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Prophecy for Sale: On American Rails

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PROPHECY FOR SALE: ON AMERICAN RAILS

A Creative Project Report

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English and Comparative Literature

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

by

Erik White

August 2018

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PROPHECY FOR SALE: ON AMERICAN RAILS

by

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND COMPARATIVE
LITERATURE

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August 2018

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ABSTRACT

PROPHECY FOR SALE: ON AMERICAN RAILS

by Erik White

Prophecy for Sale: On American Rails follows the poetic tradition of Walt Whitman and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. This collection contains five numbered sections which show a progression of the human consciousness. Drawing on the works of Sylvia Plath, Weldon Kees, Jack Spicer, and others, the works in this collection exhibit a strong poetic American voice. Section “I: How Much Longer?” addresses class separation, racism, and inequality. Form mirrors content, confronting a world which seems bent on its own destruction. Section “II: The New Garden,” explores the human impact on nature in more detail and sets up solutions to the problems of inequality, pollution, and the spiritual crisis posed in the first section. Section “III: Living Tributaries,” continues to examine the power of nature. Water is both the source of inspiration and the cause of death. The water speaks to the theme of universal consciousness, to heal divisions which keep us from enlightenment. This intense exploration of water as a vehicle to the spiritual world is amplified in section “IV: Burnt Offering—Seven Hills for Sylvia.” Highly sexualized, these poems seem possessed by Sylvia Plath, and emphasize cooperation to ensure the survival of our species. Section “V: Fairy Godmother: Take us Home” is filled with hope for the next generation, and asks us to seek out truth and deal with it even if it is hard or uncomfortable. This collection suggests that social problems and moral ills need to be addressed so we can heal and grow. It speaks truth to power and offers emotional tools that we can use to solve our most pressing issues. It suggests that a brighter future is attainable as long as we put down our electronics and pay attention to each other.

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Preface

Prophecy for Sale: On American Rails follows the prophetic poetic tradition of Walt Whitman and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, calling for justice in an unjust world. This collection also draws on the works of Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, Weldon Kees, William Shakespeare, Jack Spicer, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, William Butler Yeats, and Langston Hughes—these poets were all instrumental in creating the American voice exhibited in this collection. An indignant, sexually charged voice of revolution, revolting against injustice in all its forms—the prophetic revolutionary voice can be tracked back to biblical times, when Moses cried out to Pharaoh, “Let my people go!” (Exodus 3:12) It persists through the twentieth century with Ferlinghetti’s edict, “Poets, come out of your closets, / open your windows, open your doors,” (Ferlinghetti 3). This aspirational voice privileges the poetry of common speech. It is poetry written to speak to ordinary people, to address our common struggles, and to remind us we are all connected despite our national heritage, ethnic identity, or personal affiliations. The poems in this collection speak to the themes of true equality, ending environmental pollution, and seek redemption through the acknowledgment of past wrongs.

These aforementioned themes echo the voices of old testament prophets by calling to society into account for things which are out of alignment with nature, or unjust. The biblical prophets did not predict the future, but warned their societies how the people had fallen out of line with God’s laws, portending dire consequences if they continued down the wrong road. My poems ask the reader to examine society, how we live, and use our resources.

My collection aims to carry on that prophetic tradition, being compelled to speak truth even if it is uncomfortable or against accepted social norms. This prophetic drive is expressed by the prophet Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the hostages,
And opening of the prison to those who are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of our Lord,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
To console those who mourn in Zion;
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified” (*New King James Version*, Isaiah 61:1-3).

The poems in my collection carry forward this prophetic voice, to reconcile America with its racist, colonialist past, in order to help the next generation to heal, grow, and move into the future on a higher level of consciousness. My poem “What the Water Said” expresses this drive toward higher consciousness and greater understanding:

You must realize there is something
More important than your needs—
You are involved in a process
That lets you transcend this sacred peace.

Peace leads to understanding and allows us to examine life on a deeper level. This string of understanding binds the five sections in this collection: “I: How Much Longer?” “II: The New Garden,” “III: Living Tributaries,” “IV: Burnt Offering—Seven Hills for Sylvia,” and “V: Fairy Godmother: Take Us Home.”

Conflict between the past and the future, is at the heart of section “I: How Much Longer?” This small selection of my early works at SJSU squeezes large ideas into short lines, and breaks the lines in ways that create multiple meanings and poems within poems. In form and substance, this section asks how much longer will class separation, racism, and inequality exist? How do we create meaning in a world which seems bent on its own destruction? The poems in this section address these questions, prompting the reader to bridge the white space on the page to make meaning. Form mirrors content, leading toward understanding.

The first poem, “An Oceanic Observation,” introduces many recurring themes that will be explored more fully throughout the collection. These themes include: the writer or artist’s creative process; the conflict between humanity and technology; the process of writing or creating art; the destruction of culture; the genocide of Native-Americans; the destruction of nature; the imminence of catastrophic natural disasters because of human-caused climate change; slavery; the western expansion of the USA; colonialism; race, racism, class, and the growing separation between the rich and the poor, which is causing a gulf in political and moral leadership.

Later in the collection these themes expand to include the corporate media machine and the Military Industrial Complex. But “An Oceanic Observation” does not weigh us down with the heaviness of details surrounding these historical events (i.e. the slave trade, the slaughter of the buffalo, and a growing disconnect between modern society and nature, “The sunset / Bores us.”). Rather, the poem asks the reader to view these events and the issues which surround them intellectually so that we may grow from the experience. Though it is dense with diverse themes, a single thread connects them. It is

the artist's search for justice, oneness, and unity. It is the struggle to set all people free and make all people equal, in a world that is determined to impose hierarchy and class, which sets the artist in line with the prophet, on a higher moral plane. The poem suggests a parallel between the artist's creative process and the process of creation in the natural world:

Artists are like oysters.
Put a piece of dirt under tongue
Protected by a hard outer shell, and watch
a pearl grow—

This metaphorical pearl turns into a literal pearl of wisdom by the end of the poem.

The poem itself is an experiment in form and style, taking inspiration from Lawrence Ferlinghetti's formal experiments. In "A River Still to be Found," the poem ends with a passage centered to the right of the page, as though the words had to travel a long way down the river to get there:

a river
still to be found
in the interior
of America (Ferlinghetti 52)

It is like the poem itself takes on the characteristics of water and flows like the river. This constant continuation, similar to the flowing of water, is even indicated by the lack of a period at the end of the poem.

Lawrence Smith describes the intention of Ferlinghetti's form, where style mirrors content, enhancing the subject matter: "In this tone of reflecting consciousness the poem moves toward a quiet epiphany in content and form. The line becomes the pattern of thought finding itself in the strong central block of reality impressions which focus in

form, then enlarge once more as the poet's emotion dictates expression" (Smith 95). The spacing of the words creates an emotional reaction in the reader. This emotional reaction becomes a doorway to examine the past.

"An Oceanic Observation," examines history through the emotional reality created in the reader by the poem. The line breaks in "An Oceanic Observation," are meant to both impede and rush the reader, mimicking the ocean waves, or the rush and lull of the creative process. The emotion is carried in the image. Images of waves, the ocean, and water can be found throughout the collection, used as a symbol for the power of the creativity, and the changing tides of human emotions. The poem directly addresses the artistic endeavor itself, to create something out of nothing. My poems strive to revolt against nothingness and embrace this new use of language:

Of the hyper-future;	the language
Through fields of electricity	surging forth
As energy builds	
Until the tension is so great,	inside,
Is broken—a token of all their hard work.	the seal

The piece of artwork appears like a pearl from the mouth of a giant clam, or oyster, emerging after a long gestation. The creation of the art like the prophetic utterance is an explosion from the repressed subconscious. Telling unwanted or unpopular truth puts the poet, or the artist, in line with the tradition of the prophet. Hart Crane recognizes this alignment of the prophetic with the poetic in his essay "General Aims and Theories": "In this condition there may be discoverable under new forms certain spiritual illuminations, shining with a morality essentialized from experience directly, and not from previous

precepts or preconceptions. It is as though a poem gave the reader as he left it a single, new *word*, never before spoken and impossible to actually enunciate, but self-evident as an active principle in the reader's consciousness henceforward" (Crane). This is the image as archetype, as its own new language for a new emotional reality. It is the beginning of understanding. The purpose of art is to help us understand. Through art we are able to identify problems, and imagine solutions. The solutions to our problems will require nothing short of revolutionary thinking. Revolutionary thinking requires imagination. Art unlocks the imagination, and illuminates our emotional reality.

The artist's pearl of wisdom is that creativity can heal. Art can mend past wounds and lead us into a prosperous future, but only if there is someone there to listen. There must be communication to lead us to understanding. Otherwise people feel trapped and alone:

A ruling class, who can afford to think	to serve
About things like class, and don't have	
Away the days, digging their heads	to slave
In the sand—shaking an invisible hand.	deeper

By this last line of "An Oceanic Observation," the thesis of the book is clear: progress requires cooperation.

In Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" this same prophetic force is present, as we see the revealing of the poet prophet's soul undoing the layers of capitalism and religious rectitude that constrain it. Whitman's authorial speaker professes oneness with all of humanity, and the compulsion to share his truth is evident, "In all people I see myself, none more and not one barleycorn less, / And the good or the bad I say of myself I say of them" (Whitman 43). When Whitman writes, "all people," he embraces the American

ideal expressed in The Declaration of independence that “all men are created equal” (Jefferson). However, he is also highlighting the hypocrisy exhibited in those original words meant for freedom, penned by a slaveholder, and not meant for women. By aligning himself with “all people,” he highlights the disparities and similarities between people. In Whitman’s day, there was great disparity between the classes and a great deal of unequal treatment in society under the law, based on race, gender, or sexual orientation. But Whitman sees himself in the other, in those different from himself. He is essentially saying that despite our differences, deep down we are all the same. Whitman is not afraid to address this unpopular topic. It is the poet’s job to tell the truth—even if it is unpopular, especially if it is unpopular. Telling the truth in the face of great opposition takes great courage, and could lead to struggle, or harsh criticism—though this kind of physical and mental sacrifice is the poet’s choice because his passion drives him to it. There is no other choice but to push back against the oppressive forces holding him down. This oppression drives him forward, “Urge and urge and urge, / Always the procreant urge of the world” (Whitman 24). Raw passion propels the poet through life. It gives him the courage to speak the truth, despite great danger, or the possibility of bodily harm, because he knows that telling the truth is worth whatever suffering it causes.

