A JOURNEY THROUGH THE FOREST OF ENIGMA

Cacophonous Verse by
Gregory Holmes Singleton
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

A child of mossy swamps and root-dyed creeks
Escapes to majestic mountains and mighty sea below,
Detours to the island of steel and concrete giants,
Then settles on the plain by the long lake.

A child of feed corn and sugar cane
Migrates to the land of dreams and illusion,
Jumps to the frantic metropolis that never sleeps,
And comes to rest in Mid-American comfortable reality.

A child of platitudes and vacant thoughts
Learns new worlds on the Pacific slopes,
Glimpses the divine in Gotham’s Gothic corners,
And finds a sort of serenity north of the Loop.

A child of fixed reality and lazy consensus,
Formed by the literal Word of a made-up god
Finds God in questions and uncertainties;
Finds answers in God’s compassion.

A child of empty eyes devoid of passion
Ventures forth in search of . . well . . something,
And after bizarre and frightening twists and turns
Finds sporadic solace in the Heartland’s Emerald City.

A child of children made hard
By a world they could not escape
Ventured forth to find himself,
Leaving family behind in fading memory.

The child is laid to rest
So the man might live,
Plagued only now and then
By memories that will not die.

Yet the child lives, mostly dormant
But called forth from time to time
And still runs away again—and again—
Whenever necessary.
ABOUT MY STYLE

A passerby asks
Why my verse doesn’t rhyme.
   She takes me to task
   For not taking the time
   To make metrical
   Tempos for alternate lines.

   I’ll answer with care
   This well form-ed query,
   And I would not dare
   Start my spiel with “Dearie.”
   But now that I’ve laid
Out the rhyme scheme so clearly
   I’ve forgotten the core
Of the message so dreary.

   Since dreary dictates
   A quick change of pace
      Let’s return
      To blank verse
      Down and dirty.
It’s what I have written
   Since I was thirty.

   Gentle flowing verse
Needs bucolic environs,
   Like green corn fields
With a hey and a ho
   And a hey noni no.

   But in this great city
With shoulders so broad
We sing of the complex;
The contradictory;
Cacophony replacing harmony;
   Lyrics more ambiguous
Than a Unitarian homily.
And so the verse
Is blank; Is raw;
Perhaps jarring.
It’s only right
To thus write
In this beautiful flawed City.
The verse should be gritty,
    Not pretty.

ANY GIVEN MOMENT
Any given moment
Life can and will
Change; sometimes
In ways so radical
We can scarcely
    Believe
It’s the same world.

Any given moment
IT can happen
With such subtlety
We don’t take notice;
And those are the shifts
    That throw us
    The most.

Any given moment
We can assume
All is as it was,
Yet one degree turn,
Hardly worth our notice,
Can change the course of life
And leave us wondering
    Weeks, years later
    When IT happened
    And what IT was.

Any given moment
Choose disaster
Over the mesmerizing
*Ennui* of a status quo
Stable as quick sand.
Choose tumult
Over slow killing
Gradual decline
In which free fall
Feels like
Comfortable familiarity
Until we realize
That nothing is
As it was.

Ah, if only
We could choose,
But too often
We see potential
And call it actual.
We see stagnation
And call it smooth gliding.
We see mediocrity
And call it quality.
We fall into quiet desperation
And call it contentment.

And the hell of it is
Any moment
The truth can blind us
And the bottom
Falls out of our world.

More hellish yet,
We never see
The abyss into
Which
We have fallen.
THE PAST FOREVER WITH ME

“What’s done is done,
What’s past is past,”
I heard a pundit say.
“When the course is run,
When finished at last,
Take all that has happened
And put it away.”
This guru of “NOW,”
High priest of present,
Urges forgetting.
But I don’t know how
I can consent
To annulling what
Is still begetting.
The past gives birth
To old ideas anew
That change tomorrow;
Helping unearth
A lesson or two
Buried deep
In regretful sorrow.

Forgetting what was
Is abnegation.
How can I improve
And avoid the faux pas
Of living in mere affectation
If I shut out the past
And get stuck in a groove?

Of this I’m convinced:
The past will control
If the past I ignore.
The past has evinced
Many insights that roll
From ancient memory
And open new doors.
TIME

Time, both elusive and pressing,
   Is always with us yet always
      Just beyond our reach
Because the past is never finished
   And the future never gets here,
Now is always a fleeting illusion
And so we reminisce backwards
   And project forward
And often wonder where we are
   At any given moment,
Yet moments themselves are
   Fictions contradicted
By a continuum that has an arc
   We can perceive clearly
      Only in retrospect
Which is why some of us study history,
   Which is a nifty way to
      Con ourselves into thinking
      That there are beginnings
(Think Genesis, 1066, 1776)
   And there are ends
Which means, of course,
   That old bromide rings true,
      This too shall pass
But still there is that nagging fear
   That it really won’t and life is
      Perhaps just a series of
Linear random progressions
   Or cyclical repetitions
And I don’t know which is worse.
SPACE

Speaking of time
Leads us to space.
Only a fine line
Seems to separate
These defining
Dimensions of
Moment and place.

Time marches on
But space is just there;
At dusk, at dawn
In foul weather and fair;
Whether expansive horizon
Or confining small box;
Freeform or foursquare--it's just there.

Two Alberts assayed space,
   Einstein and Camus.
   “It’s curved,” said the first
       To keep pace
       With Minkowski.
   “It’s what’s between us,”
Said the second with sad grace.

And though I’ve reached few
Conclusions in my many years
I’ll venture this one on which to chew:
The space between galaxies
   Is smaller I fear
Than the space between those
   Who love once knew.
A COMPLAINT TO GOD

Lord, whom we adore,
   Obey, worship,
(Now that I have your attention)
And sometimes question;
You said the Gates of Hell
   Are no threat,
But did not tell of
   Greater dangers.

The evil one is no match
   For evil we deliver
      To ourselves,
      To those we love.
   And we get back
   As bad as we give.

The demons of Hell
   Are nothing
      Compared to
   The disingenuous smile,
      The malicious lie,
   The truth used as bludgeon
And manipulation offered as comfort.

   But worse than
   Deception and dissimulation
   Is the cosmos confounding
   Fawning over Mediocrity,
      Ineptitude,
   And downright inanity;
   The deflating rejection
Of honest doubt and elegant probing
   As the happy-clappy
   Dwellers in the NOW
And denizens of Positive Thought
   Write Hallmark Cards
   Some call wisdom.
So Lord,
Is this really what you had in mind
When those clueless kids entered Eden?
You had to know they would fail,
    Indeed you set them up.
You knew full well
Where “Don’t you even think about. . .”
    Would lead.

No, Lord,
Don’t tell me about
Laying the foundations
    Of the universe.
Put that whirlwind away
    And give me an
Answer better than
“Because I’m bigger than you.”

Unlike Job I will not
Put my hand upon my mouth
    And maintain silence.
Let me rant!
You can rest secure in the knowledge
    (For you know all things),
That my rant will turn to Psalm
    “I will declare your name to my people;
    In the assembly I will praise you.”

Just give me these few moments
To complain with truth and righteous cause.
    And you, only you,
Know that
Beneath the justified ranting,
    Worse than the deceit
Worse than the triumph of the vulgar,
    Is the impending loss
Of what never was.
CONTEMPLATING GOD’S DNA

No one claims to have seen God
Except those daft old gents
Who assert their status as mystics
   With breathy whispers
Smelling of cheap Bourbon.

   The most compelling
Stories of divine encounter
   Speak of “experience”
More lively than life itself.

Whether they speak of
A full-blown personality
Or Ultimate Concern
Or Ground of Being
Or The Force,
All discerners of the divine
Know, believe, or hope
That IT, or SHE, or HE
Lives more literally,
Surely and certainly than do we.

   And all that lives
Has a code written in
   The mysterious
Languages of mRNA and tRNA.

Some look for the code
   In ancient lore;
Stories of the Creator
And Lord of Jealousy
Sometimes vindictive,
   Often bloodthirsty,
And a tad judgmental.
   Frankly, to me
That God looks too much like us
To be worshiped and adored.

   I look for the code
Beyond the lore,
Conceived in a strange mixture of
Socrates, Jesus, the Philosophes,
And those 19th-century Romantics
I publically scorn
And secretly emulate.

If all creation is God’s body,
Then the code must be all around us
And in us.
And that code, if God is the God
I hope is God,
Has three simple parts:
Love, Beauty, and Grace.

And so I will search,
In spite of so much
(Actually, too much)
Evidence to the contrary,
For
Love, Beauty, and Grace
In all that surrounds me
And, more difficult yet,
Even in myself.

And if that is not
God’s DNA,
Then I would just as soon
Pass on eternity
And take my chance
On a grand nothingness
When I check out.

IS THERE A GOD THIS SUNDAY?

I ask the question upon waking
Every Sunday morning.
I ask it other days too
But not as a rule.
On Sunday there is
A pragmatic logistical
Consequence to the answer.
Do I get my butt out of bed
Or luxuriate under the covers
  For another hour;
  Maybe two?

The question is neither
Ontological nor existential.
  It is a measure of my
Internal theistic stethoscope.
  Put another way
The question is
Whether there is a God-beat.

Once upon a time
Long, long ago
The answer had to be "Yes,"
And if I had theistically
  Flat-lined,
Then I administered
Heavy voltage of
Dark French Roast
  To revive a
Decent God pulse.
The show must go on
Even if it’s make believe.

But now I’m a free agent
So I ask the question
Every Sunday morning
And sometimes the answer is
"Yes," as it is this day.
  So I’ll explain while
Getting ready.

