



Harvard-Radcliffe
Class of 1969



Poetry for the
50th Reunion



 1969 



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Harvard-Radcliffe
Class of 1969

*Poetry
for the
Fiftieth Reunion*



CAMBRIDGE

Printed for the Class

2019

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THE HARVARD-RADCLIFFE CLASS OF 1969

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Foreword



Harvard-Radcliffe Class of 1969 Fiftieth Reunion Poetry Chapbook

The Class of 1955 published a poetry chapbook for their Sixtieth Reunion in 2015. Renny Little '55 and Bob Blacklow '55, members of their chapbook committee, were quick to offer help and advice when we expressed interest in a similar project for our Fiftieth Reunion. We thank them both for their generosity and friendship.

Diane MacDonald, senior associate director in Harvard's Class Report Office, worked with the Class of 1955 to publish their poetry chapbook. She encouraged us from the start and gave generously of her time and expertise. Diane has been a great friend of our Class and we are deeply grateful to her.

Thanks especially to our classmate Sarah Smith for her able service as editor of this book. She accepted with good humor all those submissions that arrived long after the "deadline."

We celebrate the poets and photographers who contributed to this publication and send it proudly to all classmates as a special Fiftieth Reunion gift.

Benjamin Levy and Eleanor Hobbs
Fiftieth Reunion Co-Chairs

Chapbook Committee

Chairs

Benjamin N. Levy
Sarah W. R. Smith

Rachel Hadas
Craig Lambert
Robert Burns Shaw
Mary Lee Wile

About the Art

Carol Ginades, *Blue Boats*, South American Portfolio, and *Floating Bridge*, Outer Cape Portfolio. <http://carolginades.com>.

For me, photography is a process that I experience as being a cross between poetry and prayer. My photographs honor moments of transcendent appreciation of an ordinary reality that is so blessed by the clarity of light and color that it seems heightened to a dream. My work intentionally hovers at the intriguing intersection of painting and photography.

Diana Mara Henry, *The Paint-In*, Harvard Yard, fall 1968, published December 23, 1968, to accompany my article, "Harvard is a Blank Wall," *Harvard Alumni Bulletin*, volume 71, number 5, page 6.

Lee Smith (cultural photographer), *Thrive*, coastal rain forest in Olympic National Park, and *Anywhere*, vanishing main street in Marfa, Texas.

In my photographs, I use the light and textures to explore the tension and ambiguity that always exists between what you see and what is real while painting a canvas in the mind's eye celebrating culture and people.

Every picture in my collection has a story, a story that most certainly enriches the visual textures of that moment and place in time, but a story that necessarily restrains an uninhibited imagination. This is the paradox of visual art. I want each of these images to speak to you in its own voice, and I invite you to explore and enjoy the intense visual fields just as I did when I took them.

Anne Whiston Spirn, *Threshold*, Mount Rokko Chapel, Kobe, Japan.
1990.

Haiku

Glowing, shadows show
What is there, hidden and real—
Eternal threshold.

“What is there, hidden and real,” from Seamus Heaney, “Feeling into Words,” in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968–1978* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 47.

Poems by
Members of the
Class of 1969

50 Years

Commencement: June 11 and 12, 1969

Vietnam, the draft, sanctuary, “light at the end of the tunnel,” the Pentagon Papers, “Vietnamization”

“That’s one small step for man”

Watergate, Deep Throat, the Saturday night massacre, “I am not a crook,” the White House tapes,

18 ½ minutes, United States v. Nixon, impeachment hearings, resignation, pardon

Roe v. Wade, NPR, PBS, Title IX, the NPT, genetic engineering, “opening” to China

“And that’s the way it is”

Earth Day, EPA, clean air, clean water, climate change, “An Inconvenient Truth,” superstorms

Woodstock, “American Pie,” Dylan, Moonwalk, Macarena,

Hip Hop, Madonna, Springsteen

ERA, “I Am Woman,” Geraldine Ferraro, Sandra Day O’Connor,

Hillary Clinton, #MeToo

Star Wars, All in the Family, Monday Night Football, Les Miz,

Riverdance, Friends, Hamilton

John Lewis, Shirley Chisholm, Jesse Jackson, Barbara Jordan,

Michelle and Barack Obama

Children

Sesame Street, Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood, Disney World,

Harry Potter

Helicopter parents, teacher conferences, soccer moms, empty nest, Modern Family

Pong, Super Mario, Tetris, Grand Theft Auto, Fortnite

Roots, Alex Haley; Cosmos, Carl Sagan; America’s Storyteller Ken Burns

“Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee,” American Indian Movement, Standing Rock

Farm Workers, Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Sí Se Puede, De Colores

Jimmy Carter, human rights, Billy Beer, “MEOW,” CNN, “test-tube” baby, Three Mile Island

The Shah, the Ayatollah, the hostages, Oliver North, the contras
Camp David, Anwar Sadat, Menachem Begin
“Morning in America,” supply side, PATCO, Nuclear Freeze, artificial heart, Challenger
Solidarity, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Reykjavik,
Star Wars

Stonewall, LGBT, Harvey Milk, Pride, Brokeback Mountain, gay marriage

“Read my lips!” Kuwait, Americans with Disabilities Act, a Thousand Points of Light

Communism and the Cold War end—or do they?

NATO expansion, Serbia–Bosnia–Kosovo, Vladimir Putin, Ukraine, Crimea, sanctions on Russia

The Man from Hope, NAFTA, Whitewater, Amazon, Murrah Federal Building, budget surplus

“It depends upon what the meaning of is . . . is.”

