

SELECTED POEMS 2012



JOHNMICHAEL
SIMON

Poems copyright © 2012 by
Johnmichael Simon

All rights reserved
Printed by Cyclamens and Swords Publishing
P.O. Box 21, Metulla, ISRAEL

www.cyclamensandswords.com

ISBN No. 978-965-7503-058

No part of this publication may be reproduced
in whole or in part, or stored in a retrieval
system, or transmitted in any form
or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise
without written permission of the author.

CONTENTS

Dark Stranger	1
Myatery.....	2
Connecting The Dots.....	3
Rebirth.....	5
Most memorable moment.....	6
To My Absent Muse	7
Shall I Compare Thee	8
Sonnets In Their Bonnets	9
Progressions	10
Assimilation	11
Review.....	12
A Different Anthology	13
Mistaken Diagnosis	14
The Girl Next Door.....	15
Rediscovering Immortality	16
Atonement Missed	17
Writer's Block.....	19
Poems.....	20
Metaphors.....	21
Mazeltov Or Mazal Tov	22
What happened to the dinosaurs?	23
Pollen And Honey.....	24
The Road	25
The Passing Rites Of Poets.....	27
The Case for Esperanto.....	28
Henry The Eighth.....	29
Reliving An English Childhood	31
Help!	32
Departures	33
Inspired.....	34
Fifty Percent And Rising	35
Blog Entry.....	36
Outside My Sleepy Window	37
Tucked In There.....	38

Tracing A Poem's Geneology	39
Pop Art Poetry.....	40
Bees.....	41
Grasshopper Days	42
Dandelion.....	43
Untitled	44
Premature Aging	45
The Passing.....	46
A Poet's Plea.....	47
Free Falling Couple.....	48
Permanence Then And Now	49
All In A Day's Work	50
Despite It All	51
These Brief Moments.....	52
Interrupted Melody.....	53
Count your blessings.....	54
My poem is a dog	55
Te tinnitus barrier.....	57
Thoughts On Watching Stephen Hawking's Lips	58
The Boundary.....	59
3a.m. composition.....	60
War, Peace And The Art Of The Fugue	61
Beginnings And Endings	62
You'd Better Believe It.....	63
Tea Break.....	64
Dysfunctional Legacy	65
Over Hill And Dale.....	66
Book Worms	67
Believe Or Not	68
News from the physics dept.	69
Overcoming.....	70
Ode To A Safety Razor	71
Best Of Friends	72
Behind The Scenes.....	73
Sun song or swan song.....	75
Bridle And Halter	76

Moon.....	77
Quest.....	78
Counting To 100 Under Water.....	79
The judge	80
A dog named Halley.....	81
Foreign bodies	83
Couple Viewed From A Train Window.....	84
Crow on road.....	85
Tortoises Of A Certain Age	86
My Tussle With Tongues	87
Wall.....	88
Thoughts.....	89
What is a poem?	90
Seismographs	91
Survivors	92
Children All Their Lives	93
Read This First	94
Birthright	95
Living On Crumbs	96
A Few Words About Life	97
A Mix Of Mice And Metaphor	98
Fog.....	99
Lady Inspiration	100
Doves.....	101
Bed Time Story.....	102
Bed Time Story 2.....	103
Instructions To The Confused	104
Paper Doll USA.....	105
Getting Together	106
Atlantis To Los Angeles	107
Middle Eastern Deluge.....	109

SELECTED

POEMS

2012

JOHNMICHAEL
SIMON

DARK STRANGER

You whoever you are
have taken my love away
have entered my soul like a stranger

like a stranger clothed in darkness
an oil spill from my shipwrecked love
you have entered my heart

like a lump of tar inside my shell
dark stranger and instead of a pearl
I find in the chamber of my throbbing

a growing lump of black

Tomorrow I shall go down to the sea
open my shell a chink, wash your gloom
from my heart. Dark stranger

whoever you are, return to the depths
to the bones of wrecks sinking in the silt
tomorrow I will be freed of you

as my body splits empty on a sun baked shore
bleached free of darkness, free of love

MYSTERY

And we use words
And we use high sounding phrases
But we cannot describe it

And we gather in places of prayer
And we gaze through tubes at stars

And we recite prayers for the dead
And we watch seeds grow into trees

And we count the fleeing galaxies
And we watch children learn to speak

And we ask questions that have no meaning
And we find meaning where there is no meaning
And we write treatises, compose symphonies

Read manuscripts, collect butterflies
Unearth bones, drink potions, hallucinate

It's so familiar, all around us
Yet we still cannot describe it

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Like balls of wool unraveling we've traced the pathways
our ancestors took, scrolls hidden deep in hills,
inscriptions entombed in pyramids, paintings on cave walls

We've probed the languages of rocks deciphering hints that
fossils leave captured in cataclysm's camera flash between
ice ages, shards from ancient fires

We've leaped the chasm between legends and collision
theories, watched computer reconstructions of four billion
years and found inside a comet's icy heart whispers of clues
no-one seems to hear

My neighbor's son who's been to a yeshiva tells me that it's all
a heathen myth, how studying the writings is the only road
to take, learned minds span centuries interpret bible's clues

And yet despite holy and unholy research, observations, calculations
simulations, om chanting and such,
we somehow fail to see how we've progressed that much
as answers lead to further questions

Theories collapse and in the end we're unenlightened, still conclude
'perhaps'. Yet if we're lucky, think good thoughts, become aware that it's an
illusion we're at the center of all things, there'll come a moment

Quite uninvited, out on a walk, listening to trees or
watching a bird, wondering how it flies when suddenly you
know it's all connected forest, bird and you. Your fingertips
stretch over oceans

Reach beyond the stars and for a brilliant second, every dark
and dusky doorway opens a teasing fraction – just for a second
then it's over but you know it's there

So when you step into darkness out beyond the night
your fingertips and mine will mingle, stretch
turn on the light

R E B I R T H

What wakens the awakening dream
the deep somnambulence
syllables born before I learned to speak
my father's father's tongue recalled

What flames have forged these ancient words
scrolled, curlicued and black
my muse molten to their gold
my blood flows with the sound of them

What memories are buried in these cells
the sound of swords over the scratch of quills
a dream of desert miracles and stones
echoes of scripture magnets to my ears

That in my dream I am a bugle call
crying a melody sung when ink was born

MOST MEMORABLE MOMENT

if you could take
but one moment
to accompany you
on that fearful journey

would it be
your wedding waltz
the day you graduated
the race you won?

or perhaps
a taste of lover's lips
a trip to haiti
your first smoke of pot?

probably not
after all
life's a joke
isn't it?

how about
the time
grandpa berkovitz's
dentures slipped out

as he was reciting
when israel
came out
from egypt land?

you could die
chuckling
at
that one

TO MY ABSENT MUSE

I know you will peep into my lines
between my syllables packed tight
like freezing beggars around a fire
find my lonely heart there, shivering
buttoned and jacketed, misunderstood
even by myself

I know you will creep into my heart
as you always do, take my hand
as together we stroll into some
sun-warmed glade where orchids grow
deep pools abound sparkling with
exotic fish, soft harp music inspiring,
filling the air

No matter how cold the wait
how empty my windswept page
leaves blown away by winter blizzards
I know you will return, guide me again
back to the place where seedlings sprout
colorful birds call to each other

Today I left a trail of breadcrumbs
that when the sun comes out
will lead me back to you

SHALL I COMPARE THEE

In an exotic garden
surrounded by blooming metaphors
blasé, competing in color and perfume

a humble simile stands
like a stalk of wild garlic

but when you're hungry
for good old fashioned fare

like ploughman's stew
like an amulet against disease
like a poem
that compares you to a summer day

you pull it up
hoping to enjoy that
lush plump goodness underneath

taking care
not to trample any of
those metaphors

sunning themselves
begging to be plucked
Anthologized and
displayed in bookstores

SONNETS IN THEIR BONNETS

Blessed are those who lie down among flowers
who watch cloud ships schoon across the world
blessed are their daisy chains - now ours
they fashioned *love me love me not* unfurled

Fortunate are those whose words like flowers
decorate the pages of old books
who rescue princesses from moat-ringed towers
from dungeons pinned by bishops and by rooks

Sanctified are those who dream of lizards
of amulets and dragons trysts and spells
whose operas and ballets, kings and wizards
put pay to evil spirits and foul smells

And as for me I love Shakespeare and Dickens
and Harry Potter when the plotline thickens

PROGRESSIONS

Monteverdi begets Verdi
Verdi begets Lady Gaga

Da Vinci begets Wilbur & Orville
Wilbur & Orville beget Enterprise

Eggs beget chickens
Chickens beget kneidlach

Abstinence begets clergy
Clergy begets child abuse

Doh begets re mi
Twelve fa's beget Schoenberg

Smoking begets lung cancer
Warnings beget more smoking

Global warming begets hot air
Hot air conference rooms - outside it's freezing

Age begets senility
Senility returns to childhood

That's progress for you
At best a Moebius strip

ASSIMILATION

There are writers who wear
 their Jewish families on their sleeves like hearts
 or yellow stars of David

When the curtain goes up on
 dawn-fresh pages they rub eyes
 remember mealtime repartee, arguments

