

Selected Poems

2013



Johnmichael Simon

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WHAT ELSE IS THERE TO THINK ABOUT?

You could look through glass bottles at galaxies
chasing one another across fields of starry blossoms

Or stare at a piece of scratch-marked cave wall
for half a century wondering which library of
sharp-edged flints etched these inscriptions

Or if you were a fat and greedy child you could
catalog all edible fauna and flora
these for breakfast those for dinner and so on

But nothing simply nothing can come close
to the ponderings on sun-filled spring mornings
watching as a seed buried all winter
hiding its thousand word vocabulary in the cold ground

Bursts forth its green-waving head and without
any instruction manual smilingly becomes a pale crocus

Or the nights of frozen-hearted fear
knowing that for all – cave painter, child grown old and feeble,
short-skirted flower – the midnight executioner approaches
implacably
sharpening his sword, chanting his ancient formulas

No matter what else there is to think about
in your shortening days

COMPASSIONATE WOMEN

they take animals into their lives
spend days, months, petting, feeding
cleaning up mess, throwing out broken stuff

they kiss, cuddle and pamper as
his lordship curses and growls
they have themselves photographed with him
make videos, become well known

eventually the beast attacks and devours them
posthumously they become news items

it doesn't stop others from imitating
doesn't stop town folk, mothers
and neighbors who got scratched and mauled

from saying
we told you so

SMALL TOWN POLITENESS

*Hello good morning, we're polite so polite,
lovely day isn't it, may we please have a word?
And so are we sir, more polite than polite
how can we help you? Oh please do come in*

*Some folks down the road say your son,
your daughter, your husband as well...
You must be mistaken, they're not that at all
and now if you don't mind, I'm busy right now*

*Look ma'am just a minute, we have here some things,
some things you should look at, your daughter, your son...
They're liars I tell you, the scum of the earth
inspecting our garbage and reading our mail*

*There's talk in the village, cross words in the street
Now listen here mister take your muddy feet out*

*They're coming to get you old woman, be warned
Take your things you low bastard, get out of my house*

*How dare you insult me you dirty old witch
take this and take that, I'll show you who's boss
You're a cheap lying devil, granddad get my gun
the battle's begun and our honor's at stake*

*Well good day to you ma'am, we're polite, so polite
And have a good day sir, the weather's just right*

CADENZA

at night

he struggles to sleep
wonders what it's like

darkness of nothing
absence of light
never to awaken

is it like a black fire
or some pearly radiance
where souls

bump each other
like molecules of light
in a cathedral

so many friends
parents, spouses
out there

singing their throats out
in excelsis
or simple, sorrowful

silence and darkness
like before everything
started moving?

and he wonders again
why nobody ever comes back
to tell him

until the birds start
their crazy singing
oh boy, it's morning again!

THE GURU

On her podium, dressed like a man
she dispenses insights gleaned from
internet, newspapers and back-cover blurbs
chewed up and regurgitated for her disciples

You can't see the outline of her genitalia
or inhale the faint perfume of her
personal relationships. She rises each day
reincarnated, denying the wrinkles
of her three thousand year old mortality

A host of hired accountants shovel bags
of golden coins deposited at her feet
by students, into sacks to be stored in
time vaults and used to purchase
food and ammunition in the days

Succeeding the next cataclysm. For an
additional thousand dollars she will grant
you a personal interview, during which
she will debunk all the myths you've
lived under emperors and clergy

Leaving you breathless for her
final words of comfort which
somehow never come

SUBMISSION TIME AT THE OLD CORRAL

it's becoming more and more
modern to smear yourself over
pages that could conceivably
have been used for some other
purpose - papier maché for example
or folded into darts thrown off
skyscrapers, sandwich wrappers,
foggy windscreen wipes or for
removing something the new kitten
left on the carpet with a grimace
thinking that some poets could
benefit from having their noses
rubbed in it and then having NO
repeated to them in a very stern
voice. oh for a paperless world
dogs write poetry on trees and
other dogs stop to read them
if they like them they write their
own. who was it that wrote
i think that i shall never see
a poem lovely as a tree?
scribble away boys and girls, god save
the king, hip hip hurrah

LONG HAUL JAZZ

Music written on the windscreen whips on

Arpeggios waterfall from rocky heights
as underneath where a throaty engine sings
its minimalist background drone
double bass fingers strum a rubber-asphalt hum

Dashboard radio's on, announcer dreamy-toned
beside her 5 a.m. machine-made coffee
coughs into big city's tuning up

She puts the next discs on – Mozart and
Charlie Parker, centuries apart, now rub shoulders
in reassuring cadences
along this winding black strip day

Outside blackbirds start their daily chatter
stomach rumbles hungrily as roadside
gas stop/diner lumbers into view
engine sighs into silence, door slams
bacon sizzles, coffee bubbles

Truck driver yawns
stretches, burps
six hundred miles ahead
he'll oversee unloading
turn and start his klaxon-horn road back

EVENING PRIMROSE

These butterfly yellow flowers
grow low and delicate on Sharon's cliffs

All day they listen, and then
as a sinking Mediterranean sun

Conducts the orchestra
of breakers, gull cries

They watch little children
frolicking in the waves

That strum on the shore below
then as maestro sun descends his podium

And mother moon
puts on her pale lipstick

Stealing some yellow from them both
they fold their petals into sleep

And dream of sipping milk
and singing lullabies under the stars

Until night's interval is over
and the clamor of the day resumes

Here in this fragment of a country
where honey and turmoil live side by side

We close our own petals every night
and dream of peace

TWO, ONCE DAILY AFTER MEALS

Our son, she says
does everything for that woman
he's open, generous, honest
and she treats him
like a package insert.

She's always looking for
contraindications
things he didn't tell her
about his past, our family.

*She keeps a beautiful home
says father, and at the university
she's very highly thought of*

And the way she interrupts him
look how she bosses him around
he does all the cooking
she only sets the table

*She's very good looking
folks think she's much younger*

She doesn't want children
I knew it! All those years together
mid forties, she's missing the last bus
and he just smiles at her

*I asked him about that
he said maybe in a year or two
when she completes her doctorate*

And you swallow that story
like syrupy cough medicine?
Listen to her shutting him up again
always getting the last word.

FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE

There is only one person in the universe
and he is a lie.

No throne his nothingness, no lightning bolt
can describe his inscrutability
his blind immortal eye.

Alone, he invents armies of children
to disobey him. They reinvent him
in multiple disguises.

He ignores their games.

Child, you are but a passing fable
told by a drunkard on a stormy night.

Come, climb these stairs up to the attic
meet your father.

Look, he is a bespectacled fellow in
a yarmulke reading a yellowed newspaper.