MS DOS, PC, www, email, Y2K, Google, Facebook, smartphones, hack, virus, apps, VR, AI, AR

Columbine, Aurora, Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech, Pulse, Las Vegas, Parkland, Santa Fe, etc., etc.,

Lockdown drills, Parkland students “Road to Change”

Hanging chads, Bush–Gore, 5–4, “Leave No Child Behind,” human genome mapped

9/11

Al Qaeda, Taliban, “Axis of Evil,” Patriot Act, “Shock and Awe,” Shiite, Sunni, Abu Ghraib, ISIS

Subprime mortgages, global financial crisis, “too big to fail,” Wall Street bailouts, recession

Red States, Blue States, the United States

“Yes we can!” stimulus, Obamacare, Dodd–Frank, Citizens United, Tea Party, Warren Buffett

New START, Paris climate accord, Iran nuclear agreement, Pivot to Asia

Oprah
Grandchildren
The 99%, Occupy, Black Lives Matter, feel the Bern, ICAN
“Make America Great Again,” fake news, Access Hollywood,
Electoral College, tweets
 “They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.”
 Dreamers, border wall (“And Mexico will pay for it!”), zero
 tolerance, family separation
 America First—G6+1, “Trade wars are good, and easy to
 win,” tax cuts, budget deficits
Women’s March, Elizabeth Warren, Doug Jones, Alexandria Ocasio-
Cortez, “country over party”

Meddling, collusion, Robert Mueller, witch hunt, obstruction,
Russians, Rudy, Stormy, the Fixer

RBG, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, Merrick Garland, Neil Gorsuch,
Justice Kavanaugh?
 Nathan Pusey, Lawrence Summers, Drew Gilpin Faust, Lawrence
 Bacow
Gloria Steinem, John McCain, Meryl Streep, Paul Simon, Ted Kennedy,
Al Sharpton, Steve Jobs

Retirement?
Midterms
“Persist!”
“Imagine”

—*July 15, 2018*
and July 15, 2018 through May 26, 2019—?

After Thanksgiving, Fort Juniper

The night is warm
Deceptively benign
I can heat this little house by boiling water
And drawing a pot of soup
From the bones of a turkey.

A big wind from the south has blown
The encroaching winter back over the plains
And somewhere in the far north
An old Inuit man sees new colors in the sky
Marks time by the length of his shadow
And scans the emptiness
Of a barely frozen sea.

This afternoon's slanted light
Air suddenly soft with the spice of earth and pine
A false spring before the first snow
Hell's blessing comes with such a day

An arrangement worked out
With the local undertaker
That we would blaze across this opal sphere
Burn out In the Dark of Space
And submit to our extinction.

It is the Devil's familiar deal
The thing we always must conceal
Till the witching hour comes round at last.

Power itself does not interest me
Stealing from the past
As well as the future
Impoverished by desire.

The Shaman's vision flickers like the Northern lights
And written words separate out of sense
Fluttering down like bits of paper.

Cluttering the room
Like a schoolyard full of broken toys
We conspire to diminish history
As if to look no further down the road of one's own life
Required a great forgetting
Of what the past had offered:

Forgotten lands receding into the sea
Cities sinking away
Like dreams into darkness.

In the confusion of my younger life
How could I evaluate the road ahead
The women whose beauty would enthrall me
And pull me from the sky

Into the story our bodies told
Of travelling through time
Earth air fire and water
Condensing out of starlight

We go where the planet goes.

Dennerson Is Dead

Dennerson is dead.
I can't say I really knew him.
We talked one afternoon
Outside in the driveway for an hour.
He sat there in his truck
Explaining why it was his right
To tear away a ridge top
And mine its fine grained granite core
For the glossy countertops most favored by the rich.
I leaned politely on a metal rake.

His was the adjacent land,
And down below the loggers' slash
And tangled piles of hardwood brush
Another harvest waited.
Of course, he failed to recognize
How ten ton loads and granite saws would shake the hills
Or how the distant hammering would pound its way
Into the deepest chambers of our minds,
But Dennerson is dead, and the conflict is avoided.

Maybe some of us can simply outlive our rivals,
Stall them off till they get rooted out by their own bad ideas,
But Dennerson has saved us all the trouble.
He just blinked out while no one was looking,
Sat there scanning the paper in that deep leather arm chair
Till suddenly he wasn't.
It was the cat that noticed first.
She jumped onto his lap, then skittered quickly off and shook herself
The way she would if someone tossed her in a pond.

He was old enough, Lord knows.
Why he wanted still to squeeze the last dollar
Out of his small empire of trees and stony ground
I can't say. Maybe it was how he kept himself alive.
So it wasn't crass disregard for neighbors
And a cold indifference to the myriad living things, well, not entirely.
This 86 year old man's race to blast money out of a hillside
Was just the only way he knew to outrun death
And keep on living as he always lived.

Stress the web of anybody's flesh and bone
Long and hard enough
And something's bound to give.
That's the way of the world, Dennerson,
And all the creatures in it.
At some point of dysfunction
The earth itself could darken
Like a disconnected string of lights.
The switch gets thrown
But you didn't see it coming.

Phonemes

I wake to the harsh cheep of the osprey
repeating rifle shots from his high perch
on the spruce—he swoops down to the flat bay.

I walk though the woods and hear Sweet Canada Canada
the white-throated sparrow's warbling song
echoes through fallen trees and mossy bog.

At dusk the loons begin their hooting calls
alone on the salt water of the bay
escaped from their nest by the inland pond.

And just before I fall asleep, full moon
rising, I hear the Barred Owl's hoo hoo hoo hoo
nocturnal hunter's sylvan memory.

Blues Poem

Poems live in a lonely land
Poems hide in crevasses
Emotions too fragile to speak
Too shy to be seen
Poems hide in a lonely land
Written in a silent room
Wrapped in tissue paper
Placed in a drawer
Afraid they'll blow away
Afraid they'll be crushed
Poems live in a silent room
Poems dance in my dreams
Blue dresses swirling
Dark ladies of midnight
Dancing in the dark
Swishing, bending, swaying
Poems dance alone
Poems dance in my dreams
Poems sing their blues song
Call for love, moan for affection
Poems sing the blues
Cry for love, wait for recognition
Poems live in a lonely land
Poems sing the blues

Regina

The second time I met Regina for the first time,
She exuded a warmth and beauty that reached inside me.

We met through friends in June 1968 in a bar in the Bronx.
The beer and the company of our friends was nice.

But Regina's sunshine blinded me to everything else.
I could see only her beauty, smile and sparkling eyes.

I took her home that night and kissed her goodnight on her forehead.
I headed home enraptured and wondering—what had just happened?

