

## The Car, a Window, and World War II

We grew up facing the despised backside of  
an otherwise honest house.  
As in all good tales, it is a Period without a period.  
The atmosphere in which shirts were stacked  
in a Chinese laundry and now live on in us  
like an ancient fern.  
Forget forgetting; we depend upon the pin stripes.  
Memory calls and says, *Shut the window,*  
*we're CLOSED!*  
A pledge of discretion, I guess it's a yes or no thing.  
The way the remains of an intractable fact remains:  
some furs are fake, some are not; a true blond  
poofy hairlet;  
the more obscure hood of a car (not a place to sit).  
I can't remember all of them that well.

A car is an object like a small country.  
World War II: The Palindrome War, WWII.  
Mom, Dad, car, window, the never ending WWII.  
*Das Boot, Enemy At The Gates, Sink the Bismarck,*  
*To Hell And Back, A Bridge Too Far,*  
to name but the most memorable Memorials.  
*First Blood, Drugstore Cowboy, The Terminator,*  
*Blade Runner*—everything on video and  
DVD forever.  
To go the distance is not to close the distance.  
It's an inside/outside problem.

Once, after the war he shot his gun into a pond,  
the dead fish soon rose to the surface.  
I could see that he could see it, but that's all I could see.  
Not another one of his fish stories; he told me once and never  
mentioned the fish, pond, or gun again.

Three inscrutable fingers rest gently against the glass,  
the darkness, the page.  
What becomes of a hand in a window,  
the shadows cast by a magic lantern, a simple fire?  
Losing track of images, losing track of people—  
the secret destiny of HDTV on HDTV.

The experimental film *Walt Whitman Nurse and Poet*,  
it's not bad; we enjoyed the catalogue of birds.  
The dull and unmusical notes of the Yellow-billed Cuckoo,  
like the *cow, cow* of a young bull-frog repeated eight or ten times  
with increasing rapidity.  
The way sounds become words, and words  
can store their sounds, and return back to Sound.  
As we learned, some of the birdcalls and songs were recreated  
from written descriptions.

And T (like me) adores the tabby and often says,  
“It’s not always better to know better.”

Ask yourself this question:

Does silence have to mean a lack of sound?  
I hate the lack of sound myself, though crave the silence.  
Yesterday, three people were shot at a check-point.  
The difference between a moment of silence  
and a decade of silence.

A lone piano plays into our daily commute.  
Gravel, pretzel bits, a penny on the floor. VACUUM:  
Fifty Cents.

Sonic Youth behind another pane of glass, glazed.  
They didn’t invent *flesh as material*, only the name:  
“Adaptation Studies.”

The light through the painted window  
becomes part of the notes on the page: pink and perfect  
in the *here* and *now* of the *there* and *then*.  
Trace the tire marks, the fuel leak on the carpet,  
call them “relics.”

She was emphatic: “I don’t read the quotes, I skip them.”  
A statement which clearly gave her a lot of satisfaction.  
This was years ago, hence the spaces, hence the space.

## **A Free-for-All Ends at A.C. Airport**

“The airport parking lot was known as a free-for-all where tow trucks routinely had to sort out the handiwork... cars parked at all angles, ...often with no discernible ingress and egress.” —*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

New Jersey is the greatest poem never written.  
Not an accident, but constant accidental.

Parking space is the central fact to man born in America.  
There are several hundred ways not to understand.

Despite the invitation to excess, in A.C.  
no bets are placed on the stay-at-home team, Pomona Nomads.

Directions: 1.) Park and lock your car 2.) Fly to Florida for the winter 3.) Remember,  
there's little reason to think *New Jersey* when you're not there—even if that's where you  
parked.

Fluxus is the name of the vapors coming off the cinder fields  
meeting the black birds as they come in at night.

Before the war, getting a good spot  
was what most Americans considered warfare.

The forward function is a maneuver  
all novice tow truck drivers like to do for you.

Your delight in pattern and repetition is dropped off  
to search a dusty field filled with hundreds of towed cars.

Until you actually say it, unscriptability and New Jersey rhyme.  
The State's equilibrium is located elsewhere.

