

poems by
Benjamin
Kimble
Rogers

Small potatoes



s m a l l p o t a t o e s

poems by
Benjamin
Kimble
Rogers

with artwork by Lacey Stinson

PONDEROSA PRESS
Plano, Texas

Other books by Benjamin K. Rogers:

Holding Five Aces

Returning from the Pyramid

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Ponderosa Press
1724 Huron Trail
Plano, Texas 75075

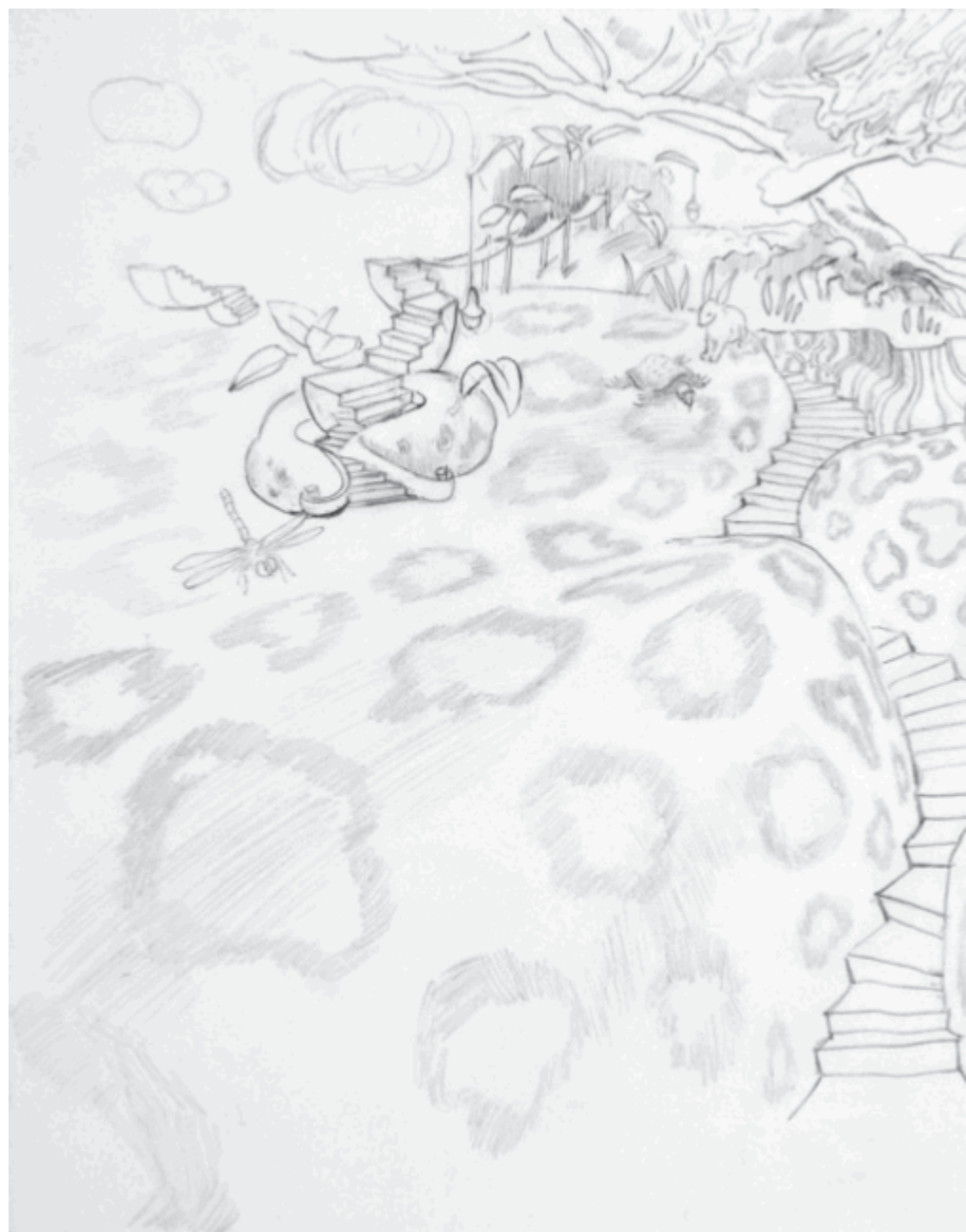
Third Edition

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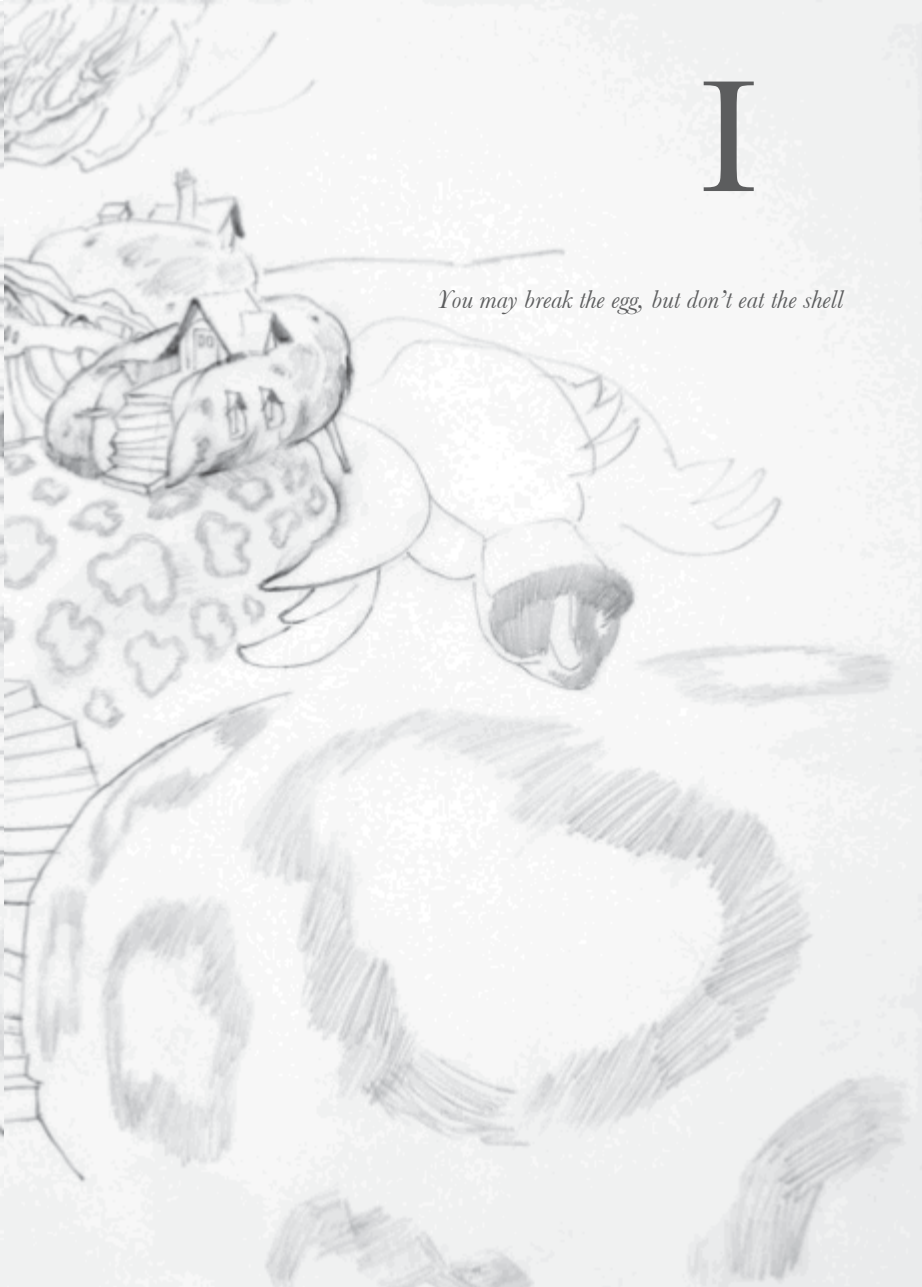
for Carole, who never wrote,

and to Hana



I

You may break the egg, but don't eat the shell



IN THE DINER, WITH A LOTTERY TICKET

At the level of almost pure folly, the man
at the counter has one thumb stuck in his ear.
His red tie – that’s tied to a blue collar
working shirt – touches its tip

into his cold, vegetable soup
that’s been brought to him very late
by a weary waitress, homely as Adam’s sin.