I had been looking forward to a summer of many different girls,
But now those thoughts were gone, and only Regina's image remained.

I could only think of entering into her life and being part of it.
Summer had sprung, my hopes came true, and we were one.

We laughed, we played, and, most of all, we talked.
Being with Regina and sharing our lives was a privileged joy.

Senior year of college called me back to Cambridge.
I drove with heavy eyes, only thinking of Regina.

Supposedly, absence makes the heart grow fonder.
Absence was tearing my heart and me apart.

Senior year, law school, and our time apart passed.
Our love survived the absences, and we grew together.

Meeting Regina is 50 years past, and the memories are still beautiful.
But somehow, the present with Regina is even more beautiful.

Time Flies

When experience is familiar,
Time contracts.

When novelty is present,
Time expands.

When every now is new,
Time disappears.

Cameras lie;
Time flies.

Never ours to hold,
Never captured,
Never still.

—1991

I Do

She was all he'd ever wanted
He was all she'd ever need
They were lost in love together
Lost was all they'd ever be

Lies they'd learned from mom and daddy
Myths they'd taken to the bone
Minds and hearts so long surrendered
To the fear they'd end alone

Silence spoke of years of boredom
Whispered tears they'd never shed
Long forgotten, never noticed
Longing given up for dead

Sons and daughters birthed and scolded
Shattered window slamming door
Fits of joy and recognition
Lost to blame and keeping score

Even phone calls every Sunday
Now a ritual of regret
Even Christmas with the grandkids
Touches pain she'd best forget

What got lost among the losing?
Why'd the TV get so loud?
Why so little consolation
From the one that once she vowed

She would love and hold forever
She'd take deep into her heart
He'd vowed too he never leave her
Till his death tore them apart

Secretly she'd wake to watch him
Lost in rest he looked so sweet
When in bed he lay beside her
Seven mornings every week
Now their yelling yearns to echo
Years of mumbling yearns to yell
All the death that long lived with them
Now lies buried and it's hell
Hell created from the heaven
In their youth so briefly known
Now a brutal quiet sentence
She is left to serve alone.

—1994

Too Full a Moment

I woke alone to noises of camper families,
Children's high pitched voices and dogs,
Just loud enough to know they were nearby,
Spread a pancho of unspun wool on the ground
And sat by the side of a cold rushing stream.

The air crisp, clear and biting,
Sunlight danced where the water met the sky,
Wet lightning jagged darting staccato,
Brash, brilliant, blinding.

Face to face
This unremarkable morning
With beauty and energy
I could nowhere contain,
Thoughts went unformed,
Emotions unnamed,
And words unspoken.
In their place
The awesome human hunger
For transcendence,
Snatched free of time,
A sudden razor's edge
Of ecstasy and pain.
Alert, raw, and yearning to burst,
I wept.

—1995

the badminton game

For we should have left that afternoon, but our friends detained us

It was through her that I learned that her mother had died, and
it was through her that I heard that she died
it is through you that i learned that you died it is through you
that i learned that i died, it is through me that you learned that
you had died. It is through me that you learned that i died.
(a grammar lesson)

so we turned summersaults on the grass
we think that by telling the end will be found a cure
god will fix things if we can tell him about them (Sing me a song)
lend me your ear

getting married has somehow become integrated with accepting the
assumption that there is a certain level on which no one wants to
know or can understand about another. Do we all have to
do this, or is there another door?

like larger goldfish in a larger pool beside that shallow one,
over an invisible netting stretched pole to pole we played our
cocky game, all trajectories broken off all awful offal too soon,
a missile that would rather frustrate its momentum and turning
aside
from its very goal than meet you, eyes in yours.

Nevertheless, the badminton game is courteous, no matter which
way and from whom
the cock is sent, it will turn around and present itself to you
for its just smacking reward.

this is remarkable but no more than cute
some manugrabber will have to design a shuttlecock that stays
put if not moved, better than this mechanical twitch which gets us
out of bed each morning.

our solitary shuttlecocks, missiles past our heads build castles in the
air

our game stopped then stopped and stopped

*A video and interview with Diana Mara Henry is at
<https://youtube.com/watch?v=npp5IeAinV8&feature=youtu.be>*

Early Morning Swim at the Jewish Center

“Were our mouths full of song like the sea
and our tongues of exultation like the waves....”
—*Nishmat* from the *Pesukei D’Zimrah*

A dawn swim in the old JCC pool
was like morning prayers for me —
the strokes and laps, my *shuckling*,
the practice a ritual, the ritual a practice,
shallow to deep, deep to deeper still,
kevah to *kavannah*, discipline to intention,
from body to mind, mind to spirit,
spirit to a vision of the day, even of life.
At first I would linger on the edge of the pool
still resurfacing from the dark depths of dreams
which had phosphoresced in the abyss of the night,
until in a do or die moment, like *Nachshon*,
I dropped into the pool, pushed off,
and began cleaving the elemental waters.
Instantly there was the shock of the cold,
a rude awakening to the reality of the day ahead.
Struggling first with the sheer mechanics of the swim,
arms flailing, legs thrashing to gain purchase,
lungs gasping, heart pounding
until a measured rhythm and flow set in.
The mind took over and stretched out,
ideas flowing into the distance of tasks beyond.
Then the silence of immersion engulfed all.
Racing thoughts calmed, opening to a wider world,
surface and depth, without and within.

But the marvel of that pool at daybreak
was to behold the sun rising over the lake.
The J was perched on the brow of a bluff,
a site the Creator could not have chosen better.
As I swam and turned my head to breathe,
to the east I could see, as if in an infinity pool,
the horizon, still a brumous border of water and air.
Ever so slowly the sky brightened,
the heavens turned delicate blue and pink
heating to blazing rose and orange,
then the molten, shimmering sun emerged,
as if fire born of water, actuality from the womb,
bearing the prospects of a new day.
The pool's surface through which I swam
soon mirrored liquid light pouring in,
and the depths over which I passed grew more lucid.
Picking up my pace, a luminous wash flowed around me:
I became one with that encompassing flux,
empowered, ecstatic, whole and holy
in a moving moment of transcendence.
And even at the end of the swim, though spent,
I was at the same time stirred
like the reflections now dancing all about.
To *daven* too can be to douse in enlivening waters,
seeking purchase and progress
against eddies and turbulence
revealed in first light each day.
The difference between such a swim and a prayer
to me may thus be which discipline serves that day
to buoy and move my spirit forward
toward a world dawning to be created anew.

