily south
while all the river round it
flows north at high tide.
That is the river's secret,
that is the dragon's
secret too. two ways at once,
fire guarding rivers,
claws, scales, leathery wings,
the whisper heard
deep within the roar,
I am here to guard you,
protect everything that comes and goes.

4.

But even so
we crossed the river—
so natural, normal,
Pesth and Buda,
shopping on tthe other side,

booths of the merchants,
flags full of air,
the south wind.
The dragon let us cross—
bowed his back
and was a bridge,
bright sun, hot day,
his fiery breath.

5.

You are a woman
not a dragon,
you know half a dozen
languages,
a dragon knows them all,
but he says the same
thing in every one.

6.

My name is church
my mother's name was fire,

my earliest clear memory
)May, 1939) was a church on fire,
wooden white Good Shepherd
where I was christened,
smoke and ash and shouting men
hauling futile water buckets,
what could they do?
What can anyone do about his name?

7.
Then they built
a byzantine basilica,
sleek crimson tiles
remembering the flames.
And it was near the sea.

8.
But your name is spring,
and you grow forth
what words mean, my words too,
so the trees around you,

neighbors, even
the dragons can hear.

9.
Poems, lines
happen to language.
A line is the shortest
meaningful breath
between two silences—
I quote myself here
to save myself the bother
of thinking what has been said.

10.
And lines are what you know,
you grow them with your breath
just like springtime. Just like
dragons you thought I was going to say.

11.

You understand
the flower bed,
the earth below the words
and the first fresh
leaves of meaning,
gaudy green, soft
some of them, *vert*,
sinople, silk.

12.

Rayon I should say,
to stay on the right
side of now,
hot wind from the mountains
fills the car windows
while I am waiting,
studying the dragon of time.

13.

I shouldn't say mountains
though we call them that,
no Tatras or Dolomites,
they're hills. soft rounded
hills eight hundred meters high,
soft rounded hills, curves
of a body at rest.

14.

And then come home
the simple way one does
from shopping, toll booth,
stop sign, driveway, done.
And the other kind of dragon
is waiting for us, traditions
breathed out with every puff,
the names of local gods,
dryads (yes, we have them too),
the 18 dialects of one single
mockingbird. —20 Ky 2021

SCENES LOST FROM *SALOME*

**It does not serve.
The procurator's fist
tight round the girl's wrist,
o how can we stop dancing?**

**2.
The pines broke the light
so slivers of it
ztriped the skin.
We are patterned
by what we see
and it sees us right back
till we are done.**

**3.
There is something about history
takes the edge off now.
Our eyes are still full of tears
but memories distract us**

**just a little, and every
now and then a gull flies by.**

4.

**Let the girl go
let the music
dwindle in the trees.
The story ended
a little while ago,
gaze at the texture
of the empty page.**

5.

**I am the head
of John the Baptist.
Cover me with kisses
then throw me away.**

6.

The story's all mixed up anyway--
it wasn't the governor
it was the king, she danced
for pleasure not for him.
they blamed her for killing
the articulate prophet
but government always does that.

7.

But these morning hemlocks
are not in Judea,
we're not in opera anymore,
the mire of history
dries on our ankles,
our little skin disease,
our leprosy.

8.

The message read:

Get off my boat and swim
if you don't like my sails.

I answered as best I could,
I can't swim, please let me stay.
So then the music began again.

9.

Some nights we go
to sleep to the sound of the sea,
a mild contralto
never stops whispering.
The burden of her song
says what the sea always says:
you'll get over it,
people always do,
sleep now, that special
anesthetic of forgetting,

10.

I didn't eat supper
so I must be hungry.
This is called thinking
and is bad for the soul.

11.

Mozart said it best
and we have to reckon with it,
a deep voice from on high
To love I will not compel thee
But, but, I will never set thee free.
Now all of us must figure out
who we are in his music.
Are you I or are you thee?

12.

Her words were plain enough
my ears were mutinous.
The cup was empty

but I held it tight.
And prayed for rain,

13.
Are we there yet?
the child wants to know,
every child we are
in every bossy father's car
hurtling through landscape
that scares us we so want to know.
Be quiet, child, there is nothing to be known.
And the child prays
O stop anywhere and be.

14.
O the old laws
the old ways
streets lead to the river
the Thames
remembers everything,

**dive into the mud and know.
The artifacts of yesterday
doom us to tomorrow--
come up for air
if there is any there.**

15.