The poet’s need to tell the truth comes from seeking justice. This motivation to make America deal with the horror of its past to heal the future can be seen in Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s “Populist Manifesto,” (first published as the final poem of his 1976 book, *Who Are We Now*, later reprinted as the seminal poem of *the populist manifestos: plus an interview with jean-jacques lebel*) Ferlinghetti’s poem begins:

Poets, come out of your closets,
Open your windows, open your doors,

You have been holed-up too long
in your closed worlds (Ferlinghetti 3).

Ferlinghetti's poem argues that poets are not being heard, because they are hiding their truth from the world. In 1975 when this poem was written, homosexuality was a taboo subject (except in parts of San Francisco), and many poets were still hiding in the closet. But Ferlinghetti's metaphor is not simply about homosexuality. I read it as primarily being about the poet as prophet, as a person with knowledge to share with the outside world. This knowledge is not getting to the outside world because the poet doesn't think society is ready to hear it. "Closed worlds" may also refer to the fact that poetry gets very little traction in the mainstream culture, thus their words have little effect on society. Ferlinghetti's "Populist Manifesto," attempts to break through this stigma around poetry, and to inspire poets to engage in radical forms of truth-telling. It calls for poets to share their prophetic truth with the outside world and to be heard. This is echoed in the poem's last lines, "Whitman's wild children still sleeping there, / Awake and walk in the open air" (7). The poet does not live in an isolated bubble, but is part of a tradition of soothsayers, revolutionaries, and prophets. As Ferlinghetti says in the last line of his interview with Jean-Jaques Lebel, "Not rocking the boat is no way to keep it from sinking" (41). My book embodies Ferlinghetti's call to rock the boat. My poems do not hide from the horrors and atrocities of the past, but insist that it is time for dialogue, understanding, and compassion to guide us.

To heal the future, we must examine the past. This is expressed in my second poem "Lost Country." The poem posits that our hope for a better future is:

Carried in the hearts of a nation
No longer content to slaughter
The freedom it claims to be fighting for?

This poem foregrounds human indifference toward the natural environment, which allows for the destruction of nature and the loss of morality.

In “Wild Backyard,” The speaker experiences nature, as he watches his dog interact with the environment surprised by the sounds. It is about the nature of nature, and humanities place in it. The poem’s language is matter-of-fact as though it is a news report on the state of nature, or as if nature had its own news feed. It ends, “That must be the secret life beating on / Vibrant wings that pollinate the fruit this week.” The implication is that nature does not need us, and we are lucky if we recognize its beauty.

In “Passing Through a Garden,” the speaker is sitting on a bench in the SJSU campus Rose Garden listening to sounds that bridge the gap of the speaker’s alienation. This alienation the speaker feels is finally annihilated by the water seeping through his shoes. The water is a source of inspiration, as it changes the physical state of cold wet feet into the musical feet of a poem:

Still I never feel as though I own it
But am some conductor of the shuffle
Of steps, or translator of feet numbed by cold water.

The poem emphasizes the creative the ability to lose one’s self in the music of life, ending the feeling of alienation, which allows life to flow like water.

Another poem in this section, “What Spicer Thought,” shows the water’s power as both inspirational thing of beauty and as something capable of causing death. I wrote the poem before I knew the saga of the Bay Area poet Weldon Kees, who allegedly committed suicide by leaping from the Golden Gate Bridge. My poem is a gloss for Jack Spicer’s mystical composition method. Spicer believed that poems came to him

whispered by spirits and that the poet was a vehicle capable of connecting to the spiritual world:

On electrical waves, whispered
By “spooks” in the night
Or from beyond the grave.

For Spicer, “spooks” were actual ghosts or spiritual entities capable of communicating with the poet, who was tuned to the spiritual world the way a radio tunes to different radio frequencies. But this spiritual connection to the afterlife should not be taken lightly. Channeling such a connection can drive the poet to madness or suicide. Yet, at the same time, it can also be the source of the poet’s passion and creative drive:

Before a swan dive
Off the Golden Gate Bridge.
But this is no metaphor.
The poet actually jumps
Come hell or hard water,

The poet must endure actual suffering and experience problems which are not easily solved, to gain the wisdom and patience needed to receive truth. Truth without wisdom can be so painful it kills you, or changes you forever. Ultimately, it requires a relinquishing of the self to whatever larger purpose the poet feels the spiritual universe holds in store.

Jack Spicer’s poem “Improvisations on a Sentence by Poe” embodies this diving into the spirit realm, and the consequent annihilation of self to reach a truth, or a “music,” which enables the speaker to be capable of a higher level of consciousness. The goal becomes the obliteration of the self, to see all things unfiltered by the ego, and thus, to grasp the unifying consciousness beyond the self:

It is not even an orchestra. Concord
Alone on a pier. The grand concord of what

Does not stoop to definition. No fish
No other seagull, no ocean—the true
Music (Spicer 69).

The music of life is constant and continues on whether anyone notices or not. It is this indefinable fabric that exists between us even in the silences, or when we think we are most alone. The irony is that by saying “no ocean,” Spicer conjures up the ocean’s music. It becomes a symbol of the journey of life and the place where the seagull belongs. The seagull calls alone on a pier, just as the poet writes music to people who aren’t there, on a page by himself. Here the water is a place of renewal and homecoming—a rebirth of the spiritual soul—evoked by its antecedent.

The power of the water is carried over as a main theme of the next section, “III: Living Tributaries.” It begins with an Elegy to Weldon Kees, “Words for Weldon’s Tears,” which further extends the water imagery as both giver and taker of life. In *Vanished Act*, James Reidel writes, “He told Grieg about his plan to either jump from the Golden Gate Bridge or go to Mexico” (Reidel 351). Kees’ car was recovered “in the sightseers’ lot on the Marin County side” (352) of the Golden Gate Bridge, but his body was never found. Weldon Kees’ greatness as a poet was to feel in himself the immensity of human potential, alive and thriving at “noon.” When the world took a lunch break he went to work, filled with inspiration. This vibrant inspiration embodied in the bright light of “noon” is evident in this section of his poem, “The Beach in August”:

What I thought about the human
Condition was this: old fruit
Comes in and is left, and dries
In the sun. Another fat woman
In a dull green bathing suit
Dives into the water and dies.
The pulmotors glisten. It is noon (Kees 135).

The contradiction of the glistening sunlight off “old,” “dull,” “fat,” adjectives, makes the mundane or usually unnoticed, memorable. This exemplifies Kees’ peculiar aesthetic, which highlights the beauty of the poetic gaze, and how it can render the obscure or overlooked in an interesting light. To see beauty in the commonplace or ordinary, or in what other people might consider ugly, is a gift of perspective. But some of Kees’ perceptions border on clairvoyance, or indicate a deep connection to his own unconscious mind. The line, “Dives into the water and dies,” is eerily similar to Kees own death.

He died just before he gained public acclaim for his work. It is said that there was a thick fog that day, and he tried to call his friends whom he had been staying with but they were on their way out to pick up an aunt from the airport and couldn’t talk. He was never heard from again. A self-embodied contradiction, Kees dressed like a banker but lived a passion-filled life. My elegy to him is written from this dual perspective inside his depressed consciousness, just before he jumped off the bridge:

Shadows of who you were run through heavy mist; the fog swallows
You whole, and you forget the sun is high above you—it is noon
When you awake; and all the world is filled with possibilities.
But the pain you feel stains you in this moment
Of convergence with no future, where all the past leads
To the railing of a bridge you cannot cross alone.

Ultimately the bridge, which was a major source of his inspiration, was not able to save him, and helped cause his death. Kees, in his despair, was not able to resist the mystical finality of the water. They say it’s as hard as concrete when you jump from such heights. Though the water may have killed him, it was not malicious. The physical reality described becomes a metaphor for lost promise.

Water is a symbol of life that is also capable of causing death. But water is only a vehicle, and it is up to us how we use it. Water is not silent. Its waves speak constantly. It

has a voice and wants to be heard. It is up to us to listen. My poem, “What the Water Said,” asks:

Are you sure you want to venture
That deep beneath the surface of her water?
Where many sailors have never dared to go
And those who have, never returned.

The unveiling of the poetic process and the understanding of how the self is to fit into the systems in which it exists, is like the salt dissolved in the ocean. Each piece is still its own molecule but connected in an expanse of moving liquid, dissolved into the whole. The self dissolves in the perfect solution.

This dissolution of self leads to action. As the self merges with the water of life, more often than not, the water speaks in actions. It is a marker of time and epochs longer than a human lifespan. In my poem “Modern Spiritual,” water is carver of canyons, the maker of human beings, and a spiritual force that flows through us and everything else:

With this love we share
Every moment is a heavenly note.

We are blessed to breathe
Between this sky and that sea
Where water flows
In and out of you and me.

A constant crashing
Back to the source of all things.

The poem’s theme of water as mother of universal consciousness, and all things being part of the same whole, is examined as a source to heal the divisions which keep us from spiritual progress and enlightenment.

This spiritual quest for enlightenment continues in section “IV: Burnt Offering—Seven Hills for Sylvia.” The water is embodied as a spiritual force, with raw sexual

energy, expressing the unity between the creative artistic force and the forces of nature, or the divine. These seven poems which I wrote while studying Sylvia Plath's, *Ariel*, in Kim Addonizio's 240 class, are a response to the highly sexualized symbolism in Plath. They contain a good deal of water and moon imagery, which counteracts the heaviness of the burnt part, or death imagery, alluding to Plath's suicide.

