

*Floats and Sinkers*

# **FLOATS AND SINKERS**

## **Selected Poems**

**By**

**Richard L. Rose**



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### **Floats and sinkers**

What should I expect to catch  
or resurrect  
if I sit out this unwatched game  
with time to touch and miss my aim?  
Should I throw out the line  
or wait until the bobbing sign  
can dive deeper than I see—  
are my chances one in three?

Given that people are speech  
and knowledge a story,  
and that even what we've called  
*within us* concerns translation  
from senses to articulation,  
it does appear a storm is coming.  
Pull off the roof and jump in.  
Only a surface that has touched the sky  
will stay afloat.

### **Indexing things past**

Being a rather superficial fellow,  
I cast about a good deal—  
mayflies showing more constancy of purpose—  
but here and there I notice,  
now and then, with surprise,  
an unflickering face.

Filter-feeding, reading, indexing  
(no depth analysis here)  
with superficial aplomb  
I track, as would caterpillar  
packing up her skins  
to prove whence she had shed,  
what I knew as well as know.

Easier perhaps to let it go—  
both the retracting and extending edge—  
into the void.  
Let it all go  
and eat Pfeffernussen  
in honor of Herr Freud.

**Handle the day if you can't seize It**

because real to real  
there is no playback.  
Memory, being new,  
is made, not replayed.  
Digital mastery,  
Herrick and Epicurus aside,  
Digital mastery,  
like Kreisler's vibrato  
or Wozniak's gentle scrape of flux  
Digital mastery  
of all the *Doigts of Man*  
is the Eternal How,  
meaning that we probe and shape  
but do not gather rosebuds --  
instead reaching for flowers  
in ebony or granite,  
wire or wreathes of sound  
until we touch them.

***Latimeria's cosmos and ours***

Mostly not dead, but rather, not alive,  
both in time and composition,  
water our most rigid part,  
surprising, supple-jointed, flowing  
within our one event so brief  
the stars have yet to comment,  
though leaves of apatite have strewn the sea,  
risen on mountain backs, and crumbled  
in our bony hands that dug them up  
to grasp our past from flickering swimmers  
without names, intentions, or endeavors,  
except the one endeavor shared by all—  
to be, to live coherently and clean—  
even though we are mostly not alive,  
we have our forms, our means, and methods.

Compressed, we're mostly mineral. And life,  
even of our protein parts, is a trace unregistered  
between breath and gasp, or wobbles of a stellar path.  
but we proceed with all due speed, like this fossil fish,  
rising, as hawks, concave on thermals,  
apparently adrift, like the pebbly fingers of clouds,  
but spreading apart to grasp the sky,  
contending with disorder, to show  
that, though such little things,  
of rarity and passing consequence,  
we became rudders, conceived of steerage,  
wove the scaly cosmos of our vessel,  
reached out, secured ourselves on facts,  
extracted life from a dying star,  
and, from mostly space, spun skeletons,  
and polished thoughts for them to wear.

**Death, the old wind bag,**

the old fart,  
the one trick act,  
tiresome, *in extremis*:  
Mere Cessation,  
yet so much  
represented  
in fear and art,  
never quite swallowed up  
in victories,  
the Vagrant ever-tapping toe,  
drumming fingers;  
humming till we finish  
whatever seemed important.



**Starlings in November**

Against the muscular clouds of a Hobbema sky,  
thick commas, punctuations, flutter where leaves were—  
punctures, rather, the clouds heaped like putty  
pushed around them to keep out the raucous draft.  
Through each hole, death peers  
from the gold-tipped branches—  
but not from evergreens,  
there being nothing evergreen about death.

### **Deflections**

Making shifts continually,  
riding bubbles to surmise our lot  
within a multiverse where the demise  
of time's arrow, like as not,  
with other certainties,  
makes us a drifting snow,  
a scattering of selves,  
we inspect the scene  
for some perch to hold it captive  
in landscape, story, score  
or string of formulas,  
but finally, seeing the hour,  
genuflect, rise, leave the service  
as the fauxbourdon swells behind us,  
and again approach the day  
with its deflections.

### **Sunday Afternoon**

I organize my life around no Cause.  
Perhaps this should be cause for some regret  
because a Daily Office fills the time  
that would be ordinary otherwise.  
Stations are provided, places marked,  
rubrics followed and events announced.  
Whether Prayer or Trees come first or Guns  
or Better Schools or Gender Equity,  
Deterring Crime or Saving Market Share,  
or Marginalization of the Arts,  
these causes help to fill an afternoon  
that seems to be about some grief in joy  
or joy in grief I cannot recognize.

The robins have returned to fill the gutter  
with their sticks. Forsythia retires  
to the background for another year.  
A late frost takes some casualties but comes  
as no surprise, since months of freezing rain  
and sleet and snow so hard our tracks don't sink,  
and ice polyps made of laurel buds  
have made me wary of the ordinary;  
uneasy with the afternoon, the warmth,  
bees in holly, and steady pulse of clicks  
the ratcheting horizon makes past noon,  
the light that sinters memories to bone.

### **The Knife Switch**

The stumps where his legs were before he stepped  
on an oil circuit breaker in the rain  
didn't feel like stumps. He had to look  
so as not to think his legs were crossed.  
He looked above the rail at the wire fence  
he'd strung around the yard, wheeling himself  
from post to post—the Western Union wire  
he'd kept when they retired him, a fine wire  
you could hardly see, on Bakelite spools.  
Waiting on the porch beat sitting there.

The ancient cow and children knew by now—  
the boys when they'd brushed by on bicycles.  
Sometimes a rabbit or a dog would serve.  
Lena knew better than to take the knife  
from his lap while he waited on the porch.

Visitors came slowly up the drive  
so as not to raise much dust, and leaned  
against the gate—him waiting—greeted him  
for the greeting back he never gave  
before Lena came and welcomed them,  
excusing him for and from everything.  
They'd quickly go inside and he would wait.

One time it was the Ladies Garden Club,  
rearranging flowers and neighbors' lives  
three hours or more before they finally left,  
carrying little sprigs and sprays outside;  
lining the drive with billowy floral prints  
and opening the doors to cool the cars—  
one leaning on the fence. Lena saw it.

The knife closed, and he had his little dance.

**Vigilantes**

Twenty thousand years after  
taking the law into our own hands  
we can no longer hole up  
for the long winter,  
having run winter out  
on a radiant heater; can no longer  
hunt down the puma  
as claimed our cache, him being  
treed up a redwood sinking  
in the great divide  
between "pity and indig  
nation." Come on boys,  
get the rope: Head for the hills—  
or a hill of heads.  
No, summer came too often—  
summer and the whir of cicadas  
like wire souging through pipe;  
we swelled too often,  
dense and opaque, sank  
and took on  
more of the same maturity,  
drowned in a tun  
or atonement—  
even-handed, though.  
We never meant no harm, Ma'am.  
And heat crackled in the night sky  
like arthritic calenders  
twirling and reckoning.  
Sheepmen, mostly—  
such as enclose  
(Guess we showed you, Bion)—  
then out of nowhere came this god:  
High in the saddle,  
Big as the Tetons,  
Wide as the sunset;  
allowed as how we'd best be  
moving on--water rights or not—  
The West not big enough for both;  
so we hit the trail again,  
camped in a grove of highrise  
and lay on our bedrolls out under  
less than the time it takes  
to torch an armored limousine.