The car alarm. The unison HONK. The techno field jam.  
The songs Bruce Springsteen will not write anymore.

## **Accurate Clouds**

And so you find she left because  
She did not like to stand on concrete

For too long. Now you feel the bone  
And the painted floor in your shoe.

What did she say again and again,  
Or only once? "The lace is effaced."

"The lace, effaced." What you say  
Is what you heard said, not what was

Said. As the way you begin to see  
Those you've seen only once.

When the time comes to twirl her hair  
A small finger of red is all that will count.

Outside, the tingle-tangle of the afternoon  
Streams out before you—

Between opposing buildings  
And empty spaces—you walk.

Through the tag and dregs sale,  
The sidewalk and the sky.

A T-shirt, a stain, a ten speed bike.  
Probably another false alarm.

## William James and the Giant Peach

James ate the giant peach and waited for the rain.  
It wasn't a children's story, but an entire year  
of his journal razored out.

The August heat had taken its toll on the garden.  
The clouds hung low over the upstate hills.  
It wasn't raining raining, but it looked like rain.  
James relaxed his shoulders and walked.

He didn't feel the rain, but could see it falling  
Lightly across the field of gentle showers.  
You can go to the Adirondacks by yourself.  
James recognized the freestone's curve and  
Golden natural split. Leaves leave their mark,  
The amber blush, stained. The enchanting prints  
Of leaf, sun, and skin: radiant and nude.  
From James's experience the soul ached.  
He laughed at himself, but still couldn't sleep,  
Buy a horse, or make up his mind.

In most cases he preferred a mid-size peach.  
On hottest day of the hottest month,  
It's easy to like a peach, even a giant one.  
All mouth, all mind, plain and high living  
coalesce.

Yellow-gold flesh on the turn to golden fruit.  
Peach passing into peach.  
Taste varies with movement.  
From hand to wrist and chin to ground—juice  
and more juice.

James wiped his mouth with his hand,  
And hand on his handkerchief.  
The red and inborn gift of a fine-grained pit,  
Held, loved and gone too.  
A little more mountain and a little less valley  
and light.

Is this what "half" looks like?  
Damn the causes, damn the effects.  
The universe meets us half way.  
When it's perfect, "the perfect peach"  
Is the perfect phrase.  
Don't tell, never tell. Valley, mountain,  
Sun-in-the clouds—James never did.

## Sonnet

You know all those sonnets the ones where I said, "I love you," well  
This time, I mean it, this time I'm talking about  
Your curly hair soaked black from October's frozen rain.  
You reading Milton and eating a BLT.  
Our up-front lies about being vegetarians,  
(Milton's, "I can not praise a cloistered virtue").  
More really, all those times we never kept meeting,  
Till we finally never met—giving up,  
Till bacon, Milton and the rain were all we had.  
Admit now I never wrote you sonnets,  
And that this probably isn't a sonnet either,  
Tho' I'll call it one, and loud skies pour down  
    To live on, back-of-the-brain with you,  
    Milton, bacon, your face in a year of rain.

### Trying to live as if it were morning

Every character in Dostoevsky is going to be in the hospital  
after this poem.

The underground man with a baseball bat, clearing house  
“Philly-Style,” and from what I’ve seen  
it would be true.

I put the Brothers K and their endless array of calamities  
out with my pinky.

I don’t go in for the ping-pong of rational-irrational,  
possible-impossible—  
The sad, lucid, mad, attractive, murky  
and yes, horrible overcoat of Paradox, Pennsylvania.

I don’t need that.

The Bros. K are gone.  
The problem of fake hamburger or even real hamburger remains.

The Past at my back,  
Back in the past, I agree with John Coltrane  
when he says, “War begets war.”

I drive all around my neighborhood with “the Idiot”  
in the front basket of my bike.  
When he falls out we pick him up and keep going.  
He’s clever in a way that *any* other person might be killed for.

Of course, people don’t fuck with us.

It’s the old game of imposing order where there isn’t any  
then calling yourself on it.

The ancients called it gravity; the modernists job security.  
The people after lost a lot of weight and went home pissed off  
Not believing they were home when they actually were,  
so they never really slept.