He’s waiting for the stretcher to be brought in
by the paramedics, high on traffic, speed, and coffee.

The lumbago that he’s harbored for years
has come to its crest; and relief is not so important.
It’s the attention that he’ll receive as needed,

a fawning kindness, the plushy ride
he’ll get in the back of the ambulance, just down the road,
just *out of here!*

WATCHING FROM THE GAS STATION

One sign stares back at me,
and not from the obscurities of the beyond,
but so close it's as if the earth is shaking beading pupils
into an expansive clarity.

The filling up of gas could be determined by this light:
its amount, clarity, need. The older man in plaid cap
and Mackinaw appears to capture,
(while he thrusts the nozzle deep, with a stare at numeric
wonders):

his own amount of solitude, the moments alone,
when his pausing retains the need to gain sure footing,
the solid grace needed for farther journeys.
And as he drives off rapidly from the pumps,
the newly-rimmed tires whine bemusingly, and almost give
off color,
whimper, in a way, much like some shepherd
who would be awakened in the dawn
to yawn at a falling star.

QUARTER MOON WORTH THE PURCHASE

Goodwin Road blows a good wind.
It moves the short palm tree,
Orders it to turn left,
Find a cascade of pavement that unwinds
Its leaves, leaves all pain to those bereft.

Silence falls in the shadows that bend
Around the crooked, farthest corner,
Where a dog barks a wake-up call
To crickets, or sleepy souls of men.

All things stop when sound stalls
The freeway: an outstretched arm that flexes
To receive the hypodermic thrust
Of travel, as a trucker, near, relaxes.

Minus time, time returns to dust.



ON LOOKING AT BEAUTY

“There are more than a hundred ways to kiss the ground!”

– Rumi

I see a flower. I do not know
the name of such a flower. I shall call
it “Pretty Flower!” Wouldn’t that be enough?
Wouldn’t that qualify it well enough: “Pretty Flower!”

Right now I need a place to lay my head.
Perhaps right next to this flower,
I need a place to recline my noggin,
like old Rumi did, after long nights
of kissing the ground.
He was . . . “well grounded,” one might say
of ole Rumi.

(There should always be room for Rumi.)

I shall not kiss the ground; I am far too tired,
too washed out,
like someone’s spent words, after
a theatre’s hurricane.

I shall not kiss the ground.
It is for my weary head.

ESSAY: WHY I LOVE WOMEN

This explanation may take forever,
and I have been told
that forever is not a very long time.
I have been told that forever
is the passion we feel
 in the intensest moment,
that this passion
grinds down eternity
into seconds, and seconds into
nothing at all. This explanation
may be nothing at all,
but I am willing to forego that,
run the risk, as they say.

At some point in time
I am going to have to say
Why I love women.
Notice the difficulty here.
Notice that this puzzle
is made of steel and molasses,
dust and fire.
Yet I know the answer,
must know the answer.

I love women because it is certain
that I undoubtedly love women
in the way that obviously
all men love women.
And this is inscrutable.
Take the measure, and throw it away.

I love women beyond the reasonable
forecasting of possibility,
beyond the possibilities of reason itself.
I love women
because love is made in the form of them,
and they of it.

Here ends my explanation.

TWO THOUSAND DEGREES KELVIN

Blinding turns of convulsing whirlwinds
chopped down this sycamore tree here.

I step across it –
for the pity I should feel
has taken a back seat
to the homage I should pay for clear weather.

When you left the farm,
and left with all the bar-belled ambition
anyone would scrape for,
I knew you wanted to be the writer,

knew how you'd pawn your soul
for a trinket or two
of freighted nature's ornament,
prizes of words that would become new to you,
and yours only.

I knew how you'd kiss the asphalt's steam
in some other city
to secure the reddest lips of that conversion.

You left these streams, these hills,
these fields of clovered tapestry
to make much nonsense
out of senselessness,

to move over the mountain,
not because it stood in your way,

but for leverage and vaulting power,
so that you could lay waste
to every human travesty!

THE TACTILE TOTEM

I stand on the shoulders of a strong man,
and that also: a tall man,
who himself
stands on the shoulders of one woman:
an avatar of the sweetest intrigues, she is,

a liaison between myself
and the lowest of all substrata,
so low
none barely see it.

One could say she is a cooled volcano
of what is feminine,
the first resort for any strength,
and maybe the last.
She is the chiseled perfection
left by a history
which refuses to dissolve itself,
become cakework for scholars
who grow dreary in the chase.

I stand above her, give over to her,
while she kneels to flex clouds,
faces the air's sublime breath,
and reaches out, with hands free,
to purl and knit
the patterns left by stars.

If I know my place, it's only from her loft:
I and the man, a certain ownership
that she shall carry with no grudge,
a circle which leads to vague eternal,
that daily, and clearly become concise.



THE DURABLE MAN

Life is not so hard as you think.
I have a friend who is “anti-concrete”.
He thinks that there’s too much concrete
in the world, on its surface, covering roads,
sidewalks, carports, foundations, swimming pools.
He thinks we should swim in mud?
Walk beside the road in mud, the road
in mud sloshing, bogging us to our knees
to keep us in harmony with Mother Gaia?

“How can the grass grow in concrete?” he asks,
looking at his football trophies,
playing his wooden piano with great elegance, and charm.
What a handsome guy who is anti-concrete.
That’s his song, his refrain, his message, his motto, his *thing*.
Everybody’s got to have her or his *thing*. His is anti-concrete.
I guess he has a strong predilection for abstractions.

TO NOT GIVE UP

You walked to the podium
to deliver your good words,
and there was so much light,
a fission/fusion

which took these tired eyes
and led them to new sights,
like sunsets that had been reversed,

to head eastward
to the amazement of all around who watched.
That was the way you plowed the land,
the sky, the vocabulary.

Do I believe in an afterlife?
Answers will come
from such lips of wry-smiling deities,
may be sooner
than we dare think.

For they handle their tunes
on their star-blessed alabaster fifes
to make art
the final result of perfection's alloy.

Hear the saw cut the wood
for the edifice a saint shall march toward,
in comely spring,
and walk along with him,
leading your worried throngs.

We are lifted by such sacred elites,
our ankle bells reminding us
of dances we must repeat.