Divorces, diseases, deaths
 how dad met mom how uncle met aunt
 it's like finding yourself in a kosher delicatessen

Where sauerkraut rivals petchah
 for nose turning reminiscences
 other writers who deny their ancestry

seep into other environments like tofu
 absorbing gentile ways, changing Shmulik
 into Sanford, like Mr. and Mrs. ex Cohen

Now Brentworth and Barbara Charles
 hyphen Kennedy who never had a bris
 a barmitzvah or a chuppah

He now a Methodist, she a Buddhist—
 as for myself, I chose to live in Israel
 where children take their parents

To Chanukah pageants and Adloyadas
 where the grocer down the road from the shul
 sells bacon on Sabbath and where I fill my tax return

In the language of the bible

REVIEW

Geraldine K's poems come over
"barefisted as a big cat's catch"
 not without sweetness not without regret,
 they burn holes in the animal/human
 barrier like shopping in an aquarium

take this pantoum-ghazal-senro
 nonchalant derivation of archetypal
 incantations from her book
"Cooking and coughing lengthwise"

*Oh to be in Nizhni Novgorod
 oh to be anywhere
 as the fat man arrives
 with his legions of caricatures
 cursing, belching
 oh to be free of restrictions
 like bones of rodents
 left withering in the earth
 obesity abandoned eternal*

Geraldine K's work
 defies tradition
 and sexual prejudices alike
 exposing the raw emotions
 of a bored middle-aged
 mahjong-fixated
 Jewish divorcee

A DIFFERENT ANTHOLOGY

There on serried shelves
fanciful fonts flaunt frosted syllables
wide windowed wonders open
back to rooms of floral wallpaper
daffodils dandelions and much ado

While here
a weather beaten immigrant
pocketless with dreams of winter
in his veins
scrawls history of savagery and czars
on scraps of tablecloths
that live for centuries

After all the floral frumpery
has crumbled to dust

MISTAKEN DIAGNOSIS

She types a memo to her publisher
 finishes her address to Wednesday's meeting
 calls the grandchildren, puts a chicken in the oven

*He washes some dishes, leaves a few still soiled
 opens a drawer then closes it*

She makes the bed, changes the pillow cases
 puts cat food outside the kitchen door
 phones the pet shop orders some flea collars

*He sits in a deckchair in the sunroom
 flicks the remote searching for the tennis
 then switches the tv off again*

She writes a poem, works her needle through
 an untidy curtain hem, drives to the mall
 collects the mail, answers the phone, goes to
 her fitness class, buys cheese and wine
 texts friends about the book launch

*He picks up the newspaper, puts it down
 watches her unpack the groceries
 his eyes on her following her movements
 can by can, package by package*

She hands him his medication, turns away
 he drops one pill, pockets the other
*a grin lights up his face
 did you buy the chocolate cake?*
 She answers in the affirmative

Quickly he gets up, cuts himself a slice
 sits at the table munching
 his glance a clouded tapestry
 a knife, a bullet

THE GIRL NEXT DOOR

A memory you may recall about
a nursery school ring
eighteen little flower buds
holding each other's
crayon-fingernailed hands
Sarah scratching a spot on her cheek
Thomas squinting through his glasses
closing eyes, scrunching faces
caught in the excitement of
listening, guessing, knowing

A rhyme you may remember
a green and yellow basket
tiptoeing around a circular theme
little hands in your brain
clapping, giggling, out of tune

It all comes back now
the taste of illicit bubblegum
little Sarah's hand in yours

That mad-happy chase ending
in marriage twenty years later

It wasn't you, it wasn't you,
it was you!

REDISCOVERING IMMORTALITY

there's got to be a first for everything
and he's determined to be it
outwit the scythe-bearer
turn the clock around
grow younger every year

so he exercises
goes vegetarian
gobbles vitamins
until
in the fullness of time

he eventually disappears
back into his mother's memory
then to even
more distant places

last heard of
he's wriggling tadpole-like
back into past lives

a wisp of floating dna
setting out on a
vaguely discerned voyage

towards the frozen lands
of forgotten beginnings

ATONEMENT MISSED

The Chief Rabbi and my father
met in a dream one night
we arrived for Kol Nidrei in a car
which was not the Chief Rabbi's habit
but he didn't complain
merely discussed the world
with my father

We tried to find a parking spot
but all the neighbors had placed
in the street garbage cans
which were filled with the world's woes

So my father parked next to the shul
but the Chief Rabbi didn't complain
he stood on the sidewalk, stroked his beard
and started to sing Kol Nidrei

Then my father (not a pious man)
spoke with the neighbors
who emptied their garbage into a truck
that the Chief Rabbi was driving.
When the truck was full of
grief, prayer and atonement
the Chief Rabbi drove off

Leaving my father and me
on a deserted sidewalk
outside a deserted shul
discussing the state of the world

Which, as he died more than
thirty years ago, makes it
a rather repetitious conversation
with all the important things
left unsaid

Like a carousel with a broken section
that the neighbors had loaded
into the Rabbi's truck
and taken away with them
to the garbage dump of dreams

Where every Day of Atonement
it emits the most frightful groans

WRITER'S BLOCK

Distraught you wonder
where your words have flown
minutes, seconds, years
thoughts receding like the tide
stranded now on windswept sand

Still a semblance persists
pockmarks suck and dot your mind
rock pools where crab-syllables crawl
sideways through your synapses

And tiny silver poems
slip silently from hidden grottoes
momentary inventions
a trick of light and shadow
almost substantial flicker-fiends

Amid a waving host of fronds
and disappear again
anemone memories

P O E M S

Some are operas
written after midnight
where characters sing their lines
in rooms with misshapen mirrors
like caricatures of truth

Others are kites
soaring and bobbing
like crows on leashes
while real cousins
perch on wires
vanish into foliage
jeering at their
kamikaze paper-thin bravado

And then there are the rondos
jigs and carousels
whirling in Catherine-wheel gyrations
beside toy trains that circle
endlessly on clicking tracks

Once in a while
creations of pain or joy
emerge from hidden places
unbidden they plunge their blades
into our hearts
and find their recognition
in the quickening of our blood

METAPHORS

At best we spend our days
bouncing between metaphors—
the canvases we paint in dreams

words we write on inner walls
games we play, balls ricocheting into
bodies, faces, sometimes our own

They say it's all a figment, an interpretation
the real hidden in star's furnaces
or in returning comets' tails

Playing hide and seek with legends
flashing trails of snakes and ladders
apples too some say in affirmation

The real hidden in creation's mind
a metaphor itself to camouflage or blind

MAZELTOV OR MAZAL TOV

It's really a question
 of where you were born,
 precinct and ward accents
 floating in to stimulate
 those Yiddishe brain cells
 that later will grow into
 drawls or clipped inflections

Seven days of relaxation and cooing in
 Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Bronx or Beer-Sheva
 you sucked, burped, slept
 certain all your needs were satisfied
 then on the eighth this dreadful shock
 bam, pow, the searing pain of it,
 humiliation, your mouth gagging
 on some folded gauze soaked
 in Manischewitz, Carmel Mizrahi

What's the difference, Mazeltov
 or Mazal Tov, the whole world over
 when you're a Jew you'll hear this
 phrase repeated in whatever accent
 through all the corridors you'll travel—
 weddings and bar mitzvahs
 checkbook clutched in palm

Reminding you that life mein kind, b'ni
 is always sweet wine mixed with pain

**WHAT HAPPENED TO THE
DINOSAURS?**

Which is the better way to go
a blubbering, slobbering crawl
to finishing line mirage?

In the height of season
notebook of poems
clutched in hand
slumped over tankard
in the East Village?

Or banner in hand
riding a foaming steed
against the enemy ranks?

Which is the best way
a hero's death
an orator's
or lingering in the shadow
of earth's penultimate orbit
around an uncaring star?