It’s the kind of trouble a fleet of blimps “up in flames”  
Might cause flying over an Olympic stadium as seen  
on video cassette—  
but really real anyway, like on fire.

People point out the violence I do to my own words,  
How uncareful I can be—I duck under their commentary.  
My copy of *Crime and Punishment* is under the aloe plant  
all buckled and stained from water.

A man I respect said there hasn’t been any “breakthrough work”  
since sometime in the 1930’s.  
Sometimes for me it would just be breaking things;  
Like my uncle’s a “good guy,” but

The precinct captain pulled his back-up.  
He shouldn't be here; we don't talk about it.

Take out a piece of paper and write down:  
Man the builder, Man the destroyer, Man the eater  
of donuts, butter cake, and pork buns.

The experimenter says he, or a recombinant  
He and She "unsettles all things."  
Even though that's cool, I don't unsettle "all things."  
I don't have enough time.  
There's enough nonsense without that nonsense.

I'm not here to settle that.  
I'm here to write a poem because I'm a morning person  
and it's morning.

This is a morning poem.



**In Iceland there's no reason**

to mention the giant wave  
the ocean falls            the sky  
a swell    a dropping edifice three  
or more stories            past the brim  
barrier walls    there are no problems  
the apartments of negative space  
have no visitors  
the house breaks o'er the coast  
green moss o'er the lava hills  
the sun is out    for fifteen minutes  
makes a fast-reverse    and is out again

### **The 1,000-Year Storm**

The basement wall is not a wall  
Only stones soaked through.  
Sheets of rain and sheets and blankets,  
Emily's eyes softer and softer.  
Water streams under the French doors  
    on the basement floor.  
A \$1,000 deductible—  
    for the 1,000-year storm.  
All reports arranged to float or sink,  
Cars not stuck near Gldwynne, float  
At Conshocken; on Midvale  
Floodwater sweeps woman under;  
The sound of water, a truck parked nearby.  
Double-crossed at Trenton, boats  
    are ordered to moor;  
Washington's Reenactors revolt.  
Not a drizzle nor merely a downpour—  
It's *that* kind of rain.  
Hold the space, take their place,  
Clouds replace the clouds.

## Otherwise

I get people and the extractive industries confused.  
Everything from steel to Chinese bras.  
She says: *My Lord take me to the voice  
and let it float.* Float to the bottom and stay there.  
Surrounded by silent trees for months,  
the voice is deep, the eyes are closed.  
The smoky sunglasses are what take you.  
Past the fear of life's paucity,  
you might anticipate that *patience*, or  
*crazy quilt* would be the word.  
Where else can you be both beautiful and warm?  
White is white, it takes up space.  
Crumb-stained spicy salt between the pages.

### **It's no fun living in the no-fun zone**

At his funeral they said he was,  
"Never a downer."

It takes a day every day.  
They're filming in your area-code.

The Director asked if you'd stand in.  
Things are good people are over.

Drama, drama, drama, drama.  
Grow angry, proofread slop. Lose days.

The specific emotional quality of former sex.  
Know the cat knows.

Tomorrow on Oprah will be called:  
Creating Damage.

Soup tastes better the second day.  
Phone up the hotel. There isn't a job.

All the same, there's no more time.  
Go to where you feel a river.

Scan in the ocean.  
Remember what you once thought.

You were wrong.  
It's not dark.

Something's stuck in your gut.  
You still need to eat.

## Private Far-Off Places

I've never loved a man, woman, or cat.  
It's not sad or even a pity, but the greatest thing really.  
The greatest love poems in the world have nothing to do  
with it.

A man's face, quiet, and skinny-cool body  
in an Italian foreign language class;  
The force of a dear woman's mind and body melded  
in a summer yellow dress.

Not a flash in the pan, though that too fills a peripheral need.  
It's the impeccable tempo of our French friend's questions  
Opening up to more one-at-a-time questions  
and perfectly timed pauses, taking us  
To private far-off places—to here and here again, all new.  
The calm, late-night focus of your companionship.  
Assured in words not to be reassured in words.  
No promises past the page only all the moment can hold.  
As fast and as slow and as stunning as an eclipse.  
On a given moment, about a given moment,  
Worthy of a Nobel in Ethics, attending to our attentions.  
The weight of a good fork, the small joys of a good lunch,  
and lunch itself.

