

NEVER LEND  
YOUR UMBRELLA  
TO A SUBMARINE  
AND OTHER  
SLIGHT POEMS

/

ALL THE  
SHORTYPOOS

/

1962-2008

Bill Knott

Copyright 2009 Bill Knott

The poems in this book are fictional. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used ficticiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

\*

When I began writing back in the 1960s, the short poem was popular. That vogue soon ended, but stubbornly or stupidly I continued trying to write them.

All my poems and my short ones in particular are indebted to Robert Bly, who encouraged my early work . . .

Regretfully over the years I failed to live up to the promise that Bly and a few others thought they saw in me back then when I was young,

a failure evidenced by the fact that this book must be printed as a vanity publication.

\*

The order of the poems is random, with a few obvious exceptions.

\*

## EXAMPLE

All my thoughts are the same  
length—they're lines,  
not sentences: you may protest  
that on the page they seem dissimilar  
in their duration,  
but I swear to all you  
unregulated readers-of-prose,  
that in their passage  
through my mind  
each of these took an equal amount of time.

## PROPHECY

When I stepped up onto the TV  
to see what channel I weigh  
the card I got from the slot  
said You're going to travel far away  
don't forget to leave the remote

## LOVELADE

The sea is the cargo of empty ships  
Moon bears the sun when it's gone  
My face with the trace of your lips  
Will fare from now on and on

[UNTITLED]

after the carnival suddenly  
mysteriously burnt down they  
stirred the fortuneteller's ashes  
to try and find the reason why  
but sadly it seems prophecy  
does not work in reversus

SONG

When my shadow falls off of me  
I yell "So long!"  
But when I fall off my shadow  
It cries "Long so!"

It seems obvious  
That one of us  
Is either falling wrong  
Or calling wrong.

IDEAL ESTHETIC

I only keep this voice to give to anything afraid of me

## MY EPITAPH

WANT  
TO EARN  
BIG MONEY  
CARVING  
TOMBSTONES?  
CALL NOW  
FOR DETAILS:  
217 1840

Note:  
unfortunately snow or grass obscures  
most of the phonenumber.

## PRISONER

What raw name scrapes and saws at my breath-hatch . . .  
This voice wanted always only to soothe, not grate.  
And its last noise, that rasp, that deathrale scratch?  
—A file, smuggled in to an empty jail cell, too late.

## GOODBYE

If you are still alive when you read this,  
close your eyes. I am  
under their lids, growing black.

## HOMEWORK

Dear boys and girls,  
please don't forget to  
underline my words  
after you erase them.

## MISANMYOPE

They say that blinking lubricates  
the sight and keeps it safe—  
but did this World-Eye really  
need the lid of my brief life?



## HAIBUN: THE JUGGLER TO HIS AUDIENCE

One must be able to juggle at least 3 things to be a juggler (2 is not enough). But whatever the 3 things are that one juggles—whether it's (for example) father, son and holy ghost; or mother, father, child; or id, ego, superego: whatever this minimal trinity consists of—the juggler must acknowledge that his audience is not external to the act; and the juggler must confess to that audience:

One in my hand,—

one in the air—

and one in you.

## TO A DEAD FRIEND

mourning clothes worn  
inside out  
would be white  
if things were right  
if opposites ruled

if truth prevailed  
then me and you  
would be two  
instead of the one  
we've become

## DEATH

Going to sleep, I cross my hands on my chest.  
They will place my hands like this.  
It will look as though I am flying into myself.

## MESSAGE

I am a messenger sent to find  
the genius in everyone here,  
because it alone is the true  
recipient of what I carry—  
it alone can read the code  
this note was writ in: it alone  
is the genius in everyone  
but me, which is why I alone  
can bear to bring it to you.

## AT THE CROSSROADS

The wind blows a sheet of paper to my feet.

I pick it up.

It is not a petition for my death.

## FRAMEPOEM

First, make a 100 minute movie. Then take the 1 million 440 thousand frames, or stills: take each frame, blow it up, print it, put a frame around it, then take all 1 million 440 thousand pictures, hang them in a gallery, consecutively in a line so that the first frame of the movie is the first picture inside the door and the last, last: you get the idea. Then have the people who come in RUN past the 1 million 440 thousand pictures, so that in this way they become both spectator and projector.

## SHOWER

I tie my handkerchief  
to a kite  
to try and dry  
the cries of  
the clouds up there.

Pour, pour:  
oh, if only  
I hadn't loaned  
my umbrella  
to that submarine!

## MY FAVORITE WORD

"Attentionspan" is my favorite word  
because I can never finish  
reading it all the way through.

## ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

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

## VOWS

The commonplaces of  
the wedding ceremony  
would like to go back and marry  
the proposal's florid words—  
But isn't that love?

## THE FATE

(for Anne-Marie Stretter)

Standing on the youthhold I saw a shooting star  
And knew it predestined encounter with the sole love  
But that comet crashed into the earth so hard  
Tilted its axis a little bit not much just enough  
To make me miss meeting her by about a yard.

## WISE SAYINGS

Sitting under a tree in the forest  
or under a chair in the house  
wise sayings may pass by unheard  
or worse may be misheard  
through all these leaves and legs.

## EN PASSANT

While orbiting  
the earth  
at a height of one millimeter  
I notice  
it tickles.

## PENNY WISE

well alright  
I grant you  
he was a fascist  
ahem antisemitism the  
er war and all  
I'm not defending them  
but at least  
you've got to admit  
at least he  
made the quatrains run on time

Note:

2 puns explain the title and last line: "Penny wise, pound foolish"—  
And: Mussolini's admirers used to say, "Well, he may be a fascist, but  
at least he makes the trains run on time."

[UNTITLED]

The trafficlight on Lovers Leap never changes to red.

[UNTITLED]

scarecrows placed on  
the airport runways  
to frighten the fish  
away ah if only I  
were as admirably tasked

SKIRT

My hem has a snake threaded  
through it to hold it down  
when the wind blows and  
then when the wind is still  
to give it a twist of tremor.