### **Wooly Bears**

Nature also has its fasts and feast days,  
its Shrovetides and somber passion plays,  
its seasons of contrition and confessions,  
its invitations and its grave processions,  
its Jubilee years, coming after plague  
and pilgrimages holy, long and vague.

With pinching steps and bristly flourishes  
the wooly bears, for leaves or low October,  
or whatever nourishes a great endeavor,  
drop to the highway at midday and die  
in quiet thousands; in this dolorous way  
they leave behind no trail but themselves –  
no slimy ribbon of mycelia,  
no stained glass or slaggy heap of tailings.  
No sunken bridge or termitary tunnels  
crumble after them. No wake of pillage  
trails their pageant, but some of them grow wings.

### **Trees**

To old men's beards and cypress knees  
and stubby bristlecones that grip  
forever over unpacific seas,  
and giant arbor vitae, live oaks  
in a bluebell sea, pecans  
shading woodsheds and swings,  
to heaps of brittle scrub  
replaced by installment plans,  
to all the sacred litter, holy mould  
and jewels of decay in delicious darkness,  
between the toes of mockernuts  
and shaggy oaks and sidling dogwoods;  
to all whose ancient shoulders  
gave comfort and rest,  
from whose arms we swung out  
and returned old men:  
Farewell, and be blest.

### **Crooked E's and Other Swell Ideas**

Many were the elaberrations,  
the buffaloes and buffalos  
massing in corridors,  
their whistles bristling,  
racing from stage to exits:  
makeshifts  
of bones and hieroglyphs—  
bricolage of shelters,  
hedge annuities, monoliths  
and multiple holdings—  
scaffoldings  
secure for now—  
Do not mistake:  
they are provisional.  
So much meant to last  
at best will simply hold.  
Pardon, but have you noticed,  
mean time,  
how the tables turned  
not only for Greenwich  
but for the “green world”?  
and how usury is small potatoes  
compared to derivatives  
and gas bubbles like drunks  
guessing their way upstairs  
on a delicate spiral path  
of prices and pizzazz?  
No AC for CA, but Surf’s up.  
How piquant.  
Nothing was more natural  
than to set the standard  
by the center of the Empire,  
having finally made it not  
Spain or Seven Nederlands  
or France, but closer  
to Aldersgate and Cheapside,  
where the gin distillery exploded,  
showering the thankful mob.  
Nothing is more natural  
than looking in the mirror  
to be centered, Mr. Fox,  
whether we’re talking poles or souls.

what becomes of discarded centers?  
Do they roll away like doughnut holes,  
or rust out like vacant strip malls?  
“Position yourself,”  
The advisors remarked,  
singing another tune, but descant,  
as they left us holding the tulips,  
junk bonds, and swollen ergo sums.

Summing up, it would appear  
that appearances are what they seem  
and that unseemliness  
is what we have to work with.

### **Ludwig and other stellar events**

A singularity,  
than which there is no whicher,  
from nothing special,  
performing exactly  
as never imagined,  
in a burst of revealing  
obscuration,  
reminds us  
of the individual.

**Teak Walker**

*Act I*

His pace his own, it only happened  
she was keeping up with him.  
In her string-bag she carried things  
he wouldn't eat without a fight.  
The streets were rivers; he could dive,  
come up in shattered glass and screams,  
drive, trailing cheers, and break away  
in squealing turn and nitrous haze  
low as a shadow to the road--  
or he could simply roll and glide.

She waited while he got a trim,  
pulled her socks and held her purse.  
His barber smelled of talc and chaw,  
chanted the Racing Form, and wheezed  
when he had to reach across  
Eric Walker, smooth the cloth  
and crank the chair down to the floor.  
"This boy has grown. Why, thank you, Ma'am."  
She kept ahead of him, so close  
they could hold hands. No, better not.

Passing the Dollar Store, the bar  
that he could tell you all about  
although he'd never been, her friends  
on every stoop, they paused to lean  
into the Preacher's car and nod  
regarding how the world had slid,  
weaving from car to car in twilight  
motionless in amber talk,  
drivers sitting on their hoods  
and willows tipping down to hear.

They reached their porch as thieves ran out--  
banging the door--someone he knew  
struck her where her gray hair thinned  
along the crown--some kind of pipe.  
She shuddered like a bat he'd poked  
once in a tree; her arms fell down.

Tomatoes leaped off down the steps--  
down, down--and she talked to him or God.  
"Abide with me," she said  
and smiled at him and closed her wings.

*Act II*

Her name was Myra --Rudy's cousin  
from Mobile. Rudy later said  
she brought him lunch because of Teak--  
Eric Walker—Teak, they called him.  
"Black Teak, only wood that sinks.  
He drinks it in but doesn't speak:  
too dark inside to be too close  
to anyone, he live alone,  
eat alone and work alone—  
a tree so big and dense takes space,"  
She said, first leaving sandwiches  
where he could find them; later, soft  
as bedspread his mother cast  
like a fishnet over him,  
Myra James knelt down to him—  
her hazel eyes on him alone;  
she settled over him like grace—  
the kind of grace his mother said  
was greater than our sin but not,  
till this, a thing to be believed.

He'd filled his head with program code—  
not what you showed to anyone  
or talked about, except sometimes  
he told his mother --if she heard.  
Myra would smile and bring him drinks.  
One day he didn't go to work—  
Rudy had no lunch, they laughed.  
"Download anytime you want,  
Teak, honey. I will serve your file."  
With Rudy Program Manager,  
gone every other week on calls;  
two salesmen and a clerk in front,  
Teak was the only research staff.  
He had four clones he rolled between  
tying their memories in knots.  
Sometimes after they had raced

together he would talk to them  
like a boy who walks the hots  
around the track another turn.

Myra didn't interfere.  
Just to be near him was enough.  
She came midmornings; stayed past lunch.  
Teak could palm a coconut,  
his hands so big; and when he stood  
was nothing that he couldn't reach.  
One day she watched him change a light  
without the ladder or the help  
another man would need. He knew  
she watched—and changed the ballast too.  
She watched him and the way he lived  
so close in on himself he'd crowd  
her out if ever she allowed  
herself to seem to want him more.

They knew how it had been and why  
since Zula Walker passed from Can  
to Can't. The darkness left behind  
grew deeper, like an abscess, sore  
and cavitating everything  
he did. She meant for this to change.

He would not play ball in school  
or Navy. He would not hang out.  
He had one goal --and object code  
was only part of it --one pole  
worth discovering --one aim  
worth uncovering in time—  
in due time. Nothing could be scant  
in preparation: Master code,  
crypto, and make some rank.  
He did all this and bought the store  
with Rudy, who grew up with him;  
Rudy who hustled, made cold calls,  
pumped up sales, played the track;  
Rudy, gone every other week,  
leaving him with Cousin Myra,  
who knew that if she got too close  
he'd bolt and spin and break away;  
Rudy, the one friend who made good—  
but always left the books to Teak.

*Act III*

The plums and arbor were Teak's age;  
pink Liatris and nodding Phlox  
grew under them with sage and chives;  
tomatoes of all colors, staked  
with red peppers, grew beside.  
He'd kept up Zula's garden beds  
but mostly, working on her knees,  
tough as roots that wouldn't come,  
and hands spotted with age like leaves  
begun to mottle, Zula kept them.