Archeologists will not uncover
the final cry of departing flesh
from skulls that have no lips

POLLEN AND HONEY

sometimes you only need a line
to hang a poem on

a kiss bestowed at midnight
to dream a wedding march

it only takes a snatch of
ragtime music

to tap dance rain filled streets
of paris

a conversation overheard
to pen a script

our lives are movies
screened on walls

behind our eyelids honey combs
of melodies and clues

we write and having written
bow and exit

an audience of wing tips
hums our tunes

THE ROAD

We've traveled this road before
 gleaming black strip between the hills
 fields flanking us in undulations
 peach and apple blossom pink and white
 rows of apricot and pear
 serried rectangles diagonals and squares
 anemones in dancing red
 between the yellow mustard grass and gorse

We've traveled this road before
 its root a falcon's nest between the peaks
 its arm a snake shedding its skin
 through seasons cerise ripe and rust
 and at its end a pair of glittering eyes
 a fang—a hospital

We've traveled this road before
 x-rays doctors appointments surgeries
 last week we visited emergency
 fluorescent lights electrocardiograms
 needles inserted in arms
 and all around us fellow travelers
 waiting with bandages anxieties and hope

Next week we'll travel it again
 another doctor another surgery perhaps
 a good friend's husband has passed away
 we visit with condolences and love
 enmeshed with talk of poetry
 of workshops and of threats of war

The radio tells that in the South
missiles still fall too close to towns
today again children won't go to school
they'll stay at home and watch tv
play computer games not far from
iron windowed rooms

Our lives marked off along this road
that snakes between fruit trees and flowers
between bright lights of hospitals and war
this road we travel hand in hand
wishing for a pain free future
between the yellow mustard grass and gorse
and at its end a quiet place among the trees

THE PASSING RITES OF POETS

Young poets, full of rage and
passion, blinded by flames of
injustice, carve swathes of protest
fire breaks through burning forests
starve themselves for hopeless causes
throw themselves beneath bulldozers
bury their poems in foreign fields

Aging poets carry their bags of words
through yellowing fields
they cast their thoughts like rice
a slowing dance that as their
sun sinks lower and their fingers tire
write epitaphs for fallen friends in ponds
reflections of trees and mountains
fading slowly as their
poems sink into darkness

THE CASE FOR ESPERANTO

Grandchildren age six or thereabouts
 babble away in gibberish
 our neighbor patters on in Portuguese
 which is the language spoken in Brazil
 so close to Spanish that you could munch it
 in a tortilla—crunch mouthfuls of its syllables

Our veterinarian speaks seven different
 grammars - she's from Romania but to her dogs
 and cats she coos only in Hebrew while doves and
 sparrows watching from the pecan trees
 and jacarandas repeat familiar melodies
 underneath the swooping gutturals of crows

Across the map of continents and islands
 tongues proliferate, each colored triangle or blob
 competing in its lexicon of grunts and groans

Some say that language conditions thoughts, that words
 ignite hostility—birds don't speak with fish, the French
 don't understand the English, Greek is Greque
 a certain similarity lost when sandwiched next to
 Camembert, roast beef

So why we question, are the cries of babes and sucklings
 round the globe so similar before they grow into their
 parents' foreign accents and what about

The dictionary of whales, the secret voices hidden
 in nerve endings, the silent cold communiqués
 of digital devices and of stars?

HENRY THE EIGHTH

When Henry makes spaghetti bolognaise
for his grandchildren and friends
he breaks the sticks into smaller pieces
before throwing them into the bubbling boil

He's made hamburgers for previous kids
dimly remembered French toast
for others who have drifted to far-off places
in the bubbling boil of things

Once he walked a baby pushcart
around the park seven times
until the infant fell asleep, once
he carried another on his back through
dawn-filled streets of Sunday in the city

As for his occupations he's been
a salesman, writer, poet—born
to Judaism but became an atheist
once he was a tobacco mixer, breaking
the day into Orinoco, Amarillo, once
a printer, roll of paper rumbling
through a press at midnight
perforated, stitched and bundled

He's changed his status many times
from married to divorced, married to
widowed, changed addresses too
his identity card now needs a suitcase
to carry it around from change to change.
Sometimes he wishes he could
lose the key, throw all those old addresses out

Henry's life seems broken into brittle pieces
some long, some short, its difficult
to imagine they're all him, yet as spaghetti
boils and bubbles and he stirs those memories
the children waiting, hungry for their food
he realizes somehow that it's all congealed
into a single tasty mess

That served with fragrant meaty sauce
is what his biographer will probably call
Henry's crazy mixed-up life

RELIVING AN ENGLISH CHILDHOOD

These are the backdrops of his life
their music still playing in his head
like floaters drifting across his vision

Childhood fragments crossing decades
like Halley's comet or the wandering Jew
father spreading marmalade on toast

Mother beseeching in Yiddish
'zogn der kinder keyn esn'
the upstairs loo that leaked an incessant

Drip into the night until it
was downstaged by the howl and whine
of a buzz bomb crossing London's skies

After the curtain goes down
an orchestra of memories
plays 'God save the king'

HELP!

Help!
I'm a
teenager
trapped
in a
75
year
old
body
who
can't
find
the
zip

DEPARTURES

On a morning such as this we'll fly
perhaps a quiet sigh escaping lips
that only yesterday learned dates and kings
practiced scales and long division
chewed away at wads of gum and
peanut butter sandwiches without a
single thought to differentiate
the endlessness of morrows

On a morning such as this
we'll pack our crayons, our compasses
and rulers no longer needed to encircle
or to measure arbitrary days and years
and all those mornings in between when
we only pretended, only dreamed of
growing up, of facing the inevitable

We'll chew a last bazooka
adjust our caps and coats
attempt to run again into the wind
those memories of classrooms, marbles
soda pops and kites, bobbing, flying
towards a quiet horizon like emigrating birds
or like some wind-blown clouds

INSPIRED

It was not from her mouth alone
although her lips and tongue worked in concert
as they cut the phrases into syllables and sounds

It was not from her fingers alone
although they moved across the page like ripples
on a lake, like autumn, like the way beavers build dams

It was not from her heart alone
although each beat of it was filled with passion
thrusting out letters of fire, utterly convincing

In the gathering dusk we could almost see
a beam of light stretching upwards from her head
upwards higher, higher, filled with dancing whirling motes

Higher than the trees, the birds, the clouds
the emerging stars – higher still. It's as if I'm
taking dictation, she said

FIFTY PERCENT AND RISING

there is no way
to soften this conflict
except with naked nerve endings
sandpaper over cringing skin

marital power failures
communication over barbed wires
our trust spilled
like doll's stuffing

porcelain eyes rolling
from shattered embraces
now staring vacantly
under twin chairs
beside the unmade bed

you and I
in tense corners
folding abandoned love letters
into missiles

to be collected later
into legal writs
bound with red tape

and buried like
dead promises
in lawyers' files

BLOG ENTRY

Today I'm not going to write about old age
not about dying nor regret
loves lost, relationships that didn't work
and all those other subjects
that fill my ball point with remorse

Today I'll write of something neutral
the price of fuel for example

Last month they raised it several times
to reach an all time high
it's pensioners like me that suffer most
I'd rather die than drive my car today
and as for buses, I hate their noise and
you know how they always pass you by,
leave you standing, waiting for
the next one that never comes

No, I'll walk today and if I can't
I'll get someone to push my wheelchair
to the park where I'll sit by that
polluted pond watching how this
broken hearted world slips into darkness

Leaving me alone with my distress
on finding that I'd left my pen at home

OUTSIDE MY SLEEPY WINDOW

Six a.m. the tractor outside flub dubs at the kerb
 he, pitchfork in hand, lifts canopies of garden cuttings
 twirls them on to the iron platform, lifts discarded
 furniture, chairs with three legs, TV's that don't work

Down the sidewalk strides the trimmer man, buzzing
 trimstick in hand, advancing steadily as weeds and
 errant branches succumb to his angry cutter string
 I'm pulling blanket over my head to drown them out

I curse men that work in dawn-filled streets
 the man that drives the bread van rumbling outside
 at 3 a.m. is already returning at 9 when I take my
 Bursting-bladder dog for a walk, loaves neatly

Stacked on grocery store shelves, cooling and
 fragrant, some bought, sliced, spread with chocolate
 or peanut butter, folded into lunch boxes and bulging
 satchels to be munched at break

Such a noisy bunch, these men who work in dawn-filled
 streets, probably still snoring loudly as I take my dog
 for his afternoon outing, their sun my moon
 their moon my sun. Now 10 p.m. all is neat outside

Garbage and trimmings removed
 dough patted into floured racks by night shift hands
 newspaper crew finalizing tomorrow's edition
 soon to be rolling off the presses into folded bundles

How I bless the men who work in sleep-filled hours
 who make such welcome noise in dawn-filled streets

TUCKED IN THERE

next to the house cleaning
salad greens waiting to be chopped
school bus lurching down the road
bringing hungry grandchildren

tucked in there
lies a poem
waiting to be written

eyes and ears like butterfly nets
darting this way and that
capturing short lived impressions

or like an untended line
of semi transparent nylon
stretched out over the water
of a pool of half submerged crockery
computer games singing
in the background

waiting for a magic fish
to bite, tug, and in the manner
used by inhabitants of that
imaginary sea

call out between the cacophony
and bubbles of dishwashing liquid

drop everything
capture me now
before your fumbling pen
gets lost again
drowns in a symphony of suds

TRACING A POEM'S GENEALOGY

I've been reading history, recently found
myself wondering how it came about
day endless as a trail of bread crumbs
leading through discoveries of books
discourse of minds discussing trees
and bees, relationship of stars and
cheshire cheese and how after it darkens
a pale and waxen moon often comes up
to illuminate a shadow escaping into
forest depths, a silvery shoon described by
some as flaxen perhaps a legend
or a nursery rhyme repeating in my head
something about a sheep, a pail of water
and how the king stood there so naked
in the moonlight, the giggles that escaped
the leaves, the branches and what it's
all about, a history of doggerel and doubt
and how despite it all despite the flickering
half light we manage you and I
to leave our traces on the trunks
carve our initials into bark, defy the dark
light rockets, send our poems soaring
roaring, lighting up the sky