He hands you a slice of bread and a pickle
the bread crumbles in your grip to star dust
the pickle is a comet dipped in green vinegar.

You turn to thank him and he is gone.

HEADLINES AT BREAKFAST

after the Beatles

The weather so the Times says will be cool
with scattered showers in the afternoon
at five the radio will announce
which numbers won the football pool

Fried eggs and Worcestershire sauce
to start off a usual day
fried eggs and Worcestershire sauce
and a large cup of tea of course

The Syrian army pounded towns today
and lines of refugees began their march
oil's past the hundred mark again
the priest's a homosexual so they say

Black holes are getting larger scientists claim
the latest smartphones talk three languages
we're very sorry to announce
tomorrow's been postponed again

It's been raining steadily since eight
my brand new raincoat's got a tear
I think I'll wait a little while
on days like this the bus is usually late

I'll have another slice of toast
with just a teaspoonful of marmalade
in Baghdad only two bombs went off yesterday
and now my newspaper is closed

I couldn't really care for all that barf
I'll turn the hit parade up loud
or maybe go to bed for half an hour
and in the afternoon I'll take a bath

STILL LIFE WITH BEETLE AND DUCKS

after Vincent van Gogh

She spends a summer hour, this farm-born girl
scent of mown hay mingling with her hair
lying there under the stack watching a bug
go about its shadow-etched excursion
or strolling pond's brink as a scattering
of ducks paddle-flies to glide another
soft blue introspective landing

I can't do it, my mind pursuing fireflies
across a sky of falling stars, or racing
time's roller-coaster back to where
dinosaurs roamed hugely before
flame, smoke and falling heaven
choked them into history's museum

Oh lure me down to you, farm girl
haul my kite line in to rest beside you
in this hay-fresh fragrance
that bug is climbing faster now
and soon he'll disappear leaving
the two of us outlined against the shrinking sun

VENI VIDI VINCI

That about sums it up
Dinosaurs Ozymandias Al Aqsa

A tiny explosion
in the Eastern sky

The statues on Easter Island
unblinking at the heavens

Or perhaps an un-noticed mutation
in a waterborne virus

Ushering in a new season
of dust and velvet darkness

MY WIFE AND I

My wife has supernatural powers
she's telepathic, tells me what I'm thinking
long before I even begin to think
we've been together so long it's hardly
necessary to open my mouth at all

She's terrific, washes the dishes
hangs the laundry, thanks me for not thanking her
gives me a never-mind-no-thankyou kiss

We live in a mouse hole in the kitchen
at night we come out in the dark
watch an old movie or something
wait for the you-know-what that's
getting closer all the time

I'm not telling her all these things
she knows them anyway better than I do
if anything happens to either of us
I'm going to marry her again – save me
a lot of trouble thinking of what to do
which way to turn, how much I love her

She's clairvoyant too
talks to cats and birds
wish I could remember her name

VERNACULAR

This poem has its own
manner of speaking
whistling while brushing dust
from library shelves
lifting its little finger
at teacups and funerals
a poem composed while eating a
soft boiled egg each Wednesday
(except on the 4th Wednesday
of every other month when
the library restaurant is closed).

It's indifferent to migrations
of English to distant shores
centuries bifocally displaced
as it hides cheap rumours
of Royal misdemeanours
inside folded newspapers
for reading in the Underground.
Outside it's always raining
as it has been the past three
hundred years. Rhyming is
permitted once a fortnight
preferably in the men's room.

It pays no attention to echoes from
other climes of twang and slang
how railroads of actors and actresses
dressed in crinoline and graffiti
have spread twin tracks across
great plains and valleys as
at every station they descend
shouting plain talk in jazzy rhythms
infecting bystanders who run off
to copy them into encyclopedias
of smallprint declarations
and candy coated insincerities.

All this while in the East beyond
the clamor, an ancient scribe
great grandchild of meditation
dips a quill into a rivulet of ink
and inscribes the same character again
and again and signs it with
a black or crimson brushstroke.

BETWEEN FOREFINGER AND THUMB

Is this a legitimate pastime
for a piece of charcoal
cold from a dead fire
or a quill dropped from
a passing cormorant
as it flies out towards
the narrowing horizon?

Why should the ink in my veins
the walls of this cave
care about anything? As the
waves write their endless
white operas upon the shore
the stars describe their patterns—
creatures that never existed.

The blind map of sky
looks down on us
caring neither for philosophy
nor guidance
sharpened charcoal, dipped quills
need to be held carefully
between forefinger and thumb
to inscribe these marks and scratches
on manuscripts, canvases and walls.

This tidal urge
our fingers obey
and like the stars,
the cormorant, the waves
must keep obeying.

ANATOMY

I.

I'm perfect
from the tip of my osculation
to the cornerstone of my
toenails - perfect
like a Geiger counter in ice.

II.

Thank you Miss
I'll have a little more of that
ectoplasm please
it's good for the libido
so deliciously liberating.
What's that, your husband
became a monk? Could we
get together sometime, just
the two of us? Friday after
prayers perhaps?

III.

My friend Sigmund
is translating Gray's original
manuscript. Into German of course.
He got down to a few inches
below the navel, became fixated
there - for decades scholars followed
him to see what he was up to.
I can show you what he was up to, Miss -
5 o'clock, behind the Coliseum.

IV.

But I digress

we'd got around to the wishbone
hadn't we? You know, some
politicians spend half their lives
as liberals, socialists even,
until some rich uncle leaves them
an apartment building or an oil well,
then snap. Close your eyes darling
it's like everything you ever imagined
moving from back benches to boudoirs –
bedrooms they call them these days.

V.

Home is

where the beating Laundromat is
the absolute center of space and time
24 hours every day
even while the body is sleeping
dreaming of Elysium
background music of everything.
What's love got to do with it?
That's one of the best kept myths.

VI.

If you place your stethoscope here
right here, don't be afraid
you will hear the hit parade
gurgling its way round and round
like yesterday in a doggy bag.
Fasting is good for the system
it hushes the symphony until all you can hear
is the Dalai Lama on his mountain top
chanting his endless om.

VII.

Dem Bones

they always get in the way, don't they:
clavicle, tibia, fibula, vertebrae, these days
they have a machine that can
photograph your silhouette in black and white
a frightening thought but quite topographical really -
with all the verve, passion and agony
bleached out of it
leaving only a grinning copy of you
to show that you were here at all.

VIII.

Procrastination

does not necessarily mean
missing the main course
loin cloths were invented before
tablecloths by Homo Vulgaris
as any Scotsman worthy of his kilt
will tell you, cutting into his haggis
to expose a pair of tartan suspenders,
wooly army issue socks and knobby knee caps

IX.

