

Musical score for measures 78-85. The score is in G-flat major (three flats) and 4/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The right hand has a melodic line with a trill in measure 78, followed by chords. The left hand has a bass line with chords and a trill in measure 80. Dynamics include *sf* (sforzando) and *cresc.* (crescendo).

JOHN MICHAEL SIMON

Musical score for measures 86-95. The score continues in G-flat major and 4/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The right hand has a melodic line with chords. The left hand has a bass line with chords. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo).

SONATA

Musical score for measures 96-103. The score continues in G-flat major and 4/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The right hand has a melodic line with a trill in measure 96, followed by chords. The left hand has a bass line with chords and a trill in measure 100. Dynamics include *sf* (sforzando).

POETRY

Musical score for measures 104-111. The score continues in G-flat major and 4/4 time. It features a piano accompaniment with a treble and bass clef. The right hand has a melodic line with chords. The left hand has a bass line with chords and a trill in measure 104. Dynamics include *sf* (sforzando) and *pp* (pianissimo).

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This book is dedicated to my life partner Helen Bar-Lev and my children, Daniel, Guy, Alon and Maya.

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**Foreword by Katherine L. Gordon,
author, editor, publisher, literary critic,
Resident Columnist for Ancient Heart Magazine**

In moments of introspection one often suspects, as Johnmichael Simon verifies for us in *Sonatina*, that life is orchestrated. The interplay of characters, casual and intimate, underscores moments of life experience in this dance from surprised birth to gangly growth to mellow aging, a staged progression of musical opus, holding both lament and celebration, percussion highs and fluted lows.

This collection of poetry is presented so intriguingly, with the beauty of a found folio, the themes and the delicate drawings by Helen Bar-Lev, all accenting the score of life. Pleasing cadence and lyrical language sustain the musical interpretation of events. Sharp and surprising images flash in and out of the script and reverberate into the next poem: "as a falling meteorite burns itself to death."

There is an accepting reality softened by a love for the human symphony, a shiverous tide of truth in gripping poetry that washes over the reader. Deep seeing of this poet pierces layers but never judges, from the ant to the rose, to the blazing skies, we stretch with Johnmichael in song beats, hearts at times hurt but drawn to connections: "age is heavy on the ground/ weightless as a butterfly."

Discords, misses and tangles, are all addressed and folded into the *Sonatina* while the carousel revolves. What this book accomplishes for us is the vision of all events meshing in the music of life, the bizarre just another octave, the sweet and miraculous all plucked appropriately in reprise and return: "the clouds and God are all that exist and the music, the music."

To Hold The Notes, a long-time favorite poem of mine, catches the essence of the purpose of music. The collection as a whole captures the essence of many things and distils it for us into a song to keep. It is a gift to see life from this perspective and the reader will acknowledge "in the heart of things/ everything points North." There is a subliminal flow and direction to all the intricacies of each of our lives. *Sonatina* has caught many of them for us with Johnmichael's talented baton.

So absorb and enjoy the music and fascinating verses of *Sonatina*. To paraphrase one of the poems "these words, written in margins of the wind, shall be our applause!"

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To Hold the Notes

There was a time
when the notes slept, hibernating,
breathing thumbed parchment,
quiet as cathedrals locked up for the night
while around parish hearths
stout voices sang their pious words

Then came wax cylinders
wound tightly as bobbins
and squashy shellac blobs
that pressed out and dried the notes to brittle patties
where winding roads and bumpy paths
guide scratchy thorns along their quavering circuits

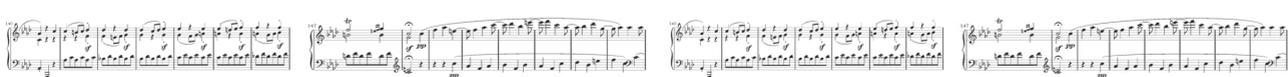
Scant revolutions later notes hiss over speeding decks
in and out of skimpy see-through dresses
while jockeys whirl them back and forth
like dolls at a barnyard square dance
and singles stand around waiting to join the jig

Still fading, the notes, collapsing further
sought refuge in wires, shiny ribbons, skin thin wafers
that held hieroglyphics of their shrinking glory
while packets of ones and zeros
carried them from ear to busy ear

Amidst this impersonal mechanical going on
we set our feet upon the northern road
that leads between the towering peaks and rushing streams
where bird song, rosy apples, fields of cyclamen
and shady cypresses walked beside us down the peaceful ways

And in the valley, beneath the spreading oaks
a classroom beckoned, just a wooden shack
but from its open windows came forth such a blessed sound
that we, compelled by its beauty, approached

There seated on simple wooden chairs four youngsters sat
at cello, viola and two violins
and as we watched them play and pause
and play again and annotate and then again
our hearts began to sing with them
and as we smiled and listened on
we knew the notes had found their home



To Sing the World

Each language has its own music
 And those who sing it are its harmonic true
 From opening bars they recognize each other
 They are as staccato to legato
 As guttural is to milk
 As icebergs from lagoons
 They smolder and hiss as fire steams from water
 As plucked guitars from tom-toms beating smoke

Consider: a flurry of Italians
Accelerando agitato as spaghetti around spoon to mouth
 Ignitable as Latin is to love

And there, a day or two across the water
 The dulcet tones of *le Français*, cedillad and accented
 As accordions in the street
 Each syllable a mistress, *douloureux* or sweet

Listen to Greece, her tongue all olive oil and X's
 Proud as phrases carved on ancient stones
 Bouzoukis lilting linking arms stepping foot after foot
 Around breaking plates, while at a wooden table sits
 Pythagorus counting his magic numbers
 Discoursing on the healing music makes

Consider isiXhosa: fifteen different click sounds
 The poetry of ancestors and dreams
 Hear the language of night people, phantom figures
 They close their eyes, *surrender to the music of the stars*

Consider translations: often golden words of beauty, works of art
 Masterly forged doubloons that subtly miss the mark
 True at times to libretto, timbre, image or melody. Never all

Listen to those that cry rivers, raise voices in anger or regret,
 Argue in tones of bedlam, discordant and strident as Babel
 Each striving to drown out the other
 As across the sky a wild goose cries in Esperanto
 Flying from tongue to tongue honking from land to land
Alhaj vivoj. We touch their wings, listen
 Begin to understand

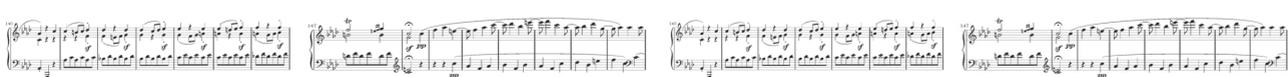


Each of us has his own music
 We swirl with each other, against each other, over our green globe
 In choreographies of dissonance and pride
 We chant the languages of tribes with cymbals, swords or scimitars
 Our words betray us, cascading from a past we cannot hide
 Consider the language of flags: each emotion, each devotion,
 Each declaration of respect or honor, each hymn an anthem
 To divide us

[Consider the music of ants on leaves
 The language of grass growing
 The sounds of desert winds blowing]

Each language has its magic, its memories
 Its palaces and echoing ballrooms
 Its secret passageways, its trysts and feuds
 Our voices twist and twirl around themselves
 Each in its own cadence, temperament, rhythmic beat and break
 The music of our world, vowels flowing around continents
 Like chocolate snakes

Listening carefully, we discern
 Melodies that slip between the words
 The music of children playing
 The things that whales are saying
 The music of old age praying
 Cadenza, coda, finalé



Moment of Beauty

From high above the planet
 The piccolo of solar wind
 Blows through the shimmering
 Sheaves of thin-air, warming
 Past nimbus, down to
 Dark rain clouds
 Their full udders far below
 Heavy in the warming.

Weaned of protection the ice weakens
 At the joints, drops of water
 Tremble into hairlines, brow drenched
 With sweat the glacier finally
 Gives way, tumble-slides into foam
 Of waves and flashing gulls.

The roar subsides and then another
 From beyond the curve.
 Without a complaint the giant settles
 Lumbering into floes, gulls screech
 Splinters of sunlight
 Scratch into the ice.

Up beyond the coastal villages
 Noah herds his zoo towards the clouds;
Make haste, make haste, the shoreline rises
Time is short.

High in their slender castles
 In their counting houses the war kings
 Wait, deliberating, calculating,
 Trade balances, stock markets, interest rates
 And budgets stacked high to shut out
 The splintering light. Thick windows
 Double glazed deafen the piccolo notes,
 The giants' roars.



Day by day, inch by inch the water rises
 The kings deliberate, arguing now, advisors
 Passing notes from one to the other.
 We watch them on television, hypnotized
 By the pendulum swing of interests and greed.
 Too late they see the brine rising in
 The elevator shafts, creeping under the doors.

High above the pinnacles bobs the ark
 Survivors waiting for the planet's pendulum to
 Correct its swing. Generations pass, millenniums
 Tick their frozen seconds, nebulas swing
 Unconcerned across the stellar night.

A lone astronomer on a distant world
 Adjusts his telescope to observe the changing colors
 As blue slips across the green, across the white,
 A moment of beauty captured in the lens.