The answer is “Yes,”
  But only because
That’s the way the
Day feels to me;
  Not exactly a
Foundation for
Apologetics or proselytism,
But I am neither an apologist
Nor a proselyte.
Indeed, by most theological reckoning
I am a piss-poor example of a Christian.
I can live with that evaluation.

And when I go to worship
(Will be leaving in a few minutes)
I seek a nave where
“Maybe” is a good enough answer
For any question.
I avoid sanctuaries with an odor
Of an infallible person
Or an inerrant Word.
I leave Atheists and other Fundamentalists
To explore the mythical realms
Of absolute certainty.

I wonder what next Sunday
Will be like.

“PLUS LES CHOSES CHANGENT, PLUS ELLES RESTENT LES MÊMES”

In the calm
Just before dawn
The soothing balm
Of looming day
Gives way
To the harsh stab
Of the first ray
Of morning light.

And in that fleeting
Moment the failures
Of the past will rejoice
Anticipating the meeting
Of new possibilities
Given voice;
A new world
Arising from
The death
Of the old.

Yet, sadly
The new is never that new,
For the old ends badly,
Having failed to resolve
The basic problems
That plague our species;
And those problems revolve
Into new incarnations
Of old consternations.

Our path, alas,
Is constantly cyclical;
Perhaps more tragically karmic
Than blissfully biblical.

MEDITATION ON ASH WEDNESDAY

Glitter tossed in the trash,
Pancakes consumed;
Now we awaken midweek
To hear and speak truth:
"We are in bondage to sin,
And we cannot free ourselves."
Before we receive
We will declare,
"Domine non sum dignus!"
Weeks hence,
As altar stands bare,
We accuse ourselves:
"I am a worm,
Scorned and despised."
Even then,
On the cusp of salvation,
We begin again.
You Lord
Have taught us,
Have purged us.
We hear joy.
And then forget,
Or rather
Choose not to remember.
And so we begin again.
We will teach, Lord,
Once we have learned.
You hide your face from our sins.
You blot them out.
You create anew.
But for now
We are obsessed with past misdeeds.
We reject the blotting-out,
Perversely delighting in agony
The remembrance of sin.
We despoil each new creation.
And so we begin again.

We cried out for peace last year,
And the years before,
And war has not ceased,
Our streets run red
With the blood of our children.
And so we begin again.
You do not despise,
O Lord of Love,
O giver of Grace.
Yet we fail
To grab that Grace
So freely given.
We don't believe
In Love so pure.
In despair we despise;
Mostly ourselves.
And so we begin again.
MEDITATION ON PENTECOST

We gathered in the public square
Not knowing what to do or say
Wondering if it was all a dream:
    That vision of peace,
    Of love so great;
That nightmare of strife,
    Of swords that rend;
    The “Blessed are”
That gave us hope,
    The “Woe be to”
That made us quake;
The call too frightening
    To contemplate;
Our King enthroned
    On bloody raw wood.

Now there we were
(We didn’t know why)
Clueless, more than a little scared.
    Then winds rushed up
    And flames descended.
We knew nothing, but spoke
    In words we’d never heard.

Days, months, years after,
We wandered around, still dazed,
    Trying to make sense of it all.

Centuries; millennia after,
We still wander, we still wonder.
    Some gurus say listen.
    Some gurus say speak.
    Some gurus say act.
    Some gurus say,
    “Don’t just do something;
    Stand there!”
Pragmatic ones say,
    “Look busy.”
Still clueless,
We don our red,
Read passages
In a thousand tongues,
Giving voice to
Creation’s Confusion.

Spiritus Domini
Replevit orbem terrarum.
Yet we still search.
Even though it is accomplished
We still cry, “Veni Sancte Spiritus!”
Some will shout “I see it.”
Those more bold and foolish
Proudly proclaim,
“I have it! Follow me!”
Only the wise shrug and meekly say,
“Thy will be done.”

TRANSITION AND COMPLETION

The wastrel sometime soldier paused
To think, to feel, to apprehend,
To breathe, to grasp silence
Amid that blooming buzzing confusion
And perfect harmony
That is Creation.
The impetuous youth
Marched away from family
To find the family that is Creation.

In resignation the youth cried out
“OK! Now what?” And out of the wind
He heard “Repair!”
Brick and mortar gave way to finding Grace
In the Leper’s embrace.

And the family came forth;
Slowly at first; then came a flood
So large the aging youth sought sanctuary
In the bosom of Creation itself.

The message transcends one small life;
And Sister Death,
Loving completion of Creation,
Claimed her brother as yet one more
Who inspires from life eternal.

written while contemplating my 72\textsuperscript{nd} birthday
\textit{The Feast of St. Francis, October 4, 2012}

\textbf{TOO MUCH YOUTUBE}

The cursor blinked, inviting input.
I typed what I recalled from a refrain.
The music rose, and memories flooded.
\quad Elated I typed again.
\quad Endorphins danced and tears fell.
\quad Song upon song, the soundtrack
\quad Of my youth—of my hope—rushed by.

We would not go quietly into that good night.
We’d follow that Dylan, and another too.
We’d march away from our parents’ world.
\quad We’d stride into a better place.
\quad And it seemed real. It \textit{could} happen.
\quad But that was then, and THIS is now.

Suddenly, with shattering force,
\quad Endorphins stopped.
\quad Tears flooded all the more.
\quad Where is that world?
\quad When did it fade?
\quad Was it ever real?
\quad What are we now?
\quad And with my generation
\quad I grieve the loss
\quad Of a place we never quite reached.
FACEBOOK IN A NUTSHELL

Photos of dogs and cats
   And little kids
   Do make me smile.

   And once in a while
   Snarky wisdom
   Skewering THE MAN

Or other miscreants vile
   And mean spirited
   Delight me as well.

Links about the Nile
   Or other bodies of
   Water being salvaged

Or someone walking a mile
   Or more
   To help a stranger

Reduces the bile
   That builds up with
   Ubiquitous bad news.

But. . .but. . .but. . .

Well, it just isn’t my style
To “LIKE” The likes of
   “Up now.”
   “WTF!!!!!!!!!!!”
   “c u later.”
“No tuna sandwiches? Really? I mean REALLY?”
And the ever popular “LOL”

C’mon folks!
Is this the best millions of years
   Of evolution can produce?
IT IS WHAT IT IS

_Homage to a Popular and Meaningless Cliché_  
This ain’t no haiku  
Nor sonnet so fine,  
But it does have a meter  
And it does have a rhyme.  
You might find some solace  
Or maybe some Zen  
In these here words  
That I will now pen.

_Refrain:_  
Oh, it is what it is  
And it ain’t what it ain’t.  
It could be what it could be,  
But it cain’t be what it cain’t.  
It should be what it should be,  
But if not don’t faint,  
‘Cause it is what it is  
And it ain’t what it ain’t.

Jesus knew Cohens  
But _koans_ he knew not,  
And Abr’am knew trouble  
As did nephew Lot.  
David knew sorrow  
And Bathsheba too,  
And they all have one thing  
To say unto you.

_refrain_

CONTEMPORARY RELIGION

More frightening than terror,  
More threatening than failure,  
Generator of greater apprehension  
Than abandonment, betrayal, bankruptcy
or even a trip to the dentist
  Is boredom
  So deep
In both existential
And ontological
Dimensions
That the mere possibility of joy
Is not even on the scope.

Worse yet
Is that Holy *Ennui*
That creeps in
Even (especially?) during liturgy
  When
  *Kyrie Eleison*
Seems the real center
  And
  *Goria in Excelsis*
Smacks of vain hope.

Theological integrity
  Then gives way
  To God
The cosmic restroom attendant,
  The wish grantor,
The problem remover.

Or, if the G word
Sticks in your craw
Substitute nature,
The Universe or Higher Power or
  Whatever;
The function’s still the same.
  It really is all about me.

Come join our flock
  And drink
  Personal success
Mixed with a little Gospel,
  And don’t forget
That the Lord loves
A cheerful giver.
Or, attend my seminar;
   I will grace you
   With
Personal fulfillment
In the realm of hope
And collect my fee
In the realm of reality.

Try just a sample.
It’s perfectly legal
   And won’t lead
To harder drugs.
   But it will
   Take you
To the same illusory
Promised Land
   Where ennui
   Is morphed
Into serenity.

THEOLOGY DEFINED

Theology: **noun**; that sub-discipline of alchemy,
   Wherein the rhetoric
   Of phenomenology
   Is spoken
With an empirical dialect
   In order to transmute
Predilections into presuppositions,
Presuppositions into possibilities,
Possibilities into probabilities,
And probabilities into proofs.
Kierkegaard’s leap of faith
   Looks pretty good
By comparison;
   N’est-ce pas?
A DISCOURSE ON DISCOURSE

Before we begin
Let us survey
The craft, the art,
The potential array
Of rhetorical styles
And ways to state,
Simply and clearly
While avoiding debate,
Positions held dearly
By ardent bibliophiles.

Avoiding discord
Is the prime objective.
Points are not scored,
We avoid invective.
We’d rather be nice
Than risk noxious candor;
We’ll meet fire with ice,
Making discourse far blander.

Let’s poll and assess,
Let’s make a profile,
Let’s avoid a mess
That could defile
Innocuous pleasantries
And banal bromides
Hiding behind pedantries
Lovingly preserved with
Verbal formaldehyde

What’s that you say?
You would like to speak?
Well, of course, you may!
Our interest you’ve piqued!
But we’ve run out of time.