Plath died by putting her head in the oven and turning on the gas. Anne Stevenson's short biographical essay about Plath's life, ends with a brief summary of Plath's later work written right before she killed herself, "Twelve final poems, written shortly before her death, define a nihilistic metaphysic from which death provided the only dignified escape" (Stevenson). It is almost like she gained an extra extension of herself, and her consciousness grew just before she died. As though, subconsciously, she knew she would take her own life.

In these lines from "Fever 103°," Plath seems almost prophetic about her own death:

I am too pure for you or anyone.
Your body
Hurts me as the world hurts God. I am a lantern—

My head a moon
Of Japanese paper, my gold beaten skin
Infinitely delicate and infinitely expensive (Plath 54).

Her reference to "lantern," and "gold beaten skin," seem creepily similar to the heat of the oven, and "delicate," flaked black skin of her own death. These lines seem to imply that though she was little known before her death, her death made her infinite, by catapulting her into the literary cannon. "My head a moon," can be interpreted as her consciousness ascending through her poetry to illuminate the world after her death, and

her work becoming “infinitely expensive.” Her spirit rises like the lantern into the annals of history and lives on after her death.

In this fourth section the poems are inhabited by Sylvia Plath’s spirit. The speaker seems possessed by her voice (inspired also by Spicer’s channeling of spirits). The section begins with “Queen of No More Bees,” and the voice of Plath addresses the reader from beyond the grave as part elegy, part heroic epic:

Starlight pierces my curved
Molecular body
Spinning into nothing—all

Accounts
Seem to say you and I have a while.

Involving the reader in the temporality of the deceased consciousness from the first moment, there is a sense that Plath is infinite as a spirit body, which she seems to imply in “Fever 103°.” There is also the indication that some part of her misses the physical world, as addressing the reader from the spirit world ironically makes life seem more important. The voice of the spirit reminds the living that they will also pass into the spirit world one day.

The seven poems in this section imply by their conclusion that there is hope for us as long as we can work together, and use our differences to our advantage. The last line from the last poem in this section, “Survival After Dusk (or Death),” reads, “We must huddle.” This line emphasizes the need for cooperation, to ensure the survival of our species.

Optimism for the future carries over into the final section, “V: Fairy Godmother: Take us Home.” These poems are filled with hope for the next generation, and packed with cultural and literary references. These lines from my poem, “Listen to the Signs,”

ask us to deal with the truth head-on, and to seek it out even if it is hard or uncomfortable:

The cultural syntax
Of beating around the bush

Burning in the wilderness,
A modest proposal
That we should eat something
Not quite meant for polite hearing.

The first line imbues the poem with sociological language, as a way to say that what we say matters, and how we say it is the “cultural syntax,” or the acceptable jargon of a particular time period . This idea expands into two different sayings: “beating around the bush,” means not being direct; and “Burning in the Wilderness,” which is a biblical reference, to when Moses was addressed by the spirit of God through a burning bush in the Bible (Exodus 3:4). The sentence structure suggests there is something about God that we are not being told. The enjambment of “bush,” satirizes that idea, referencing Jonathan Swift’s work, “A Modest Proposal” (Swift), a satire in which Swift proposes that the Irish should eat their children to avoid starvation. Swift’s satire suggests that you can’t fix a problem by ignoring it. Problems need to be addressed. We can’t fix what we don’t know is wrong. And we can’t heal without fixing our social problems. To “eat something / Not quite meant for polite hearing” is to hear the uncomfortable truth, and then ingest it so that it may be digested and processed. Only then can we expel the excrement, heal, and grow.

It is my intention with this collection to address a great many social and moral ills which plague our era, our age, and our epoch. My motivation is to give my readers hope

for a better future by offering suggestions about what we can do to fix the problems—
giving this generation a new revolutionary American poetic voice.

Prophecy for Sale: On American Rails speaks truth to power, and asks for justice for those who can't speak for themselves. This collection contains poems whose themes address homelessness, racism, patriotism, injustice, nature, love, sex, society, culture, and war—and offers emotional tools we can use to do better, to care more. The poems in this collection suggest that hope, peace, and understanding are still within our grasp, as long as we look up from our screens.

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PROPHECY FOR SALE: ON AMERICAN RAILS

I: How Much Longer?

An Oceanic Observation

Artists are like oysters.
Put a piece of dirt under tongue
Protected by a hard outer shell, and watch
a pearl grow—
It's torture really—the most uncomfortable
Thing possible for a bottom-dwelling being
That is essentially anti-social.

It's not that they can't talk—
But no one understands
the language
Of the hyper-future;
surging forth
Through fields of electricity
As energy builds
inside,
Until the tension is so great,
the seal
Is broken—a token of all their hard work.

So we are left with this
little piece
That barely remembers the slaughter—
And would rather forget the mass graves
That made way for American expansion
Into the western frontier.
The sunset
Bores us. What about the Buffaloes? Or forty
Acres and a mule?
All the treaties
Signed with disappearing ink, vanish—but
the stain
Won't wash off, for generations
as men in chains cross the ocean,
to serve
A ruling class, who can afford to think
About things like class, and don't have
to slave
Away the days, digging their heads
deeper
In the sand—shaking an invisible hand.

Lost Country

There is one line you cannot cross
When times are hard, and full
Of dust and dirty work; how long
Will the dirt cover over you
Lying still in the hard ground?
Or will the trees grow tall
Needles bathed in your gray ashes
Scattered as the wind blows
When you are remembered
As some great progenitor
Of future foundling cultures,
Carried in the hearts of a nation
No longer content to slaughter
The freedom it claims to be fighting for?
There is no way to escape
As country after county falls
To money that never existed at all,
Breaking nerves of the working class
As trash piles up outside suburban homes
Like bones buried in old graves
That have been robbed of all worth—
Gold and jewels coveted before your birth
Were made dull in the moist underground
That rusts and cracks and deteriorates
With each professed deliverance,
As the lost descend into darkness
Humanity has half a chance;

When that purple mixes
With a little bit of orange
At dusk, and raindrops fall
Like petals of gray dust
On corners of juniper bushes
Beside a red wheelbarrow,
Underbelly painted black, rust proof
In opposition to water, rubber grips
Help you control the evening
As there is just enough light
To see the scene beside the shed,
Covered with Young American Graffiti
Back when we used to smoke blunts
And put up a Piece over old tags—

A block of color here, a sharp line there—
Hey those are letters anyone
Who saw it would say after a minute,
My brother'd chuckle a little and smile
And just say yep, like he knew
Something you haven't figured out yet
He couldn't tell you, or he'd
Be giving away the great secret
And it always made you want to know,
It wanted to make you know
So much more what it was—
He'd just smile bigger the more you asked
And just kept carving his letters
With dark and light shading,
Charisma by **Jim Prussia**, always
Signed JimPinc at the bottom, always made
You think something different
Every time you looked at it.

Glass Game

The dead
 have more passion than the living,
This bothers the ones who are alive.

Call it pride
 or arrogance, the ignorance
Of youth drunk on a week night
Carries the weight of truth in a pool cue.

The players are
 professional
Waiting for fresh blood, to enter
A wager of life and death, hung on
A tree they hold in their hands, to defeat
The enemy is the plan, no thought
Of the future, only the next shot
Matters, where you leave it, believe it
Or not, the brotherhood's been lost
To fierce competition, camaraderie is gone
Looking for greener pastures to lay money on.

Not ready to sacrifice
 for the pursuit
Victory bled out onto the floor, dying
To be alive again, recognized brilliance
Found in circling sharks' sharp teeth
Ready to eat the weak, who hold it wrong
Out of step with the beat, not listening
To the song in the background, that tells all
Those who hear it to be strong, never fail
To bring their hardest piece of wood along.

So, to the victor goes the
 cash, as ash
Falls from a fire lit in celebration, smoke
Rises into night air, the taste mixes
With water, melting into the dark drink
That's been sitting there patiently waiting
For its owner to return, and consume it
Until nothing remains but ice and cold glass.

Armantrout's Misunderstanding

It is a pleasure to burn
Such vague notions
Of meaning and motion
That Angels and Demons
Are indistinguishable
From ants and anteaters.

For the truth
Is not subjective, but plain
As daylight illuminates
And evening shades,
Show the difference
Between light and dark.

Right or wrong?

Death comes to us all—
But some ask for it;
And some try to love
As they would be
Loved, in the halls
Of Heaven, or High School,

Eternity is not
Picky enough to distinguish.

Language Poets

How was it
 Knowing too much
 To have pleasure
 Realliding this?
 I C U
 Sitting in your chair
 Playing with your hair
 Adjusting your glasses,
 Upset I see you
 So well without
 All the books
 You filter images through,
 Until it becomes
 Projection screens
 Pompous diction
 Nu Words
Hung on old skeletons
 Made of plastic
 Grounded electricity
 Caged in glass
 Grinding uncomfortable
 Through many gears,
 Years filled with tears
 Meaningless friction
 Endless acceleration
 Cloaked in black
 Destructive dreams
 Without understanding
 How this form
 Detaches us
From each other
 From ourselves
 Until disintegration

Down by the River

Inside of me is nothing
More than a good heart; my Art
Penetrates fertile soil found
Where seedlings sprout into books
Made of dead leaves history—
No storyteller would sing
What's wrong with playing my part
As this song becomes the sound
Of tales wagging different looks
Seeing parts of the mystery.
Hughes said that was "God spelled G-
O-D", glad I didn't start,
Don't know what I'd do; get 'round
To fishin' with all these hooks
When I despise injury.
Spent most of my days searching
For someone to pull my cart
Then I settled on a hound,
And saw low-down with the crooks
When Ma' began to worry.
She sighed, "Don't no trouble bring
'Round here you can't duck or dart,
You're treadin' on sacred ground
Where the blues bounces off the nooks
And fannies dance for vict'ry!"
These wise words did some weight bring;
Couldn't let it fall apart
To the mourner's bench be bound,
Confession of babbling brooks
Sorta' contradictory.
Water has a truthful ring
Beneath the surface bit part
When you get your head around
How the fire overcooks
Tastes of burnt delivery.