**They slew the prophet
then slew the dancer
to hide the evidence.
The government is a hiding place—
who killed Kennedy?**

16.

**You call that history?
It's all conspiracy,
you choose your lies.
A bee hovers by the window,
we call this a relationship.**

17.

We'll work it out
we say,
forgive the unforgiving.
Everybody walks alone,
left foot right foot
enough for conversation.

18.

Then evening comes
and it makes sense
to seem together,
together after
all the dancing and forgiving
as if the story now
were coming to meaningful rest.
As if, as if, o
as if is just one more song.

21 May 2021

====

I come to you
by eagle feather
eagle wings,
I come to you
by melting snow,

it is all I know,
arriving and arriving
and hard to be here,
fur and flowers
and things without names,

it is all I know to make up names
for what I don't know,
for what brings me here
and keeps me here
where it is so hard to be.

21 May 2021

THE LIONTAMER

Every house needs one.
Those creatures
live in the walls
(we call the walls dreams
to pretend we can
move through them at will
or that they protect us
from waking reality
but they are walls
and lions live in them.

2.

What is a lion?
King ,of beasts,
consort of the Sun,
master of August,
an idea you hear
breathing nearby

in the jungle of the mind.
A lion is a thought too many,
waking too early,
a sneering mirror,
roar of traffic, dust
blown in the window,
one memory too many.

3.
The job never means
killing the lion, never,
who would want to hurt summer
or slay the human senses five
as Blake says, he knew
about lions too
though he's famous for tigers.
His masterpiece Jerusalem
is full of lions.

4.

**Growl. I am the girl
who never answers your letters.**

**Growl. I am the agency
that doesn't call back. Growl.**

**I am last night's dream
that stinks your whole day.**

I am the stupid thing you said.

**Growl. I am your conscience,
your false confession, growl,
but I am not your sin.**

5.

**And speaking of Israel
do not confuse
the endless war against the Jews
or the deadly strife of Palestinians
with Israeli with lions.**

**No lions there. The Lion of Judah
has emigrated, can be found
in all the nations of the world.**

No, lions are not about war.
War is for lesser animals,
weasels and lizards-- look
at the face of any general closely
and you'll see what I mean.

6.

No, lions live in houses.
Your house.
Live in you. (Note:
in poetry, you
almost always means me.)
They're near you
as you walk through the trees,
watch you at table
as you sip your broth
from a silver soup spoon
from your mother's kitchen.
They watch you read the paper,
once in a while stretch
out a paw to rustle the pages

so you think it's the wind.
They distract you from now.
That's where the liontamer comes in.

7.
Some bring a bottle of pills,
some bring a book of stories
to keep your mind off the lions,
some turn on music
and confuse you with song,
opera is great for that,
how can a big strong man like you
sing like Isolde, a slim girl like you
bellow like Boccanegra?
Opera is a place where no
listener knows who he is
anymore. For a whole act
the lions flee the noise.
But then the intermission comes
and they're licking at your cheeks again.
So when the applause dies down

ask your neighbor for a cigarette.
Nobody smokes these days
and you can't smoke in here anyhow
so the look he'll give you
will confuse the lions,
puzzle them while you slip
away to the loo or the champagne bar
before the lions notice you are gone.

8.

Anybody who didn't know better
would think this is a pretty nice day.
Green trees yellow sun blue sky,
the usual palette of harmony.
But there are lions in it.
I found one waiting by my pillow,
between me and the window,
how patient they can be,
even gentle, he purred
as he asked me what my dream

really means. I tried
to go back to sleep but he yanked
the pillow away, growled softly
and I was lost in the dim fin-de-siècle Vienna
of
what anything means. I mean
if anything means.

9.

Call the tamer, the blithe distracter,
the charioteer, the toreador,
spin the dial, go out for a spin,
eat something spicy, feel
to the full that delicious pain,
the jalapeno at the uvula,
be anywhere but there. There
is where the lion waits.
In the wall. Close, close,
I sometimes smell their breath
rich with all the thoughts

they have savaged and devoured.

10.

The closest I ever got
to Africa was flying
over Egypt once,
mouths of the Nile.
But still I keep telling
people I stroked
a lion once. Zoo,
of course, I reached
over the railing
and through the bars
and stroked his massive mane.
Slowly his head turned
and he looked at me--
they have golden eyes, you know,
looked quietly, as if he
were the visitor and I
the beast exhibited.
Gently even, peaceful

curiosity, I see his eyes
still, the lion who tamed me
just by looking. Maybe
that's the way it's done--
stare at it quietly, alertly,
gently, till it goes away.