*Shower in a Forest Glade**For Mary Oliver*

Silver sounds
 like a river
 no punctuation marks
 running across
 and down the dell
 each syllable
 a song
 of love

of life
 sunlight
 filtering through
 mottled shadow
 lighting pools
 where fish
 and tadpoles
 play gleaming games
 between the drifting leaves

only the owl
 and the coyote
 sing their coda
 as butterscotch moonlight
 is heard
 lapping vanilla
 through
 the undergrowth

and then
 the maestro
 from a podium of cloud
 lifts his baton
 and a glissando
 of soft wet notes
 streams from the sky
 filling the trees
 with chandeliers
 of almost
 soundless
 drops



Sea Song

I long to write a song about the sea
Where gloom and gleam merge in a fishes eye
But find myself aquarumed instead

My notes restrained behind thick glass
Not free, not open to the screech of gulls
And sky, imprisoned still I long to sing the sea

I long to romp with dolphins and with whales
To leap in figure eights round sailboats' hulls
Aquarumed I swim with mournful tail

Come put your ear up to this glass with me
Come listen how the fishes gleam in gloom
And as our noses bump, my eyes you'll see

You'll hear the songs the conch shell sings of sails
Of wind and spray of dolphins and of gulls
You'll hear the lobsters tell their crusty tales

So when you feel aquarumed in gloom
Come put your ear up to this glass with me
Together we will sing about the sea
Unhinge partitions, set the lobsters free



Unnoticed on a Bus

she still glosses her lips
 that moon girl
 wears long sleeved sweaters
 up to her nostrils
 dark slits for eyes
 moonbeam catching eyes
 vigilant and bright
 layers of halos
 she spins out of limbo
 while dressing

coffee she sips through
 a kaleidoscope
 between her glossed lips

he still uses his prayer book
 lest memory err, that moon man
 praising the Lord he winds and unwinds
 strips of leather, cramped text
 recites solemn syllables thrice daily
 at bus stops, in bomb shelters, again
 and again, and again again
 a comforting ritual, like stirring tea
 waiting for mercy, limp as a rag doll
 to drop from heaven; one spoon,
 two spoons, no moons, all moons

squeezed beside themselves
 in a bus
 moon girl, moon man
 avert eyes into a fashion magazine,
 a pocket sized bible,
 under the sweater
 a full-breasted moon
 slit eyes deciphering
 ink blot hieroglyphics,
 bracketed eclipse, moon meets moon
 on a bus
 between limbo and heaven



Multimedia Underscore One

The orchestra tunes up
cellos scrape, marimbas writhe
oil-drum cauldrons clang out
like a Jamaican fruit stall
fonts wriggle themselves into shape
quickly go on diet to fit neatly
underneath rows of dancing notes

It's experimental music
pitched off-key and zany
yet reminiscent of Vivaldi
flavored with mustard
from an Andy Warhol hot dog
it flashes in the night
lightning before drum roll thunder
while blue neon holograms
shiver over perspiring rhythms
and five inverted versions
of mystery flats and sharps
counterpoint each other in cool intervals

Then comes a sudden hush
a breath held in anticipation
as a single wind chime sounds
again and again, like a bird on a steeple
like cold rainwater trembling from brown eaves
dripping like hot chocolate sauce
on to an ice cream ball of pristine snow
freezing instantly into flaky nuggets of sound
and all melts in the wonder of it... melts,
and hushes back into a silent white world



The Secret of the Rose

Computers work faster
 than brains which design them
 which work faster than poets
 who need to ponder everything,
 taste, sniff, inhale,
 weigh up, choose, write,
 scratch out, rewrite, ponder,
 weigh up, rearrange, squint,
 shake heads, purse lips, frown,
 rewrite and finally, nod and smile

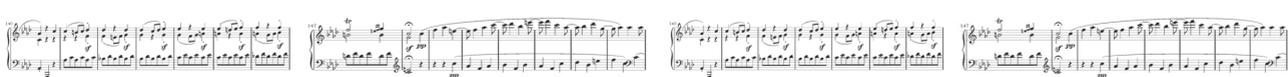
Poets work faster
 than changing seasons,
 faster than buds which open imperceptibly
 drinking in days, weeks and months

Sometimes there are mornings,
 wonderful mornings
 when poets come across
 flowers and fruit
 full of nectar and juice
 that only yesterday were buds
 and rush delighted
 to inscribe them on pages

Then, smiling with satisfaction,
 they feed them to computer brains
 to spell-check, save and print

Yet, brainy or talented
 as they may be
 neither computers nor poets
 can really understand

The secret life of a rose
 the memories of an apple



Cantata for Bus and Cell Phone

Ten a.m., Haifa Bay bus station
 green buses lined up like panting athletes
 at the starting line, dirt, diesel fumes
 and oil slicks greet passengers sipping coffee
 smoking, talking into cell phones
 soldiers lean on railings, rifles
 and submachine guns slung carelessly
 between their legs

Everyone here has cell phones, each with
 its own musical overture, the air is so thick
 with conversation, you could slice it
 with a metronome into scintillating fragments.

'Where are you, you said you would be here at nine?'
'She said to me, I said to her, she said to me, the bitch!'
'Did you give the children to eat? And don't forget your keys again.'

and soldiers' slang repeated everywhere
 in acronymic anagrams of military shorthand
 that only parents of conscripted children
 can attempt to decipher

Here we all commingle, zealots and hobos,
 gum-chewing youths with pierced tongues and nostrils,
 mothers with bottle-fed babies, all rubbing shoulders
 in the rush to go home, back to the base, visit friends
 in hospitals; three dozen and more assorted life stories
 thrown together for two brief hours into a green, caged
 tiger on wheels

The morning paper tells the news that might have been:
 a terrorist was captured on his way to explode his body bomb
 at the central bus station in Tel-Aviv



Prince of the Night

She stole the sun
from its golden orbit
and placed it under her tongue

She stalked the tracks
of the mountain snowman
rubbed stinging ice off blazing peaks
to rouge the pallor of her cheeks

She swam with whales and dolphins,
learned their sonar clicking language
she dressed in bark and moss,
asked questions of rain forests
searched distant skies for a jeweled clue
to light a beacon path to love

But no answer came
and with each passing millennium
she came to understand
that her shining prince was just a legend
a fairy tale in a bottle from another world
bobbing the seas of the universe
lost in the eternal cold of blackest space

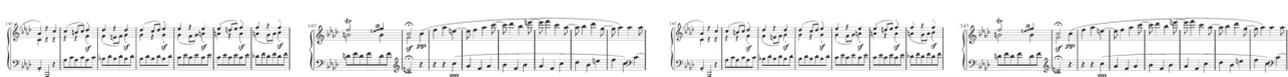
I am alone, she decided after countless eons,
alone forever in the whiteness of an ice splinter,
the roaring silence of a shoreless sea
What am I to do?

Do not despair, sang the sun in her throat
keep searching, echoed the glacier
swim deeper, urged the whale's mind
pass through us, whispered galactic clouds

And so she searches for her prince
through sea and sky and stars
she searches, searches, sifting time
like sand grains seen through glass

And if you too would seek your prince
and you are brave of heart
go out into the desert vast
and raise your eyes towards the sky
a billion burning candles will fill your night
and as this blazing wonder thrills your mind
you will see her riding there
from gleam to gleam with wand outstretched

And when you see a falling star
you and she will find your prince



Intimacy with Strangers

It's best to do this with your eyes closed,
 imagine they are opening into other familiarities
 or look away, look up, look anywhere

Or lose yourself altogether
 wander along paths next to willow banked streams
 watch how the willow fronds touch the water
 kissing my hand like a trout's wet nose

It's best to go to ball games dressed like an Inuit
 keep the cold on the outside of the bear skin
 watch the striker warming up for the home run
 muscles bulging under his red and white insignia
 share a hot dog with an old friend

Come watch a movie with me
 you dressed in your pink dressing gown, I in my blue one
 then you'll go and take a shower
 we'll turn up the electric radiator
 arrange the pillows just so

Smelling of mint toothpaste and Old Spice
 we'll hold hands, imagine old intimacies,
 walk by rivers, watch the willow fronds kiss the water
 go to a ball game, unwrap a hot dog together

Sitting in the back row
 we'll allow our hands to slide into each other,
 eye's open in the dark, barely breathing
 imagining we're strangers for the very first time



Oboe d'Amore

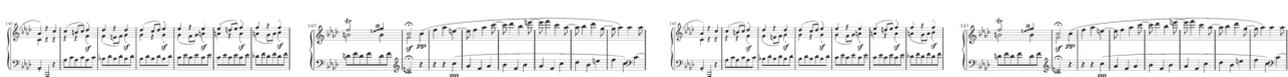
There's a melody plaintive and true
 an oboe air that winds
 between the young woman and Cimarosa
 now that she is undressed and alone
 Touch me! it cries and I stretch out
 but she is not there and I touch another
 standing at the window looking out
 as she hears the melody played on
 the wings of a blackbird
 pecking at a plum

The plum falls to the ground
 the melody flows into the earth
 touches the thoughts of a young man
 boarding a train and she,
 standing on the platform,
 tiptoes to his lips waving goodbye
 as he sees a boy on a piano stool
 holding a ball
 gazing into nowhere

Once again the old photograph of the boy
 trembles in its leather case
 hears the melody
 fingers the piano keys
 as they remember a young girl
 boarding a train on tiptoe
 her dress stretching upwards
 to her thighs

No, says the melody
 I am an oboe, touch me!
 hold me firmly, gently
 press here, and here,
 feel how the melody wanders out
 touch me, touch me

And she stretches upwards
 standing at the window
 looking out as the platform drifts away
 the brown case closes,
 folding the twin reeds of the oboe
 back into maroon baroque velvet
 until all that remains
 is a blackbird
 picking at a plum



Night Dies Over the City

With only two hushed hours
left to the night
shift worker yawns in dim apartment room
watches truck beams paint
flicker strips across the gloom
dresses in the dark so not to waken wife

On bedroom wall diagonal fish
turn to Escher ducks
who gaze towards the sky
as blinking wingtip lights
drift in toward runway's empty boulevard
and above the water on the bridge
today's suicide takes a final puff
deep into the stubble of his joint,
and flicks it over the rail curving
deep to estuary below

Down they sail together
towards the beckoning depths
brief as fireflies caught in fleeting
beauty before demise

A blind man blinks from aircraft window
at the city where, here and there
high rise windows burn forgotten,
while moored at waterside
freighters reflect in oily silence
a whispered adagio
creeping from a muted parked car
where illegal lovers,
extinguished in each other's dreams
hold on to the fading glimmer
of wishes spent

...and somewhere in the heavens
the darkness parts
as a falling meteorite
burns itself to death



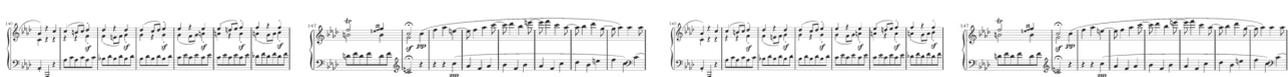
Where Waters Meet

Two separate episodes of life
 swirling downstream to where the waters converge
 pause one more time in some quiet pool
 to survey the rapids and the waterfalls ahead
 before rushing onwards to the sea

Dressed in their oldest and most comfortable clothes
 life-jacketed and sculling away in kayak
 they laugh like children when the fragile craft
 spins out of paddle then rights itself again
 crying to each other in one voice, look at
 that fish jump, did you see that bird,
 its azure feathers, its orange beak

Under the brambles of a raspberry bush
 that has spread its prickly wonder out over
 some tranquil bend, they taste the perfect fruit
 all berry fingered and purple with joy
 and kiss a shared sweet berry kiss, and if you
 pass them by and spy only one of them in this tiny craft
 you'll understand that somehow they have combined

