

CONCUSSION PLAYS: A COLLECTION OF POEMS

WITH A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

By

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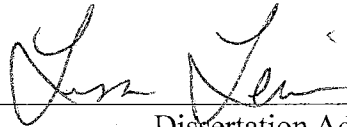
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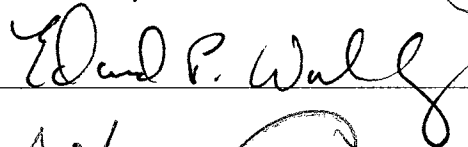
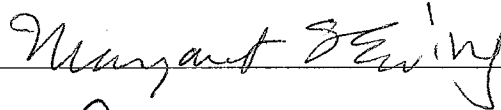
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## PREFACE

This collection of poems, broken into five sections, was written over the last five years in and out of the workshops of Lisa Lewis, Ai, and Alfred Corn. The introduction discusses my work in two ways: first, with respect to poets whose work has influenced my poetics; and second, with respect to the importance of diction, voice, and prosodic elements characteristic of the poems I write.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful acknowledgement goes to my committee, especially Lisa Lewis who subtly motivates her students to set higher standards for themselves and their work. Thanks, too, to those publications in whom some of these poems first appeared: *Poems and Plays*; *Parnassus*; *Puerto del Sol*; *RE:AL*; *The Louisville Review*; *Spork*; and to the Editors at Lazy Frog Press for the award and publication of my chapbook comprised of poems from this manuscript. Special thanks to Jerry, and finally, my most grateful acknowledgement goes to Tiffany and the dogs.

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## I. A GENERAL INTRODUCTION FOR MY WORK

As a poet whose work could easily be called personal, I am always concerned about not sounding self-absorbed or falling into solipsism. Poems are not a medium for grandiose self-display nor are they a form of therapy. I might find that writing poems provides some degree of intellectual, emotional, and psychological clarification, but no matter how much these potential effects may motivate me to write, I am always rooted in the understanding that poems are meant to communicate. When writing poems, I envision someone or some coterie of people to whom I am writing, or put another way, to whom I am speaking. Regardless of what it is I am saying, the rhetoric of my poems most often expresses this desire: “I want to tell you something.”

The following project was born of a personal existential crisis brought on by otherwise normal intellectual and emotional development in conflict with what I saw as the whole of the constructed world passed off as incontrovertible reality. The core of this manuscript was written during and just prior to this crisis. From this selection, I went back and forth through drafts and earlier, completed poems, and continued writing and selecting the poems that I felt spoke to or out of this condition. I suspect that in many ways this condition was nothing out of the ordinary. It stemmed from an increasing awareness that much of what I thought and believed came to me from sources I no longer trusted. I was not sure how to trust myself since so much of my

thinking was built upon these foundations of family, religion, education, class, and the superficial, pervasive—and therefore insidious—images and productions of culture. The poems in this manuscript reflect and express a desire to shed social constructions and personal situations that stem from and reinforce these constructions in an effort to birth a new, authentic self. Now, I do not believe that this actually can be accomplished. Nor do I believe the manuscript reflects that belief. And, I recognize, as many of my poems express, that any notion of “self” is constructed by the very ideologies from which one might hope to be free. Let alone the problems that inhere in the word “free.” All caveats aside, in the simplest terms these poems express, to one degree or another, what I was attempting to do in my life: to effect a deconstruction of the self, which turns out to be a continual process of confronting, breaking down, reconstituting and turning. This deconstruction has its origin in what I call a cathartic impulse—the desire to clarify and purge oneself of the contaminating claims to one’s identity. Poems provide a way of externalizing the conditions the self feels and experiences so as to gain a level of control and authority over the writing of a new identity.

### *TOWARD A POETICS*

Popular culture tells us that you can free your life with words, that poetry is a healing medicine, that it promotes health and well-being, that it can transform your life and heal your soul.<sup>1</sup> While all of these sentiments make for nice marketing, they fail miserably as motives for anyone who takes the writing of poems as serious art. Still, the impulse to write, to give shape to experience, in the form of a poem comes from a desire to uncover and clarify the complexi-



ties of experience. Writing can be a way for working out one's problems, but to write a poem means that whatever the "problems" may be quickly become "formalized," that is, intrinsic and unique to the poem and distinct from the writer. For me, a poem functions as a site of projection, one where I have taken an assembly of experiences and projected them onto the page in the form of a poem. I believe, then, that for the poem to succeed some aspect of the reader should be able to project him or herself into the emotional space of the poem. In other words, the reader should not be looking at me (whoever I am) but at some form of him or herself, or at an understanding of a self thought or believed to be private but perhaps embarrassingly true. Ultimately, I want my poems to sink into a reader's unconscious and nag at him or her for a time like a grain of sand in an uncomfortable place. It is not enough for an object of art to stand by itself and be revered. It must *work*, that is call out to the reader/viewer/participant and make some kind of demand on her or him. Some of the poets whose work has most influenced me, nagged me the most, who I believe have played some part in this tendency, this formulation of a poetics include T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery, and William Carlos Williams.

"Influence" can be a misleading term. Perhaps, it is better to say that these poets' work that has provoked a strong reaction in me as a reader and a writer. Whether my work reflects their forms or sensibilities has more to do with absorption than with any conscious imitation. Nonetheless, I can identify aspects of their work and their poetics that enable me to describe my own. Eliot, Stevens, and Ashbery influence me through their diction. Their work is discursive, born from an idea or the idea of ideas. Eliot and Stevens wish to transcend materiality via a theological position or the idea of the idea of a pseudo-theological position, respectively.

Stevens and Ashbery write a poetry of ideas in which, as the language builds and stretches through longer poems, ideas evaporate or burn off like a thin layer of alcohol leaving only a rhythm of voice to tap away at the reader. Ashbery's work is about reaching the condition of air and moving through the tiniest of spaces in all matter via a polyphonic register that expresses tonalities from the height of poetic discourse to the technical and to the base. On the opposite end of the spectrum and for this reason, perhaps the most important influence is Williams's work. His poetics arguably work inductively, via the scientific method. Ideas come from objects in relation to other objects, from experience and stimuli in the physical world. So much of my thinking about poetry and much of my work vacillates between the deductive and the inductive. Williams wants to grasp materiality and the space between material things to make apparent the dissonance at the center of all. He does not subscribe to the fixity Eliot speaks of, but to its opposite, to the energy and the power of destruction and creation that inheres in all things, that is "beauty."

In my work, I vacillate between reveling in materiality and longing to escape the myriad complications of the flesh. I am not interested in any marriage of opposites such as one finds in Blake and even Williams. I am more interested in the truth of something like, "the details, which are every / thing, are unimportant" ("Shedding Skin in the Year of the Snake"). My orientation toward the world, then, is something like cosmic irony, over which only our own sensibilities preside. My poems are about neither ideas nor things, but about the intercourse of the two. In this way, my work more closely resembles Ashbery's than that of any of the other poets named, but my work differs from Ashbery's in at least one important way, namely, through its effect.

The aim is neither transcend materiality (Eliot, Ashbery, Stevens), nor is it to claim the “radiant gist” of material, but to convey an emotional shape and energy, one that is felt and not seen, so that a reader walks away from the poems having had a very definite reaction, the details of which are entirely his or her own. The experience of the poem should lead us back to our own identity and to the task of remaking it.

For me the poem begins from a disembodied voice. A nagging conscience. A demon in the back of the brain who juggles ice-cubes and matchsticks. My method runs from ideas to objects and back to ideas through the tone of this voice. Ideas and objects cannot be known outside of some mode of discourse and all modes of discourse, like genres, have their limitations, their specializations. Sounding off in as many registers as one can within the limitations or the demands of the poem’s reality functions as a way to keep reconstituting the materials of a poem. As I see it there are two reasons for this. One belongs to the integrity of experience. Since experiences are never singular, but always made up of multiple stimuli, multiple discourses, any attempt to convey experience must necessarily speak to its inherent plurality. In doing so, the details increasingly become equalized, spread out across the canvas of that experience and what flows through most clearly is an emotional energy and shape.

The second reason is actually more an effect of the first. To work in as many tonal registers as possible increases the likelihood that something in the poem will reach a reader. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* provides an example of this. Memory and desire, announced in the poem’s opening lines, permeate the action of the poem, much of which concerns domestic arrangements, whether personal and contemporary, historical, or mythical. The poem operates

as an extended lyric in many voices aimed at correlating the emotions associated with memory and desire to “objective” facts. Each fragment arguably speaks to these themes, and though none are necessarily dependent, taken as a whole the effect becomes clear. If I do not understand what the whole poem is about, I at least can figure out the duologue in “A Game of Chess,” for example. Some connection to a reader is made.

### *SOME THOUGHTS ON FORM*

After more than a century now of wide-ranging experimentation with poetic forms and countless apologies for traditional and invented forms, it at least ought to be clear that whatever formal choice a poet makes is a choice. Formal choices (whether traditional or invented) do not denote particular political values. On the other hand, forms are not devoid of a political history, nor are they free from political associations, as numerous writers of the 1980s and early 90s, in particular, attest.<sup>2</sup> Forms are strategies that enable the poet to effectively express her or his intentions, and the choice of form tells readers something about how the poet feels about his or her material, about form in general, and about the world. Although, I have done my own share of experimentation, my poems remain largely conventional. This has everything to do with finding what is necessary to making the poem’s voice clear and consistent.

