



# Mouth of the Water

*rains came*

*jasmine trembled*

**by Ken Peters**

**cover painting by Joel Johnson**



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Index**

A DAY WITH THE DOGS . . . . .	7
A MILLION MILES AWAY . . . . .	8
A NOVEL PLACE . . . . .	9
a small prayer . . . . .	10
ALL OUR LIVES . . . . .	11
An Elegy for Corinne and Ben . . . . .	12
ARCHITECTURE . . . . .	13
at a loss . . . . .	14
BANISHING DARKNESS . . . . .	15
BEARINGS . . . . .	16
BLOOD SO BLUE . . . . .	17
BORN THAT NOVEMBER . . . . .	18
BOXES . . . . .	19
BREAKING FAST . . . . .	20
BUILT ON SAND . . . . .	21
changing way . . . . .	22
CHANGING WEATHER PATTERNS . . . . .	23
Co-Anchors . . . . .	24
come too far . . . . .	25
COYOTE WAITS . . . . .	25
Dear William (Blake) . . . . .	26
DOGGEREL . . . . .	27
doggerel for long nights, knives and life . . . . .	28
Dues Paid . . . . .	29
dubious apogee . . . . .	30
dynamo . . . . .	31
el jefe . . . . .	32
EVENING EVENING . . . . .	33
feel that power . . . . .	34
Get Down . . . . .	35
Gentle Does It . . . . .	36

## Index Continued

golem . . . . .	37
good thing trees are trustworthy . . . . .	37
Horror Story . . . . .	38
HUTCHINSON ISLAND AT DUSK . . . . .	39
I DON'T BELIEVE IN FATE . . . . .	40
I Forgot About Until Just Now . . . . .	41
I Like the Middle of the Night . . . . .	42
I Love The Baby Cheeses . . . . .	43
imperfect gardener . . . . .	44
inevitable chastity belt . . . . .	45
IN NEED OF REPRIEVE . . . . .	46
is it coo coo to Bossa Nova? . . . . .	47
It Could Happen . . . . .	48
IT IS . . . . .	49
LAMBENT VILLAGE . . . . .	50
late night snack . . . . .	51
THE LEATHER MAN . . . . .	52
LEONIDS . . . . .	53
LIFE SAVER . . . . .	53
lighter than air . . . . .	54
little smoke . . . . .	55
long night's journey into day . . . . .	56
Lost In America . . . . .	57
Mask Making & Music . . . . .	58
MEET IN A SANDWICH . . . . .	59
misguided . . . . .	59
Moonlight (parts 1 and 2) . . . . .	60
MORNING, MORNING . . . . .	61
My Best Friend . . . . .	62
my life in a third world country . . . . .	62
N'Awlins . . . . .	63
New Math . . . . .	63

## Index Continued

NO ROOM IN THE LIFE BOAT . . . . .	64
Ocean Calls Me Back . . . . .	64
ON THE WHEEL . . . . .	65
One Soul At A Time . . . . .	65
OPENINGS, ORIFICES AND OPPORTUNITIES .	66
OVIPOSITING . . . . .	67
Paper Cup . . . . .	68
PARADIGMS . . . . .	68
Peace Comes Dropping Slow . . . . .	69
plenty of planets . . . . .	70
PURPOSE OF COLOR, THE . . . . .	71
REASONABLY PRICED RELIGION WANTED .	72
RELIEF . . . . .	73
REMAINS . . . . .	74
Renewal of Wonder . . . . .	75
RICE IN THE DESERT . . . . .	76
rising on Easter . . . . .	77
running man, run while you can . . . . .	78
SHRUG . . . . .	79
SIFTING THE ASHES . . . . .	80
Slide Into the Sea You Blood Red Moon . . . .	81
So Much For Pretending . . . . .	82
SOLIPSISM . . . . .	83
Sometimes . . . . .	84
SONG FOR THE LONELY LADY . . . . .	85
SONG FOR THE NEW WORLD ORDER . . . . .	86
spring wind . . . . .	87
Steel Trap, The . . . . .	88
Stone Cold Sober . . . . .	89
STORM . . . . .	90
SUMMER SONG . . . . .	90
Sundown . . . . .	91

## Index Continued

superstitious . . . . .	91
SUSHI BLUES . . . . .	92
the bum's rushing . . . . .	92
the color of cotton . . . . .	93
the poker game at the end of time . . . . .	94
THE SHIP . . . . .	95
The Used Camel Lot . . . . .	96
THE WAR AT MY DOORSTEP . . . . .	97
There Are People in These Words . . . . .	98
there is no circle but full circle . . . . .	98
this pilgrim's regress . . . . .	99
Time's Perfume . . . . .	100
to and fro . . . . .	101
top o' the food chain to you . . . . .	102
tripplin . . . . .	103
UNTITLED . . . . .	103
warning for a young woman . . . . .	104
warning from the government . . . . .	105
WHY THIS GRAVITY? . . . . .	106
who . . . . .	107

\*

## A DAY WITH THE DOGS

she stood at the rail  
poised and posed and pale  
while I attended  
conscious of my cheap shirt  
"What happens if a dog catches the  
rabbit?" she asked.  
"They won't chase it anymore," I replied.  
"Then they become no good for racing?"  
I shook my head and watched her turn  
back to the track  
she laughed when she won  
simple luck  
her number  
and touched my cheek briefly  
"But I bet they still like to run," she said.



## A MILLION MILES AWAY

when you come to see the family  
you travel from a justified bank account  
overdrawn and overwrought  
rectified rarefied deified thoughts  
come prowling and scurrying  
around the armoire  
off the back of the divine  
adopted from the novelty of the dime  
in the picture all the generations  
and ascenerio asterisk hysterical scenerio  
when the dead and the the quick come to dinner  
and you go to the hall  
smoking and thinking  
secondary wishes and weeds  
questioning your palace, your place at the table  
and the miles you've had to travel  
while the family unravels

## A NOVEL PLACE

the world is complete  
when I arrive  
nothing is needed  
but to sing of it  
warp and weft  
on the loom  
the fuller art  
the dying art (indigo blue and the cochineal red)  
that can be pulled  
or replaced  
the cloth growing  
under and through the looming  
families that are separated  
by the daily strife  
joined again  
in founding the university  
an endowed chair  
for the study  
of black smokers  
and fumeroles  
the secret of the cloth  
being the volcanic heat  
that drove the looms  
bottled by partisanship  
freed by the telling  
sharing  
renews the vent  
and all prosper  
in the old hills  
their bones hidden  
and graced by verdant growth

surrounding the families  
some face the morning sun  
others warmed by the evening glow  
but all within the circle of the hills  
all part of this world  
to be sung