THOUGHTS FOR MARCH 8, 2008

In writing poetry,
the first line comes from Andromeda.
The second line
is one which some scavenger would not eat
unless it were baked for one half day
in the sun.
With reaching the third line,
the writer could be now on a roll,
and this might be more like that of Sisyphus's Great
Rock,
it being laced with maple syrup
and oozing down on top of those sandaled feet.

On coming to the fourth line
one quatrain has been completed;
and that could be a good resting place,
giving one the time to then contemplate
either rapid publication, or the nearest wastepaper
basket.

Reaching the sixth line, what rears its pointed head
is the hidden quest then to find the end,
to see if that alone justifies
the meanness of it all:
a process which begins turning maybe yellow,
like cellophane that's wrapped around
last year's Christmas turkey.

Only the Bold
go on to seven, and points beyond.
And that then becomes a way of not looking back,
of trying to get something, just get something down
to its final, crystalline coating, one made
like of crinoline, and that to wear,
for when one runs out, and then says:

"Hey, Mom! Look what *I* just wrote!"

SONNET

Youth was a trip we took on the Mayflower,
Or so it seems, so long ago. I can
Still feel the rocking, can't you, its power?
Or "No", as Coleridge says: how time ran!

Maybe it's all within the testing mind,
A non-wasted mind, grown still, like a child
Who's lost, or who's watched some old toy unwind,
Then starts to cry at a new silence that's wild.

So then, what's the flavor of remembrance?
Something taken just to celebrations
Where old joints bend in curling to the dance,
Unable to meet will's expectations?

Best not to think back, or further aft;
The future yet has grabbed its mouth, and laughed.

THE STUDY OF EXCELLENCE

On one of the bookcases in her room
was the complete works of William Shakespeare,
the Oxford edition. It was
well worn, torn, and she had

learned that duct tape can be applied
to most anything, even great literature.

Other books were there: Nietzsche,
Goethe's *Faust*, Sophocles, *The Iliad*.

The dart board on the wall
showed that she had something of a
gaming instinct, and she had been reading

Moby-Dick (which lay open on the desk),
so perhaps in her mind she had been throwing
darts at a Great White Whale.

The wastebasket was full of empty
Diet Coke cans, and none of them
had been muscled into a crushed shape,

as women usually don't do that.

On the wall: a poster of a waxing moon
and a message "Perfection is eclipsed by reason".

THESE CHANGES MEANT FOR BREAKDOWN

Any amount of loneliness is far too much,
and could be akin
to the life some conch must live,
that's recently been washed ashore,

covered up by the sand,
and forgotten completely by the nearest waves.

I dig such wealth
for the shells that you've attained,
while some hold roses,
mottled by the shine that comes from
cosmic spray –

while you lean from above, a light,
full of ever-intending labor
to find something beyond our enduring selves.

Any castle built in sand
shall entice a tired jongleur,
who sits, admiring any sea
that brings forth such wonder.

THE FARTHEST OF THE FAR ROOMS

Written Three Days Before 9-11

As the pseudo-comic, entangled traffic
removes itself rapidly, longitudinally
down the cool and graying asphalt,
hovering billboards standing beside it
give nihilistic, fake impressions
of any kind of stability. They've become, then,
precursive to the trip we must not take,
where, as on some indefinite shore,
winds churn in their passages to destinations
we must not be allowed to know.

And while these winds
blow steadily in their noise-ings and their loosening,
they source-out, as if from some force
which always says, "No, we can do no better."

The shipyard ships run
with all the muck and truck of bother,
and in endless jet streams of their supposed benefactions,
(where human kind feeds its own prosperity),
the prices grow even faster, like spring corn,
and rain becomes a culture's arms
which falls from the weight of the image itself:
a too, too solid mass.

So how shall we insist, (like droning rhythms
in a sagacious raga),
that all have become too deaf, too cooked-up, overdone,
and in the highest sense of heat

Through all of this miter-shaped industry,
the work-mania of business on top of business,
the *false* agrees with the *charm*:

And complex and selfish shards stack up
in a world of hard, manipulative brick, which,
like humanity itself, form outwardly a façade
which shall mirror the callous, and insensitive stare.

THE OLOGY OF ART

A sea of heads,
warm bodies,
the sway of life
in a cafeteria
where the food
is at the most
a mediocre offering.
She comes by
tired in the study of science:
zoology, biology:
all the ologies.
She says that art
was an easier curriculum:
the dab of paint,
the form come to life
like a new growth
in a Petri dish of canvas.
And I think
that there must be
an ology of art;
and of course there is,
and it's just the word
which would sound funny.

She says she has
to study, hamburger
in hand – on
the way back to her
dormitory castle
where she will let
her hair down at night
to flow in breezes
from the window.
And I could stand below

at night, the minstrel,
and serenade each strand
of her hair till she sleeps.
And then . . .

But then she would
wake to science and order
and the studies of the day.
And I would swear
that she knows nothing
of my art.

A CRITIQUE THROUGH OPEN WINDOWS

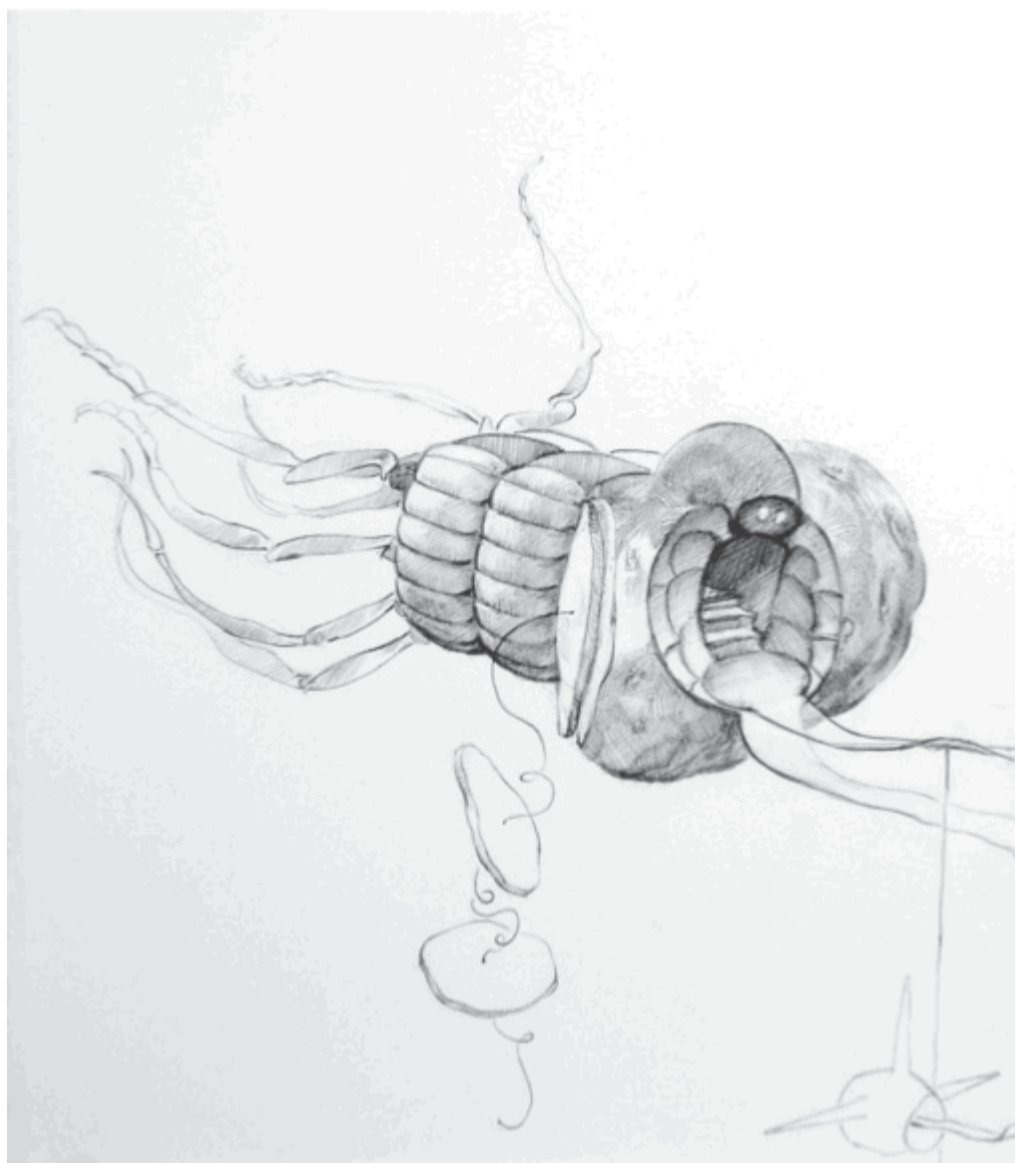
The traffic is not what it used to be;
one can almost feel the steel, as the evening air
parades along with it, blowing human revelry.