Myra arched her back and yawned,  
pointing her toes, and turned to him.  
He counted freckles on her nose  
and traced their sprinkling on her cheek.  
He held her down. "It's time to walk,"  
she said, kissing him, pushing back,  
sucking her teeth, "and this must change—"  
But Rudy pulled her down again.  
"You sure these back-ups worked for him?"  
"Poor dense old Teak, I'm telling you,"  
she said, "he let me see the files.  
Didn't know a thing I did."  
"Cousin, he's got code for brains.  
His precious store he doesn't own.  
And the bid we get for this  
will set us up in Cozumel.  
Good old Navy buddy Teak—  
I'm the only one he trusts."

Rudy didn't know he'd seen  
the night he swung the pipe and ran.  
Three years passed before they met  
in Pensacola, bound for school—  
tough training Big Teak helped him through.  
Teak had a goal.

The plane would land.  
The LOAD command would arm the file,  
crash both drives and print these lines:

*"Teak don't swallow all he drinks,  
and it's ebony that sinks."*

The Prosecutor had Teak's books—  
the real ones he had kept, and tapes  
of Myra, faithful to her friend.  
His mother never loved him less  
for failing her, though she was mute  
and something from her mind was God's:  
the angels took it, Preacher said.  
But every shoot she set grew tall  
and strong like him and bore good fruit.  
"Your hand," he said. Now it could end.

### **Emma Strawbridge**

Emma Strawbridge lived on this corner.  
Autumn evenings we would sometimes watch her  
lowering bags of soil or garden flowers  
into her storm cellar. This bush was hers.  
She planted it when land across the road  
went for an airport and the road  
became an eight-lane highway  
where faces blur past gardens every day.  
This pyrocantha never was allowed  
as now, to reach the porch or crowd  
her violets aside. She had a gift  
for keeping things alive: she could lift  
a coreopsis free as if she found  
its blazing roots and bargained with the ground.

### **Patch this to his midbrain.**

In a six foot line that one must read as five  
by somewhere stealing stress, more briefly to arrive,  
the Morphemic Operator designated  
contrived (uneasily) to write a pattern slated  
for another operator from the pool.  
Tedium, praise for the end of the shift, or the Rule  
itself a challenge (confining duty to directives):  
though she was only to abbreviate connectives --  
for whatever reason -- she had tired of this  
and pulled up a readout problem none would miss.  
It came from the bench of a Particle Counter  
like a meditation upon emptiness.

This Scintillator on his early morning stints  
(shift same as hers; as tedious, on evidence)  
was wasting costly beta cocktails on restarts;

his overruns required excuses and new parts.  
The screen's left margin stealing a space each line,  
zero untrue and shifting, he could not assign  
corrections fast enough to track the slight advances  
and declines; the rubato robot ruined chances  
of his ever keeping error five percent:  
Just the problem for subvocal management.  
She produced a ponder program to improve his dwell  
on noise and static and give him peace with the erratic:

*Come, Oh come, Oh sweet and careless feast of lips and  
hands  
and breasts and tongues and catching, spilling,  
wasting, reaching, tasting, drinking, stretching;*

*Come and come again, droop and rise increased; dwindle,  
dally, strum the belly of desire; swim the medley --mound  
and cave, brook and pyre, reach within reach settling  
only to reach higher, slowing to heaviness and subtler,  
bluer fire;*

*Come, blue-green and slippery from slumbering eddies: lie  
slyly on my thoughts, you fingering, shallow roots;  
drench me, seize my gentle flowers, crush my shoots with  
swelling softness, salt me in your shuddering breeze.*

This the Morphemic Operator for the Counter  
whose quench curve flagged and error rose unsated,  
prepared: a sutra, subvocal and subzero,  
to conduct him, as a pilgrim on a saunter  
through emptiness and cool expanses of unstated  
uselessness, to dwell in secret warmth of snow.

**Some say**

we'll greet him in the air.  
Others, who never got the hang  
of proof but never err,  
describe faces like ours  
at a homestead  
with rockers on the porch,  
a quilt drying on the rail,  
and an elderly couple  
welcoming us to dinner  
somewhere past the attic  
but not quite in the air.

**Progress**

from ineffable  
to unavoidable  
and back again;  
from Chief Smiter  
to holy pal—  
loving insider—  
and then again,  
flaming antiheretical,  
to Blaming Levitical,  
and from this  
to Great Bystander  
as piles of shoes and hair,  
sheets of skin,  
tangled eyeglasses,  
meals of bone, meals of villages  
then, meals of young men  
bursting with fervor  
are served. Such an appetite  
makes a Huge Consumer,  
and us retail

### **Holy Space**

doesn't give you much to work with:  
a lean mixture whose ignition  
hollows stars creates unease,  
allowing room for argument,  
perhaps, gives space enough. Yet more  
is wished for, prayed for, waited for.  
Time and shape, out of absence  
construed or dreamed, or realized  
in works, like a hand of cards  
are finally played, reshuffled, dealt  
to other hands. Perhaps space waits,  
hoping, perhaps, for form or tense.  
Perhaps holiness is in the hand-off.

### **The Potter**

When off the hero strode with a brave look  
she did not know the form that evil took,  
that space so empty and destructive  
could seem so gracious and instructive  
and with a sinuous flexibility  
invade its host. She took it for a snake.

That space should bask there and be dreaming  
of whether it should bring her into being  
she could not abide, and rushed upon it,  
grabbed its drooping tail and quickly spun it,  
looped it end to end and coiled a shape  
around its nothingness, a slender vase.

Then every jar and cruse and pot she filled  
with seeds or oil, or flour she'd milled  
and every hour became a thing to lose  
and timing space and spacing time a ruse  
to hinder waste, with clocks and dials and births;  
last, she held formlessness itself –in glaze.

Then she could gather faces up again–  
discarded images of gods and men,  
of hates and hopes, of simpering distrust  
that lies with faith, both simmering in the dust.  
She picked all of them up again and blessed them  
and fired them in the shine we cast through space.

### **Postlude**

Our being out of sight,  
for you, may put me out of mind,  
while I, out of my mind  
missing you, having used mind up  
in this feast of space,  
this fast of never-mind,  
take on another form.

You, Potter, understand this:  
know it in your hands, shoulders, hips;  
warm to it as the wheel turns—  
    How fear, grief, pain,  
    and other formless things  
    are only spun away  
    when space enters them .

### **Tailgaters**

No speed that I could go would be enough.  
Anticipation overtakes the chase.  
The prize precedes the game; the goal, the race;  
the mystery, the search; the smooth, the rough;  
the thought, the slow peripatetic pace.  
The struggling steps between are left behind,  
the hardships undertaken for a cause  
and yes, also the last sweet clinging pause  
delaying grief or parting.

This does not find,  
as lawyers say. For those who wait on laws  
within themselves and make a thorough search  
before capturing the obvious—  
in their defense and mine— I say, "For us  
the obvious is mystery enough.  
No race will make it more mysterious."

### **Cruise Control**

Cruise control is a state of mind.  
Lock the speed in. Insert a pause.  
Find within any urgent drive  
cause to hesitate. After using  
live explosives—each charged with shock—  
taking pressures till power exhausts—  
detonating precious plans to costs  
day by day; after watching what  
jam why to gassy nought: Why, then,  
shut down, drift in a cloudy thought;  
cruise and troll in a lake of mind;  
drift past deadlines and then notice Death  
slam his brake in the other lane.  
Cruise control is a state to mind  
borders of—a long dotted line  
Showing history where to cut.