Talk-singing the lyrics of "I Got a Gal in Kalamazoo."  
The quality of a line related to the next. Again  
and again I fall

A ballet of attendant parts and wholes: the good, the bad,  
and the lovely, call it *a counterpart of what we are*.  
Enough for the night, early morning, and a lonesome  
afternoon.

Here before the crumbs of the morning toast can be wiped  
from the table.

In "If the Birds Knew" I remember you say:  
*Not only as though the danger did not exist*  
*But as though the birds were in on the secret.*  
Today the sweltering heat has passed and the wind is soft  
and cool.

Today the wind is not so windy, a perfect morning really.  
Not the wind that hit me from all sides, in the back of a JEEP  
to Atlantic City a few weeks earlier.

At 75 mps light rain isn't so light.  
The unruly wind, straight from central casting,  
is our goofy guru, constant friend, diligent teacher.  
Drying me off as quickly as the clouds cross the highway.  
Why didn't we pull over to put up the top?  
You wouldn't have read this far if that was what  
you wanted to know.

It's the back-and-forth play of wind and rain  
That guides our attention—its willful beauty:  
Wet hair, dry hair, wet air, dry air.  
It's not only glorious dogs who appreciate the charms  
of the wind.

I cup my hands over my ears, let go. Cup. Let go.  
Sometimes hold my hand out the side window  
like a child, surf the powerful air—do it again.

When my friends glance back I break my stoic pose  
and make faces at them. People driving by look twice.  
I laugh out loud, as loud as I can, as loud as the wind.  
I breathe in. I realize I am someone else. I am somewhere else.  
Emily is in the doorway and proudly translates for the cats:  
She explains: "It wasn't bad of Rupert to wake us up last night.  
The kitties said, *No no no—come here, I have something to tell you.*  
That mouse was in our house—The House Mouse.  
Ru wanted to tell us he did something good for us;  
For over thousands of years he was bred to do it!"  
I delight in the dark well-told tale of last night's caper.  
Old windy rumors of instinct and love—a beautiful dead mouse  
Between us, its soft gray fur licked clean.

## Obi-Wan Kenobi

Toward the end of his life Obi-Wan Kenobi was like an old cat.  
He was like, *cut the pomp and circumstance and show me the couch.*  
The rebels had gone off without him, his planet a backwater of the known worlds.  
It was hard enough to do the little things: get a decent hair cut, mend his sandals.  
He understood longer than he'd like to remember,  
That it's the little things, comfortable shoes, a good haircut, that really keep you going.  
And in another hundred and twenty years, if anyone remembered,  
He didn't want to be known as the "long-haired, broken-sandaled Kenobi."

A hundred and twenty years of tough love can put some ideas into your head.  
Sure, he could have as much sky as there is to take, but he's not above the petty:  
The pens and pencils of existence, as he calls them.  
He makes the Red juice from concentrate and drinks it all morning,  
Says his "May the force be with you," old man prayers.  
Then back to his pens, pencils, faintly ignorant of the window, and the others,  
Thinking, *the old giants can't turn their ships around fast enough.*  
Today, the pang of a long-gone love's swarmed over him, invisible,  
Like sand ants on a crater.

Today he notices his sandals, made of Taun-taun, or possibly even Bantha,  
Are beat and in great need of mending.  
He'll get them mended; it's a half day's journey.  
He'll take leave, traveling light;  
The sand ants are clambering in song and dance.

## **ORIGAMI HEADPHONES**

### **severely clear**

The funeral business was creepy as it probably still is.  
We knew we wouldn't change the world, but had the decency  
to embarrass the guilty. Persons in the house were often made  
to feel an unspecified levity. Whether it had anything to do with  
our fluorescent ceilings flickering one thing and our computers  
flickering another you can better tell. It was all in front of us, part  
of the articulated body of problems, with dozens of bit parts,  
which also broke your heart.

### **emergency numbers**

Dirty waters found us before we found them.  
It might sound obvious, but by the time everyone knew,  
    there was no one to tell.  
Saved from the waste of waters, the secret  
and hidden determination of some living  
and intelligent nature—ancient waters over the present world.  
We distrusted our spigots, there was no story.  
One day everyone was just drinking bottled water.