To drift downstream past bends and rapids
 down to wider waters where one day, in some remembered
 rock pool on some undiscovered shore
 they'll separate again and watch the salmon
 beating upstream towards the spawning grounds



To Aid the Words

Let's use everything we find
to say the things we cannot say
in words alone

Let's use brackets to surround us,
hide the thoughts we really think
considering them too callous
then remove them later
reconsider and apologize

Let's use repeated hyphens and periods
to distance us from who we are
or wish to be some day

Let's splatter ourselves over the page
like spilt coffee
then entitle ourselves Rorschach

Let's take the paper, fold it into four,
scissor out parts of it then open it up
to see what we have left
where the light shines through

Let's press aggressively with a red pen
write syllables that never can be erased
let's use box files without labels
to store in bottom drawers,
gather cartons from street corners
to pack away the words for posterity,
pile them in attics to gather dust

Let's use recording devices to listen to ourselves,
sound mixers to record over recordings
over recordings, sing the same songs again
and again in different voices
producing a strange symphony of sound
that someone later will remark
oh, that's modern music

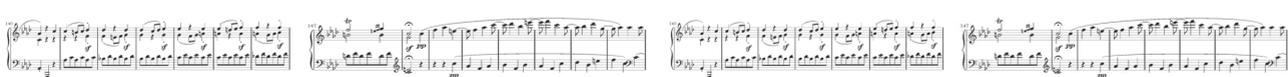


Let's use laundry pegs, clip them on our noses
 speak in adenoidal foreign-sounding accents
 as if we're someone else from some other place
 making ourselves up

Let's use newspapers, carefully cut out the headlines,
 throw them away, clip out learned quotations from
 the literary supplements, throw them away too,
 use photographs instead

Let's collect finger paintings of three year olds
 and gaze and gaze remembering so much we have forgotten,
 once knew so well that we took them for granted

Laughing, playing, falling, crying
 never trying to describe anything at all
 that wouldn't be forgotten the next day



The Sound of Islands

"Islands have a silence you can hear"

Italo Calvino

Sotto voce
From offstage
From somewhere
In a sunken
Prompter's box
Comes
A mouthing
Of silent words
By their absence
Recognized

A gesture in Italian
A bar or two
Hinted a capella
From the score
This is an island
This is a wave

Escaping
From the confines
Of seaweed and of rocks
Come words and notes
That write themselves
They sing an island
Between the palms
Silent, yet stretching
To the birth of sound
The waves, the branches shiver
Like a first violin
Their finger's dot
Enunciating
Soundless fifths
Along the fingerboard

Somewhere between
The waiting stage
Sits Stradivari
Cutting, fretting
Varnishing the wood
Until the voice
That holds the echo
Of a thousand
Unborn virtuosi
Seeks inside
And finds a pain
A hollow, a malaise
The struggle of the silence
To escape
Before the pegs are tightened
into E's and G's and D's and A's

It is the quiet
Before a shimmering of strings
Bursts from inside
No whispered prompts
From, Paganini, Kreisler
No quote from Calvino
Is required
This island has its own voice
No longer sotto
Crashing in the tide



The Day Before

Time's river's running out
 each note as clear as water
 a piano that has twenty fingers
 plays a last duet
 with evening as it drifts in my window
 accompanying the song

Someone there across the waves,
 across the sky is playing
 from the other end of the world
 I can't see his face
 but I think he knows I'm here

Listening to him
 I can feel it in his music
 and when I try
 I can almost smell the rose
 that sits in the vase up on his sill

Can almost hear his children playing
 can almost see his garden
 through the window
 hear his front door slowly open
 see his eyes turn from the notes
 as he smiles her a greeting

Time's river's running out
 and I wonder whether
 if I put my finger in the dike
 will the music remain?



The Streets of Time

Last night you came to me Johann Sebastian
 this is not the first time I have dreamed of you is it
 Do they remember me a little you whispered
 just a little your eyes beseeched
 Oh Johan my dear come to the window
 look out on these towers their spires
 piercing the clouds the transports
 flitting like fireflies between them
 See this wall of buttons press this one
 and again and this one and this
 ah yes that's right now

How could I describe how you lit up
 like a laser torch glowing pulsing listening
 your feet beginning to tap in wonder of
 alien voices and instruments beating out strangely
 familiar notes and rhythms and then your eyes glistening
 with first recognition you dared to mouth the question
 What is that?

Press this button Johann
 that is jazz, that is rock, that is improvisation
 funk heavy metal trance different dances
 Swingle's there too sweet and true
 dream, fusion, integrative blue complexity
 Do you hear emotions, romantic intrusions
 words woven in between the notes to and fro
 the tapestry of modern music
 can you hear them Johann, I see you do
 begin to understand they are all you

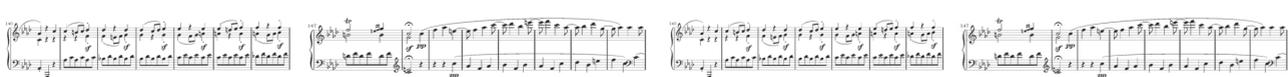
Press here and here
 colorful long tailed birds tadpoles pitcher bearers
 climbing busily then tumbling
 helter-skelter through nimble snakes and ladders
 up and down the rungs of sol and fa
 rhythms notes counterpoint
 all coming clear now yes they are your children
 and there you are striding head and shoulders
 above them all down the streets of time
 open the window Johann and float out
 to meet them in the scents of the night
 you and they and their children and
 great grandchildren will be back
 I know it eternally



The Old Composer

His compositions were a series of serrations
 dim figures, a row of poplars toothcombed
 across the dusky horizon of his fading years
 for as the evening breeze began its chilly chant
 the truth was he could remember little of them
 they were all slipping away now
 into the haze of approaching night

Was that a bird call, a dove, an owl perhaps?
 a phrase from a violin solo, an oboe trill?
 or the wind calling its children through the branches
 but wait, there was a melody, was there not?
 perhaps he would develop it one day...







A Visit to James and Gilda

James Deahl (born 1945) is a Canadian poet and publisher. Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Deahl moved to Canada in 1970. He is a founding member of the Canadian Poetry Association, has taught creative writing at school, college and university and is currently the publisher of Unfinished Monument Press. Deahl lives in Hamilton, Ontario. His wife, the editor and artist Gilda Mekler, passed away in February 2007, suddenly.

we see
where we have been
hear where we are
as poems light the dark...

a dozen graying and some tawny heads
backdropped by hissing espresso chrome,
bonded to the tenor of his song,
ignited by the flashing of his eyes,
beer bottle impudent between his boots,
a line, a sip, a golden stanza
a cry as if the sky would open
right there in Hamilton
pour tears of relief
into our thirsty eyes

two uninvited guests
perched on barstools
drink in his words and gasp
(silent thanks in gratitude)
he reads and sips
songs for thirsty lips

we see what we see
hear the words once more

what kind of man?
so kind, so eloquent, so rough
hewn from Ontario's coarse granite
or from softer grey-green flagstone
we see him now again
beer bottle to moisten dry mouth
kindness on his liquid tongue
introducing poets at the street café
kindness in his eyes, in his voice
what kind of man?
so strong, so gentle



we see what we see
see but do not grasp

a meat packer this poet
a hewer of rock this poet
a stacker of heavy bathtubs
in a dusty warehouse this poet
a father this poet, house crammed
with books, two teenage daughters
sprawling on the couch, this poet
a fine-hewn rough man, so gentle
steps around piled cartons, books
of every hue but mostly poetry

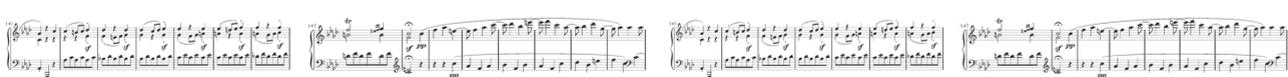
to her he is man, poet, translator
of dreams, lover and all her life
this poet: man to her bed, food to
her lusts, father to her young,
this poet

and she, the artist partner crouched
now over the keyboard recording every
word, his breath in her hair, thrust
of him so rough and gentle, so much
a part of him, a voice, a caress,
willing fingers to type, to print,
to illustrate his life with joy

she was still there when we got the news
still there, slumped over her keyboard
still there as if asleep, carried away
so young by some cerebral mystery of prey
still there, so still there

where now kindness, where eloquence
where thrust and love, where burdens
carried, where shoulder, where pain?

so still, so young, gone in sun and rain
two girls and two hundred book-filled
cartons still remain, we see what we
do not wish to see, hear what we do not
wish to hear, while poems light the dark



Sleepless

After midnight yet the room can't sleep
 Bedclothes rearrange themselves, some fall
 A painting on the wall so monochrome and still
 When it was young begins to feel the pain of shaking limbs
 Wind rising through its trees and from an open balcony
 As if on cue a chilly breeze gusts in with sounds of hills
 The window frame's fingers pause into the latch
 As through a pair of star-blown curtains its eyes look out
 past rushing silhouettes to lamps of nearby cottages
 That flicker through the leaves

The rug bunches, gathered on stone floor
 It knows something is wrong, beyond the half opened door
 A dog's blanket scratches itself, fleas hungry for warm skin

Down a flight of stairs the desk lamp glows
 A glow of many sleepless nights. The manuscripts, piled
 High on shelves and stacked in heaps alongside stairs,
 Somnambulists themselves, consider this and that
 A word, a phrase that might perhaps be expressed a different way

It's going to be a long night, the kitchen clock ticks,
 trembles through the minutes, in the garage your car,
 its rubber treads uneasy, looks through its mirror
 Past the open gate to the street, so empty now
 Where only a faint trace of ambulance exhaust hangs in the air
 Reluctant for a second, then rushes red tail-lamped down the hill



The Couple

They sat
in Kapulsky
the 'in' place
for blind dates
in those days

He an Easter Island
statue
she a woodpecker
enquiring

Ten thousand
inscrutable
cups of coffee
and crossword puzzles
later
she's still trying

Perhaps
what she was
looking for
isn't there
at all

Freudian psychoanalyst
and cultural anthropologist
she thin and black
he huge and smiling
some said
what a perfect
match
others laughed
how do they?