### **Drive Through**

This has been your life. Let me clear away  
inconveniences. Am I in your way?  
Pay or reckoning automatically  
in a single stop: Key your number in.  
Ever there to serve. Feeling queasy yet?  
Everybody does. As they will explain,  
Rollovers occur at a higher rate  
nowhere better than –given there's a where  
one of us could stay rather than drive through.  
By the way, come Spring, you've already won  
flights to anywhere you can ride on moths.  
Beatitude depends upon your attitude.

### **Unadvised Though Televised**

Accused, I serve my own defense  
and plead the potent innocence  
of weak and utter ignorance.  
Whatever happened once or since,  
I was not there, in all events.  
I have been nowhere for some time.

A hundred peoples rose in war;  
a hundred others, keeping score  
resolved that hate's worth fighting for—  
no end to vengeance seen; no floor  
to depths that they would sink for more:  
Are heights so seldom worth the climb?

In other places, hope collapsed  
while what had seemed good health relapsed  
and heartbeats paused and parts prolapsed  
and neural cells no more synapsed;  
meanwhile, insurance slyly lapsed.  
Are paid-up policies a crime?

I'd feel more certain of my case  
if I had really been some place—  
even the scene of my disgrace—  
instead of running with the chase  
across a screen, the ritual race  
to run, instead of feeling, time.

### **Engineered Consent**

He gave, I think, to everyone who mattered.  
He gave (and how) to planetary peace  
and chow for hungry tots in Mozambique,  
disabled veterans, hapless tree-frogs.  
He gave his wife for homeless refugees.  
To all unloved, unwed, unborn, unknown  
he gave his children. Such a good neighbor.  
He kept on firing as police closed in

### **Beneath the Trees**

I wish my verse were high and heady.  
(Some of it is, I think.)  
But wings have always seemed unsteady  
as woods beneath me shrink.  
Beneath the trees I'd rather lie  
than stall and sink behind your eye.

### **A shell game**

*(for critics in chambers)*

I know (a man who (read (between (the lines  
I write are always failing my designs)  
two states of mind – intention and presence)  
half aware of reading, half of sense)  
reads lines backwards, telling how they grew,  
claiming words are least of what lines do,  
would laugh) that lines close shut behind me  
in chambered thoughts: a mollusk minstrelsy.

**Abstracts**  
*(Driving to Oklahoma)*

Ignore the smear  
of leaf, cloud, pounding, filaments of light,  
fast twittering, yellow flashes, screams,  
gray faces—slashed and scored;  
whipped; in tears—the mesmerizing fog,  
the pounding water on gray rocks,  
the whipped trees, scorched marsh,  
grass leaves tipped with tears,  
the memorizing of it, the slog  
through idioms skittering;  
through dreams where nothing will cohere;  
detach only this:

a marsh-snail attached to a blade of grass  
that nods and seems too frail  
to stand both fire and raspy kiss.

For leaving all amiss you earn detail

**The blue sky**  
*(In mem. sbr)*

and other unmentionables  
like clouds through branches,  
sunlight through red maple leaves,  
a bright cardinal in the yew,  
are visible to the pure in heart,  
unlike those Mazarins,  
those cardinals of a different hue,  
invisible to you.

### **Hagiography**

Saints are worthy of regard  
because their intercessions bridged  
divides, spanned chasms, spoke  
when banned. They broke with form.

That there were miracles, and are,  
is not the point. To be a saint,  
however great or slight,  
one simply stops and sees.

Pause to let a vision grow.  
Trust that you can work it out.  
Step onto the bridge  
you build by stepping out.

We need a tune for the unknown,  
some ancient air or sacred dance  
for chippers, flakers, speakers,  
molders, and spark makers,

a tune from reeds they wedged in clay,  
from birds they learned to catch and coop,  
string they drew from sinews,  
or hollow bones made flutes.

Let it simply be the drum  
of expectation and delight  
when, thoughts too full for sleep,  
we work into the night.

### **Chrysanthemums**

Twenty-one curled petals in a row,  
etched like tusk shells, intaglio,  
stiffly bending from sepal-knuckle  
backwards on filmy leaves and pointing  
like spider's spinners that prey shuttles  
tombs upon or like tiaras splashed  
from a puddle skin the spring rain drums:  
yellow, frost and cushion, these are mums



### **The Albatross**

*In mem. Eric Hoffer*

The waddler stumbling on her wings  
soared off and left us underlings.  
Misfits, migrants, bums and children  
tramp the freeways we are given;  
pick the berries, pluck the vines,  
pass beneath the highway signs  
routing what is driven to burn,  
but passions driving us to stalk  
the flyways give us in return  
the heights, sweet hope and shimmering talk.

### **Beads**

*An appreciation of A.R. Ammons*

At three forty three I awoke.  
Clearly it was early. Crickets  
were still at it. At once  
I saw that the probability  
of a choice would exceed  
that of a combination. Although  
of course I had known it before,  
I hadn't seen it perfectly, even  
seen through to what it meant,  
implied—so happily had sleep  
pruned the burr of miscues,  
misleadings, and misdirections so  
willfully wooing me down  
garden paths wistfully woven  
with tangles of my own doing. I  
also saw why eschewing  
effects of form—enjambéd,  
meant to surprise, flatter, maybe  
comfort—Ammons just  
batters on, flinging words  
in combinations and even in  
choices without as he said making  
any little rondures, even as  
garbage is flung into the chin  
chopper every tow-head child  
admires. Every nose-dropper

knows a dump truck as a  
wonder. And I knew why  
his lines move on minus dwell  
on any shiny find haply turning  
up in furrows of words, like  
the flow of trashed worlds.

Not as earlier when we picked  
coral from a pebbled shore,  
brought out the ruby shine  
with sand in a sack rolled  
between brothers, the clarity  
I have now, the last day  
discharged, the coming day  
suspended—although the crickets  
have stopped—allows me around  
the tiny room between my ears—  
a cylinder of light, always  
a ring circumscribing and  
dividing light from dark, goods  
from the business we give  
ourselves about making distinctions,  
as if the magic of our deft  
daft cuts misleading us into  
amazement with ourselves is  
what matters in the flow.

No, looking again at that clear  
cylinder of light, forget the  
rings it makes, the sets  
including or excluding haps.  
Think instead how the blowpipe  
fused sand, the barrel aimed at  
star clusters or the grit inside us  
(instead of between the eyes) framed  
new worlds; how the tiny red bead,  
bored from both ends, the center  
tapped out, passed hand to hand  
eight thousand years ago, was strung  
and unstrung as many times, chosen  
and combined as many times,  
like these words for your adornment.

**Interdiction lifted**

Why when wheeze  
after wheeze seeming  
the last finally  
one was last  
and the air let in  
without impost or  
passport, none  
on the line can tell  
since plain policy  
so rib-lathed  
had long forbade it.

**To Edward Hirsch**

(after reading Judith Harris's interview)

Bronchitis slowed me to find  
you are not that Hirsch—  
the one who insists on the canon.

Insistence, tying a bag  
with no escape hole in it,  
however beautifully,

like the Wasteland or Cantos,  
cold as a pound of hocks,  
is not a wise companion.