On the Origins of Spin

Mr. Dumpty, the original egg head
Was convinced about all that he said
 The words were his servant
 And every word meant
 Exactly what Humpty intended.

Humpty's meaning was sometimes oblique
 His word use was often unique
 Their meaning was bent
 To Humpty's intent
 He had mastered political speak.

On Verbing

Verbing so stranges our speaking
It outside-the-boxes word seeking
 Whereas nouning a verb
 Creates little disturb
 Vice versing amoks everything.

On the Impact of Modern Technology

Star crossed, but wily Odysseus
Was impeded by winds of King Aeolus
There'd be no epic poem
Had he traveled straight home
Navigating by GPS.

Romeo needn't have died in that way
Cell phones would have altered the play
By texting, no doubt
They'd have worked it all out
Met in Rome by the end of the day.

February 31st

for Bob Dylan, on the occasion of his Nobel for Literature

I speak in tongues of angels.

I channel what the whole world sings.

I live in mortal danger

The rising sun could melt my wings.

My father was a leprechaun,

My mother was a shaman who was cursed.

And I was born outside of Eden

On February 31st.

I'm a populist iconoclast

Itinerant shape-shifting millionaire.

They can shoot a film about me

Without me, even being there.

Though seven stars portrayed me

They played me, without having been rehearsed

'Cause the only day I was available

Was February 31st.

Well, fame can lead to money

But money is what leads to power.

She may be the Whore of Babylon

But she still charges by the hour.

Cause when they turn off the water

The sacramental wine won't quench your thirst.

So make sure your bill is paid up

By February 31st.

I know that you're an artist.

I can see it by the sorrow on your arms.

Am I worth what I will cost you,

Knowing I'll use up your magic charms?

You say you know the zodiac

And in astrology you are well versed.

Babe, you'd better do your horoscope

For February 31st.

They brought me up on charges,
 Said I was concealing evidence.
But I maintain I got the right
 To wander and to not make any sense.
And as best I can remember,
 There *are* a lot of clues I've interspersed.
I'll sit down and explain it all
 On February 31st.

I'm now in the 7th chorus.
 You may be getting restless. I don't care.
My job is not to entertain.
 My job is to be edgy and to dare.
The verb "to dare,"
 Archaic 2nd person past tense: "thou durst."
And this song will last till I run out of rhymes
 For February 31st.

I was minding my own business.
 The phone rings, it's Stockholm on the line.
Well, I knew they were into poetry,
 Turns out the kind of shit they like is mine.
They asked me to their ceremony.
 I said, "Where?" and they said, "Way up North."
So I showed up at their ceremony . . .
 On January 94th.

—2017

Jay Epstein

Night Song

Jazz of bright sunlight
Yields to night as spring frogs peep
Hearts sing and minds rest

—*June 6, 2015*

Martha Stark

Stark Reality

Stress causes all sorts of things bad
Including making you so sad
'Cause when it's chronic
Your mind it gets sick
Please don't think I'm stark raving mad!

Morning at the Lake

Despite the coffee, I feel no rush.
blueberry picking can wait—
mist on the lake . . . birdsong . . . loon call . . . hummingbird wing
buzz—is anything more peaceful than this?
My kayak sits at the dock—patient.
The plastic swan guards the waterfront—her marigold filled back
reaching to the sun—purple loosestrife—must uproot. weeds—
must pull—
as soon as the hummingbird has had her fill.

Teaching Poetry

Today we teach the poem: trace the way
images flicker and cohere and cluster,
remark how rhymes give point to what lines say,
how words themselves take on a tender luster
when they are chosen with uncommon sense
by someone whose five senses are aligned
keenly to catch Creation's radiance
and draw it dazzling through a reader's mind.

We sift through style in a search for meaning.
For all we find, some final clue lies hid.
Rooting deep in us, though, to grow up greening,
the poet's words restyle our lives amid
renewed awareness of what's obvious:
We do not teach the poem. It teaches us.

Two Poems by Rachel Hadas

“The Red Hat” was written in 1994 and published in 1995. It soon turned out to be one of my most anthologized and AP English-assigned poems; people understand the tug of separation from a child, whether that child is ten years old or twenty-five. And my instinctive use of metonymy proved contagious. I recall a letter saying “My red hat is seventeen; how old is yours?”

My red hat, Jonathan, born in 1984, was about ten when he started walking to school alone. But when asked, I always liked to leave his age vague. Poems should be able to float free of the facts that occasioned them. The red hat in this poem will always be a child.

“The Poultrice” was written in the cold spring of 2015. The details in the poem—a bruise on my forehead; my son’s recommendation of a poultice; cyber attacks; drowning refugees; a visit to Hamilton Grange (and this before the musical made Hamilton a household word)—are all factual, but the poem uses a jump-cut technique, perhaps absorbed from my husband, Shalom Gorewitz, a video artist, to juxtapose them. And the composite picture is darker, more open to the alarming world at large, than used to be the case in my work. Pushing back against this gloomy texture are the theme of love and also the poem’s almost childish use of jingling couplets.

The Red Hat

It started before Christmas. Now our son
officially walks to school alone.
Semi-alone, it's accurate to say:
I or his father track him on the way.
He walks up on the east side of West End,
we walk on the west side. Glances can extend
(and do) across the street; not eye contact.
Already ties are feelings and not fact.
Straus Park is where these parallel paths part;
he goes alone from there. The watcher's heart
stretches, elastic in its love and fear,
toward him as we see him disappear,
striding briskly. Where two weeks ago,
holding a hand, he'd dawdle, dreamy, slow,
he now is hustled forward by the pull
of something far more powerful than school.