Lost Generation

Where have all the people gone? They are here
Without love in their hearts, or truth
In their eyes. Loneliness cloaks the alcoholic
Revelry like a badge of honor. No one sees
Justice dying under the weight of our indifference.
The water that will not flow is bought
And owned by Coke and Monsanto. The drugs
We take are made to keep us sick, so profits
Increase without the hope of ever becoming
Anything more than someone who suffers
A disease. We are defined by disillusionment
But no one knows what the word even means.
Consumers lost in the endless search for things
Window shop until something screams take me home
I'm what you can't live without. The screen
That moves and responds to your every touch
Talks to you, keeps you company, doesn't ask much
And knows your plans with every voice command.
This machine that replaces your friends
Makes you feel the world is small
And you are connected to everyone
And everything in it. But it is a lie. You are lost
At night, when you go to sleep alone, all the ideas
You shared on-line have come to nothing
But the echo of hollow birdlike tweets.
A pile of dry bones appears in your dreams
Between the gunshots, blood on the ceiling
Of American cafeterias, haunted children see
The world is fast as lightning. It screams
For meaning, lost in the web of lies, that stream
Across transmission lines, and through the minds
Of modern lives so disconnected by the tools
That could connect us to the truth. We find
What we're looking for. So it's only a matter of time.

Supernatural

When was love enough
At night
To make the day
Always last?

Certainly forever
Was just a metaphor
As everything dies?

So it collapsed
All around you,
Will your will
Stop you?

You say
Walls keep you safe,
In the space between
Lines are bridges
Where meaning
Jumps off
Before it splats—
That's where you like it
Lying flat
On your back.

Looking for an escape
Caught in your trap,
Spider and cat
Mouse and fly
You and I are
The same
Pieces of stars,
Or specks of dust
Between God's
Enormous toes.

Rebirth

What do we know
 of flames of old
When all that burns is rocks and stone?
Why do these bones
 creak in the cold
When the path we walk is never alone?

Before the fire's ash,
 the heat of the coals
Leaves the smells of the places we've known
Stuck to our hands and our clothes,
 while rolls
Of blue heat dance
 above orange embers grown
Fond of moving, like waves to a glowing shore.

As wood is consumed
 to make a new floor
The ash of dead trees helps seedlings grow
Through black topsoil
 where there's nothing to know
But the water and the sunlight combine
To make a life that no one can divine.

We are
 but the observers of time
Opening slowly
 like leaves on a vine.

The skin absorbs nutrient rich light
And converts it to heart,
 to see through dark nights.
The wine we drink helps us forget the fight
That contorts the body through first and last rights.

So we are bound
 to natural insights
By a burning flame of pure white,
That illuminates
 lost corridors
Extinguishing darkness and wars.

II: The New Garden

Uprooted

Dark future beneath the twisted branch, you are
Apart from me,

 chimes turning hour into hour
As stealth precludes the hunter from making a sound
Lest pray should stray away from the beaten path
And see you stalking under brush.

 The rush
Of falling water stops a passing car, curious
To see foot-steps echo off concrete in the grand
Attempt to find shoes with well-tied laces placed
One over another, again without retreat
Or conceit, to tie a perfect knot, there has to be
A breath,

 a pause marks the space between
What is real and what is seen beyond the confines
Of the mind,

 memory comes to tell us there is some
Greater thing, made of feats and failures remembered
As some other means, when there were not so many
Layers piling up, indistinguishable from heroic dreams.

We are what we were meant to be—we become what
We see—we are made

 of many nights and days
Strung on a line, we cannot always recall.

 We fall
Into whatever seems comfortable,

 as it flows within
This stream, until it feels too heavy and starts dragging
Down what we believe.

 Then we walk again, to find
Some peace with nature, or some piece of what we've left
Behind some long-closed doorway in the mind, or some past
Moment when life was kind;

 no one wants to die,
 alone in the cold.

No one wishes their fingers were frozen
 stiff with gangrene.

 Who is the predator
Beyond me in the shadows

 I cannot see
 I hear the rustle of something most unnatural.

I am
no longer at ease with the beast
that lives
inside of me.

The greatness that I seek
is an escape
from mediocrity

Sitting on a bench, as quiet wooden steps
Come 'round to San Jose to be borne by planted trees—
Slouching outside
class in sagging pants
that plead

For just a few more days,
to satisfy your needs;
Their discarded candy-wrappers blowing through the streets.

Wasted Land

I

The beat could be mistaken
For a death march, hard
Ghetto worn colors, Flat-
Brimmed hats, baggy pants

No one dances, thug
Culture, arms crossed, nod
Empty heads in agreement,
Can't hear a God, a God-

Damn thing in hear, dive
Bar, the news is on, Paul
And Eddies, popcorn is hot
Peanuts are gone, used to be

All over the floor, I remember
Shaking hands after pool
Won or lost, it was a good game
When no one cared, but that was

When we were young, things were
Important, now is not, nothing
Feels the way it used to, innocent
Wandering in the dark, light

Is refracted through the glass
Whiskey filled with ice, out
Of hand, preoccupied with the page
Turning into sand, left in dust

Wind washes the streets clean
Of human garbage, under
The influence of water over
Rocks, nothing to stand on

Without a savior, not yet, no one
Has decided which way they want
to go, but it has been decided.

II

Plow a field, plant a seed
Be patient the harvest
Is coming, though unseen
Savor the moment, George

Washington, money on the ceiling
Stapled to the wood, moments
Marked on green paper history
Made worthless, un-spensible

Priceless in the eyes, the memory
Of a time forgotten by even those
Who lived it, who were there
To witness the miracle

Of rebirth, when it was born—
The soul of man escaped
The mortal body cold, stiff
In the air, the smell of death

And no one spoke of it, it was
What was beneath the thoughts
That let us all continue on
As though something weren't

Horribly wrong with this picture,
Or for that matter, this entire planet.

III

The Universe never seems
To notice what we think. We are
So small, spinning in its weight
Under gravity, the pull of this rock

Doesn't care whether or not we're here
To document the change. It matters
Not, it is coming, we have no choice
But to make something

More important than ourselves
Before the stars fall.

Playing Cards with Jack

Low ghost, high ghost, what matters most
Is there is more than one of me.
I'm in denial up to my neck
In water, swimming doesn't seem so easy
Covered in oil—if I were a duck
Someone would rescue me and clean my feathers.
But I am a man, and not a very bright one
At that. Time is slipping away. Nights
Turn into days, and sleep has escaped
Out the back door of the casino. The lights
Are always so bright in there. Chips
Clicking for hours; it is as if time has stopped
It vanishes so quickly, it's not like playing
A piano or painting. Nothing is created
In this zero-sum game with only one winner
At a time. Everyone else loses. This is
Acceptable to all—it dangles there
A carrot. The prospect
That they may be the next
To strike it rich, hit the jackpot
And go mining for gold up in the mountains.

Robert has a hydraulic operation
In the foothills—he says I can ride with him
In his Blazer—let's hope that pan
Sparkles this summer, when it will be hot
Sitting next to the stream sifting through pebbles,
Shaking the tin, to find a shining nugget or two.
I hope it really happens—Sometimes people are all talk—
Especially gamblers, can't really trust 'em as far as you can throw
A chair into the ocean. Words like waves just keep
Crashing on the shore, what rhythm there is
Washes the sand of understanding smooth.

Passing through a Garden

I walk these grounds in the dark
Searching for a piece of truth, and think
I've found it in this Botany Garden
Beside a dumpster and a parking garage.
In the sound of skateboarders doing tricks
Or highflying passenger jets that roar
Before the jingle of the janitor's keys, steady
And soft as a cool winter breeze, distant
Approaching voices, conversing very seriously
About some important thing. The screech of tires
The engines scream, the slow deep bass of lift off
In some San Jose glade. These things all together
Take recognition of the broken wheel's squeak
And paint a picture of trash bags gathered
In the night, after so many live their lives
Upon the belief, there is only so much time.
Stack together the images of everyday life
And see how often you land the kick-flip divine.
Bang, bang—a scream floods the air with laughter
As someone must have landed. The compactor hums
Drowning out the buzz of almost inaudible
Flourescent lights, yellow lights and white lights
Under the glow I write on this bench, as so many
Have done before me, in hearts with arrows
Scratched into the wood, or scrawled in graffiti;
But not quite like them, there is very little
Memory of ever having been here before.
In fact, this is the first time I've ever stopped
In this exact spot, to watch and hear time
Move—this life pressing forward renewed
With every passing moment is alive.
Still I never feel as though I own it
But am some conductor of the shuffle
Of steps, or translator of feet numbed by cold water.

What Spicer Thought

The true poet does not so much
Master his art, but is a slave to it;
Does not create the poem, but is
Lucky enough to capture it
As it drifts through space
On electrical waves, whispered
By “spooks” in the night
Or from beyond the grave.
It is fuck or fight,
Before a swan dive
Off the Golden Gate Bridge.
But this is no metaphor.
The poet actually jumps
Come hell or hard water,
And really falls at such speed
There is no controlling the impact.
You die in it.

Where the Music Lies

Chorus of fearsome hiss
 Throws light upon the page
Like walking through a wish
 Drops water on the stage.

Rearrange these images on the steps
 To turn the camera off, you must
Unlock it first, throw away the props
 The squealing brakes and rust
 The engine roars past yellow lines
 Drifting slowly over the divide,
 The center is alive in time
 Making the way narrow where it was wide.

How is it that I, with all these talents
Should hold onto the past as though it were divine?

When all that life well lived will flaunt
 Good conversation over a bottle of wine.
The answer sitting on my knee, has become
 The better part of me, waiting to be delivered
 By cautious footsteps on wet streets, by some
 Who have to run before they're old and withered.

 A call is coming in, but I cannot answer
 With frozen fingers and a mouth so far removed
 From my heart—I say to you become a dancer
 No matter where it leads or who's approved—

The matter of existence exists in real time
Even if philosophy tries to box and cage the vine.

The moment is perception and memory—the sublime
Experience of living barefoot on wet grass, over the line—
Drunk and feeling fine, where every word is life or death.
In an epitaph on the rock above you, they hung a wreath
 It said, "He lived life to the fullest every breath,
Until the spirit above eclipsed the ground beneath."