Give us an abstract of your contribution.
If it has tact and lacks retribution
You’ll be on the platform when next we meet
And you’ll have your say. . . if you say it sweet.
THIS BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

Fractured selves,
Torn between
Dystopic visions
Of what is
And a Disney version
Of what should be,
Encounter
Self-assured
Flag waving
Apologists
For the
Right path,
And
Smug moral
Self righteous
Activists
On the
Left bank,
Then retreat to
Crystalized death,
Virtual chat rooms,
Reality TV,
Or the cure du jour—
Whichever is closer
At hand.
Now, if this ain’t Nirvana,
Please tell me what is.

JESUS, THE KING, AND THE DUKE ON VELVET

Gentle morning breezes ushered in
An unusually mild August day.
The rest of the nation was still busy
Either cheering or mourning
The resignation of a President
Who was his own worst enemy.
But those of us who gathered
At a small church in Chicago’s
Quirky northwest quadrant
Were happily focused on two
Remarkable youngsters
Exchanging vows.
They met in one of my classes,
The first of many couples
Who share that distinction.
The first in their families
To go to college,
Both excelled.
After the ceremony all the guests
Drove to the bride’s parents’ home,
A large ranch style structure
With a statue of
An African-American jokey at the curb.
“Toto,” I thought, “We’re not in the 1970s anymore.”
The father of the bride
Was mainlining Seagram’s Seven
Augmented by RC Cola.
“So, perfesser” he slurred,
Whacha been teaching these kids?”
I tried to tell him.
He didn’t listen,
But took the conversation
In another direction.
“You like art, perfesser?”
He asked.
“Dad! Don’t!” His daughter pleaded.
“What?” he asked, genuinely bewildered.
“Just don’t, please!” She said,
This time
More like a command than a plea.
The man shrugged
Then turned to me.
“Let me take you to the den,”
He said and laid a hand on my shoulder,
Or rather grabbed my shoulder and
Directed me to stairs
That led down
To a room as cozy as it was curious.
   He switched on the light
   And several **objets d'art**
   Came into view:
   Several pastels of clowns,
A singing fish mounted on a board,
   And a few duck decoys.
   His hand still on my shoulder,
   He directed me to the far wall.
   “This is my best piece.”
And there before me painted on velvet
   Was the most memorable image
   I have ever seen.
Billowing clouds, evidently suggesting Heaven,
   Surrounded Jesus
   With one arm around Elvis Presley
   And the other around John Wayne.
   Above them was a banner:
   “GOD BLESS AMERICA.”
Try as I might, I’ll never forget that moment.
   Noticing my stunned silence,
   The father, with a tear in his eye,
   Said, “Yeah—it’s really something.”
   He patted me on the shoulder and
   Quietly climbed the stairs.
   The bride looked at me
   With sad eyes and stooped shoulders.
   She started to speak but found no words.
   “I understand,” I said, “I really do.”
   She nodded.
   I have rarely felt so useless.

**ODE TO CHICAGO**

Neighborhoods (north, south, lakefront and west)
   Bear the imprint of peasant cultures
   Of Europe, Africa, Asia, the other Americas,
   And the rural states of a past confederacy;
   Or perpetuate the centuries old patterns
Of burghers of the middling sorts
From The Pacific’s west rim
To the Atlantic coast of Ireland;
Or, less frequently, host the descendants
Of Old World revolutions:
All housed in small enveloped enclaves,
Little provinces in this urban house of many mansions.

Universities and corporations,
Some clothed in gothic garb,
Others draped with steel and glass,
Draw their modern denizens from
The global cutting edge of visions of tomorrow
In this world-class city.

In this provincial / cosmopolitan city
Traditional past, modern present, and post-modern future
Tacitly coexist in sporting arenas, concert halls and museums,
But those provinces rarely engage
One another in this burg
Where differences fester
While silently ignored.

**HARMONY, DIVERSITY, UNITY:**
**UNISON, UNIFORMITY, DISSENSION**

Our species is peculiar and amusing,
But just as often peculiar and sinister.
Perhaps the human story
Is best classified as Dark Comedy.
There is too much mean spiritedness,
Pettiness, and just plain stupidity
To qualify as tragedy.
I’ll raise no objection
To shelving such a volume under
“Horror” or “Theatre of the Absurd.”

Consider one cluster of examples—
A syndrome, if you will.
The symptoms
(To give the analogy verisimilitude)
Can be found in all areas
Of our life together that involve
Opinions of the most urgent
And important sort:
Politics and Social Theory,
Economics and Anthropology,
Philosophy and Theology,
Cosmologies both broad and narrow.

Simple observation,
Even by the dullest of us,
Readily reveals
Remarkable diversity
Approaching the Vulcan Kol-Ut-Shan:
“Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations.”
Yet a massive amount of
Brainiac talent
And even greater legions of lesser minds
Have sought to find the
Golden Mean
Through which the inconvenient
Contradictons of social reality
Can be made smooth.

Often,
Far too often,
The goal is to reach
HARMONY by enforcing UNIFORMITY
(Think of Nicaea, Blue Laws, Witch Hunts).
Impossible!
(And dare I add “Idiotic!”?)

HARMONY demands DIVERSITY
With at least two different voices,
Most often four,
6 part dispersion with shape notes,
And at least sixteen distinct voices
At one time in some operas.
HARMONY is created
By the convergence,
And UNITY is found in the midst
And because of DIVERSITY.

Singing with a single voice—
    UNISON we call it—
Achieves UNIFORMITY,
    But the range of voices
May not easily adapt to
The enforced monophony;
Polyphony seems to be
Our natural inclination.
Thus UNIFORMITY will never achieve HARMONY
And may well (Actually, bet on it)
    Produce DISSENSION.

Politicians, religious leaders,
Students of the human condition,
    And pundits right and left
Should study music
    Before pontificating
And leading us to chaos
In the name of HARMONY.

WORDs

Words come
From all directions;
Some ancient enough
    To become clichés;
Others ephemeral,
    Born in “the now”
And then gone forever.
    Most fade quickly.
Some are savored
    And then forgotten.
Others, too many others,
Seem like epiphanies,
Then upon reflection
Become embarrassing
As we slowly realize,
In vapid wonder,
How empty they really are.

But now and then,
Only occasionally
(Well, honestly,
Less frequently than that)
Come those words
That stay forever.
A few, so regrettably few,
Bring enlightenment,
And usually over
A great expanse of time—
Be cautious about
“AHA!” moments.

Alas, most words that stick
Just haunt us.
We choose despair
When we hoard those words
That bring paralysis;
Those words that shout “Surrender!”

Those words
We can’t forget,
Try as we might.

We choose delusion
When we bury ourselves
In pious platitudes
And pleasant pedestrian phrases
Uttered with mock sincerity
By those who know
How to turn
The Desperation of others
Into a quick buck
With half clever turns of phrase.

We choose life
When we assess
Those words
That come our way;
When we don’t swallow whole
Items hastily grabbed
From a conceptual buffet;
When we choose words of our own
To critique or expand
Those words that come
From All Directions;
Thus transforming
Verbal chaos
Into a path
Of our own.

THOUGHTS

Thoughts
Systematic or chaotic,
Focused or scattered,
Rigid or free floating,
Disciplined or wanton,
Purposeful or vagrant,
Nourish our sapiens nature.

Thoughts hoarded
In solitude,
Fueled by fear of
Casting pearls to
Porkine auditors,
Die in the
Still of the night
While their
Thoughtlessly thoughtful genitors
Descend into
Useless smug contentment.
Thoughts shared
Just might survive
And if robust
Might live on
Long after we
Are dust;
Perhaps our only
Shot at immortality.

Those whose thoughts
Are chaotic, scattered,
Free floating, wanton, vagrant,
Should not dismiss
As tight-assed
Those whose thoughts
Are systematic, focused,
Rigid, disciplined, purposive.
Be in conversation with them.
They can bring
Intuitive hunches
To rational fruition.

Those whose thoughts
Are systematic, focused,
Rigid, disciplined, purposive,
Should not dismiss
As flakey
Those whose thoughts
Are chaotic, scattered,
Free floating, wanton, vagrant.
Be in conversation with them.
They can give birth
To brilliant flashes of insight
Worth your time and effort.

Thought,
While intensely and intimately
Personal
Is best served by synergy.
We need both thought and sociability
More than ever
In this age threatening
To entertain us to death
   And
Place us in cocoons
Spun of texting acronyms,
   Job descriptions,
And ubiquitous labels.

Rebel by thinking.
Take action by sharing
Your thoughts.

SYNERGY

Cooperative, correlative, and confluent;
Seeking understanding and discourse
   More than answers;
Placing greater value on creative tension
   Than on convenient resolution;
   Fostering relationship
   Rather than alliance;
Desiring to gather participants
More than assembling an audience.

ODE TO FOUR PRACTITIONERS OF HOLY INTEGRITY:
Emily Dickinson, Walter Kaufmann,
Christopher Lasch and Stanley Hauerwas

Pious platitudes
Proclaim pleasantries
   In times of chaos;
Moments of distress.

Smarmy sweetness
Sends simulated soothing
   Into recesses of despair;
Chasms of longing.
Snake-oil merchants
Have no problem
Finding markets
In our corrupted culture
Of diminishing expectations.

Complexity, Ambiguity, Contradiction
Define our fuzzy here and now.
The pious, the pleasant,
The smarmy, the sweet
Anesthetize the ennui.

Then comes forth these blessed four,
Poet, Philosopher, Critic, Divine;
Loving honesty more than plaudits
Loving God enough to grumble,
Loving others too much to lie.