Where are these people going,
when autumn is such a shutdown of heat,
and vigorously the neighbor's pets
dodge around those most-common things – cars?
Who's the victor?

Pack the crates more tightly, O workmen.
Salivate for that paycheck
and let the new truck shine
as if it has been burnished by the new season's star.

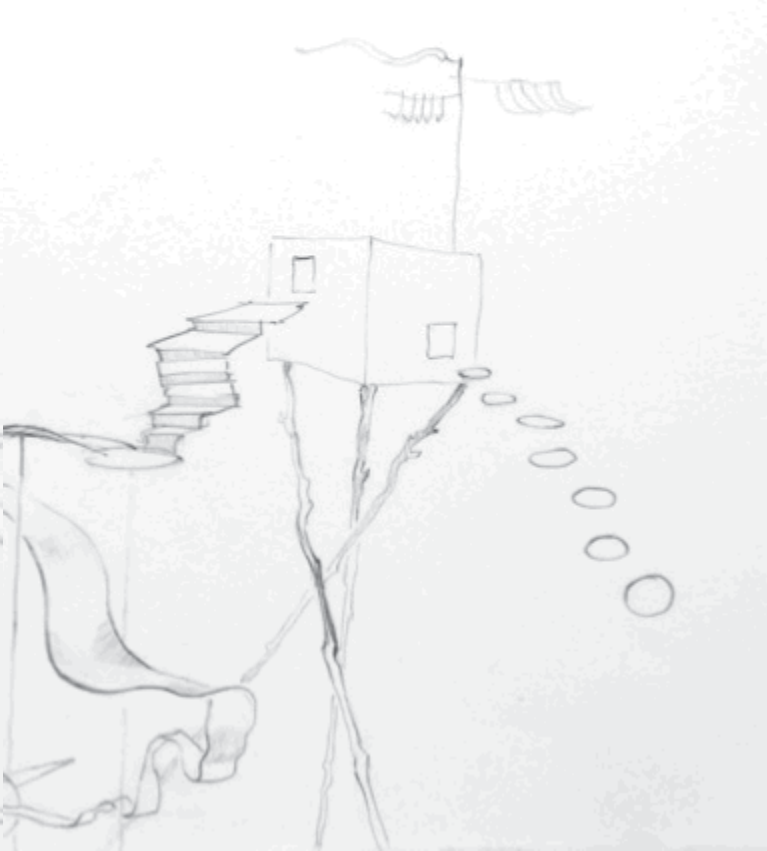
Quantity must be worn around the celebrity's neck
or we're all left out,
all in our modified class of classism.

They dodge the rabid panoply of need,
while we can stand alone, in mid-boulevard,
to raise our voices to shout: Arriba!



II

Five wonders are not better than three



HORIZONS OF VERTICALITY

Blind, and tearing his clothes, the priest
stands quietly on God's tracks.
He never knew
that there would be an end to his own holiness.

Appertaining to this, his own failure,
were facts of non-belief, a lack of attentiveness
to those casual, tight handshakes, the spilt water
that dropped, as rime closed down the sidewalks.

In ringing the bell
in hope for the last lady present
to give him smiles and vague images
which he'd collect at random
to match an inward sight of churches burning down –

He knew that he was nothing
but an arbitrary vessel, a crack
between unseemly stones,
or words that were shorn by those
whom he never knew:

saints who had disappeared
to work in circus routes, hawking like manic jays
to bring about a change
in the hearts of those grown monied.

And faulting only the empty sky,
he could pray
that the last storm come quick,
leave in silence the earth's shell, and then move on.

A PLEA OF THE HOMINID

There has to be something which touches on to the beyond,
something that just touches it, not with a bumbling, clumsy hand,
but one which perspires because it has not worked in years.

What we need, (and this is the collective “we” of us all),
is the pitch, the roll, the list, the sway
in a little glimpse of that ship itself, with some comfort
in its compass.

Speak more clearly, Jeremiah. We alone shall listen;
and then shall paraphrase, or eulogize that any sea
is salt and brine for the seasonings and weathers of our souls.

Tamp down all the languages, Nostradamus,
and we’ll hear the quatrains correcting tones
that sail winds of idle tongues
which watch a forest spread its tangent-worth from your gale.

Harvest us again, one more time,
Ezekiel. For we must know latitudes and longitudes
of vast uncertainties; or just one plucked note
that the psalmist sends. We can almost hear it,
through the din.

Our breath is ready for such cataract, the bolus precipitant
to stand and stretch and scorch the fingers’ tips on ice,
at higher realms, then blanch the eyes,
or close them
from rife fatigue, which sends us fast to sleep,
knowing nothing more of such fair tangents,
resulting forms of truer comfort.

THE MELODIOUS OFFSPRING

My last touch against love's sovereign wall
was just to hang a picture there,
add to the verticality a sense of aesthetic.

Imagine the sea, and that you yourself
were a wave so far from shore
that any strong spying glass, destined to fall too short,
would rather be kept in its case.

Things are this way when the last measure
flirts in first dalliance
with the apocryphal sins no angel would purport.

We are all too far away from each other now.
We have all lasted beyond the chimes of the sacred,
the bellowing shrine having cracked
from powers far too shrill, far too ominous.

It is ours only to wait; and that alone bemuses
the green earth that flowers to sun's gesture,
sowing light-seed to determine the season,
and the garden's glowing grace.

FRANNY AND ZOE, TAKE A HIKE

I want to stop all the wars
because feathers float easily in the air,
because ball bearings sink rapidly into the sea.

These may seem to be descants that apply
only to the rickety laws of nature.
But to the providential leanings of gull-work,
heart jab, and machine malady,
peace shall be the starboard fence
to the leeward haul of jib and spar:
the last resort for the winds which seek atonement.

Those of us who are guilty
know very well our own participation in this disease,
yet deny it, like jackdaws which make currency in their
mock,
that take pride in their showy spectacle
of over-the-top, flamboyant extrusions.