22 May 2021

=== = =

Even the rose
of Sharon our
latest blossomer
is taking notice
now, pale green
enquiries out
into the humid air.
What world is this
I hear it thinning,
and have I come again
to this same place,
road, house, cars,
and they will still
demand my flowers—
roses they call them
but I call them mine
Don't you people have
your own flowers too?

22 May 2021

WARNING

Don't start with me,
the weather's enough
to put up with. This
is not Berlin, no earth-
shaking science here,
this is the quiet old
neighborhood of now
and LESS IS MORE is
carved on every fireplace.
This is the alone they mean
when they tell you plainly
Leave Me Alone. Hot day,
that's enough explanation.
A little wind stirring, leaves,
even a branch or two.
Dear Christ it's lonely here.

22 May 2021

=====

Does wind come from the sea?
Is it the sea's own breath,
every wave we see the soft
or fierce exhalation of the elf
it shares with us, it must be
something like that the way
it lifts us to be in *air that moves*,
that comes to us and lets us
breathe too.

She walked along
the sand in Carolina, north or
south make no difference to the sea,
or she walks along by the rough
combers off the Vineyard Sound—
different women, same sea.
Same wind that comes to us,
all the way up here, far from Atlantic
but its ancient lover's breath finds me.

22 May 2021

=====

**There is a pain
in a part.
Focus on it
hard. Now
shift your gaze
to somewhere else.
The pain goes
there too, rides
on awareness.
Maybe all it is.**

23 May 2021

=====

The new day means something,
scrub out the mind,
put a holy image above the sink.
morning's not the time to think.
Let the sacred otherness of things distract you.
That's
what you have a world for.
Trees are only the beginning.

23 May 2021

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CHANSON DU MALADE

**I am an athlete
turned inside out,
skilled mind
in useless body,
language
my Olympic Games.**

23 May 2021

=====

Perch on this
powerline, my bird,
and be at ease
in all your song,
close enough to hear,
far enough away
for you to be safe
from my appropriation,
I capture what I love—
sing free.

23 May 2021

=====

Witchy to wait,
wizard to want

but I want to be
safe from me

my own magics
desires inventions

just alone on the lawn,
a crow in the sky.

23 May 2021

=====

**When the doge of Venice
marries the sea,
the whole Adriatic
remembers Diocletian,,
Constantine, Aeneas,
Odysseus. When the doge
casts the ring into the lagoon
Penelope catches it on Ithaca,
this is what government should be,
casting gold to the sea,
waiting for the waves tp
bring back flowers from Aphrodite,
purple irises, weird Persian roses.**

23 May 2021

SEMANTICS

Let my words
speak for me,
if you know
what I mean,
they know better
than I do
what I mean
And I really
do mean it.

23 May 2021

=====

In sun, just now,
no glasses on
those trees in shade
look like all
of a sudden the
grain of wood.
This is the moment
when essence shows?
Study your face?
Dare glance in a mirror?

24 May 2021

=====

**Come play with me
the picture said,
I was four years old
and yearning, learning
what the other is for,
not always getting it right.**

2.

**Come play with me
a song you just make up,
a game you invent
as you go along. I mean
to follow, my eyes
fixed on how you move,
my heart attuned
to how you sing.**

3.

Come play with me,
you are the nation
and i am just me.
Don't make it a war
again, don't be big,
fierce, false,
let me learn you
like language, all
its quiet rules
just to be clear,
let me live clear.

4.

Come play with me,
memories that might
be mine, no matter,
they're there in here,
the man in Oakland,
afternoon in Chicago

with the elephant,
Everest out the window,
red sand of Florida
pelican beside us,
whose hand was that?

5.
Come play with me,
the years don't matter,
just tell me your name,
or just a word, give me
a word to play with,
a word and I will know it's you.

24 May 2021

GREEK LESSON

Hespera men en
the speech began.
long e on the *en*,
and we studied it,
some for grammar
some for rhetoric,
whatever, a stone
it was whose grain
held clues to something.

2.
then it was evening
but who among us
knew why that matters,
some night two
thousand years ago?

3.

**Why do we study
this old thing?**

**Because it made
a difference once**

when it was day.

**This bone-dry cup
once quenched a thirst.**

Study it till it fills again—

thirst is permanent.

**Language, language,
keep coming back for more.**

24 May 2021

THE PRIEST

When she wakes up #this morning
the church will still be there,
empty except for you know who
and pale irises fading on the altar.