POP ART POETRY

here poem sprawls
across page
a naked king

an italicized byline
on the floorboards
peeps upwards
at his genitals

as in a mirrored
doorway opposite
an artist
possibly from an
immigrant family

has glued a
gaudy illustration
his or her interpretation
of the effect that
association can have
when taken on
an empty stomach

if the emperor only knew
that next door
the queen was flirting
with a computer
generated sestina

he'd get dressed fast enough

B E E S

There's a humming in the undergrowth
 between blue mouths of rosemary
 yellow bells of fragrant gorse
 fingers of pink flowering trees
 with names like incantations
 legends of myrrh and frankincense
 across the holy land of Spring
 the bees are buzzing, hovering, lingering
 an all pervasive symphony of
 sun and pollen, dash and wild desire

Your head deep into my blossom
 drunk with the imperatives of lust
 here where snows have melted into streams
 where overnight the land has cast aside
 its winter clothing and like a hungry
 waker at a smorgasbord moves
 ravenously from blue to bell
 to yellow – an intoxicating dance

This magic April-world fertility rite
 enabling birth of cherries, apples
 nectarines and other miracles

A multi-nectared rainbow
 flowing into a pot of gold
 to meditate and lick
 through winter's numbing hush

Until the buzzing starts again

GRASSHOPPER DAYS

Just sitting around
with nothing to do
watching everything go by

Like vanilla ice-cream
on a long silver spoon
melting in laziness

The lingering sweetness
of endless summer days
down fingers to tongue

some drips on my nose, my shirt

Life is a hot summer day
on a melting planet
history dribbling down

Towards waiting ants
patiently building their
diligent tomorrows

somewhere underground

DANDELION

Once I wrote a poem,
folded it then folded it again
into a paper dart

On a grassy hillside, I stood
stretched my arm
over trees and ponds
filled with birds and fish
who couldn't care a fig
for poetry

Floated my poem out over the world

Afterwards, I thought of bees
how they sip each flower
work so tirelessly, cluster like
a brown storm in and out of the hive

How honey trickles golden from a spoon

And how with one sting
used in self defense or anger
they disappear into mounds of leaves
and darkness, their single statement
gone, forever

I don't care much about money
or about fame whose artificial
sweetness dissipates like saccharine
leaving a bitter aftertaste

Perhaps a breeze will carry
my poem to some other place or time
land it safely on a patch of grass
or in a bush. Perhaps some passer by
will pick it up, think of dandelions or of bees

UNTITLED

And we strive to rhyme it
hammer it red on meter's anvil
and we lose its soul

And we twist it, make braids,
stretch it out in thinning wires
'til its electrons glow in song
yet we lose its sullen soul

And we copy it, faithful scribes
line by toothcombed line
capture its likeness in a flash
of magnesium, pixilate its portrait
while canvas groans its absent soul

And on a hillside meandering
or by the ocean shore
we come across a child wandering
stepping lightly rock-hop dance
and splashing barefoot mossy pools
over the lightness of its unseen soul

PREMATURE AGING

Ladies and gentlemen
 I hold in my outstretched hand
 an object that would have been considered
 frivolous science fiction several
 decades ago – a compact black device
 that quietly fits my pocket
 yet when carried to distant destinations
 enables me to communicate with
 anyone across this bright or unlit map
 at button-press, which has

(in lightning-fast flicker of years
 been thrown into discarded drawers
 by tee-shirted upstarts
 with names like Gates and Jobbs)
 become an object
 scorned by facebook-familiar, twitter-tweeting,
 touch-screen driven, double-camera-expert,
 virtual-wallet-brandishing, game-playing
 children barely out of nursery school

In short, like so many
 of my generation's inventions
 (and inventors)
 as obsolete as morse code,
 tom toms
 or scribbles on the
 walls of caves

THE PASSING

I say they are gone
nary a word from one of them
soldiers, lovers, parents and pets
and the preacher buttering his toast
in perfect squares, reciting his prayers
and the medium from Australia
counting her guineas
nodding goodbye
gone every one of them
in a conversational tone

And their words, their poems
was it an errant breeze
that brushed the microphone
last autumn's fallen leaves
their imprints trodden yellow
on the paths we take to our devotionals
talking about the weather
in a conversational tone

When the siren sounds
shall we stand dumbly at attention
fiddling with loose change in our pockets
when sods are piled in mounds
and wreaths fade crumbling on their wires
shall we exchange our wordless knowledge
for an umbrella, an overcoat
turn on the radio, discuss the indiscretions
of the neighbors, listen to the wind
as it whispers secrets in the trees
greet the passing day
in a conversational tone

A POET'S PLEA

Oh lady muse has escaped me
she's lost like a moth in the night
and though I labor to call her back
all I can find is this maze in my mind
and a paper blank as an unpainted wall

Oh lady muse how shall I tempt thee
with chocolate and petit fours
and a book of verse by Robert or Will
with a groan or a joke or a jug of wine
but the clouds have covered your veiled face

Oh lady muse why have you left me
with a pain in my groin and my mind
and an unblemished page and a day full of toil
and tasks to distract me from seeking at all
or searching in cupboards or under the bed

For a clue or a hint as to where you have fled
but all I can find is a stick of chewed pencil
and a sheaf of old pages I thought I'd thrown out
so with these I will scribble and hope you'll relent
forgive me, come back from wherever you went

FREE FALLING COUPLE

There's a shudder, a lurch
a snap at the parting
of a frayed umbilical
and we're floating in free fall
looking down or up at each other's
previously hidden predictions,
like balls in a lotto storm
we don't know whether
to scream or whoop
joke about how long it would take
for an unleashed astronaut
to drift away
in vanishing smallness
or for an asteroid to crash
into a helpless planet
the two of us
contemplating the balance
of our forevers apart
galaxies away from here, spots
in a smudged glass eyepiece
of an alien telescope
or a shared nightmare of
a trench in the ocean's depths
containing the bones
of our failed relationship
whitening in a common grave

PERMANENCE THEN AND NOW

When chair married table
it was out of duty not love
to provide a comfortable place
for buttocks and back
which over a kitchen's years
birthed five similar seats
with nary a thought for anything
but repeating lessons learned by heart
about dusting, polishing, stoking the hearth

When the calendar illustration
replaced the previous one
it was out of boredom not dislike
*for thirty days it had been displaying
that same old kitchen table and chairs
warm and yellow but not very exciting
this new month is abstract, haphazard - splashed*

*but like most things these days,
it will shortly be outdated - trashed*

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Pawn to King Four. A standard opening
 a nonchalant iambic hop, finger on clock
 eyes raised cat-like at the moon
 or skip-jump nimble-pawed to the
 next simultaneous board, a quick succession
 of soft-syllable jumps, finger again on clock
 nimble-toed repetition, not yet grand master
 poetry but developing, thinking of snakes
 and ladders, one small step for cat-kind

At the next table an old octopus sneers
 from his watery bifocals, cigar in one tentacle
 glass of blended ink in another, he tries to
 answer Felix: Knight takes Bishop as
 en passant a drop of whiskey falls between
 the black and white soldiers sidelined
 into spectatorship. Check. With an artful
 tentacle-entwined clock punch
 one small stab for Octopussy – on to table 007

Now Felix, too fast to figure out his jeer
 returning agile-ever from table 49
 glancing not at Humphrey Bogart, he extracts
 a tiny hypodermic from back pocket, squirts
 old smoky-face between the eyes and while
 he's flailing for a handkerchief, whips his
 queen across the diagonal. Check and check
 again. Check mate. Thank you Bobby sorry
 Boris, punch clock one last time, free verse
 Felix grins his alliteration-loaded feline grin

Another small step for cat-kind, nimble-pawed
 grand master. All in a day's work

DESPITE IT ALL

Is there music that the deaf can hear
impinging on some inner ear
an ode to joy or hammerklavier?

Or visions only the blind can see
white sticks drawing on memory
an asphalt tap on sidewalk near?

When grandma lost her sense of smell
she leafed through cookbooks loved so well
and in despair sipped tasteless beer

And you my page I love so much
I pray I never lose my touch
to feel you, kiss you, here and here

Cause you to blush, my sensory sonnet
your body with my fingerprints on it

THESE BRIEF MOMENTS

Are they compensation for:

Days of boredom and frustration
 watching images of celebrities in Ferraris
 or activists holding hand-scrawled placards
 crawl across your tired tv screen, power shortages

Washing greasy dishes, packing kid's lunches
 PTA meetings, semester beginnings, year endings
 report cards, new year resolutions
 discussions, decisions, marking off heights
 on kitchen doors, sending them off to camp
 for two weeks of incredible blissful quiet

Medical tests, nail biting, family doctors
 specialists, more tests, more waiting
 more specialists, considering options
 giving up smoking, giving up drinking
 giving up hamburgers, going on a macrobiotic
 diet, with just one double chocolate
 whipped cream butter crunch delight on your
 birthday

-O-O-O-O-

A red robin accompanying your morning walk
 third prize in the poetry contest, your first
 grandchild's drawing of a flower
 your lost dog comes home after three months
 two sons who haven't spoken to each other
 for years arrive together on your seventieth birthday

Finding a scrap of paper buried in some forgotten
 book "I've always loved you, always will"

Yes they are
 indeed they are

INTERRUPTED MELODY

I spun some words into the air
they glistened like clouds before the rain
but the rhymes choked in my pen's thin throat
and the two o'clock news announced the war