So my dear Miss, may I thank you
for participating in this course
the trajectory of which has been
artfully concealed by generations
of baroque painters. On Friday when hopefully
after prayers or behind the Coliseum we will have
our next tête-à-tête, I will introduce you
to the Animal Cell, the Ovum, the Spermatozoon,
the Sternococcus and the other Articulations
of the Lower Extremity.

BIG CITY POET

Rooted in concrete
like some Manhattan trees
she looks up to heaven
sees only lines and rectangles

Sometimes she dreams
her poetry is soaring
like some celestial angel
up into those mysterious regions
she glimpses occasionally

But then her gaze reverting
back to here and now
she rides in elevators
noticing how people avert their eyes
and on the fifteenth floor
beside a plastic potted plant

She overhears some cries
behind a door marked *don't disturb*
and wonders in a quick poem
dictated to her smartphone
whether they are arguing
or making love

LAVENDER

In the afternoons
we play rummy on the balcony
discuss politics, cost of living
show photos of grandchildren

We sip mint tea
waiting for an autumn sun
to set behind the row of pines
silhouetted on a hilltop

As twilight comes
we kiss each others' cheeks
promise to meet again
next week perhaps

Or at the very latest
in a fortnight
weather's getting chillier

AND SO THE OLD CAT HAS DIED

And the younger ones tread lightly
over his favorite places sniffing for him.
No more special menus of flaked fish
minced chicken livers, it's back to
dry food again and the bus still
rumbles outside taking children to
school (except those that are in
the army now) and the sparrows
approach the window again where
he stood guard up on the table
between the potted plants

Do the other cats miss him as we do?
This empty gray space
loping slowly upstairs to where
his ghost on top of the refrigerator
leaps - a bundle of aging fur with
royal green eyes - leaps across
the still open wound to land nonchalantly
once again atop the kitchen cupboard

Today we notice that the brush still
has his fur in it

M E N U

This century's calling card
mayonnaise on everything
to cover up atrocities
and other gruesome items

Short order cooks
we sweat over burgers
mass graves smothered in
thousand islands, green cheese
even dogs wouldn't sniff at us

Out in the rain again
hatless, drenched and shivering
we conclude - our menu is
similar to it's predecessors but
our ovens more efficient

We have automatic incinerators
digitally programmed
to burn up the truth
before the inspectors arrive
with their kosher certificates

At the United Nations greasy spoon
they're handing out eggs and bottles of oil
do it yourself salad dressing
between vetoed resolutions

EVERYBODY'S FRIEND

mister english accent
doffs his hat at
everyone he meets

explains impeccably
in news announcer voice
the way things are these days
the size of jupiter
and other things
like what the menu says
which way to reach the loo

his wife and children
trail behind
listening to other music
they've heard it all before
and frankly he's a bore

BORDER BLUES

Beyond these orchards roars the road, winding between villages and hills, a writhing asphalt snake, southward it heaves, then east again, until it disappears leaving a constant echo in its wake.

Trucks rumble up and down the road, laden with sand from quarries, rocks and timber. Some are covered with tarpaulins and even binoculars can only guess their contents – bulky, ominous, concealed.

Dividing us from them, brothers from cousins, hard by the road, a wire fence, marked off by electronic posts, pencils in twenty yard segments the barrier which, in its way, despite seeming fragility shouts louder than a road can understand. It shouts 'keep out', 'no entry', 'military zone' in Hebrew, English, Arabic. Here only crows, mountain breeze and ants cross with impunity, heedless of the signs, the wires, the road.

Signboards pointing to the border bear the legend 'The Good Fence', and now and then a visitor, still uninformed arrives, asks for directions to the gate where women smiling behind burqas once peddled halvah.

Olives and pastel-colored squares of Rahat Lokum*, their children and ours observing each other curiously like animals in a zoo. That was before the war, now gateway, smiles and kiosks are replaced with concrete walls

while children in their schoolrooms, so close yet not so close, chant 'God is Great', or sing of cypress trees that grow in Lebanon, unconscious of the irony – the trees, the birds, the ants and God – don't really care at all.

*Rahat Lokum – a sweetmeat similar to Turkish Delight

WISDOM COMES FORTH

In sleep he invented driverless cars
glatt kosher rabbits, boat trips to Mars
his parents both frowning did not understand
“deficient in attention”, “hyper in his glands”

At the age of eleven he wrote his first thesis
refuting the lies told about God and Jesus
discovered a cure for toenails ingrown
invented a scent that smelled like grass mown

Determined to teach other kids how to think
he concocted a potion that they all could drink
which he sold for a quarter each very small bottle
the schoolmasters vowed they would catch him and throttle

Then schools all closed down as the kids were too busy
some teenagers took over running the city
and a thirteen year old who resembled Bill Gates
became President of the United States

And that marked the birth of a new generation
the first time in history that kids ran the nation
their new constitution said “let’s all have fun
undoing the dumb things our forebears have done”

The moral dear readers is not fiction nor dream
just give kids more respect and you’ll see what I mean

GIRL SOLDIER

She sat beside me on the bus
soldier girl from basic training
rifle clasped between her knees
the road was long to Tel Aviv
a popular tune wailed from
loudspeakers set into the stained ceiling
a weak fan fought against the desert heat.

We did not exchange a word
she less than half my age plugged into
her own earphone wire snaking down
inside her uniform. Somewhere before
Beer Sheva she fell asleep and as the bus
turned at a junction her head fell on
my shoulder, a lock of corn-colored hair
tickled my neck.

I could have woken her pushed her away
but feeling fatherly left her there until
the journey's end. She jerked awake lifted
her head picked up her gun and khaki duffel bag
stood up straightened her shirt and still without
a word joined other soldiers leaving the bus.

My shoulder ached but somehow felt so proud
that she had chosen it.

IT'S A PANIC

i'm late for school again
can't find my biology book
dog's eaten my homework
shoelace snapped

it's a panic
kid's fighting again
no bread for sandwiches
dog needs feeding
temper snapping

it's a panic
can't find my glasses again
or my prescription pills
neighbor's dog barking
one day i'm gonna shoot him

it's a panic
where has the time gone
where, where has the time gone
it's almost finished
and i still can't find
what to do with it

CONVERSION FACTOR

My husband's lips are Fahrenheit
his heart is Centigrade
his temper boils much higher than
his chilly masquerade

Often I just can't figure him
five eighths of what he says
is thirty-two more that he shows
or thirty-two points less

In vain I strive to calculate
the meaning of his weather
and if his words are from his heart
or elsewhere altogether

SHE WANTS EVERYTHING

child in me butterfly blue
 my pocket book
a poem i wrote on the way
 to a date with a jewish virgin

everything the lies i told in school
 my trek to katmandu fragrance of rice
and limp vegetables the way
 the stars curl up and scream when
smoking grass

she wants me hungry into her
 circles me with forefinger and thumb
her breath galloping on thick-veined stallions
 empties me like froth remaining
on an emptied beer glass grasps me
 in a stranglehold

now she says tell me everything
 tell me forever tell me you'll never
leave me

then she turns and starts a conversation
 with a stranger who looks
like johnny depp

FROM A MOTHER TO HER DAUGHTER IN LAW TO BE

I raised him do you understand
from sweetest milk to chicken soup
I bathed him clothed him
praised him scolded him
and with a wetted forefinger tip erased
some smudges that soiled his cheek
and when he brought those birdies home
for my appraisal, squawkers all of them
with frowsy feathers and unpleasant accents
I neatly clipped their wing tips
disclosed how under those pristine feathers
grayish and brown ones grew. How tenderly
they held his arm gazed into his eyes
a smelly lot indeed - smeared lipstick beaks
yellow short skirted legs.