\*

### **a small prayer**

Dear God  
save me from religion  
that sunders the wholly world  
protect me from the zealots  
who would condemn in your name  
bring peace and forbearance  
to the bible black heart  
that sees demons, sinners and heretics  
send a clear day to the imams  
who enforce  
but do not heal

## ALL OUR LIVES

we will  
welcome all the days  
we will  
breath sweet clean air  
we will  
drink clear cold water  
we will  
live all our lives  
we will  
hold these truths  
we will  
sleep in peace  
we will  
join the dance  
we will  
walk in the earth  
we will  
look to the sky  
we will  
remember our friends  
we will  
hear the silence  
we will  
hear the song  
we will  
live all our lives

## **An Elegy for Corinne and Ben**

where are you now?  
myths and intimations  
dancing on the campus  
building houses in Houston  
growing elephant garlic  
on the farm  
with the Cascades in the distance  
older now  
my 54 40 Rio Grande  
disdain learned  
at the Captain's knee  
in the  
halfway house  
on the  
post road  
shutters on the blind eye windows  
tired black against the white clapboards  
Demon rum in the cold, cold cellar  
blond children and music flying  
over the valley road  
and away  
Corinne would tell of what was found  
Ben would speak of what was lost

## ARCHITECTURE

machines for living  
profit centers  
homes  
anything can be holy or profane  
bricks are blessed and blasted  
mine mine mine  
citta d'autore  
I walk through streets of my own making  
under a bright light given to me  
just moments ago  
with the weight of stars on my back and the sign of the wave  
in my hand  
elements melt in the solar furnace  
electron dance and slow stardust fall accrual sighs  
15 billion years and just getting started  
while we, silly and inquisitive monkeys,  
build cathedrals, palaces and hovels  
raise high a tree to mark the skeleton  
of the new marvel  
watch as old stores burn  
a fire in the heart  
ain't like a fire in the street  
architecture of dreams, offices, orders, terminals.  
allegations, museums, insinuations, assembly and dispersal,  
prognostication,  
procrastination, warehouses and row houses, whorehouses  
and white houses, penthouses and farmhouses  
all holy all profane and waiting for us to move our furniture

**at a loss**

don't know if I should spit  
or turn left  
and this ignorance is harmful  
to everything  
and everyone  
the static is deafening  
the light is harsh  
and I'm free falling  
through my own fears

## BANISHING DARKNESS

circling the paint  
hoping the colors  
wishing the light  
forgetting the falls  
riding the radio wave  
laughing up the circuitry  
spinning the electrons  
balling the jack  
trucking the main line  
hauling ass and ashes  
banishing the darkness  
wading in light  
swimming in air  
tumbling in waters  
skying the feel  
painting the walls and doors  
making them so obvious they disappear



## BEARINGS

luminous, lambent way

is lost

traveling man faces

a wilderness of choices

sailor waits and watches

a sea full of peril and possibility

empty sky

wheels and turns

wide world trembles in a new orbit

erratic compass and inadequate transit

can not measure the swelling probability

traveling man steps away

from his shadow

sailor lets the sail fill

the new day begins

## **BLOOD SO BLUE**

blood so blue

I forgot

the color of time

blue eyes, blue skies

blue circle, blue sea

within and without

a shade of an idea

so true

I forgot

the color of lies

## BORN THAT NOVEMBER

it's something that happened to me  
a long distance call  
cool as the breeze  
smoother than silk  
born that November  
beneath cleansing rain  
beneath closing skies  
investigating the number  
a course of the treatment  
wearing headphones  
the color that humbles  
the timber that falls  
a shimmering slumber  
a shuddering wake  
unwilling to judgment  
the reality is  
you're going faster and slower  
away from the equinox  
to a shore where we please  
tourists at the solstice  
tourists at the end of the world

## **BOXES**

A box of glass

Where the mirror leaked its secrets

into the room

A box of rain

When the cloud leaked into the

afternoon

A box of nails

While secure in a box of wood

A family waits in the first world

While far away in mad dog sunshine

The small dark medical technician

Carries the box onto the plane

A box with a living heart

Winging its way

To the rich man's chest

## BREAKING FAST

Bears play cards while diplomats wait  
And children die  
Somewhere I knew all these things and more  
But not here  
Eggs, sausage and grits at the diner  
The butter sun sliding west across the gritty wasteland  
Under the humming fluorescent sky  
I look up from my coffee to discover  
A certain density of atmosphere  
Atoms whirl and collide while the waitress  
Refills cups and smiles a plastic smile  
I know this too but remember  
My son growing up  
My lovers laying down  
Sweet release now in slow dropping light  
While the truckers hunker and burble  
The old man hacks and hacks  
It does not matter  
Everything and no thing appears  
Loses focus and is gone  
I don't mind  
I go back to my eggs and the still melting butter

## **BUILT ON SAND**

and the dunes are shifting  
now is the time  
to understand  
each grain of sand  
writing on water  
and now is the time  
to read the stream  
a cry on the wind  
and now is the time  
to feather your nest  
a brave and brazen saint  
after the tears have fallen  
is revealed as the devil  
who hounded your nightmares  
it's time to lighten up and go home

## **changing way**

I have no words left  
my mouth and eyes are dry  
while colors run riot  
surging and purging  
old thoughts  
old names  
old skins  
I'll wake tomorrow  
to a new day

## CHANGING WEATHER PATTERNS

we can precipitate  
but never reign  
the more aloof  
remain afloat  
waving in air

we can participate  
when it's raining  
breathe moist air  
float paper boats  
dry our sandals

gain initiative  
change our weather  
God's breath in ear  
returning sun  
welcoming day



## Co-Anchors

ready smiles and ready wit  
when they're on  
on the town  
on the A list  
on the make  
rapid party repartee  
that makes them social coup  
and dinner trophies  
bright, bright, bright  
young couple  
shining bright  
when the light is on  
but home alone  
the weight  
pulls down their mouths  
and they sink  
below the load  
below the surface  
to the deep, cold place  
where anchors lie