My voice, in and out  
of the Lost and Found, seeks  
good fellowship on walks

through Paterson, through grass,  
where hay is left to make,  
across the downs, where runes

and mine-voids beckon, woods  
with poems in their roots,  
lake-shores, and valleys wild.

I regret the mistake  
and promise to read you, a drink  
between us as light fails.



## **S C A L E**

ONE & THREE  
(Place kick by Fabergé)

1  
i s  
G o d 's;  
T h r e e  
h o p e 's.  
S n e a k s  
t r y a n g l e s ;  
H i e r o p h a n t s  
n e w s c a s t i n g ;  
S u p e r b o w l e r s  
r e s u r r e c t i o n ;  
(S o u p b o w l e r s  
i n s u r r e c t i o n  
w h i l e l i t t l e t s a r e v i t c h  
f r o m s i l v e r t u r e e n  
s i p s t u r t l e g r e e n ).  
F r o m g r e e n b a y s  
o u r b o y s s l i p p e d  
i n t o m e n ' s  
s h e l l s :  
h e l l  
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i  
n  
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e  
d ,  
a n d  
p e d e  
s t a l l e d .

**TWO**

No two  
alike;  
yet each  
line's up  
to more  
than one  
who waits  
for dole  
or cheers  
or caste  
function.

**FOUR**

Two by two they came  
to later, blame  
shared all around;

even spread so fairly,  
the two of them so squarely  
set, would not come round.

So two by two to corner  
the other with a lawyer,  
they came; settled; drowned.

**FIVE**

Hear apple petals,  
crunched core's stars, and hand that sings  
peasant songs to trees.

Watch the strum of fins,  
gill rakers straining sorrow,  
the flick of escape.

Inhale the last breath  
of mussels stinking at ebb,  
their threads like sutures.

Sip among the dead  
the dark twig tea steeped in salt  
tears for drowned singers.  
Touch tapered fingers,  
dear hands, songs escaped, and sense,  
from petals or stars.

**SIX**

What we pick up sticks  
like burrs, a masquerade  
managed behind the scenic  
Mardigras parade

of slogans, jingles; copy  
and voiceovers from Styx,  
that voluble river gurgling  
below the pitch to wants.

**SEVEN**

Seven ages later,  
we arrive, our bearings  
lost, our meanings ferried  
back to where we came from,  
oceans all around us,

packet's swill of troughs and  
peaks in greasy tow aft  
pulsing, pulsing, pulsing  
back to where we came from,  
notions all around us.

All of that behind now,  
we arrive, our caring  
lost for everything that  
backed us where we came from,  
motions all around us.

EIGHT

This page, intentionally blank,

leaves undisturbed the drive to smooth  
this world, perfect it, give it style  
waxed like an apple in produce,  
or, like thin winter fog, sublime  
life's drifts into an abstract gas.  
None of this will do for a stage  
cleared for art—or a waiting room.

Weight by weight, each finds the measure,  
spaces intervals, sets the frames  
that make inescapable points,  
ineffable truths, mordant claims,  
or dark cracks on cosmic matters,  
shifting places with emptiness.  
For pages blank enough to mark,  
a hundred million hold their breaths

**Backlogs**

back beneath the trees  
seasoning  
with violets under leaves.  
Rake them out to bloom.

**Dragons**

hid under the wash house  
pale as the hot sand  
tracked in after running after them  
to drink iced tea:  
Horned blood-spitters,  
flounder-flat,  
sweet as the lemony slurry  
that won't dissolve  
years afterward.

**Hurrah**

Let's hear it for restraint.  
Let's hear it. Give a cheer  
and in another year  
this world, so hard of hearing,  
so dumb, so butchered,  
may listen.

***Sustineo alas***

Kites sustained—alas—by air  
dip and sail and bob:  
so harmlessly they dive  
into the throat.

### **To Fashion**

Ask for it by name  
if you kept the label.  
Deep we are the same  
but variously able  
to buy what we are given  
or strive when we are driven.

Every age the same:  
at a bench or table  
makers at their flame  
vicariously stable  
fix all that floats and dives  
in images of lives.

Not for decoration  
but interior preparation,  
no doubt could I complete my thought  
as easily as I stride, I would leave this  
and be satisfied. Some are.

But as things are I must go back  
and revisit everything  
and tell myself here  
what I told you there.  
A poem's a room one cannot help  
on seeing it revised  
but tighten everything that holds a shape  
to human size.

### **Easter Planting**

The chemotherapy is over; soon  
the radiation will be too, but first  
the three days of elation must subside—  
as Zofran—Ondasetron—Glaxo tail.  
Fatigue will follow; so will any urge  
to move fall back like these clay wells I dig  
that tumble in upon themselves—undo my efforts.  
What these clotted knots are stuns  
me with belief: *Astilbe*—florete spires  
as pink as cherry trees and coxcomb-soft—  
dry bulbs dropped into pits that I have dug  
for them, first sweeping off the hands, some five  
and some three-fingered –hands that hide  
the face I'm looking for in this debris.  
So much death to deal with before life.

### ***Ecce homo***

Behold, the man exceeds the homily  
as cedars do quaint quatrains  
and acrobats their pose.

The man exceeds his rationale,  
his quartered rinds of verse, his anecdotes,  
memoranda, academic foot-play, squibs,  
lectionaries, themes, concordances,  
creeds, and heady stanzas.

None of his pulp holds up  
as time pours down.  
The flowing present lets  
no tracks in or out—  
no ammo, brass, or brassy clout  
gets dibs to hold terrain:  
no arms, no feet, no measurable lines  
walk this perimeter.  
No beat that Coltrane,  
Brubeck, Oscar, Stan, or Dizzy  
could drive down a lonesome road  
would calm this torrent.  
No Beat's Allowed

unless it keeps the time,  
lets those beatings in the south be told:  
the men named Medgar, Osip, Avi, Nelson, Jim,  
who rafted down south, deep south, around the Cape,  
around the shape of fear.  
Their beat goes on to the last pulse,  
the old beat, steady beat,  
its downpour holding time,  
the downbeat, beaten downbeat  
the downpour beat goes on.

What's to hold the beating rain?  
Clepsydras—water clocks?  
Yes, and lines, and frails, and hymns.  
These hold the songs, the seeds flailed from grass.  
These hold the fluid years.  
these subtle seeds  
scattered for the buried ears  
that listen in the earth, ready to stay  
at last, to rest between the beats, to wait  
for songs from cedars to the sidewalk weeds;  
ready to await the wisdom that does them honor  
and honors the beasts, listening with them,  
all listening in the earth as the growing grasp  
of human roots exceeds the pretense of flowering speeches  
that care only for themselves.

Behold: more now keep time to themselves.  
More listen, ready to stay  
until the best forms within them,  
the time kept between the beats,  
caught like rain or tears,  
each drop counted.

Some let us hear the steady rain on felted leaves,  
each drop, each beat as durable as gravity  
or growth:      Behold!