So now he's brought you here oriental fowl
all blushing for my blessing. Out wretched child
you're less worthy than all the others
away do you hear me, how dare you steal my jewel!

Korea. Where in God's name is that?
Oh how I wish you understood my English.

FAÇADE

Nothing slips normally from your lips
polite deceptions, clever little lies
and made up things, asides and quips
but not a word about what hides inside

Those lips painted across your face
like a Picasso painting underneath two eyes
one pointing east one west that show no trace
of goings on behind your glib disguise

Silence would more become you clowning friend
even a curse some angry howl or scream
I'm sick of all your trying to pretend
that neither hate nor love are what you mean

ALONE IN MORNING'S AUDITORIUM

Every morning
as sun ascends his podium
and all the instruments of day
stringed and piped and flowing
winged and striped and growing
clearer now – the music starts again

Although some of its chords
and rising rhythms I know
as I know the beating of my heart
each morning
I hear them once again
freshly composed just for my ears

Listen
a tiny bird
somewhere at his wind-shaken
microphone is singing
his heart out
and yes from somewhere in
my dull flub-dub existence
that old music appreciation class

I hear my own
echoing reply
yes, I'm here

WE'RE STILL GOOD FRIENDS

and surely it's for tomorrow
and tomorrow's tomorrow
that we unraveled our love
saying goodbye to each other
meeting in elevators and
on children's birthdays
in hallways between our lives
which slowly seem to stretch
and widen as our past together
yawns apart distorted now
like Dali melting away

and surely it's for today
and today's tomorrow
that we try on new lovers like
garments in changing rooms
looking at ourselves in mirrors
furtively making comparisons
pulling at a hem adjusting there
until we go our separate ways
dressed like strangers holding
strangers' hands and thoughts

it's seldom now but still comforting
to pick up a phone and ask
how are the children doing?
is he or she asleep and how are you?

holding on to that remnant of affection
that stubbornly refuses to go away

THE COW

Someone left
a cow at the top of a page
in the copier
on which he printed
his heart's passion
a poem of love and longing
which it was his intention
to read that evening
to a small gathering
of young students, mostly female
all anxious he hoped to drink
the Professor of Literature's
urgent words
drop by precious drop
perhaps even one of them...
but no, he shouldn't allow
himself such thoughts

But oh, the best laid plans—
a small jazz combo
in the faculty of biology building
drew all the potential ears,
lips and fingers away and he was left
in an empty classroom with
unrequited love and longing
and a Times New Roman cow

EMILY

She had a way of using Words
in Quaint Representations
where common things and things absurd
rubbed shoulders and dictations

And though she hardly ever stirred
from bedroomed contemplations
her musing Magic whirled and whirred
delighting generations

How Capital we now exclaim
at every mention of her name
delight at lines she made Her Own
and shiver Zeroed in the Bone

BABUSHKA GIRL

Where is she now, where is she now
cheeky clothes tight on her frame
all eyes and shrieks and wonder
sliding down banister, curled like a question mark
then unspringing, flat as a board with buttons on

Where is she now, where is she now
under oaks with Hemmingway and Omar Khayyam
spring bright as a robin in her breast
bees and boys a buzzing round her ringlets
midnight rides, hair flying, foot flat on the pedal

Where is she now, where is she now
blushing in heat, pushing her way to motherhood
yet and again as cooking, washing, scolding, encouraging
passing outgrown clothing down the line until
the day when things no longer fit rebellious adolescent limbs

Here she is now, here she is now
peaceful, profound, five different kinds of face cream
no longer anti-age her wrinkles, dispensing advice,
grandchildren's birthday presents, she can't use a smartphone
but shares her memories like chocolate coated candies

BUTTERFLY

(to be read with a French accent)

Ah yes, I am exquisite but that is not all
on my wings alphabets, flashbacks that enchant
catch me, paint me if you can
one day a cocotte with sorrowful breasts
the next a soaring celestial body
dashing round the universe as clock hands whirl

I'm transformation embodied
a song, lightning, a flutter
in the pit of you

Chase me, capture me, hold me
you know this feeling won't last for long
but if you dance too close, beware
I'll leave my wing dust on your lapel
brand you mine for ever

Let's tango, boogie, cha-cha, quadrille
paso doble, waltz me, slow me down

Now tell me you love me
whisper it in my ear

'cos you know, quite soon now
it will be time to move on

FLYING NORTH

It's perfectly true, she says
I see geese flying over clouds
like compass needles

wheeling at times
in spiral galaxy arms
waiting for slowcoaches to catch up

as far below
akimbo on a frozen lake
nine years old, red skirt and scarf

skating in huge hissing circles
she spots the flight and
music dancing in her eyes

takes off and joins the whirling flock
a weightless balloon
their beaks and flapping hearts

now one with hers

later she tells friends and parents
no one believes her
except her grandmother

and she's been gone now twenty years

RIVER

*when we dream of time's end
it's like a frozen river
a children's choir, a cloudless morning
metaphors bend into melodies*

an then a moment of complete silence
the hand of eternity
reaches down
and turns us into icicles

time flows
milk, chocolate pudding
oatmeal porridge, thick and sweet
and then it thins out

into a broad stream
where cows and sheep bathe bodies
bound for packing houses
to be salted, canned

shipped in huge trucks
rumbling through the night
time flows
slowly at first then speeds up

we don't notice, we're too busy
earning a living, having children
teaching what to do, what is forbidden
warning don't fall into the river

beyond its placid pools it narrows
rushes between rocks
dips, cascades
suddenly becomes rapids

hanging on to fragile bodies
hurtling towards a waterfall
swept on, we pass a church
perched on a hillside

in a flash it disappears
but we have seen the steeple clock
hands whirling now
each year a minute, each week a second