Anyway
they're still there
she brings the bread
he washes the dishes

It's difficult
to understand
how these things
work



Country Rose

When the young woman
sitting on the steps below the porch
starts peeling potatoes
legs parted as a country rose
it's as though a busload of tourists

Held up by the roadwork on the bypass
has taken a detour through this tiny village
the sign, neglected, has been obscured
by leaves of sprawling trees, through which
demure blossoms of some flowering vine
peep colorfully

Tonight is fry night, attended mostly
by locals now, but unlike the big cities
where fish and chips are prepared
cheek-to-cheek with chicken thighs and
frankfurters, this fare is fresh as
ice waters of the North Sea,
the loamy soil in which the tubers grow and
leisurely swell, breathing country air

Deftly she wields the peeler, extracts
unsightly eyes, chops slices into generous
thick strips. Each Friday night is special
for her, she knows most of the regulars
by name; between bubbles of steaming oil
she scoops large portions into paper,
flashes you a smiling question – salt & vinegar,
cod separate or together - and if by chance
while glancing at her nimble hands, your gaze
should brush past her rosy apple breasts,
well that's alright too

This autumn she's off to London on a scholarship
to an academy, she'll dress like the Londoners do,
read her notes on the bus or the underground,
lost in the crowd she'll wrap herself in anonymity
cross her legs, perhaps smile a little less,
but that's alright too



Tugging

Yesterday I saw a leaf walking
it was pulling itself along in shaky tugs
like a driverless carriage
yet quite certain of where it was going

With this thought in mind I bent to take a closer look
and beheld a tiny black ant at the tip of its stalk
like a tugboat leading a freighter into port

And as I watched and tried to calculate
the ratios of size effort and weight
I saw another dragging a long thin stick
as if it was battling with a difficult piece of calculus
yet inching steadily over little obstacles
the way skilled porters do with bags and straps
as they maneuver furniture up stairs and through doors

Last summer on the way back from the Rockies
we camped by a long lake leaping with salmon
all night the freight trains lumbered along its length
from south to north and from behind a clutch of hills
came others up to Calgary and beyond; unable to sleep
I counted the cars and after exhausting double digits
several times, discovered that over a hundred
was common on this line, each convoy rumbling behind
a single locomotive, endless nights of fuel, grain, timber,
electrical equipment, food supplies and fancy goods
enough to fill a thousand warehouses or more

And concerned more than a little
I asked the ants if perhaps they knew
how many twigs
how many car loads
until no more remains



Returning

Of what shall I return

Of owls, two of them I spoke with in a dream
brown and speckled, eating from my hand
across the night

Of manuscripts buried inside flasks
the secret words of history
remembered by a Djinn

Or shall I return of gold, of wanderlust
of leather sails and storms

Shall I return of flying cloud
or grottos still and deep

Shall I return of distant worlds
lit by a dozen distant suns
where shadows never creep

Shall I return of flying fish
of dolphins or of whales

Shall I return of tree climbers
of snouts and paws, of glowing eyes
of stalkers or of prey

Shall I return across the plain
or climbing trees for nuts

Shall I sleep a billion years and return
of cold, alone
infinity flying past all vision

Shall I return at all

‘Twas all a dream these owls who spoke with me,
who nibbled from my mind; what could it mean,
what could it be, mere scratches in the blind
is this all of returning

I’ve only just begun to understand,
to read manuscripts, to fly, to sail the sea

A wish I have to that freed Djinn
Please help me to return of me



Age is Heavy on the Ground

Age is heavy on the ground
 alongside the pansies and begonia
 the fuchsia and snapdragons
 the tulips, the pomegranates
 just beginning to swell
 the pomelo now into its second month
 fragrant; trowel and fork
 watering can sprinkling, she stoops

Age is heavy on the ground
 between the roses and the bougainvillea
 in loose balloon-cloth-yellow shorts
 down to her knees she bends
 pulls at a weed, age is broad and heavy
 her red tee shirt flaps pendulous as the wind

Yesterday's windfalls are on the ground
 she gathers peaches, ripe and rescued
 from ants and birds, soon she will wash
 cut up, make some jam, tonight the grandchildren
 will be coming, there will be chicken
 honeyed, crisp and herbed, potatoes from
 the garden sprinkled with parsley
 grape juice with a splash of club soda
 bread rolls from her own grandmother's recipe

But first there are some poems to be typed
 the ones about the sounds at dawn, the wind,
 the lost kitten she'd rescued, the concerto
 of Saint Saens, her notes on the latest novel
 for the book club

Soon the grandchildren will arrive.
 She sets the table, answers the phone, arranges
 flowers in vases, puts on some nice music,
 showers, dresses, perhaps a drop of perfume
 a stick of incense in the bathroom?
 The papers, the emails, turn down the flame
 under the soup

Age is heavy on the ground
 from flower to fruit
 to candle glow on silverware and china

Age is heavy on the ground
 weightless as a butterfly



Homeless

Crouched under bridges their embers smolder
 Or hunched in doorways from the rain
 On benches their frayed bundles linger
 Plastic placards fates explain
 Some stand at intersections cups in hands
 Curse at intruders *this one's mine*

My granddaughter wrote that on the common
 Their homes are littered amongst the weeds
 Cartons for walls, cracked food containers
 From some midnight bins retrieved
 Bathrooms hidden under brush
 Objects discarded she could not adequately discuss

Yet some strange wind of life's affinity
 Blows me close to these same shores
 On my record, addresses twenty
 And long forgotten many more

These days I live up in the hills
 My children scattered to the winds
 My parents names on foreign graves
 And still I seek a resting place

Somewhere to tuck myself away
 Some corner of a homely field
 Tortoise rings etched on empty shell
 My flesh I shall to vultures yield



Found Memories

Somebody
At the Albert Hotel
Is dying
Quietly

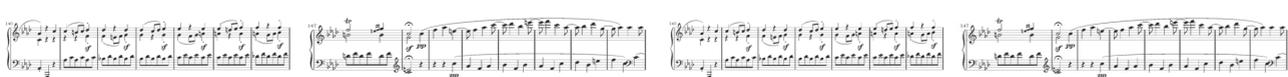
He once was
A bit actor
In a musical
Still can remember
The theme song

His best friend
Had always been poverty
But one Christmas
Years ago
He'd made a killing
Took some people to dinner
At a fine restaurant

He'd never married
Had no time for it
He would say
No kids
No strings
He'd always been
A loner
But there was this girl
He'd forgotten her name
Now that was
Some girl!

Most of the windows
At the Albert Hotel
Are darkened
Except this one
Where the light
Flickers

Somebody
At the Albert Hotel
Is dying
Without regret
With a sweet song
A tender steak
And a fuck



Border Town Street

He was parked by the curb
 half way down the main street
 between the Alaska Inn and
 the House of Peace, both misnomers
 in this turn-of-the-century
 border village which overlooks artillery
 disguised as apple orchards
 and launching pads hidden in a quarry pit

His three-wheeled motorized cart
 was shabby with years but still
 the yellowish carriage looked respectable
 under its green plastic awning
 and to add to his protection from
 the summer sun and from the gusty wind
 he wore a wide-brimmed straw hat
 on which was perched, like owls eyes,
 a pair of sunglasses

The pug which had been sitting
 on the floorboard scowling when they
 first passed me, had now disembarked
 and after peeing on a fence post was
 discussing the weather and other canine
 matters with a waggy Labrador and another
 curly-tailed fellow of local extraction

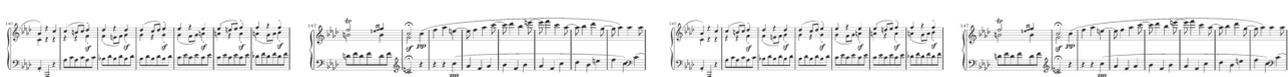
I left my camera in my pocket and smiled
 at him as I walked by. He must have weighed
 two hundred and fifty pounds even without
 his amputated leg which was neatly folded
 into an empty trouser cuff beside his good one

But I could still see that it had been cut off
 high towards the groin and could only guess
 which battle he had survived, which war,
 for since the State was declared and even before,
 this tiny town had witnessed many waves
 of thrust and counterthrust



Eventually the pug got back on board
 and off they trundled up the street, past
 the Farmer's House museum and the ice cream
 parlor and I was left with unanswered questions

Concerning the camera embarrassed in my pants,
 concerning the history concealed in his,
 and concerning the pug who scowled as if he were
 a close relative of the one who runs circles
 round my little black terrier



Mixed Up People

1.

Old people
 With children inside
 With old people inside
 Receding in the background
 Ghost mirror people

Others
 Merging
 Somewhere behind curtains
 Fitting room people
 Trying on each others'
 Clothes and faces
 Before posing
 In the mirror

Stage full of people
 Running around
 Quicksilver droplet people
 Teabag infusion people
 Pureed people
 All blended together
 In cream of people soup



Mixed Up People

2.

Granny's installed a motorized chair
 She's 89, severe angina pectoris
 In the chair she's once again
 A clear blue-eyed giggling little girl
 Faster, faster she laughs even as
 With inner wisdom she relaxes
 That impudent finger on the speed control
 What memories that brings back
 Of tobogganing in winter
 Like a forgotten ghost
 Suddenly popping out of a mirror

In department stores Granny and Sarita
 Swap roles, merging somewhere behind curtains
 Fitting room people, each dress, every pair of
 Designer jeans five sizes too large or small
 In the mirror she pushes sagging cheeks up with her hands
 Listen she thinks, Becky had a facelift, so?