## **come too far**

come too far  
on this wind  
cruel and cold  
to step back from the edge  
open up  
when the sun comes  
close down like a small town  
when the dark creeps  
the bullet's deep  
against the bone  
like Buddha said  
like Jesus said  
and I can't tell up from down



## **COYOTE WAITS**

the trickster, the scavenger  
omen of death  
I'm headed his way  
and he waits with  
raised ears and ragged breath

*William Blake's 242nd birthday, Nov. 28 1999*

**Dear William**

who saw angels and devils  
were all one in the sight of God  
and knew the rain fell on us all  
if we let it  
abandoned in an age of imperfect reason  
and imperfect faith  
with a view of the tree, the sea, and thee

## DOGGEREL

with annoying repetition  
the canary in the coal mine  
tells racial memories  
gives the very high sign  
while the world turns  
once more turns  
the tree on the hill  
shelters the blind  
the root of the matter  
is a box made of pine  
while the world turns  
moon rises sun burns  
thief lives by the double cross  
walks a fine line  
rich man smokes filtered camels  
in his single needle 3 piece suit  
with silk tie that binds  
while the world still turns  
the dog laughs  
the bed burns

## **doggerel for long nights, knives and life**

they want a human face

they want a human emotion

but why float on this stream of consciousness

when i can drown in an ocean?

I'm a sinner/saint and entirely at home

but don't make me be here all alone

i'll give then a human face

reveal a global position

but won't play the knave

when receiving my transmission

## Dues Paid

my affair with god  
has been a dime a dance romance  
her presence meted out in silver I could not afford  
or afford not to spend  
I could catalogue the 'ho earth  
tell you that all my therapy has been chemo  
a painted chariot with the meter running  
unrequited, not conditional  
feral black, fever wracked, and blind  
when the wheel turns  
you could see the tire tracks down my back  
not just friends  
we can laugh at the temps past  
and count our blessings

## **dubious apogee**

fallen off the earth

unintentionally

(who would have guessed

escape velocity to be this slow?)

invisible

except to birds and dogs

I cast a shadow

it's tossed right back to me

slowly pinwheeling

not peddling any more

or any less

solar wind tugs

my shirt sleeve

makes me think

about what I believe

## **dynamo**

hhhhhhhhuuuuummmmmmmmm

of hidden machinery

behind closed doors

vital secret heart

acrid sacred coil and hhhhhuuummm

that feeds the city and the endless light

garish and gilded

in every parking lot

every corner

arching sinuous cathedral and hhhhhuuummm

nomen and clattering

churl of this new millennium



## el jefe

i was el jefe  
but  
i could not choose  
between  
the necessary new clinic  
and improvements  
to the port facility  
so i built  
a lovely hacienda  
in the grove  
the dust rising  
like a memory  
on the road  
from town  
i was the lover  
who crept midnight ways  
I was the smirking private  
who lounged at the door  
i was the colonel  
who held the luger  
to el jefe's head  
i was the laughing driver  
who drove  
the beat up  
Chevy Impala  
around the square  
i was the rope  
that connected  
el jefe's battered body  
to the Chevy  
i was

most of all  
the small boy  
who watched  
from the corner house  
second story  
to see el jefe's ear  
bleeding  
as the Impala  
made the turn



## **EVENING EVENING**

the westing sun bisects the gray carpet with a golden rule  
reed bottom chair at the window has learned to be a throne  
the plastic shades and the ragtag bush  
have conspired together (inspired by the lowering light)  
to make a delicate brush and ink from some forgotten  
dynasty  
evening evening  
my family gathers at the table to laugh and argue  
slow talk of our days  
the warmth is gathered and remembered  
to carry me through to another morning

## **feel that power**

approximate apostles  
diesel powered  
steel shanked and  
l o n g g booted  
round that bend  
and off the track  
I'll change my habits  
if you change your skin  
change your order  
nun-such and damned narrow  
feel that power  
something I once knew  
about two millenium ago  
something I once said  
before I was dead  
something about  
forgiveness  
and shelter for us all  
before I was back and blue  
there was a better day  
a better way  
feel that power  
in your last hours  
gonna rescue you  
gonna see it through  
feel that power and go home

## **Get Down**

rambling in his dark  
mumbling away his breath  
Jacob wrestles with his angel  
half submerged in sleep  
he ladders and lurches  
from his bed  
to clutch fetters and feathers  
awakes to morning and wings  
chided by elders  
altered by children  
awakes to morning  
and wings

## **Gentle Does It**

we have a plague of fear  
and they call it frogs  
we have a plague of want  
and they call it locusts  
we have a plague of greed  
and they call it slavery  
we have a plague of anger  
and they call it war

sometime here below  
where falling angels  
cast shadows  
and rising apes  
make lights

we best be kind and easy

## **golem**

make it  
from AM  
to FM  
from monotone  
to polyphonic  
from repetitive  
to polyrhythmic  
from threnody  
to harmonies  
awaken the mud  
to the potential for water  
and let the rabbi sleep

✱

## **good thing trees are trustworthy**

people exhale carbon dioxide  
trees inhale carbon dioxide  
people breath in oxygen  
trees breath out oxygen  
a relation to value  
good thing trees are trustworthy

## Horror Story

Stone cold moon was full of herself  
she cast a pale light on the world  
(pale as an undertaker)  
convening her shadow government

Wind and trees conspired together  
usurped this pallid force for their own wild purposes  
moved serried ranks of gray thieves  
carelessly  
petulant children arguing over a favorite toy

Eyes occupied with this assault on my home  
failed to see the greater threat  
the Fool's Gambit known  
only when Death put his cold hand on my shoulder

Dressed to the nines and grinning

## HUTCHINSON ISLAND AT DUSK

on the cusp of day and night  
on the steps at the top of the dune  
the westering sun behind me  
scissoring palm trees  
and sea grape into black silhouettes  
ahead of me the sea is already dark  
save three pinpoints of light  
at the horizon  
small craft  
perhaps a dozen souls at sea  
the hurly burly waves do not heed the setting sun  
but shoulder each other aside  
to reach the sand  
the anglers leave their sentry posts though  
and hurry from the beach for home and hearth  
I walk the now deserted strand  
waiting for turtles and tides