POEM

the door is open  
but the wall  
which the door opens  
continually waits for it  
to enter

## FAITH

People who get down  
on their knees to me  
are the answer to my prayers

## TO X

Somewhere in history  
Somewhere in untold ages  
Somewhere in the sands of time  
Somewhere in the vast seas of eternity  
There is one person  
Only one  
Who could understand me and love me  
And you're it  
So get with it

## [UNTITLED]

Before going to the palmreader I glued  
mirrors to my palms, so the irrevocable  
lines and configurations that told my fate  
were merely reflections of the reader's eyes,  
eyelashes, retinal imperfections which time  
will perhaps deepen to blindness . . . I was  
about to p.s. this poem also. What do you see,  
O Sibyl?



## SYMMETRIES

How mirrored this merging: it's like lover/loved—  
The poem aligns us and aims to make our skins  
Correspond, each of your pores barrel-grooved  
With one of mine, clone-gunned: then void opens  
Onto void, grid-ideal, union, see, it joins!  
First of course the skins have to be removed.

## NO-ACT PLAY

I'm sitting alone in my rented room.

A door knocks at the door.

I don't answer.

It goes away.

Later I leave the room, and go to my crummy job.

The door returns, and knocks again.

It is admitted.

## NAOMI POEM

The beach holds and sifts us through her dreaming fingers  
Summer fragrances green between your legs  
At night, naked auras cool the waves  
Vanished  
O Naomi  
I kiss every body of you, every face

## UP TO THE MINUTE

A jet falls on a cow.  
Part of the animal sticks out and twitches like the  
usual closeups of the hero's jaw.  
Children I admire play in the crushed cow's shadow.  
And even the plane itself has been left atop the skel-  
etonized milk-giver,  
clouding one's dreams of a bloodless coup.

## [UNTITLED]

on the one hand  
but on the other hand  
I rest

## NOTE (NAOMI POEM)

I left a  
right where the nipple cheeps  
kiss in each nest  
of the black bra  
hung inside your bathroom door.

## THANKYOU, TANKA

Was it out of kindness  
I dropped a compass  
into the volcano  
so the lava will know  
which way to flow.

## SANS

To cross-section a pinpoint,  
reveal what quadrant  
still exists. Oh  
keyhole-cleaved,  
data mint. Tin ion,  
meet iron quark.

Grasped at or loved—

It's a cease orifice.

## NAOMI POEM

When our hands are alone,  
they open, like faces.  
There is no shore  
to their opening.

## POEM

The pose heightened in desires, the pose.

The several lovers in their young arms.

## MUTABILITY (Polvo serán, mas polvo enamorado)

Quevedo wrote he would be dust, but dust in love—  
And while I can't believe that millions from now  
A rose and a quartzstone will embrace, I can believe  
Still less that my arms are around you here: or how  
    Your sharp crystals  
    Are tearing my petals.

## SLUM SCENE

poor children sharing  
back and forth their one  
set of Dracula's teeth—  
here even the dead  
live hand to mouth

## NAOMI POEM

What language will be safe  
When we lie awake all night  
Saying palm words, no fingertip words—  
This wound searching us for a voice  
Will become a fountain with rooms to let.

## ANOTHER COLD WAR POEM

So what if you lived only  
One second longer  
Than we  
Did: to us  
You will always be known as the Survivor.

## RETORT TO PASTERNAK'S ZHIVAGO'S JESUS

The centuries like barges have floated  
out of the darkness, to communism: not to be judged,  
but to be unloaded.

Note:

See the last lines of "Garden of Gethsame," which is the last poem of  
'The Poems of Yurii Zhivago,' the verse supplement to Pasternak's  
*Doctor Zhivago*.

(POEM) (CHICAGO) (1967)

If you remember this poem after reading it  
Please go to Lincoln Park the corner of Dickens Street and sit  
On the bench there where M. and I kissed one night for  
a few minutes  
It was wonderful even if you forget

## BANG BANG GLUB GLUB

My ark/my life's-boat  
had two of everything  
necessary for salvation  
with the exception  
of two bullet-holes  
in its bottom hull.

## RECAP

It was that kind of day  
the kind that goes through you  
like a skewer but is okay as long  
as there's someone beside you  
waiting ready to lick the skewer  
when it emerges from you

## UNTITLED

Unscarred unscratched  
Unnicked as the bottom  
Of the lost wishingwell.

## POEM

See the unicorn's empty sword,  
how its lack takes place  
in a lack of place.

Nothingness is its own niche.

## FRAGMENT

Because at least one couple is making love  
Somewhere in the world at all times,  
Because those two are always pressed tightly together,  
Hatred can never slip between them  
To come destroy us.

## PHOLK POEM

The soup is lumpy.

Well then, pour it out.

The soup is lumpy.

Well, pour it out then!

The soup is lumpy, the potato soup.

## ALAS

yes I allow each fool  
to toss around my skull  
but remember I tell  
them remember it will  
finally always land  
in Hamlet's hand



## AT THE MUSEUM THIS WEEK

Poland Through The Centuries a touring  
Exhibition of maps drawn  
By German and Russian cartographers reveals  
There never was a Poland.

## QUICKIE

Poetry  
is  
like  
sex  
on  
quicksand  
ergo  
foreplay  
should  
be  
kept  
at  
a  
minimum

## HISTORY

Hope . . . goosestep.

[UNTITLED]

Photographs—  
lightningbolts which,  
their shadows having caught up with them,  
perish.

## POEM

The dead paperweight rests  
on my lips, occurring to me  
like a cry from the words it  
has crushed: think of what it  
saves from scattering minds  
and windows' wind-drafts,  
think of all the blink-wafts  
of Argus trying to read this.

## POEM

Doesn't each tree throw  
its shade to show  
boundary to the others'  
thirsting thrust?  
Only the roots are brothers;  
the roots are the forest.

## TO COMPLETE

last one in the sentence is a rotten old period

## SEANCE

Around the readiest table  
a manicurist with a hammer  
nails in place our hands together  
to hold the ring of our focus clung  
and keep our communion open:  
like jousling airliners the dead  
must circle before they land  
along the medium's tongue.

[UNTITLED]

Rice thrown from  
an open grave marks  
the height of a ceremony  
somewhere in our lives.