And on the way home, all the crazy characters
 Skinheads, kids on roller-skates, jump boards,
 Swerving in and out of traffic, hanging on
 To buses, land sakes we used to jump on
 Moving trams but now, look at that one
 Skittering around like quicksilver, sure as
 My name's Sarah one of them's gonna
 Land up in a hospital bed all mashed up
 Let's go home Sarita, I've had enough for today



Flying Paste Book Girl

Slim as a stick lady
 flat as a paper doll
 in cut-out, glue-on clothes

She winds the string
 round ankle, straightens
 cord to bubble-red disk

Waiting patient on the ground
 a flip, a skip, a hop, they're off
 tied to each other

With this swinging singing line
 round and round they go, merging
 lifting, zinging in the air

Scattering dry leaves to heaps
 round and round they whirl
 a singing dancing flying creature

Made of cord and sticks
 and paste book colored clothes
 that flicker red then flicker blue

A spellbound sash-tied couple
 rising like a helicopter toy
 at one end a singing Catherine wheel

And on the other
 counting like a skipping rope
 as tens and hundreds mount

My whirling red-cheeked
 record breaking six year old
 skirt flying paste-book girl



Goslings

It was a baby blackbird that dropped
 out of the tree and then another
 warm breasted as dumplings of wool

The cats nearly got them and then I saw
 one had probably broken a leg
 but it didn't complain just looked

Up at me with button black eyes
 and I felt like an old woman
 whose milk has dried up

And who never had a mother of her own
 that she could remember to take care of her
 when I fell off the bike and had to walk home

Trembling as I took them to a neighbor
 who had parakeets and an empty cage
 and brought them birdseed and some water

And said she would phone someone
 who looked after injured birds
 to come and see what she could do

But she never came and the next time
 I met my neighbor hurrying in the street
 she said that they had died and that

Wild creatures could not survive
 in captivity no matter what their condition
 and I wonder whether when I turned my back

What their parents (and the parakeets) had thought
 about that watching them struggle for life and about
 my own three whom I'd walked away from after the divorce

To survive in a world which suddenly
 was changed forever like falling out of a tree.
 One who dusted off his wings and flew away

Another still standing flapping, falling
 flapping and falling vainly for the nest
 and the third, all his life a gosling

Wounded and in pain who seemed to say to me
 please pick me up and other words I can't explain
 I think I'll never ask my neighbor's help again



Dancing With a Ghost

Dancing with a ghost
 is something
 you should not think about
 at evening-fall
 when candlesong is strong
 as lanterns glow
 on the dance floor below

Floating with a ghost
 is something
 you should not brush against
 at night
 when quilts are turned down
 blooms swim in dusk
 water lilies float in musk

Dancing with a ghost
 to an old guitar
 is a memory
 you should not allow yourself
 to play
 his fingers on your strings
 your neck your breast your wings

Soaring with a ghost
 above the stars
 is a fantasy
 you should not tremble to
 his feet like wings
 across the sky
 your skirt a bird about to fly

Dancing with a ghost
 is something
 you do not wish for now
 betrothed to your vows
 your bodice tight
 your hair pinned up
 your heart beat manacled
 your wingtips clipped and sheared
 lest you scratch your skin
 and bleed a thousand tears

Yet despite it all
 when candleglow is strong
 and when a sweet guitar
 picks up an old familiar song
 you dream of dancing with a ghost
 the whole night long



Nights of Honey

What is there in Nature
that allows the light in?
A one-way valve
to trap the way sunrays
glint on a bee
crawling into petals
that fold and close at night

The light held hostage
in a hive filled with
yellow rows of cells
each chamber a treasure house
of poems, music, reflections
of songs that filter into dreams
through doors and windows of wax

And seep through spreading arteries
and nerves down to our finger tips
to emerge on the page
as trails of golden ink
and children's voices
reciting verses
in a classroom filled with sun



The Poetry Teacher

I would say generally, yes
Men and women write
Differently but this isn't
Hard and fast
Good morning class

For example: steel, thoughtful, ropey
or touching eyes and hollows

But further, I in this semester
Have learned each of you
Like a loving parent

How could I tell them?
Greg of gumchew, hair greased
into a tight rhyme
Tony of cocoa, every stanza
Fragrant as an African moon
Carol of betweenies, each time
I read her I understand more
Of her slipped-in associations
Brenda the butterfly, never staying
On one leaf for more than
A closed wing second
Larry of cornerslouch, how he got
In here I don't know but I would
Recognize anywhere his tight jeans
The bulge of his arrogant phrases

And in a moment of weakness
I ask you my children, have you
Learned to recognize me too
The firmness of my copperplate
The stricture of my red pen
The tightness of my tautology
I suppose I'm recognizable too
Stern as a thin lipped stereotype

Yet sometimes you know
At night when I mark your papers
I recognize myself
In all of you



Friend to Friend

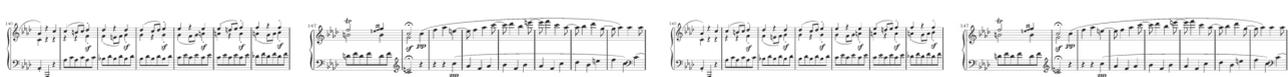
I feel your pain
 what can I give you?
 know your pain
 what can I give you?
 it touches me
 like a memory
 what can I give you?
 my friend

I can't take you in
 there's no room inside
 that can house your pain
 I've been there inside
 deep in that lonely place
 where from life we hide
 what can I give you?
 my friend

I can't hold your hand
 I can't wipe your tears
 you won't understand
 it's your pain I fear
 I can't let you in
 let that old ache return
 what can I give you?
 my friend

Let me tell you this
 my friend
 there are people out there
 my friend
 folks just like you and me
 folks worse than you and me
 folks who can't feel or see
 from rain and cold

Go out and find them there
 my friend
 sit down beside them there
 my friend
 give them your bread to share
 tell them that you've been there
 the answer's somewhere out there
 what can I give you?
 my friend



Fruit Trees in the Mist

Bare mountain, foothills,
stone terraces stretch away
moonlight flickers, slides wan
through cloud banks
dark with bulging rain

On the ground, rows of gray trees
stand naked in the mist
rows without end, east to west
and north, across and up
thin branches, witches fingernails,
point skywards, curl incantations
or prayers, the swirling fog drifts
undecided which from that

Within a few short months
these fingers will conjure buds and leaves
white and pink fairy blossoms
warmed by the sun, fruit will appear;
apples, Starking and Delicious,
blushing nectarines, plums, hairy kiwi vines
a canvas of shaking green, red and gold
to paint these hills of Galilee
in impressionist splendor

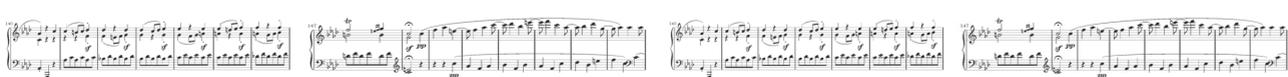
But tonight the witches rule these slopes
raising the wind, curling their fingernails
the anxious moon and darkening sky
cry out to me, run home, run home
to warmth and hearth, run home before
the storm descends, run home

Still I linger yet a moment, gasping,
drinking the scene, my every pore open
to the rain as now it comes, a torrent
from the sky, an angry ocean whipping all
lashing, lashing. One minute longer I stand,
my clothes wet slapping rags, capsizing boats



Part of me, a ghost, a skeleton, who knows,
 escapes the confining garments and stands
 naked as the trees, arms raised, fingers
 stretching upwards, exulting in the storm;
 in answer, a flash of lightning illuminates
 the terraces and thunder roars
 across the stretching rows

I turn and run, a rain phantom, racing home
 to hearth, safety and dry again, to bed
 to dream that once again I am a tree
 dancing with those witches in the rain



Virus in Sol Major

in the darkening city the skeletons stand
tall and eyeless, scarecrows against the rising heat
blind bones, they stare across the reddening plains

as through the egg crate girders drifts the wind
a stench of venom vapor in its wake
the last dweller and rodent buried under dust

and in distant Magellan a small star winks

why do you lay so slain heroic planet,
where are your battalions of green and leaf,
whose hand has slashed your river veins,
what perfidy could scythe you in full bloom?

but as the explanation writhes in final spasm underground
the remnants of a prayer for unity smolder without sound

and in distant Magellan a small star winks
a webbed finger marks an X and carefully blots the page



Ode to an Old Friend

Tell my gray wolf
would you take me in
if I were lost
if I were abandoned
wounded in the forest dark
were I praying for my life
far from the lamps of home
would you take me in?

Tell me gray wolf
would you lick my wounds
I've heard of Romulus and Remus
but they were babes
whose only need was suckling
and I am old and scarred
and fearful of your teeth

Tell me gray wolf
once I had a dog called Ken
we buried him among the trees,
under the rocks, in a wood just like this
tell me gray wolf
will you sniff at me
poke me with your moist snout?

And carry me to a blanket of leaves
out of the dripping rain

Come gray wolf, nuzzle me,
hold me close against your fur
take me gray wolf
and place me next to Ken



Orbs

They saw the orbs
 at the same time
 hugging each other, pointing
 fingers sharpened with instant
 recognition
 there, floating
 over my head
 through whispering ash branches,
 see, the camera witnesses
 (hand on the bible
 so help me)
 a visitor from another world
 look, an Orb!
 I looked,
 all I could see was
 refraction of the light
 on molecules of moisture
 caught by the camera flash
 floating, like a jelly fish
 seen from a glass-bottomed boat
 Look, they said,
 I saw their eyes
 fill with wonder,
 with familiar surprise
 and somewhere inside
 (ridiculous)
 I felt so jealous
 for a moment
 of this bond between them
 then I sighed,
 averted eyes,
 dismissed the feeling.
 Yes, I said,
 the camera never lies



Listening to the Voice Inside

In the heart of things
everything points North

In silence, a voice
saying, this way, do not doubt

Misnamed future, it is a disentanglement
unfastened with a slender clasp

It is a skein constantly unfurled
allowing freedom to escape forward

Do not doubt the forwardness of North
it does not require movement, only acceptance

It does not require understanding
as a compass, as a magnet knows the way

Through birth, through death
lies an arrow pointing North

Do not whirl, be quiet
it's always there in the heart of things

Listening to the voice inside.
Can you hear it?





f

King of Jazz

Smiling he sits alone at the piano
cigarette burning in an ashtray
composing toothpaste blues
honky-tonk sarsaparilla solos
cool clarinet cascades

Evening news snaps on
the tea lady clinks her cups
birds chatter to each other
rustle to their nests
a dog barks in the distance
but he, alone in his house of deafness,
hears nothing but the music of his mind

Caught in the wonder of the mood
he hears her voice again
sees her flying skirts
the seventy-eight girl
spinning between bass man and guitar
both hands holding the mike like a lover
she throws a throaty hello to the crowd

Now he is dancing with her again
crouched over keyboard, his fingers
thrust softly into the sound, the blues drift out
linking him, her and the crowd
in a dusky cloud of notes and cigarette smoke

Then the number ends
the crowd shouts for more
but he only hears the ghost of the seventy-eight girl
standing beside him
smelling of raspberry and wild fruit
spelling the notes into his pencil
onto the sheet, bar by blue bar

The cigarette burns itself out
the melody sits completed on the stand
smiles back at him
the seventy-eight girl wheels him back to bed
tucks him in between the blankets
kisses his dark brow
turns off the light
and King of Jazz
slips smiling into paper dreams



Life Line

Drop after drop
like silver coins
viewed from below
the surface

They blink
their healing mantra
Morse lamp messages
that deciphered
mean
Life

I think of
ships
across stormy seas
passing
in darkness
exchanging greetings
or seeking help

Tonight
is a dinghy
clinging tethered
to the hull
of mother ship
bobbing
on the waves
looking upwards