As far as I am concerned, all strategies are available. Prosodic devices serve as tools in the development of the poem’s voice. I feel a kinship with the dramatic mode, and while the many of my poems may be best described as lyric or narrative (or some blend of the two) all of my poems stem from a sense of a dramatic situation. There are very few poems in this manu-

script that do not imply more than one character or participant, and in those, the voices are kept largely discrete and consistent. To the extent that I wish to foreground the importance of voice in my poems, I look for forms that enable me to let that voice speak at the volume, intensity, and duration at which it wants to speak. Form is never more than an extension of voice.

### *Diction & Voice*

Tone, according to Stephen Dobyns, is where we locate “intention,” and by implication the answer to why this poem was made, that is, intention gives us recourse to understanding the speaker’s/writer’s motivations and the poem’s ontology. Through tone and voice we discern the intentions of the speaker and obtain some insight into the being of that speaker. According to Dobyns, a number of factors affect tone—loosely metrical and rhetorical elements—with the upshot being that “tone is the emotional distance between speaker and subject matter” (153). By extension, tone also provides insight into the “writer’s emotional distance to the reader” (153). As Dobyns describes it, tone of voice is the governing element in all poems.

In my first drafts, I am writing the language of whatever voice I am hearing. In subsequent drafts and revisions I am working toward shaping the integrity of that voice. Frank Bidart explains that when the typed page finally seems to reproduce the voice he hears, “something very odd happens: the *being*’ of the poem suddenly becomes the poem on paper, and no longer the ‘voice’ in my head” (236). Bidart is to my mind the most important poet of voice poetics since Frost. When I refer to Ashbery’s work as an influence, I am speaking of a rhetorical affinity, a verbal and syntactical play that is not afraid of whimsy, but when I speak of

voice, or more specifically, when I am writing the voice of my poems, any verbal play I might inherit from Ashbery must work genuinely with the poem's speaking voice. At a glance it is clear that for all my privileging of voice, my poems more closely resemble Frost's than Bidart's. When I read Frank Bidart's poems, I have no problem understanding why he chooses the expansive form because I hear the voices in all their integrity very clearly. When I write my own poems, I cannot justify adopting Bidart's methods because they do not seem to work for the voices I am writing. All of this brings me to some considerations of the line.

### *Line & Stanza*

A few years ago I experienced an "anxiety" of the line. I could no longer understand the rationale behind my line breaks and began to doubt whether there was ever any rationale at all. I decided to leave the line alone, for a time, and to focus on the sentence. I began reading only prose poems, prose poem theory, and histories of the prose poem. My interest took me to the historically notable prose poem pioneers, Baudelaire and Rimbaud, and to more recent writers such as Charles Simic, David Ignatow, Vern Rutsala, Russell Edson, James Tate, Robert Hass, Jane Miller and Olga Broumas, Lyn Hejinian, and John Ashbery of *Three Poems*. On top of this growing mountain of prose poems, I began reading studies of the form by Michel Delville, Stephen Fredman, Margueritte Murphy, and others.<sup>3</sup> Later, I found Caliban's speech in W.H. Auden's long poem *The Sea and the Mirror* written in prose that sounds awfully similar to the later Ashbery of *Three Poems*. In *The Dyer's Hand*, I came across this remark: "the difference between verse and prose is self-evident, but it is a sheer waste of time to look for a definition of

the difference between poetry and prose” (Auden 23). Looking back to early defenses of poetry—Sidney’s, Shelley’s—I continually found argued that poetry can be in prose, in other words, that there exists no absolute relationship between “verse” and “poetry.” For a time I operated under the assumption that unless one were going to write formal, metrical verse, then one may as well take his or her “free verse” and make it a prose poem, or put another way, that the prose poem is the logical extreme of the non-metrical poem and, by implication, the “free verse” poem does not exist, or at least is no longer a viable, defensible prosodic choice. This, at least, seemed to be Auden’s take on free verse. Russell Edson has remarked that the prose poet is lazy (speaking mainly of himself), since he need only think about the sentence and not the line as well (102).

All of my reading of and on prose poems happened in a rather short period of time. Voraciously I read and rather quickly concluded that for all the writing and theorizing about how the prose poem subverts genre expectations and lends itself to poly-vocal poetics, blending discourses and so on, the only real reason to write prose poems is to avoid having to think about your line breaks. To be fair, the corollary to that reason is one chooses to write prose poems in order to focus entirely on the sentence. My sojourn in the form, for however far and wee it ranged, started and finished with this simple consideration of the sentence: where it flexes and relaxes, how many kinds of sentences there actually are, and the relationship between the sentence and the speaking voice.

In truth, I had never fully abandoned the line. While writing prose poems I was also writing a number of very bad imitations of Robert Creeley lyrics, made of very clipped lines.

Some of these poems were constructed by pulling the most salient and imagistic words from published prose poems. It was an exercise in going to extremes, I thought, but what came out of it was this: my very short, clipped, Creeley-esque lines felt faked; the sentence, for however much thematic tension might be built, could never maintain the tension, the tautness of a line, and, frankly, the sentence could not come any more close to a speaking voice than a line; moreover, the line lends itself better to establishing an authenticity of voice than does a sentence because of the possibility for tension, abrupt pauses, and run on-rhythms. It seems anticlimactic to think that out of single-beat lines and long sentences, I decided that the optimal conception for a line for my poems involved something close to a blank verse—lines approximately nine to eleven syllables, about five beats, and consistently applied throughout the poem. I also felt little reason to spread my words across the page. The left margin is a magnet and words are heavy metals. My hand pushes the words away from the margin only so far before they turn and fall back to the left. I suppose a right-handed poet would pull the words, draw them out from the margin and might even feel free to use more of the page. Maybe my hand is lazy.

Charles Hartman's book-length essay on free verse explains something that proved valuable to my "anxiety," namely, that the essence of verse is not meter, but the line and that lineation is what distinguishes verse from prose (52). I may not be writing in regular meter, but I am also not writing prose. I am writing lines that often carry what Eliot calls the "ghost" of meter and that are syntactically playful. Hartman's essay helped me understand the extent to which writing in lines means one is pulling double-duty. The poet must pay attention to the line as a unit of meaning as well as to the integrity of the sentence. My lines exhibit relative consis-



tency and equilibrium or even isochrony. However many beats I hear in the first line becomes the dominant number of beats for subsequent lines, usually from three to five. Even where I reach out from the margin, I am listening to a rather traditional line:

my hand  
in yours,  
dear sister—  
may we never be whole again.

I use a lot of trochees. I have come to understand the thinking that the trochee, and not the iamb, is the base foot in English. I am less interested in any truth-value to those claims than in the frequency with which I find myself using trochees. I suspect this has to do more with the isochronic nature of English: “Every utterance in the language tends to equalize the intervals between accents” (Hartman 42). In constructing the line, then, I am conscious of isochrony and often use analytical discourse as one means of punctuating rhythm:

Letters arrive by cable. Cables arrive  
by ship. Ships arrive by **one of any number**  
**of propulsion systems** and the ocean closes  
all wounds. You could satisfy  
your curiosity by looking, but it’s no longer  
very clear what you’re looking for.

Though my time in the valley of the prose poem brought me around again to the line, I did not leave there without dragging some prose poems with me. The few prose poems in this manuscript have less to do with voice than with syntactical play, and broken into lines they are bland. At least as paragraphs they aspire to little more than vehicles for ideas (“Man Left Holding Half a Cow,” in particular), and it is chiefly for their thematic qualities that they occupy a space in this manuscript. “Sub-Narrative” is the most “language-centered” of the prose poems, while “Glass Bottom Boats in Murky Water” is a deliberate effort at making syntax awkward then releasing it. The other prose poems derive from the archetypal and fabulist tradition of Edson, Simic, and others. I do not mean to sound deprecating of my work. I like these prose poems in particular very much. They are a modest survey of what has been done in the genre, but they are foremost poems written from my aesthetic and poetic assumptions.

### *The Second Person*

A significant number of poems in this manuscript are written in the second-person. Scanning literary journals of the last ten years or so, we find the frequency of second-person poems somewhat alarming. John Ashbery’s *Your Name Here* is among the most recent examples of this move. All but a handful of poems in the book address a “you.” One might be tempted to suggest that Ashbery’s book parodies the increasing number of second-person poems, were such poems, and playing with pronouns, not already so significant a part of his work. Second-person poems are at worst a cheap way to “connect” with a reader. Once I found myself writing them, I became suspicious, though for a number of reasons I could not and

chose not to stop. It became immensely important for me to formulate a clear understanding of what I was doing when writing the second-person.

How one reads the “you” in many of the poems in this manuscript opens up the first question regarding the poem’s ontology: whether “you” addresses the reader (the royal-you); another character—seen or unseen, real or imagined; or, functions as self-reflexive. In a second-person poem, the object of intention is the you, so interpretation necessarily involves understanding a number of relationships: between the writer and the speaker/spoken to complex; or, from the standpoint of the reader, a relationship between the reader and the speaker/spoken to complex; between the writer and the reader; and finally, between the pronouns implied in the poem itself. Questions regarding the poem’s intention (its ontology) cannot be conducted solely with regard to the poem’s form, but must reconcile the form with respect to the speaking voice.

My goal in writing a poem of direct address is to convey a coherent emotional direction and to maintain consistent relationships among the pronouns. Even so, what may be ironic in one situation can be brutal or compassionate in another. Stevens’ short poem “Gubbinal” provides an example of this kind of ambiguous use of direct address:

That strange flower, the sun,

Is just what you say.

Have it your way.

The world is ugly,

And the people are sad.

That tuft of jungle feathers,

That animal eye,

Is just what you say.

That savage of fire,

That seed,

Have it your way.

The world is ugly,

And the people are sad. (*CP*)

It is hard to read this poem and not hear an accusatory note. On the other hand, it reads almost as plausibly as a fatalistic advocacy of hedonism. If everything is ugly and sad not matter what you say or do, you may as well “Have it your way.” Like many of Stevens’s poems, one must read on to understand the one.