The fairest maid I ever did spy
was playing a fiddle crooked to her chin
then she crossed her legs and I fain could die
to the strains of an unfinished symphony

We're born to a life of struggle and toil
as the crow of the rooster marks another cold morn
but before summer's gold warms our fortune or fame
the slaughtering knife puts an end to our song

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

when you've got
vocal cord paralysis
and you feel you need
psychoanalysis

stay happy buddy, stay happy

when your bladder
has been replaced
and you piss like
a tube of toothpaste

stay happy buddy, stay happy

when your shoulder dislocates
when you beckon
to your mates
and the pain in your upper torso
is like arthritis, only more so

stay happy buddy, stay happy

'cause you still enjoy your toast
with some lard on
write a fuckin dumb poem
beg your pardon
and on weekends you still
get a hard on

stay happy buddy, stay happy

MY POEM IS A DOG

A disheveled mongrel,
a pandemonium of yaps
yelps and scamperings
that greets me when I open
the door of my notebook

My poem is a wet nose
on my ankle, a thirsty tongue
lapping at a bowl full of waking impressions
a shivering water level of dream recollections

My poem is a collection of cut-out
phrases and phonemes from phone books
anthologies and newspapers -
triangles, rectangles and carelessly torn
fragments piled haphazardly in my brain

That suddenly origami-like rearrange
themselves into the semblance of a dog
who when he sees me reaching for a pencil
performs circles around himself
in tail-catching delight
paws at my trouser leg, scratches at the door

And then he's off, barking in anticipation
sniffing at traditional or popular
territorial markings - then dashing away
pissing on his own choice of trees

My poem has four nimble legs but I
only have two. I can't walk on my hands
so most of the time he is far in front of me
unleashed, tail raised like a flag held by
a tour guide, sometimes disappearing
in a crowd of bushes or getting impatient
at other poems lifting their stanzas in French or Spanish

But then I spy him waiting at some intersection
of ideas, looking back at me to sense which way
I wish to go today. He's quite unpredictable,
at times he intuits my undeclared choice
but often as not he takes off on his own accord

And I must follow. Not in a tussle for mastery
but simply a mutt and a poet having a romp

THE TINNITUS BARRIER

Oh how I envy natural scribes
who sally forth at break of day
sweet William W. or the like
who wander childlike, lay in hay
watching dappled creatures play
how moles dig burrows, bees throng hives

While I, perched regular upon my seat
my coffee hot, my pen uncapped
inspired by all they have to say
attempt to emulate their feat
but end up scribbling out of tune
scratching my mind, an old buffoon

As through my brain cells limericks dash
like schoolboy pranks, or Ogden Nash

THOUGHTS ON WATCHING STEPHEN HAWKING'S LIPS

We never know how close we are to truth
yet even truth itself is just a word
a word like universe, big bang, black hole
a word like life, tomorrow or like soul

Rules that we sought from overhead
are really imposed from within instead
while buried behind expression's mask
are thoughts invisible that ask

And even ask's not right for stars don't think
amoebas don't question, pen's aren't ink
yet built in all is yet that inner urge
to glitter, multiply, connect and merge

"Becoming" happens from an inner need
the "truth" is hidden inside every seed

THE BOUNDARY

Confabulo, reading you I realize the difference between us (again that word 'between', dividing and uniting as one.) As if there was something there aside from this transparent diaphragm; something that would permit us to overlap into each other. Like colors blending on an autumn palette. But we are different my friend. You write from the inside out, every tree in the night-hushed forest lit by the incandescence of your trembling candle mind, so that leaves and rustlings in the undergrowth disclose a cinema of your childhood, your discoveries, your loves and losses, ponderings, sighs of your sadness. Companions that you miss stroll through your pages, paint them with brushes of longing, turning every harbored seascape into a reflection of your flashlight mind.

Whereas I, Confabulo, write from the outside in, impression following impression like animals crowding into an ark, until the page is filled with grunts and squeals, pushing, shoving and cowering in corners - a great odorous soup tureen of groaning timber, where the reasons for the voyage itself are slowly obliterated by the rising water and left behind forever, their secretive conspiracies rotting in the darkening deeps.

Are you and I perhaps one person, Confabulo? An ambidextrous being with four eyes, two pairs of lips? Why don't you answer?

3 A.M. COMPOSITION

My words crawl across the page
like ants spilling out from my pen
in this brief hieroglyphic of a morning

A pause torn from a dream manuscript
a refrigerator hums, a clock ticks
and I wonder over them, these borrowed symbols

Tired, losing meaning in constant use
and re-use by armies of poets and authors
lining the bookwalls of this room

These recycled symbols, imperfect maps
are still the only means I must use to attempt
to convey what's really happening

The pounding blood, the nimble neurons
a jackal calling from the undergrowth of night
fridge humming obbligato, clock ticking towards zero

Reality disguised as consonants and vowels

WAR, PEACE AND THE ART OF THE FUGUE

In men's affairs as in music
counterpoint is a valued form
Bach knew this centuries ago
as do free souls today, crossing easily
the lines of nationality, obedience
convention, faith or blind belief

Yes, power struggles, wars, aggression
conquest and oppression are distasteful,
cacophonic, but crying peace and love
in saccharine-like chords of harmony
grate on our senses as clichéd compositions
made by fingers more accustomed
to buttering toast or pouring tea

Preferring a world in which
disparate voices played together side
by side produce a patchwork counterpane
of counterpoint from which the only blood
that's spilled is paint and point
passionately discussed by interweaving
melodies playing many lines at once

BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

And so my friends, when you consider
the inhabitants of this storied world
'beginning', 'legend', call it as your bent
where hero, heroine, innocence and guilt
interact across the stage of time.

While slithering from its branch or from
the undergrowth, a serpentine depiction
with an Evil plan. On whom should we now
blame our banishment from bliss? This man?
This woman? This tree on which fruit of
temptation grows? And what design
the gardener in planting?

Consider perhaps the serpent as a worm,
sown not in a garden but in our minds—
and thereby hangs a tale of curiosity
which in its telling, tells our world, our history.

YOU'D BETTER BELIEVE IT

There are things going on in the world
that threaten the end of Poetry

and don't think that Poetry is going
to accept this without a fight. No man

Poetry is going to give it to them
straight from the hip

Poetry is going to put out a call
to all peace lovers to raise their voices

Express their indignation, hold readings
in every city, put out a call

To arms - appalled at the world's
brazen massacre of its beloved peaceful

Stanzas - Poetry declares a National Day
of Protest - June 15th across the country

In every damn place where outraged activists
hang out, come one, come all, raise

Your Voices in Protest before it's too late
June 15th in your local town hall, raise

Voices, raise arms. Pizza, beer, extra copies
of the Anthology, felt pens

Placard cardboard, water bombs and ammunition
for hand arms available at the door

TEA BREAK

Oh the sensuousness of it
Wedgewood china one day
fragile Rosenthal the next
dark fragrant Ceylon leaves
lounging in the drawing
room pot
the cultured discreteness of it
silver tray carried in white gloved hands
little fingers raised
just so
in Bo Peep hooks
sparkling affected conversation
wit and cucumber sandwiches
lace doilies and petit fours
lazy mornings in the sunroom
listening to Chopin
watching swans float down the river

Time slows to a hush
then speeds up again
with a teabag flung hastily
into a glass tumbler
made in China
lukewarm water from a machine
muzak in the bathroom

DYSFUNCTIONAL LEGACY

Masters of the world, they stood
Lugers unholstered in some Polish clearing
chatting about obscure philosophies and lunch
watching a group of Jews and Gypsies dig a trench

Masters of the world, they marched
over plains and pathways in the bush
setting on fire the slumbering adobe huts
storming into others, unbuttoning their khaki pants

Masters of the land, avenging angels of the Prophet
clad in black and hooded, eyes aglow
with flaming torches, kerosene, napalm
they hurled destruction from the skies on schools and hospitals

Now in a burning shack, tin roof already buckling
coughing in smoke and poison a true believer kneels
guardians of ancient faith his streaming eyes
turn towards a silent heaven and implore

Somewhere in time and legend Emperor of All sits
on a chipped gold plated throne, his eyes downcast
counting a daily tithe of prayers and lamentations
careful bookkeeper, he inscribes them in his balance sheet

Then turns to other matters, stars, black holes
and an unfinished game of solitaire in which he moves
black knaves onto queens, red queens on to black kings
one move, one card uncovered every million years

OVER HILL AND DALE

A line of wooden posts carrying wired messages
from villages to earpieces of Bakelite
divides my morning into matchstick rows
tree trunks stripped branchless now naked
stand at attention in their stationary salutes

Across a map of byways, streams and brambles
helmeted they snap and crackle in code language
between the watching mountains and the sky
as through October mist I watch them march

A sudden sharp tattoo breaks from a nearby pole
a drummer snaring serried semiquaver notes
drills his piercing question into the waking day
a call to arms, some pointed prayer or incantation

That sets my ears on fire, eyes darting here and there
down rows of frozen faces their rifles raised
straps motionless round unsmiling chins as
hammer-drill in urgent warning knocks into the wood

Until, unsatisfied by lack of worm or weevil
a woodpecker, abruptly disclosed, flies black on
white into some softer pockmarked oak

BOOK WORMS

Over here, the guide said
is the worm colony
born into blindness
white bodies squirming
exuding trails of hieroglyphics
they wriggle their way
across sheets of pressed papyrus
in meaningless patterns of
intestinal scribble and scrawl.