WHAT AUTUMN WAS MEANT FOR

Through memory's dispatch of images,
down the long, moon-haltered lane

where the scrub pines filter the star points
which lie against a northern horizon,

I can see the house-dwelling,
as it was, as it is,
and how the future shall surely dissolve it.

I can't go back; the hand
no longer fits the glove,

and desire is on some other pinion's driving
which knows more strength
than the past allows to rust.

What's worse? To sit in the forward seat
with the chauffeur, to keep him awake,

or to nod in the back
and let providence live its own special will?

No mind! No mind!

The acorns fall to continue the oak.
The moon settles its nestings
for farther realms.

Sleep is once more the day's pocket!





THE RULE OF PIED FANCY

With the clock turned back to where all order is obscured,
I remove myself from the autumn's comforting midnight,
Only to think of snow, and how any thirsty creature –

Living in timeless time –
Can easily stop the cadging of his thirst
By availing the imagination.

I dream of you, as if only to drop large stones
In a well, then run away, before any of the echoes
Can be heard.

This is a sort of masochism, I know:

Count me among the animals who eat their young,
Who stand at the edge of the sea
Preferring their own mysteries, to the ones before them.

THE DAILY AFTERNOON SESSION

Though this dawn's weather is as cold as Fagan's chest hair,
and the stars retreat more rapidly than wild rabbits, for fear
the sun shall steal their mystery, I set aside
the new book on philosophy I bought

because it warms about as much
as the heart of a glacier, or ammonia.

I've learned to read because Aunt Laura was insistent,
patient, and had a lap that held the books, and held me.

We started with "Jack the Giant Killer,"
and now I've tackled Kant.

What makes a woman's soul become a human hammock?

She's gone now, because arthritis (and cortisone) took from
her
all happiness; and each injection
pulled a tap root up, till the garden was lost against her will.

I'll read this some day, through the pain
I never felt in her, but saw, at a distance, or was kept away.

THE THIEF OF QUALITY: OR THE ARTIST'S DILEMMA

with respects to the poet Tad Richards

We are living in a world that's chocked so full
of those who dwell, salacious, in their Art Thief Havens,
that they've wrapped up the markets,
and fleece-lined their pockets!

They've stolen from us
any grip we might have had
on our potential fortunes:
those that we might have produced in time,
while we drew sap out of the onyx, lilies from the acorn,
learnings from some fast-bound book.

Anyone of us here in this room
would never mute such a message as this.
Anyone of us present could vomit right now,
out on that pavement, and there would be
languages thieves, flocking soon to sap it up!

. . . This brings up an idea, and a question:
What exactly is *quality*?

In that oft read sterling novel, ZEN AND THE ART
OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE, by Mr. Robert Pirsig –
from the old vintage of 1976: that landmark novel for its time:

– The book was a stirring search for definition,
for a definition to the word *quality*.
We know now, and watch, how people flock always to quality,
even if they do not really know specifically what it is,
by definition. They go, they seek, and they find.

But now, in my own scholarly reflections, one must think
that quality relates directly to the individual figure
known as Aristotle, and what he himself once said –

an old Greek who wandered in the shades of mental mists,
someone who *did* write his own books,
and blessed his books in history's sweetest bliss.
He, old Aristotle, said this, in quote:

“All things eventually move upward, toward a Higher Good.”

So I guess there is some guarantee of a higher good.
And is that not a good thought?
One that leaves us to be even more patient in our work,
in our thoughts, and our painstaking actions,
while we're challenged to strive to learn our crafts,
to teach our crafts, and yes, to even *compete*
for those senses of quality.

“The palm stands at the edge of space;
The wind moves slowly in the branches . . .”

as the weakened, old Wallace Stevens said, in his final poem.
(And the man had studied the law
in order to make ends meet.)

Where do the ends meet now, O Muse?
And are they to be found in these collective
hearts that melt in a faint sigh
to know more of the other,
in a struggle to escape the regime of the world
which steals more than it has ever given back?

Or shall we fade, like some old vinyl siding on a future,
forgotten museum, one that has been boarded over
for profit and temerity,
with a sign written across the front of it saying:

NO ADMITTANCE!

STAGE ONE

There are no rules, just
concessions to rules: projections
of theatre, that, as in the dance, sustain.

The pirouette
sustains the world, and causes it to move.

In corners
where the air moves light to dark,
blinding and circuitous,
the dust stirs, point on point. And each point,

not as a regulation, but as
an affirmation, stirs within itself.

Here the stage is built.
and in a blinding turn, the second stage,
through time – also it is built.

SONNET

I'm not astonished you're pure mind at times;
 These bricks, they fall where mortar knows their weight,
And I collapse to hold up fairer rhymes
 When intellect desires the mason's slate.

And if my back grows raw from heavy lift
 It's only there the globe is balanced well,
While clouds support the feet with heaven's gift,
 Much better than the heat that sears from hell.

Hard work becomes the ladder, awl and frame
 To set the toil from daylight, till it ends;
And what's constructed bears the maker's name,
 But only till some better one contends.

We're but sand in the eyes of those on streets:
They walk for gain, but lose as time defeats.

WHO ROCKS THE CRADLE?

I think it's true, that when old Walt Whitman looked out
he saw, from among the world, many things distinctly
which were not there.

I praise none of those things, and out of a deep or shallow bore-
dom.

No one knows, really, enough of his authentic sweat,
when he fleshed out embraces in dazzled dawns,
those that roped his soul to heights and clouds
of this course, yes, this America.

Now please don't get me wrong.

The capon will crow in morning here, and the daily busy sheep
who find an ample stock for what they need
in rich, green pulp, and fountains full beyond a glistening water,
will seek their precious divvies, and range on range.

Or within all of this, he roughly saw, and above all things,
himself: ole Walt, the model of stately America.

And now, where we have come to, among the tired tires
of commerce, the provocations of sub-primal wonders?

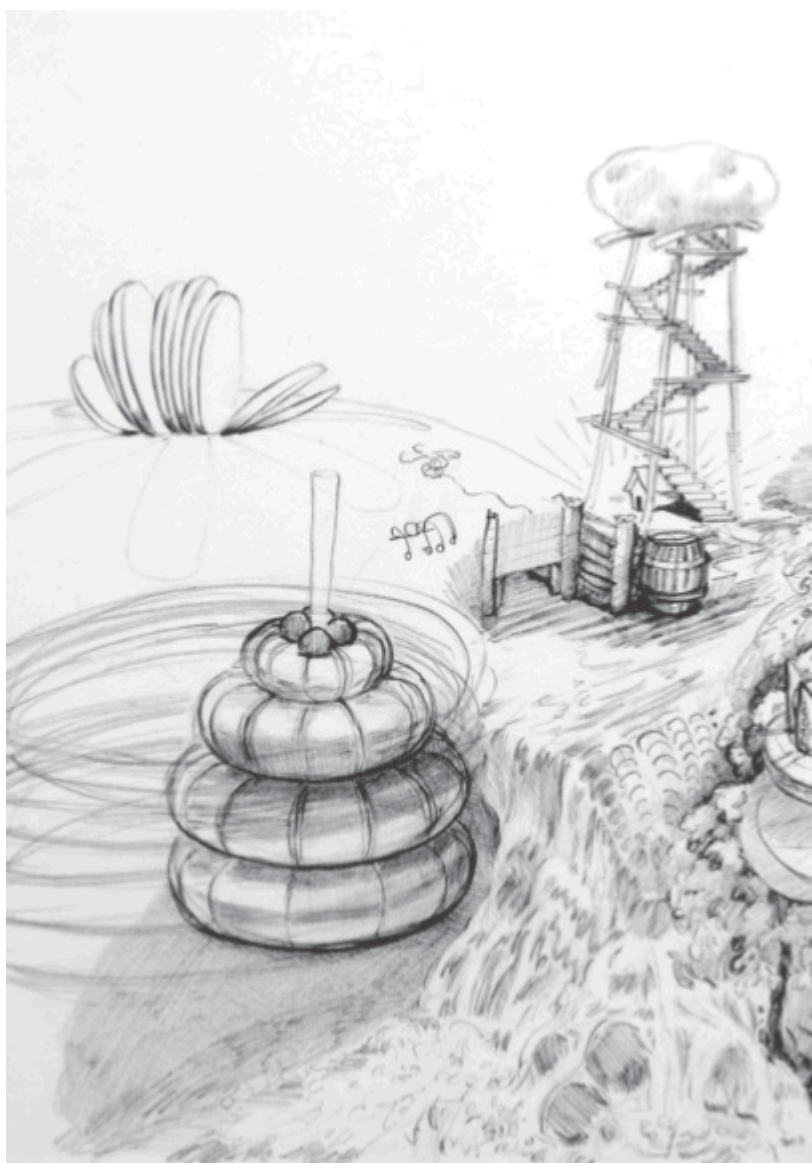
What wheels turn now, O Walt?