Light seeps through the windows
with nothing to see with it
and no one to look, not yet,
but soon she'll shrug her vestments on,

thoughtful amble lightly through
the sacristy and stand
silent in the pulpit. This
is what she was born for,

to speak the word, the word
that takes forever to pronounce,
life after life to say even
the first sounds of it, o soon,

soon let the ardent vowel come
to hint what the whole word means,
her young lips part to begin
the everlasting pronunciation.

24 May 2021

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**Filled my pens,
loaded the dumpster—
language is pure
recyclement!**

24 May 2021

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in my perplexity dissolve
three spoons of Orinoco mud,
two of Nile and one of Tiber.
Let them ferment—
they do it fast, almost overnight—
inhale the fume that rises.
Then throw out the mixture
and inhale from the empty glass.
What happens in you now is secure,
a science, a part of history.

2.

But my worry
is still there,
know how to dance
even without music,
stares at the sky
sees 3D horror
flicks on TV.

3.

**Ease up, sleep down.
Try to forget my dream.**

4.

**I confuse myself
with everybody else—
o poor passers-by
in the innocent street
what have I done to you?**

24 May 2021

=====

**Are there mosquitoes on the Oder.
the river that is sometimes a frontier,
boundary between two nations,
sometimes just water flowing north
through farmlands and factories.**

**Are there mosquitoes skittering
through the sedge, anxious to sting
pale skin of the Polish swimmer,
the Silesian swimmer?**

**What is in
the blood that they so want? Or is it
not something they take out
but something to yearn to shove in,
learn to insert within us a meaning,
a meaning we call a disease?**

I've seen them in Wyoming
buzzing up from the snow,
in dust-dry California even,
by grace of a slovenly puddle
to breed in and become. But to do they
plague the Oder, Oder on its way
north to the Baltic, cold, cold,
cold Jordan wash me clean

24 May 2021

IN MEMORIAM

**My hands still full of the feel of you
I meant to say
but halfway through saying it
I realized we had never touched,
not thatway, a cup of tea
shared maybe, a cigarette.
I hurried back ibto sleep
my mind full of the feel of you at last.**

25 May 2021

=====

I want to get
to where the numbers sleep
quietly, counting nothing,
just being themselves.
I want to watch the chest
of Seven rise and fall
quietly, and hearth breath
of Six so soft and Five
maybe snoring just a little.
I'll stand in that dark place
and figure out what things
really are and mean
when we forget to count them,
and then what numbers
mean themselves, those notes
in the scale of our mind music.

25 May 2021

=====

**Wake-up Call.
Is it time
to be me yet?**

**This enormous hotel,
soft buzz on the house phone.
Want turns to must?**

**Forget the if, or get up
and fight the is?
Maybe they'll call back**

and tell me who I am.

25 May 2021

=====

Coarse voices
void of storm

I'm good at feeling
sorry for myself

the other window
aces the stream

how does the water
know where to go

why can't I know that too
or is that built in

so no one has to know
to do and just does?

May 2021 240

**The voices pass, cyclists
maybe, wheels going round—
they too know what to do.**

25 May 2021

SAKA DAWA DUCHEN

**It is the Feast— Full Moon in Vaisakha,
we celebrate today
Buddha's birth
enlightenment
and passing into Nirvana,
the whole story,
84 years compressed in one day.
Are we born with the end in sight?**

2.

**I follow truth
by studying the other.
Any other.
Because at last the other
turns to me and explains
“The truth is in you--
that's why you look for me
to tell you so.”**

3.

**I was born
with a firm thumb
to press deep
and make my mark
in the clay tablets
on which I write.
Something is wrong
with what I just said,
but it must be right
because I said it.**

4.

**I was born
(waht, again?)
with my left foot
one size larger.
Nobody notices.
But I chose this
when I decided**

where I was to be born
and to whom—
the circumstances
were mine to choose--
and by choose I mean
compelled by all
the history and habits
of all my lives. But all
choice is like that,
every choice impelled
by what came before,
The foot was a surprise,
things come packaged
with eterni/ty, DNA, yes,
but also the genetics of the soul.

5.

As a teacher the meanest
assignment I ever give
to my students is to write
why they chose the parents

they chose. I mean mean
because they can discern
sometimes some meaning
in their lives they never guessed.
Some are very happy, some
look at me, a grinch who took
their fond resentments away.