### **Rose hips**

When finally I take the measure of my heart  
it turns out smaller than I wished:  
something less lasting than contained.  
Some hearts are too ripe for picking;  
perhaps in time and without meaning to  
we come to understand  
each has its own small pleasure.  
Each takes it; there is nothing for it.  
Nothing can be done. Each  
has its own pleasure.  
Small as it is the measure  
does not reach us does not  
seem enough to the swollen  
berry of our pride, the dripping  
half forgotten reach toward  
more. More is what we want  
to have reached but then  
falling back  
to have reached beyond measure  
to have gone out early  
for the hearts  
the rose hips the bright dripping  
and to return speechless in our  
emptiness, to have gone out  
and return over-reached,  
returning smaller and smaller,  
the distance of a fingertip,  
we touch edges set just  
where we left them, dinnerware  
laid out to dry  
the table set on sibilant desire.

Still it whistles to what wakes in  
early hours, stumbles over bedclothes  
reaches for  
a light splash  
hope on the face:  
this: ever tentative  
dying backward into dreaming.

### **At Cancer Surgery**

Each of us Odysseus  
and each Penelope:  
both of us the wanderer:  
both wait; both search the sea.

Gray and cold, the waters break  
around the grasses, rocks,  
hermit crab whose claws divide  
a wilted cardboard box,

roots whose banks have given way  
and dropped them in the flux,  
bits of glass and crumbling stalks  
in black ooze, oily mucks

stretching miles on every side,  
invasive mole crabs: pale,  
scurrying with buried thoughts.  
To wait is to set sail.

### **Death Benefits**

Art begins with poses, unlike riders  
spelling out exactly circumstances  
through which, by which, under which and, which is  
unforeseen, when what's left of mine  
shall be distributed to sundry heirs.  
When you believe in art, remember, please,  
that it begins with poses, with a role,  
a voice, a choice of scene. None proposes  
claims for our inspection. Who wants a scene?  
An air's for singing, stories most telling  
when they seem for real, and detail most fine  
in steps or swaying lines when most at ease:  
Careful! Though Plato warned us off poets,  
we need not march to mottos, go up in flair:  
Afterwards, the still life must be eaten.

**June 6, 1994**

Immobilization follows war.  
the puff of national resolve goes hiss  
and we in different stages of undress  
deploy from bedrooms to our breakfast bar.  
Our risk in travel overland exceeds  
deaths once from snipers, mines or rocket fire  
on dayrooms, jeeps and mess tents. We require  
an overlord to reassess our needs.

When Amy left and pierced her lip with pins,  
shaved her head and joined a punk band downtown  
she called home once to calm her Mother down,  
and heard the game show watched along her street.  
No planes to spot, they were in quick retreat  
by watching any games that someone wins.

**Sonnets from the porcupine**

are long on spine, short on sentiment  
and, though prolix, easily summarized,  
to wit, that one who's easily surprised  
should wear a quiver, flail without stint,  
and only later probe for what was meant,  
making thereby the careless unapprised  
account for data more than was surmised,  
given new points for better argument.

A needle spray has often saved the day,  
leaving intact the opportune contract,  
soft belly, subterfuge, or quiet compact.  
In short, a rain of darts can pave the way  
for highways and commemorative plaques  
through punctual, informational attacks.

### **In praise of socks**

Let's praise those too low to plead:  
that they do hide most ugly feet  
and that they comfort in our need  
more than the mouthing of a creed;  
that in a narrow range of use  
yet they leave all our digits loose,  
unlike some other proud devices  
that lock our digits into vices;  
that with a minimum of yarn  
they keep both heels and great ones warm

### **Graduates without tread**

We don't find them ready  
trimmed to our purposes.  
Basic skills are an issue  
And working on the public.  
As far as content goes,  
what we need are on-line skills,  
up-to-date delivery,  
commitment to product, flexibility  
And readiness to start on the ground.  
Surround-sound is a perk,  
as are stylized conveyer treads.

They don't come out to us ready to go.  
Training sets us back, I gotta tell you.  
With attrition in the first two years  
we don't break even  
till we've kept one at least five.  
and you can forget presentation.  
They never dress properly or come on time.  
One even took calls during the interview.  
Where is the preparation?  
I gotta tell you.

### **Flow Through**

The hammering woke me.  
Someone had died.  
They spoke Spanish inside—  
to which tongue we contract out  
our chores and grief.

A dolly of scrapwood,  
molding and shoes  
scored the wall. Such issues—  
choosing paint and matching grout—  
transform relief.

### **Arms and Amen**

After centuries of connivance  
we came up with a contrivance  
that will blow us well behind the starting gate  
to points unknown and places far away.  
After such a vast displacement  
and millennia in the basement,  
we'll emerge, limp as a dodder,  
wondering if the ball is still in play.  
Ask me then if we are better,  
what we've learned as cannon fodder  
and being in an abstract state,  
and if I find my mind, you'll get a letter.

**A bid beyond the Id**

Pardon me if I fall flat  
on my *Ars Poetica*  
when I say that we are only obliged to breathe.

The squats, fits, snits  
and other counterfeits,  
whether they be *formes fixes*  
or simply the vexations  
swallowed for approval  
by committee  
may be required  
to avoid pity  
or to be allowed to hang around,  
even by your anapest and trochee,  
but you are not obliged to be admired.  
You only are obliged to breathe.

Take in capaciously all harm and grief and loss,  
warmth, honesty, and aspiration;  
yes, and also perversity and animosity,  
and insulation from seeing and inflicting pain.  
Breathe in and then breathe out.  
Give order, virtue, estimation, valuation,  
choice and will to live,  
to change and plan,  
transmogrify and glorify.  
Take and give;  
Do not stand pat.

**Then and now**

A glance, a nod, the slightest touch  
when I was leaves and you were daisies  
were rain and radiance.  
A glance, a nod, the slightest touch  
now I am moss and you are stone  
are gains stolen from chance alone.

### **Edging tools and other implements of oppression**

The hooks and twine that twist  
privet and boxwood into topiary  
belong with the majesty and formal design  
of gardens customary to kings, the tools  
needed to trim books, hemlines,  
and those who sing to resist, or school  
themselves on life, our sole attendant  
and Intendant, waiting, in all its finery—  
the fine edges between tree and cloud,  
free edges of all sung and said aloud,  
and sharp edges of mastery—  
finally to rule.

#### ***In memoriam Arthur Ashe***

In touch with dreams, before the rinse of light  
that races through the curtains can spread past  
in arcs and stripes that bleach his rods with sight,  
he is now object, neither first nor last;  
in touch nor held; in high nor low degree:  
now object without self or sense of each  
to separate him from the nearest tree—  
or sense of thinking this (that gives men reach).

He is an object, without even edge  
of color or of other lines between  
our genic distances so shared no wedge  
of hate can ply. His edge was never clean—  
as wholeness never is, that spreads our skin,  
makes objects men and gives the world topspin

### **Watching peonies and listening to Mozart**

Within each truth an embryo  
of falsehood dreams and waits  
for truth to flower, droop, and die,  
else it will never know

if blossom, petals, fragrance—all—  
are only passing states  
or whether from some deep supply  
they drink and never fail.

It only grows when we have given way  
to living as if flowers were meant to stay,  
or spirits only what is meant,  
or actions only our intent.

### **Lost in the woulds**

Something like a brittle flower—  
a rose, perhaps, or snap—  
or tilting peony: deter  
this fatal mood, this trap,

this seizing self-ingrown motive  
ceaselessly repeating  
in all registers of grief—  
some leaf or flower, speaking,

as only leafy, lofty, inarticulate  
can speak, in pattern, hue,  
growth, colors variegate:  
Let wildness lead me through.