Wild Backyard

Radiation sink into my bones, still calm
Of midday, quiet rustle in the soft breeze
The leaves of Old Oaks line the waters
Edge, the stream I live by, grew up by,
Under Eucalyptus and Mulberry the short
Lemon tree bares many fruit, surrounded by
Sharp spring grasses, relentless weeds grow
Too fast to eradicate; the bamboo in the corner
Before the steps to the lower level is
A transplant just a few years old. The sun
I recall has been here a bit longer, the birds
Agree, though they seem to be taking a siesta,
As there are almost no chirps to be heard
In this gentle wind. The heat burns
The top of my head and leaves me feeling warm
In a black shirt; the carpenter bee's brother,
Stripe-less, no yellow across my back, nor do I cling
To a leaf to drink the same sweet nectar, nor
Spread fertile pollen from flower to flower. I
Sit watching and listen to the ants crawl on concrete.
Sometimes I sing as the birds without a beat
In rays of the day. My little dog's nails click
On paver stones, unaware of his important feet
Ticking some meter in natural backyard jazz
Music he hears as it whips through the leaves
Of grass, he takes the time to stop and eat,
As he jumps at some thing he cannot see
Rustling in the cave of juniper bushes, beneath
The dense surface of pointed spines and impenetrable
Branches, he sticks his head in to see. Jingles
Attend the tags around his neck, his red collar
Silent as he sniffs out the intruder, then
He darts and jumps and lands with a thump
On some old discarded piece of wood, he barks
At two jays taken refuge in his little tree,
And at my neighbor watering, completely unaware
Or unconcerned for the humming bird become
Fond of the blossoms on the lemon tree.
That must be the secret life beating on
Vibrant wings that pollinate the fruit this week.

Off Cervantes Road

A single blossom falls,
Flutters downward, caught in lawn grass,
Becomes a single white point
In a vast field of green
With perfect edging;
Waiting to be joined
By another, then another.

It takes so long to fall
From such high branches;
Incalculable as air—
Spinning circular arcs
Like a falling seedpod,
Before resting in peace
On a soft bed of thin blades.

Fresh blossoms falling
In the middle of winter
Feel warm like spring;

The birds seem not to notice.
They've got worms to pick
Through the dirt for
While it's still moist;
On the edge
Of the Bocce ball court
Where two Jesuit priests
Play a game with God—

As though the final
Single point of man
Is not to die alone
But in the company of friends.

The swings have gone
Untouched, no children have
Visited here in a while.
The playground is pristine.

Angels dip out of the sky
To ride the slide;

As larks and jays
Warblers and robins

Sound the alarm,
A blue jay jumping
On the planked wood
Is almost annihilated
By one of the priest's balls
Thrown a little hard—
The ball hops up, the bird hops off,
Pecks the wet soil
And flies away, a worm dangling
From its dark beak.

III: Living Tributaries

Words for Weldon's Tears

Tendrils of frozen wind wrap the supine body
Bereft of cool summer air, with the pounding waves
Somewhere outside of this dense whiteness; in the sound
Of breath, this expanse of braided steel wires stretches
A great distance across the bay I cannot see,
A great weight hangs beneath the girders, trembling,
Hard concrete surface, where water droplets flatten.

I trample everything under feet, and hear the tires of cars
Approaching with a rush—then fading into the distance;
Sometimes I can still see the span I'm looking at,
But most of the time I end up looking past it,
Into the cold gray high above the passing sound.
Instead of enjoying the sunlight or the water, discovering
Some distant beach and all new shores can offer, with
The risk of being crushed by all that life can take
Away—I see the past or future, carrying us through
Whatever we experience—this little piece of whatever
We make it, whatever it is the universe wants;
That is, if the universe has feelings and desires
Like you, or me. It is not likely, or even probable, but nevertheless
Here you are anyway; striving to do your level best.

Walking a one lane road with no exits, in the dark
With no light source, you must close your eyes to feel
The gravel beneath your feet, and hear all you cannot see.
The crunch from the edge of the road as you proceed
Is a sound that reminds you, the light you carry
Inside you gives off no visible illumination.
This impenetrable front, looms a specter, hardens
Most people's exterior—hides in darkness—but it is not
As grotesque as the horrors of war, haunting the dreams
Of brave soldiers—the warriors of incorporation—
Shadows of who you were run through heavy mist; the fog swallows
You whole, and you forget the sun is high above you—it is noon
When you awake; and all the world is filled with possibilities.
But the pain you feel stains you in this moment
Of convergence with no future, where all the past leads
To the railing of a bridge you cannot cross alone.

No hand, or phone, could pull you from your plunging dive; there are no words
For such rough lines, for such sad eyes—only tears fall from such great heights.

What the Water Said

Fishermen are lazy, but romance is not
The Spanish Inquisition. I'm sorry I am not able
To pleasure the woman eating plums, under
The table. You can't see what she's doing
With her other hand, there is some suggestion
Of love, but most people wouldn't call it that.
Most people would lap against her shore like water
Coming in off the Pacific, slow and steady, waiting
To shush against the sand, and roll the rocks around
In cool wet pools that form dark jagged
Swimming holes for sea creatures.

In the current, language is broken up
Like sand flying horizontally through the air
Cuts and grinds, like diamonds, or hardened sand-paper.
She is not sure if you are there yet, the ocean
Is personified and waiting for you to come
Into her cool water, that feels so good
Wrapped around your body here.

Are you sure you want to venture
That deep beneath the surface of her water?
Where many sailors have never dared to go
And those who have, never returned.

No, you are safe here in your classroom
Digesting the salt swallowed in near drowning
Though someone else's mouth, who never
Really existed at all. She was just the figment
Of an enlivened imagination, who sounded
Like the ocean foam atop the cresting waves,
And now she walks among us, beggars
Whores and slaves, our footprints washed
Away in vagrant dreams of water.

Over and over it polishes the rocks
Clean and clear, as crystals hold
The shine against the hardened stone
That washes up with the shells of long dead things.

So I am a fossilized nautilus, cut in half
To see the structure of creation

That exists in all beings, that existence
Still struggles to exist beyond the space
Inhabited by an earthly body. Be it
Man or beast, fowl of the air or fish,
The water and the salt are all
It takes for carbon to exist in your cells,
The golden spiral spinning outward feeds
And now it is my bones you're seeing.
You must realize there is something
More important than your needs—
You are involved in a process
That lets you transcend this sacred peace.

So go back to the ocean, go back to the beach—
Let the water wash over your feet, and stand
Against the breakwater, until you've sunk in deep—
Only then can you rest and sleep.

Mashed Potatoes at 5:55PM (3)

Inside of her there is
Nothing left. Charleston
Virginia calls to her,
As do the shores
Of South Carolina.
She caught the train
So many moons ago.

There are powers
Beyond understanding.
But she knows
It is easy to be
So much more
Than human—
When you wonder,
What am I?
Then you realize
I am infinite
Beyond the existential
Divide, a being
Of love and light
Spread out through the fabric
Of space and time.
Eternal in the ether
Of the cosmos.
Matter and spirit,
Faith, hope, and life.

The adventure
Begins again here.
Now
And again.
Every second
From now until eternity,
There is nothing left to say.

She met a man in Charlestown,
She had to Chew, it was
Sticky like a hot night.
Beach wind on the coast
Cooled under her skirt,
As she turned into all things.

I remember watching her change,
How her face shifted and disappeared
And no one could see it
But me. I saw it,
I still see it.
She is inside of me.
And I am inside of her.
Our connection runs deep,
Sometimes too deep to breath.

She is the repeating fifth,
The grifting of a wish
Like a shot of liquor
Poured down her dress.
She says, "Oops
I have a drinking problem,"
And everybody laughs.
She's a high class
Video star, kept safe behind glass,
And the forecast
Is sunny with no chance
Of turning overcast.
Everyone will see
the parade.
People she deceived
Will perceive the charade.

What façade you ask can keep
Her world of debt growing larger
With confidence in doubt, that
Expands like pie crust when
Left too long in the oven.
Burned to a crisp,
Cracked, and over risen.

There is still one piece
Of gooey dough left
In the middle, and it
Is delicious. She
Eats it.

What Happened at the Institute

Beat the book against your head.
Do you see the glaze
Frozen on the page?
Here is where the Obama Bill
Was made complete,
And all the paint was sealed
By clear oblivion.
Elsewhere things fly
Away from what harms flies,
To where the actors
Come out to play a game
That has no meaning
Or action, but time
Stops on the edge
Of a building
In the financial district
Where people learn
Nonchalance enough
To arrive in a state
Of wisdom and enlightenment
Completely staged
By higher powers.

Do you see the colors
Of the energy left
By Angel wings in the sky?
The skies are filled with them,
So it is a wonder
That the demons still run across
The power lines.
You would think that God
Would stop them from whispering
In your mind.

The Real American Dream

It is amazing
The way we feel
At one moment or another.
The way the world
Seems to hang
On the outcome
Of some event
We are experiencing
So fully,
Nothing else matters.
Only later
Do we realize
After years go by,
What we thought
Was the whole world
Was just a moment
Where a wall fell down
And a door opened
After another door
Was annihilated forever,
And grew like flowers
Out of the hole in the ground
Where two towers fell.

But we were stupid
Because we still believed
In terrorists,
And that our government loved us.

Now we still believe that
Everything will be all right
When nothing is changing
Except the gap between
The rich and the poor.
It's like inequality is what we ask for.

So why do we deserve love?
Maybe we don't,
And it is all there is
That matters
So we hold on to it
For dear life,

And fear death,
Because if we lose it
There will be nothing left?

If there is a God
Maybe he or she
Would be nice enough
To make an appearance
Once in a while,
Just so we could be sure
The world isn't going to Hell.

'Cause most of the time
It sure seems that way—
Especially for the people
In Iraq or Afghanistan
Or any of the other
God forsaken
Countries we are
Determined to blow
The shit out of.

Pardon my
French,
But the French don't
Treat people like that
Anymore. That is
A distinctly American
Trait these days.