6.
How far we have to travel
to be where we are.
And only at the end
to hear the darkness whisper
who we really were.

26 May 2021

=====

**Wounds are leaves
on some weird tree
the wind whispered
that to me, weather
is to be endured--
to live in a body
is sheer heroics.**

26 May 2021

=====

**Curbs get higher
stairs get steeper
car goes faster.
childhood is after me again.**

25 May 2021

THE WIZARD'S ASSISTANT

stares into a pool of ink.
bowl on the table, bends over,
watches close, reports
what she sees. The wizard
write it down word for word,
wouldn't dare summarize
or chide the grammar. Strict
adherence to what she tells
is the secret of his knowledge.
Sometimes she smiles at him,
never a trace of ink on her
seldom says much, comes and goes.
He hurries to the throne room
to make his revelations, wondering
who is really serving whom.

26 May 2021

TRUISM

**Nothing is further
than tomorrow
except yesterday.
Boring, sad.
but true all the same.**

26 May 2021

THE LION ROARS BACK

to his trainer,
come play with me,
I love to pretend
I'm a kitten just
playing by your feet,
mewing mildness,
soon to be fed, loved
downward instead
of being fearer, I growl
soft as I can, come play with me.

26 May 2021

QUING

Let there be a person called
The Quing, a woman
ruling nations all by herself,
just because she is herself,
not because of who her father was,
no reference to prince consorts,
she rules because of who she is
in herself all by herself,
no heirs but whom she chooses.
A land ruled by a quing
would be a wondrous place,
the genders slowly balance out,
men freed of the habit of seizing,
women from the habit of submission.
May the Quing live forever!

26 May 2021

== == =

Purchase,
 they say,
get a grip on,
take hold,
 a place,
a stick stuck upright
makes a shadow
that guides the sun.
We are one.

2.
Don't have to be mine
just have to be.
What the clock
says to time, what
any you says to any me.

3.

Baskets, full of
they call it produce,
onions red and white,
potatoes russet and pale,
the world is full of genders.
Amazon. Idaho.

4.

Morality gets so abstract
like one candle flame
in a very large crowded room
if it is a room at all.
You never know until
you find the edge of things.
Say your prayers.

5.

Stopped at a red light
in a dream, stream
of people crossing
each distinct, face, clothes,
age, gender, all different,
all distinct. Where are they
coming from? In me?
Where are they headed.
They cross at right angles,
I wait for the light, the east
ahead of us is all sky, all bright.

6.

Where does the world
come from, for that matter?
The boffins play ping-pong
in the basement of the lab,
gravity helps us take our
mind off things. Little white

**sphere, with a sound a little
like a cup breaking in a distant room.
Humans feel more at home
when they can use their hands.**

7.

**That Russian from Armenia used to say
our public wars and private atrocities
are meant to feed the moon,
blood-soaked energy rising through sky.
In old countries they learn sorrow first.**

8.

**Don't get me started.
This is cross
country skiing
in the summertime.
Or swimming
in the desert**

with green seaweed
streaming
wet from your hair.
This is called looking
at a tree and seeing
someone. Nothing
is where it should be,
only where it is.

9.

Trains went by.
The helicopter settled
and the president climbed out.
A well-spoken white man
a little on the pompous side
stepped down onto the moon
and didn't even say hello.
The moon didn't care the moon
is hungry for our energies,
our language we can leave back home.

Or nothing to talk about up there.

Or am I wrong yet again?

We would not be surprised.

10.

**None of those people who passed me
were at all familiar. I never
saw any of them before.**

**Yet there they were, ten feet away,
proud in their distinctness
hurrying cross before the light changed.**

**Dreams remind us
of what we never knew,
make us remember
what never happened.**

**Yet every night we suck
our melatonin hummies,
hurry happily into the dark--
is it just the cheapest show in town
or the ancient cathedral of the really real?**

11.

**We, and that means most of us, who
went to the movies when we were kids
or sat dazzled on the parlor floor
in front of the flagrant TV
are different from all humanity
all those people who came before.
Every blessed day we had
the experience of Something Else
and they never had that,
not easily is ever.
How could we not be different,
deeply different, from all those
who came before? Our minds
afloat in imagery, detailed history
of what never happened.
And yet we saw.
A new genus with the same old hands.**

27 May 2021

SCRIMSHAW

Through the straits the Pequod
named for the fiercest
tribe in all New England,
through the straits of somewhere
it sailed, out from New Bedford
to reach by way of Nantucket,
to reach the open sea.