HOLISTIC

Before eating the cherries  
I pinched my cheeks  
to get in tune, in tint—

OLD JOKE FROM THE TED & SYL SHOW

Hectoring her as usual with a bark in  
His bite wit, Ted tutors his young gal Syl:  
God, he scold-quotes, is in the details.  
She grins and wanks his chin with pinkette nails  
And winks that mock-erotic spark in  
Her eye: You're wrong, you bodkin, you big moose,  
You handsome sod: God is in the profile—  
Got one, and you're God; you're Ted Hughes;—  
Don't got one, you're Philip Larkin!

## ANOTHER RESURRECTION

God sucks off tombstones  
until they cum, the soul  
up from its finest gloryhole  
gushers across His tongue—

Only the premature flesh  
(for the last time/eternally)  
is left to detumesce, just  
another BJ, another JC.

## POEM

My cheeks threw themselves as fuel  
into the fire of the kiss and then in  
succession the rest flesh bone all  
features flowed thusward until my  
entire body was gone burned away  
in the flue space that held between  
two mouths turned ash the heart  
or hearth that cannot last the night.

[UNTITLED]

each a prey to self's salt  
though impervious to sea's  
mermaids must never weep  
their tears would rust erode  
their scales     their souls

[UNTITLED]

Fucking; nightcrawlers smashing my anonymous.

JUNK

Nothing evicts our everydayself  
(our (as Heidegger calls it) *they-self*)  
like a glimpse of that tenant within,  
Occupant Corpse.

And to think that all the mail addressed to it  
is elegant throwaways.

## HAIKU

The sweat on my forehead  
shines brighter  
when it's in my eyes.

## STUMPED

I wish I could count  
up to one without  
first cutting off  
nine of my fingers

## CONTRIVANCE

The perfect artist is  
the one who manages to die  
at the hands of the critics.

## PRISONER EXCHANGE

After I replace the bars of the cage with my bones and  
replace the bones of my body with the bars,  
will I have escaped?

[UNTITLED]

A nose surrounded  
by a flaw—  
hark, that's my face

## DIRECTIONS

A kite in the shape  
of a map floats  
over the land it depicts,

but at night no-one sees  
its roads at the end  
of which a child feels

his hand tugged upward,  
disappearing  
in salutations.



## WRONG

I wish to be misunderstood;  
that is,  
to be understood from your perspective.

## [UNTITLED]

Nothing could be born if there didn't  
already exist a metaphor for it, or if  
the whole world wasn't a metaphor for  
the non-existence of this nothing, this  
none-too-future something.

## POEM

The most private part of the clock is the hour,  
no, I mean the minute,  
or wait, the forever.

The most private part of me is the heart,  
no, I mean the nipple,  
or wait, the never.

## OR NOT TO BE

Not Hamlet but his shadow  
shows the clarity of performance—  
see how brilliantly it holds its stance,  
soliliquy bold and brando.

But then of course it is like all  
such primadonnas, liable  
to be much too much dependent upon  
its prompter, the sun.

## [UNTITLED]

Some have a bodied voice  
Their tongue its skeleton  
Mine's a wraith  
Waiting for a wind

## KNOT (Hendecasyllabics)

After you've sewn it, bite the thread off my grave—  
Please leave no loose seam of me to wave above  
The bones unknitting, the flesh unweaving love.

## THE DAILY ROUNDS

I keep a TV monitor on my chest  
so that all who approach me  
can see themselves  
and respond appropriately.

## PUTATIVE POEM FROM SAMURAI ERA

he made a haiku  
before his blade took my head  
why not a tanka  
tanka would have let me live  
fourteen syllables longer

## HUMIDITY'S TONES

Four AM, nothing moving, no hurry,  
dawn still has time to be choosy  
selecting its pinks. But now a breeze  
brushes across me—the way my skin  
is cooled off by the evaporation  
of sweat, this artistry, this system  
someters me: when I am blown from  
the body of life will it be refreshed?  
I dread the color of the answer Yes.

## NIGHT THOUGHT

Compared to one's normal clothes, pajamas  
are just as caricature as the dreams  
they bare: farce-skins, facades, unserious  
soft versions of the *mode diem*, they seem  
to have come from a posthumousness;  
floppy statues of ourselves, slack seams  
of death. Their form mimics the decay  
that will fit us so comfortably someday.

## MY RIVER

The closer it gets to the sea the more  
it aches for its source, the wound  
that sprung it from the ground.

## NOTE

After Cocteau wrote  
in his journal that  
"Beauty limps"  
he did not go out  
and break his leg.

## PARANOID THOUGHT

My roots are twisted entwining lovers,  
Couples passing me on the path, ignoring me,  
Always pretending that I am not their flower.

## PAST FUTURE

Idly wondering  
if the underlined items  
in one's itinerary  
are more likely  
to occur.

Ditto diary.

## TYPE-CAST

Of course I refused all roles until  
they offered me the lead  
in "The Co-Star Killer"

## STRANGLEHOLD

9 planets and  
1 sun make 10  
holes into which  
the fingers go  
so smoothly but  
who is wearing  
these gloves that  
orbit my throat

## OCTNOV

Stickum leaves fluttering down  
Pin unpin each path's compass

The season on our sleeve has shown  
Another course for us

## FEARS (CONT.)

niche niche niche niche  
the birds go seeking a covert

eclipse eclipse eclipse eclipse  
my shadow hides behind the sun

this this this this  
every corner finds a crevice to keep

wish wish wish wish  
the oldest word pacifies the youngest infant

## THE GETAWAY

It's 1969—and I'm

All iam: down  
These libertysplit streets  
U.S.A. I

Throw a measuringtape out, run its length,  
Throw again, run,  
Throw, run.

## TRIP

. . .Jesus walking on the water  
. . .keeps tripping over  
. . .the flying fish

## STORMFORM

All the lines of this poem  
would like to contain  
the sound of the rain  
against my windowpane,  
but I'm going to have it remain  
here.