An Hour and Forty Minutes of Thoughts

I

I have emerged from the ash
Of burned books
And scorned lovers,
Dead three years
To become a great light.
The silence ended
When I picked up this pen
Again, so I wouldn't
Give in to the pain, or
Pick up the knife
Or the gun I wanted
To buy. To kill
The bastards who stole
My child, who wasn't
Ever really my child.
But I would never
Hurt her, and they did.
So I had to forgive
To get rid of the hate,
Because it ate me every day
And turned all my colors gray.
That's no good for a painter
Like me. I have
To make the world
A more beautiful place,
Or my mind fades away
And I descend into darkness
A boatman on the river Lethe.

That's no way to stay
Happy in this rebirth
Asked to give love away
For free—because it should be.
So thank God for the words
And this ink, and the lock
On my heart, that opens
With a kind phrase—
I never want to lose the key.
It is so simple
When you stop and think,

Without running to the
Next place to be.
But I guess it's not
The lives we lead—
Bleary eyed, exhausted,
Another car in traffic—
That give us meaning.

II

A twelve-hour commute
What a disaster.

It would be better
If the roads were made of sand
So, no one could travel faster
Than a camel filled with water.

If my art offends
Your delicate sensibilities
Then you're not sensible at all.

Call a doctor to relieve
The stress you feel
Slow in your commuter blues
Never ending, against the wall,
Faster now, you're about to fall
From your twenty-four-hour grind
Into a dark place in the mind,
Where they may never find
You again.

Stein's Revelations

A granite slab lays flat
High above the ground.
We are elevated to meet it
Where earth does not seem round.
The beer flows down
And smoke floats up
In this hazy town,
Where I too drink a cup
Of everything that life deserves
To escape this bloody rut.

Nothing is sacred anymore
On the floor of this clean bar,
That is if it ever was
A place where God would visit
To alleviate the suffering
Of these poor drunk retches,
Reaching for oblivion
In a place where someone seems to care.
That is the crux of it
Escaping the heartless pretend smile snare
To leave it all behind.

“Forget that, love is blind,”
Some fool whispers from the corner;
That is how wisdom hides
Beneath the rocks you never turn over,
Undisturbed by the mind
You are dragged back to the grinding wheel,
Asked to steal something real,
But no one can decide what that means anymore
Inebriated beyond recognition.

So the patrons give their best rendition
Of an Irish wake, and sing
“Hey little lass, beneath the grass,
Shed no more tears for wasted years.
It's time to run off and play.
You'll never grow old
And it's a glorious thing,
'Cause it's a hideous curse
To be wrinkled up that way.”

While some laughed at others
They didn't understand,
Some just recoiled,
And knew life
Couldn't carry on that way.

So-called Progress

Every moment
Quicksand swallows
Future plans
And past regrets,
The cries are
Of a baby cat.

No one comes
To rescue
Felines struggling
Out of earshot
Deep in jungle
No one wants.

The predators
Have disappeared
With giant trees
And native fires,
Cultures vanish
Lost to progress.

Bring in the roads
Pour the concrete;
How will people know
Where to go
Without sidewalks
Under their feet?

Still we need
Light to travel deeper,
So burn the torches
Run the wires.
Cut through leaves
And low hanging vines
To make a path
First narrow then wide.

Modern Spiritual

I

What we are
Is made of stars,
Traveling faster
Than lightning through a rod.
A flash of light
And then it's gone.

A thunderous crash
Then silence long
Enough to see
What's in a song,
Not just the notes
But natural pause
Between the highs and lows.

There must be space
To let things grow.

II

Nothing's built of constant tones.
So the spirit travels through
These things we do.
With this love we share
Every moment is a heavenly note.

We are blessed to breathe
Between this sky and that sea
Where water flows
In and out of you and me.

A constant crashing
Back to the source of all things.

Deep inside the rumble knows
Rocks are carved
By glacial streams.
Polished smooth
So canyons gleam.

Sacred Smile

Why is it so much easier
To critique someone else's bad habits
Than to change your own?
Maybe it is scary
To look inside yourself.
So we look outside instead.

How can it be
So difficult to do what is right
When we know all along
What it is?
Maybe fear guides us
Where we need faith instead.
Some day you will be dead.

So what are you afraid of?
How long will you hide
What's in your head?
Have no fear
Of your thoughts
Or what other people
Can do to them.
It doesn't matter
What others think of them.
Have no fear of your heart
Or how big life can get.

Maybe you are meant to grow
So large that no body can contain you.

Maybe your spirit is meant
To shine like the stars.

Maybe you are God's masterpiece
And God is just now putting the finishing touches on.

Maybe all you have to fear is in your past
And all there is before you is victory.
Maybe you are on the divine path
And no one can steal your power or mystery.
Maybe you're about to make history
So all that's left to do is grin.

Whether it's true or not
It's a good life to live in.

IV: Burnt Offering—Seven Hills for Sylvia

Queen of No More Bees

Starlight pierces my curved
Molecular body
Spinning into nothing—all

Accounts
Seem to say you and I have a while.
The bones

In old closets penetrate
The mind, closed in a dripping wet box—
How am I to decipher

The real sex
From the flat screen I watch
In my sox—

Waiting for you
To come into your own
I watch

The ripples form,
It chases me like Jurassic Park's
Tyrannosaurus Rex.

Driving for life—
The horror is what we choose
Not to know,

So I am caught running
In circles—nothing
Good is ever derivative,

Because you have to steal
The moonlight
And make it your own.

To become
Something more, forgive everyone
All you can—

And those who made the chains,
The great

Opressors of human kind,

Let us bring them to justice—
We are pieces
Of the same cloth, you and I.

And I am a radiant picture
Of what
Is possible for us if we

Slip between the lines,
Like juicy
Cheeks bouncing down and up

And up and down for weeks,
We can
Do just what we want—well it's just

As easy as sitting down
To write,
The snowflake's descent

Cold and white—frozen panes
As translucent
As Death's breath—soft

Moonlight illuminates her
Bald gaze
In the reflection of sorrows,

And unending despair
Where
Her black yew trees absorbed

The endless parade through
Childlike eyes.
Where scorched black and

Yellow flesh balled,
Silvia will
Forever stare into the sea—

Rising and falling
In the waves—
Her knives and men carved

Out of you and me.

Death of a Bee

A red arrow points
To a sign you haven't
Noticed yet—high above
Your head—in the darkness
Outside of the car; a light

That also seems to be vibrating,
Like this engine I refuse to turn off.
I'd much rather turn on a dime
And get up in time—to go as deep inside
Of these black and yellow lines as buzzing allows.

I do not want to alter your perceptions
Of my intentions—but are you coming
To feel as soft as me? Do these wet syllables
Roll over your tongue from a moist cave?
Our bodies are so beautifully wrapped

Together, in the sound of our buzzing.
Can we be blamed for lurid interpretations
Of innocent mists that moisten erect blades
Of tall grasses—that pierce and sting
Like the stinger of a bee, lost in the finger

Comes out—and the guts spill
All over the floor—and everything's wet,
And warm—and you come
To see the light opens
As you close—the world hums.

Sylvia's Coming

I am turning on too much
In the pallid moonlight—
This woman is coming into
Me too much—and I am not ready

To become all that I am
Going to be. O-radiant sheen
Of ocean foam, melt her sweet
Heart cooked by pain, scorched

Earth that fell around her
After her death—then she was
Like a god—only after
She was gone—fucking critics!

Fucking morbid fucks, fuck,
You want to be me, more
Than me—and I would
Give it to you if I could.

The words know sometimes
The weight gets counter-heavy—
So here take my sword—you see
I can't even give it away—you can't hold it.

The woman in the moon gave
It to me—you wouldn't be able
To wear this bald crown of her
Moonlight that I have learned to tame.

The sword comes with the crown—still
The waterfall breaks—the stains of her
I see on this sheet—our wet cheeks touch
Between pieces of a piece her nature begged for, then

Suppressed in saturated dreams—
I could only nurture her to come
With me over the dome, and make it whole—
These flames of our rebirth

Sold for pennies and a quarter—going in
The slot—the slow mechanism delivers a scream.

Kissing Sylvia

Overseer in clouds of dust, under
Rust red branches, that
Droop over black dirt in
This false metropolis of future debt,

Do you even see that you are blessed?
Piled under writhing mounds of flesh,
How many is this in one
Evening?

I am not sure it is. I am not sure
I am ready—but I am ready to see.
Look into the vast wetness of the sea
To discover the dripping truth

Of a planted seed—undulating
With the need to undo this tight
Strap across the back—that holds
Two round orbs more powerful

Than me—laying her beneath
The hard surface, packed full
Of moist earth in lost moonlight.
Now settled, to become breezes

Blowing through the ears of old forms,
She loves me from beneath the waves
And comes to me—she lies here now;
And I hold her close, not wanting

To let her go back—deep inside her ocean cave,
To hide her dark bejeweled voice—as wet breath is made.

Silvia's River of Light

Her dark orb hidden between
Limbs more perfect than any tree—

No natural forms can mount
In the mind's eye as well as she.

Whose reflection is now carved by light
On the surface of the moon—as moonlight

Shines down on the earth in darkness;
The sun is hidden deep inside her

Dreams made for coming with me.
So we will come together to know how

To come together, and you will learn
To come with me, and I will learn

To come with you—and then we
Will look forward to coming and going

Together—we can do everything
We want, as long as we turn on

The right parts of the river Lethe—
I'm still waiting to go over the falls

And plunge into wet all over, covered
In white mist lifted by pounding water

Beating down over and over, pushing
Its moist weight through rock hard

Slaps that break in slow and certain
Rhythm—confident of the pressure

That must be maintained, so that we
Can come together to change the course

Of the stream—that pours over you and me.

Sylvia's Sea

Sleep now
You monsters of deep
Intimation—

Reap the virgin fields
Of stalks
Still sharp as wheat—

Breathe
A deep red firmament, blood-red
In the black

Crushing depths of the ocean,
Beneath the reflection
Of moonlight, off the crashing waves where

We lied
Together on the sand—this hand
Crept up

Inside
The tight closed lip,
The air

Drawn out and back
Again
And again, and again,

Then, a break
In the sound of the water
under the surface—going

Deeper, the further we walk out
Into the crushing pressure—fathoms under the sea.