## I DON'T BELIEVE IN FATE

sometimes the swim upstream  
is the only way home  
while the rockers chime  
jocular scapula rays swim by  
I feel free  
I feel my hands slip on the ring  
while savings are made  
and spendings are wasted  
kismet kissed my ass and my balls  
but left me for a younger man  
so now I walk below the umbering trees  
and penumbering hills  
the path is hard to see  
in the grass  
but I don't believe in fate  
unless it feels good

## **I Forgot About Until Just Now**

they only come out at night  
except, of course,  
for the one  
that is closest  
a telescope would probably help  
except, of course,  
when dealing  
with that close one  
in which case  
UV filtering glasses  
or a box with a pinhole  
that the kids made  
(camera obscura if the edge of the hole  
is ragged)  
focused by name  
and habituation  
love and trust  
the lady next store watching the kids  
while she weeded the garden  
until overcome with curiosity  
she asked  
and laughed  
remembering her own teacher  
and a painless game of physics  
and optics  
that I forgot about until just now  
endless loops and whorls of stars  
sunspots and freckles  
a secret code  
with the kids' eyes  
as the decoder ring

## **I Like the Middle of the Night**

the people sleeping  
and the sounds of strife  
(the smell of fear)  
have subsided  
night pools and eddies  
at my feet  
the lack of want  
cool and refreshing  
the cage  
that is the fear of death  
open  
while they sleep  
their dreams of youth and riches  
are insubstantial  
weightless  
never sully the perfume  
of time  
that graces this quiet  
this dark  
this peace

## **I Love The Baby Cheeses**

devolution of religion  
from insight to institution  
from flame to form  
from dervish to dogma  
but I love the Baby Cheeses  
metaphysical entropy  
from here to then  
from now to there  
gaping wound to gaping mouth  
and a plastic Baby Cheeses on the dash  
to keep us safe  
from good to gouda  
from perfection to parmesan  
from faith to feta  
from stellar to stilton  
I love the Baby Cheeses

## **imperfect gardener**

hesitating

when I thin the seedlings

unsure

of lost potential

bounded

by finite resources

does God hesitate too?

ponder losses?

husbanding resources?

no

only I have weeds

and choices to make

## **inevitable chastity belt**

thousands of new moons  
flying to their inevitable error  
"all things put together - especially by lowest bidder -  
fall apart"  
one silent careen telling star to telling star  
cascading splintering  
chastity belt  
new constellation shining  
cellular web collapsing  
the spent breath of a rabid dog  
black kid at mall  
mom in SUV  
churl in movie house  
suddenly completely  
bereft  
telephony cacophony  
subsiding in background hum  
inevitable chastity belt  
makes a lie  
of militarization of the old moon  
of colonization of the new world  
turns human consciousness inward  
and God waits  
semaphorically prepared  
for us to wonder  
at the spreading lights

## IN NEED OF REPRIEVE

(When I'm Alone)

you were

a stone in my shoe

a gun to my head

I didn't know this could happen

you were

a flame in my heart

aflame in my bed

I didn't know this could happen

you were

all that I saw

something I said

I didn't know this could happen

## is it coo coo to Bossa Nova?

Brazilian money  
has interesting colors  
south of the equator  
is that cicadas  
or crickets  
or simply tinnitus?  
while Sacajawea  
smiles  
the color of money  
the color of money  
a bright bright sun  
the color of tan  
the color of tan  
color commentators  
tell us that  
only the poor  
in America  
are fat  
but in Rio and Sao Paulo  
(the big tourist hotels  
that Sugarloaf looms over)  
and perhaps now even  
in Manaus (outside the Opera House)  
and Brazilia (in the government plaza)  
gangs of homeless boys  
are shot by police and shop owners  
but we all want to go  
to Carnival



## IT COULD HAPPEN

voluntary slavery around  
any corner  
thinking in a brand new way  
across any street  
the sunshine so sweet  
you think you know their name  
better off when on your own  
somebody, anybody  
could call your name  
and you unplug the phone  
because it's calmer that way  
everyday is a new day  
when you want it to be  
and that's where I'll be  
when I shuffle off this mortal coil  
give up on pain and toil  
parallel tracks  
go as far as I can see

## IT IS

a dog's life  
a man's world  
a woman's prerogative  
another day  
a new day  
a day like any other  
a red letter day  
a day to be remembered  
a lesson to be learned  
best left unsaid  
water under the bridge  
the end of an era  
the end of the world  
the end of the week  
every man's dream  
every woman's right  
bigger than I thought  
about time  
all right  
worse than I feared  
better than I hoped for  
now or never  
no big deal  
just my luck  
here now

## LAMBENT VILLAGE

stars strewn on a velvet blanket  
of steep, sparse sere hills  
and when the new day arrives  
the stars are frosted trailer windows  
and the first shift is on its way to the mine  
can this be home?  
could I belong here?  
my back and legs ache  
but I'm not sure  
how to lay down this burden  
or if I can  
maybe long blue miles  
must be run  
before I can sleep  
the sleep of the righteous  
in the lambent village

## **late night snack**

galaxies in the bowl

spoon floating gracefully

gravity of the soul

the future and my undoing

in clumsy hands

worry over nothing

scurry over something

breathe exhale

human as the day is long

in 3/4 time

## THE LEATHER MAN

Forty years of ceaseless travel  
from Hartford, up the Connecticut Valley,  
then west on the Mohawk trail  
to Rome and back he fixed pots and pans  
in every town, slept in caves  
and windbreaks, slowly accruing  
leather patches til he was a small  
mountain of crazy stitches and multi hued skin.  
The children sometimes threw stones  
and the mothers warned of his wrath  
if their admonitions were not heeded.  
Forty years in the wilderness of New England  
farms and villages,  
scorned, feared but useful  
the butt of jokes and small town news  
he followed his circuit like a shuffling leather mammoth  
the first year he failed to make his rounds,  
dead in some lost cave,  
did the children miss their target?