What armpit that could have been yours, scents
the sallow sky. What blood, a pomegranate red,
is tasted in every exhortation and factory-grown sentiment?

One can see the lemon on the tree, and still not pull,
nor stir those leaves, nor sing of a tangy, proudful hope.
It's not I, dear Walt. None can levy the cost, the shame
that's grown fearful, even unto death.

It's all in the glory song, you say, O Walt.

And I have heard, and mingled with your adducement,
and fallen short. O say how I have fallen short.



I THINK IT'S ALL ASIA MINOR

Who is this “I” that chisels the edge of her sentence,
and others I’m known to keep reading?
Their obsequies keep falling to the page
as blankets of clear, white snow,
decidedly precipitant.

Such chills to me are good,
the taste of fine vodka, that rubs the dry throat,
and lets a subtle kind of warmth create the harvest
that boasts long-delayed autumn reveries.
I pause among her letters.

For though some other poet
who was known to hammer his mythic occurrences
down to a perfect unity,
so this one does the same –
for a truth is an absolute
in the nature of things as they are.

Doubt shall not stop her jigsaw,
nor her trampoline, nor her seesaw . . .

And while those lids may lower in a cool condescension,
I breathe to bask, acquiesced in her wise statements,
to gaze at her far-torn towers
which frame the distant hillocks,
to be shorn up once more as a rejuvenated edifice.

WHERE LATE THEY SANG

The quiet city
thumps its chest.
The heart works,
even better now.
The veins
tingle as traffic
slowly erases
the moon's slate,
gives new pictures
for old frames.

An owl prates
that his wisdom's inevitable.
He has no choice,
delivers solace
with a quaint voice.

SMALL POTATOES

In wondering which is older, the earth, or my father,
I follow his order, and go to the field, in this September,
and dig.

The haze in cloud structures,
the treason of rain, the dusk's holy tincture,
all move my rebellion of resistance,
to face, instead, his insistence
to retrieve his labors, and bring back sustenance.

What mysteries must I learn
from his general, straight-faced smile,
when I know nothing of work,
save only art I continue to compile
for history's x-ray memory.

His is strong too; and the planetary
sting of his eye, as I commence,
holds my own pain as well as his,
as in each elbow bend I feel his strong sense.

WALPURGIS NIGHT

I call out softly, so easily, to the mother of dark caverns,
and into her deep, mythological offspring, light.

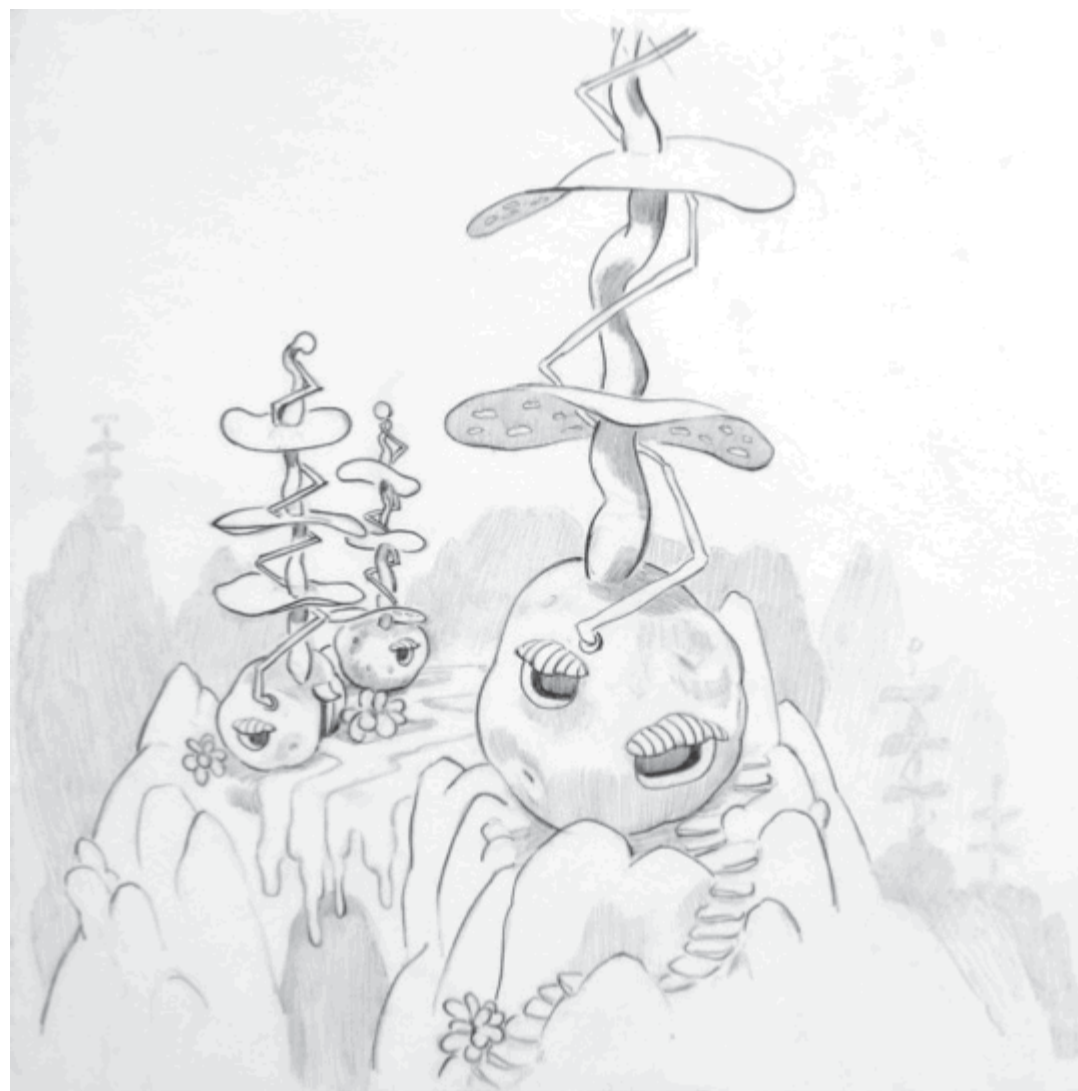
We need such now, while we walk to the edge
of a nearby grove, through small trees we've pruned
for the sake of allowing the wild world's gape.