They say a billion worms
crawling across a million sheets
said a goat-faced student chewing
a carrot next to a showcase
labeled Fact or Fiction,
could write the entire Mythology,
compose the Seven Holy Books.

Indeed they do, clever goat
intoned the guide, and that is why
the Scholars say...., but his words
were cut off by a procession
of monks carrying brooms who
swept the worms into scroll-like
containers to be buried and
rediscovered by new generations
of diggers searching for The Truth.

BELIEVE OR NOT

when you go
(if you believe)
you don't completely vanish

a little piece of you
an echo, a crocheted cloth,
a piece of chipped pottery
remains behind
slight movement in the air

(and if you don't believe)
and then you go—
a crumpled cloth
a shard found on the beach

a slight movement in the air
reverberates with your
unmistakeable
little giggle

remember Ripley?

NEWS FROM THE PHYSICS DEPT.

When they were students
 some time ago, some smart lass
 asked a mind boggling question
*"What happens when the irresistible
 force meets the immovable object?"*

Now, several decades later
 a classmate asks his modern version
*"What happens when a Ba'al Teshuva
 meets a Higgs Boson?"*

And truthfully (both being converts
 from previous schools of thought)
 a complicated argument ensues
 which being inconclusive, ends

In them getting married in a
 civil ceremony and some time
 later producing a host of
 polyglot children, the more obedient

Ones dancing and singing *Baruch Hashem*,
 the daring, more rebellious offspring
 reinventing fireworks, Bach, Beethoven,
 the Beatles and on Sundays, God willing,
 going to Mass

OVERCOMING

There's something about the way you place
your tongue inside the flowing stream of liquid
that prevents hot coffee from engulfing
scalped tonsils, avoids you choking
spluttering without air

There's something in the artificial leg inside
the trouser that snaps to attention like a
wired puppet whenever national anthems sound
their blue and red or when a lady drops her
handkerchief or military music sounds salutes

There's something in a blind man's stick
that reads the clicks between the traffic lights
and kerb, detects the elevator buttons, navigates
unfailingly the measured distance between the
land of vision and the maps hidden inside

So that when you hear the story of three
prisoners who fashioned tools to scrape
impenetrable walls, sew raincoats into rafts
to cross the icy waters of the bay, escape from
Alcatraz, you wonder

Which is better: to spend your days dreaming
a dream of childhood's carefree playfulness;
to live inside the blind man's raincoat, cast your
artificial limb into the water, fly or swim
a legless amputee

Or like a rag doll puppet, be found a few days
later floating face down in the water, defiant
smile upon your pale and bloodless lips

ODE TO A SAFETY RAZOR

All manner of men with hair on their cheeks
unsmiling portraits of nobles and Greeks
sages and saints, monarchs and madmen
zealots and sinners, the decent, the bad men

Judges and barristers rabbis and rabble
the wigged and the wagging all nodding with babble
Robinson Crusoe windswept and wavy
Campbell and Knorr all soup stained with gravy
disguised or disgusting they all take their places
the parade of the men with hair on their faces

But as for myself, barefaced I was born
and now wield a razor each chin scraping morn
smooth as an Ingres oil painting's virginity
showing off to the end my fresh-faced masculinity

BEST OF FRIENDS

I want to belong to a home-made synagogue
travel the world with a portable god
he could be called whisper, wonder or thingabob
and no one would think it the slightest bit odd

We'd converse in a language that we alone used
once reserved for the birds or the whales or the muse
and we'd laugh at the Christians, the Moslems, the Jews
with their old fashioned prayers and their temples with pews

He'd call me JJ and I'd call him GG
and we'd carve our initials on every which tree
and watch how the trunks ooze with sweet smelling sap
which means JJ and GG are really nice chaps

And if you think I'm a heathen or mad as a hatter
I'd reply that it's really my personal matter

BEHIND THE SCENES

1.

People said
they seem such a nice couple

2.

A few words
thrown carelessly across a bed
set the scene for winter
stretching longer than usual
bleak and off-white days
of snow-filled emptiness

3.

She observes
like a bird of prey
as he ascends a stairway
eyes like dusters polishing his shoes
until the flash of pink and white ahead
gets off and walks away
on four-inch heels

4.

He likes Rachmaninov
sad and blue, lugubrious
filling the space between them
with cotton wool, gauze bandages, antiseptics
she, answering a withheld number call
casually flips the volume button down

5.

She feeds street cats
tops up the bird water daily
thinking perhaps this earns her
good marks in heaven
he knows heaven is the place
the dog goes when he's off the leash

6.

Love and marriage
someone sang as they walked by
hand enclosed in hand
go together like
hard boiled eggs and salt water

SUN SONG OR SWAN SONG

He's the poet lariat
rides in his chariot
of words

While the world whizzes
by he fiddles and swizzles
his verbs

Metaphorically muttering
ambivalent utterings
absurd

He's a western style hero
twanging stanzas like Nero
wild bird

Fitzgerald, Roy Rogers
he lassoes then dodges
sun bursts

But his impudence earns him
reprisal – sol burns him
unheard

BRIDLE AND HALTER

I've had this bit of metal between my lips
since I was very young
this bit of properness
of should and shouldn't
this bit of cleanliness
and godliness
of rules, restrictions
bible talk and prohibitions

When I got troubled
eyed some foaming surf
or grassy undiscovered path
they'd yank the leather straps
that hold it

Pulling my painful jaw in line
with where to go, not how to go
filling my mind
with what to think, not how to think

While in the veins and arteries beneath
my teeth still ached to spit it out
my blood still longed to surge
high with the flaming sun
plunge into the waves
gallop off, wild undisciplined
uncivilized and free

But now that I'm a parent myself
that freedom's lost its lustre
I tread the straight and narrow
set a good example to my kids

No more horsing around for me

MOON

I accused her of being controlling
pointed an angry finger at her
shouted, indignant, a red faced lunatic

Hurt, a pale ghost of herself
sailing silently sullenly
she hid her face behind a cloud

But I knew she was there
by the pull of the tide
ebb and flow of my blood
by nights spent alone
longing for her touch

Then, her one side ashen
the other dark, cold
we faced each other
in unknown immensity
of futures together yet apart
unable to divorce
locked into each others gravity

Pale ghosts
casting shadows on each other
reflecting an absent sun's warmth
so near yet so far

Revolving and fading
like tears on the shore
of a loveless ocean

QUEST

The first map makers
rowing their dugout logs
across the heaving distances
shore fading weeks behind with
only hope for sustenance

Could not have dreamed
of compasses and sealing wax
of how their descendants
would tabulate occurrences of ice ages
movements of stellar galaxies
of microscopes and genes

So arrogant they'd find
the final outlines of a land
with constant outlines, or one at least
where changing images were traceable
in words, blackboard equations
needles of iron, two handfuls of numerals
a box of letters and a book of myths
legend built on legend
reinventing long gone continents or
unseen futures from their armchair perches

Blinded by sun at birth
we are but mapless savages
with minds that question like sharpened pencils
each on its own uncharted page

Each in his own dugout canoe

COUNTING TO 100 UNDER WATER

Let's say in a moment
of blind darkness
comes a flash of light

You become aware
the lightness of things
fragile transparent ghosts
everything—buildings like spider webs
highways—cracks in parched soil
the hum of tractors—cicadas
bibles, maps—piles of dried leaves

You can't remember your name
or why you should have one
instructions fade inside your eyelids
hieroglyphics of veined leaves
shattered glass crenellations

And all the words that were never written
the things left unsaid
all the important issues of days
shaking, disappearing like snowflakes on ice
until everything freezes into
a single light gray solid

The outlines of a face
sleeping an imagined sleep
peaceful, motionless

Waiting for a kiss from a princess
who will perhaps bend down gently
from clouds that drift and drift

THE JUDGE

he sits inside
obsequious
fingers poised
over colored buttons
a green, a red
a maybe

we go to school
learn history
of art, music
and literature

and who came first
and who was influenced
invented jazz,
abstractions,
blatant nothings
forgeries and junk

and in the end
we say
nodding politely
I like it or
I don't
It speaks to me
or it doesn't

the judge,
no jury
to confuse him,
presses his button
and we smile
grimace or shrug

A DOG NAMED HALLEY

There he is again
eyes burning, tail
raggedy as ever

He comes around here
every so often
more dash than amble

Sniffing at Jupiter
and Saturn, their cold
orbs implacable, uncurious

Ignore his scampering
and then he's
in our neighborhood

Bounding over asteroids
barking as Venus slides off
to the left, raising the hem

Of her skirt so as not
to get splashed by any
interplanetary debris

From his paws as he
digs and throws a shower
of stones and star sand

Over the place where he
deposits his you know what
once every four score years

And then he's flashing across
the sky, expectantly waiting
for some astronomer to