The mornings we turn back to are no more
than forty minutes longer than before,
but they feel vastly different—flimsy, strange,
wavering in the eddies of this change,
empty, unanchored, perilously light
since the red hat vanished from our sight.

A Poultice

Turmeric, rosemary: blend with run.
Winter is fading, spring will come,

snow will melt, and leaves set in.
Rosemary, turmeric: shake in gin.

Turmeric, bourbon, rosemary:
a blue-green bruise leaks toward my eye

(a week ago I bumped my head).
I swab and bathe it. The bruise will fade

faster with this concoction
recommended by my son.

Soak a cloth and wipe the place.
Weapons are poised to fight in space.

Refugees packed in lifeboats drown.
Cyber attacks: the system's down,

an outage no one can repair.
The turmeric has stained my hair.

The pillow smells of alcohol.
Wind and rain and petals fall.

Sunday excursions: Hamilton Grange,
the empty streets subdued and strange,

the widowed house perched in its park.
White petals gleam in the gathering dark.

April this year is cool and slow.
The stain seeps toward my left eyebrow.

Care for the hurt place: soak, swab, wrap.
And then, before I take a nap,

dab the spot with oil of myrrh.
The poultice: patience and desire.

Turmeric, rosemary, and rum:
my love and I are rocked in time.

The motion lulls us, we forget
the bruise, the wound, the doom, the threat.

Skin Colors

I don't write poetry, but characters in my novels do. This one's connected with a work-in-progress called *Icaru*, set in a fantasticated Brazil. I was reading Ian Macdonald's *Brasyl*, wonderful book. In the bibliography he describes an attempt by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics to define all possible Brazilian skin colors. Someone had to write a poem.

The Icaran Institute of Geography and Statistics
which collects data for that vast romantic fairyland
once grew concerned that they were tracking only five skin colors
black brown white yellow red
and asked Icarans to describe their skin color
their very own skin color
in their own words.

This in a land of poets.

"Flamengo!" which is the name of a soccer team.

"Rainbow colored. But my balls only."

"I have crimson feathers. And I can fly."

Out of these somewhat freeform answers, IIGS
developed a list of 134 different skin colors
and here are some of them.

Azul. Blue.

Azul-marinho. Dark blue.

Turva. Opaque.

Negra. Dark-skinned.

Negrota. Dark-skinned. And fat.

Branca, white. *Saraúba*, like a pale meringue.

Branca-pálida, sickly white.

Branca-suja, dirty white.

Branca-morena, darkish white.

Branca-sardenta, white with brown spots.

Encerada, the color of a wax candle in church.
Burro-quando-foge, the color of a burro. Running away.
Paraíba, the color of marupa wood.
Cardão, colored like a thistle.
Cor-de-café, with a tint of coffee.
Cor-de-canela, with a tint of cinnamon.
Cor-de-cuia, prostitute-colored.
Cor-firma, it's obvious what color I am.
Parda, what color do I look like?
Verde. Green.
Laranja. Orange.
Roxa. Purple.
Regular.
Number 5 on the list is *aliviero*
“The color of a shadow in the water”
They don't say which water
The Rio Negro, black as fertile soil
The Rio Branco, silty and *turvo*
The color of the shadow under reefs, blue, shifting, the color of Yemanjá
The color of the shadow of palm trees over the pool of a rich man's house
The color of the shadow of a rent boy pissing in a river
Of the shadowed dripping trees in the mata
Of clay sucked for moisture in the sertão.
The penis shadow of Marca Zero shadow-shattered in the waves
Aliviero
The color of resistance to colors
The multicolor of the country
Where every color speaks in poetry.

Resurrection

Elizabeth was buried on the hill that overlooks
The bend that launches the Long Reach of the
Ohio River. Folks are buried there as if they are
Just gazing downriver, the grey ribbon of water,
 Low steep hills, the verdant trees that turn
 So bleak and haunted in the wintertime.

 She died while pregnant at sixteen.
The doctors said they might rescue the mom
But not the babe. My grandmother refused the
Operation, said they both should live. Both died.

 In years to come grandma would disappear
Then found prostrated on her daughter's grave.
 Upon her own death, she insisted burial
Such that she looked uphill, so her first sight
 The moment that the Resurrection came
 Would be Elizabeth's face.

That's mostly over for us now, but it had a good
Long run, belief in resurrection. As I go through
My days, I wonder whether grandmother knew
 Something that I don't.

World Trade Center

The ghosts of Wounded Knee
welcome you.
They are quiet and gentle.
No one has young eyes.

Their clothes are neatly patched,
their moccasins carefully repaired.
It happens to be their rotation as guides
in the museum of atrocity.

Last week it was Dresden's turn,
the week before, My Lai.
The week before, Tiananmen Square,
the week before, Nagasaki,
the week before, Guernica.

Next Tuesday, a small ceremony
will mark the opening of
the World Trade Center.

The ghosts of Wounded Knee
welcome you.

Two Seagulls

Two seagulls call sleepily,
down by the pier.

Though dark, the beginning of dawn
must be near.

The duvet is warm
I wish you were here.

The Best Education

I.

I was at Harvard.
Taking Chemistry 20.
Down the corridor,
a professor worked
to make napalm stickier.

The Vietnamese had learned
to scrape it off
their pyjamas.

DOW chemical wanted
an improved product.

The professor worked,
diligently,
to preserve the torch
of liberty,
and finally got it right,
so it would burn
to the bone.

II.

The telephone rang.
It was my mother.
Breaking.
A body bag, was coming home.

Touching the Light

While amongst friends in the Crater of Haleakala,
The weariness of doom snatched me from life
And flew my soul breathless into an infinite space
Of intense light and peace beyond measure
And the presence of something so grand
I cannot ever try to give it a name

So unexpected a turn of events—
Blood clotting and clogging my lungs and
An unanticipated wind storm at the summit
All robbing my air, stealing it out of my mouth
Yet I was brought back to gasp like a baby's first breaths
Breathing life again, inspiring and struggling

“I am a part of all that I have met”
And a larger part I have yet to meet awaits me
And so I regretted my return, forced and unwanted
Yet the light I touched remains with me
A gift and legacy from the house of the sun
Which now fills and warms my days with gratitude

And so although I could not stop my breath—
Death kindly stopped for me.