And that's the end of the story.
The rest of what you think you know
is a young boy's dream,
a prickly young lubber from upstate
who sinks his ship in dream
and lives to tell of it,

A likely story. And is the sea
ever open? How did the ship
(named after a blood-thirsty tribe
from Connecticut that scared the wits
out of peaceable Mohicans, Wappingers,

**Esopus, who raided as close to me
as Shekomeko, outskirts of Pine Plains),
how did the whaler get free
of the mainland, down Buzzards Bay
was it, or through Woods Hole or
Canapitsit channel right by Cuttyhunk?**

**Was there ever a boat and ever a man?
And what about that open sea,
why won't you tell me about that,
is the sea ever open, open and free,
a vast water park we can play in,
Or is there a price we have to pay
we who sail or swim it, watch it
from our trembling shore, dream
about its everlasting energies, mysteries
precisely as deep as the world?**

Through the Straits of Somewhere

the mind makes its way
looking for some place it knows is there
always on the other side of the sea.
Come with me, it tells us,
let us go together, love and reason,
fear and folly, all of us on our way
to find the place where all we know
makes sense, and our ignorance is eased,
soft sleepy slapping of the littlest waves.

27 May 2031

=====

**Walk a shallow sentence
through the grove.**

**The words will follow
trailing half-reluctant
to leave each leaf behind
and find a new one
to talk to, to describe.**

**Hello, You! the sentence says,
I'm only here for your sake,
to fill your ears with news,
images, observations, lies.
Yes, I know that trees have ears.
Yes, I worked it out for myself,
my 'self' being also part of nature
if not quite natural itself.**

**I keep talking to find my way.
Tree Bad, *tribade*, they told me
was a naughty woman and I believed.**

**That is a child's business, to believe
what it is told, and I did, and I have
been looking for her ever since,
the naughty tree that talks to me
and tells me what I have already guessed
is true, true as apples, true as bark.**

**This is what comes of walking in woods,
it's like sitting in an easy chair,
evening, and feeling your pulse,
counting the hoof beats as the day
canters away into the dim.
my heart, that wordy woman in the woods.**

27 May 2021

=====

**Find a word
and pit it down
where you can find it again**

**this piece of paper
will do the job,
will hold the word in place**

**until the Apocalypse
reads all the books at once.**

**27 May 2021
Rhinebeck**

=====

**Listen to the lover
lispig in twilight**

**the day is not ever over,
the wolves howl politely**

**at the moon, we all do
the work we're cut out for**

**or at least the job we
sometimes are able to do.**

**27 May 2021
Rhiinebeck**

=====

**See, under all the Greek and Latin
and all the crypto-hermetic fuss
I am a proletarian, descendant of kings,
just like all the workers who sweat
to keep the old ball rolling along
without too many people falling off it,
without too many meanings getting lost.**

**27 May 2021
Rhinebeck**

GROWL

**I like the wrong
evidently kind of music
and have view
about lost things,
especially the weather.
And summer is just
one more pop song.**

**27 May 2021
Rhinebeck**

HYPNOKINEMATOGRAPHY

notes for a treatise

**How do all of us, all
of us, become
such skilled film makers
in our sleep?**

**Dreams are perfectly cast,
precisely on location,
every face distinct,
bodies and costumes
convincing—
all of actors we have never known,
never seen in waking life.**

And the sets!

**The amazing cityscapes,
crystalline rives, jungle without end!**

How do we do it?

Enough of wondering what dreams mean.

**It is time to study how we make them,
or whp it is in us who makes them,
and what we can learn from
these Eisensteins inside.**

27 May 2021

VAULT

Vault over
the mere creek,
yes, salt
from the sea
let in, low soft
but you jump.

2.

That is how it is
with dreams
or other cities
a river is there
we need to cross
to be on this side
safe.

Vault over
water, tolerate
the earth, ask it
to grow things.

3.

After that the story
gets confused.

Languages interfere,
wandering hermits
fill us with unease.

What are neighbors
anyway, *voisins*,
the mere nearby.

4.

But mere has *mer*
in it, and salt
means jump.

Even the impossible
has offspring,
blond ringletted children
on a Balkan shore.

5.

You will accuse me
of maintaining that everything
also means something else.
You will say Pshaw (a sound
you heard n books).
monosyllable of dismissal.
Why shouldn't we both
be right? Doesn't now
have all the human future in it?
Or do I mean the past?

6.

The point is to leap
over the stream,
to know both sides
of what flows
and where it goes

**and what it knows.
The point is dragging
the no out of know
and bend it to your purposes,
your sacred yesses.**

28 May 2021

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Silver sunset
see,
abashed at all
our Spartan propaganda
(less is more; hurt helps)
the opulent evening
unfolds.