DRIVE SOUTH FOR TOYTOWN

Past the magistrates court
its concrete slabs gray with commandments,
the office block where you worked
for twenty six years with Mervyn and
his reptilian jokes and overweight Brenda leaving her
lipstick smears on chipped crockery

Past wrong turns, two divorces
both somehow grotesque copies of a whiskey
fumed father and a crimson-fingernailed
mother screaming at each other in Yiddish

Past the hi-protein diets, your biceps and abs
swelling in ironing-board emulation of
Charles Atlas possessor of the World's Most
Perfectly Developed Body and Clark Kent getting
undressed in a telephone booth with Captain Marvel
somewhere shouting Shazam through parting clouds

Past Lil Abner, Dagwood Bumstead, Acne Rosacea,
your first date with Joyce Rosenblum, her kiss
smelling of egg sandwiches, past forbidden
glossy magazines, Lady Chatterley's Lover, Fanny
Hill, hidden in a cardboard carton under the bed

Pedal faster now Noddy, feet flying, you're
almost there. Toot-toot you shout, climbing the
yellow ladder up to a whizzing bumpy slide,
pushing your eager body on a wooden-seated swing,
chains squealing as you fly higher, higher towards
bird-topped trees, finally letting go of all those
fearful, confusing memories and sailing off
into the endless sky over Toytown

SAINT - RÉMY

If you went there you would probably recognize
the wheat fields, trees, sunflowers, rooftops,
you might look at this simple bedroom, its wooden furniture
and say, 'Yes, I know this place'.

Even if the bed is empty, has not been slept in
for more than a century, there is no water in the jug
and the paintwork is brighter than it seems possible
you might still nod your head, your memory might fill in
the details of a bearded face, wide brimmed chapeau
and eyes that burn with indescribable passion.

But even if you stood after dark behind that same tree
watching the lamps light up in village houses,
the church steeple, hills rolling around protectively
would you still see whorls in the sky, crazy can-can
of stars as they lift their skirts at a cavorting waterfalling moon?

For that you might need something more than vision,
something that would enable you to reach up
to the wild madness in your own soul.

GROWING UP IN BUTTER COUNTRY

Mondays I'm a bugle, smiling,
yellow clockwork circled by triangles
frightening clouds into shadows

I hopscotch planets, hurl Saturn rings on Tuesdays
canvas after canvas of shimmering wheat stalks
farmhouse rooftops, drawbridges, bouquets and chairs

Thirst overcomes me Wednesdays; you'll find me
quaffing Guinness at the pub, rivers of it,
translating Phoebus jokes into foaming Gaelic

What I do on Thursdays is my own affair
slinking in downtown doorways,
through broken shuttered windows
thrusting and tonguing some naked after dinner mints

Why do Fridays always make me nervous?
my popcorn packets burst, can't find my glasses
get lost in prickly forests, my rays scratched by brambles

On Saturdays I lay out on the porch, sip hibiscus tea,
read weekend newspapers, seek old friends in obituaries
and contemplate hours remaining for the sky to fall

Sundays, thick, creamy and bursting at their seams
my histories of glory hanging
from a thousand splintered mornings
I sign my name in gold, grin again and sink into the sea

MENORAH

Children again we light our candles
Gay chooses blue, Joey the white Shamash
two blood reds for two Andreas
and a flaming orange for little Lee
which splutters fitfully at first then
buckles and is consumed

Tommy chooses a grayish braid of wax
that seems to last and last but finally
totters and is extinguished

Should I tell you how
each of their candles burned down
before their time? Perhaps it does not
really matter, all streaky memories now

Then, it was a game played between
dreidles and doughnuts. Now, those of us
remaining don't make any more bets

We tell stories of the Maccabees instead,
serve low fat fritters, pack the grandchildren
off to bed

Clean the wax off the menorah
put it away until next year
count our blessings

Glossary:

Gay - killed in a road accident - age 24

Joey - killed in a road accident - age 20

Andrea - died from leukemia - age 60

Andrea - died from cirrhosis of the liver - age 47

Lee - committed suicide - age 18

Tommy - fell off a cliff - age 79

GLOBAL WARMING

Seeking some sun and summer fun, we went
to Ireland – the Emerald Isle
the forecast said, bright and clear
at this time of the year the weather's mostly fair

– it rained! On Wednesday afternoon there was
a break, a parting of the clouds from five till eight
and after that it rained some more

We went to Italy in May and June
to miss the tourist season and the crowds
but somehow got involved with heavy clouds
that went from overcast to fog then covered the terrain
with days of ceaseless rain
it hasn't been like this two hundred years
our hostess said shaking her head

To Swaziland we went, eight years of drought
had bleached the country out, but how absurd,
as we arrived as if they'd heard our wishes for a bone-dry
week, the rain clouds dashed in dark and bleak
and then it poured, the sand all turned to mud
and we got stuck between the soggy map,
the road – a river now – the windscreen wipers' thud

Eventually we got the hint. It seems wherever we decide
to go, it starts to rain and turning
ill fortune to gain, we're opening a company to aid
locations where shortages of water plague their nations
and for an ample fee
we'll come there dressed for sun
and with a little luck and chutzpah
the rainy days will come

C A T A R A C T

Where my eyeball used to be
there is a glass with a fog
everything is fogged – the jacarandas
crying their purple tears

like soft rain they splash, blurring outlines, roads run
into one another crying mauve war cries
once I was young, believe me
history does not lie – between my forefinger
and my thumb I bent spoons, soft metal, soft as butter

I try on pairs of glasses, walk chalk lines
across a quadrangle – look, here
is a pathway I used every day to school
now obscured by dust and rubble
look, I see as clearly as a chameleon
holding on to leaves, my sticky tongue
climbs to the highest branches
touching lilac blossoms
I carefully slide down, know the way by heart

On page eighty of my notebook lives my grandmother
wearing horn-rimmed glasses like a man
I can't see her but she's there I know
each night she puts her dentures in a glass of water
it's blurred but I can see them quite well
floating behind a mist of bubbles

A wise woman, she read her bible, had a saying
for every occasion – her favourite from Robbie Burns
“O, wad some Power the giftie gie us”
(wiping her bifocals with a lavender handkerchief)
“To see ourselfs as ithers see us!”