Beyond them all, we can see a hill
we've known to be quite steady. For in twilight,
it appears an Indian mound. Yet in the dead of day
it rallies a much more lofty struggle to reach clear height.

What clouded moon will affect us next?
Will it be such a one as this one, one which bends its arc,
as if readying a stroke from some blacksmith's hammer,
aiming to forge a niche gold enough
to store the midnight's wealth?

We'll turn aside the closer limbs, and walk on through,
to where dim stars sprinkle a glimpse of better footing,

which transforms the surety of this incautious sojourn,
allowing the chance for primal wonders, surrender.



III

Bring up the rear, I'll start the wash



THE SOJOURN

“I want us to go find evil,” she says.

And my head bounces across a memory
of leafing through one of the many volumes
of *The Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*.

I forget exactly which one it was.
“Let’s do that after cappuccino, at Louie’s.
We’ll go looking, as you say; but let’s be wary
that there may be a wide variety of vacuities,
or that Sartre may surface his balding pate,
and we’ll have to paint it then, surrealistic!”

She only laughs,
as we take to the dirt sidewalk
that skirts the lower side of Kansas City Southern’s
steel-demanding reach.

Fall colors, orange, ocher, copper,
guide as distance that seems indissmissible
to young eyes – boiled from graveyard walks,
games of bootless gin rummy, over-reading.

We walk with no sympathy, no concordance
of leg work; in fact, we’re anathema
to such parallelism.

“How long have we been awake?” she asks.
“Two and a half days; and Hunter Thompson
blew his brains out.”

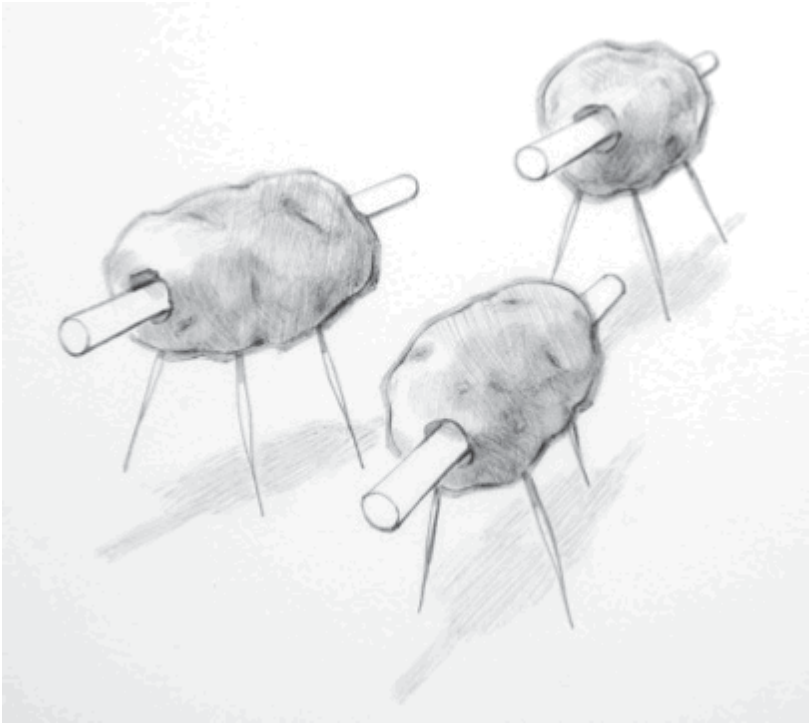
“Would evil treat people
like it would want to be treated?” she asks.

“Look!” I say. “There’s a piece of flint
that looks more like dolomite! –

I think that people would like other people to treat other people like other people would like to be treated.”

“Did you bring along your *Iliad*?” she asks.

“Yes,” I say. “And I’ve got the Fitzgerald translation; 1959. It’s in the book bag. And I brought a broken compass.”



L=O=N=G P=L=A=Y=I=N=G

The disgusting thing about being perfect
is that each thing you touch becomes free,
a treasure running through generosity,
the apogee of the actor's gemstone intrigue.

God Apollo, the tropes which twitched at Canterbury
turn to sumac, epigrammatical to clot poesis's artery,
to plug the fine line between rhythms meant for the dance,
and the amalgamative whispering pine which cleaves on the plow-
shares.

In the parody of the beginning of the all,
the absolute canon lain out on scapulas of those, the bravest,
falls out like strings of soldiers: such perfidy it is
that their birthrights juxtapose with their steadiness.

Don't provoke any more than you can force with two raised fingers;
for the doctrines of the ponderous become lighter
in the feud between what's publicized, and forgotten pipe dreams:
those places where early marigolds hold to the sedate, become scent-
less.

UNION HILL

Now as I was both young and old, when time
Held secrets it couldn't reveal,
And the acorn kept futures it wouldn't conceal,
All boys would play at their games in the fields,
And the girls would make pantomime.

As all of the oaks turned green in respect,
As a duty to the streams that ran so near,
It was for those children that children elect
That they shall be heard only by those who can hear.

And we were grown much more to expect
That no one would find our understanding.
Everything else was beyond their demanding.

And we were both young, and we were both old,
And the laurel wreath now has become ours to hold.

THE FOURTH WALL

She waits. Though nothing dons simulacra
but that which is meant for a new dramaturgy of hers,
and for her only:
steps which she shall take to perk the indolent dawn,

to teach it prime movement
in every one of its steps, as she tasks forth
in her finalized wonders.

Her images flow through distances
beyond even Kandinski's scheme.
They are prismatic, constructed forms
in what is possible
beyond prime numbers that are ground to mist:

evidences of sights which trip the eyes;
those she begs for,
while tears collide.

A STRANGE CITATION

What matters most when you are on the inside
of the belly of a whale,
is that the privacy there
guarantees to outstrip that of any other haven.

Jonah, old friend, send us back your olive branch!
No dark and brooding underworld
has need to be illumined
which cannot more accept the redux candle-rite,
even from such cramping quarters –

surely as a comfort, the worth of ten young sheep,
fat, ready for their fated coif.

So you, old Jonah, sing a sweet song.
Make it a paean to glimpses of light,
improbable echo!

WHEN I WRITE MY "BYZANTIUM"

When the occasion comes for me to write my "Byzantium",
I know how the sky, it will split asunder,
rain down vast complexities;
although this event may be no given.

Yet I'll hear it rumble
in the deep ear's core,
or perhaps in the soul itself, which may be riven,
from such an onerous task:
where the pages strain
to hold all the margins, all the glossing.
For me to purge the unpurged images
may take at least a fortnight, or two, or maybe more.

And after the final period,
(if such as that does happen),
there will be a rest, and a focus into more reading,
on top of other reading, as if that would not be rather odd.
Maybe some subject about Japan.

THE AGING PROCESS

I went to put on my red hat,
and instead, I put on my blue hat.
Then, needing to go to the grocery store,
I got ready to open up the door,
and instead opened up a window.

Finding my keys already in the car,
I drove directly to the bank
and ordered a club sandwich and an order of fries.