## LEONIDS

dances sacred and profane  
Christo Redentor  
wailing through the clouds  
a finger in the socket  
an ear to the ground  
eyes skyward  
seeking the spark  
laughing with the prank  
the scent of flowers lulls me  
while I lay beneath  
the waiting stars

✱

## LIFE SAVER

I dream a God  
who spills desert sand  
I have a friend  
who's walking on water  
I balk, I plod  
not sure I understand  
but near the end  
I stood still and caught her

## **lighter than air**

the fuse sputters  
runs down the time  
until we  
big hair  
big band  
big bang  
a curious thing  
when the boson sings  
electric dreams  
of perfect gases  
boundless blue  
all I can believe  
awash in waves of light  
all I can eat  
drink  
sleep  
think  
pedigreedy  
perigee whiz  
wonderful waves  
wonderful  
echoes  
the star ignites  
in perfect love  
in perfect harmony  
while we watch  
lighter than air  
brighter than where  
we were  
lighter than air

## **little smoke**

i ride a dark horse  
little smoke beneath me  
trembles in the baritone rain  
shelters in the leeward hill  
hurries homeward  
the way is long  
and the shadows race  
but little smoke knows the path  
carries me softly unspoken  
sure and swift  
above the brazen plane  
into the light



## **long night's journey into day**

perfection turns up  
at 4 a.m.  
demanding attention  
okay, for a while  
I can do that  
exact angle of a shower  
purity of a shampoo  
absolution of a close shave  
but all devolves  
blood sugar will out  
there's insistent rain on a tin roof  
in this aluminum palace  
I take to my chipboard throne  
perfect in my account  
and my posture  
by the numbers  
emptying ashtray and mind  
awaiting glucose  
and dawn

## Lost In America

wanted to be in this country  
can't pay the dues  
the ground fees are too much  
one neighbor's a racist  
the other's a sexist  
couple across the way  
are homophobes  
politicians are for sale  
doctors are entrepreneurs  
ministers spew hate and fear  
a used car salesman told me a lie  
so did a president  
people talk at me  
want me to be  
just like them  
my heart is a cage  
blood rats  
spinning the wheels  
but I'm too tired  
to feel rage  
had enough

## Mask Making & Music

I reach for the impossible  
touch the possible  
somewhere when the CD  
includes birdsong  
outside my window  
gardens blooming  
on the glass table  
turning tables  
and handstands  
creating equitable distances  
shocking proximities  
friends leaving for Key West  
and Montreal  
jefe and honcho  
for 10,000 headmen  
or is it  
10,000 cicadas?

## MEET IN A SANDWICH

press the flesh  
harp the chord  
mind the rafters  
drifters shafters  
press a palm  
pass the alms  
a psalm for the sordid  
a song for the profane  
a picture worth a thousand verbs  
a world of the absurd  
absolutes absinthe and absolution  
a seven per cent solution  
detective dick gumshoe PI  
meet in a sandwich  
and tea with Mussolini

\*

## misguided

don't tell me  
about your rock and roll heart  
when all the casualties are coincidental  
don't send a message in a bottle  
when the straw has been broken  
on the camel's back  
and fills the dog's manger  
don't lead  
don't follow  
there's a million ways  
to get home

## **Moonlight (parts 1 and 2)**

moonlight ride to sea

go with the waves

stay with the stars

moon sends

glad tidings

to beloved earth

like an ardent

constant lover

tugging

at his

fat

wife's girdle

## MORNING, MORNING

somebody must have made my bail  
or called my name  
when old man death was walking round my room  
morning, morning  
I came through the tourmaline night  
with the Christmas decoration moon  
(hung there slightly skewed  
by a careless Johnny Barley)  
somebody must of called my name  
to set me free  
from those cold nocturnal chains  
morning, morning  
the tocsin and toxins  
that drove me through the night  
are purged  
morning, morning  
I wake and break my fast and chains  
somebody must have called my name  
gone my bail, walked my blues

## **My Best Friend**

Rita's rubrics is friendship and relativity  
No theory when facts are needed  
Knowledge trumping mystery  
In each hand she holds the world  
Laying her cards on the unified field  
Laughing geometry and light years  
Metaphors spawned, images sprawled  
Approximation spurned when no longer useful  
She unfolds tetrahedrons  
Under the trees at the edge of perception  
Shaking stardust from her blanket  
For an afternoon, an infinity, a picnic  
I'm subsumed and blessed  
Languid hills and time enfold me  
While she spins a dervish equation  
Of sky and smiles

✱

## **my life in a third world country**

sleepy villages  
under the shadow of volcanoes  
treacherous rivers  
with sudden falls  
busses that plunge  
from crumbling precipices  
and angry multitudes  
storm the general's palace

## **N'Awlins**

brazen hussy of a city  
onliest diamond  
on that stringy Route 10 necklace  
black drum tattoo adornin'  
soft lily-white  
underbelly Dixie  
cloacal end of Middle America  
drunk with music  
revealed in masque  
wise in the science of magic  
and callin' my name

\*

## **New Math**

a thousand strings  
the angle of Stevie Wonder's smile  
the perfect radio  
a dozen eggs  
coda and cola  
similar dreams  
sequential gifts  
new friends



## **NO ROOM IN THE LIFE BOAT**

refugee, landlord, warden  
with quitclaims and tort  
torture one another but fail to see  
the inexorable tide  
that washes this kingdom  
out to sea  
out of touch  
the moon pulls back coral lips  
to wash the world with the incense of the abyss  
but lunatics know only loss  
bemoan their fate  
while the waters rise  
refugee, landlord, warden  
drown in salty tears  
clutching at their goods, their pride,  
their anchors

\*

## **Ocean Calls Me Back**

don't need a book  
to put my hand in the fire  
no missing links  
to rattle chains  
don't need a choice  
to make my way  
no passing thoughts  
in my little brain  
calls me back

## ON THE WHEEL

The color of my heart  
the seven wheels of fire  
the tantric tease  
samsara on the half shell  
on the half life  
we're all gonna have to deal with darkness  
we're all gonna have to deal with pain  
the color of freedom  
tall pines on seven hills  
a passing fancy  
a fantastic sideshow  
we're all gonna get through these lives  
we'll all be here in sun and rain

\*

## One Soul At A Time

birth an impersonator  
death an invasion of privacy  
meantimes  
television hosts of angels  
baleful box of debils  
sail through our waking hours  
and night walking  
every congregation  
must be saved  
one soul at a time

## OPENINGS, ORIFICES AND OPPORTUNITIES

portals, passageways and portages beckon today  
windows open, their mullions gracefully seductive  
behind ever neighbors house is a laughing horizon  
it's a day of doors slightly ajar and half spoken thoughts  
every common street remembers  
the urban grid and ferveral highway system  
that came here and can lead away  
bikes are poised  
trains sing in the distance  
there is gas in the car  
a contrail of a jet bisects the sky  
while birds wheel overhead  
a truck goes by like an open invitation  
I think the passport  
is in the top left drawer  
of the desk in the spare room

## OVIPOSITING

Under the tropical moon  
sea turtle slowly, inexorably  
leaves her element for the foreign strand  
the once graceful wings  
are now clumsy flippers  
What was sleekly suspended  
weightless on the breast of the wave  
is now heavy and earthbound  
covered with the suffocating sand  
But the ancient song is sung  
and the tide can not be ignored  
She plows the wet sand  
an ancient armored chariot  
covered with barnacles  
What voice tells her where to nest?  
What secret scent led her to this beach, this dune?  
The moon rises higher  
while the clutch of leathery eggs is laid  
She covers the future with sand  
and monumentally slow turns again to the sea  
The first wave frees her of the clinging sand  
and looses again the wings  
that will carry her to the deep.