—July 18, 1997

Ron Kwon

Dancing with Antipodes (Bipolar Illness—In Memory of My Mother)

There is a terrible beauty
In knowing, sensing, and touching the infinite
At times, this made you crazy
At times, you transcended the mundane
And brought us with you.

The intensity in your dance
Was the artistic price you paid for your passion
Earned with sorrow, privation, and heartbreak
Yet glorious moments overcame it all
And you brought us with you.

Though the years passed
And your beauty faded and your strength waned
Still the yearning and the striving were evident
Always the wish to be part of all there is:
That which you brought us to.

Now you are gone, and our loss is immense—
I could not tell the dancer from the dance,
I saw your brightening glance
And the force of eternity flowing through you
Bearing the burden you brought us.

Lyrics to Aftermath

At the height of war, we marched for peace
 Boycotted stores for civil rights.
We cleansed the city's air we breathed
And smashed its windows in the night.
 Fought poverty and length of hair
A joyride going we knew not where.
 We fought the parents we became,
And never stopped to learn we were the same.

 Heaven help us while we reigned
We kept up speed, we kept up grass
 Love for free was preordained,
We screwed ourselves and had a blast.
When "All You Need is Love" was sold,
 Did we grow up, or just grow old?

 Was Southeast Asia won or lost?
 Are helpless billions still ignored?
 Was every battle worth the cost?
Have we become what we once deplored?
 Was equal justice ever won?
 Or just a mantra we'd pause to hum?
Our children reaped what we have sown,
Were their dreams fulfilled, or our chances
 blown?

 What aftermath of hopes and dreams?
 Why did we battle in the night?
 So we could remake history
 Or worry if our hair was right?
 A hungry child awakes and cries
And never knows we knew the reasons why.

What will be the aftermath of our lives?
That we left a better world, or that we just
survived?
What will be the aftermath of our song?
That we tried to change the world or just went
along?
That we tried to change the world with a song.

Song can be heard at https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=5GXPavFQ37k

Xylophobia

My friend says she can't understand why Midwesterners hate trees,
cutting down the twenty-year spruce, the century oak
or, failing that, to unlimb them, like the Melos Aphrodite.

My wife is likewise vehement on the subject.
Our municipal electric company hacks away branches
anywhere close to their wires, with all the abandon
of reckless hormone-inflamed teenagers at drive-ins.
Bugs infest open scars, hastening the process:
First leaves wither, then woodpeckers riddle, then deadfalls.

Is it our trans-Alleghenian cultural memory,
our forebears fearful of Red Men resentfully watching
hidden by pampas grass and that forest primeval?
Or is our haunted sleep tormented by nightmares
peopled by fur-bearing predators—feral dusk-stalkers,
bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, sharp-toothed, merciless of claw?

Here in our tracts suburban, our lawns blare daytime
fanfares to civilized sightlines. But over the back fence,
trickster Coyote still howls by night in the dark woods.

So Big and So Small

An odor wafts throughout the house
The putrefaction of a mouse
So small a creature who would think
So small the mouse so big the stink

Advice to Feathered Friends

(When will they ever learn?)
When choosing where
Your nest to make
Remember your babies
Are food to the snake

Beer, Sickness, and Love

The beer danced on my tongue.
But the mussels were rancid.
Their jagged hook of nausea
yanked me from sleep.
After a few hours it passed.

The beer, brewed in an abbey near Antwerp,
danced on my tongue like light on ice.
But the mussels were rancid.
Their jagged hook of nausea yanked me from sleep.
I lay in bed. My wife read to me from the *New York Times*.
After a few hours it passed.

The beer, brewed in an abbey near Antwerp
that harbored 3 Jews and a Communist during the war,
danced on my tongue like light on the ice thawing from my window.
But the mussels were rancid.
Their jagged hook of nausea yanked me from sleep.
As I crouched over the toilet bowl puking,
my wife held my hand and stroked the back of my head.
I lay in bed. She read to me from the *New York Times*.
After a few hours it passed.

That afternoon, just before the movie began,
a man wheelchaired into the theatre
a woman, all bones, no hair, coughing.
His mother or his wife—it was too dark to see.
He lifted the woman, her arms clinging to his neck,
and placed her on the seat in front of me.
And kissed her.

That too is love.

When I Forget a Word

When I forget a word, I like to think
it's needed elsewhere. From my home it
speeds like an illuminated license plate
into an unknowably long darkness.
Seldom does it return the way it left,
but rather, like the eight of clubs you signed
which the magician, after many jokes,
finds in the ankle of your girlfriend's boot,
it greets me from a newspaper column.
"So did you miss me? Were you at a loss?
Or were you happy with my synonyms?"
It's not that I begrudge the roving word
the right to finish its adventure, but
I'd rather have remembered by myself.

At the Museum Café

For lunch I order matzo ball soup
before I tour the museum.

“How was it?” asks the waitress
as she wipes the table.

“It was light,” I say, “Airy.
A dense matzo ball
is like a stone in your stomach.”

She smiles. “Some people ask me
why it doesn’t have noodles, or carrots.”

Halfway through the exhibit
I reach the hollow boxcar
stenciled “Karlsruhe” on its side:

Karlsruhe, Rhineland hometown
of my German ancestors,
car that rolled towards Mauthausen,

crammed with Jews
from one of the
four hundred ghettos,

each with its traditions,
its folk songs,
its recipes for soup.

New World Disorder

After the national news
we watch crowd scenes
in the streets of far-off cities.

People throw stones
at phalanxes of uniformed men
in helmets and gas masks
whose left arms hold transparent shields,
four feet high, rectangular,
curved like the one
that did not save Achilles.

Today's riots come to us
from Ankara and Jakarta.
The shields are emblazoned "Polis,"
the word for "city" in ancient Greece.

The polis's right arms raise truncheons,
silently crack protesters' heads
as the newscaster reports
on "IMF-ordered cutbacks."