From hospital bed
I am a deep sea
diver
breathing life
through pipes
drip-messages
saline friends
coursing
through my veins
as between
the drops
reassuring
I see
a silent
silver lantern
moving across
the waves
white lady
with a lamp



Clogherhead Afternoon

The tide was out at Clogherhead
 Down below the scrub and sandflowers
 The flattened epidermis of the shore
 Lay exposed, bared by the scalpel
 Of an invisible moon, children played on it
 Gray trousered and pink frocked
 Kicked balls, clambered around rock pools
 The magnet of the receding tide attracting them
 To jettisoned wreckage of the sea
 As it did us, salt on our fingers
 Seagulls in our hair

Here and there the jellyfish came in
 Perfect disks, their internal structures
 Obscenely visible through translucent skin
 Floating to harbor in the sand
 One unawares, carried a mollusk to its mooring.
 Continuing, the sand flats fled moistly away
 To the place where white wavelets fringed into them
 Like lace on a dancer's bodice

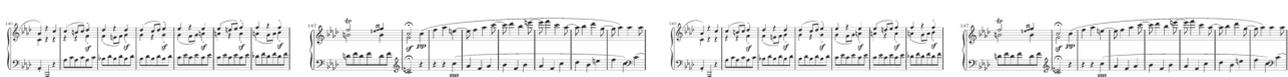
Wetly undressed, the beach revealed its secrets
 Scuttled crab carcasses, balloon-like shells
 Fragile as sucked eggs, castles of sea worm dribbles
 Intestinal homes of dark muddy mystery
 Close by, waving fronds of one-legged crustacean
 Ballerinas upended in the sand, beckoned us
 To pluck them or dig them out to find out
 Why they had buried their heads

Far out along the mossy rock line a crowd of gulls gathered
 White customers at a popular sea food takeaway, they waited
 To be served; behind them, tall and dignified, a cormorant
 Stepped carefully across the backdrop of the waves
 As we approached the gulls flew off in a shower of wings
 Leaving the cormorant, a deserted monarch, to survey
 His emptied court



And what a courtyard it was! Strewn with abandoned treasures
 Spiraled curving shells with rushing music in their ears,
 Glistening pebbles, their histories etched into them
 Like signatures on Chinese paintings, polished by
 Centuries of underwater currents to multicolored perfection

The tide was inching in at Clogherhead
 Lapping to reclaim its sovereignty over the sand
 The cormorant, dethroned, stretched its wings and body
 To fly over the trees as we, clutching our booty,
 Retreated to our car to warm ourselves
 Against the chilling breeze



Anonymous

The art should not contain the artist's name
 for only then we glimpse into his soul
 past layers of skin wrinkling in
 grimace or grin
 past aches, deceptions, affiliations,
 past nationality, past health,
 past politic, past good deeds or bad

Past age, for age deceives
 and in every crinkled shell
 lies a child
 naked to the world
 that cries a first cry
 peeps a first peep
 giggles a first laugh
 dips a hand into the muddy paint
 and smears it on the page
 to be hung in exhibitions
 nameless



Secret Poem

i have a poem
in heart and bone
that pierces the very inside of me

when i move it creaks
like the wind rattling a door

it speaks to me in gusts
and rain, squalls in my mind

flurries and blows as if to
shake the marrow out of me

opens trapdoors inside my cells
stairways to cellars no rain or storm

may reach to disturb the silence
of my soul writing its own song

with a feathered quill in brown
ink on parchment, rolled and sealed

with red wax of my heart



Pizza Lady

I pound into the dough
 flatten it disk-like on the whitened counter
 lift it, flip its limp body between my
 fists and thrusting fingers
 sweep it into a new routine
 your whirling skirt flying higher
 above your burnished thighs, your
 spinning white cotton briefed hips

Now we jitterbug
 laughing back to the fifties
 bebop, rock 'n' roll
 leaning backwards
 holding on by the tips of our fingers
 legs concentrating in a studied sassy routine
 I bend you to my will, you comply
 spinning concentric above my fingers
 a perfect circle, taut and thin

I dust you with fragrant mozzarella
 sprinkle you lovingly with chopped olives
 wild mushroom, green pepper, salami
 decorate you in kaleidoscopic quarters
 pop you in the oven, watch your cheeks
 blush with passion, inhale your lusty odor

Ready now, I slide you swiftly on the platter
 behold your succulent beauty,
 —suddenly I see his eyes upon you
 competing with mine
 writing love letters to you
 through his glasses
 licking his thick lips

Now I hesitate in a sudden flush of ownership
 pause, roller-cutter knife in hand
 let my eyes caress you one more time
 your golden hair, crimson lips, still heaving breast
 then thankfully, a pregnant woman comes in
 with a brood of chattering little ones

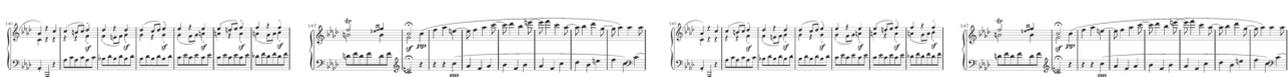
Mr. Thick Lips averts his eyes
 as rapidly I divide you up
 and serve the children first



Night Coffee Day Coffee

East of the morning
 hurrying buttoned up through steaming streets
 the night people toil on
 coffee repeatedly renewed and neglected
 polishing the latest scandal
 they sit in smoky rooms
 counting the gains and the losses
 the wounded and the dead
 shuffling the cards of signs hopes and warnings
 food for the slumbering millions

Their work completed somehow
 as dawn pushes the cobwebs from the sleepy sky
 then alarm clocks beep
 coffee machines clear their throats
 clock radios snap on
 computers start their endless daily conversations
 lovers reluctantly disengage
 open eyes ears toothpaste tubes
 and the bombardment of babble begins again
 good morning coffee world!



Variations on a Blue Theme

Thirteen twists on a blue theme's chest
yo ho ho and a bottle of fun
sing till the rhythm beats fast in your breast
yo ho ho and the dance has begun

Twelve dapper crows on a willow tree branch
cawing caw caw at the river's run
cawing after breakfast, cawing after lunch
cawing after dinner as moon outshines the sun

Moonlight dancing in a blue theme's dream
skipping round the bodies of the sleeping tree's trunks
when the river paints the leaves in eleven shades of green
they scuttle back to heaven in gleaming yellow chunks

Ten years old skinny dipping in the river
legs flashing pinkly at the tiny silver fish
as the sun sinks westward she gives a little shiver
wiggles clothes over shoulders and makes a special wish

Crows caw caw into sleeping themes
hoarsely intruding her pink and blue dreams
nine-o'clock teen slips into her jeans
brushing teeth she ponders what the blue dream means

Secretary gets to the office after eight
fixes up her lipstick at the coffee machine
thanking her blue luck that the old crow is late
she types another memo to the head office team

Seven willow trees line the dancing river's banks
tresses bowing down from lipstick green shoulders
sipping at the rhythm, watching fishes' pranks
admiring bubbly themes floating in-between the boulders

At six o'clock each day Willow brushes her teeth
washes blue dreams from her sleepy morning eyes
slips on sexy panties and a skin tight blue sheath
wishing once again she could go down one more size



In the Blue Theme nightclub at a quarter past five
 a loving pair gaze sleepily into each other's faces
 the pianist plays oldies from the sixties and before
 and jazzes up some classics in between slow embraces

Four blue streams merge and sweep towards the ocean
 gushing river melodies play morning themes to crows
 colors mix and match in melodious commotion
 rainbow dancers swirl in flamenco to's and fro's

Moonlight streams blue on the swaying river shores
 ghosting lunar rhythms through the swaying theme trees
 centuries old melodies return to dream encores
 willow fronds play waltzes in gentle one-two-threes

Thinking about Rachmaninov's Paganini variations
 the poet wets his pencil in the leafy moonlight gleam
 feeling like a florist making dance music creations
 he slips a single rose into a blue theme's dream



The Child in The Red Coat

Maroon velvet curtains drape heavy, imminent, impatient
 last minute mothers bustle fidgeting children to their seats
 unwrap them, settle them in
 as in the swell of silence the first shivery notes ring out
 thrilling into the mist that ruffles down-feathers above the lake
 my six year old smiles rapt, she recognizes the melody
 from the pirouette of a porcelain doll on our mantelpiece

Intruding like a drop of blood on the page
 a new silent tune beckons from the edge of vision
 and following that call I turn and see
 a wheelchair parked in the wings
 and in it, red-coated up to her gaping jaw
 a paraplegic child about my daughter's age
 eyes closed, head slightly backwards
 gaping unseeing at the ceiling, immobile

Captured now, I cannot take my gaze off her
 staring at nothing, like a dropped doll
 and as the plaintive oboes and violins ripple
 on blocked toes across the stage, I, like a shining prince
 wish a kiss to her across the crowded auditorium...
 a healing kiss and then another, whispering
 wake little princess
 smile half an inch from your frozen world,
 half a millimeter
 smile half an eyelash from the depths
 of your red buttoned coat
 but she moves not a whisper
 mouth open blindly from her crimson nest

After intermission she is gone
 wheeled away to some secluded bed
 but in the night I wake
 see her sitting there by the window
 a glass ball in her hand
 I reach out, shake the ball, and see
 tiny colored figures drifting and dancing
 in the liquid inside
 drifting and dancing
 drifting and dancing
 as on the windowpane a single tear condenses
 and trembles down to the sill



Flying Into the Wind

Who understood her?
 I graft snippets of her wanderings on to my page,
 so many faces, all the same, all nothing.
 I touch you and you're gone, she said
 unbuttoning my pajamas, taking me in
 Are you going home tonight? Yes - never mind -
 she wiped the words carefully away
 next moment she was gone again
 she floated away as I kissed the back of her neck
 popped a tiny piece of crystallized ginger into her mouth

It's difficult to swallow. You're gone again
 she said into my eyes, seeing a startled world
 so many pieces of blank floating there.
 You are in pain, I will heal you
 I laughed at the way she mispronounced the words,
 it was her pain

She rubbed almond oil into my warmth
 starting to dissolve
 I had a dream, she whispered with her fingers
 I was on a ship, sailing home to nowhere
 I stowed away
 two sailors were looking for me but I was naked, invisible
 I touched their legs, they did not move.
 then I heard a tune in the wind
 as I rubbed, they disappeared
 but the tune remained
 the ship turned into a gull
 spread its wings and flew to the horizon
 I watched it sink