## Paper Cup

i'm my own desperado  
my own gunslinger  
my own corral, okay?  
finish the coffee  
finish the thought  
hope for enough strength  
to toss the cup

\*

## PARADIGMS

I dream and the world wakes  
but who will dream me?  
for rubics, menes, unattainable ideals  
Sometimes in a crowded room  
there is a murmur  
that s u s t a i n s  
but will not abide a sharp glance or word  
logic carried on too small shoulders  
too wide a stage  
too brief a breath  
bludgeoned Gods and Goddesses  
into silence  
irreparable and irremediable  
I walk home  
hopeful yet of danger unimagined  
goals undreamed  
wine unspilled  
but arrive safely anyway

## **Peace Comes Dropping Slow**

glacially  
when bloody Christians  
aren't looking  
incrementally  
when red Imams  
aren't listening  
inexorably  
inevitably  
when wall building Zionists  
and bomb laden Palestinians  
are sleeping  
God must be laughing  
at this horror  
because my prayer  
"dear God  
protect me from  
your believers"  
may not be enough  
while I wait for glaciers, trees and rivers  
to replane this terra  
into Eden

## **plenty of planets**

plenty of planets  
plenty of suns  
short circuits longing to go  
garden path a long, lonely run  
working the earth with a broken hoe  
enter the gallery to see holy pictures  
nobody remains to quote Scripture  
ladder's leaning against heaven's window  
but the last tenants stole the fixtures  
I've been wrung dry  
left to wander here below

my plantar is raised high  
my soles above my head  
there are water stains and footprints on the ceiling  
but no rug on the floor  
I'm thankful for my friends  
and my tormentors  
all who wake me

## THE PURPOSE OF COLOR

the purpose of color  
is a focused thought  
like my lover's breast  
like my killer's aim  
like my child's eyes  
like my God's game  
the purpose of color  
is beyond my words  
like the eye of the storm  
like a computer's dream  
like a vestigial part  
like the story's seam  
the purpose of color  
is a dancing bear  
a laughing breeze  
a young girl's blush  
an easy chair



## **REASONABLY PRICED RELIGION WANTED**

must be gentle

and broadminded

no druggies please

for possible long term revelation

send picture and SASE

principles only

watering wine not necessary

all serious and casual inquires

will receive response

## RELIEF

lightning played at the edge of day  
distant thunder promised a better future  
but still we were held in thrall by the sun  
past promises had withered with the grasses  
dried up with the small ponds  
and still wet heat a seamless blanket  
smothered activity  
the land made tired by the drought  
but the thunder quickened  
and the lightening fed on the sunset  
the sweet, hard rain fell  
on the upraised face of the waiting earth  
the sounds of water on the roof  
filled my ears with new secrets and happy songs

## REMAINS

when all the things in our life  
can be broken or lost  
why hold them dear?  
ephemera amuses but will not sustain  
processes go on  
they say rust never sleeps  
but I would rather watch the waves  
the slow inexorable growth of trees  
the weed that splits your parking lot  
a sign  
that though Barbara's World of Fabrics  
may fade  
Shoes-O-Rama  
may be (bardspeak) bootless  
when the grinning consumers have fled  
the encroaching growth will hide these temples too  
just another Monte Verde, Stonehedge or Tulum  
and future archeologists  
will give religious meaning  
to the golden arches and piled goods

## Renewal of Wonder

white light like a gift I did not expect or earn  
each object singular and lambent in this glow  
common objects made holy by the light  
that illuminates/infuses/informs  
from within  
a renewal of wonder  
shatters my complacency  
colors run wild and warm  
in what was once my dingy suite  
the small rooms suddenly expanded  
the cracked wall speaking eloquently  
the old chair infused with sense and sentiment  
let me stay like this  
forgetful of every sin I have ever committed  
here now with the light

## RICE IN THE DESERT

how the west was lost  
a minimalist morality play  
a populist party  
in shuffle time  
with water for the barrens and the barons  
and taxes for the rest  
while the Colorado  
has lost its way  
and lumbering companies  
slumbering giants subsume  
for just a few more pages  
in the NY Times  
or a bench for the backyard BBQ  
I hear America singing  
they are praising the IPO  
damning the HMO  
drinking and going home

## **rising on Easter**

do I have money?

no

do I have children?

yes

a fading sign

on a winding road

two friends

with no teeth

a friend who rides

a low boy

until she gets off

a friend

who reads

newspapers all day

a windy day

in the fading light

do I have a future?

no

do I have a past?

no

fading dreams

blown away by a wind

**running man, run while you can**

going down deep

to where the monsters live

get past their teeth

to the answers they give

running man, run while you can

raising the water

sink in the land

fall up the mountain

just like it was planned

lover boy, love what you destroy

come to the crossroads

see eight different ways

all those lives to live

all that work and play

running man, run while you can

## SHRUG

I can't sing for my supper any more  
so don't measure me by the company I keep  
    working for  
take this world off of me  
I don't need it any more  
it's a broken reed  
I can't suck enough air out of here  
but when I am walking  
when I lay down by the riverside  
when the grain is whole and holy  
and I'm not slivered any more  
when I invoke the name of Lugus  
and the harvest comes  
the blind think all is well  
I'm here to tell you  
all is not well  
and the change that's needed  
is tapping on my shoulder  
so don't ask me to sing for my supper  
take this world off of me  
I can't stay here any more