The crowds flee. It's almost time
for an ad from a global corporation.
"Next up: sports and weather.
Yankees massacre Indians. Karl says
it's only going to get hotter."

Villanelle: April 15

Two hundred clients see me every year.
They call or e-mail, and we set a date
as, month by month, the filing deadline nears.

The organized, the ones who face their fears,
the ones due refunds (federal and state)—
I meet those clients early in the year.

Our sessions are relaxed—my schedule's clear.
They've added their receipts; they're never late.
The calls come faster when the deadline's near.

Slow filers are predictable, though dear:
next time, they vow, they won't procrastinate.
April brings half my clients for the year.

In heart-to-hearts that no one else will hear
I jot down notes, ask questions, calculate,
hand them their tax forms as the deadline nears.

I've come to feel they always will appear—
old, young, singles, couples gay and straight—
That I'll see all two hundred every year.
But decades pass, and sterner deadlines near.

Through a Keyhole

Through a keyhole I peer
 Into a room filled to capacity
 With ancient furniture
 Covered with sheets
 And hung with cobwebs

Rickety old legs stab the floor
 Claiming gloomy territory

Light filtered through dust caked windows
 Casts indistinct shadows
 Obscuring a space destined to shine

If I could find the key
 To open the door
 The clutter might tumble out
 And clear the space
 To let in the light

Leaving a fresh canvas for new dreams

Holding Ari

Holding Ari
suddenly here
calm and cooing
in our arms
her angel arms
stretching
encompassing
heaven and earth
Ari holding us
holding time still
while time swirls around
holding Ari
Ari sleeping
the picture of her mother
sleeping in our arms.
Ha! laughing with joy
surprised each time
we see more than we
ever could imagine
and when
Ari's eyes open
the wonder to see
those eyes
and wonder what she sees.
More each day
the doctor says
who doesn't know
what our eyes see.
Pippi holding Ari's picture close
her eyes close
Pippi holding Ari's mother close

Grampa Benny holding her
Gramma Binca holding her
seeing, not seeing them
time and space swirling around us
holding Ari
seeing, not seeing Carol
holding Ari, holding us
all our eyes
and all the heavenly host
holding Ari!

For Jim

For Jim Doherty

When Jim died
I thought of Mary and Martha
in the Gospel of John.
“Lord, if you’d been here,
our brother would not have died.”
I thought of Jesus weeping because he loved him.
I would have waited gladly by his side.
In the disconnected darkness I am confused,
but Jim was clear. Year after year he saw the connection
clear in Mary’s, Benjamin’s and Molly’s eyes.
His shining eyes could laugh away this world but love it too,
could see the serious deep.
I see his noble brow
clear in the struggle
for justice in this world.
No matter how foolish I could be
his eyes could see me just as me.
I was not surprised how graciously in all the pain this world
could bring, he still could see. Help me, Lord,
to see what he could see!

The Large Economy of the Beautiful

Phoebe Russell MacAdams Ozuna has published seven books of poetry. This is the title poem of her recently published *The Large Economy of the Beautiful: New and Selected Poems* (Cahuenga Press).

I am wearing my birding hat
and crazy paraphernalia:
binos and bottles, little notebooks and pens
as cars whiz by on Highway 1.
Today I have learned about Syrinx, nymph
beloved by Pan,
also the throat muscle and cartilage of bird song.

The Black Skimmer moves along the top of the water
trolling for fish;
California Cormorants stand on the sand
drying their wings.

willet, whimbrel,
dowitcher and plover,
yellow feet, red bills
Great Blue and Snowy White

At night the shapes of birds move differently:
wings calling

us to rise from our daily difficulties
and sing ourselves into form.

The Eyes of Heisenberg

Here's one of my favorite of my lyrics, "The Eyes of Heisenberg," from about 1988, inspired by my beautiful new bride Wendy's comment about Manhattan's skyline from a plane looking like a concrete chess match, while I was daydreaming about the quantum of our entanglement and Einstein's doubt about God's skills with dice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYPaSK7ZlwY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sM68c4R9dDY>

Oh, what's that light, through the broken window there?
What's that face, that's castling in the air?
That shields the king, behind the checkered curtain
That loves the love, of the sky and the uncertain

A handful of houses, a string of blue hotels
A heartful of happenstance and wedding bells
We dance the dance of pawns and gameboard tokens
Searching through the cards for what's unspoken

Your move, my move, waiting on a word
Watching through the eyes of Heisenberg
Your move, my move, waiting on a word
We are watching through the eyes of Heisenberg

You turn the pages of the Sunday paper
I used to look in there for clues and secrets
But it's like trying to speak to whales by counting waves
Tea leaves on the surface are the weakest

You cannot only be the shy observer
You cannot only be the distant architect
Deep inside your eyes I see my future
Our hearts were born to intersect

Your move, my move, waiting on a word
Watching through the eyes of Heisenberg
Your move, my move, waiting on a word
We are watching through the eyes of Heisenberg

Fusion is the other side of fission
We arrive by another bride and groom's decision
Your move, my move, let's move together
The eyes of Heisenberg are just a vision
We know better

We are more than we seem
We are each other's dream

Your move, my move, waiting on a word
Watching through the eyes of Heisenberg
Your move, my move, waiting on a word
We are watching through the eyes of Heisenberg

Watching the eyes

Gorillas in the Night

We lie here in the darkness
beset by fears and angers,
the smiling face of daylight
turned to furrowed brows
and fierceness.

Gorillas we've become—
no language but a cry.
When morning comes,
our knuckles drag the floor.

Sophie: Final Visit, October 2001

Her painted nails on wasted hands
rested on a small brown dog
while I cut out black bats
for her to hang—
silly symbols of Halloween horror.
Her lungs rasped and fell, rasped and fell,
while planes packed bombs and missiles
half a world away.

The flimsy paper bats are not enough
to hold the horror of these times:
An adolescent girl awaits her dying
and sudden death waits, pregnant, in those planes.

A Wider Sky

Morning, Colorado mountains, quiet deer:
Sunlight rampant, and a fresh smile.
The young oak, spine straight,
Spreads out in a small space,
Preparing to make shade and majesty.