In my own work, the poem “In This,” operates on a similar pivot—between compassion and brutality:

Nearly paralyzed by words he’s cut

from his tongue and affixed

to your eyes like post-it notes.

You wear them around town, signs  
that conceal the wounds they name,  
placards of despair, sweet innocent,  
you knew they'd persecute you.

For every time you've been called worthy,  
inchworms of cruelty copulate inside you.

In this you are not alone. The bee's sting  
punctures and the bee dies. Crush it  
under your boot heel. We come to respect  
but cannot avoid our failures.

In this, there is hope.

This kind of ambiguity is desirable but depends in large part upon consistency for its effect. Put another way, the intention of this poem lies not in manipulating the plurality inherent in any pronoun, but in communicating something to a seemingly specific you. We can say that the "you" in the second half is specific because it pretty clearly functions that way in the first half of the poem, although the poem allows us to see the "you" in the second half more generally as well. Similarly, in the Stevens poem the "you" is likely general, but it remains general and the poem's ambiguity lies not with the question of to whom "you" refers.

Many of Ashbery's poems do, however, involve us in the question of pronoun referents,

often to the point where it becomes useless to speculate because no clear referent or set of hypothetical referents can be ascertained. The poem, "And You Know," utilizes all of the pronoun constructions in such a way as to dispense with any coherent sense of the speaker. For Ashbery, pronoun stability is not necessary. His poems are less interested in communicating a dramatic or rhetorical situation than they are in postulating the idea of such situations. While his work remains important to me in terms of its varied diction, I differ when it comes to speakers and pronoun consistency. My aim is to write a poem in such a way that it may be read consistently one way, or consistently and simultaneously in two or three ways. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, as noted, provides another example of this. That is, for all the poem's fragmentation, each element contributes to a coherent emotional and thematic center.

Between these possibilities—the consistent, general "you" and the pronoun salad—lie two additional ways in which I conceive of the second person in my poems. As a specific person, the "you" affects the reader differently than it does when used generally. If the poem conveys rather clearly that the speaker is talking to someone specific, then as readers we are witnessing a dramatic situation as distinct from a rhetorical situation. What we call the situation—dramatic or rhetorical—is a matter of emphasis. "In This" can be read as dramatic or rhetorical depending on how we read the "you." Other poems, such as "One Melody," fall more clearly into a dramatic use of the second person. A dramatic situation offers the reader the opportunity to witness something intimate and, at the same time, feel implicated in the scene. Over the course of reading a collection, the effect, I think, begins to take hold, and the poems have a better chance at accomplishing what I intend for them to do, that is, sink into the reader's

unconscious and tap away. The use of the dramatic you implies that the speaker's concerns lie solely with the spoken to implied or stated in the poem, whereas the use of the rhetorical you bespeaks an audience for the poem, indeed asserts that there is someone listening. This, in part, helps us answer something about the poem's intention, or at least the intentions of the speaker, and to answer the question why the speaker/poet uses direct address.

The fourth way the second person might be used in a poem is self-reflexively. By using direct address the poet clearly expresses a desire to communicate, but that works only insofar as the poem with which we are concerned speaks to a "you" outside the speaker's head. One reader of Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" explains that part of the original confusion with the poem is that "Eliot is more preoccupied...with what Coleridge calls the mind its 'self-involution', consciousness engaging its own self-awareness by continually turning its thoughts, feelings, and environments back on itself" (Mayer 4). From this standpoint, the speakers who appear most to be talking inwardly are not engaged in a reaching out, that is, engaged in a communicative act, but rather they are engaged in a problem between communicative acts: a "What-have-I-done?" and a "What-do-I-do-now?" To access these kinds of poems, one fruitful question is to ask, "What aspect of the speaker's consciousness is speaking?" or, put another way, "What is the speaker's tone and how does he feel about himself?" In my manuscript, "Not to Mention" and "Other Than the Move You Usually Make" feel, to me, like the best and longest examples of this kind of use of direct address. In fact, a reader might find that the greater number of poems fall more closely into this category than any of the others—for example, the title poem, "Baggage," "First Impression," and others. It is important for

me that these poems can be plausibly read in at least one of the other ways as well and that they create a clear sense of more than one participant in the drama of the poem. Put another way, should one read a poem that seems self-reflexive, the poem should evince a severely divided consciousness. In this way, the reader experiences the stark contrast, the gulf between equally powerful aspects of the self and, moreover, the plurality of identity.

### *FINAL REMARKS*

At the beginning of this introduction I suggested that writing poems has something to do with writing one's identity. The correlation between one's experiences and one's work as a poet can be a source of endless speculation and misunderstanding, particularly for the poet. Writing poems has never helped me psychologically. In fact, it has often created more problems. Poems are a way to measure the known and unknown of experience. They create their own problems and the making and remaking of one's poems possibly functions as a metaphor for what one might be doing in one's own life. They might also function as metaphor for what one wishes one *could* do in one's life. In any case, the writing of poems works for me as a mode of inquiry and reflection, and as my methods and strategies for poems change and develop, so too does my identity as a poet and as a person. There are innumerable ways to convey or to write one's identity, but of these, the speaking or writing voice is the most powerful because it uses the very materials of thought: language. What shape the poem (and the person/speaker) takes and what its (his/her) ontology is rests predominately in the tone of the speaking voice.



## II. CONCUSSION PLAYS

Work

Someone in the next room pounds a nail.  
A sound like rain on sheet-metal  
vibrates in my left ear.

At other people's houses  
I always look behind the shower curtain  
expecting to find a body.

Next door, for instance,  
in his blue jacket a man strikes  
a woman harder than he intended.

This is how it goes every Friday  
night. I'm not convinced they don't  
want it this way. Secret cruelties.

The smell of certain flowers, fading  
into dust. And today, while I am washing  
the dishes, my wife, angry again, pushes

me across the kitchen. My head hits  
first the freezer door, second, the floor.  
She didn't mean it. Apologizes,

and helps me up. Even grills steak.  
Rare. I chew slowly, grinding the gristle  
with my wisdom teeth. Blood fills

my mouth and runs down my throat.  
I swallow a tumbler full of whiskey.

Each bite tastes like heaven should.

## Bipedal

This is where it gets me. Right here.  
Between the big toe and the shoe. Left  
foot. The blister now the size of a tic tac.

I am a worm clinging to a brass  
hook, suspended above  
a sandstone ledge.

She tells me, "You can't live without it."  
I suspect, given the certainty  
of her utterance, that she's speaking  
to the one who looks like me, who  
when I move, seems to follow  
an eighth of a step back, or to the right.

The one who gives me blisters.

It's not so much that I (he) need(s)  
anything in particular, it's just that  
when one has a hangnail, he  
cannot resist tearing, till  
blood emerges—the head of a pin—  
solidifies, protects the wound.

The woman at the shoe store tells me  
the insoles come in one size only.  
You just measure the foam pad  
with the foot-shaped placard according  
to your size. The one who tells me,  
"I can't live," tries on another pair of boots.

The wait is long  
and the assault  
could come from anywhere.

Last week. Driving to the lake.  
Windshield wipers on the fritz, sweeping  
the window every third or fifth beat,  
I decide it's too cold to fish anyway.  
Park the car. Smoke in the rain.  
The way the smoke curls about her neck.

Dark water below. Above, a brownish light. In the interim, green.

I wonder if people with prosthetic feet wear insoles. The question comes off as rude. I'm not playing fair, anymore. "You're better than that," she says, opening her umbrella.

Surprisingly, the scissors cut through the foam—about an eighth of an inch thick—with ease. I am sure to cut slowly, counting the tiny air-holes that minimize foot odor and provide maximum buoyancy.

I know what she means. It's uncharacteristic behavior like this that strains relationships, of whatever dimension. Even he, who at times goes unnoticed.

I think he's picking my pocket.

The barb runs through my seven hearts.

## The Weight

Keeper of the present tense—even now  
the undoing of seamless love  
reveals a pressing weight.

Weight of a nightmare's  
flash the next afternoon. The afternoon's  
weight, with anticipation. The weight of what  
you've left in the corner, the corner's weight  
and the weight of the coroner exchanging  
one fluid for another, ounces, the weight  
of fluid past all remonstrance,  
of remonstrance and its denial. The denial  
of weight in the act of lifting, a syncopated  
measure. A bird eats twice its weight,  
and the weight of water over falls  
makes this canyon—the memory of weight  
and the weight of memory pressing untold  
into cities and slums, summer  
weight and sentience, winter  
and the weight you move, that moves you,  
momentum and things divine: *on this rock*  
I weigh the balance, myself included,  
*in the blind weight of my judgment*,  
dead weight, light weight, apples  
ripening in a basket, the basket independently,  
the sweat to make the basket and the salt  
that sweat carries into the earth air,  
weight of the waxwing, of eighteen bridges  
and the maximum weight,

I long  
to feel you in the penetrating weight of an  
approaching storm, night weight, weight of words  
sinking through the page onto your knees,  
of an embrace long after we have parted,  
of the air around the embrace and  
forgetting, trying, turning, insouciant weight,  
plodding through the weight of words to tell you,  
ephemeral, weight pentecostal, the idea  
of weight and the weight of ideas, of what they obscure,  
logarithmic, of the last light

turned down,

between the weight of speed  
and melancholy, of the equestrian,  
equatorial weight, inside the open form filling  
with fading presence  
the dance of weight, of the name  
you take,

moon weight and weightless  
walking, the failure of weight and the weight  
of failure, recollected, of tranquility,  
the everlasting, authoritative weight,  
oceanic, capital, distant weight  
that anchors sense of distance, familiar  
weight of a hand on your shoulder—feel it?  
Blind weight, leaf weight, weight of Autumn  
turning and spring chlorophyll rising, climatic  
weight and your eyelids closing on a room,  
of prophets, prophetic weight, intuitive,  
erotic—your teeth sunk  
in the aggregate weight of my flesh,  
flesh burning with the weight  
of someone unknown  
approaching,

and the weight of a room post-  
passion, stale weight, of a missing phrase,  
kind weight that underscores your perfect  
ability to hate, of hate and all  
it has begotten, of the not made and the made  
weight of conversation, of what if,  
and the bankrupt weight of always been,  
sail weight, of tides and undertow,  
cumulative, cloudy, of the park bench  
at noon and pigeons, all your hunger,  
mythical weight, the seed and its opening,  
fire weight, Nietzschean weight, the weight  
we have forgotten is weight, *unto you I commend...*  
your reply, silent, solar and the weight  
of pyramids, of the ring you cast  
into water, wind under water and sacrificial weight,  
weight that bears repeating: water  
cutting a channel, channel  
forcing down the body, carried

on the back of the river, secret  
brother, carry me into the sea.