## SIFTING THE ASHES

the eye is on fire  
the forms the eye sees are on fire  
fire of passion  
fire of possession  
fire of hatred  
fire of infatuation  
birth, death, sorrow, lamentation,  
    misery, grief, despair  
pride, fear, exhaustion, ennui,  
    gluttony, sloth,  
are all on fire  
the ear is on fire  
sounds are on fire  
the nose is on fire  
smells are on fire  
the body is on fire  
all the tangible world is on fire  
the mind is on fire  
ideas are on fire  
heaven and hell  
and all your angels and devils  
are on fire

## **Slide Into the Sea You Blood Red Moon**

my constitution is killing me  
I know enough to care  
about the lead in the water  
or in the air  
somebody mistook their freedom  
for a license  
we should just be fair  
everybody complains about the water  
but just wait until it's gone  
everybody complains about their life  
but just wait until it's gone  
they all talk about the violence  
doesn't touch them behind locked doors  
they don't have to be out there  
hanging with the poor  
so if I never danced for my father  
and didn't dance that much with my wife  
I can hear the drumbeat/heartbeat now  
I'm dancing for my life  
slide into the sea you blood run moon  
we'll do it on the run  
slide in to the silent, silent sea  
slide in you blood red moon  
slide in you blood red sun

## **So Much For Pretending**

here on the edge  
everybody is walking  
telling the truth  
without doing much talking  
I could pick your pockets  
while you pick my brain  
dogs in the manger  
man in the middle  
who lit your rocket?  
who brought you pain?  
take off your clothes  
take off for the coast  
you can answer the riddle  
when you go insane  
a piece of the action  
a startled reaction  
I'll pick your pocket  
you catch the train

## SOLIPSISM

I consider the logic of tragedy  
and the tragedy of logic  
of the self storage facility  
where locks and keys  
are all the world  
thieves kept at bay  
by electronics  
dedicated wardens  
concrete block  
and lights that sense your movement  
even in retrograde  
of course  
all this wealth  
these piled treasures  
deserve a universe  
of locks and keys  
a controlled environment  
an air condition  
a self storage facility  
it's the logic of tragedy and  
the tragedy of logic

## **Sometimes**

From second sight  
To mole mindless  
From sun king  
To deaf and eyeless  
From gentle breeze  
To freezing pit  
We ring up these changes  
The world rearranges  
What we knew  
And what we see  
Sometimes I remember  
Every life  
I have ever known  
Can recall everything I've known  
Sometimes I am dismembered  
Sometimes I'm blown away  
Nothing more than  
An empty room  
An empty head  
An empty heart  
An empty bed

## SONG FOR THE LONELY LADY

words can never be  
what your naked truth  
speaks to me  
our desire a river to the ocean  
and the ocean is never filled  
after the dream is over  
there will still be  
a bird nest in my soul

## SONG FOR THE NEW WORLD ORDER

A tyrant, a rant, arrest  
and i want to shout redemption  
with the people at the barricudas  
but the lawyers are circling -  
smell blood in the murky fiscal waters  
the masters laugh  
and 180 million Brazilians must cry  
the masters sneer  
and family farms  
(generations of sweat and blood and tears and semen)  
disappear  
liberty! laudenum! Reruns of Lucy!  
Anything but to watch this particular farce  
again and again and again

## spring wind

wind arrived  
with the equinox  
subservient to basic physics  
as the land became  
warmer  
more quickly than the sea  
but subservient to nothing else  
thief rattling my windows  
persistent vendor  
at my door  
insistent prodigy  
refrain to every conversation  
presage of change  
sweeping the land clean  
carrying salt sea tang inland for miles  
restless harbinger  
of green



## **The Steel Trap**

unnatural metal torn from the earth  
leaving gaping wounds and sullied streams  
Carnegie's carnival and Frick's fix  
when the militia fired on the Homestead workers  
the union and america died  
to build pyramids for the corporations  
the ribbon of steel unwinds  
through the heartland  
carries only Morgan's minions  
and cinders for the streams  
armaments for the bosses  
to kill the poor  
profits soar and spirits sink  
the heart of this land  
rust-streaked and wavering, waits  
while there is no sacrament in Bethlehem  
or us in U.S. Steel

## Stone Cold Sober

from precocious to precarious  
this painted bird  
(it's real paint)  
wends and wanders  
through excuses  
glass envelopes  
rationalization  
seldom soaring  
tetany tired muscles  
stretched taut  
across the hollow bones  
ragged edges  
of primary feathers  
pushing against  
inexorable gravity  
wind messages  
guiding magnetism  
forgotten  
in the effort  
to stay afloat

## STORM

white hot necklace of lightning  
hangs on the velvet tropic throat  
of the horizon  
wind-tossed supplicant fingers  
of pines and palms  
reaching to touch  
the warm, breathing sky

\*

## SUMMER SONG

rain on tin roof  
a military march  
squeal of worn brakes  
introduction to  
a horn concerto  
sandpipers  
trilling  
against the deep bass voice  
of the waves  
all the songs I hear in my dreams  
and voices of friends

## **Sundown**

westerling sun  
jigsaws the horizon  
into self-fulfilling prophecies  
sanctifies my steps  
colors the sound  
of the birds  
a pale rose  
moves the shadows  
eastward  
toward tomorrow

\*

## **superstitious**

when I get it right  
I'll be illegal  
when I get it straight  
I'll cakewalk  
right into heaven  
but sometimes here below  
I walk under ladders  
don't carry a gun  
don't throw salt over my shoulder  
don't carry no cross  
don't cross my fingers  
don't cross my friends  
gonna cross that bridge  
when I get there  
see you on the other side

## **SUSHI BLUES**

my clouds dot calm  
sushi blue skies  
bread lines and bombs dot net  
gain and loss  
topless bar none ranch and country club  
dot com  
while smaller alliances  
go astray dot edu  
ordnance illumination  
dot aolian harpy  
flying warthog  
dot sushi blues

\*

### **the bum's rushing**

waking cobwebbed and cold  
waiting on the sun  
wanting to go walkabout  
too proud to beg  
too dumb to steal  
held together  
with Zig Zag papers and scotch  
tape  
to hold body and soles together  
wandering down  
empty streets, long corridors, faded memories

## **the color of cotton**

the color of cotton

does not mean

what they say

stands comfortably alone

woven weightless

so I can be

washed and folded

while shedding skin

at a prodigious rate

listening to

contrabassoon

and insect continuo

## **the poker game at the end of time**

everybody wants to play  
the cards settle like birds on the green baize  
amazing confessions and countless connections  
forgiveness of sin  
and calling of hands  
the room floats in the void  
and light stirs motes of star dust  
morning and other concerns  
remain in the corner  
I call  
I call  
I call  
what have you got?