## FOOTNOTE

All of us who lived on earth  
and all our loves and wars  
may not appear at all  
in the moon's memoirs.

from A BACHELOR'S TANKA

copulation entries in the diary there are none  
I'll never have a daughter or a son  
no woman wants my wrong to go on

[UNTITLED]

so here I am  
if truth be told  
feeble and lame  
either febrile or cold  
senile-years-old



## CHANGE

Why don't the ranks in a marathon  
carry little piggybanks, and listen

to the coins clank around as they run:  
wouldn't that be an encouraging sound?

(Oh surely I can't be the only one  
the sanguine clashing of cash spurs on!)

## WHAT I SAID

Humor is banned in hyena heaven.

## [UNTITLED]

are there some  
invulnerabilities too  
hard to bear perhaps  
the bulletproof vest  
stabs itself in secret

## 'QUOTE UNQUOTE'

Who wrote that we use our children to forget  
the size of our parents, or is that really  
a quote? And if it isn't, and if I forget  
to write it, does that mean that someone will—

But what if someone forgets to write the words  
that bring me here, that let me be born?  
Oh micro-mini-soul, you, my shirking ego,  
your quotemarks would just hang there in the air  
like wings without a bird.

## MAY EAGLES GUARD YOUR GRAVE!

The weird thing is,  
I can't remember if the above  
is a phrase I read or heard somewhere,  
or if I wrote it myself.  
(And, is it a blessing, or a curse?)

## DAYS

Ceilings ring with morning's occasions;  
but evening's toll us to the floor.

[UNTITLED]

I beg myself bare  
I cry my knees  
For a penny please  
A share

[UNTITLED]

in case it forgot  
was the apple not  
reminded to rot  
before being put  
into Eve's hand

POST

the one skull I'll never find  
between my teeth is mine

anyone else's skull I may  
(all the dystopians say)

have to suck the brains  
out of if no food remains

postnuke postplague  
(I'll crack it like an egg)

## AUDIENCE

Murderous the fist  
of their paws condemns  
us all to die of applause:  
in this circus minimus  
even Coriolanus must  
nurse and gnaw and showcase  
his scars when the next  
closeup comes.

## DEAR ADVICE COLUMNIST

I recently killed my father  
And will soon marry my mother;  
My question is:  
Should his side of the family be invited to the wedding?

## [UNTITLED]

only when  
the welcome-mat is  
exactly centered  
at its core  
can a labyrinth  
begin

## ANCIENT MEASURES

As much as someone could plow in one day  
They called an acre;  
As much as a person could die in one instant  
A lifetime—

## TO X

You're like a scissors  
popsicle I don't know to  
whether jump back  
or lick

## MY LIFE BY ME

Every autobiography  
longs to reach out  
of its pages  
and rip the pseudonym  
off its cover.

## HAIR POEM

Hair is heaven's water flowing eerily over us  
Often a woman drifts off down her long hair and is lost

## ALTERNATE FATES

What if right in  
the middle of a battle  
across the battlefield the wind  
blew thousands of  
lottery tickets, what then?

## PERFECTION

Cueballs have invented insomnia in an attempt to forget eyelids

3 A.M.

Time to pare down, pull in, simplify;  
—I'll buy a dark coat, move my lips when I read  
the bestseller lists . . .

## POEM TO POETRY

Poetry,  
you are an electric,  
a magic, field—like the space  
between a sleepwalker's outheld arms!

## MADE FOR EACH OTHER

Today a fashion-model stopped me on the street  
And asked me to marry her because  
She said  
She wanted to eat all the rat-poison in the world for  
her wedding-supper

## THE THIRST

Light through the green leaves  
drinks an absinthe of itself,  
entering the earth  
as forthwith, as fleshed.

Sweat dripping from a sundial  
regulates the time  
for those who wait  
their turn at the spigot.

TWO EPIGRAMS FROM A NOTEBOOK DATED 1984

1. [The ageing epigrammatarian]

Youth's engine  
of thumbs revs  
and purrs—

Oh:  
I am all  
fingers now.

2. [Plus ça change . . . ]

When young  
I was attracted to what they call  
Older women.

Older now  
I am attracted to what they call  
Old women.

BEDDYBYE

Just hope that when you lie down your toes are a firing-squad



## I SHOULD HOPE SO

Next year when this book is  
pulped and the pulp recycled to  
print your Collected Poems, will I  
still be here still writing this?

## SECURITY

If I had a magic carpet  
I'd keep it  
Floating always  
Right in front of me  
Perpendicular, like a door.

## POEM

Flinging your door keys  
into the wishingwell will  
not unlock the secrets  
of what you wish for  
down in your own depths,  
and is not even funny.

## SLEEP

We brush the other, invisible moon.  
Its caves come out and carry us inside.

## POEM

All my soapbubbles dance on daggerpoint.  
I throw dice while jacking off and cum snake-eyes.  
Where there are twins one is wearing a mask.  
My enemies list consists of nothing but autographs.

## [UNTITLED]

that poem I was working on in 1959  
and the half-done one-act play from 1969  
the novel I spent 1979 starting  
the painting I made sketches for throughout 1989  
and the website I planned to debut 1999  
are around here somewhere  
maybe I should  
                    finish them up today

## WHERE

are the arrows that  
bear bandages instead  
of feathers at  
their ends

## OCCUPATION

Error is everywhere,  
but one might hope  
that the graves of surveyors  
would at least be dug  
the correct distance apart.

## POEM!

Shh, you'll wake up the stains on my bedsheets.

## POEM

Night, in whose death did your ennui take refuge?  
The women all lay their kerchiefs on the water, and  
stepped back.

## POEM

The brow is the face's map,  
on which can be read  
the twists and turns it took  
to get here. Yet the seams  
and cracks on one's footsoles  
show that only through detour  
can the road reach itself.

## WHAT ABOUT PENS?

Always remember that day follows day,  
but night precedes night—  
and that your hands are merely microscopes for pencils to  
look through.

LOVE, HATE, LIFE, DEATH, MAMA, WATER, ETC.

If everyone on this planet was forced to write  
one word on a piece of paper, their favorite

word, the resulting anthology might add up to less  
than Shakespeare, who had, or so I've read,

a 40K vocabulary: wouldn't most of us  
just put down the same few words; how many could

resist the usual abstract homilars, our limited  
minds consisting of each other, non sequitir. I would

be ashamed to show that book to my UFO guests,  
no matter how repeated or urgent their requests.