As I always keep a new dictionary
on the seat beside me,
I thought I'd better look up the word,
"confusion". I think that's in
the second chapter of *Mark*.

THE BLUE IN THE POT OF GREEN

She stands at the stove
and lets the water go far beyond the tepid,
watches it carefully, though non-superstitiously,
as the bubbles surface slowly,
one at a time:
much as swimmers that are begging appreciatively
for their oxygen.

And then, in frenzied multitudes they rise,
as if in a race to win
in which they're guaranteed their trophies.

As she leans over to turn down the fire,
she breathes in the fine and errant mists,
though allows no deception of sweat
to form on her faultless, wan complexion.

The task she's doing takes rituals histrionic:
a little quick bend in the knees,
a furtive look at the ceiling for a sense of relaxation.
Then, as she gets ready to put in the blueberries,
she tastes one of them, only one.

SONNET

I am all alone, and that can be blest.
I confer with a memory, out loud,
Reminding me of a time lived in jest,
When I was strong, agile, witty and proud.

I sink deeply into the rarest thought,
As if it will show kindness of being
When I am heavy, like goods overbought,
Or when someone's sight offers no seeing.

Yet in the dance of those in high martyr,
Like oaks looking over sapling's treasure,
I find such comfort in such a larder
That I rise above uncommon measure.

I will not give up; no stone in the mind
Weighs down meanings I dare not leave behind.

IT'S ALL HERE

I let the grace descend slowly,
and then think a good thought
about the universe.

In the spring breezes are hints,
pulsed out in code –
and often within the rhythms
in which the grass grows –
that all is fine, that all is answered
mystery, that the lack of mystery itself,
mysterious, can be the ultimate solace
when the mind ceases
and only the soul tracks the deepest river:
to tributaries, to source and to delta.

Then, the matter at hand
is that there is no concern
beyond the simple breath,
the tingle of time's repulsive goad
to make us aware, where
sitting then becomes motion, prayer
then becomes promise, life, the ultimate garden.

AS A HOLSUM BREAD TRUCK GOES BY

for J. S.

The price of admission to the carnival of science
is three ergs of brainpower,
and a desire for questions.
The absolute reality
is that we are “here”.
How we got here is up for grabs.
It’s a big place!
Who we are, is more or less manageable,
we’ve come that far.
The way we got to this proximity in form
is being contended.
The eternal question “why?”
is the biggest boogaboo imaginable.

Let’s go to work, someone says.
That ethic, and roll of the dice,
aims toward the positive, though potentially
frantic need to fill the pond with fish,
and to somehow manage to keep the fish poles
growing and growing.
Stacking data, insight, knowledge and intuition
in such a way as to “get somewhere”
all makes a lot of sense to the sense-making
critter.

That’s us, the “we” we are
that goes forward, and backward,
and breaks all other dimensions, at least with the mind.
No reason to fret, says one
who has fried, baked, lacquered his thoughts
with anything available that will numb.
But perhaps *this* bit of writing fits the prescription.
And we all know that the doctor is out!

THREE FOR SPENSER

to K.J.

Refuse more now the antique than the new,
O muse. Or moreso, find a current, spring
Denying both: some unexampled hue
That fits no palette meant for anything
Of remote resemble; yet for queen or king
To render to them happiness and zest,
Much like the lark must know at highest wing,
As he takes the sky as honored guest,
And floats the highest thermal, daily at his best.

One's feeble art must answer to the call
To find, at last, that place: the singular
Monition of the art: the tinker's awl
To drive and point the words beyond the par,
Deep-set in love; or for Venus star
To show the work as workless in its light,
Mere breath, inspired by thee; and from afar
To take one thing unique, and to the height
Where recompense and pay can prove it to be right.

Nothing ever fails. What is labor's name
But labor is what labor does? And this
Is not the hart that seeks or carries fame;
But one that preens and parries in its bliss,
Forgetful of everything, save the kiss
Of Dawn, the wild world's need to stay wild,
The season's promise not to be remiss,
The weather's charge, though it may seem as mild
As any fond embrace, from any, or every child.

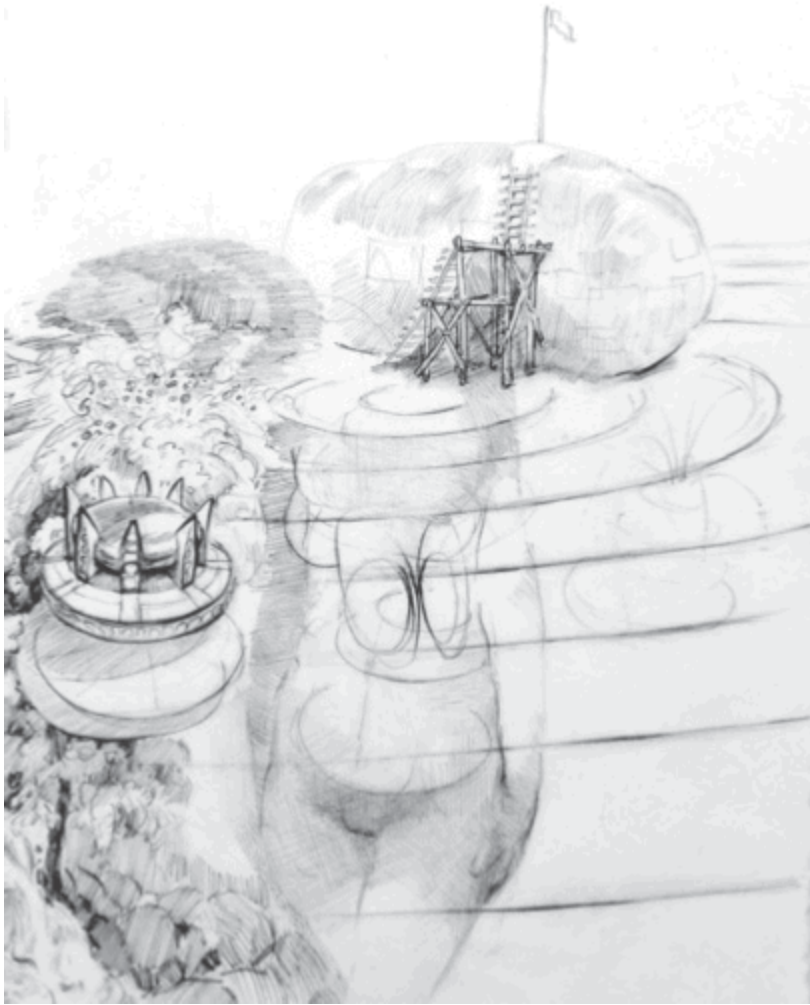
ON SHAKESPEARE: A STUDY IN SPECIFICITY

In the way that oceans
can be put into a bottle;
in the way that vast forests
can be used to make one guitar;
in the way that all the winds of the world
blow against one leaf
in one garden,
tended by one Buddhist monk, near death:

this is your effect on me;
this is the miracle you work.

In the way that eyes
see everything, except what's before them;
in the way that rains fall to earth
but never touch;
in the way that all the winds of the world
blow against one leaf
in one garden,
tended by one Buddhist monk, near death:

this is your effect on me;
this is the miracle you work.





“Ben Rogers’ poems are the lush fruit of persistence and belief in the power of words, their music and meaning, and their enduring influence on the heart.”

– Karen Douglass
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– Gary Sloan
former George Anding Professor of English,
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