We must think in centuries at this point—
Centuries gone by and centuries to come:
Civilization always now—being fully present to ourselves, to begin
with,
Willing to be crazy and sane as we actually are,
Not as we pretend to be—
To see truth in chaos,
To greet life and death as they occur,
Facing forward toward wakefulness.
This is done, as it has always been, and will always be
By great warriors of uplifted existence,

Who built elegant buildings out of brick,
With a vision that has nothing to do with bricks,
But rather one of the human spirit, non-material,
That happens nowhere and at no time if it does not happen now.
No theory can cover, no device prevent
That fragile strength and depth of openness.

Too late for songbirds this morning; summer heat's already risen.
Too early for the young to rise;
Mid-morning, when elders such as I, simply here,
Make eggs, preparing for the day, next generation,
Times to come—laying the groundwork for their brilliance
To show us how we were and are.

We cannot claim dominance;
However, we may gain victory without condition
If we know our own light, which surely we do in a moment
Of summer song and pain, that has no beginning and no season,
No finale, nor words to speak the core.
Present memory becomes the map
Should we learn in our short time how to read it.
If we seek effective means for passage through,
Let us look within.

Dignified, relaxed, alert,
One lone buck settles in the grass.

Witness to a Death

Was that intention that you sketched
Upon the air just then
Or was it plain the impulse of the nerve
Bereft of all connection with the will
That gave it life to live
And use to serve?

Was it the window that you paid
Your attention to, and tried to turn
Away from me, and toward the sun,
The colors of the daylight to discern?

Were you reaching for a truth
That shone like understanding, or like rhyme
And skittered out of reach when grasped
Like other denizens of time?

Was there some message that I missed
Left from the last time that we kissed
A bitter counterpoint to bliss
An understanding failed to reach
From one to one, and each to each?
An unknown loss? Oh, tell me this:
How could I deserve
That you wished to kiss me so.

Forgive the secret pictures that I took of you
Behind my eyes
And that last one just now
When I saw you naked for the first time,

You spent all you ever had to reach this moment—
Life is so expensive!

When we have performed these offices:
The assessment of blame,
The adding up on consequence,
Remembrance of what never happened,
Disparagement of wisdom,
Atonement for blessings,
The search for joy in tears,

Then if I could but knit it all into a single sleeve,
And contemplate it all entire,
Would I for an instant understand the whole
And warm me at the sacred fire?

There's no time to forget
As if it really mattered yet.
No more time to borrow
To empty out the cup of sorrow.
Just things I'll have to learn from you
Like how coffee tastes tomorrow.

Winter Reverie

The cold Sun doesn't shine on you,
It soaks in.
It casts shadows from the inside,
Through the bones.

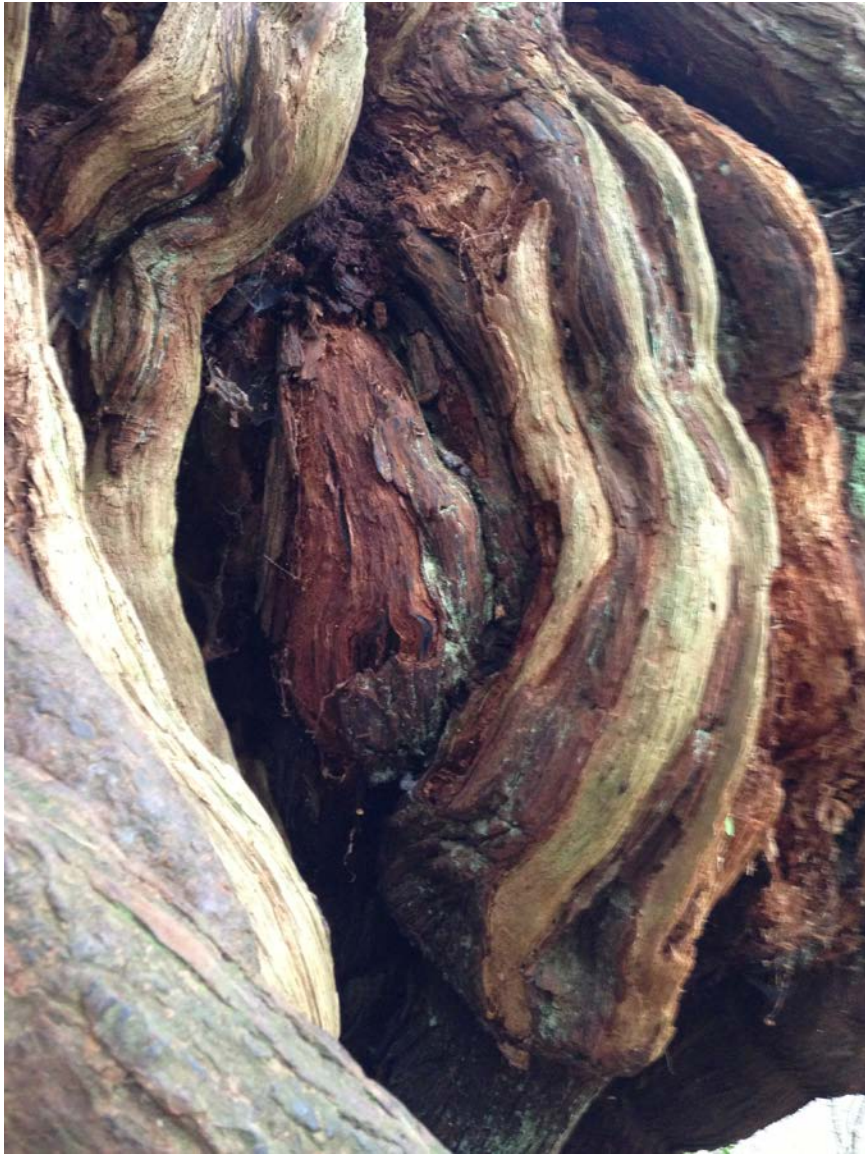
See ribs cast on the wall
In black and white. See souls
Floating in the shadows.
Shiver in the cold, and judge yourself
Against the coming season.



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