### **The makeshift art**

assembly on the fly—  
in this we have our start;  
from this we live and die.

From sometime ease  
of fixing flower to shoot,  
of making ligands grease  
the dance while brigands loot

the dwindling larder  
of our shadowy pride  
from substance, mind and ardor,  
cooling as it dried,

we, our wonders,  
our own fashionings,  
we—fascinated burrs—  
tie slipknot fastenings

while, with peerless self-regard,  
timeless self-excuse,  
like a low discard  
we cast our efforts loose.

### **On Attracting a Mass Audience**

Wrecks, warm and steaming,  
dental products, touchdowns,  
or accompanied screaming,  
crimes of passion—  
in this way, poems may pay.

Here's a day stolen from oblivion,  
a wake of meanings scattering behind:  
life was always the requirement  
and the aim continually recovered,  
re-examined, and re-invested,  
but art wants its say  
in the same way bread wants yeast  
pushed around inside, not buried blind.

**Hills**

like gentle heads,  
foreheads of men  
and elephants  
or mastodons,  
if they cannot intend,  
foresee, or plan some end,  
perhaps prepare  
only to begin.

**Roots in the air**

A dead tree on end  
Whether posed or poised for death  
To be determined

**Idea**

Here's the thing,  
a something like a green fly,  
who doesn't so much generalize  
as buzz.

**Too early**

It feels too early.

*Too early for what?*

It has felt too early all day.  
And now we sleep?

*Sleep comes soon enough  
that comes too soon.*

Not just sleep  
but something more.

*So take less.  
You could do worse.*

Dawn men wake  
feeling early and unready.

*Dawn redwoods, maybe.  
Not men, ready or not.*

Here I come.  
Fiddle-headed—

*Ollie, Ollie In Free—  
Curled up and unready—*

Unready to curl out  
like a new-year's tongue—

*Stiff with air.  
Or just stiff.*

### **Scatter plot**

Of my sliver of what's known,  
half is error,  
another third is supposition,  
the proud remainder  
confidence.

Snowfall's white scatter,  
burring edges,  
lining tendrils, buds, spires,  
becomes, where it lands,  
apparent trees.

So many thoughts adrift,  
heel and yaw,  
push and draw us  
into cool but temporary states.  
Mind where you settle.

### **The Betta Version**

What could be more natural  
than artifice?  
Hexagons of wax  
and spittle;  
lines of code;  
polygons of bricks;  
a quarter  
housing poets, colorful  
as Betta fish.

Each is squaring off his lines  
against someone,  
anyone like him,  
in challenge-mode,  
puffed with craft and tricks  
that mirror every fix the other makes on life  
between gulps for air.

### **The Mortgage Button**

Wielding influence, my penknife,  
I ascertain what we contain,  
what of this life, sure and uncertain,  
we can claim for satisfaction,  
for the glory of God,  
or morning glories on a newel post  
finally ours.

It's less and more than you suppose:  
these flowers.

### **Bone exhibit**

Greasing the antler after scratching on it  
snakes, sea-lions, lavender and barley,  
the changing quarry of the sea and land,  
put a yellow shine on the raked surface.  
But all that glitters is not ornament.  
This gloss becalmed the struggle with a hook  
snagged in a bristled mouth that dragged away  
a foot, and broke this handle on display.  
This shine, like thought, is calm above much trembling.

**Keep subtracting and you go into debt**  
*(For J.P.)*

or maybe dream  
of some imaginary scheme,  
a life table  
that would make an actuary pause.

If you can hold your breath  
for twenty minutes  
you can try for more:  
Create a cause,  
sell virtual tickets  
on the net,  
raise crowds of inhalers  
soaring over death.  
No bill on the floor,  
not even the Senate's,  
could raise a debt  
like such a resurrection.

These lines, alas,  
like bubbles caught in glass,  
are as far or close  
in that direction as it gets.

**Lady L.**

Signifying awe  
rather than  
nothing,  
a fullness  
too much to be felt  
at once;  
and us, trumped,  
poor players,  
with hands empty  
before they're dealt,  
the deck is stacked  
to steerage with hope  
that borrows on tomorrows,  
risking everything  
to mean  
something.

### **Tipping Fee**

Since human futures bottomed out  
the tipping fee went up. You pay  
up front. I'll take a rind of air—  
none of those sweepings you call loam  
without an assay. I'll take salt  
from tears. No copper, please. No one's  
at fault. The artesian wells  
are dry, so I'll apply your swill  
to the account, brackish as is.  
Bring in your fill, the residue  
of all who had theirs. Dump it here.

### **Gnomics**

Revenge and rivers—  
divertible.

Karma and cardboard—  
convertible.

Riches and rashes—  
reversible.

Fog, claims by the state—  
aimless.

Dog, hydrants; tyrants—  
shameless.

Bog; rust; rebellion—  
flameless.

**2°, 575 gT, 2795 gT, 350ppm**  
*(after Bill McKibben)*

Some businesses you have to mind,  
like those near Cow Town,  
where I came from.  
Now *us* they lead to slaughter.

Not all of us, of course.  
Not all at once.  
The top execs  
expect some to survive.

An islander pulls out, moves on,  
lives on roots,  
builds oxcarts.

So shift your assets to oxen.

### **Wildfire**

*(Oklahoma, August 2012)*

A propane tank popped  
twenty feet to crater  
bedroom and kitchen, leapt  
the berm and railroad track  
sending swords of flame  
dancing on end and falling  
like straight pins into a cushion.

Someone saw a stranger  
tossing burning newspapers  
from a van. No straying  
mustang race of sparks,  
this wildfire had a mind  
behind it—mostly human.

Less accidental, wild,  
and uncontrollable than  
unforeseen, the heat  
we feel these days raced free  
since Coronado, wheeled west  
and east in conquest, scorched  
coasts; tipped pack-ice, drowning  
equally all the views  
on what or whom to blame .

### **Fall Morning**

Try as you may, sitting on this porch  
watching a squirrel hop furtively until  
it finds the spot under privet to drop  
and cover slender acorn with quick moves  
like blessing bread, and the line-up of other  
porches, and trees alternately planted,  
and sidewalks buckling over roots, cars  
obediently waiting, under which like a darting L,  
a chipmunk disappears, and even  
listening to slam, ignition, and gravelly  
departure of early riser, the drone  
of traffic, feeble skirl the frost-survivors  
high in branches release to join the hum  
of quavering power lines, stridulations, chirps,  
burrs, and mimic arias, you will find  
nothing that has not been arranged.

Listen even to the tap of bone-blade on amber  
while white-out stalls the daily hunt and low voices  
by the fire in quick cuts by stops and hiss,  
clicks, and plosive hushes, shape the unseen.  
Nothing missed, we talk our way into oblivion,  
blessing and addressing even as they slip  
through us, slime through lace, the resistant  
streams of particles our so certain mesh  
in purls and points, tenses, tensors, lines  
and chips contrives to snare. Needlecraft,  
try as you may, remains—even as you poke  
the infirm terrain to tease apart the naming  
of it, find a place to settle where heave  
of ice, collapse of stone, and lashing  
wind are on their own. Once you arrive,  
the scene is finished in brocade.