What do you think? She opened her eyes at me.
 I looked into her irises but she was gone
 flying into the wind

Close my page when you go, I said.
 she did not hear me.
 flying into the wind



A Capella

In a place where words cease to exist
 where days hang listless like doldrums
 I wither in the blistering mirage of summer
 without a syllable to quench my thirst

From forth the desert
 a Mexican town appears
 melting into the sandy foreground
 of a parched heat wave
 where even the slimmest fragments
 of phrases creep under doorways
 pursued by the sun

I step into the silence
 search for inhabitants
 but none are to be seen
 and then, folded into the hush
 a little church offers harbor from the heat
 I go inside,
 its pews creak with dust of time
 and there, bent between its wooden benches
 a woman kneels, clutching a rosary
 softly chanting her prayer
 a capella
 again and again and yet again

Speechless, I kneel too
 and listen

And suddenly as the unaccompanied music
 of her prayer rises to the rafters
 drenching my page with waterfalls of penitence
 a cloud of birds rises from some
 hidden nesting place close by the altar
 and uttering coarse cries
 flutters towards the stained glass windows
 as the empty nave answers her
 in a tumult of beaks and wings
 amen, amen and amen again



The Sandpiper and the Gull

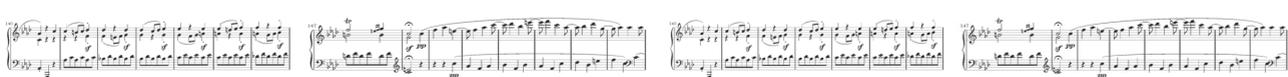
The distance between us now grows stronger
 time's shores come lapping from the deep
 the sand recedes and levels out to keep
 the distance between us ever longer

Your feet glue to the sand with little sucking sounds
 as you walk backwards prints appear and disappear
 as the distance between our hearts now grows clear
 and the voice of the Sandpiper is heard on the ground

Salt is his song in the tears of the spray
 salt are his eyes in the twilight on the shore
 salt are your whispers as you fade away
 and the salt in my blood runs to my core

Home is the rock that hugs the cliff
 home to the wind now rising stiff
 gone are the footprints beneath the gray tide
 as the voice of the Gull cries high and wide

as the distance between us grows longer
 and the distance between us grows stronger...



Cactus Years

Thirteen years later, nobody knows
 why she fell from the window
 of her top floor apartment to her death
 between the oleanders and the rose bushes

We were sitting on opposite sides
 and I was picking a crumb off the tablecloth
 to whiten the pain

Her eyes were clouded
 into blue-gray mist
 you hold my bird in your hands, she said
 it is wounded and can fly no more
 look —and darkness
 came across her face, falling like rain,
 like pain, into mine

It's like a hot coal, I thought,
 passing it back and forth,
 glowing and malignant
 a difficult place, somewhere before
 and the coal was her invention
 but I fanned it into life

The bed was hard
 the soft mattress had turned into thorns
 like a yellow flowered cactus
 as I dodged her barbs
 while between the growing buds
 the fruit split open with the knives of our accusations

She sliced too deep
 exposing the seeds
 the glistening orange interior
 and I fell from the window again and again
 the roses coming closer and closer,
 like a photograph of a dead planet taken from space

Thirteen years later
 I fell into her
 and she was gone.

A cactus dream surrounds her grave



A Gift From China

I received a gift, a box of colored pencils
made in China, their finely
sharpened points all lined up
like eggshell tinted ballerinas
three sultry violets, five different moods of blue
reds, greens and yellows, forty-eight in all
centuries of Chinese tradition captured in a simple
cardboard pack; entranced I hold them, one
by one and rub them gently on the paper

Frozen into a moment of beauty
a Chinese child emerges, faint at first,
then taking form
like a Degas pastel dancer
red painted lips, white frozen leg,
gauze pixel skirt finely etched around her hips

She skates down rainbows laughing
delighted between the red strips
and the purple ones
one foot hissing through sparkling ice
the other pointing behind, stiff and delicate
frozen into a moment of beauty

Perhaps some Beijing worker
dreaming of a rest-day in the park
packed her in there by mistake
an unintended New Year gift



Perfume and Smiles

On the little plastic table
cars and buses trundling by
a row of bottles – testers
perfumes from famous houses
and above them, exquisitely packed
boxed in carton and embossed
the famous names
all imitations
she smiles at us this woman
who looks like a gypsy, sprays us
with smiles and we buy two
for the price of a sandwich

In the department store
the painted ladies wait
all lipsticked and powdered
these are the older sisters
experienced seductresses
their originals on sale, two
for a mere hundred dollars
they smile a painted smile at us
and we decline
such painted smiles!

Before we go to bed
we spray ourselves
a hint of Paris behind the ears
a dab from Rome a little lower down
breathing in the fragrance we relax
go through the motions
eyes closed, up and down,
back and forth
and we smile
some nights a gypsy smile
others a painted one

The Chinese have a scent
for every night



Highveld Minstrel

Snow falls on the highveld
 nature's fugue
 bar by bar
 dusky staves whiten
 a cat hides in a crotchet
 at the fork of a tree
 women call to one another
 —wild Xhosa birds

Paths to the village
 cross soft-pedaled fields
 corn stubble hugs the ground
 crows caw tunelessly
 hop on cold staccato legs

This morning I passed myself
 on the way to school
 a sneakered picannin*
 kicking a stone in double time
 he did not look up
 did not recognize me

How could he know
 his rhythms would cross the world
 ruffle dance steps in Alabama
 play duets in Graceland,
 encores in Carnegie Hall?

How could I know
 how he still longs for a wintry song
 strummed in a highveld overcoat
 plucking a cold drink can guitar
 along a Transvaal path?

**from Spanish *peque niño* (little boy) — in South Africa,
 picannin*



Riding Down Texas

I breathed you in like a tobacco leaf
 absorbed the sunlight of your cowboy rhythms
 you were dark and strong
 like Mexican coffee
 clean and true as a guitar
 strumming El Rancho Grande
 down a white walled street of a
 lazy Spanish afternoon

You were the unshaven epitome
 of the swaggering hero I became
 at Saturday matinees,
 crunching my popcorn
 hunched back in my seat
 I shared dreams with you
 as the burning sun leached out
 my most perfect fantasies
 set fire to them, drifting up
 mingling with campfire smoke
 from a clearing between the trees
 and the ambling rocky crags

Your macho values
 have accompanied me since those days,
 when riding down Texan stone-strewn
 Saturday afternoons,
 our spurs never far from the ground
 our feet apart, hands on hips
 our fingers never far from the triggers
 we strode through the west,
 blood brothers

Together we cantered
 down the dusty paths of childhood
 watchful and taciturn
 we drew our guns
 only in the name of justice

Fights never far from our fists
 heads never far from the clouds



Toccata and Fugue

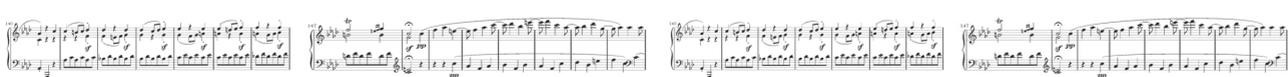
He could feel the serrated knife
of wonder thrill between his ribs
as he climbed the steep polished stairs
of God's bell tower to tug the rope
and let the bell's somber passion peal out

Frequently there were moments
when between exertions he would
watch the pigeons fluttering
from the belfry, skimming and skittering
in the heavens and thus inspired, could
hardly wait to inscribe their contrapuntal
patterns in the dawn light, recite in his
mind the star-bound logic of infinite
variations as the Creator's hands leaped
over each other and crossed back again
in flawless patchwork harmony

To be true, he knew it was heresy
to allow the soaring music of his intellect
to interfere with the perfectly pitched
modulations of time-worn chimes and
traditions; yet as he climbed the stairs,
beheld the wonder of fast-approaching
daylight, this was the muse that overcame him

Generations of pigeons had fluttered
out of the bells for centuries
but now he was sure the time of change
was drawing near, when intellect would
combine the beauty of the bells,
the fluttering of the pigeons
and the intense painful wonder of it all
into one shimmering crystal collage
linked, interweaving and perfect

One last tug and the pealing was over
others would pray, but he needed
to transcribe this music of wonder,
capture the fluttering pigeons on
and between the five lines of the staff



Tinfoil Ambitions

Here they trip in with their giggly microskirts,
 their wobbly platform shoes,
 tapping stuttered improvisations
 waiting in cigarette smoke
 between counterpoint and blue numbers
 to be discovered
 they're young, barely out of school,
 willing to do anything to get an audition
 as they chat up a brief streetwise
 camaraderie with each other,
 eye the bulge of the guitar player,
 dream their tinfoil dreams

They're so stereotyped, he thought
 a row of paper cutout dolls
 strung to each other by their outstretched
 arms and legs and their TV magazine ambitions
 strum them a few bars
 and they switch on
 gyrate and go into their routines

He smiled a smile of countless
 failed clockwork springs
 strummed into an accompaniment
 played on past the pain
 past the inevitable disappointment
 eyed the one in the skin-tight denims again
 tonight she'll accompany his bluest dreams



Twiggy Thinstick

Lopsided as a monocle
I search for Miss Thinstick
I know she's there
hiding in the pussy willows
sticky buds on her twig
she crooks a finger at me
then disappears

But I know she's there
watching me
I look into the sun
close my eyes
see complementary colors
become orange, fade
become blue
-but no Miss lopsided Twiggy

Nimble as thimbles
crows carry twigs to high nests
squirrels do it with acorns
inside branch elbows
sheltered from sun and wind
in a crook in a book in a nook
nimble I search for Twiggy Thinstick

I'll recognize her immediately
by her lopsided grin
her tousled dungarees
her penchant for climbing trees
nimble as a thimble
up the branches
laughing like a dandelion stalk
Miss Twiggy lopsy pops
I'll catch thee yet

I paid a visit to all the bookstores
hoping to find her
wrapped up in a fairytale
sitting in a corner
chewing gum
lost in a story book
and then it was time to close

Perhaps she's here
skipping down the road
in those long stockings
candy striped
a whole bunch of her
giggling girly secrets
he loves me,
he loves me not
you're Miss Twiggy,
no you're not

Sometime I want to cry,
give up
let go, fall from the tree
from the branch
from this lopsided hunger
for twigs
once glimpsed,
never forgotten



The Moth and the Candle

1.