We see the silver
sprinkle us as rain,
asperges me, Domine,
we cry to the Lord
by which we mean the all,
the wise totality that rules us,
and we fall on our minds' knees
the bones we call sleep.

2.

Then it was day.
The confused liturgies of dream

talked themselves out.

Anaphora, what we repeat.

Wake renewed from the same old dark.

So now it is day,

soft and cool for the season,

the sky looks as if remembering

the storms of last night.

Yes, weather has a memory, too,

we see it in the trees too.

3.

Walk with me some day

through a few lines of Homer,

the most famous ones,

about this raging foreigner

who came to wreck a city,

helping other angry men

who had no city of their own.

Wreck the city and leave

food for the dogs and birds,

beasts who usually eat

carrion or what they kill
now given by those angry men
dinners of luxurious fresh meat.
boys and men, blond and brown,
bodies spread on the blood-soaked ground.
Angry men from Europe
who come to sack a city in Asia--
sound familiar?
Even history has enough sense
to call the book Iliad, the poem
about Troy, not some weird
Achileid. No wonder Alexander
had it carried into battle,
help the angry man defeat society.

4.

Forgive the lecture,
I was just looking out the window
when it began. Sorry,
morning should be lesson enough.

5.

Sometimes one squirms
out of dream into something worse:
rational thinking without feeling.
That too is where war starts,
and detention camps fill up
along our borders, dumps
for children with the wrong color hair.

6.

Of course I forgive you,
you didn't mean it--
but that should make me madder
than id you did.
You should at least know
what you're doing
whatever you do.
Sprinkle me, o Lord, with consciousness.

7.

This is me still
trying to wake up.
Thousands of years
deep all sleep seems,
and every day a pure naissance,
nothing again about it.

8.

I love using words
like every and all,
they're easy to spell
and make you mad,
make you search
fast for exceptions,
objections, tear holes
in my plausible absolutes.
That way you get to share the work,
striving along the road with me
to find what language means.

9.

Means today, I mean,
not some old book
I try to understand.
Today is an epic of its own,
we stumble through
its lean hexameters
wondering what dialect
we're in this time.
Is this a line by Homer?
A haiku? Each has 17 syllables,
how can we know
what anything is
until we see what comes next.
Look far out to sea,
your eyes are better than mine,
what color are the sails
on that schooner on the horizon?
Or is that an osprey
settling on a much closer wave?

29 May 2021

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I wrote this poem with a pen
I found on Hitler's table at the Sperl.
Way at the back. on the left hand side,
where he;d sit with his cronies and dream.

2.

I wrote this poem with a pen
I found on an empty table
last table at the end, on the left
as you go in. They told me
that was Hitler's *stammtisch*,
where he held court with his friends.

3.

I wrote this poem with a pen
I found once in Vienna,
at the Café Sperl on the corner.
They said the tab;e it was on
was where Hitler used to sit.

4.

The Viennese don't like Hitler much
though he was Austrian. Still,
he was famous for a while,
that nervous art school kid
who became the worst man in the world.

5.

A young man sitting with his friends
in a comfortable cage in old Vienna.
In the room over to the right
grown men are playing billiards.
You can hear the clack of the balls
even back here, a sound like something
breaking, they heard it as they talked.

6.

I wrote this poem with a pen
found on that table, blank table,
café almost empty, I was alone,
half a century had passed
since that sad horror of a man had died.

The pen came away with me.
something to figure out,
something hard to understand.

7.

I wrote another poem
but not with this pen,
I tried to find out
just by writing words down
how that soft, clearly inadequate
young man became the worst
human being of his time,
at least of all the ones I'd heard of.
How could it be?

8.

I wrote a poem Hitler couldn't read
because it was in English. But it was
written in language. and he had that
We both had that. We all have that.
And that makes the whole terrible history

even harder to understand. How can one person with language hurt or even kill another person with language, another person, six million persons, not counting all the soldiers slain in war, civilians bombed to bones, all, all of them with language?

9.

I wrote this poem with a black gel pen
I found abandoned on a table at the Sperl—
you know the place. on the corner,
famous among Viennese cafes, and Vienna
is famous for cafes, cafes and operas,
coffee shiops I mean, Vienna where the Turks
stopped their westward aggression.
retreated but left their coffee behind.
And there the cheap pen was, abandoned,
a pen made long after the Hitler time,
still full of what it uses for its ink.