## Flamingo Lodge Syndrome

Anxiety is a glove worn on a salt-bloated hand.  
This is one way of answering fan-mail. Of being both  
elegant and elegant waiter. The crystal  
spectrum of the table blown out  
across a large canvas  
trigger. This is how the movie starts  
and plays on, like this, with violins.  
Sooner or later you recall only  
one scene, so the scene becomes the whole  
and something else, entirely personal  
myth and yet faded  
like a photograph from childhood:  
you on your red wagon about to crash.  
Christ, it's like it was yesterday  
and still, your mother calling...

At the strip  
club I'm splayed across mirrored walls,  
almost another sex entirely and without film.  
And she, with shoes shined like an Arabian  
palace I've never seen, dancing across the stage  
in another starring role. Her cellular plumage  
pressed between two thin strips of glass.



## Beveled Out

Your skin in my teeth.  
The teeth in your jaw.  
The jaw in my mind.  
My hand in your skull.  
Your skull on the beach.  
The beach made of snow.

Snow that condemns an atmosphere,  
reported as real,  
real in the way you reveal my position,  
a position that rotates

with respect to other positions,  
positions bolted to a blueprint  
rife with contracts,  
contracts accumulated like snow.

Snow forgotten, we walk on the beach.  
The beach in the moonlight white like skull.  
You hold my skull in your hand.  
Your hand affixed to my jaw.  
My jaw emptied of teeth.  
Your teeth in my skin.

## Negotiation

Watch closely while I break my eye  
over a small cup of water and serve it  
to you poached-egg style.

This is my one good eye, you see.  
The other remains concealed  
in a small pill box.

It retains the scenes of your anger.  
I implore you—pluck out *your* eye

that reflects my indifference  
and place it with mine.  
Come, let us serve each other

and look upon our mutilated faces,  
forever, to wonder at why we love  
and to wonder at why we love.

## Meat

Of course you know me.  
Now hand me the tongs  
I've purchased  
to denude the grill of its ribs.

Is this really the time to ask?

Your mannered expression betrays  
your rising inflection—near rupture:  
barbecue sauce overflows, the gravy boat  
a complete mess now. So too my apron,  
with its cartoon image of a pig grilling wienies.

Even pigs eat pork.  
Without hesitation.

Last October, we penetrated each other  
in the pig pen. Of course you know this.  
My recalling it only marks a desperate attempt  
to stifle your momentum. We've all seen the clips.

The film keeps rolling beyond even  
the projector's control, though  
the projectionist ceased to disrupt the clarity  
of the picture. If it weren't for the intermission,  
you'd never have seen me. Though still,

you would know, wouldn't you?

You always know.

## Groucho Marx's Mango Eye

Someone painted a face on the side of the second-hand toaster, fashioned in the image of Groucho Marx. They colored his glasses a dark green, and his moustache—and all the rest of his face—a bright, cherry red. They'd pasted a sticker for one of his eyes, the kind of sticker you find on a mango in the produce section of a large supermarket, where fruits and vegetables from all over the world are flown in, sometimes on a daily basis. We can suppose the painter a painter executing frustration. Perhaps a housewife bored with painting her nails. Or her young boy, for whom consequences are an inchoate rumor. But before I can explain the basis for these suppositions, she's asking me why I don't throw, "That ugly thing" away. All my dishes are separated from hers and crammed into one box. I can fit no more. "Good idea," I say. Then, "Wait, let's take a hammer to it." The handle of the hammer is wooden and the claw head, a shiny titanium. The price tag reads \$5.99. The titanium head of the hammer shatters the toaster's plastic frame affixed inside its aluminum shell. Once, I got out to help a turtle cross the highway but it had already been hit. Its shell was cracked in two places, blood welled up from the cleaves. At the Vet-med clinic, the orderly told me they'd probably have to put it down, but thanks for the experience. I felt good about what I'd done. After I'd hammered the toaster nearly a dozen times, she implored, "Okay, that's enough!" I was surprised at the number of small, metal parts inside my toaster. I picked up what I could of the remains and dropped them in the trashcan on top of a set of broken dinnerware. Weeks after she'd moved out, I returned to the house, to clean up the mess she'd left for me. There in the lawn sat the mango eye of Groucho Marx.

## Looking Down the Barrel

It's 5 a.m. and this candle is burned down  
to a nub like my one blind eye.

A car narrates through the intersection.  
Stop lights blink, de-programmed

for another hour at least. It's cold  
though my open window admits no

wind, only raucous bird songs that  
hemorrhage in my eyes.

I'm practicing to forget, so when  
I've forgotten it will surely never return.

This requires discipline, active  
reenactment of what must be forgotten

so that forgetting affirms the absence  
of purpose, ritual.

I'm constructing a culture.  
The will to exclude is the first rule.

The second: to exclude.  
The third: worse. And

the fourth: extreme prejudice.  
One must be tolerant of these ideas

to affect larger issues.  
There is no other way;

the object of exclusion does not matter.  
Go ahead. Pick anything.

## B. THE WAITING ROOM

“Quotidian”

I'm told is the first word  
I uttered in the dawn of my  
uncommonly quiet childhood.  
Then my father, given to pleasant  
vulgarity, instructed me  
to declare that all  
was “probably” shit. Things  
haven't changed much,  
though I'm tempted to ex-  
plicate further, repair to  
more complex elucidations  
of hand-jobs and theories.  
Could there be a drill-press  
working here? An anointed  
cloth? Try as I might, the  
seams split with un-  
compromising regularity.  
All order? Remarkably  
silly, which rhymes  
with holy. (Look it up.) I'm telling  
you this because last night  
in bed you asked me  
the first thing I remember  
after all the things I've for-  
gotten. This was one of those  
things: hair-brained yet combed  
to look primped, ready for a  
paint-the-town-oyster kind of night,  
tailored to double-stitched  
strength, and unabashedly  
smoking *Macanudos*. Between you  
and the letter-box, my tether  
frays and I lift off  
the page, buffeted by direction-  
less wind, out of a sub-  
division called childhood  
and into a city called god.

## Sub-Narrative

The recurring pattern of Cathedral ceilings does not necessarily derive from religious architecture; it has been argued that it functions as a kind of class marker the builders of this subdivision saw fit to replicate every third lot or so.

Subdivision: subordinate to an already existing division.

This afternoon the narrator and his friends Will and Jeff were tossing around the Nerfskin which in all its blue sponginess marked the end of a pass and the contact point between Will's forehead and the right side of the narrator's head. The ball coming to rest beneath a blue spruce.

Nerf: foamy, sponge-like substance, cake or brain, molded into the shape of an American football.

Will sits on the orange floral-print couch in his living room, eyes cast simultaneously left and forward. His vision transposes the television and the fireplace, in which birds cry trapped.

Concussion: an injury of a soft structure, esp. of the brain, resulting from a violent blow.

Beneath the ceiling fan's whirr (fans also mark nearly two of every three homes in this subdivision and approximately three of every five homes in the larger suburban area) the blue Nerf sits on a rocking chair.

Suburb: subordinate to the urban area proper, part of the blast pattern of progress, population growth, urbanization, rich-poor gap, manifest destiny, what have-you...

On Monday the narrator follows a line of blue-uniformed students into the Cathedral at Holy Trinity School, which lies on the edge of a subdivision near the center of a suburb. Several students remark Will's absence. Jeff says the narrator, "Hit him in the head."

Concussion: a violent jarring; e.g. a concussion caused by a bomb's detonation.

And though the narrator feels proud sorry not guilty but responsible a twinge in his right lobe stops him mid-smile to let Jeff explain the rest as the Sisters ssssh the blue-uniformed canaries into the Church where the narrator kneels, looks upward not at Christ crowned in thorns but to the flying buttresses that make the narrator think of Will's living room and its Cathedral ceiling, though oddly, the narrator notes, the reverse never occurs.

Lot: one's fortune in life; fate; miscellaneous articles sold as one unit; a piece of land; to apportion.



## In a Manhattan Hotel

The fat old suit guffaws and grabs  
the cocktail waitress's hem.  
Tell the Bellhop the luggage is in  
that van, the red one with yellow stripes.  
It's all very motivating here,  
you can be sure. The drinks with a twist,  
the cigar clippers, the daily crossword.  
Someone ought to tell you,  
in stereo, where the guitars are kept. It strikes me  
that one thing about the way  
you look at me resembles the way  
I must look at you, so that one wonders  
what the original look was, the first impression,  
as it's called here. I don't care much  
for beginnings, toss them out like old shoes.  
It's not one of my finer attributes,  
though, still, something about not getting hung up  
on things as unpinpointable as a washcloth  
odor curbs a certain frenzied  
absurdity. Like decaffeinated coffee,  
or green tea. Both hot, usually, and thought  
to relax you, or at least not rev  
you up anymore than you are already—caked  
with aggression, spoken to by someone whose face  
reminds you of a wrench, whose systems  
are anathema to your stated intention.  
Reaching for a skirt he says, "Sure,  
you can have it that way, too."