Greet him, whistle, raise
an arm in recognition,
even for some miscreant

To pick up a stone
in warning - but nothing,
absolutely nothing - they're gone

A world deserted, burning
he sees now, in red-embered
radioactive glow - and then he's off

Barking away between the stars
pursuing his dogged route
thinking perhaps, as dogs sometimes do

Somehow he knew this might happen

FOREIGN BODIES

Born to new world's song
 wind-blown from other territories
 they meet like hurried leaves
 dashing to random destinations
 under trees, their body language
 saying – move aside

His calloused hands have known
 logs, heft of axe
 shining steel, fragrance of gum
 sap diverted from amputated trunks
 warm bodies of paid women

She, squall-driven from eastern shores
 red spot on her forehead
 denoting the caste that she resents
 her dimly felt vision of tomorrow
 pushing her along this wind-swept path
 no man to soil a better home

Now here they stand so sturdy
 side-by-side up on a polished shelf
 and here's a photograph of them together
 some sudden storm sweeping through forest
 had flung them haphazardly into each other's
 arms, rain-drenched against all odds
 to found in this American dream
 a common future, no longer foreign bodies

Applauded by a dozen smiling grandchildren
 who fondly feel this log-frame incense-scented
 home they share has been there always
 solid as two figures carved in wood

**COUPLE VIEWED FROM A
TRAIN WINDOW**

Dark in his beige armchair
Pale on her dark rocker
A man and a woman
Silhouetted in the gathering dusk
Silence brooding between them

Indistinct from flickering carriage
Memories from other similar scenes
Play out on an internal screen
Fill in the gaps behind the view

Years of toil and bitterness
Childless years
Outline distances unbridgeable
Barrenness of their iron covenant
Etched into separate loneliness
Here on autumn's porch

Back to back
A man and a woman
The negative space between them
Burns into the retina

Leaving an optical illusion
Of closeness
Fading as night replaces day

CROW ON ROAD

in a smoking
late afternoon
aftermath of
another world war

a crow pulls at
a piece of congealed meat
adhering to the scarred
surface of tank-tracked
melting asphalt

that once carried
baklava and bible story
cardamom and camel dung
mcdonald and coca cola
from east to west and back

the crow speaks all
languages – flap flap
pull pull, wrench, gobble
screech screech screech

the rotting tar
speaks only one-
man's folly

TORTOISES OF A CERTAIN AGE

Read newspapers cover to cover
eyes bifocal, heads wisely nodding
they've heard it all before, know most of the answers.
On sunny afternoons they lumber onto balconies
play mahjong, discuss doctors' appointments

Between moves or after boring financial reports
they doze off, retract heads into shells
sometimes if you wander along some sandy track
you might come across one by fallen leaves, you might
Even mistake it for a piece of bark or granite

Until you bend closer to observe - but not to touch -
and in a little while a wrinkled head emerges
a scaly limb begins a clever move that had been
concealed while hibernating in its reptilian brain
coughs, sips some water, turns a page
to view the crossword or the sports news

For tortoises of a certain age, an afternoon
in the sun on a balcony or next to a pile of leaves
could last a hundred years

MY TUSSLE WITH TONGUES

I'd like to do an interview in Greek
 read Homer in a language I can't speak
 but what I really think would be terrific
 I'd turn myself into a hieroglyphic

But sadly I'm an ordinary pa
 as monolingual as most English are
 don't understand my children's changing slangs
 and aft agley my best laid listening gangs

I went to classes in a Berlitz school
 but couldn't grasp exceptions to the rules
 my tongue got blistered twisting round the sounds
 that in Swahili or in French abound

But I've a talent you should not belittle
 comparable I think to Doc Doolittle
 I bark at dogs and mew and hiss at cats
 tongue clicking I communicate with bats

I understand the plinks in dripping sinks
 and how the treetops catch the sun and blink
 appreciate the forest's green-throat pattern
 that compensates me for my lack of Latin

So that's my back-to-front romance with languages
 like whistling Bach while eating Chop Suey sandwiches

W A L L

I'm building a wall
between your intransigence
and my vulnerability

It stretches like the barrier
between these villages
gray, concrete, unsmiling

Look, I have left
an aperture less fortified
through which some tanks
might pass

In times of rank hostility
and further on
beyond the embankments

A tiny doorway
fit only for a field mouse
a soft nosed faun
or playful messenger
bearing a spring flower

THOUGHTS

the thing is
 we're all wobbling on the brink
 waiting to fall in if anything

goes wrong
 and we're so adept at)posturing(
 that everything's perfectly normal

that we are
 exactly how we /pretend/ to be
 pretend to be/pretend to be...believers

in names and nouns
 stamped with approval, turn the other
 cheek. o jesus it's happening

again that babble
 go fuck yourselves all you fakes
 i know who you are !waiting there

inside that manhole
 to infest, invade, scream into fragments
 any ?whatsitcalled that omigod

without a warning
 !deafens i forget exactly why and how
 again. again. until the world stops dead

/don't say/don't say/
 not me until you hear those verbs
 and *things*

begin their buzzing around your head

WHAT IS A POEM?

a bunch of words
chattering like pegs on a clothes line

one small step
into the outer space
between verbosity and distillation

something to write to your love
when you forget her/his birthday

a hundred lines of
tired recycled mythology
translated a dozen times
freshened up with sauce tartare
to look like nouvelle cuisine

all of the above
none of the above
something that goes aha in the night
buzzes round your head

until you swat it
with a notebook
and spend the next six months
editing the squashed remains

SEISMOGRAPHS

we're jelly quiver
puddled tadpoles
ears on a train rail
everything about us jangles
flashes whistles signals hoots
tomorrow accosts us screaming
children terrorists tsunamis
we pack suitcases with
bundled clothes cotton wool
antiseptics painkillers tranquilizers
it's fight or flight
adrenalin time
and we're stuck on this
barbed wire that
trembles in the wind
everything that moves
pierces us
a hundred wounds
the hands on our clocks
are whirling out of control
time zones politics predictions
the neighbors are yelling
at each other again
words falling from their mouths
the front door tears off its hinges
what's that they're shouting?
magnitude Nine Point Three!
nowhere to hide
we're born like that
epicenter never far away

SURVIVORS

Taking a rest from digging our nuclear shelter
we're off shopping again
today it's canned meat balls and baked beans
long expiry dates
false alarms don't fool us
2000, 2012 and counting
tomorrow, next week, next year
we're almost ready

Damn fools the neighbors
their kids screaming for attention again
homework, carpools, PTA exhaust their spare time
we're not having kids until after it happens
three years maybe five we'll emerge
into a recycled world

When smoke clears there'll be time
for everything, we'll check the Geiger counters
clear the rubble, plant hydroponic corn

We've got rice - a dozen blue barrels
our own borehole, enough wood and coal
for many winters, a backup generator
canned chickens, tuna, gas cylinders

Our guru tells us it will be a new world
for those of us who prepare in time
the world population's expected to be
around ten thousand, a new chance to
live cleanly, sanely

We've got three handguns, ten crates
of ammunition, an M16 and an Uzi
by the solid iron front door
just in case

CHILDREN ALL THEIR LIVES

In our village there are two of them
a man who is always smiling
wanders streets and hitch hikes
from here to there and back
asking everyone how are you today
and we smile back, give him a lift

And there's a woman with a pushcart
no baby in it just a bundle of
newspapers and some assorted
outdated journals. She knows everyone
and greets them all as she pushes her
cart along our streets pausing now
and then to smoke a cigarette

Sometimes in a big city, outside
a home or in a park you'll find
a group of them, usually of small
stature and always smiling with
their small-talk faces; children all
their lives - we smile back at them

No harm disturbs their thoughts
their sleep, no jealousies, intrigues
or passions; sometimes we look
at our own faces in the mirror or
at the bitter grimacers driving joyless
cars and wish we 'normal' folk were
not quite so adult as we are

READ THIS FIRST

The page before the last contains a clue
that had we started there we'd surely know
just how this mystery is going to end

But if we did, there'd be no chance to muse
no guessing game, no unknown characters to meet
no loves to find or lose, no hours to spend

Staring at the starry skies and wondering where they end

And say we skipped the preface, jumped straight in
to page nineteen or thirty four perhaps
that way we might become the first to understand

The gist of it, see how the book was planned
but knowing where and why so early on
may just produce a smugness that prevents

Us from enjoying all those cliffhanging events

BIRTHRIGHT

When this land
is given back to its owners
all your arrogance, your metastasized dwellings
monuments, insecticides, networks of
asphalt capillaries, of doubletalk
hens fed on antibiotics
tax collectors, bulldozers and sheep

Will be as dust on disused doorsteps
rotting timbers, thin whine of desert wind
blowing stinging particles of sand
over your severed limbs

Even as the vultures have had their say
and lurch away, great bags flapping
to some mountain retreat
we will emerge from cracks
reclaim what was always ours
this brown expanse of rubble littered landscape
on which to lay our eggs

LIVING ON CRUMBS

I'm homeopathic over you
just a grain of a smile
an echo of whispered fondness

diluted in a million hours
of tears and neglect

is enough to
heal my love-starved
world

A FEW WORDS ABOUT LIFE

my life
has been like a writing workshop
I learned a lot
but not enough

and then the leader advised
*you have fifteen minutes
to write
a summing up*

I looked around
everyone was scribbling
their heads off

a gray-haired lady
next to me
was into her
sixth page

outside the butterflies
were doing
what butterflies do
 quickly of course

and the sun
was committing suicide
into a sea
of incomprehensible
depth and beauty

and anyway
my pen had
run out of ink

so I just said
pass
and left it at that

A MIX OF MICE AND METAPHOR

The poetry assignment was too dense, I fumbled
 my ears rang syllables and rhyming sounds
 last night I spied a metaphor, a grayish ball with
 brown appendage, button eyes, it scuttled across my
 notebook page and disappeared into a question mark

It's tail, like Amerigo Vespucci hauling up the flag
 a madman shouting 'land brothers land'
 how could he understand that voyage of discovery
 the bearers of his Christian name would take

But I digress, life's but a mess of pottage I wrote
 my quill no longer still, deleting words like cottage
 substituting house, nib poised to kill that dratted
 mouse that nibbled, gnawed and scribbled between
 my lines, gobbling the dots over my eyes, the crosses
 on my tees, leaving a trail of droppings
 and. full. stopped. enjambments.