REMEBERING ANTONIO GRAMSCI

As late autumn skies turn gray
And red leaves become ashen;
As the season’s first cord of wood
Is nearly gone before Thanksgiving;
As long shadows of afternoon
Become obscured by early dusk;
As cinnamon and clove
Adorn more of our meals,
I contemplate settling in
For several days
(or maybe weeks)
Delighting in the insights,
Subtle nuances,
And grand vision unveiled
In Gramsci’s Notebooks.

Sitting by the fireplace
In a modest but cheery home
I smile almost sadly
At the irony of this guilty pleasure of
Relaxing in the happy comfort
Of my septuagenarian dotage
Reading the words of
A young man imprisoned
For thinking too much and too well;
A young man who died three years
Before I was born.

\textit{Requiescat In Pace} Antonio
And thank you for the gift
Of more wisdom in your
Too short time
Than I will generate in
A life twice as long.

\textbf{A LEAP OF DOUBT}

Driven by uncertainty
Of everything
Except death,
We imagine a better world
We never quite grasp;
For which we hope
And some fervently pray.

We assemble bits
Of ancient lore
(Which don’t quite fit)
To form a mosaic
That mimics
A triumphant tale
If we squint real tight
And the light is just right.

Most keep eyes shut
And substitute
What we believe we have seen
For the more somber view
We know we have seen.

    Lord I believe.
Help thou my unbelief;
    Or ,better yet,
Grant me the courage
    To complete
This leap of doubt.

**DISAPPOINTING DEMOCRACY**

Cosmologies abound,
    Moralities collide,
Predilections permutate
    Into defined doctrines,
Often mutually exclusive;
Competing for dominance.

    Progress is not linear,
And we give thanks for that,
Elsewise Fascist regimes
    Would forever last.
Progress is not cyclical,
As Forest's mother might tell us,
Because you never know
    What you'll get next.

Democratic pluralism
    Is one hell of a mess,
But the chaotic outcome
    Is worth the aggravation,
Even if trains don't run on time.

**RANDOM THOUGHTS ON ELECTION DAY 2012**

Twixt Halloween and Advent I
Our moods quite contrapuntal run:
Bare trees against the autumn sky,
Winds blow and dry leaves fly.
Baseball’s done, Football’s here.
We eat smoked meats we love so dear,
And squash enhanced by savory spice
Stuffed with beans, corn, onion and rice;
Election Day filled with expectation
Divides an already fractured nation.
Who will win, who will lose?
We heard so much rhetoric; was it all a ruse?
Then Advent dawns with another view
One understood by very few;
Though winning and victory we value so dearly,
They’re eclipsed by a question presented so clearly;
At beginning and end, below and above,
Who loves you and who do you love?

A SORT OF BLUES RIFF

Woke up this mornin'
With thoughts I didn't choose.
I think I've got a dose
Of the old anarchy blues:

Political pundits,
Left, right, and center,
Proffer prospective
Perspectives, proposals, solutions
Perpetuating persistent
Aggrandizing ambivalent posturing.

A Petrified populace
Obediently listens, applauds.
A prescient and predictably
Few cope with
Particularly pensive
Insights, intuitions and hunches;
Wisely ignoring
Political pundits,
Left, right and center.

Yeah--it's been that kind of week;
Scratch that--it's been that kind of lifetime.

PLEASANT INTERLUDES

Even in wastelands
Small nuggets
Of great beauty
Nourish hope:

Arias in dusty halls,
Sung well or not so
But with fervor
And heard with
Gratitude;
Feral cats
In a wretched alleys
Tending their young
With tender love.

Such scenes are there
Amid the rubble.
Even greater hope
Shines from rubble itself.

Mean spirits
With a touch of grace
May yet
Be transformed.

Corruption is
All too obvious;
Promise
Too often obscured.

Consider the lily
Growing in forsaken land;
The bird singing
On ruined plain;
Observe the kindness
Of the toothless hooker;
The wisdom
Of the illiterate.

If you find
Nothing but despair,
Consider whether
You’ve projected it there.

THESE MARVELOUS MOMENTS

These marvelous moments
Come without warning;
Without fanfare;
Which is just as well.
Trying to prepare
Would burst the bubble
Before it’s formed.

Such moments,
Neither joyful nor sad,
Devoid of excitement
Yet hardly boring,
Are often mistaken
For ennui.
Some of the young
Indulge this fallacy,
As do the old
Who shun their age.
Both rush to
Excitement,
Bottles, pills, meth,
Or an evening of
Anonymous lust
And miss the portal
To something transcendent.

Contentment is not
For the faint of heart,
Nor the slaves of fad
And fashion.
Serenity is not
For the never satisfied,
Nor the seekers of superlatives,
Nor the lovers of illusion.

Those who see
The beauty of the ordinary,
Who hear
The sonority of raspy sounds,
Who discern
The exceptionality of the commonplace
Treasure these moments
And, more often than not,
Communicate them
To kindred spirits
Only in calm smiles.

CONTEMPLATING RUBLEV’S ICON ON A GRIMY TENAMENT WALL

Whether visiting angels
Or Holy Trinity
Or just friends,
The three sit
Seemingly frozen in time
Yet animated by
Silent conversation
Shouting with intense passion.

We can feel the
Profound and joyful
turbulence as
Ideas become material
For building serious answers
To somber questions
And delightful questions
Beyond the answers.

Surely this icon is misplaced
On such a dismal wall.
Surely this image deserves
A more elegant home
Where the wise and powerful
Can be inspired.

But maybe,
Just maybe,
More humble ears
Are needed to
To hear a message
Of hope
For a broken-hearted world.

IN PRAISE OF BARE TREES

Bare trees
(Skeletal, really)
Against a battleship gray sky
Seem ominous to some,
Foreboding to others,
But to me presents
An honest, beautiful
Promise of life in the guise of
Seeming death.

The branches,
Even when gnarled,
Wave gracefully in the
Gentle (or sometimes angry) winds
Of late fall
And form intricate
Ever shifting patterns
In the late afternoon shadows
Of early winter.

On a crisp clear day,
Enhanced by a
Dark roast coffee
(With a bit of Chicory)
And the smell of wood
Burning in the fireplace,
Can there be
A more stunning view?

**EVENSONG**

Sunlight slowly fades;
Colors loose bold
Brilliant hues
As meek faded primary colors
Resolve to
Weak shades of blue.

Eyes adjust to
Dusk and perhaps
We contemplate a quiet
Sedate evening.

Suddenly! Startlingly!
Sharp stabs of bright light—
Street lamps, neon signs,
Electronic billboards—
Appear in random syncopation
Giving new life
To a day not nearly done.
Attributing neither meaning
Nor moral to this transition,
I nevertheless hail it
As a Vespers of sorts.

It is not Compline
When we pray
For a quiet night
And peace at the last.

The music of the evening hours
Underscores the revived light
And strong colors
Inviting us to
Brandy with Mozart,
Beer and shots with Blues,
Strong Coffee with Brahms,
(And whatever hipsters ingest
With the latest Rock craze)
While we celebrate
The mysterious
Alchemy of night
As the day
Takes a noble—if futile—stand
Against inevitable death.

CONNECTED IN LINCOLN PARK

A sea of People
With important things to do,
Crucial calls to be made,
Walk their dogs while ignoring them.

In their midst
A solitary young woman
Has a conversation
With a Weimaraner
Who joins the discussion
With wagging tale
And glances of adoration.

A father shares
Made up words
And joyful laughter
With his not yet
Year old son.

A couple
Old enough to have
Marched in Selma
When they were thirty
Walk hand in hand
Enjoying the early morning air.
They pet the Weimaraner,
Greet the father and son,
And walk on
Smiling at one another.

While others
Go about the business
Of being busy,
These slackers
On the edge of importance,
Or actually
Just a bit outside the boundaries,
Are the only ones
Who have grasped
What it is to be connected
In this anonymous sea
Of people
With important things to do

THE WISDOM OF CATS

The wisdom of cats is undisputed,
Except by tyrants who are reputed
To quaff cheap distillates
While despising feline independent spirits.
Cats know who they are,
   Each one a star,
And their owners, alas,
   Are of a lower class.

Cats read our minds easily
   As we watch them queasily,
Knitting a furrowed brow
   Asking “What is s/he thinking now?”

Cats understand every word we say.
They never forget—tuck it all away
   In memories as sharp as a lance
While they give us a knowing glance.

Cats shower us with affection
   As sweet as any confection,
As rewards for good behaviors
   And to cajole anticipated favors.

Cats are nature’s elite,
   So let us concede defeat.
Let us pledge our fealty in one voice
   Because frankly we have no choice.

ODE TO AN INTENTIONAL SOMNAMBULIST

He sleepwalks through life,
   But I hasten to add,
With intentional deliberation
   Devoid of indolence.
Several decades ago
   He heeded the words
Of a bearded public TV guru
   (Not the one who hugs;
The one who used to be a priest)
And he heard amid the
   Psycho-Dribble
One undoubtable truth:
“You are the only person
You will never abandon
Or who never will abandon you.”

Armed with this doctrine
He went forth into seclusion
Looking neither to past
Nor to future
But dwelling in the
Perpetual NOW
With himself
As his only companion,
Thus sparing himself
And others the pain
Of inevitable separation.

He sought only
Fleeting and surface
Connections with friends
(The quotation marks
Were palpable),
Reinventing himself with
Each new encounter.

He smiles incessantly
While functionally absent.
His nods and “hmmms”
Denote whatever
The other projects,
While he plans his
Escape from the mere possibility
Of entangling relationships.

He adopted a mantra,
“It is what it is,”
To explain his
Nebulous persona
And affectless
Presence.
So let’s raise a glass
(Make mine Pellegrino)
To this latter day hermit
Who lives in the midst
Of sociability
Perfectly shielded from
Contaminating intimacy.