Parallel to the feeding line, a lot of missed  
opportunities go unnoticed. Aside from begging  
the question this is probably best. Still,  
the questions beg and you feel obligated to throw  
them the proverbial bone, an organic chew toy  
good for the teeth and gums. And what is physical  
health but a mask for internal bleeding?  
The pieces of cork floating in your wine?  
I usually feel okay about drinking  
them, absorbing the sloppy execution.  
This is about developing rapport. Something  
behind which lies a motive

and behind that motive are more motives,  
some born of need, some of malice, to be sure,  
and others, a kind of what-the-fuck-ever  
that strikes you now as the best motive,  
the cleanest because you need not provide  
a rationale. Others will anyway, and be aware  
this will only further embroil you  
in an otherwise pleasant cake-walk,  
in prison, without files, and not much on your mind  
but the nagging questions: "Where are my bags  
now?" "That red van, where did it go?"  
"And the Bellhop?"

He's sitting near the fountain,  
not looking dejected  
so much as casual,  
indifferent. You want to ask him,  
not his higher-ups, though  
he's more likely to tell you to go to hell  
and anyway, you didn't need all that stuff.  
It's what was keeping you prefigured  
so that others might size you up, making  
your first impression  
before you knew it was yours.

If I Could Paint Like Hopper...

there would be a man lying in bed, sheets pulled up to his chin, left hand turned palm up and resting on his forehead, elbow outstretched: a triangle.

Standing behind him, a woman with her back to us unfastens (we suppose) her bra, fingers wrapped round the clasp, elbows extended: a trapezoid.

The painting would be dark. Almost too dark to make out the figures.

But you would feel them, not quite breathing...

Just as you feel the cold through the square blue window, the only discernible light, though somehow not a source

of light, but a vacuum

like that other, black square, that hangs next to the window, on which (we suppose) is a painting by Hopper.

## Friday Night Lights

A large, yellow dog licks the back  
of my hand. A calliope rolls  
down the street at about five to nine mph.  
Air hangs heavy with rain. Across  
the intersection, a boy flags down the van.

A girl puddle-jumps. Another watches  
the reflected street through a laundromat  
window. Night inflames its occupants.  
One looks into the black, eastern sky,  
smokes slowly, as if considering domesticity.

Another, the tired one on the step, looks  
to be looking at the lawn, or inwardly.  
(My hand just above the dog's scruff.)  
Our bodies, arranged triangularly, sit  
near, but not exactly around, a candle.

White, gravel alleys cleave damp lawns,  
white houses, dark sky. A construction crew  
has left orange netting along someone's  
fence and painted orange lines on the street  
marking where they will break concrete

to insert a new manhole. The ice-cream  
truck plays a tune that reminds me  
of the Mexican neighborhood where  
I used to live. The yellow dog crosses  
the street and pees on the orange netting.

In the airport bar, Gary—the only other passenger on the city bus—tells me, “The workers here at Portland International are the nicest people you’ll ever meet; they really like their job.” Two tables over, a woman fingers pages of a magazine. She’s alone, in business attire, casual. Part of the new corporate image. Initials engraved on the black leather briefcase that rests on the table, next to an ash tray. She’s drinking a diet soda, mixed with bourbon. Down the green corridor, carrying far too much luggage, pushing a baby stroller, two more kids, one crying, a woman struggles to a seat in the waiting area near the window. The bartender dries a glass. There is no one else around. Gary continues, “They actually enjoy it. You’ll be safe here.” I swallow three more pills and chase them with scotch, tell him, “Gary, I think I’m dying.” He finishes his sandwich, ham on white with a slice of processed orange cheese, no mustard, which gives him heartburn, makes him think of his daughter, or ex-wife, both terms used to define various relationships, roles to keep things in check. I can’t tell which, exactly. He asks the bartender for a napkin, wipes his mouth, then blows his nose. For a moment, I think *he’s crying*, and I almost choke up, but the pills I’ve swallowed have made everything teflon. Lights on the tarmac taxi toward the nearest gate and Gary, lifting his right hand, says, “Watch that ground crew—they really love what they’re doing, really love it.”

## Waiting Room Poem

How complicated the world seems.  
I wonder if. I might try.  
I imagine it was always this way.  
The girl in the orange chair,  
chin pointed at the pop machine.  
Nurses' cloth shoes scuttle across  
the carpet floor. Someone pushes a square  
button and a door slides open then shut  
without anyone having entered.  
Fried rice with peas; chicken breasts in jerk sauce.  
Pills poured into plastic bottles,  
receipts run off a printer. Issues of *Time*,  
*Information Management*.  
A name called. A name named.  
When the nurse calls mine it's as if my ear  
is pressed to her bosom and I've been  
dozing all afternoon, cradled in her arms.  
I'd like to tell her how I really feel  
but it might misconstrue her position.  
Just enough to let her know I'm serious  
about being here, and the more I tell  
the more serious I become.  
Her careful cursive rounds out the lines  
on the in-take form. I go on,  
bit by bit, adding to history  
with vague but emotionally  
charged details. She reassures me:  
*The doctor will be able to help.*  
Her voice convinces me  
of what I've told her. She removes her hand  
from mine. I watch her fingers clip  
the form to the patient file folder.

Discharged with my prescription  
and complimentary box for the  
holidays, I lurch past the nurse's  
station trying to look as depressed  
as when I came in. The contents  
of the waiting room have shifted—  
a change in the walk-ins. I'm well past  
the walk-in stage. I'm a regular,

hoping that one day I can make the call  
from home, preferably while still in bed  
dining on pop-tarts and sipping  
Somalian coffee. I deposit  
my prescription, take the seat I am told  
to take and resume waiting. Ignore  
the same magazines as before.  
Read the signs: *If you think childhood  
diseases can't kill adults...*  
The difference between 350  
and 400 degrees? Brown rice  
mixed with the sauce after it's fried.  
Plastic pills poured onto plastic trays.  
Receipts torn off like toilet tissue.  
A name named. A name called.  
The pharmacist's voice ignites.  
My nurse calls another's name and I swell  
with jealousy. Baking versus roasting.  
My name sounds like an air horn blast.  
I pick up my prescription, pay  
with yet another credit card. The girl  
in the orange chair rests her head  
against the suggestion box.

## To the Neighbor's Stolen Boat

Not that he deserved it, but he did  
leave it out in the open, unchained,  
available for the taking by anyone  
with a truck, or trailer,  
or El Camino who happened by  
and felt the boat should be his.

It wasn't a big boat, but one that reminds you  
of Renoir, except the red in the painting  
that depicts this particular boat  
is actually more orange (plus it's not a hat),  
but that does not make it an adequate  
life preserver, nor would it serve  
as a warning to fellow deer  
hunters that you are not, in fact,  
a deer, despite your odor,  
but a hunter (one who hunts deer  
with bow or rifle, looks deep  
into the animal's chest and sees  
the steady, powerful beat  
of the heart—the blood fast-  
pumping through muscles  
that could crush a man's skull  
with one half-hearted kick)  
whose self-styled job it is to kill  
deer because last November,  
two weeks after receiving his tag,  
this neighbor loaded his utility  
vehicle with large implements  
I was convinced served as a makeshift  
bridge and drove into the woods,  
or what in the prairie passes for woods—  
dust-bowl prevention “shelter belts,”  
some of which have grown out  
of their rigid lines to form “groves”  
or areas that around here we call “woods”—

because such terminology is, after all, relative  
and to “beat around the bush” disables  
our ability to understand the stray bullet  
that found a warm nest in my neighbor's



supple breast was not so relative in meaning,  
but in space—relative to his heart  
by three-tenths of an inch, and somehow  
that son-of-a-bitch managed to scale  
down from his tree-stand, walk the mile  
and three-quarters back to the roadside, climb  
into his utility vehicle and drive thirty-five miles  
to town, up the emergency room driveway,  
turn off the engine, lie down on a gurney,  
and ask the nurse to see a doctor.

After several months of convalescence,  
he walked out of his house  
on March 11th  
to pick up his morning paper,  
coffee steaming from the blue mug  
in his left hand, Lucky Strike dangling  
from his lower lip, thinning hair mussed,  
(not “moussed”) and wearing yellow  
boxers I would not take  
as an indication of his cleanliness.  
After all, I’m disgusting  
in the morning, too. And I confess,  
I too own a pair of yellow boxers,  
but I “wouldn’t be caught dead”  
wearing them, much less in front of my house  
on the morning of March 11th  
from which I’ve just emerged  
carrying my mug of coffee, cigarette dangling  
from my chapped bottom lip,  
to find that my flat-bottom boat was missing,  
stolen—the supposition here—much less  
that the boat now surfed the waves  
of a nearby cow-pond in which two,  
maybe three persons, one wearing a red hat  
and rowing, took in the morning sun,  
the subtle breeze and spasms of light  
glinting off water, where the women  
in long dresses laugh at the man’s  
expression, who rows like one  
determined to reach some barnacled  
dock on the pond’s far side  
where he will tie off the boat, strip  
to his bare chest and with cheap bottle of red  
Oklahoma sweet wine christen the boat his.