### **one idea about terrycloth**

A widely felt appreciation for texture. Linc sat on his  
red rubber seat listening to headphones, reading his  
magazine. Thought (finger wagging, pointing on a T-shirt),  
*I can't believe, I can't, can't, believe the way you acted today.*  
He was over it, but couldn't get the same emphasis,  
so he turned it into a song.

### **start a course of study**

Your blue Ford Pinto  
explosion law suit.  
There's no case.  
Everyone knows  
they're a death trap.  
You try anyway,  
all burned up like you are.

### **a mysterious work**

In the essay about the bloodied and smear-stained  
kitchen Santas there is a mini-chapter about "Humor."  
Humorous people talk of the serious  
and serious people talk of the serious.



### **the old**

“Look at those filthy windows. I’ve got stained glass windows in my house,” the old woman said, shaking her hands weakly in the air from the kitchen chair.

### **drop ceiling**

Light and dirty as air.  
As soon as you walk into the room,  
and can think, you think:  
*How fast can I get it down?*  
There are more ways to get in than out.  
Lights are built into the mix.  
Head poked up in the dark, dusty  
dry water damage. Wires hang amid  
the irregular and buckled woodwork.  
Trashed as it was, you work towards  
the ceiling, holding the ceiling—  
crap all the way up.

### **why birds don't fly into the glass**

Bird watchers have nothing on  
what the birds see.  
The birds are amp-ed  
by powers of 10X10. Ornithology  
is the public name of Intricacy  
written in the sky.  
Augurs never were and never will be  
a metaphor.  
They really see the shit.

### **good design is good business**

We weren't the we  
we thought.

A bull's-eye. Brass tacks.  
One station in your ear.

We called our cell when we said.  
We were waiting to have our baby.

Big things happen  
before your eyes “Whitey.”

**roughly fickle activity**

A father had died, several were dead.  
People stood loosely together.  
Their standing was a swerve felt  
against other things once felt—  
ideas that survive their occasion;  
Something physical kept close  
similar to 2000 B.C. when the Japanese king  
    had 'flying sun discs' for advisors,  
or when Sodom and Gomorrah were nuked by angels  
for not being perverted enough, and Knossos was microwaved  
for no reason at all. If you wanted to know a good restaurant,  
you could still ask your butcher. A cat and the shadow of the cat.  
The weight of the head in the hand remained in the hands.

## **Arriving**

In the old days, people  
would have to say it.

There would be a big-up  
to Coco Chanel.

The question of who's  
remaking whom's  
Image  
might or might not be worked out later.

Everything  
from the face  
to shoes would be shining  
directly so the city  
would not forget.

Inevitably there would be talk  
of inevitability—  
but *talk* all the same.

Heaps of crap HERE.

Endless interiors. Eyes.

The worst of winter would be mild.

## **Coffee Milk**

Coffee milk  
Is not a fifty-fifty blend.

Something you knit  
Like twiggly wiggy, or

Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.  
It's a Rhode Island thing.

Runner-up for the State drink:  
Del's frozen lemonade

It's not that it's delicious,  
It is—coffee, sugar, milk.

Nourish the morning, stay  
The sweet empty night.

Everything else succumbs.  
No church wedding,

Nor *Mazel Tov* you can pass  
Easily over.

## **DELIBERATE**

Here is a guy, in the corner.  
It and he and we sit on our secrets  
In the dark basement of *Double Happiness*.  
He doesn't nod, but opens his marked  
    and watery eyes wider.  
I take it as hello, and it is.  
His eyes are older than he is.  
He's not someone from Philadelphia,  
"A good place to be *from*," he says,  
Though for the glancing moment of smoke  
I understand him in that way.  
People there would know him.  
It's the walk, yes. How he stands:  
A short guy, big for his size.  
How he looks when he looks and—  
    looks good too.  
Sharp and serious, one of the older guys  
You can never know, but know all the same.  
So he sits; then he's up, then he's stands  
And then we're here—and he says:

*But here's The truth:*

*You have the right to keep your mouth shut*

*Trust me,*

*Across the room  
A person looking like a crazy version  
Of somebody you once knew  
Might be our Savior  
One who can draw fire  
Out of ashes  
At least a lover, maybe  
The one to take you up a little higher*

*Or let you down easy.*

*But don't look this way,*

*It isn't me*

Call it speech, and it is. Not as fast I am  
    saying, but not at all slow.