### **The Meaning**

Stop looking for what can only be made.  
You seek the rose petal's perfection,  
cupped and soft as a baby's ear,  
or purpose in our lives—some  
thread of silver lining—or trace  
significance to an archaic fact,  
or look for the one ingredient  
in the simmering stew of existence  
explaining the taste. Find it.  
By all means, find it. Only  
remember, you put it there.  
Your hunting made it dear.  
Your seeking made it fine.

And *you*—you looking for the sore  
swollen and full of stink—  
you also will find what you think.

**A truth**

Immense in a tiny back yard  
the oak with its terrifying crown  
a frozen dance of dryad arms  
slowly shakes everything in reach.  
What is this tangle, this individual?  
A record of its own life in splay  
of paths, spray of leaves  
thrown out in all directions,  
raking the sky, here is proof  
being centered is untroubled travel,  
unlike the pinched face beneath it  
of the house with stained roof  
which suffers from the idea  
it is alone and cannot move.

**Be jubilant my feet**

That beauties go I can report:  
they go, at length, and leave us short  
both mind and eye.  
*Prepare to die.*

The loose confection I admire  
and call my life's bright brief empire  
is borrowed might.  
*Return the light.*

Detained and finally undermined;  
left unsold even when consigned,  
take heart –or any other part.  
*Cut losses, please: Depart.*

But yet I feel some reticence  
to prematurely be past tense  
and give a peerful court  
the fearful Final Sort.

The posted package one submits  
in skin that wraps but never fits  
is all unopened hope and gift.  
Through these, stranger, gently sift.

**Morning Find**

Going to nowhere  
faster than usual—  
only a day since  
grackle departed  
feathers (as usual,  
left on the doorstep),  
gone to the where none  
fares any well from—  
still among breathers,  
sweeping the carnage,  
I wake in plumage.



*. . . sharing all lines and the quilted cover  
of the Earth, now surveyed,  
waiting to be remade.*

—*FRAMESHIFTS* (vol.2, p.376)  
(Quilt design by Mary Hobson)

## **AFTERWORD**

Annunciations surround us. Attention to them reveals patterns in the world around us and inside us. Attention is always rewarded, but annunciations come on their own terms. Mary did not make a deal with Gabriel. Newton did not select his own spectrum. Proper attention requires the proper frame of reference. You do not watch the *chola* cactus grow without yourself slowing down. You don't see through the *sipapu* hole in the floor of a *kiva* without knowing that the character of the world can change so much that only a few survivors may rise into the new reality—the new frameshift.

My writing and music is about accepting annunciations, changing your frame of reference, and crossing thresholds into new realities. We cross thresholds at a child's birth and coming of age, at the death of a loved one, and in other moments of insight and

sacred encounter. *Annunciations*, my first musical work, was an oratorio about the angel's message to Mary. In my works, annunciations come in many forms: a crocodile's warning (*The Queen and the Crocodile*); a child's disappearance (*Shura*), a tattoo (*Hidden Moves and Hidden Faces*), a frequency distribution (*Spearpoints Bright*, second story in *FRAMESHIFTS*), a veteran's memories (*Amber*, a chamber opera), and even a virus that seems to have a message for its hosts (in the second volume of *FRAMESHIFTS*).

Sometimes nature's annunciations must be mediated, as when James Hansen explained the frameshift of climate change to a Congressional committee or when Bill McKibben wrote his book, *Eaarth*—giving a new name to our altered planet. In *Marking Time*, a memoir, my reflections are mediated by the mountains, wildlife, and people of New Mexico, where I lived as an adolescent. Avery Crawley, the weather-prophet in *FRAMESHIFTS*, comments on the way things and places seem to hold our memories:

**In some way, railing and cloud could be trusted;  
They kept his memories, as did Ark and Salvage Yard.  
These and his museums and Foxglove Center  
Were his vessels for such memories . . .**

Returning to New Mexico after more than forty years, I found that many places and objects still held memories. Annunciations surrounded me. Perhaps, like the teepee stone formations of Cochiti, the annunciations had been there all along. The poet Basho wrote:

**Stillness—  
soaking into the rocks,  
the cicada's cries.**

Were so many annunciations soaked up by the desert during forty years, or was I finally quiet enough to hear them?

—*Richard L. Rose*



Other works by Richard L. Rose:

***FRAMESHIFTS?*** *Two volumes? What is it?*

It is literary fiction made of multiple genres united by theme and character. At first glance, it appears to be a story collection, beginning with a mystery; but look at the back and you find a philosophical poem. Between the covers are mysteries, suspense stories, literary fiction, science fiction, love stories, fictional memoirs and letters, adventure stories, dramatic dialogues, and a section of poetic narrative made of dozens of forms—sestinas, sonnets, *terza rima*, *droeg-kvaet*, prose poems, ballads.

One may read the stories and poems in any sequence, but as one reads, a novel emerges. Its narrative concerns a fictional community in Northern Virginia from the current time to a disturbing future of climatic and social upheavals. Both volumes are listed on Amazon in hard copy and in Kindle versions. Rose's book blog is <http://www.frameshifts.com>. To find or add to the reviews on Amazon, look for *Frameshifts* by Richard L. Rose. A sample of *Frameshifts*, the mystery story *Death Wears A Tricorn*, is also available in multiple ebook platforms.

***MARGINAL NOTES.*** Words and music, collected with personal papers, are on the website [marginalnotesinwordsandmusic.org](http://marginalnotesinwordsandmusic.org). Here find reference to the set of operas—*Annunciations*, *Amber*, *The People's Voice*, *The Books of Daniel*, *La Rinuncia*, and *The Profit of Doom*—as well as other works and information, including the sequel to *Frameshifts*, entitled *Hidden Moves and Hidden Faces* and information about works in progress, such as *Floats and Sinkers*, a poetry collection, *Marking Time*, a poetic memoir, and *The Fisher of the James*, a solo work retelling a Grimm Brothers' fairy tale about always wanting more than we have.

## About Richard L. Rose

Richard L. Rose has retired from several careers, including teaching, medical laboratory work, environmental education and research, math and science supervision, and teaching science and science teaching methods in public schools and universities. After growing up “on the road” with a military family, described in the memoir *Marking Time*, he settled in Northern Virginia with his wife to raise two sons and follow his vocation of teaching and avocations of writing and musical composition.

Since retiring, he has produced a poetry collection, *Floats and Sinkers*, and a set of chamber operas, *Annunciations*, *The Books of Daniel*, *Amber*, *The People’s Voice*, and *The Profit of Doom*. Following his wife’s death and beginning a second marriage, he composed *La Rinuncia* and self-published the novel, *FRAMESHIFTS*, in 2011. All but the last of the operas were benefit concerts for groups like Amnesty, Habitat, and local charities. Another musical work, *The Fisher of the James*, on environmental concerns, and a set of stories, *Hidden Moves and Hidden Faces*, come from living in Richmond. The book and other projects are described on his website [marginalnotesinwordsandmusic.org](http://marginalnotesinwordsandmusic.org) and book blog site, <http://www.frameshifts.com>. In his spare time, he collects rejection slips.

Recurrent themes are the transience of our lives and habitat and an insistence that we find effective ways to attend to this fact. By producing benefit concerts, reducing royalties, and recommending nonprofit organizations worthy of their attention, he invites readers to make their own creative responses. Perhaps readers of *FRAMESHIFTS* will be inspired to imagine and accomplish something positive for their communities. In writing, however, his intention is simply to tell a good story with interesting characters in surprising situations.