#### MINOR POEM

The only response  
to a child's grave is  
to lie down before it and play dead

## HOLY SHIT

Gosh golly Galway Kinnell's pig is holy and I  
Am holy too and so are you and gee if I could only  
Find the name of the right saint to throw in here they  
Would print this next to his in all their anthology.

Note:

After Kinnell's "Saint Francis and the Sow."

## THE FINAL WORD

Our farewells lack the plausibility of our departures.

## STORM: FARMBOY DREAMING TO REACH THE SEA

I skiffed up rivers  
and creeks of lightning  
till thunder  
split my covers

and down I drowned  
lung by lung  
to a stone  
of salt the cows licked.

## TANKATOWN

This island has  
Been discovered by a great explorer,  
But fortunately,  
News of the discovery  
Has not reached here yet.

## BREAKFAST

You know how I like my dawns god— 'll  
Just tap off this nubei-pink 'n' 'n'  
Call yuh call  
    That a 3 minute dawn?!!

You need a new timer old timer

## POEM

The amputation of  
my stilts has left  
me leveled, eye  
to eye with what  
should have been  
cut off, myself.

## ADULTERER WITH NO MOUTH AMUSES WORLD\*

Not having a mouth is no joke! Imagine an ax  
left by somebody, sinksank into some tree-trunk:  
and each day you go by, the embedded ax seems  
higher, higher, until finally, one day, jumping,  
you're just barely able to brush the fine of the  
grain of the bottom of the ax-handle with your  
fingertips—and yet the tree has not grown. Nor  
have you shrunk. Imagine: imagine trying to  
explain this to someone if you didn't have a mouth.

\* Newspaper misprint

## THE RUINS-READER

I-beams uphold that wall—  
You-beams bolster me: guess  
Which one is going to fall.

[UNTITLED]

I tried but  
they wouldn't let me put  
tombstones on  
the merrygoround  
for a ride



## EVICTIVE

If the body is a house,  
eventually that house  
pushes us  
from its rooms  
out  
onto its ledges.

Age must live on a ledge.

## COURSE

Our ship needs wheels  
to sail across these  
waves of stone if  
Medusa is our  
figurehead.

## [UNTITLED]

Nakedness exists only an instant—  
Quickly becomes flesh, becomes thought:  
The night is a torch of comas . . .

[UNTITLED]

As a detail in a painting  
frames that painting in  
the often memory,  
so, for me, your face is  
surrounded by your eyes. Aura!

INTERRUPTUS

Wait. What are you.  
I'm a poet. I write filler for suicide-notes. Like:  
I love you.  
Alright. Continue.

[UNTITLED]

Once I had to leave you so  
I arranged for earth-tremors at night  
so in your sleep you'd think I was caressing you—

THE AMNESIAC'S NAME

Whatever it is it is  
The only alias  
Anonymous never uses.

## POEM

If the poet could say to everybody,  
“I release you from your duty to me  
so that you might tend more purely  
the grass and the trees  
and all the earth,” then the poet  
could say to eternity,  
“OK, let’s go—we’re free.”

## WEIGHED

Always jumping from one pan  
of the scale to the other, always  
trying to measure  
your absence.

## THE TENTATIVES

If the arrow is merely  
An elongated bullseye

Do I know this head  
(Target that grins and winks)

Like mine surrounded  
By eye speedbreaks

[UNTITLED]

Searching it goes,  
alone at night,  
—my beacon of ashes.

## A STROLL IN THE COUNTRY

Here for ear-rings my lobes  
Are pierced by scythes  
Whose handletips bump along  
The very ground I despise!

[UNTITLED]

trying to find the name  
five letters first letter J  
of an ancient prophet  
or god which I need  
to complete my cross  
word puzzle and  
my cross

## SIC TRANSIT

Tangentially  
                  the sun  
unites itself in us,  
                                  forged  
by our transparency  
                                  into  
another shadow  
                                  to avert  
one's eyes from.

[UNTITLED]

They wandered through the hand in hand.

## ODD

Hard rhymes of childhood ride  
me back to lack's kitchen

in which it's leftovers again:  
from the cyclops cupboard

I plop another half-ate  
Ulysses onto my plate.

## ENLIGHTENMENT OR SENILITY?

The night is paced with stars  
Day spaced by birds' wings  
At last the spread of things  
Has replaced my particulars

[UNTITLED]

Octopus floating  
in earth's ink-ore core  
whose arms extend  
up here as trees  
may your branches squirt  
their black across  
my pages please

## FLAWLESS

Mopbucket toed across a jeweled floor.

To scrub down between these gemstuds is hard,  
and yet I have to cleanse every dust-shard  
that might perturb the great ones who walk here.

Only rubies diamonds pearls and other  
beautifuls can their bare soles encounter.

[UNTITLED]

Check out the Obituaries—each  
day there's another page and  
guess what, those fucks,  
there's nobody on it but us.

## METAPHOR VS. METONYMY

As the hand carries on the function of the  
sleeve to a somewhat absurd degree, so you  
could take over for me if we ever finish  
this sentence, whose period is its cufflink.

## VISION

moon of all means  
sun of all ends

the TV screens  
whatever day

or night sends  
me away

## SUMMER DAYS

a butterfly with a sandwich  
bite out of one wing flies away  
from the inhabitoads of our shadow  
or tries to

## [UNTITLED]

Do they let you still keep your crutches when  
they crucify you, as if you could even manage  
the goshdarn things with your hands out like that.  
Heck, they'd have to nail them up to your armpits.

## LUST

The parachutist wearing stilts so long they reach the ground  
Wants  
To jump anyway.



## SNAGGYPOO SNUGGUMS POEM

Morning always lets down strings, knots  
of light to be untied by our hair—  
but by the soar of night's coiffure,  
all them puppets lie back in their cots.

## FINALS

My classmates  
wrote the answers  
on my skin in  
invisible ink then  
during the Test  
set fire to me

They passed  
I passed away

## PROGRESS

I advance a few whines,  
then am driven back  
twice as many whimpers.