The hour was late and still I stumbled, searching
 for some inspiration, my eyes were closing almost
 dozing now, I penned a few quick phrases in irritation
 like dictation wrote:

I wandered lonely as a cloud
 that floats on high above a crowd
 of pattering feet and waving tails

A piper leaving Hamelin could not do better
 than drown those rodents in a plagiaristic
 sea of letters

The English master gave me a zero, the rat

FOG

All night the village disappeared into
its hilltop and by morning only camouflage was left
dogs whimpered, cats blundered into lamp posts
the GPS played Philip Glass and clouds
the sundial and the street lamps turned to Braille

I trod by some mistake on my bifocals
counted footsteps from memory to brain
Shakespeare had got confused with long division
my fingers turned to thumbs misplaced my name

Groping I found you in the kitchen
searching for a match to light the way
our fingers locked we skated to the bedroom
consoled ourselves with touch and taste and feel

It rained next night in waterfalls from heaven
and when we rose covered in love's dew
the fog had lifted, treetops stretched their branches
we smiled and hoped it soon would start to snow

LADY INSPIRATION

Poetry gave me a gift
it was you
flaming into a daybreak
of coffee and birdsong
of desiccated dreams
of winding shores
fishermen gathering stanzas
in nets of starspun shadows
while traffic hums
along highways
between suns and planets
singing a slow turning adagio

You in the crook of my neck
you whispering in my ear
you between darkness and moon
between sign language and gasp

Making rainbows
in my eyes, my heart
dancing in my cerebellum
you, here with me again

DOVES

Each year on her windowsill
the doves lay their eggs
it seems to be the same pair
a dove gray man a dove blue woman
carrying bagfuls of dry twigs
year after year building again this
haphazard crib for two
alabaster egg babies to hatch
hatch and grow under dove gray
dove blue bodies food spooned
into O shaped mouths
stretch shiver spread wings
fly away her heart with them

They've brought their muck again
these flea-infested doves
hooting and shitting non-stop in
the most inaccessible corner
of windowsill get rid of them
he cried taking a stick to
brush the loathsome creatures'
dung heap off the sill, he lost
his balance slipped and fell
his body staining red a concrete
pathway sixteen floors below

The doves don't notice
they build their nests and coo
and raise their young
year after year singing their
joyful mournful song over
a world of gray and blue and red

BED TIME STORY

It rained for forty orbits while she slept
coastal towns submerged sea awash with drowning ants
she wiped the planet with some Kleenex

When that didn't work she tried detergent
putty, mixed boiled rice with stuff to cure
diarrhea that had passed expiry date

As if to mock her came a rumbling
mountains split apart and where formerly
were deserts oceans poured - land masses broke up

It looks quite nice this way as well she thought
but then it started heating up, turned red
and angry and was painful to pick up even touch

Not willing yet to throw it out and start again
she read up ancient manuals consulted with a priest
left it in the freezer overnight - the fridge burnt down

Asbestos gloved she packed it in a crate of iron
and dropped it in the deepest black hole she could find
from where a symphony of bubbles soon emerged

Ten million revolutions later a little girl
while wandering across a desert landscape
came across it lying on its side all rusted

Enchanted by its dull allure she picked it up
it seemed quite warm and with a little key
she found suddenly as if by destiny

She open up its lock - the box burst open
and in its dark interior she found a glowing sphere
how beautiful she thought and took it home

Each day she rubbed and polished cleaned and waxed
it's time to go to sleep now children, happy dreams
tomorrow night I'll tell you more about what happened next

BED TIME STORY 2

Hee hee cackled the witch
I'm not your grandmother after all
disguised as a broomstick
or a seemingly sleeping cat
I watched you try this or that bottle
fall headlong after a rabbit
prick your finger on a needle
freeze for a thousand years
hee hee, I'll scare you to death

But Goldilocks laughed back
I'm not your little miss innocent after all
I'll set my ninja mutants upon you
my sword-wielding avatar will decapitate you
grind you into meteor dust
orbiting with dismal cries
around a black hole
in a spiral nebula light years away

And if that doesn't work I'll simply
turn off my iPhone, watch some TV instead
tonite there's a really good documentary
about the tsunami in Japan
followed by a rerun of
The Rocky Horror Picture Show

Witches are passé don't you know
you should have kept up to date
and my real grandma's out playing tennis
against Serena Williams

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE CONFUSED

Hang the hangman high
decapitate the guillotine
cut and paste the priesthoods
drown all nuclear submarines

Start a hospital for faked
righteousness, burn frayed rhymes
ban bombastic balderdash
make the love song fit the crime

Paint a sign in blood-red ecstasy
leave your boots outside the door
turn your ploughshares into cutlery
don't spit on cathedral floors

PAPER DOLL USA

I see her now
 huge and shapeless
 struggling with the washing
 meals children cleaning
 her years upon her
 like layers of papier-mâché
 covered with putty dough
 more papier-mâché
 and baggy clothes

I see her struggling to
 get out somewhere there
 inside the years
 a young girl again
 with a balloon on a string
 or chasing a dog
 across a field

She's reading now
 piles of books beside her bed
 wind outside fading
 children flown to new nests
 she's reading Alice
 and as she falls after the rabbit
 her years fall off one by one
 in peeling papier-mâché

And when she lands
 quite gently
 on a pile of leaves
 she's slim again
 thin careless waif
 who runs into a room
 tables laden with
 cakes and donuts
 bottles of fizz burgers fries
 candies and chocolates
 and a sign that says 'eat me'

She looks
 into the mirror
 sighs and turns
 another page

GETTING TOGETHER

Adam did it
 Anthony did it
 Solomon did it (and did it and did it)
 Mary didn't (or maybe she did)

Jack and Jill did it
 Victoria hid it
 And Fanny Hall did it
 In a flat at St. James

Reverends do it
 Reverently do it
 Gays do it often
 But differently

Carriages do it
 But pogo sticks won't
 Kings and queens do it
 But singleton's don't

The confessor doesn't
 He says that he mustn't
 But I'm pretty certain
 After drawing his curtain
 While performing ablution
 He finds a solution

So if you're in mind
 Happy endings to find
 I suggest that you do it
 (If you're that way inclined)

ATLANTIS TO LOS ANGELES

We seek cultural clues
in stains from cigarettes
and clotted cream
left on tablecloths
in palaces, newsrooms
and striptease clubs

But we can't find them
obsessed with lexicons
and mystic signs
and even if we could
they'd huddle misunderstood
in grimy depths

Where canisters of celluloid
piled aimless in nostalgia
gather dust in some
abandoned basement
of Vienna, Leningrad
or in a cavern under Bollywood
viewed once or twice
and PG rated

And yet we dream of them
our nights disturbed
by punctuated visions
of Marlene, Gary, Deepika
Hercules and Sergeant Pepper
all crying faintly under heaps of
broken masonry

As calendars and libraries
collapse and from a previously
quiet ocean a wall of mountainous waves
sweeps pages, scripts, love letters,
recipes, Al Jolson, Lincoln,
Moses on the mount, into
the gloom-filled depths of what
was once so vibrant

A million conversations
hardly overheard
by coelacanths and whales

MIDDLE EASTERN DELUGE

Before dawn
skies opened
and the rain came down
by morning it had muscled
into a demonstration

Nature's protest
against the balmy
indifference a carefree
summer had lulled us into
Busloads of surging crowds
swept down streets
turned instantly into rivers
stormwater drains like
unarmed watchmen
were instantly overcome

By rushing gesticulating
mobs full of mud
shouts of God is Great
bursting from every
open mouth

The waters carried everything
before them
spring, summer, autumn
innocent bystanders
crushed underfoot
whirled away to vast chambers
underground

Where armies of ants
guard the reservoirs
and polluted seas
of forgotten coexistence



Printed by
Cyclamens and Swords Publishing
P.O. Box 21, Metulla, ISRAEL

ISBN 978-965-7503-05-8



9 789657 503058