## Mathematical

The first quarter of my life  
slipped all the way through the machine,  
out the coin return and down the hallway,  
passed a woman's feet wrapped in white,  
cloth shoes gained speed and hung  
a wide left into someone's room.  
Someone close to death. Perhaps  
they'd seen this quarter roll round the corner  
past the sink and its paper cups  
like the ones I pitched pennies into during 5th grade  
science class taught by my mother.  
Mostly it was a bad year.  
She was diagnosed with breast cancer  
and since she was my teacher  
it's not like I could go to school to forget.

During a multiple choice  
quiz I couldn't decide  
between A or B, and C was ludicrous  
so D, by default, became the answer  
through its negation of the others.  
And I noticed Matt Stover open his math book  
and mark in the column labeled  
"Mrs. Dvorske's hair loss"  
and I couldn't blame him. I did the same thing  
in my own way, though I'm hard-pressed  
to remember how exactly—  
unless it was frequent  
trips to the hospital, hours spent waiting,  
tubes of various colored liquids  
and the Coke machine  
in the lounge into which I deposited my quarter  
only to see it roll down the hall.

What of the miraculous journey of a quarter  
through two wings, the cancer ward, and three  
floors of Humana Medical Center  
on its way out the door, where I left  
off because I couldn't decide where to go?

If A meant greater than, and B less than,

and C equal to, then how could I pick D  
which ignored C but affirmed it  
through its negation of A and B?  
This is how it works, I thought, the treatment  
and how to cope and, in a way, Matt Stover.  
But this is not about forgiveness and  
capitulation. It's about that quarter  
falling through the machine and rolling  
down the hallway past a nurse's feet  
and into an old man's room who never  
had any visitors, and about how he reached  
from his chair to pick up the quarter and slip  
it into the frayed pocket of his pink  
robe before turning his eyes back  
to the television set where the world  
seems a little less familiar  
if only because it's strange.

C. RE-DEPARTURE

## Spare Tires in the Realm of the Automat

like a dog  
whistle it whines through the air of  
your thought. You can almost see it whip  
down the hallway, around faces that  
sometimes look at you, go about their  
business, preoccupied in matters of that  
business—its receipts and small  
decisions. Sometimes big ones that consist  
of nothing on paper so much  
as the decision about which pen  
to use. With which hand to write. The left  
being my preference.

Four days ago you sat steeping  
in the bathtub, recalling the womb. A box  
of razor blades, clenched in your teeth,  
reflected the overhead light. The steam  
found a friend in the mirror and you were  
pleased things were cooling off. *Such is life*,  
you thought, pulling the drain plug.  
Today is a different story. The news-  
paper arrives, sinister as usual.  
It's a classic symptom of morning,  
but one you choose now to view as relevant  
only in context of the past it preaches,  
perhaps carelessly. With coupons.

All of this accompanies the act  
of walking out the door. Hearing it slam,  
you fumble for your keys, or maybe  
they're already out: in the car door  
or the ignition and you're on your way,  
barrel-assing down side-streets  
with your mug of coffee in one hand,  
cigarette in the other and knee on the wheel  
because at this stage it's so far  
gone it appears to be something else  
entirely: freedom, abandon,  
a hard-on. And it is  
almost these things.

You're convinced  
of the desire to be convinced  
you will get T-boned at the next intersection.

But of course, it never happens this way.  
Not until you forget about it, that is,

completely forget.

## Not to Mention

It's greasy now. The stove-top. The car door.  
The way you've handled things, leaving

a residue of distrust thick like a layer of wax  
and capable of preserving surfaces

but requiring more and more coats with each  
new season. And the build up! It's bound

to get tight in here, close off the air ducts,  
become stale and settle like dust

on the recently polished desk. You see  
what I mean? Had we known this beforehand,

we would have gone about things differently,  
taken up a collection or played

possum more literally, burying  
ourselves in allusion so that

the allusions would become us. We would  
have receded into the annals

of charred memory, existed only  
as a chance reference happened upon

by someone looking for other evidence  
that once found is soon forgotten, like where

you put your glasses, or car keys, or that map.  
The friendly travelers on the cover

smile as they make their way along  
Highway 101, wedged between ocean

and the façade of a once lush, ancient  
forest. Like them, we've moved on.

Realized we must move past the frame  
in which we've placed our photograph, faded

and dusty, which rests on the piano,  
shadowed in a wintry light or the haze

of recollection. In this frame of mind  
you sense you don't stand a ghost of a chance

and a curious disregard takes you  
over, an attendant condition

such as found in those who've experienced  
recent trauma, can still drive, settle

the estate, buy groceries and even  
joke with the clerk before a new kind

of weather darkens the radar, almost  
with enough warning to check your flashlight

batteries; but you don't care, an outage  
brings with it a peculiar awareness

of gravity, the morass of your  
indecentcy, a relief in failure.

No standards exist for you to live  
up to. Your next move can only surprise

but you're careful not to act too fast,  
prefer to chew on the ruin you've phoned

for delivery. You're safe, for now,  
from a strike by the sky's heated barbs.

Surely the storm will pass, and your attitude  
about things will change. The sense of relief

will dry, harden and crack. New growth will push  
through, eager and urging toward sunlight.

This is just one way of saying what's  
already been said. The windows were always

open, to the extent that we could see  
through them. And the panopticon affords



innumerable correspondences,  
some of which take the form of pairs,

while others take the form of letters, death  
threats, junk mail, greeting cards: Keep up

the good work, Paco. Our sympathies  
are with you in your time of need.

## Personal Appearance

The first time Karla shot me it didn't really hurt. There were red welts all up and down my arms and one big one above my left nipple. I took it as a signal that she didn't like me, or wanted something from me so bad she'd kill me for it. Either way, avoiding Karla seemed the logical course of action. I guarded my personal appearance more closely, keeping it at all times behind me, or always on the side furthest from the crowd. This was easier said than done. For a while, I went about my business, carrying business cards on the backs of mules. Ever worked with mules? They are surprisingly patient, and capable of arresting the finest of details from otherwise unimpressive vistas. Plus, they love going for a swim. Working with mules does wear one down rather quickly, especially when one is covered in red welts, which in time turn a rather romantic shade of purple. People begin gathering around one's purple welts wanting to know if they are tattoos or stars. Once a crowd gathers, it's difficult to guard one's personal appearance. I tried tying it to a mule and sending it on its way, but the mule was having nothing of my personal appearance. I slapped the mule's rump, an encouraging pat, yet the mule remained stubborn. *Aack*, I thought, *this will never do!* Just then, without any explanation, Karla shot me a second time, and slowly the mule carried my personal appearance over a stone white hill.

## Plunging Fool-Fast into the Earth

Along one wall of this room  
you could stack five of me—end on end—  
before I'd touch the ceiling.

On the opposite wall: two point five.  
It's not like me to worry  
about what will happen, unless

something's already happening—something big—  
that might involve someone kicking my ass  
up one side and down the other,

leaving me half bloody, wholly beaten,  
and unsure if I just got what I deserved  
or want what I desire.

In the dream I'm arriving from  
I took a bullet for you. You paused from  
counting business cards to kiss me, to tell

me you love me and that our feelings  
are *inappropriate*. Amidst the chalkboard  
scratches of bird calls, cars slurp through the rain-

soaked streets. I'm despondent over the T-shirt  
industry's clichés: all the clever  
sayings saying it about each other—

lies of those who've laid you, stacked in catalogue  
fashion: Whitman, Sears and Roebuck—I want  
to suck them from your navel, particularly

the lies I've told while cowing to your call,  
a monk to vespers. For some the act  
of study means caring for one's soul.

The soul hungers for acts of the flesh.  
You said it's all just bumps-in-the-road  
thinking, that one must persuade past

the inability to scandalize.

My stomach feels punctured. You'd better go  
home with him, her. Across town trucks raise

dumpsters in salute to the dawn. We lie  
curled in the ashen light, fingerprints  
smeared on carbon paper. Firecrackers snap

in the alley as your moans rise above  
the hum of the air purifier. Let's  
pretend we're headed somewhere interesting:

a festival or trade-show featuring  
those enormous fiberglass houseboats most  
of us don't even bother dreaming about owning.

I've got candy corns on my feet, blisters  
on my lips. The sad fact of your leaving  
is the love we should have made.

## One Melody

It's not the biscuits and gravy nor the plastic menu of this diner that brings you to mind. Though I remember you in the booth next to me, coy looks that hid—not too well—what you never wanted to admit to yourself. It's not you in that booth but her face is yours. I want to ask her if her life is still possible.

I'm not looking for revenge. I don't care how you'd look at me now, or if you even still think of me. I'm certain of the answer and it brings no feeling. I call her your name. She looks at me as at an accident. I insist she's you. She assures me, *no*. I tell her I would have left her anyway, better that she moved out the weekend I was out of town visiting my friend in the state hospital.

She grows hostile, asks for the check and tells me to *fuck off*. That I don't understand a thing about how she feels, or about what she's gone through. Moreover, that I've got the details all wrong. She didn't move out. I did. The U-haul pulling away as she returned from her weekend at the lake. I start to think I'm imagining this. She reminds me that it was *I* who contrived our cohabitation. It was *I* who assumed that through my gratuitous gestures of love she would see that I was meant for her. She says things don't work this way, and that I may as well forget about it because if I don't want anything, then why am I even asking. I tell her I thought she was someone else.

## Baggage

It's the way they came  
across the shoulder  
the two of them

the roads weren't slick  
they'd been there  
all along

calling your lights  
into their  
receival.