## WINTER SUN

Full-stop, period, dot,  
erased at times by birds.

Or asterisk, whose footnote  
clouds our breath with words.

## THEIRTOWN

a lack of streetsigns shows  
those who live here  
more fortunate than us  
they never need to know  
where they are

## TRY ME ON FOR SIZE

My head is put on and taken off  
by one thought after another,  
though strangely it seems to fit  
none of them. And yet somehow it  
never goes out of style, that hat.

[UNTITLED]

the past and the future  
are my parents  
meeting for the first time  
when I die

[UNTITLED]

now that I die  
my past becomes as endless  
as my future used to be

[UNTITLED]

Eternity gnaws its thirst.  
Its tusked planets rut suns raw.  
Its grapes mist the sea.  
But sleep flows to the fallen.

MAYBE (TO X)

a stopsign stranded  
in a sea of cacti  
won't grow needles  
maybe but then

even I take on some  
characteristics  
of human when  
I'm with you

[UNTITLED]

Silence disguises itself  
as vowels, but the loudness  
of consonants is also a ruse,  
a mask worn to betray  
the words we chose to say  
only for their echoes.

[UNTITLED]

a jet zooming by  
may see climbers on a cliff  
and never know if  
those souls ascend or descend—  
to the fast slow has no end

[UNTITLED]

The shorter the poem the  
longer the words.  
The shorter the poem the  
more endless it must be.

[UNTITLED]

Age retracts me, filling my hands  
with shirtcuffs as I shrink, reduced  
to secondchild. My skin is  
smoke from a paper house, my hair.

Prepare a needle sea for me to walk on.

(Prepare me. Make sure  
my cries are wrapped up in a leaf.)

31 SYLLABLES

even the wisest  
(even the esteemed poets  
who when I was young  
acclaimed me as promising)  
have at times been proven wrong

## PAINING VS. POETRY

Painting is a person placed  
between the light and a  
canvas so that their shadow  
is cast on the canvas and  
then the person signs their  
name on it whereas poetry  
is the shadow writing its  
name upon the person.

## FOOTNOTE TO CAVAFY

Sure hope them barbarians  
Will allow us to pay them  
To take photographs of them  
Before they slaughter us.

## BAD HABIT

At least once a day,  
everyday,  
to ensure that my facial  
compatibility with God's is nil,  
I smile.

[UNTITLED]

mute/hard  
forboden  
words  
line the mountain  
down which we melt—  
stones that wore our  
trickle tongues away

## LESSON

Even if the mountain I climbed  
Proved to be a duncecap really,  
It was only on gaining its peak  
That that knowledge reached me.

## ESCAPE PLAN

I examine  
my skin  
  
searching for  
the pore  
  
with EXIT  
over it

BASH (ten versions of *furuike ya*)

If I were a pond  
and some frog jumped into me  
I wouldn't respond.

I am a pond but  
when a frog gets intimate  
I keep my mouth shut.

I may look like scum  
but some frogs can poke this pond  
to orgasm come.

This pond is so old  
even its frogs want it sold  
to build the new road.

This pond is old as  
me. That's how bad-off it is.  
Frog-visits, I doze.

You're old, pond—the same  
as me. But when your frogs come  
you recall each name.

This pond is year-scored  
as me. But frogs that shake it  
up just make me bored.

I'll float in this pond,  
fearing each frog that jumps down  
will wash me aground.

This pond is old too—  
But when a frog jumps into  
It, it still sounds new.



This pond is dead earth  
But listen to its rebirth  
When frogs take a bath.

FURU YOU, EEKY YA

\*

Ya, the old wash-hole—  
wait-a-fuck—a frog?—oh, no!—  
goes splasho Basho.

\*

Ya, the old North Pole  
where Santa Frog (ho-hop-ho)  
chops a splashin'-hole!

\*

Ya, old-boys brothel—  
watch Oscar Wilde get Basho  
to wet his tadpole.

\*

Ya, here's to Basho!—  
there's one frog-booizin' dude you  
should raise your glass to.

\*

Whoa, Ranger Basho!  
frog-herd's at the water-hole—  
leggo your lasso.

POEMPATH: PERIOD

Each syllable  
a steppingstone  
till you stumble  
on this one.

EVERY RIFT WITH ORE

How fiercely foilsome the facial knife shivs  
its two blades up to where the forehead ends  
as wound-deep-wedged widow's-peaks: how weakly  
the old hero hair-line fights back and fends,  
each pass of day fewer gray strands save me—  
how deadly dull's the duel our sword lives.

[UNTITLED]

Hamlet in the nunnery kneels  
to take his veilful vow  
while Ophelia scales  
with sword and bow  
the enemy's walls

## MY THEORY

The universe's mission is to expand,  
all scientists now agree; yes, but why  
should that be its quest, they question—

Based on my experience, my theory:  
if one remains in the same place, one  
must pay rent, life's made me understand.

Landlords and clerics may disagree  
with me, but look, see every galaxy  
sneak out the back, staircase in hand?

## BATHROOM MIRROR

Every morning the glass  
empties my face  
of its night and then  
as its day is poured in  
I feel forsaken and  
my eyes strain longingly  
down the drain.

## MOVIE-Q's

\*

Ben Lyons was typically blunt  
in *I Cover the Waterfront*—  
his cute co-star Claudette Colbert  
could have frenched it: 'Ze waterfront, I co-vair.'

\*

*Attack of the 50 Foot Woman*  
is not a film appeals to everyone—  
but I, I like the way it feels, I guess,  
to have a whole town look up my dress.

\*

Although by gorgeous Gene Tierney  
he was loved, and loved sincerely,  
Richard Widmark proved pretty shitty.  
The flick? *Night and the City*.

\*

*Those Incredibly Strange Creatures Who  
Stopped Living and Became Mixed-up Zombies* blew  
my mind, man. Like wow! (—Was I crazy? Was I sick?  
Maybe I shouldn't have watched it through that Thai-stick.)