Survival After Dusk (or Death)

I can't stop stoking
The embers
Of a flash of lightning—

Silver shiver of moonlight,
Cold space creeps in
Between us,

Where nothing should come in between—
That thing we can do together
If we just

Make every part the same
As the rest.
The best have more to say—

As waterfalls carve giant boulders
In Taffoni formations
Along the back

Of long ridge—where eagle calls
Heard over the water's roar
Echo through the canyon,

Then dart
Across the tops of evergreens—blown
Back and forth,

Rustling, back and forth—easy
In the constancy of the piercing breeze,
That brings us closer

Together—to come to understand
To overcome
The penetration of stiff air,

We must huddle.

V: Fairy Godmother: Take Us Home

1953 D

I remember when you found me
Fresh out of the change drawer
And Travis said, "All right! You get
A 1953 penny." And you said,
"Must be my lucky day."
But you couldn't even fathom
The profound depth of understanding
That washed over my tarnished edges—
Being found by one so sensitive as you,
To hear the voice of one so small
And disregarded as a general matter of course,
To then be plucked up
As some sacred jewel to be extolled
Of the many virtues I have always known
I contained within myself,
Though nary a venture would I make
That ever another soul should see
My various exploits, in such light
that they may be heard by millions
Of that which I know is right.

When I was minted, boys wore trousers;
And girls their Sunday Dresses
Every day of the week, north of Houston street.
But no woman would be caught dead
In a skirt above her knees, with short hair,
Or walking around in skin-tight jeans.
The business men wore shirts and ties
Even to sell ice-cream
In sweltering Mid-Western heat.
No man but a farmer would have been proud to wear overalls
And even that man wouldn't allow it,
He got the humble gene, been passed down
Through the generations from one man learning from his daddy
And teaching his sons the way, to dig the dirt
With dirty hands that crave the softness of the soil
And make things grow with love, not toil.

What seems right to one man
May not be the truth for all
Especially if she's a woman.

But the world didn't know that
Back in 1953, July 2nd to be exact,
That's when it happened for me—
I got this beautiful Lincoln face
Stamped, Liberty, 1953 D,
On the flip side, E Pluribus Unum,
ONE CENT, flanked by stalks of wheat
That could be mistaken for feathers
Or shafts of a laurel wreath,
That came before the symbol
So many of you might be used to seeing
As an eagle with outspread wings,
When crops were harvested by men, not machines.

I remember that year I came into being
As a hope for the greatest generation the world had ever seen.
Fresh out of the wars and before that whole Korean thing
When my ridges were still sharp
And I hadn't been rubbed by a million fingers
In and out of 80,000 some odd drawers
Circulated like some cheep _____,
Except people from my generation don't use words like that,
So you'll have to fill in the blank for yourself
I can't tell you what it's for.
When I was young, no one worried about anything
Except putting gas in the tank,
And getting out on the open road.
And until you found me
I had all but given up
On becoming anything
Bigger than the change
To break someone's Dollar Bill.

I knew someday I'd meet you
And we'd be something together
Bigger than we were before we met.
Inextricable from each other
Like the stamps they can't rub off me.

I knew when I met you
My favorite Beatles song was coming true,
And you needed me,
"Will you still feed me, When I'm 64?"
I always knew the answer was yes—
So now that I've met you
I'm glad that I waited,

Even if it rubbed me the wrong way
Or got awfully dark and lonely sometimes.
Not that I really had too much choice in the matter.
It was a process of belief.
I believed I was important
So you saw me differently,
Not as some meaningless cent
To be lost in a one night rant,
But a piece of copper with dignity.

Don't Go Out (Spoken by an Old Bayou Seer)

I reckon the orange air holds an omen in it,
Asking us to consider the state of our beings
Being collectively dragged through the streets, we're seeing
Rotten spoils sweltering in hundred-degree heat.

Sweat dripping down my rib cage, inside my shirt, hot and wet
Reminds me of moist New York summer nights, thunder storms
That glazed the streets, evaporated thick red haze warms
Muggy drops lost in California, sticks to my head

Like lone stars that disappear behind a thick layer
Of particles meant to fall and not stay, forever
Descending on the face of the earth without a way
To allay; though to the naked eye, it may appear
To untrained observers, as a permanent fixture
Of air, that circles the globe, and never goes away.

What She Can't Stand

She was sure there was something different
About the way her friends saw her, the front

She put on was smooth, convincing, her
Teeth glimmered, bleach white as she spoke, what's more

Her cigarette dangled and bounced; she lit
The end and said, "Can't teach these kids a bit

Of discipline; for what it's worth, this place
Is a dump. Nothing looks you in the face

Anymore, they're all looking at their screens."
His response, so flabbergasted, careens

Off the wall, "Computer Monsters! Looking
For brains—I'll tell you what, I wouldn't bring

My dog within three feet of one of them
Crazies not watching where they're going, shame."

Listen to the Signs

You are a product
Of linguistic evolution—
The cultural syntax
Of beating around the bush

Burning in the wilderness,
A modest proposal
That we should eat something
Not quite meant for polite hearing.

The sound passed down
Through tradition
Meters understanding
Between bodies

Bending to fit around
Each other, in
Such tight space, that
Nothing fits that

Was not made for it.
Your mind drifts
To sweat, as all are
Prone to do,

In horizontal
Ramblings, of historic
Grooves, caught in
The apostrophe's

Of old men.
Beauty will always
Rule the beast,
So he's studying

The art of Zen.
You have to learn
To keep your feet
When the autumn wind

Is blowing, in time
To free the space

Of movement, in
And out of the light.

Be careful, your
Relativity is showing.

'G Be'

We find what we're lookin' for
Only by lettin' go of what we know,
To discover what we do not know,
Which leads us back to the beginnin' again.

Don't stop the process of renewal
Which must occur for you to become
The winged creature you've seen
Flyin' over battlefields in your dreams.

We meek kids play real fast and loose
With the truth, 'cause our souls are pure;
Don't get caught up on the lingo or jargon
Uptown jive is always lookin' 'tween the words.

You can get tripped up listenin' to how
A person says what they're sayin', and not really hear
What was bein' said. It's a common misunderstandin'
That happens 'tween lovers and friends,

When fondness restricts the natural movement
Of vivacious bein's, whose hearts are fiercely beatin'
In unison, millions together as one brethin' lung
Sharin' the same air, walkin' the same earth.

When equality is the rule, not some right to be broken
By selective enforcement, and dark racist notions;
Then we will see the whale and sharks as our kin,
Not just some interestin' creatures to take pictures of on vacation.

Things come easier if the line is thin,
So, ease up, relax, and watch it all begin.

Write the Angry Away, Prize Winner: For Viet Thanh Nguyen

He can't wait
To be proven wrong.

Like he said it
As a challenge,

“Literature can't change the world.”

Like it was a spring
In the diving board

He was bouncing
Up and down on,

And we were his

Jumping off point.

I see it all
So clearly now,

Form the middle seat—
I did not choose

To be so comfortable in
The company of such

Talent, the likes
Of which the world

Has never seen, mostly
Because I keep it locked

Away, hidden in my basement
For fear the monster, truth, will get out.

So you don't want to be
The voice for the voiceless,

“Then what do you want to be?”

“Just me,” he said,
“The angriest man

You’ve ever seen,
Wrapped in a neat suit,

Smiling through my teeth;
All I want is to mean

Something to somebody.
Don’t be a writer unless

You like pain, then I bless
You to be more than you

Used to be. Now believe
There is more than the

Little you can see.”

Seven Haikus for Stevens—Soldofsky Reads His Essay on Rexroth

Soft moonlight blossoms
Cold in wet fog, late evening
Blooms with howling Dogs.

Time measured by stars
Does not know it has traveled
Great distance in Light.

One line runs on grass
While sheep eat flat fields of green,
Nature's Lawnmowers.

Lie flat on your back,
And waterfalls fall upwards
Into the Heavens.

Let spooks in the night
Speak words through your radio
Mistaken for Love.

Real love is a dog,
Who can't stop licking himself—
Always barks for Stick.

The game is ready
For the players to know that
Existence Watches.

*Listening to Alan Soldofsky talk about Donald Justice
in the Steinbeck Center at SJSU*

Not Where You Think

How do you build you little rooms? With what
Vain belief, do you hold onto hope? Here
Where everything hangs in the balance, and you
Are not deceived that people will read all that
You have taken the time to take note of
In your small life. Where the drum beats sound off
On every unplanned substitution, here
On the page, chained to the ether of love;
The only thing that never dies, unless
You forget it. Then there must be a saint
Who reminded you of your meaning, here
On the banks of a river you used to visit
Where the water flowed faster the further
You went down into the base of your skull;
Which was like the underground cavern you
Had always imagined yourself falling into
After the majority of your light was spent
And no more lines of verse, or lovers were sent
To come your way, and you couldn't remember
What it felt like in the beginning anyway
So you just jumped off, the moving train,
And landed in the water you didn't know
Was there to catch you all along—you swam.

*Listening to David Koehn talk about Donald Justice
in the Steinbeck Center at SJSU*

Listening to Koehn Talk About Justice

I have a night light; it keeps me safe
So I can see where I'm going when I awake
From the sleep of the dead—and rage as long
As I am given freedom to stay, and am not
Banished back to the spirit world where everything
Is gray—and new—and arrives in a dream
That keeps me safe when I'm not with you.

Sometimes I get scared when I can't see you—
When you're not there—there is a note that hangs
With no grounding—I can't find my bearings,
Though I never have been one to run
At a Grizzly waving on the flag
Of California—while I eat breakfast cereal in my mind.
I am lucid. This is not as loose as you think
It is. It is a repetition of things that have come
Before—rustling in the bush, and through the leaves of trees
Echoing—the sound of things long gone
Except for the low hum of the machine.