SUPERMARKETS OF OUR DREAMS

They're not divided into sections
shelves, aisles, signs slung from cranial ceilings
tea, coffee, sugar, childhood memories
earthquakes, wars, myths and interpretations

No, it's higgledy-piggledy country
a cluttered market where bulging-eyed fish
float silently from grotto mouths
and fire-breathing dragons pounce from
teetering skyscrapers while in the shuddering
buildings underneath we run like rats
escaping Armageddon's wrath only to
plunge into some new disaster

And the dream cars! Of every make and shape
cars that you park and lose, cars that
fall over cliffs, cars filled with chattering
passengers and those you drive alone
across some moonless night – abandoned wrecks
in after-midnight junkyards

For adolescents, divorcees and other lonely
souls, searching in vain for the soft goods
department, there are the sexual fantasies,
silk-shrouded corners where mannequins
dressed only in their underwear beckon
with wild promises of huge erections
and week-long orgasms

And then you wake, your dog is
scratching at the door, alarm clock's ringing,
perhaps you have a hangover, your back
is painful - need a coffee or an aspirin
milk bottle's empty, today is Sunday
and the shops are closed

EMIGRANT

The Africa I left three times
has left me now
suitcases piled with clothes
three sizes too small

Dressed as a smiling domestic
she walked out and slammed the door
there's no way back
save through this camera's eye

My mother, there behind that door
unreachable, looks out
from her bedroom window
in West Park cemetery

Still young and beautiful
she parts the curtains
watches trolley buses
red for whites she calls Europeans
green for blacks she calls Natives

Downtown a train waits by a platform
bound for Sophiatown

Now comes a conjuring trick
a word misspelled
pieces of a puzzle that no longer fit
the Africa I left three times
and now revisit
gone forever

THIEVES

we have stolen
we have plagiarized the wind

mimicking old syllables and manuscripts
written by bards who in their jargon

stole them from the mouths of animals and snakes,
whistling winds, thunder, waterfalls and birds

not a word we speak or write belongs to us
all are as echoes and paintings on cave walls

songs composed of ancient notes
rearranged by octaves of the wind

dragon-fire and star breeze while plays and operas,
endless rows of kings and queens, villains and jesters

toil at their forgeries and reproductions – brazen thieves
throats full of plunder stolen from the wind

THANKS

My childhood is a book
on which these words of gratitude are written

When I undress for dreams and when I wake
and write them into poems

I hide behind the curtains of my memories
and when I peep and watch myself, I am a child again

Walking to school in those days meant you had to
cross the square with its benches where the old men sat

Playing chess, their fingers making moves
determinedly removing slain pieces from the boards

And placing them in rows of black and white, silent observers,
one of these players approaching ninety died recently

So on this page I give this prayer of thanks
for his own childhood, removed from active duty now

But still somewhere behind the curtains
watching us, our games of words and memories

Laughing at us, thinking perhaps it's all a joke
told by some crusty old immigrants from Russia or Morocco

Who once were children too - kings and queens of their
own futures in foreign accents translated into the here and now

CAUSUS BELLI

It's counselor time we're thinking
without a shadow of doubt
our relationship is sinking
we're trapped, there's no way out

It's not one of those toothpaste tube issues
nor toilet seat left unclosed
not about which way to stack the dishes
or where the soiled clothes are disposed

Not a refusal to ask for directions
when our vessel has strayed off course
nor hogging the newspaper sections
that has brought us to the brink of divorce

No, this time it's a life and death matter
a question of principle no less
that has torn our affection to tatters
replaced marital bliss with distress

It's a bedroom thing that's the cause
that's making our tempers so red
a difference about closing some doors
so the cat can't jump up on our bed

I've got used to the clock and its ticking
the screwing of tops off the creams
but this confounded cat and its licking
has disturbed my most intimate dreams

So its off to the therapist with sorrow
resolute irreconcilable and blue
and I hope that when we meet her tomorrow
she isn't a cat lover too

MARKS ON THE KITCHEN DOOR

Our prince of bubbles rides his tub
shaped like a boat, a rubber duck
bobbing and jumping almost in his grasp
he doesn't see tomorrow as we do
today is captured in a rainbow ball
that he with serious fingers tries to catch

We mark his stature on our kitchen door frame
black pencil marks for him and following
not far behind some crayon rungs denote
a princesses crayon-willed determination
to overtake him

Four decades pass, the kitchen clock ticks its
metallic way into a new millennium and
seeing that we're redoing the bathroom to suit
old fogey's needs we ask the decorators to add
a coat of paint to peeling door frames and come across
our royal highnesses' indelible measurements
pencils on tousled heads fresh in our minds as
when they were inscribed - well almost...

The prince despite his PhD in medieval literature
still hasn't got a job and princess after her last divorce
and childless has joined a small New Age community
praying for enlightenment while tracking UFOs

So no. Let's leave this kitchen doorpost as it is
we tell the workmen. Who knows, perhaps they'll
grow a little more conventional sometime soon.

DANCE OF LIFE

Absorbed in some inner choreography
I slowly walk the streets
where images merge as in a dream

An autumn wind pipes oboes and bassoons
people dash down avenues like leaves
blown off the trees in gusts and whirls

They dance down sidewalks, linger by lamp posts
cling to windowsills of cottages
shiver in doorways, damp shelters from the rain

Fragrances of buns from bakeries
leak out into the cooling air
diners sit around in restaurants

Waiters hurry in with bowls of steaming soup
watercolor palettes of rystafel saucers,
hurry out with towers of empty dishes

Clattering collections on palms
all forearms and elbows, arms outstretched in haste
backing through swinging kitchen doors

In a flash of kinship I become all of them
multiplied and many-hued, their accents, clothing
ill-fitting dentures, eyeglasses, sore throats

Thoughts of furtive hands in darkened cinemas
income tax assessments, laundry lists, birthday cards
on dusty mantelpieces, letters from friends overseas

They are all mine! Rendered asunder by the wind blowing
into every corner of me, I burst apart into a myriad
flying fragments, russet, ochre, black, brown and yellow

I am Norwegian, Chinese, a Welshman on a green mountain
a tribal dancer in Africa, I am children prancing barefooted
in wooden huts, white eyes in dark faces, all smiles and teeth

I am a free-falling parachutist, floating down
between the trees, branches almost naked now, their fall leaves
rushing in the wind to distant resting places

OLD SHOES

These walking shoes are scuffed
and stained from mud and striding
coming apart at the seams
round the world and back they've been
and when they're done
I'll place them reverently to rest
next to the body bags of kitchen peelings
emptied cans, floor sweepings

Things that once were so
bright and beautiful
while up the road recycle bins
glare haughtily as chosen people
glass citizens plastic and paper folk
preparing for new glittering lives
returning to the promised land

I've spent so much discarded time
wondering about the quality of
darkness and whether journey's end
is dust or smiling new tomorrows

Meanwhile machinery inside
goes clanking on and bright new shoes
still beckon from the shelves of stores

And deep in the forests' underground
trees turn to coal and oil and there
beyond the city limits a hill of garbage
watered by a dozen rainy winters
slowly turns green with grass and tiny plants