Few of us so perfectly
Realize our true vocation
As does
This intentional somnambulist.

A PERFECT SUNDAY AFTERNOON

The barista handed me
One cup of decaf and
A steaming hot latte
(Two extra shots).

I opened my book *du jour*
To continue inhaling
The well-formed thoughts
Cast in elegant prose.

While savoring
A particularly delicious
Turn of phrase,
Turning it over
In my head
And looking at it
From several angles,
I glanced up and
There was Richard
Raising his cup
Of straight espresso;
Nodding and smiling hello.
A tradesman my age,
He is still working
While I glide toward the
End of my eighth
Year of retirement.

He came over to
My small encampment
And we continued
A conversation
Left hanging a week ago;
   Maybe two.
We wondered out loud
About the intersection
Of Jung and Steiner and Theosophy
And (with tongue in cheek)
The Bavarian Illuminati.
His depth of understanding
   And keen insights
Rival the best of
   My former
Academic colleagues.

The barista looked at us both;
   Her eyes rolled,
But the smile told us
   She was amused;
And tossing aside
   Her better judgment,
She was drawn
   Into the discourse.

When we tired of
Esoteric topics
We turned to the
Serious business
Of solving all
The world’s problems;
   If only the world
Would listen.

It was yet another
Perfect Sunday afternoon.

STILL-BORN FRIENDSHIP

Once again,
We walk and talk.
   Once again,
I shake my head.
   Once again,
Frustration.

Once again,
Polluting politeness
   And evasive rhetoric
Trump integrity.

Once again,
Ostentatious oration
   And pretentious diction
Block clarity.

Once again,
I want to shout,
   “For God’s sake
Say what you mean!”

Once again,
I keep silent
   And wonder
Why we continue to walk
Why we continue to talk
   Once again
   And
Once again.
AFFINITY

Affinity,
Beyond friendship,
More intense than love,
Subsuming both.
Like gravity,
Like momentum,
Like inertia;
Primal.

Friendship
Without affinity
Is slothful convenience.
Love
Without affinity
Is lust
Varnished with Infatuation;
Neither worth having.

Associations
Without affinity
Lack life;
Merely exist.
Alas,
For some
All there is.

And if you ask,
“What is affinity?”
Well,
You’ve never been there.

A LOWEST-COMMON-DENOMINATOR CONVERSATION

I’ve been called lots of things,
The kindest of which is elitist swine,
And truth to tell with truth that rings
The title fits me fine.
My betters (or so they tell me)
Suggest I find a softer way
To have conversation over coffee or tea
Using smarmy charm opinions to sway.

So I gave it a try with someone today.
I followed his lead into the mundane.
He selected the topic of the first foray
And entered the realm of the terminally inane.

We agreed that winters in Chicago are cold.
We plumbed the depths of the curse of the goat
That has haunted Cubs fans since days of old.
We pondered whether petrified wood would float.

The discourse lasted an hour or two
As the topics went from silly to absurd.
I sat and listened wondering what to do
To keep from flipping this guy the bird.

My betters are right, of that I’m certain,
But to my elitist ways I’ll default.
This conversation my ears are hurtin’
And I am screaming “Oy gevaldt!”

REFLECTIONS ON AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION

A wise youth
Filled with zeal
For absolute truth
Happened upon
An old fool
Who felt no need
For Divine rules
Augmented by
Aristotelian
Sayers of sooth.
The wise youth
Dazzled the
Elder jester
With postulates,
Pontifications
And proofs
All cased within
A circular argument
Explaining the cosmos,
Salvation and sin.

The old man smiled
And quietly invoked
His blessed trinity:
Complexity,
Ambiguity,
Contradiction,
Amen;
Then exorcised
Dogmatic declarations.

The earnest young man
Shook, his head
In pity for
This ancient who said
Such silly things
In the presence of
Elegant logic
Explaining
The revealed truth of
All things,
Visible and Invisible.

The jolly old soul
Smiled as he saw
A reincarnation
Of his youthful self
He had years ago
Placed on the shelf
As he followed
His own path to Realization
Filled with wonder of Endless discovery
Rather than Certitude
Of fixed doctrine.

The youngster saw
Before him Degeneration personified;
A mind possessed
By demons Of plurality
And demented
Visions of Relativity.

The *alta caca* saw
Before him A pre-larval being
Waiting to become An ever expanding Consumer of Experience,
If he can ever Leave the Confining comfort Of absolutes.

They both enjoyed The conversation,
Although the youth Felt some Consternation
That the old fool Was not converted.
The one long of tooth Left with hope That young certainty
Would be diverted
To more expansive
Views in
Years to come.

HOPE LOST ON THE RED LINE

Glazed eyes and foggy heads
Packed into steel-gray cars
Traveling rails to nowhere
And each victim wishing instead
To find meaning anywhere
But the inevitable destination.
The lucky ones close their eyes
And dream of lands never seen
In the waking life of somnambulists
And in that state expectations rise
To the level of almost possibility
And then jarred awake in utter frustration

As the station looms ahead and marks
The location of dispersion into the faceless
Mass of drones of the American dream
Making fortunes for someone never seen
Transforming this permanent indenture
Allowing us a share in our own oppression.

HOPE REGAINED ON THE RED LINE

Vacuous heads bob in time
With the swaying car.
Empty eyes stare in sublime
Stupor at images from afar
In pixels on small screens.

Only two of thirty passengers see
The young woman reading a book,
Her face filled with wonder and glee.
And if they took a closer look
They’d see the titillating title:
Reality and Other Dangerous Myths,
An anthology of musings
By pundits and word-smiths;
Ideas enlightening and confusing,
Challenging complacency.

She reaches her stop on State Street
And closes the book with a smile
That is joyous, knowing and sweet
As she joins a single-file
Line of drones into the Loop.

And one wonders if she's alone
In wonderful subversive thought
Or if she’ll pause, pick up the phone
And share what this reading has wrought.
I hope it’s a movement

REFLECTION ON A VERSE BY JOYCE
“There is no word nor any sign
Can make amend -- -
He is a stranger to me now
Who was my friend.”
from James Joyce, “Because Your Voice Was At My Side”

Friends come and go.
Some linger longer.
A few see us through
The course of life,
Or join us in mid passage
And enrich our years
Of splendid decline.

Of those who go
Some leave too early
Through death’s door.
Others fade away or perhaps it is
We who fade, or both.
Some of these are only dormant,
And joy abounds when friendship revives.

Some leave with sudden anger,
Often mystifying and we wonder.
Is it me? Is it him? Is it her?
And maybe it just is.

Hurt, rejection, resignation
Are the stages of this kind of grief.
We may say, “Thank God that’s over!”
And still feel the wound.
But over time wisdom sets in.
We accept the sad truth
That words just can’t express.

A BIT OF ADVICE TO YOUNGER FRIENDS
COMTEMPLATING RETIREMENT

A misspent youth is sad,
But not tragic.
The years ahead
Are full of options.
Youthful indiscretion
Can be reversed
Without sleight or magic.

A misspent retirement
Is truly tragic.
Don’t sleep in.

Use this time wisely;
Take chances, think large,
Defy convention;
Don’t become static.
A CUBS FAN’S MADRIGAL
(With Apologies to Thomas Morley)

Now is the month of April
When rain falls gently playful
Fala la la la la la
Fala la la la la la
(repeat)
Winter now is past
And spring is here at last
Fala la la la
Fala la la la
Fala la la la la la la.
(repeat)

It is the Baseball season
No more will we be freezein’
Fala la la la la la
Fala la la la la la
(repeat)
And to the Cubs we say
This year go all the way
Fala la la la
Fala la la la
Fala la la la la la.
(repeat)

Our hearts are brightly burning
The pennant’s what we’re yearning
Fala la la la la la
Fala la la la la la
(repeat)
Southsiders they will scoff
But we’ll just write them off.
Fala la la la
Fala la la la
Fala la la la la la la.
(repeat)

And when we reach October
If we have been knocked over
Holy Cow, Holy Cow, Holy Cow
Holy Cow, Holy Cow, Holy Cow
(repeat)
We still will stand and cheer,
For there always is next year.
Fala la la la
Fala la la la
Fala la la la la la
(repeat)

A FEW RARE MOMENTS

In a few rare moments,
When I surrender
The illusion
Of terminal uniqueness
And abandon
The myth
Of toxic separation,
I realize
My unity
With all creation;
I glimpse
The Divine.

Then suddenly,
And frantically
A pathetic blend
Of ego and fear
Of conceit
And cowardice
Bring me back
To that nightmare
We all share
And call reality;
Woven together
With bits and pieces
Of terminal illusion,
Of toxic myth.

And I am left
To wonder
Why I flee
From serenity.

A MESSAGE TO YOUNGSTERS
FORM OLD HIPPIES AND OLD PEACENICKS

Those of us of a certain age
Nurtured by hope, frustration, and rage
Recall a phrase that for us still rings:
War’s bad for children and other things.

We’ve been dismissed with a shake of the head
And told in spite of bitter tears we shed
No matter how many slogans we shout
Our species is bellicose, and that will win out.

These sage voices claim greater wisdom
And solemnly invoke history like chrism
To anoint and confirm martial bugles and drums
Urging us to repent of our drang und sturm.

Yet somehow we persist in our naïve ways
Because we damned well know who pays
With limbs that are missing and lives that are lost.
And what is gained at such a dear cost?

We were so much younger back then
Admittedly seduced by poetry and Zen,
But now that we’re older and presumably mature
The sabre rattling still smells like manure.

If war is a matter of those who are older
Ordering youth this burden to shoulder,
Some of us old codgers want youngsters to know,
We shout out a very loud NO!