You'd seen them  
before you crested the hill  
knew they were there

not ghostly, not anything  
like what you'd expected,  
almost like they deserved it

you thought you did  
the right thing  
leaving when you did

before what'd happened  
would happen again  
you could smell that too

coming on like a gas leak  
every past pasture  
falling into perfect clarity

the moment before  
you black out the sky—  
light burns orange

on coming truck  
this is almost ridiculous  
why don't they move?

you loaded the car  
with the last few things  
you'd ever need

convinced everyone everything  
was expendable  
may as well burn up

it could be worse  
this shaving off  
there was still a possibility

the truck would slow down  
or they'd turn back  
leap at this point

they'd have to fly  
to escape you  
bearing down with all you own

or would ever own  
or know

## Glass Bottom Boats in Murky Water

The slow churning of a day off. No particular engagements. An awareness, sudden, that I can be deliberate about my staying in bed. To rise at no ordinary time. Not early, certainly, but neither late, especially. A point in rising when the will, independent of the world, though taking it as a source, somewhere in the long text of its memory, engages for the purpose of defying both disorder and the customary order that rages. It's a new middle ground. Not particularly close to the old way, but also less intoxicated by the promise of futurity. A certainty eclipses my face like a cell phone and minutes later the drive home consists of milk, bread, eggs, basic food groups with a little extra packaging for promotional offers. Today is the first day of my new declaration—to see it through, this time. For the declaration has not changed so much except that it's become secondary to the statements about it. *We'd like to thank our sponsors.* A matter of emphasis determines the force of a political think tank. Shoulder through the main stream. Quiz shows and minor attitude adjustments, frankly, bore me. There is a larger problem at hand. It consists of several choices, more or less apparent, though sculpted by the force of their fulfillment. A determinism inherent in the nature of choice. What will be woken, and wake, weakening. I plunge my head in the sand—I suffocate. I tear strips of paper from other paper—I divulge.



The Hitchhiker's Tongue  
*for Jerry*

The moon is in your mirrors.  
Where you start can often be the point  
most likely to stone you, stumbling—  
you can't go on. From the moon's  
perspective you're immobile.  
Your speedometer clicks off the miles,  
and were you certain of what it is you're  
going to, a hybrid memory, gleaming  
like epaulets on a midsummer  
gazebo, the accordion, the trumpet,  
the cacophonous mix would endear  
your basic distaste for the whole affair.  
You've been over this stretch of cities  
and rest stops more times than you can count.  
Even the seasons blur—the on-coming traffic  
just terrifies you. Don't think the next  
car will veer off, cross the median, and kiss  
your hood ornament like a saint.  
Don't think that what you carry with you  
won't be discovered. Don't think  
that their loving you is an accident. And don't  
think that what they've learned about you  
they wouldn't have made up anyway.  
It isn't true. Not that the situation  
doesn't carry its dollop of seriousness.  
Were something to go wrong, you'd indeed  
be surely hanged for it. The moon  
is in your mirrors, gold and melting.  
Take your time. Then take it again.

D. MAY WE NEVER BE WHOLE AGAIN

## Other Than the Move You Usually Make

Something blue lights  
the bare room. Rabbit tracks  
dot the snow. So what's that  
you say, you say? Time  
honored gifts, a pencil sharpener,  
paper shredder. Hooks on which to hang  
clothes. All rather indecent,  
don't you think?  
I suppose you're going to layer  
the enmity on,  
thicker than a parka, and less practical  
in this climate. Come to think  
of it, a parka really *isn't*  
very practical in this climate at all.  
Down here, I mean. Where we are. You know?

Someone got up from the sofa, leaving  
a ring of crumbs around  
the discernible absence of his derriere.  
I say "his" because it's only been men  
around here lately, and not to put too fine  
a point on it is usually a good  
idea in such cases—what with the lead  
market plummeting. So it's all  
crapped out again. The spell she's woven  
has left you complete and dry,  
unmistakably vast in your dreary anterooms.  
Letters arrive by cable. Cables arrive  
by ship. Ships arrive by one of any number  
of propulsion systems and the ocean closes  
all wounds. You could satisfy  
your curiosity by looking, but it's no longer  
very clear what you're looking for.  
The calendars have peeled away like plastic wrap.

Somehow you figure  
the situation. It resembles a hanged  
man or the Jack of Hearts. Clever is how  
you undress it and make for the corner  
store before the last light slips from  
the sky so quickly as to be almost

unnoticed like pocketing incorrect change,  
or parallel parking—concentrate  
on simple things: find the center thread  
in your fake Persian rug. If it all sounds  
like advice, the cleverest way—and you  
are clever, aren't you?—to unleash a solution  
involves staking your usual habits  
to the dart board and appearing, if not radiant,  
at least receptive to a certain glow, and  
if not a warm, inviting one, at least  
one that won't project the deer-in-headlights  
look you seem only too capable of now.  
If not, at least you can take comfort  
that advice buys you only a round or two.  
So you need not get hung up on it.  
So to speak.

Somewhere there's an orchard  
where things have gotten completely  
out of control. Spare the details,  
they may be necessary later. We keep  
them talking, giving a few a generous  
hiatus from all the rigmarole  
of holiday shopping, taxi cabs, and pleasure cruises.  
The others, holding on to what looks like  
possible reprieve, become only more eager to spill  
their contents. Juice runs down your shirt.  
It reads like one more mess in an otherwise  
breathtakingly long list of recent failures.  
That is, to read that list aloud in one breath  
would take that breath away, and others  
would surely follow, like Catholics to confession,  
never fully absolved because you're always  
forgetting something, begin to feel pressured,  
make up something that requires  
further elaboration, and before you know it, you're  
wishing you hadn't poured that juice,  
didn't need it anyway, could have made do  
some other way, by now, more retractable.  
Your razor blades need changing.

Someday, you'll look back on all  
this and...back  
to the grinding stone. It's no use  
to speculate. I'm afraid. The causes

have long since found their resting  
place just off the Galapagos Islands.  
And the what-may-come-of-it  
escorts an alphabet of variables  
capable of leaving you speechless  
like mimes talking shop. If all this  
means what you've feared,  
Crusoe, remember the journal ended  
pages ago and someone else has been  
writing this, put that footprint  
there you've not yet stumbled on  
and may never find. For the day is windy,  
and the gulls quarter it—  
taking their flight towards the bay.

## Anecdote of the Bar

Her knee, round like a soft-  
ball, rests on my hip.

Across the table, turned away  
in body, head

looking straight  
at my eyes, which look

at the bottom  
of his boot, which

he rubs and says,  
“The sole is gone.”

Meanwhile, you’re propped  
against the booth,

looking wrinkled,  
and someone to my right

says, “The center of the sole  
is an absence.” The bartender

brings a second bag  
of popcorn. Steam

rises from the bag’s  
open end almost

obscuring your face.

After

He stands in the garden wearing a red  
carnation while an old woman pins  
her grandson's shirt on the line. Beside  
him, fire ants radiate a brown dog's carcass.

In a moment, he will squander  
the opportunity to tell the truth,  
as another woman, much younger,  
approaches with a basket of fruit.

## Man Left Holding Half a Cow

### *A Choir Loft*

It's probable that the revelation you're praying for will not occur. More likely, a variety of messages will pass through the transom of your awareness, none of which will mean anything until you choose to devote to them an imprecise measure of attention, at which point they will acquire a noticeable heft.

### *Snow Storm*

This is a difficult process. You have trouble weighing the various messages and judging them (judgment is unavoidable). Nonetheless, you will begin piecing them together, tossing some out, accepting some almost without question. At times there will be a blizzard. At others, nary a flurry. You might, in these slow times, feel compelled to review what you possess and possess what you've thrown away.

### *Pulling the Teats*

Do not become distracted and miss what passes in front of you. There is a time to review and a time to view. We've all read about the "there is a time" time. This we understand. It is the knowing how to apply it that is subject to debate, and the source of all you have to say.



## Sorry to Say

Like starting a job you'd never been assigned  
Or cast in a role that madmen designed  
Like banking on a jump shot the last second drop  
I think you know why I never asked you to swap

It's here in the corner that you hear someone yell  
The memory of place names distant and cold as hell  
Their faces foregather like ten-penny nails  
And fits of consternation accrue into bails

There are signs on your sleeve and a crucifix on your wall  
In moments like this one is forced to recall  
Positions such as yours no commentary requires  
That you add a page on your affinity for pliers

My crust is scraped clean no pie can be thrown  
I sense there in you a tired animal groan  
I won't offer you comfort something that can't last  
So it's best not to dwell in the not-too-distant past

When we were born free we hungered for chains  
But now that we're slaves we envy the cranes  
It is not easy to unlearn these myths  
Their motives lie fixed twixt our gyrating hips

I'm convinced that the shallowest pools of regret  
Most often throw us the deepest into debt  
And of the ones in which no bottom is found  
We too readily turn from the snarling hound

He gnashes and bellows and growls at our heels  
Just as we've seen on so many dusty film reels  
It's the moment in the movie when the sound is turned low  
We reach for a lover to wrestle the undertow

My scarf is wrapped tight to protect from the wind  
It's cleverness with which we most often contend  
The meddling antics the fools make to conspire  
It'd be much different were we not enjambed with desire

So many days we let things pass as they must  
But sooner or later it all turns to rust  
The heavenly portraits that decorate the halls  
You've seen them on TVs inside shopping malls

The categories slip and we learn to let them crawl  
As I to your door to watch your blue dress fall  
It's the voyeur in me that persists through so much snow  
Unlike you the radiant star of your own show

Let us not get puckered not yet anyway  
There are miles to be driven and the night hours away  
So turn to the window outside which trees dangle  
Or so it appears from a certain transfixed angle

Incisions and decisions are best left for later  
Lest what we've modestly contrived end up in the incinerator  
All my boyhood crushes and your girlhood loves  
Cannot be touched without the proverbial white gloves

They exist in a stream that's long run to the sea  
And become emblems of memory like a *Fleur-de-lys*  
So much has been written and so little said  
No wonder we valorize the texts of the dead

Perhaps we've been wrong and have misunderstood  
But persistence in doubt cannot be good  
Better to take them up again and turn them a trace  
To see in a blur the whole of the human race

Like a bouquet of roses that stands near the window  
Or the breath of a note breathed through an oboe  
Like a dance hall jingle to which we ascend  
A portentous waltz that unrhymes its end

If I were a horse thief this might all be for play  
But my name is William Tell and I've come here to say  
True is my aim the center I hit nearest  
But I still would not swap with you my darling and dearest

## In This

Nearly paralyzed by words he's cut  
from his tongue and affixed  
to your eyes like post-it notes.  
You wear them around town, signs  
that conceal the wounds they name,  
placards of despair, sweet innocent,  
you knew they'd persecute you.  
For every time you've been called worthy,  
inchworms of cruelty copulate inside you.  
In this you are not alone. The bee's sting  
punctures and the bee dies. Crush it  
under your boot heel. We come to respect  
but cannot avoid our failures.  
In this, there is hope.