## **They're fighting in Atlantic City, in Atlantic City**

The urge to put question marks after everything.

Counting the loss, magnetically stripped:

1-800 generally desensitized.

Now that I'm saying this keeping it going isn't proof.

They're fighting in Atlantic City, in Atlantic City.

Legs on a chair, three fingers resting lightly on her shin.

You don't have to get abstract to see everyone's beat-up badly.

It's not the future it's Lunchtime all around.

The many ways you think about shaking off the outfit.

The kindergarten teacher's countdown to silence.

This quiet, this time of day—call it a nap.

The fried salmon burger and the salad were good.

Where did we leave the exclamation points?

The train took me home in twenty minutes, I was grateful.

I don't live anywhere.

## **Animated Folkies**

All the ninjas seem to be landing here.  
They must be on break.

You realize, you realize, you realize  
there's something.

It's about time we hear the story of the lucky duck.  
My lucky duck.

Great skeins crashing, crashing,  
kid kid kid.

There's trouble when the old slow furies  
start their laughing.

There's trouble and there's *trouble*,  
and there's the old slow furies.

The gall of your pretend hero,  
eating twenty-eight chicken tacos.

Before the short story class  
you never knew that ain't right—

it ain't; and twenty-eight less tacos in the world.  
Somehow the string section makes sense.

The occupying ninjas like a house full of cats;  
they must live here now.

The film runs along.  
And the furies, old and slow.

Jesus Christ, they've still got it.  
School is out, time for a love story.

Your best friend says it plain,  
says, she can make you happy.

There's no leap nothing will blow these lines.  
Kids keep saying regret regret.

Playing that car  
the windows closed,

makes me *what* to write a song.  
Don't look up.

Ex-large and kindness,  
kind of oversized-ness.

Can't get enough of your crazy love.  
Blue sky blue; sky so big.

Boy don't fit the description  
Even at night, the spangled blue

surrounding the car frames your face,  
totally cheap frames.

Everything else, blown away: Rolled down  
rolled down your window.

Yeah, I've been there,  
there ain't nothing there.

Now where are you, can't hear  
a thing in the wind.

Now where are you?  
Now where? Fury. Fury.



**At the end of the famous catalogue of the ships**

Something didn't look right.

The past flipped into present.

Its trick was that it wasn't a trick.

Standing in a room happily devoid

Of everything that ever looked right, now

it was this, it was here.

If you could think at all, you had to think again.

It was a place you wanted to distrust because

of a familiar smell or because

The fear that can never cross the screen

just did.

If it was possible to tell you directly I would.

A person you didn't know, but wanted to

Take a walk with, anywhere beautiful would do,

Spoke, and stood when not speaking,

in a mid-alto range.

It was cold and I had a pocket of sticky figs picked

From a craggy city garden. They were no good to eat.

The skyline had resembled fake art for the past fifty years;

Everything I had to say I didn't need to say.

### **No One I Know and the Tree**

The tree nobody I know can name  
Grows from cement atop the top  
    of all subway platforms.  
It won't stop growing from crumbled concrete.  
The one nobody I know can name  
Has many names, but it's not the "tree of God."  
I've found it in poems by many friends  
Though none of my friends are poets.  
My closest friends are a ghost and a cloud.  
Every tree I'm talking about is a painting  
    written by a poet,  
Just as all poems are trees written by painters.

For how do we call the recently noticed tall one  
    out on the fire escape?  
Before I looked out the window  
It was in nine poems, half a film treatment and  
At least four of my last seven meals.  
Sacrificing the possible beauty of its name,  
What can they say about that?  
The tree nobody I know can name  
    doesn't need encouragement,  
But I encourage (if by nothing else)  
    by not discouraging it.  
The one year headache you didn't know you had,  
    till you didn't have it.

The concrete continues to grow.