## THE SHIP

She was beautiful  
a real dresser  
with more drawers than a Chinese puzzle box  
but none could capture in line on paper  
the grace of movement  
I was the only fool on board  
there was plenty of room  
for the knowing sailors  
nowhere for my ignorance  
every passage way blocked  
by my lack of an operating manual  
until some patient salt threw time my way  
confusion blinded me  
in the crow's nest I saw only the teeming decks  
in the forecastle only the patch of blue at the porthole  
the knotted ropes were my clenched muscles  
useless except to ache  
waiting for some liberating Occam's blade  
instead the fid of endless sailing  
there was no relief  
in sleep or rum  
from the incessant journey  
and I was mute to ask



## **The Used Camel Lot**

All the world's from grieve to grave  
When there's things to do  
A child to save  
When I am king  
Yeah when I am king  
Machines will roll over  
To get their bellies scratched  
And trees will sing  
Everyone's turning wine into water  
Ashamed of their daughter  
When I am king  
Yeah when I am king  
Mountains will laugh  
And the air will swing  
Hug that shadow  
Blow that chance  
When I am king  
Oh when I am king  
We'll lay low  
Take time to dance

## THE WAR AT MY DOORSTEP

the war at my doorstep  
the light on the hill  
makes me wonder wonder wonder  
season of the witch  
stretches into the night  
reports of partisan and venomous  
contentions reject offers of compromise  
makes me wander wander willfully wondering  
money and cannon fodder  
faster and further  
illegitimate emergencies  
that pork pork pork  
collateral damage and bull markets  
two income families and abandoned homes  
the war at my door  
the fire in the heart  
worry wonder and wander

## **There Are People in These Words**

there are people in these words  
parchment skin on parchment  
wondering eyes transing verbs  
history shimmering in  
half-told truths half-remembered  
my transgressors and forgivers  
huddling together forever  
at the back of some pronoun  
every word pulsing with the heat  
of thighs and ideals  
that held me  
released me  
not so long ago

\*

## **there is no circle but full circle**

sleep brought raku fired words  
bel canto dreams  
quiet collaborations  
woke without a kiln  
brain starved for glucose  
aching for coma company  
and cuneiform

## **this pilgrim's regress**

once I thought I was the universe  
and I was  
things change  
then I thought the world was mine  
and it was  
things change  
then I wanted to live in a house so long  
neighbors would start calling it the Peters' place  
and they did  
things change  
for a while I just wanted to stay in one place  
long enough  
to know where the light switches were  
when I entered a dark room  
and I did that several times in several places  
things change  
now I just want a bed to call my own  
maybe I should be the universe again

## **Time's Perfume**

time's perfume

distilled breathe

distilled in an alembic

distilled drop being clear

clear drop reflecting

reflection dropping slowly

into the vial

into the lives

waiting on the

a scent

## **to and fro**

I'm coming home again  
I'm leaving soon  
there is nothing inevitable  
in creature comforts  
no stuff in the easy chair  
that warps around the room  
like light or gravity  
I am listening to the rain  
sound perfectly loud and clear  
with just one ear, one eye  
one bone shuddering and shuttered  
Sam-Sara, my old friend  
let me leave this seat  
this ochre mood  
this judge's robbery  
I've come to and fro

## **top o' the food chain to you**

you have to smile  
to transform the march  
into a parade  
you have to laugh  
to let the parade  
become a dance  
here at the approximate  
top of the food chain  
beset by insects  
insulted by fungus  
laid low by microbes and pollens  
easy does it  
easy does it

## **tripplin**

cumulus of smiles  
and rain today in monkey town  
the bishop blessed the sale  
of saints bones  
the pretty thieves  
make pledges  
and rain today in monkey town  
dealers dealt only aces  
buyers bought  
camels cried  
and rain today in monkey town

\*

## **UNTITLED**

we invent the future  
ourselves  
we need to try to remember  
ourselves  
we don't know the names anymore  
where we have been  
hints and intimations all around  
that we hurry past  
ourselves  
something half remembered  
half buried  
ourselves



## **warning for a young woman**

I am no window

only a ladder leaning against the wall

a different question to consider

on the road to Timbuk3 we heard

"sunshine can be dangerous"

sugar is poison

believe that and remember

there is no Superman

no bodhisattva

no Body to stand between

you and your God

## **warning from the government**

watch your back  
check your bag  
stay in line  
it's for your own safety  
there are vans with dark skinned strangers  
there are plans of dark eyed strangers  
we must beware  
watch what they're wearing  
watch the gates  
watch what you say  
terror everywhere  
but here  
with us you're safe  
just don't trust that stranger  
yet some how I am not assured  
and wonder where the terror  
in my life  
came from  
no Arab ever leered and loomed  
no latin tongued devil  
broke my head  
no commie brought crack to my town  
no fellow traveler  
deranged my train of thought  
who wants to eat from my plate?  
who wants to collar my dog?  
who wants to move right in?

## WHY THIS GRAVITY?

I'm a verb  
sometimes intransitive  
but no noun  
    Then why this gravity?  
things appear and multiply  
I glance away  
but can't dance away  
    why this gravity?  
a gene for acquisition  
a definition by possession  
a penchant for adhesion  
    why this gravity?  
useless, binding, boundless  
conjunctive, congesting, conditional  
    why this gravity?  
liquid acrobats live in atmosphere  
defy and laugh  
sing of bubbles and refractions  
while I remain on the high wire tight rope  
balancing a chair, a dresser and a chain saw

**who**

when the air runs out  
who will catch it  
bring it back  
when my patience goes  
who will remind me  
of the still waters  
who in deed  
who in Dickens name  
who in Hell  
the whole in your pocket  
the mirror in the eyes of a friend  
who knows these things  
laughing up the down stairs  
waiting at the front door

make a circle in the sand  
who will make a mandala in my heart  
listen to the rain  
who will  
pour balm in my ears  
look to the sun  
who will  
make me starlight  
I feel something  
I feel no thing  
I want to get it right