A similar vibration emanates
From the center of the universe
Since the beginning of time—since before
We started counting units of time
Or measuring syllables, and calling them feet
To fulfill some perpetually inglorious need
For everything to relate, or refer, back to ourselves.

Eleven Minutes of Justice

There was a time when
People said what they meant
And meant what they said.
But all of those people are dead.

I think what I'm trying to say is
The world is what we make of it,
And right now we're eating
A turd sandwich with mustard
While sitting on a Kielbasa sausage
Partially out of the plastic wrapper.

But not completely without
Some sort of package; there has to be
A container to fit all the pretty
People in when they decide they don't want
To be locked up in such long lines,
Waiting for so many hours, so many
Of us without even a breath to ourselves.

I'll tell you what, sometimes shopping can be
Such hard work, to find just the right thing
That suits you so well, you try it on another time.

Take it Apart

Weirdly, the door was ajar.
The door was ajar.
The door
Was a jar.
I see what
You're doing there—
Very clever,
Everyone gets it
By the third time.
That's what she said!

Now, get
Out of here;
It's about
Time.

The body is
Its own horizon
Sleeping through
An examined life.

There is a line
Of thought that carries on from the past
That was thought
Many times, throughout the history of thought—
That the mind is the origin of all things;
But perception says, this is a lie
That's better left prone under the desk.

This paradox
Asks,
Why lie?

When you can tell
The whole
Kitten-caboodle
And make a butterfly
Fly twice,
Fluttering
Through the screen?

Seven Minute Boom

Do you dance in the water
When there is no moonlight,
When all you hear is the sound
Of someone else pretending
To want to treat you right?

But you're not sure you want
To be just like they are; so care-
Less, unaware, wanting to be more
Than a piece of ragged stitching
Someone sewed out of an old pair
Of socks Pablo Neruda left on a mountain.

And now you've gone and done it.
Ruined the entire verse with that one
God forsaken long line, that was just
Way too long to be considered part
Of any sort of proper metrical scheme.
(Who ever told you to count anyway?)

I mean just look at it, sticking out
There like some sore thumb made
Purple like a plum after it was hit
By a hammer, over and over and again,
Just to see how long it took to surprise you
And discover how high your pain threshold is.
It's important to know these things you know.

With Matthew Zapruder visiting Alan Soldofky's poetry 202 class.

Ode to the Air

Nothing is ever lost
That was not meant to be
Broken.

You use the space
Between wing beats, to create
The sound.

Your vibration
Travels invisibly around me
Through tress.

Shhh...do you hear
The tinkling of Gingko leaves?
Money

Falls in thick yellow sheets
Across the sidewalk, while an old man
Sweeps up.

He's still raking
When Mother and I drive by again,
Shaking

The rake loose
Of its golden bells; and we have
The bed

For my little girl
To sleep on, without a hole, or missing
Wood board.

Do you feel the firm
Resistance of forms, beneath
Your wind?

Or are you impervious
To the goose-bumps your movement
Causes?

Either way, we are grateful
To your caress for making us feel
Alive.

Ode to the Sonnet

O, how your rhymed lines have expressed the love
Of unrequited passion, and desire
Contained only by the meter, above
God's Heaven, where cherubs play the lyre,
Sound beating the air with miniscule wings
While Plucking fingers accompany their stare
Blank and pitiless, as history sings
Of ancient battles won; as if we care.

There is a ray of light shining over
The shadowy hill where they crucified
Slaves, and one man their hate could not cover
Because his spirit rose after he died.

Let this verse recover that Holy fret
That Petrarch tried, Shakespeare's perfect couplet.

What Langston Said

The best way to steal
Is so that no one notices.

A little piece of the river here
A bit of sand over there.

You want the surface tension
Of the water to feel real

As the jazz musician
Who stays up all night

Pounding on syncopated keys
Placing two beats right on top

Of one another, line after line
Until it sounds like sea breeze

And ocean waves lapping gently
At the shores of history.

Do not let your adverbs be overbearing
You tellers of stories,
Catchers of dreams.

Remember you are connected
By all those feet that have tread water
Before you, when you could only walk

On dry land, and hadn't ever even
Really had much of anything
That could constitute a thought.

For America

America, violins are playing in your shopping centers.
The long slow notes of Thanksgiving, spilling over
Into Christmas. It is not a classical tune
Playing for your demise from moral heights;
It is a fast set of new chords changing
Too quickly to constitute a melody; a frantic
Expansion of understanding consuming all
The old things, pieces of broken dreams
Combined to make your melting pot ring,
America. You have a new song of freedom
And victory, that plays on repeat, over
Loud speakers, to the tinkle of shopping cart wheels
And the crash of metal, when they're pushed
Together, front to back. A car horn honks
For you America; get out of the way before
You get hit and this violin is playing for
Your death.

When the song ends there is
Just a long silence. No one claps,
There are no cheers. There was never
An audience anyway. It was just
A matter of self-expression
To help the violinist deal with the coming
Of a new age, and how that can feel strange.

This is the age of the new wave; equality
Is coming to sweep out the halls of your
Congressional districts, and wash clean
The molestation of Senators and your President
Who thinks it is acceptable to denigrate
All comers, and wax political about his fake
Hair, which is Fake News, and distract the populace
From the rape he is perpetrating on the planet,
Grabbing more than what is between the legs
His vulgarity keeps us from noticing the destruction,
Rolling back the meager protections to society
With the full support of the business community
Who don't mind brown air, and poison water
As long as it's not where they live, and it contributes
To the bottom line and shareholder profits.

America, you don't care about the violinist
Who is homeless and has five mouths to feed.
We know him because we stopped to ask
His name and give him ten dollars,
To buy some food to eat.

Relax America, you don't have to do anything.
Maybe there is hope for you, once all the shops
Have closed their doors for the evening; maybe you won't
Go online and spend all night shopping on Amazon,
Until all of your money, your dignity, and your self-respect
Are gone; because you bought way more than
Was necessary, or could even afford.

Be happy
America, the violins were not real; they just played
Over the Holiday Season to increase retail sales.

Rejoice America! You're not dead yet. It was not
The world's smallest violin. It was not even real.
So, shout it from the rooftops, America—
We're not dead yet!

The violins were recorded,
A reflection of our past, all we have to do is find
Someone who can still remember
How to play like that;

And that's assuming
Anyone ever learned how in the first place;
Well, obviously that one guy did, and I heard
Him live, but now his playback haunts the mall.

But you can't turn it off. You can't stop it.
You wouldn't want to lose something as beautiful
And special as that, America. You can still walk out
Of the store without buying anything.
Haven't you paid enough America?
Haven't you bought enough America?
How much longer will you let debt cover
This nation like thick snow, America?
We need more Edward Snowden's, America.
Your borders are showing, America.
America, you are tattered and worn,
On a walk of shame the morning after
Hooking up with a megalomaniac

With orange hair, who never sounded right
Even though he swore he followed Jesus,
But then he couldn't fit his jumbo-jet
Through the eye of the needle, so he was
Sent south of the gates of heaven with a sticker
On his forehead that said, RETURN TO SENDER.
Below it was his phone number, and the strangest
Tattooed Barcode on the back of his neck
Just below the shirt line, so you couldn't tell
He was bought and paid for when you hooked up
With him, America.

It's not ok to grab, "THEM,"
Anymore Mr. President, so you better watch your hands
While you're in that office that records everything.
America is watching you make a fool of yourself,
Crying outside her apartment, upset she ever
Stepped foot in your penthouse of disgrace.
Wondering if it was her fault that you
Went so far past what is appropriate or acceptable
And if she should even tell anyone;
Wondering if anyone will ever believe her
Until she realizes there are hundreds of others
And eventually the wave of truth dethrones
The most powerful of abusers and money men.
You're next Mr. President. America will have
Violins to replace the violence of your speech.
Music to supplant your downward spiral of defeat.

The wind and rain beats the flags that fly outside
All night at the Capitol building, America.
There is no respect for the spirit of revolution
Building in the youth and the enlightened, America.
America, you should be ashamed to destroy
The planet in the name of corporate profits;
But instead you shop for the holidays, and make
Light of suffering around the world, by ignoring
Your part in it; for that, you should be ashamed
Of yourself, America.

America, that was a real man playing the violin
And you couldn't afford to stop, to roll
Your window down to give him a little
Change. We gave him ten minutes to live
Without regret, and he opened the flood gates;
Now the whole street is wet with tears of joy

As Angels rejoice for what's been shared.
Do you hear the violin America? Listen

To it's long slow whine, and the jump of the staccato
Reinventing the idea of melody.
America, you are ready to hear the music.
Face the danger of introspection, America.
It's time to put your shoulder to the wheel
Whether you're queer or not, America.

I don't care what you are, or who you are,
If you bleed and you hurt, I bleed and I hurt
With you, and I want to make you feel better
When you wake up in the morning, America.
I want to help you cope with your anxiety,
America; so, are you ready to stop fighting?
To make a new world, are you willing
To become more than a self-obsessed whore,
America?

America, they are throwing ticker tape parades
On Wall Street in honor of the President
While he plays another round of golf
On his Florida estate, he uses to entertain
Dignitaries and foreign diplomats
Against the constitution of the United States.

America, thank you for remembering
To treat everyone with kindness, fairness,
Respect, and love; despite the color of their skin,
Sexual orientation, ethnic background, or religious beliefs.
That's why we love you America.
No matter what this Presidential freak speaks,
Or seems to think, about his racist advisors' beliefs;
We just say thank you for making it that easy
To see what is wrong and what is right.
Thanks for the skinheads and the alt-right, America;
Now, what are we supposed to do with them?

Maybe their hate won't turn into Violins.
If it does, I'm sure we can make music out of them.

Transformation

Gravity, did you know
That I would be
Awake on the other side
Of the world while the moon
Was first crescent over
Russia and China?

But it's white, not yellow or red;
Already lying in bed—
Loved this movie when I was a kid
Called *Better off Dead*.
They said the universal
Language was love.

I don't disagree.

Maybe we just need
Love translated
Into every language.

What does faith
Sound like?

A coin
Dropped down
A well,
Then splash.