A NOTE TO FORMER STUDENTS

You sometimes begged
And other times demanded
That I give you THE ANSWER.
You sometimes screamed for me
To assure you of certitude.

I do not apologize for failing
To deliver answers that always fall short
Or assurance of a certitude that is always an illusion.
But I did fail all too many of you
By not effectively unfolding the protean reality
Of understanding
In lieu of the cheap parlor trick of
Static knowledge;

The mind killing myth of
Final answers;
The slothful diversion of
Self evident truths.

I failed you if you are still
Fixated on the destination
Rather than rejoicing in the quest
BUT WHAT DO I KNOW?

When we say “I know”
What makes it so.
Some say it’s reason,
But with every season
Or sometimes daily,
Sadly or gaily,
Reason leads us
To different places.

Some say it’s evidence
Whether given by providence
Or gathered with senses,
Like tax rolls or census,
But oblique rotations give me the creeps
And orthogonal rotations make me weep.

Some claim “I know in my heart of hearts,”
But that makes of knowledge only an art
Of subjective projection of presupposition
Perhaps used for some nefarious mission.

Some say it’s found in Holy Writ,
But let’s think on that for a bit.
Appeal to authority is problematic
Whether Bible, or Pope, or sayings dogmatic.
It begs further questions that multiply rapidly
And ultimately degenerates to words used vapidly.

Perhaps we should admit we just guess
Or just form perspectives which I confess
Is not nearly as cool as saying “I know.”
But for the sake of honesty it’s this route I’ll go.
CONFESSIONS OF A FINITE SOUL

Some folk seek huge big T Truth
And riotously revel in revelations.
I, being admittedly more uncouth,
Humbly settle for mere realizations.

Some seek dogmatic definition
In the face of enormous confusion.
Whilst I harbor a great suspicion
That such things are just an illusion.

I opt for useful tentative perspective
Or perhaps hypothetical hunch
And avoid absolutist invective
While discussing things over lunch.

Some demand justice with bitter rage
With clenched fist raised mightily.
I more timidly ask for grace
And for a wee bit of peace and glee.

Some ask for God’s angry righteous wrath
With crushing force to descend from above.
To me it seems a more divine path
Can be found in compassion and love.

DAY IN AND DAY OUT

At dawn I greet
Continued struggles and new challenges,
Old friends and unfamiliar faces,
Sustaining beliefs and fresh perspectives,
A familiar world and revolutionary insights.

Throughout the day I
I sift through the old
Discarding what holds me back,
Holding firm to what keeps me standing;
I evaluate the new for consideration.

At dusk I greet
An evening of reflection and rest
And look forward to the same cycle
That begins again with dawn
And continues world without end.

Some poor souls
See this as tedium and seek escape
In mindless mesmerizing entertainments,
But as for me it is a life
Filled with perpetual possibility.

**DELIGHT, AMUSEMENT, PITY, and HOPE**

The wide eyes of children bring us delight
As they discover new worlds in realms
Made vivid by the new day’s first light,
Or shadows unfolding on the cusp of night.

We’re often amused by a world-weary teen
Recoiling from a myth called “reality”
Rolling eyes in disgust at everything seen
And dismissing it all as useless banality.

We vacillate between disgust and pity
When we see this needlessly persist
In moods full of ennui and rhetoric gritty
Housed in a teen who has just turned fifty.

But we garner great hope and renewed delight
When an old codger of seventy or so
Mixes childish wonder with mature insight
And engages the future with gusto and might.
DUE DILIGENCE AND SHARED DREAMS

Sharing a dream
Is more intimate
Than carnal wallowing;
More to be desired
Than fleeting passion.

But be sure the
Dream is truly shared
Before seeking
The consecration of
Consummating action.

Now hear this,
And hear it well,
Misperception
Can make the difference
Twixt heaven and hell.

Many sad stories
Begin and end
With vague empty rhetoric
Mimicking dreams
That crumble to dust.

Explore the dream fully
Before that first step
On a fateful journey to
Bliss upon bliss
Or – alas - a dismal abyss.

FIVE WORDS

Contingency,
Necessity,
Reality,
Humility,
Sobriety;
Five simple words
Sharing a
Common cadence
Defining our
Limitations,
Giving birth
To potential
Progression
Of effective
Life.
What a mantra!

FRUSTRATION

Studied niceness is a weapon
Wielded by wimps with hidden aggression.
Rolling eyes and “O dear me!”
Accompanied by sighs and a sip of tea
Camouflage malicious intent
As the wimp seeks to circumvent
Any argument but his or her own
Issued from an imaginary throne.

And the hell of it is how well it works
As those who know better come off as jerks
Screaming and shouting in utter frustration
And finally withdrawing in resignation
Rather than suffer this arrogant timidity
Behind the intractable conceptual rigidity
Of those who pander to populist sentiment
Ultimately to everyone’s detriment.

HOPE

Many years and tears ago
My hope was mere projection
Of wants conjured by ego;
A vain self-serving confection.
Many a frustrated dream
Not worthy of discussion
Taught me lessons that now seem
An end to self-seeking compulsion.

Many happy years have passed
Since those tortured days of old.
Hope is thankfully at last
Beyond my imagined control.

Hope is now a state of mind;
Walking into new terrain
And willing to seek and find
Exciting new questions to frame.

LIFE GOES ON

Morning brings the hope of new possibilities,
When rain-refreshed air greets our waking breath.
Then all the world seems open to questions
Begging answers that hint at meaning beneath,
Behind, and above the ebb and flow of everyday life.

When we put away childish things and adolescent dreams,
When we see clearly through a glass brightly,
When we abandon excitement as our sumum bonum
We understand the infinite world of the mundane
And the increasing importance of the ordinary.

And in that mode I begin this day with a clear vision
Of the beauty inherent in the ambiguous, vague, and blurry
Realm we call reality with its unpredictable currents,
Tragic and comic plots with dialogue both profound and banal
With punch lines both hilarious and baleful.

And I have gathered this cast of characters I love
Just as each of these has cast me in their play
And we are all joined by affinity
And more than a touch of irony.

All these I will lose, or they will lose me
But we all live on in memory
If we let go the starring role
And accept ensemble as the better path.

So life goes on and so will I,
Neither hero nor victim
But just one of the many
Who have found serenity in anonymity.

**LITTLE GRACES**

At random times in random places,
Without plan or formal design,
Across a spectrum of classes and races
And faiths and genders and tastes and ages
When least we expect it we can find
Connections that transform strangers to friends
With the meeting of eyes and a shared smile
A casual comment or mutual laughter
It can effortlessly and mysteriously begin
And if we nurture them for a while
These little graces may last long thereafter.

These serendipities can flourish and grow.
A family of affinity and choice
Can begin to form if we make it so,
If we allow love to gain a voice
Through the synchrony of seemingly
Separate and disparate lives
Encountering acceptance repeatedly
And thus the bond strengthens and survives.

Little graces can grow
To a life changing trail,
And it is love, you know,
That makes isolation pale.
MEMORIES

Whether vivid or fanciful,
     Persistent or fleeting,
Memories are formed
     By the strange meeting
Of reality and hope,
     Of fact and projection,
Composed of equal parts
     Of fear and predilection.

     Living in memories
Is just a pleasant dream
Or more likely a nightmare
     From which we never seem
To awake with new awareness
     But just repeat the past,
Whether real or imagined,
     And get nowhere very fast.

     We all have a choice
About vague yesteryears.
We can march away from them
     After facing our fears,
Embracing a past without illusion,
     Finding our passion and bliss,
Leaving the “now” of murky memory,
     And greeting the future with a kiss.

A FLAWED FRANCISCAN’S PRAYER

     Lord make me a disturber of the peace.
Where there is inanity, let me sow logic,
Where there is passive/aggressive behavior, confrontation,
     Where there is dissimulation, truth,
Where there is ignorant certainty, informed skepticism,
     Where there is manipulation, unmasking,
Where there is Pollyanna optimism, realism,
Where there is bland oblivion masquerading as happiness, indignation.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek to console as to challenge,
To be understood as to catalyze,
To withhold truth in order to be loved as to say hard truths with love.
For it is through integrity that we stand ready to love,
It is though love that we embrace difficulties in life and accept inevitable death,
It is through death that we are born to eternal life.

ANNAPOolis valLeY

Long ago I passed between
A youth extended a decade too long
And that vague station in life
We call “middle-age.”
That transition took a turn
For better and worse
As Nova Scotia—
Jutting east into the Atlantic,
Exceeding the stretched reach of Maine—
Beckoned me with a haunting song
Of the sea-bound coast;
Of mountains dark and dreary
Offering peace and serenity
With a side dish of
Discomfort and restlessness;
But you know full well
What a sucker I am
For contradictions.

Inexorably and inevitably
Drawn there
By both happenstance
And design,
I settled for a season

Nestled in bucolic splendor
And just the right touch
Of mystic mystery
‘Twixt Bridgetown and Wolfville
With a majestic view
Of the Annapolis River
Running its lazy course
To feed the Bay of Fundy.

Isolation and beauty,
Spiced heavily with
Types and shadows
Created by forests
Swaying at dawn and dusk
Dancing to contrapuntal rhythms
Both mythic and primordial,
Combined in ways
Wonderful and awful
To force my recognition
Of strength and weakness,
Of talents and deficits,
Of virtues and faults,
Of what is and what could be,
Of what is not and can’t be;
Of possibilities and limitations.

The lesson took
Another thirty years to learn.
The fault resides not
With that river and valley
Nor with the North and South Mountains that stood guard.
Perhaps there is no fault at all.
Some lessons need to incubate.