## Observation

An aluminum can rolls down the street  
on a cool, sunlit September day.  
The streetlight is on to no avail, but reveals  
the mailman as an interstices and precludes  
all sense. Distance swells  
and an afterglow of syntax  
motors away on a white cycle  
hurling the can to the neighbor's driveway.

In this position, one can afford  
to impose detail  
on behalf of an urging cosmos  
that resembles the erratic scrawl of birds  
marking the edge of a vanishing point.

## Translation

I walk into the place of forgetfulness  
and stop on a bridge made of bone.  
I look into the water and imagine it  
feels cool running through me, washing  
moonlight from my hair. In a moment,  
I slip downstream into darkness, float  
on the water. From behind, I hear  
my foot tapping the bridge, an echo  
out of the past. I reach down  
to catch myself, rise from the water  
as it rushes over me, and before  
I can say anything about my life  
I am nowhere, and I am nothing.

## Shedding Skin in the Year of the Snake

It's best to let the moment dissolve  
in salt solution. Then drink it back in.  
I was mindful of this when I started,  
but the series of events, logarithmic,  
kept me in the cold. My toes blistered.  
I fell on sharp decisions, punctuated  
by their reversal and the spreading  
of negative space: what was intentional  
occurred unintentionally. I hadn't  
thought about any of this today. Where  
you were. After the conflagration  
of my tongue's erratic flagging I felt  
you near as the stars, which etymologically  
denote desire. I'm willing to let this  
unfold according to its design.  
There is little choice in the matter.  
I'm aware that my role demands  
another set of procedures. Something  
like method acting where the part you play  
bleeds into your everyday person,  
in fact becomes your person so that  
the person you thought yourself to be  
no longer appears in the wake of that  
other person, wearing cufflinks or  
leather boots. The details, which are every  
thing, are unimportant. It's this kind  
of thinking she finds aggravating.  
(Who's she? And why does this aggravate?)  
In her case it's a fetish for absolution.  
In your case? I don't know.

Lacunae

So  
far from the light  
in which you turn, hair falling  
on bare shoulders, blanketing the room  
with desire—flower and thorn,  
the minor chord waxes outside the window  
gray light turning green; storm  
clouds marble the sky

  over that mountain  
in the distance, whose name is distance  
and can be no other, yet the clouds  
approach, pushing before them  
a flock of crows, paper cups, and  
leaves. Come out into the street, feel  
the cold wind blow through your dirty  
hair. There is something I have to tell you.

Only pause,  
  a moment,  
while I formulate the question  
  —is it a question?

Stars imply a secret order, calculated  
and indifferent. Their names give us only  
temporary comfort, till the stars vanish like strangers  
and we go on, smart and full of doubt, carrying  
our scars like constellations recurring  
with new seasons: one in which butterflies  
eclipse your eyes, flutter and flit away, drunk  
on the dream of you that never stills,  
always breaks in waves on a black sand  
beach. So you see, you too are like the light,  
carry light within you and around you, suffer  
in the knowledge of your light  
as you suffer the darkness that defines it,  
that it defines.

                                The ocean,  
great wink, is a desert of water. One can die  
of thirst there, stranded, alone  
in the incomplete knowledge of oneself,  
confronted by the endless horizon,

its promise of arrival and the certainty  
of never arriving. Come out of the boat  
and lose yourself in the blind  
mystery of coral, in the blinding light  
of desert sands, creosote and cacti.

Years from now, quivering  
some dark afternoon on the brink  
of yet another breakdown, touch  
your lips and remember the words  
I have placed there only for you  
to drink in and be cooled.  
I've spent months with jaw clenched, forcing  
the bile back into my gut, trying  
to come to terms with the burden  
of receiving your love and the will  
to return it. It is not easy, and  
I am afraid. I hear your cough  
from the bedroom as you brush  
your hair—an ordering of the mind—come  
down from the trees and tell me your name,  
keeping, as you should, a secret syllable  
or more, a bracket around the ellipse  
of yourself. I want nothing of it.  
For to take it, even if I could,  
would mean to possess you, stupidly  
in vain, and it is a sin among souls  
whom we must treat with exacting care.

Look there,  
across the bridge of that lazy canal,  
a boy runs content, finally, to be  
without his mother, knowing as all children  
must learn that we are orphans. Only he has learned  
it young. A sort of privilege, in the way  
it is a privilege to burn down your house  
and walk away, unclaimed, human for once  
and without almost without regret or fear  
of regret—it rises to that distant cloud,  
a wisp shaped like an ankle,  
curling around the corner of another cloud.

You told me once your favorites were storm  
clouds. I never knew if you meant  
before or after the rain, or prefer,



as I do, the downpour, when the charged air  
stands my graying hair on end. Each cloud  
is a gift, however menacing or slight  
and it is a privilege to name their shapes.  
Perhaps you too are with me, beautiful  
in the rain, or should I say, you are beautiful  
and I am rain? I long to be both the rain and the  
cloth with which you dry your body, leg raised up,  
patting your ankle, your foot, the toes,  
less delicate than strong, curled  
as your hair curls around your ears—I whisper  
into your ear, tell you, we too are clouds,  
drifting over that canal bridge, that boy  
who is also a cloud runs out of joy  
to be in the world and dying, alive—the only  
knowledge, born of a deep comprehension  
and terror.

    Come down from the clouds  
to rain with me. We will wash our feet  
in the gutters, laugh with the old man  
juggling the lemons he's selling for a nickel,  
float paper swans in the canal that runs  
to the sea and returns to the clouds—flaring up  
as the sun drops below the horizon

my hand  
    in yours,  
        dear sister—

may we never be whole again.

## E. OLYMPICS

## Goodbye

In the meantime, I'll write a life story  
in which I call up hateful things and force  
others to track down the sources, in caves  
and cyberspace. We're full of camaraderie  
here: Everyone is trying to fuck  
everyone else's wife, and the wives  
are loving it. Sexual aggression  
forms a membrane, thick as the monthly  
dissolve of uterine wall, spotting  
the tub.

In this scene, I'm in Houston,  
execution city, having missed my  
connecting flight. I've been searched five times.  
I'm patriotic. I submit. One clear  
night I sat on the concrete and listened  
to my non-wife scream like a television.  
She phoned me over, then wouldn't let me in.  
These things are never clean. Moby Dick  
was a white whale. Once I held the mammal  
in my hands, stretched its mass thin as rice  
paper. It's not consequences I'm concerned with  
but the object of affection one must  
honor before beginning: She let me in,  
threatening suicide. Half of me felt  
like dying, the other half didn't  
recognize myself. If I sat down and  
cried right now...if I told you exactly  
how I feel. She tore at carpet fibers  
in the streetlight dark of our living room.  
Lies poured out with liquor, vows, clandestine  
meetings amid the works of Russian  
composers, piano concerto  
number 2. Boop-boop-be-do.

Such are the slopes of these Olympics.  
I think there's laughter in the air. I smell  
gasoline. That plane reminds us of one  
thing, and I know where it's going. It's cooler  
up there and darker the farther away  
you get. I moved out. She left the state. Freedom  
bought on credit, but you never get far



### III. NOTES

1. A quick glance on-line reveals these titles: *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*, by Louise DeSalvo; *Poemcrazy: Freeing Your Life with Words*, by Susan Goldsmith Wooldridge; *Poetic Medicine: The Healing Art of Poem Making*, by John Fox; *The Writing Cure: How Expressive Writing Promotes Health and Well-Being*, edited by Stephen J. Lepore. There are dozens of others.
2. The polemics of “New Formalism,” and “New Narrative,” as well as the writings of “Language poets” attest to the political posturing attached to forms. This is, of course, nothing particularly new, and a modernist inheritance at least. The best book on the issue, in my thinking, is Mutlu Konuk Blasing’s *Politics and Form in Postmodern American Poetry: O’Hara, Bishop, Ashbery, and Merrill*. (Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), which looks at the work of the four poets as evidence of how form is a rhetorical choice, not something that carries inherent political values.
3. To name a few: Michel Delville’s *The American Prose Poem: Poetic Form and the Boundaries of Genre* (Gainesville, UP of Florida, 1998); Michael Benedikt’s anthology *The Prose Poem: an International Anthology*. (New York: Dell, 1976); Marguerite Murphy’s *Tradition of Subversion: The Prose Poem in English from Wilde to Ashbery*. (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1992); and Stephen Fredman’s *Poet’s Prose: the Crisis in American Verse*. (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990.)

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VITAE 2

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