\*

*Basic Instinct 2* avoids the great esthetic error of *I*  
by not having any Moviestars appear but the sheer Sharon:  
its other no-name actors fade to shadows in this Dantean  
vision of the heavenly ("Eat me!") Stone alone up there on the  
screen.

\*

I know Jack Nicholson played a cameo—  
and Elton John played a song or so—  
and Ann-Margaret played his mommy—  
but *who* the hell else was in *Tommy*?

\*

How many of you gazeekoids went yumyum  
Watching that transmuted geek Jeff Goldblum  
Rip off his own ear and eat it? *The Fly* was great!  
(And if he'd unzipped his fly, ripped *that* off, and ate?)

\*

Oh sight that might have made an atheist of God,  
seeing the screenwriter-producer-star of *Panther Squad*  
—auteur divine, Sybil Danning—opt to not go topless!  
(Even John the Baptist 'd put it on his flop-list.)

\*

Where Garbo got the great John Barrymore  
To play the part of her perfect paramour,  
Poor Joan Crawford was stuck with brother Lionel:  
Life is c'est la vie at der *Grand Hotel*.

\*

It's a crime shame that that scene where  
Sean Penn tied his wife Madonna to a chair  
and then put on her dress and licked her thighs  
got like totally cut out of *Shanghai Surprise*.

\*

\*

Note: I don't know if the Movie-Q constitutes a form per se,  
but I made up some rules for it: the complete name of the film  
must appear within a quatrain rhymed AABB. The Movie-Q must  
try to be funny, or piquant, or pointed. Etc., etc., though  
actually I can't think of any more rules.

## POEM FOR NOW

I live bent over now  
like pages folded down  
in books, the ones  
I meant to get back to  
but won't.  
These are my dog-ear years.  
What I write now  
will never  
be read again.

[UNTITLED]

perhaps I still wake up

I still live perhaps

but I hope

I hope I do it for sloppiness sake

## POEM

The thumb is  
the scoop of the hand  
and often  
it empties it.

Tongue  
head  
ditto.

## GYPTIAN

architect of the Sphinx  
must have sketched his first plan  
knelt down with a finger  
to draw lines in the sand—  
isn't that how he began?

## AND SO ON

suicide sex it's so much fun  
you take 3/4ths of a fatal dose  
and then fuck till you pass out  
you cunnil her or fellate him  
while they slit their wrists and  
then you call 911 and so on

## VANT

First, cover yourself with chameleons.

Then walk down the street.

The one who recognizes you as you is your enemy.

The one who recognizes you as Greta Garbo is your lover.

## LOW-ROOT THOUGHT

beyond reign  
of human  
songs remain  
Celan says  
meaning his  
but not mine

## SUMMIT

on this hill at sunset  
I will feel the contrast  
of it going down  
and me up here for  
a moment as total



[UNTITLED]

The snowman's luggage  
is always enroute.

INTHREADABLE

each snowflake's  
a maze  
whose center  
no other flake can find  
the ways  
to enter

[UNTITLED]

mirror smashed in a snowfall—  
the flakes will find each face  
like themselves to be unique  
as long as it remains lost  
in the blizzard of shards

## WAS

Age 20 to 40  
everyday I said  
"I wish I was dead."

40 to 65  
each day I cried  
"I wish I was alive!"

65 to whenever  
daily I'll whisper  
"Wish I was either."

## POEM

Even when the roads are empty,  
even at night, the stopsign  
tells the truth.

## WORSE

All my life I had nothing,  
but worse than that,  
I wouldn't share it.

[UNTITLED]

having found a penny  
atop a weed's aureole  
however it got there  
is it wrong of me to look  
for bucks on roses

[UNTITLED]

someone's lost handkerchief pinned  
on our community bulletinboard  
and I thought to just touch it  
just touch it that's all honest  
I wouldn't have done anything else

[UNTITLED]

clearly  
my eyeglasses  
need cleaning but  
but I wasn't looking  
at anything

## IMPOLITE

in the conference den  
impolite to strain one's neck  
past all the faces talking  
to read what someone left  
scribbled on the wall

## IN VAIN

I like to look at myself in the dull gold  
of the frames that contain erotic paintings  
and, as I gaze, ask, as if I cared,  
"Will moonlit lashes continue  
to surround sunlit eyes?"

## WISH I COULD (*AND DO IT IN 31 SYLLABLES*)

like someone whose quick  
halt in the midst of traffic  
to check his wrist makes  
him late for that appointment—  
that's how to think about death

[UNTITLED]

the sixth sense is  
what the first five use  
to delude us into thinking  
that all we do here is  
see hear touch taste smell

### THE TRINITY

I don't recall the faith I was born with  
I don't know the faith I will die with  
all I can do is hope and pray  
that the faith I live with  
differs from them in every way

### THE COMMUTER'S DREAM

Every morning an afterdinner mint  
dissolves around us. In it, cars touch,  
  
like tiny hands at a football huddle—  
headlights. Rush-hour pushes through mist  
  
or dark its stubborn, pre-peekaboo path;  
a worm fed into a pencil-sharpener.

## TOWERS

1.

Pisa's power to bend the head sideways  
must be envied by history,  
which can only force it forwards—  
and Babel of course is praised  
in every book (on every page)  
for the way it slanticulates our words.

2.

Galileo drops a pound of lead  
and a pound of feathers from the top,  
one of which hits you on the head,  
but which one—  
(which head?)—  
It makes you think, as well as stop.

3.

Every tower around here  
is always in need of repair,  
due to the superstitious habit  
of leaning over  
to peek into its 13th floor  
to make sure it's still not there.

#### 4 TRANSVERSIONS OF GOETHE'S *WANDERERS NACHTLIED II*

Every hill is overcome  
with peace, the trees are a dome  
down which the wind echoes  
to mass one last breath;  
the forest song has rung its close,  
bird by bird, descending—  
await your death  
no longer. Listen: this too is ending.

Over all the hilltops is peace;  
in all the treetops no breeze  
endures, merely the breath of one;  
the birds are gone, or at least  
their song has ceased. You have your wish:  
desist, desist! Thy will on earth be done.

You can feel your breath stilling all the hills,  
and oh, what an undulant illusion!  
The birds have wrapped their wings around their bills  
and sleep: soon you too will be no one.