And so I now smile
As I acknowledge that
Invaluable education
And sing with gratitude
“Farewell Nova Scotia.”

A MEDITATION ON HIERONYMUS BOSCH
(Inspired by Bosch’s Garden of Earthly Delights 1503/1504)

There once was a man named Hieronymus Bosch.
When I first saw his paintings I said, “My Gosh!
This fellow was a visual sayer of sooth,”
Though some may consider his work uncouth.

His images are a study in chaos theory
That will cause the polite to gasp “O dearie!”
The wise will detect undertones of order
And gaze at his paintings with endless wonder.

You say he’s just a cartoonist at best?
You say no such bizarre creatures exist?
Just look at yourself in a mirror if you’re bold:
Not the one on your wall; the one in your soul.

Bosch captured the world with the light shining hard,
Not the world of a sweet Hallmark card.
Gaze on his images again and you’ll see
Bits of truth about you and bits of truth about me.

A MEDITATION ON THE SOLAR ECLIPSE OF 29 MAY 1919

Fragile frenetic thoughts express
Capricious and chaotic maybes
Betwixt, beneath and between
Frenzied fear and fervent hope;
Then cast certainty and caution aside
And invite potential possibility.
Far from timorous thinkers,
These neo-knights errant
Hold definitive declarations in disdain,
Scorn at fixed finality,
And laugh at authoritative words.
Was it thus a moving moment
When Einstein's ethereal theory
Met Eddington's earth-bound empiricism

CONTRA MODERN PROPHETS

Pleasant Pollyannas produce platitudes.
Crusty curmudgeons create consternation.
Downer depressives draft doom.
Cunning con-men craft confusion.

All four pubic types share one thing.
Ask their opinion and they will sing
Dogmas without doubt loud and clear
And bid all the world to hear.

As for me I have no use for these prophets
With messages soothing or catastrophic. 
Give me discourse that is reasonable, 
Devoid of premises woefully feeble.

I yearn for conversation that flows 
And takes us where the logic goes. 
Ongoing discussions are fine. 
I’m distrustful of a bottom line.

To hell with slogans and pre-packaged bromides 
And puffed-up lists of ersatz *bona fides*. 
Just bring an honest open mind 
And in me a friend you will find.

---

**GEOFFREY CHAUCER MEETS W. B. YEATS MEETS COLE PORTER**
**MEETS T. S. ELIOT MEETS J. R. R. TOLKIEN**
**MEETS SAMUEL BECKETT**

Whan that September, with cooler weather, 
Gives us relief from sweltering heat 
We sit and reflect on if and whether 
Some lackluster beast without claws or teeth 
Slouches toward Fresno or perhaps Solvang 
To begin the beguine that leads to the end 
Heralded by a whimper instead of a bang 
And if not that then perhaps to send 
A message to Bilbo and Frodo: 
“It’s a waste of time to wait for Godot.”

---

**MUSINGS ON TRUTH AND PERSPECTIVE**

The trouble with truth 
Is our fallible natures. 
With brash audacity 
We proclaim ultimate, 
Indubitable and 
Final axioms, 
Then expend 
Ferocious energy 
Defending what was 
At best a hunch.

Perspectives provide 
More potential 
For honest and 
Nuanced conversation.
Behind each perspective
Are experiences,
Predilections and
Configurations of
An inherited culture.

We can learn more
From exploring the
Origins and implications
Of diverse perspectives
Than we can from
Swallowing dogmatic
Truths whole.

Discussion is most likely
A more civilized engagement,
Filled with more future promise
Than anathemas and condemnations.
Just sayin’ . . .

THE PROBLEM WITH DEEP THOUGHTS

Adrift in the wasteland
Between Archetypes and
The frontal lobe
I search for answers
To ill formed questions
About ultimate matters
Beyond the reach of reason
And outside the boundaries of myth.

And the fog rolls in,
Created by the warm front
Of pleasant bits of ancient lore
Meeting the cold front of
Formal logic,
Obscuring the questions;
Confounding the answers.

“God” and “Not God,”
“Order” and “Chaos,”
“Purposive” and “Absurd,”
Seem equally plausible
From all perspectives;
Seem equally appealing
And equally frightening.
So I am left wondering
(Perhaps for eternity)
Whether the answer
Is ever found
Or is merely projected,
And if the latter,
How often it depends
On how well
I digest my lunch.

ODE TO AGING INTELLECTUALS

We perceive, but do not see.
We write scripts, but do not listen.
We conjure phenomena and look past
The reality obvious to the simple.
Whole schools of thought excuse
Our dodging authentic life.
We destroy what could have been
Because we fear life without masks.
And then we ask in innocence,
Feigned or imagined I cannot say,
“Mais ou sont les neiges d'antan?”
We assign ourselves the role of victim;
The villains are always others, of course.
And we pretend that this is reality
When we really know, no matter how hidden,
That we created these fairy tales ourselves.

PREPARING FOR CONFESSION

I’ve tried so hard to feel guilty
About the comfort in which I’m mired
In these later year of retired indolence;
About a career devoted to doing
Not only what I damned well pleased,
But also what I damned well loved;
About having taken chances in life,
Sometimes falling on my face and
Sometimes winning big
But always looking ahead
To the next adventure grand or mundane.

My guilt is reserved for those tragic times
Over some of which I had no control:
About surviving a shared childhood
    That shattered my sister’s life;
About survival skills that let me escape
And left innocent victims in my wake;
About proclamations of indignation
Reflexively shouted with brutal intent
    All for righteousness sake.

So I’ll opt for general confession.
    No one-on-one for me!
Things done and left undone
    Is about as specific
    As I care to be.

And as I hear the words of absolution
I must wonder (I bet others do too)
Whether it’s just as perfunctory
    As my lackluster mea culpa
    When I bid my sins adieu.

RANDOM OBSERVATIONS
WHILE SITTING IN A COFFEE HOUSE

Settled comfortably into a summer day
    That seems pleasantly more like fall
I review a constantly meandering
Parade of faces and postures and poses:
    Brilliantly babbling infants
Wizened withered oldsters like me,
Young’uns with wide-eyed wonder,
Blatantly blasé bastions of propriety,
Ostentatiously outrageous defilers of convention,
    And cautiously cool adolescents.

These (and more) pass by in review
As I ponder this rich and savory stew
    Of types and styles of our species;
Each one a study of intractable uniqueness,
But taken together a living montage of
    Unlikely homogeneity highlighting
The fascinating juxtapositions that underlie
    The endlessly perplexing
Fiction we call the human condition.

And precisely because it is so contradictory,
    So out of kilter and without apparent
Intelligent design,
And also because it is a summer day
That seems pleasantly more like fall,
It’s great to be alive,
To hear the blessed babbling,
To nod to fellow seniors
With knowing recognition,
To find joy in young curiosity,
To pity the bastions of propriety,
To laugh with the defilers,
And be amused by the cool teens
(Praying they will soon get over it).

I relax, lean back, close my eyes, and smile,
Wondering what delights tomorrow will bring.

God! I love being old!

RECONSIDERING ALCHEMY

I’ve been told alchemy is dead,
That baser metals won’t make gold,
But the term still lives in my head
Devoid of the avarice of old.

The concept still rings solid and true
If we shift focus from metal to thought.
So join me as we see this through
And contemplate what we’ve sought.

Let’s start with an idea and work back
To when it was just a hunch or opinion
Before being put on the testing rack
And surviving to enter another dominion.

A hunch seems to just surface from thin air
Although it’s probably festered a while.
An opinion admittedly is a statement with flair
That captures a prejudice dressed up with guile.

Some try to shortcut by calling a hunch
An opinion and claiming the absolute right
To declare in a paper or perhaps over lunch
Transmutation to idea with imperceptible sleight.

With this quackery I’ll have no truck!
Give me alchemy with logical progression.  
Start with opinion or hunch or just luck  
And show me the steps in ordered succession.

If it passes the gauntlet of critical thinking  
And still stands without falling or shrinking,  
Then (and only then) I will rise and cheer  
As this latter day alchemy goes into high gear.

REFLECTION ON SEVERAL RECENT CONVERSATIONS  
WITH ABSOLUTISTS, BOTH RELIGIOUS AND IRRELGIOUS

Certainty is a comfortable place  
That keeps life on a dull even pace,  
A fiction embraced by Fundamentalists,  
Opus Dei, and devout atheists.

Certainty is an induced conclusion  
To avoid salutary confusion  
By trumping thoughtful deliberation  
With shouts of “I Know!” without hesitation.

Certainty is an enemy of critical reason  
That sees doubt as the ultimate treason  
Against convenient (if stifling) propriety  
Upheld by the enemies of an open society.

Certainty is uncomfortable with diversity,  
Out of place in a university.  
Let us this uncertain terrain traverse  
As we walk different paths while we converse.

A BRIEF DISQUISITION ON CONVERSATION

Some of us are given to talk  
While others are quick to balk  
At extended chats that rob time  
From reality TV or going online  
To click “like” and leave a 😊  
Or maybe dissent with a  
Well placed 😞

While an advocate of talk  
I reluctantly admit  
That walking that walk  
Can risk quite a bit.
I love discourse when it flows like a river,
But when it is stagnant it makes me quiver.
  True dialog is a wondrous gift
  But soliloquies cause me to shift
  My attention to shadows on a wall
Or if they run overtime I just might bawl.

Conversation happens only under certain conditions,
The absence of which leads to discourse perdition.
  All parties must listen, that’s the first rule.
  All parties must avoid acting like a mule
  Stubbornly blocking all other perspectives.
  All parties must commit to being reflective,
  Avoiding reactive and dismissive affect
Which can easily lead to someone being decked.

