

Wesleyan University



The Honors College

2148

NEW POEMS 1975

by

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This book is dedicated to

DEBORAH

PREFACE

With few exceptions, these poems are new, written within the past few months. With the exceptions noted below, they have not been previously published or submitted for credit.

Six of the stanzas from "Poem for an Audience of One" were composed for Mr. Wilbur's Verse Writing Class. "Villanelle: Work" was written for an exercised assigned in that class; I include it because of the felicity of the woodblock illustration I found for it in the print studio, and combined with the poem. The villanelle will appear in this year's Adlit.

"South Jersey Roads: Map & a Haiku" appeared in the Vineland (N.J.) Times-Journal in March, in Mark Soifer's poetry column.

"Down College Street Because" appeared in the 1975 Wesleyan Student Poets booklet.

"Stealing from the Abandoned Daffodil Field" is the property of Cindy Ulman, who gave in exchange for it one daffodil, honestly acquired.

I have given a few notes to allusions in the poems at the end of the collection. I will not attempt to explain "Poem for an Audience of One". This poem was to have been the major part of this thesis, but it is an unwieldy and probably unfinishable poem. The stanzas, except for the last

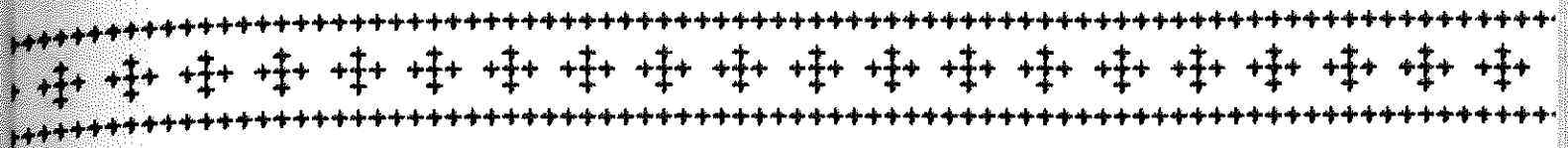
four, are separate pieces, linked by little more than the peculiar stanza form, a generalized love-complaint, and a concern for the continuation of the poem. The poem attempts a theory of poetry, which it so obviously defies on its own face, that I cannot defend it.

I would like to thank everyone who has helped me with this project, especially Jon Barlow and Richard Wilbur. Tom Wheeler has taken time from his own theses to praise a few of these poems, and to read them over the phone to his aunt in California, who was also kind to them. Everyone I know, in fact, has had to stand still and read whatever I pushed in front of them, and almost everyone has been patient and encouraging.

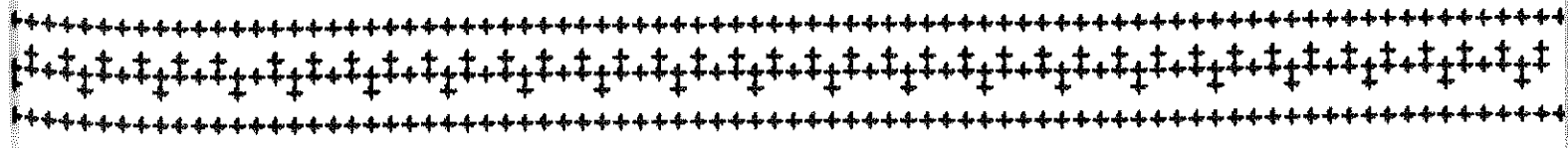
David Weinstein
April 9, 1975
Middletown

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THE POEMS



Now if a thousand perfect men were to appear
it would not amaze me.

Now if a thousand beautiful forms of women
appear'd it would not astonish me.

Now I see the secret of the making
of the best persons...

--Walt Whitman

"Song of the Open Road."

ADDRESS TO THE TWO THOUSAND

When has there ever been a day like this one?

Who has ever resembled you?

Who has ever been so perfect, perfect, perfect?

Not since the first pair
ate pure fact,
fuckt in the garden
& found it fair,
picked leaves and laced them,
stood against the storm,
& left beneath a cloud
that us still shades,

has anyone been so well-fed,
or so contented,
so well-dressed
or so happily banished from home
and easy in the dark
as you, TWO THOUSAND,
you, my brothers and sisters,
you thousands called up by the word 'perfection,'
you clearly superior fraction,
you nation sprung from the purest fiction,
you ten times ten times twenty gorgeous people!
You almost, almost amaze me.

Now if a thousand horrible sinful cripples
were to stagger out in front of me,
it would not spoil this day,

Now if a thousand overripe hags
dropped at my feet like apples,
I would not change my path.

for now I see the secret
of the making of the best persons.