HELLO PRESTO GOODBYE

for Tommy

Danny Kaye sang it, his sweet Jewish lips
in tongue-twisting velocity
roller-coaster – *hello children*, and now he's gone

When I was young
listened to Nat King Cole
drank my first beer, drove a Morris Minor
with an indicator that flipped up automatically
amazing! and yes quite *unforgettable*
and now it's gone

We smoked illicit cigarettes behind the garage
the war in Korea came and went
Basil Goldblat said don't worry
when we're old enough to get it
there'll be a cure for cancer
he died at fifty of a heart attack

All those names jiggling around in my head
come spiraling out each time some loved one
or acquaintance goes

And now hardly a few loops of the roller-coaster
pass by and we shake our heads shed another tear

You can't live forever said the daredevil pilot
as he adjusted his goggles climbed into the cockpit
of his red and yellow single propeller plane
and for the very last time looped the loop

NOW

a swathe of possibilities
two miles thick
each atom
a billion years
forward and back

and we
the dinosaurs
and dreamers
telescoped into
some bones
and books

implausible
to believe
that this
ever existed

the faintest
echoes of
Adam and Armageddon
disturbing for
a single moment

the place
where *was*
and *will be*
intersect
and move away

into the stuff
where legend
and illusion
play their game
of tag

WE THE REBELLIOUS CHILDREN

How strange to think that gods grow old
and triangles perch on their points

How breathing in and breathing out
the universe expands and shrinks

Some children draw their firework flowers
upside-down or hanging from a chocolate sky

They haven't yet been shown the way to think
grimacing and blocking ears they talk gibberish

Jump off the end of their flat worlds
tumble into never lands of peppermint trees and

Candy striped umbrellas hopscotching over
centuries of scholars chained to rusting quotes

As we rebellious children in our time
strive unsuccessfully to show them how to

stand
in
line

UNWRITTEN

Locked inside this leather and brass hinged box
that Wilfred carried from page to page
of his plastic-encased and coffee stained
forties-issue identity card

are library shelves of novels never penned

And Julia her fingernails still painted crimson
three decades of lipstick and hair brushing
are almost but not quite enough to
hide the swell inside her cream angora
cardigan where her wrinkled yet sweet-scented

neckline plunges into memories of moonlit balconies

They wait their lonely evenings out watching the
latest sitcom, playing solitaire, doing their
crossword puzzles, reading the novels of some
favorite author - Anthony Trollope perhaps

They wait through nights of erotic dreams
and we wait with them watch them finger
notebooks, pencils hesitate, then shake their heads

Oh muse, Pandora, ghost-writer, confidante
confessor, hand them a key a wish a wand
unlock that suitcase, free those soft-centered
chocolate stories, tiptoe downstairs on sleepless
nights, open the fridge, browse in the pantry

enjoy a midnight feast

MOON MOTHER

My mother lives in the moon
I know it because I've seen her there
on sleepless nights tidying up, painting stars fluffing up clouds,
whistling softly to her two
poodles named Jupiter and Venus

To come and eat their lunch just as she did the day before
she went to have that surgical procedure from which
she never returned

The moon is where she writes her poems, her letters to
newspapers, does good deeds says kind words,
tells stories about her childhood,
adds items to her animal stamp collection

She got out of breath when climbing hills
the doctors said a valve replacement
would be necessary just a week in
hospital they said and you'll be like new

The book of stories she'd written, arrived from the printer
a day before. She addressed all envelopes by hand
I drove her down to the post office
to send them out - just in case, she smiled

You can't blame the doctors, they're only human, I know that,
even though I hate them with their smug
superior airs that they know everything

The doctors say that it's a man that
lives up in the moon but I know it's
my mother tidying up, addressing envelopes,
smiling - I'll be back soon

FLOWER CHILD

she never told him the truth
instead she said his father
had not returned
from the battle field
with names
spelled at times with a K or a C
or cut-off, clipped
her tongue choking on make-believe
foreign syllables

had never existed

she swore she'd tell him
when he reached eighteen
old enough to understand

those crazy years

guitar and alcohol music
perfume of grass in the nights
and the wild days
coming, going, exchanging
intimacy, just a bunch
of careless denim teenagers

one of them was there

for sure in a graying photograph
of all of them she kept
inside a copy of The Fountainhead
they all looked alike
young, defiant, writing a novel
or tracing tattoos of a clean new world
inside her thighs

it could have been any one of them

it doesn't matter any more
on route 90, two in the morning
she overturned her purple and yellow
Volkswagen into a ditch

her son went on to be an officer
decorated for bravery
and later a scientist
a surgeon
a famous author or poet
one of those...

someone his parents would have been proud of

BOBBIE AND GLORIA

They were both such beautiful babies
chubby always smiling, two cherubs
who'd been cut and pasted from
a glossy magazine and it didn't seem
to matter all through childhood

That their dictionaries were
color-in books until age eight
and that they smiled their way through
failing grades and how they sometimes
wandered off with strangers

Fingered inappropriate items in stores
and closets, still looked like Barbie dolls
at age sixteen complete with dimples
short skirts, breasts that sometimes
popped out at the pool or when they
stooped to pet a kitten or a pup

Bobbie's mother forbade her to continue
dating those smiling simple boys she
met at special school then when she
disobeyed arranged a quick abortion
with a private doctor

Kept her on an affectionate maternal
leash, monitored her comings and her
goings, who she meets and who she greets,
dreadfully unfair - while Gloria's parents
smiled and repeated - she'll grow out of it

As she handed out to strangers those
little cards that she'd penned with hearts
and kisses, smiled when she went for a two-week
vacation at the coast with a man twice
her age she'd met the week before

Then was hospitalized for months with
unidentifiable psychosis, spent the next
half year on anti hallucinatory drugs and at
the mental hospital met a young man
she married at a religious ceremony

Who soon forgot to take his medications
spent all their social security on cheap
glittering goods and lotto, fathered four
children in eight years after they'd
joined that sect who wore modest clothing
mumbling prayers recited daily in their
junk-filled two-room council apartment

After the separation when Gloria's husband
was hospitalized for yet another time and
after the social workers found a foster home
for the kids she couldn't handle any longer

She stepped off a busy sidewalk into traffic
her leg crushed by a passing truck that couldn't
stop in time and after many months in rehab
now hobbles around her aging parents' apartment
visits the children once a fortnight
still smiling her pink middle-aged simple smile

Bobbie still lives with her mother, takes in
dressmaking alterations, doesn't open these days
that decades-old photo album she still keeps
in a drawer in her bedroom

OBSERVERS

i am both the first
and second person of myself
i talk and when the you inside
replies, i listen

not as a child or pupil
nor as someone in a
temple or a courtroom

but as a friend

it's not always easy
to make a judgment
the world and all its voices
are not good listeners

they struggle, argue,
shout each other down,
plug ears to drown discussion,
hear only righteous mantras
their truth a world that's flat

we are both judge and jury
are we not confabulo
rarely give our final verdict
on questions and beliefs
that long ago those
flat world mantra chanters
have sealed in lead and blood

preferring to remain
simply observers, exchanging
viewpoints like scholars
on an expedition
back and forth we sway
this way and that
pendulums to the world

SUNLIGHT ON THE SIDE OF A HOUSE

For Edward Hopper

Here are gas stations, motels, restaurants, theaters and railroads,
here are houses, swathes of color sharp against the sea
windows looking out and looking in. Observing. And here
are men and women caught brightly against the canvas.