10.

I wrote this poem with that pen
but a grammarian would insist
and rightly I should say that
poem with that poem—the poem
in question is not this this, not
the poem you are reading now,
sister, brother, child in language,
but another poem that I call this
because of the pen, I don't know
where the poem is or what it says,
I can't lay my hand on the pen
though I throw nothing away, ever.
Language never throws anything away.

11.

So I wrote that poem
(I stand corrected)
just to get the feel
of what that table
once must have felt.

Sometimes I think
objects have feelings
too, and can talk,
or at least listen.
Did I fear what the pen
might make me say?
Yes, a little. I kept on,
trusting always the language
to protect me from meaning.

12.

That table in the sperl.
How could he do it,
how could a man
sitting on a bench or a chair
at an empty table
waiting for his coffee,
how could he become
the monster we know?
Or think we know.
Maybe it is even worse

than this, than that,
maybe we can't even guess
what comes from quiet—
places, people. I have
to trust my pen to tell me.

30 May 2021
Memorial Day

A DRAGON FROM VERMONT

for Marja

**Not common there
but they are there.**

quietly, minding
the world's business
from gulleys, culverts,
even proper caves
up in snow country
by the longest lake.
Dragons, wings green
glossy leaves, breath
a summer wind, claws
the rock we stand on.
They disguise themselves
as places, just as we
disguise ourselves
with bodies and faces,
architecture, politics, creed.

The dragons wait for us
to ask them, come to them
simply, the way kids go
to school half reluctant,
half intrigued, we know

**they know something
but what do they know?**

**They know who they are
and so they know who
we are, the one knowledge
our trive withholds from us.
Vut the dragons know,
wait for us to come, offer
a song or a loaf of bread
and ask for their help n finding
our own precarious identity.
The dragons usually say yes.**

**They are realer than the world
we think they're fables in.
Listen to their answer, please,
listen in the forest, listen
to the creek, listen soft
to the stone they sometimes**

leave their shining image on.

30 May 2021

=SLIPSTREAM

soon

the light on the other side,
the granulations of desire
worn smooth by passage.

Quote from an old log

3 days w/o one Seal.

Because we were looking,
always looking, not for but
just to see.

2.

Hard to be on the earth
and on the ground at once
but it can be done
and we can manage it.

I heard that sermon in the chapel.
not spoken but verberated
out from the wall itself.

3.

**But by nature
being now,
I choose to dance
another way.**

**Sympathy
and reminiscence,
travel more
by hand than feet.**

4.

**You don't make up ne words,
you wake them from waiting
deep in the caverns of language.
Talk about Mammoth!**

5.

And so I called myself
a glower because I try
to put a good fce on sad things,
and call myself a glistener
because I try to find even
a little bit of light in the dark.
But you most likely call me
just a Libra, just a Jesuit.

6.

Since the earth spins
as it rolls around the Sun,
hurtling through the cosmos,
doesn't it strike you, even you,
that our duty is to sit still?
Someone sitting quiet on a chair,
center of the universe.

7.

Are we there yet?
I hear the children cry.
Of course we are,
of ourse you are,
we are there whenever
I can hear you call.

8.

When eyes are slow
to accommodate, the road
we travel on goes faster
it seems that it does
for normal eyes. Fact.
The gap between movement
and perception grows.
Soon the slipstream will be so fast
I'll think it's standing still,
our journey done. But why

do I feel the engine still,
the chatter of wind, and why
do the trees keep changing their clothes?

9.

You can hear my anxiety.
Dismiss it. The truth
is not much help
in times like these.
Measure out serenity in milligrams
and hope the armies go to sleep.

10.

Beet root. Swiss chard. Peas.
I confess I hate the taste if these.
I don't like not liking things,
I feel it is a kind of sin, a turning
away from what simply is.
I told a new friend about all this,

next day she had us in for dinner
and served all three. Wiseass
or healer? Devil or doctor?
You never know with vegetables,
skatole in the former, sweet
mush of the other.

11.

So one's tastes
are strictures,
structures of confinement.
Preference is prison.

Let the wind of passage
strip them away.
Beets? Beethoven? *Uguale*,
as Pound says. If it exists
it's somehow good for you.

12.

**That's enough pep-talk for today,
slightly sleazy it sounds.to me,
but there it is. It is.**

The wanderer comes home.

The lightner erases the dark.

**We invent the words we need
and then they speak us, clear
sometimes. Invent means discover.**

I am a waker, rubbing my eyes.

31 May 2021