Now peace envelops  
the hilltops  
and every tree's summit  
seems to submit  
its final breath to the pall  
and harshly over-all  
hushing of even  
the baby birds' calls when  
you, you and your haste, come near—  
Beware: your place is here.

## THE CYCLE

what's the use  
waking all night  
to write down truths  
which dawn quite  
easily refutes

## [UNTITLED]

in the hand's cup  
the palm is  
an irreducible drop  
a shrunken gnosis  
no one can drink up

## MINUS

For time to consist of me,  
it would have to halt.  
And space, if it wanted to exist of me,  
empty.

I forget the other dimensions—

but whatever they are, they  
must cease as I  
to be me.



## THE WOULD BE NONCHALANT

I try to shrug it off, but when my shoulders poke themselves up to form the shrug they get stuck, and I slump down trapped in between these shoulder-peaks; so I live in the valley of a shrug, in its perpetual shadow.

## TROTH

if you drew a string through  
the entwined fingers of lovers  
might it come out all knots  
which would then in theory right  
be too tight to be untied

## BOTHERSOME

what's that clatter-clack a jack  
in the box having a heart attack

open him up crack the seal  
but if we let the poor guy out we'll

just have to close him in again  
and this time with a coffin

so let's save an hour or a minute  
and bury his self with him in it

## FLAKE TAKES

Snow,  
echo  
of lightyears,  
your time it appears  
to reach the ground  
is never now.

Like truth  
the snowflakes peek  
from behind a veil.

Sunset: the snowfall lacks  
(altitude vs. attitude)  
the hauteur  
(condensation vs. condescension)  
of the skyfall.

All this missive whitefold  
is franked by a pattern  
its own; stamped unique:  
'Return to Sender'—?  
No: *Deceased*.

## UNSPEAKABLE

A comma is a period which leaks.

## TWO CRIMES

1

poem/accomplice  
distracting your  
attention for  
a second or  
is it hours  
while I pick  
and pick  
your pocket's  
flowers

2

the holdup went down  
as the clockhands show  
at 1:55 so  
I refused to stick em up  
because I never no  
I never mime  
time

[UNTITLED]

Your nakedness: the sound when I break an apple in half.

## SHUT FLIGHT

the knob's the head  
the hinges open-spread  
would make wings

but see the keyhole  
like an eye that seeks  
its beak

why does  
the doorbird leave its nest  
only when it's closed

## VALUE

the weapons I purchased  
didn't finish off the fascists

the love I sold my own for  
did not put paid to them either

why'd I never think to try  
whatever it was I got free

## NOT THIS WAY

if that bird soars across  
this wall which halts us  
why does it then  
fly back here again

## LEAD

If I could fill these lines  
up with pencils instead  
of letters I would. Less

metaphor meaning or  
superstition might adhere  
to those writing-sticks

than this. Let the tool be  
a substitute for the work;  
the eraser for the point.

## POEM

Here in town the sound  
of bells must compete with  
me for room, but out  
over the waves can zoom  
alone. Across the sea  
bells travel unimpededly.

## SAY TO SAY

Say ten snowflakes light on your fingertips,  
one on each, the ten snowflakes that match  
your ten fingerprints in pattern the most,  
the closest it's possible to get and yet remain  
a similie, since similies like M-and-M's melt  
not in your hand but in your mouth say.

## IN ORDER

the dead you  
wrote about  
in order to  
forget about  
so you could  
write about  
the living are  
still living there  
where you aren't

## NOBLESSE OBLIGE

I always put on a whole-slick tuxedo  
when I jump off tall buildings so

when I'm sprawl in the streetdust  
that passersby can say, "Oh no: and just

when he was at the height of his success;  
look at that tux—now that's the way to dress."

[UNTITLED]

Long candle, ponder, short candle, think.

#### A MEDIUM TO DOUBTERS

How can I make you sit  
Beneath the clairvoyant's  
High-table at seance,  
And, while her tongue transmits  
Some tremulant spirit's  
Long-withheld voice in trance,  
Make you tongue her clit,  
You true communicants?

[UNTITLED]

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

## POEM

I heard the abide.

How low it was.  
How loud it was.

How soon it ended.  
And what it said.

I heard its words  
poured, pouring  
from the sky.

The clouds were frauds.

The froth lost its mind in an ear.

## [UNTITLED]

The moon's a wishingwell you threw  
all your sources at, but you wasted them.  
Everything is coming true,  
but for the last time.  
The moon will soon be tossed into you.

## SENIOR DISCOUNT

Poor King Lear must use both hands to raise a Big Mac to his mouth.



## STRUNG

Song proceeds from a sort  
of inner rectitude, gut  
aligned with throat,  
foot to palate straight  
as sync: the link  
tightens each thought on  
a taut cord word caught  
between this tension, strung  
toe and tongue. Song  
proceeds all wrong  
unless it's wrung.

## THE SAME WITH POEMS

When you set the table you want to  
place the knives and forks and napkins  
so perfectly, so alignedly, that everyone  
will hesitate to pick them up, to break  
the symmetry. The food should rot  
while the diners gaze down dazed.

## DISCRIMINATION

Although not lab-test verified,  
I would guess that the pages of porno  
magazines turn yellow and crumble  
from the sperm shot onto them  
faster than the poems in my books  
turn yellow and crumble from  
the saliva spat at them by readers—  
or is it a fallacy on my part to assume  
that the products of love are always  
more acidic, more corrosive  
than the products of loathing?

## SIMILE FROM THE PAST

When a felon was condemned to die  
they would place a black cloth upon  
the white wig of the judge before  
he pronounced that sentence high—

And that heritage is what this page  
shows, words, words in their fatality,  
solemnly lowered in curt characters,  
whose bald ink declares me guilty.

## SKETCH FOR AN ARTIST

A paper lighthouse with crayon beacons  
that make visible  
a glass clinked against a waterfall  
to test the acoustics for  
a concert where we sit and watch  
a thumbprint  
howl out its whorls—

I can draw things like these anytime  
but I can't write them.

published by the author

this edition: April 17, 2009