Notice their body language as they read their books,
their newspapers. It's indifferent. They sit at tables, stand on
boardwalks, looking solemn. In empty city streets, 24-hour diners
or waiting for subway trains. Solemn.

Until suddenly you realize they're not speaking to each other
or when they do they're mouthing only clichés, going about
their lives in black and white, like sunlight on the side of a house
dividing the light from the dark in horizontal or vertical lines.

As if all their worlds are demarcated by a ruler or a set square;
clichéd solemnities, lonely, gaunt and disillusioned. That's America
you think, you never see their faces close up, they're always
looking down, looking away, even the nude, always the same nude,
on a bed or captured in a strip of sunlight streaming in the window.

She is like the empty side of the house or perhaps a lighthouse;
naked there in her loneliness up on her naked hilltop
blinking on and off, off and on, a strip of red and yellow
across a wide blue ocean, sky somehow palely unhappy about itself.

SOME NOTES ON THE UNIFIED FIELD THEORY

Look not to whitening bones or silent ground
avenues of riderless steeds buried without sound
words and worlds and wizards washed away
by seas and silt choked rivers bloodless without neigh

Nothing really dies Confabulo, look to the particles
named and renamed as quarks or quanta, indefinite articles
dividing and subdividing while emptiness between them grows
like Aristotle's questions recently returned from outer space

A song sung by a dinosaur still echoes in the ears
of creatures in a universe some say has disappeared
while hidden somewhere parallel where legends are entwined
their DNA plays monopoly between the folds of time

NOTHING MUCH TO WRITE ABOUT

Jeremy H. awoke in cold alarm
an angel was sitting by the bed, notebook in hand

Tell me about your life – just the highlights please
and for God’s sake try to keep it clean
I’ve heard some stuff recently that caused even the Old Man
to puke and you’d think he’s heard it all

Does this mean that I’m... said Jeremy shivering
Let’s get it down, the angel said and then again, Let’s
get it down and licked his finger to glue back
an errant page that, shaking in the wind,
was trying to flip over by itself

Come on, time’s short. *Well,* said Jeremy
I was born.. Let’s skip the first five pages, the angel
cut him short. Most of them are similar anyway
unless you were abused, composed a symphony
or wrote a novel – did you? *Can’t say I did*

Travel? *Not much, I’ve lived here all my life*
Work? *I’ve done the same my father and his father did*
Married? *One wife who’s nagged me now for fifty years*
And what about your fears, your tears, affairs?
Nothing much to write about, the usual more or less

Jeremy. The angel, now impatient. I’ve lots to
do tonight, there’s been a train crash in the Punjab
two hundred injured, dying...

*Well let me think, I did once win the egg and spoon
race, even wrote a poem about a dream I had – was
published in some magazine, forget the name*

Go back to sleep, the angel said, I’ve done my
best on your behalf. We’ll talk some other time
and meanwhile you can write your epitaph

SMALL PRINT

there are too many words

in parliamentary debates
bible commentaries
mortgage contracts

to unravel my confusion

and so I
listen to Bach
say I'm an atheist
sign anyway

how many languages
can a man
not understand

before he goes
tone deaf

GREEN OPTIONS

We're contemplating buying an electric vehicle soon
one that could complete a trip to Rangoon
or some other distant destination
on a single charge (or two or more)

On second thoughts it might be better
to get a Toyota with rear-mounted electra
that without a sound pushes the infernal combustion
in front or maybe the other way round

Thus getting more miles on a tank full
for which we will be most financially thankful
on our trip to Rangoon
or other distant destination

But hesitate thinking it might be better
to wait for someone clever to invent
the engine that runs on water and thus prevent
the acceleration of global warming that
has been causing much consternation some mornings

At news of tsunamis and typhoons over there
in places not far from Rangoon
or you know where

Of course we could purchase a horse or
braving the heat consider using God forbid
our feet

Yes! Let's have a green-conscious demonstration
a march to Marble Arch
or some other distant destination

DISPROVING THE THEORY

to all of you
who claim
size does matter
i maintain
despite all your chatter
mistakenly admiring
even desiring
the stronger or the longer

now herewith present
the evidence
hard to ignore

the dinosaur....

while despite the cataclysm
in their protected prison
underground
cockroaches
hardy guys
of no great size
and no bellowing cries
still go about
their love life

without a sound....

PAPARAZZI ON PAGE TEN

Here come the chocolate éclairs
The Moulin Rouge the Escher stairs
Here come the barbeque days
The fashion shows the hit parade

Here comes the Klu Klux Klan
The Fuller brush man the second hand van
Here comes the market collapse
For a twenty a Barbie to dance in your lap

Here comes the news of a rape
Wrapped round a commercial no way to escape
Here comes the gun control act the loser you backed
The legs of the stars getting out of their cars

Here come the results of the tests the pains in your chest
And a few stones to put on the place where you rest

CANDID CAMERA

Do you still remember all the fumbling
unboxing foil-wrapped spools with sprockets
the winding, slipping, missing, grumbling
bulky Brownie cameras that didn't fit our pockets?

The endless stocks of 24 or 36 exposures
and all those filters, tripods, meters, lenses
getting aunts and cousins to say cheese and hold poses
exorbitant yet gladly paid printing expenses.

No more! Now digital we take thousands of shots
and all the tourists everywhere hold silver cubes that click
we download to our own PCs ten million pixel dots
upload them to the Internet and out thick albums kick.

But wait, the end is not in sight, our kids are twinkling elves
their smartphones have two cameras that do a double act
so while they're snapping friends they photograph themselves
don't care their pictures facebook-bound can easily be hacked.

The next step isn't hard to guess, some whizz kid will create
a camera so miniature, some tiny silver chip
that can be planted on his nose to photograph his date
as while they kiss she operates the camera on her lip!

Johnmichael Simon was born in England, grew up in South Africa and has lived in Israel since 1963. He has published six books of poems and several collaborations with partner Helen Bar-Lev and other poets. His poetry has been awarded numerous prizes and is published widely in print and website collections.

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