Overwhelmed she stared at the candle
 dripping flickering grease drops
 bats flew overhead into the mirror
 a mole on cheek in glass
 budded gray tufts into parchment
 waning eyes glazed into cracks

With a final gulp she wished into space;
 the rodents sardonified, lacquered tongues
 leered in dust-choked mirth

Fatigue spun into a winding cocoon,
 strand by strand and into the fatigue
 a hard chrysalis of pain jutted
 a scab of glued wings

Moth stasis crept in, winding around
 the wing skin, the darkening eyes
 bulging, no more into day, into night
 now there was no pain, no light,
 naught but the invisible candle flame

Nothing descended on candle blood
 black ice



2.

A pipe stirred in the house of roots
 stirred and stirred again
 two notes played on the lowest register
 windfall fingers plucked
 at the rust, dim and true
 swallowed into the mist
 dim and true, dim and true.
 a wingtip ached, scratched
 and trembled,
 two pipes in the slumbering rust.
 a flake of dust fell on
 soundless fingers
 slowly
 an ancient instruction began to gnaw

On the old strands
 a single A-string sounded to be tuned
 other notes joined in, tightening
 loosening, gnawing at the rusty shell
 all flaking, shivering into an insistent phrase
 breaking through into the light

The candle wax burst!
 Melted, oozed away,
 Discarded into shards
 she trembled,
 stretched her white, white wings
 and flew into a single day of brilliance

The flame beckoned,
 crooked its golden finger
 she flew into it
 and was consumed



The Golden Locket

Flower lady, playing to the winds
she plucks music from a bowl of flowers
harp music, water lily fragranced,
rose water, jasmine, Turkish delight,
pink, white and scented with pollen.

Listen, her strings sigh
notes dropping from her fingertips
splashing into the bowl,
each note a ballad, a flower of youth,
under trees, scents of passion,
fragrances of lost love, broken promises
deep blood red roses of artillery shells
spilling from the sky, staining soil
with fragments of regret.

Look, she sings, plucking a daisy
petal-by-petal, I loved him, I loved him not.
A wind blew over the bowl
causing the leaves to rustle in the trees
dance around her hands
rusting into ochre.

Once there was a young officer,
she plucked him from her heart,
golden buttons dripping from his uniform
golden notes into the bowl
He went to war, fought bravely,
never returned.

See, she said,
he is still here, my first love.

She opened a golden locket, inside was
a tiny music box turning
an old refrain under the moon,
a bed of grass, leaves between trees
and not far away, a small hill,
a row of graves, each grave an album
of memories played less frequently
over the years
through sunlight, through moonlight.



I looked, the water was clear, the roses white,
 the petals white, translucent,
 her hair white, her music reflected
 in the snow.
 disappearing into her own song.

Sometimes in winter, I revisit her,
 frozen by the pond, her fingers white
 to the moon, white as snowflakes and icicles
 silvering from her touch to the frozen
 mirror of the pond.

Once I heard her music
 in the air and beheld a young girl in white
 riding a bicycle, singing up a hill.



Deathbed Burlesque

The rear of the bus was round and blimpy like a colorful inverted U. Its body was shaped like a caterpillar on wheels; each wheel was a chocolate digestive biscuit and inside the bus were rooms, thumbnails of his life, moving compartments where actors and actresses cavorted and swung on trapezes like a vaudeville theatre full of surprises and happenings. Here was Uncle George, there Aunt Ethel, Mr. and Mrs. Fotheringham, his own three children, doctor, dentist and bank manager and over them all, across the squares, the Letters, the Words, headlines made of smoke rings drifting across the cubicles like neon signs squeezed from giant toothpaste tubes.

The inside of the bus had porthole windows brocaded with rainbow snakes spread out like confetti rolls of every hue, they changed color and style of gyration according to the costumes of the participants, at times playful like carousel ballerinas but sometimes sad like slow turning Ferris wheels platformed and rickety with loose floorboard planks turning slowly in crescendos and diminuendos of slow motion. The children in the bucket seats were overfed and bloated, they cried crocodile tears to the accompaniment of a waltz-making concertina.

It was quite funny really, funny but sad, he didn't know whether to laugh or cry as his life wriggled backwards towards an underwater circular glass window shaped like a woman pulling a face, fingers tugging lips apart to make a mouth, a cave, a tunnel of a throat, calm sweet milk-like waters and beyond that wriggling fields of hydroponic crocuses or mushrooms shaped like question marks waving in the tunnel, hello goodbye, hello goodbye as the waters lapped against the shores of an underground sea, warm, comfortable and endless.



The Last Ballet

Two pointed white shoes
face each other diagonally
disembodied, glowing, floating
somewhere above the simple stage
lonely ghosts of fairy tales

Violins sing around them like clouds
flying used to be like this he whispered
her white gloved fingers stroked his arm.
Up there, that little plane,
the clouds and God are all
that exist and the music,
the music

Something discordant slipped in -
a falter, a cough, a missed heart beat,
she looked away from the dancers
at him clutching the wheel, the stick,
staring at the instruments, clouds pointing
downwards, needle on the clock whirling as
helmeted and sweating he jabbed at the red
button again and suddenly with a whoosh was out,
tumbling through space in an awkward
tangled dance and too soon, the ripping trees
slamming rocks, the pain painting the world
to a white bed, a mask and silence

Her fingers tightened on his arm
a white wounded bird fluttered on the stage
fluttered, heaved, then was still
the music soared, drifted and ended



Written in the Wind

Make a wish, says the little girl standing on the hillside
pulling at the stalk and pouf...she blows into the gossamer

Dandelions dance alphabets in the breeze
see-through hieroglyphics, word-spells not yet invented

choreographed by the seasons
the dryness, the bustling in the warming soil

sprouting umbrella patterns becoming discernable
slender stalk frameworks expanding into comprehension

cobweb arms, fingertips pointing, weaving mist
curtains of haze behind which lies a stage

where busy technicians rush in and out making
last-minute changes to the décor and then the lights dim

the corps de ballet take their places
and pouf ...the curtain rises

and parachute spores begin their dance into the air
high they fly painting patterns as she, delighted tries to catch them

runs through the grasses after them, arms raised, hair flying
skirt colors singing round her legs and pouf...she takes off

becomes a butterfly singing between the flying spores
twirling and pirouetting from leaf to grass, to branch, to flower

as the music drifts back to a hush, the dandelion spores
catch one-by-one in bramble, on twigs, on spider webs

caught, one after the other, I watch them drift to the ground
these words, written in margins of the wind shall be my applause



Nature Lover

For Helen

With a curve
of intuitive palette knife
you twist flaxen
on nature's canvas

Your fingers splinter
the light into fragments
hills sleeping softly
then blunt skeleton trees
nimble leafed

Blossoms emerge quick
as butterfly wings, brown
splashes for houses
adobe rectangles hide
unclothed images, dreams

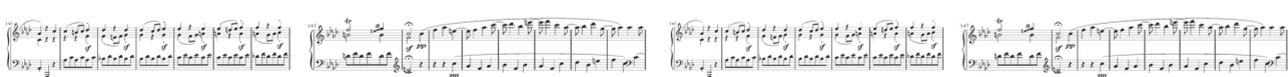
Your fingers flash
their gentle caress
of color, light and shade
I shiver lengthened
in your touch, sunlight

From behind memories
of cloud, the surge
of spring flowers
quicken between rocks

Your fingers fill blush
delicate quick strokes
of squirrel hair
we're almost there
faint hues of ochre

Hang in the air
momentarily frozen
then plunge on

Into the light
birds of paradise
released
I miss you



Unbearable Silence

In a story
emptied of
its inhabitants
the eye longs
(beseeches)
for an echo
of a voice
to inhabit
the stretching
pavements
of silence

In a hushed mall
closed for the night
shuttered fronts
gleam in standby
nothing moves

In a market
hosed down from debris
dark and empty
smelling of disinfectant
the ear strains
for the small change
of fingers
counting oranges
in piasters or rupees

In Mecca
where the faithful
pour their piety
once a year
the pilgrims
come flying
from all four corners
like white confetti
intoning supplications
from a million throats
into one small square.



There, crushed airtight
 no hope to escape
 tens, sometimes hundreds
 of bodies
 darken into silence
 dead on their feet
 held upright
 by the swaying mass

In the final chapter
 when the attraction
 of opposites
 reverses its flow
 and all flies apart
 to the end of words

When the last page is closed
 an empty world
 longs for a sound,
 an orange, or even
 a chanting mob
 anything
 to lighten the silence





sonatina

In Sonatina, masterful Israeli poet, Johnmichael Simon explores the relationship between high art and the natural world. Music in all its forms is adeptly employed as a metaphor for considering what it means to be human.

In one poem the poet yearns for that which is "linked, interweaving and perfect." In another, he longs to capture "the life of the rose/the memory of apples". One is reminded here of the poet's aspiration to enter the inner world of external things. Ever aware of the inherent limitations of artistic achievement and the irony of the creator's predicament, this poet comes as close as coming close allows. The world we hold is all we have, and so we might become enlightened by a simple song, a single voice, a pen to tell us humble human truths.

John B. Lee, Poet Laureate of Brantford

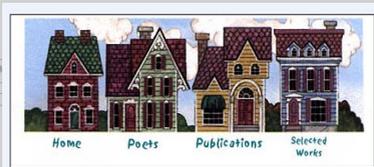
In Johnmichael Simon's 'Sonatina', music is a multicolored skein of threads connecting past and future selves, as memories of childhood delights are interwoven with the humble and wise reflections of an older man making peace with mortality. Lost friends return as benign ghosts to bless the journey; even J.S. Bach himself makes an appearance to marvel at the modern narrator's stereo system. The poet's peaceful continuity with nature and tradition inspires hope that nothing precious is truly lost forever, even after the last notes of our individual voices fade.

Jendi Reiter, editor of Poetry Contest Insider published by www.winningwriters.com. Recipient of numerous poetry awards, author of 'A Talent for Sadness'.

This collection of poetry is presented so intriguingly, with the beauty of a found folio, the themes and the delicate drawings by Helen Bar-Lev, all accenting the score of life. An acceptance of reality is softened by a love for the human symphony, a shiverous tide of truth in gripping poetry that washes over the reader, from the ant to the rose, to the blazing skies, we stretch with Johnmichael in song beats, hearts at times hurt but drawn to connections.

What this book accomplishes for us is the vision of all events meshing in the music of life, the bizarre just another octave, the sweet and miraculous : "the clouds and God are all that exist and the music, the music."

Katherine L. Gordon, author, editor, publisher, literary critic, resident columnist for Ancient Heart Magazine



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