So enter into discourse only if you’re willing
To give conversation partners equal billing.
Take chips off your shoulders and put them away.
Keep your mind focused and don’t stray away
From the path of the chat and the ebb and the flow.
Otherwise, just tune in a reality show.

THE ILLUSION OF CLOSURE

“Happily ever after”
  Is a vicious lie,
A cheap way to end a tale
  As if there is
No “and then…”
Thus suggesting
That bliss means
An end to struggle,
An end to thought,
And ultimately
  An end to
Meaningful life.

So listen well, my child,
And don’t be seduced
By smarmy sweet fables.
“To strive” is a better verb
   Than “to achieve.”
“To think” is a better verb
   Than “to know.”

Prefer becoming to being.
   Seek a life that is
      Open-ended
   Rather than finished.
   Keep chugging along
   *in saecula saeculorum*; Amen!

AND SOME CALL IT PROGRESS

In the wake of God’s death
   And the great inversion,
Hardly noticed by mindless moderns
   Mesmerized by media moguls
      And cretinous celebrities,
         Farcical fair monsters
      And foul faux heroes
   Replace ancient virtues
      As invented reality
Shoves aside venerable mysteries
   That once fed our imagination
And took us beyond possibility.
   Now in the thrall
      Of toxic consumerism
   Inducing stagnant stupor
We wallow in conformity
   And call it freedom.

MUSINGS ON LOVE AND ESTRANGEMENT

Seemingly antithetical,
Love and estrangement
Often occupy the same
Emotional bandwidth.

   For some
      The path is linear
         Plotted on a course
            Of narrative precision
               From sweet opening
Through ambiguous middle
And on to a sour end.

Others operate
On the more complex formula
Of a helix,
Where sweet, ambiguous and sour
Seem locked in
(Perhaps sentenced to)
A perpetual dance.

The distance between
Love and estrangement
Can be
Startlingly shockingly sudden
Or
Painfully ploddingly prolonged.
Both are likely endgames
Of infatuations
That start with
“Some Enchanted Evening”
And skip
“Getting To Know You.”

There is a lesson here:
If the chemistry seems right
Choose the Rogers and Hammerstein
Soundtrack wisely.
You could enjoy growing old
With the right person,
And you will be
Both blessed and a blessing.

APOLOGIA OF A RETIRED HISTORIAN

The world of historians is curious,
It’s not like ordinary time.
Minutes and hours mean nothing,
We start with the present then decline
Into the maze of old parchment
To discover (well, guess) how we got here
As we project what we expect to find.
We trace evidence we mold into episodes
   From which we infer complex epics
   That are then expanded to epochs
Convincing all but hard-boiled skeptics
   That we’ve discovered the secret code
Of cause and effect in the flow of events
   Whether glorious, hum-drum, or septic.

Historians tell stories quite neatly packaged
   But let’s seek a more honest objective.
   Integrity would be better served
If we humbly offered tentative perspectives,
   Admitted how much we don’t know
And the quicksand base of our suppositions,
   Then engage in dialog thoughtfully reflective.

**SALVATION**

   Each life,
   Designed by Destiny,
      Unraveled by
   Capricious Karma
   Promising just rewards
      But delivering
   Random outcomes,
   Comes to the moment
      Of critical turn.

   We are then
   Redeemed and renewed
   Through a mysteriously certain
      Process propelling us
   In directions hitherto unknown.

   All this happens
   With just enough grace
      To confound skeptics,
   And just enough self-will
To infuriate the faithful.

Taking that path
Is the privilege
Of the sayers of “Maybe”
And “Maybe not,”
But remains an
Unknown journey to
Dogmatists of
Both faith and un-faith.

Take a leap of
Faith and Doubt
Keeping company with
Kierkegaard and Russell.

**THE HIDDEN HISTORIES THAT ARE US**

A history resides in each of us;
Not chronology but
Analysis,
Understanding,
And explanation
Of life as lived.

Mostly we hide the history
Especially from ourselves.
Existential personas,
Seemingly born
In the moment
Of meeting,
Engage encounters
With short half-lives
Or only fleeting.

Love and Friendship
Require more depth;
Histories revealed,
Accepted, Embraced.
THE HUMAN CONDITION

Contentment can congeal
As indifference and then
Descend to the depths
And emulate ennui.

Dissatisfaction can degenerate
Into flailing frustration
Then quickly turn
To righteous rants.

If we walk down the
Path of engagement
How can we avoid the
Latter fate?

If we walk down the
Path of detachment
Have we chosen
Stagnation?

Life is a tightrope
And each choice
Redefines our future;
Reinvents our past.

And the hell of it is
All choices are made
With limited wisdom
And partial knowledge.

Integrity is found
Less in the choice
And more in the courage
To move forward.

Life goals are illusory
Or at best temporary.
Contexts change
And outcomes obsolesce.

This thing we call
The human condition
Can be daunting
But also creative.

So take a deep breath
And forge ahead
With fierce resignation
And humble arrogance.

**DOUBLE HAIKU**

Thoughts form no patterns
Just random chaotic words
That mimic wisdom.

Cancel the above
Synapses failed to function
And nonsense followed.

**WHEN DISCOURSE DIES**

According to shrewd and sagacious Shaw
A common language can divide
But I put it slightly otherwise.
A common vocabulary is problematic
When different lexicons
Come into play;
When Alice and Humpty endlessly argue
Over the meaning of “glory”
In the land of Frumious Bandersnatch;
When right and left mean different things
When they speak of “Freedom”
Beyond “let it ring.”

Worse yet are the dwellers in the mythical land
Of absolute certainty
Flummoxed by relative perspectives;
Who wince at alternative views
And withdraw from discussion
Or shout righteous invectives;
Who consider all questions a challenge
   And insist on agreement
Or obeisant acquiescence;
Who are repositories of a vast array
   Of absolute truths
And ultimate quintessence.

And the inevitable outcome I’m sad to say
   Is a monologue delivered
To empty walls and thin air
Which leaves the mind hungry
   And the cupboard bare.

A POST-MODERN NIGHTMARE

Gathering thoughts lost
   Long ages ago or
Neglected and tossed,
   Abandoned for
More fashionable fare,
   Or perhaps traded in
In a fit of despair
Over what might have been.
Gathering thoughts like
Memories glimpsed through
   The wide eyes of a tyke
Catching refractions in dew
   That vanish with only
A trace of the vision,
   Leaving the lonely
Child in confused indecision.
And so in our dotage we
   Yearn for our deep past
In vain hope to break free
From the life that we cast
   In our bold adolescent
Pretensions of sophistication,
And swallowed the depressant
Of “cool” frustration.
   And try as we might,
Those memories won’t jell;  
Then the truth shines bright:  
We’ve made our own hell.

**ADVICE TO YOUNG FRIENDS**

Awareness awakens.  
Certainty collapses.  
Possibilities permutate  
Infinitely increasing.

Choose risk  
And walk  
In lands of wonder  
And constant  
Epiphanies.

Choose comfort  
And dwell  
In a nightmare  
Of mindless  
Conformity.

Choose wisely!  
Choices create  
Your future  
For better  
Or worse.

**GOOD MORNING!**

The earth rotates just enough  
For a dimly glowing horizon.  
An alarm invades blessed sleep

The day starts and we  
Reluctantly follow  
Leaving behind the world  
Of our own invention.
Whether dreams Eros
   Or of terror,
They are creations
   Of our own will.

We rise from the bed
   And descend to
Another world crafted
   By capricious fate.

And whatever this day holds
Is both empty promise and cruel prison.
   “God!” I shout “I need coffee!”
Perhaps the only prayer ever answered.

STANDING IN SOLIDARITY WITH JOB

Amid promises and projections
   Of better longer enhanced life
Proclaimed with pretentious posturing
   And smarmy sweet sentiments
By would-be messiahs
I sense the smell of snake oil,
   The odor of ephemera,
   The stench of ersatz.

It is the lone and lonely voice
   Telling me what
I don’t want to hear
   That grabs me by the
Gut, mind and heart,
   And assures me that
The only way out
   Is through;

That speaks to me
In sometimes harsh tones
   Through the hush
Of a whirlwind;
And ultimately declares
That mine own right hand
Can save me.

THE CURRENT STATE OF MY SOUL

Weary of seers and saints,
Of prophets and pundits,
Of genies and gurus,
Of heroes and hierophants,

I look for wisdom
In the ordinary and obvious,
In the visage of the venial,
In the habitats of the humble.

I seek no more
The grand and glorious.
Restive rumination
No longer beckons.

Some call it resignation.
Some call it maturity.
To me it’s simply
Where I am.

AUTUMNAL EQUINOX

For some this day harks
Sad farewell to summer fun,
But as for me it brings great joy;
The pleasant sound of larks
Winging south to find the Sun;
Such things bring cheer to this old boy.

The leaves wither and decay
But with their last defiant breath
They leave a trail of vivid color
In such great splendor in vast array
That seems to welcome Sister Death
With phrases from Vivaldi and Mahler.

Beneath the warmth even at noon
There lingers a hint of chill
Foreshadowing winter’s snowy pall
And we know full well that very soon
We’ll peer across our windowsill
And white darkness will cover us all.

But we also know with certain hope,
   For it happens every year,
That skeletal trees and frigid terrain
Will soon give way to spring’s bright trope
   Merrily quelling our darkest fear
And filling fields with greenery and grain.

And so it is in my autumn of life,
   Just on the cusp of winter,
That I take that blind faithful leap
   And pray that beyond daily strife
Of this earthly journey we will enter
A realm that holds more than endless sleep.