The past is a foreign country:
they do things differently there. --L.P. Hartley

American visitors to the past
are advised to observe the laws
of that country

Thousands of Americans
have been imprisoned in recent memory
for trivial offenses

The Secretary of State cannot
at the present time
arrange your extradition

Several members of his own family
are trapped in the past
and he is powerless to help them.

The people of the past
are friendly, hospitable, and helpful.
Tell them your name

And who your parents were.
You will often find they know them
and can show you where they live.

If you are engaged in research
explain it to them, and they may
take you home to tea

Something they say might help you
and at least there will be
delicious things to eat.

Although there is little chance
of retrieving possessions
from so far away

always keep a checklist.

Whatever you lose you will want
to know what it was.

The water is perfectly safe
The wines are excellent and cheap
but they travel badly

and duties are prohibitive.

You must resist the temptation
to fill your cellar.

But have you considered
our exciting tours to the future?
Everyone's going there

the prevailing currents
make it much easier to visit
than the past.

Although the wine is not so cheap
it is much older.
And the people are hospitable

you may tell them the names
of your children
or look for them yourself.

DAWN SONG #2

As if he were our child
wanting breakfast or a hug
As if he doesn't know that we
too stoned last night
for anything but laughter
have plans for our morning bed
As if indeed he claims us as his own
and wants to hold us in his cheeks

the squirrel of dawn
is scratching at the window

DAWN SONG #5

We beat the drum
We stamped the frozen hill
beat the living daylight

We all beat up the sun
an egg yellow as breakfast
and every morning since

I have seen it rise:
over the mountains
in my east window

or over the bed
on my west wall
however sleep leaves me.

DAWN SONG #6

My lady dances in the bed of night
and leaves on the schoolbus dawn.

DOWN COLLEGE STREET BECAUSE

I have a hunch and am usually right
in such matters, that if anyone
will be awake and looking for company
at this hour it will be Tony the Printer
(I am always greeting friends
just unexpectedly home from Europe
at their doorsteps wearing the Alsatian hats
they didn't dare while they were there)
Well he wasn't there, my hunch was
a typographical error, nothing works in Middletown.
(He was there the next day with his brother
who looks like him exactly)
So I walked down Main Street
which has daylights all night
and south to the Senior Citizen Sculpture Park
where I sat on the wood, with elbows on concrete
and contemplated the Senior Citizen Sculpture
until I discovered its meaning.

It had always seemed to me before
to be an uncompleted trestle bridge:
three grey towers with nothing sitting
on their flatcut tops. But now I saw
them as a group of human figures:
one with a circlet cut in his flatside head
taller and resolute facing the north
and two a pace behind, turned in,
tributary, following in step, with no
outlets to the sky bored into their heads.

I knew the proverb represented:

In the country of the blind

The one-eyed man is king.

I rose and walked quickly down Church Street.
the flagstones waved in the breeze of grassroots
they flapped in the gusts of treeroots
they cracked in the gale of hammer blows
and froze like me in the act of coming to see
if you had returned to your tower.

FALLING ASLEEP, I DREAM ALL MORNING

My morning dream is god-brilliant,
colorful as oil-slick.

I dream about what happened
yesterday in the print studio.

Someone was cutting out putti
he was using a putti knife
and Sara was deciding how to color her
how to color her lithograph

with a handful of crayons
cupped to her belly
like a wing-broken bird
she had found in the grass

and I was standing there being
very helpful with my mouth closed
when someone, like the cat
who broke the bird, said

"Don't listen to him,
He only knows about words,
not colors," and went on
twirling his knife.

I drooped like a peach crayola
in the sun, and left the room.
But in the dream I return
to find Sara alone.

We stand at a stone palette
 thousand-flowered with pigment
and she shows me the colors
 of everything, what goes with what.

At first I learn quickly,
 forgetting my black and white words
simple as skunks, as penguins.

 But I avoid the brightness:

I mix a river-mud blue.

 I explain I have a scarf
that color, I want to paint
 the backs of Chinnen's turtles

the color of the bottom.

She laughs and shows me
red, yellow, lilac, bud-green,
chalk blue. But I wander

I fill my brush and touch her
breast with vein-blue,
I paint deep rivers of blood
beneath her skin

and she laughs, laughs
until I awaken, warm and
completely instructed in colors
this good blue Friday.

FINDING JAPAN

In Pennsylvania; haiku

How lucky of me
to find the bamboo here
where it always grows.

Across Lawn Avenue; limerick

Amazing what my eye never sees.
Across the street, those ten tall trees
that long asymmetrical line
of old five-needled pine
is suddenly so plainly Japanese.

IN OUR TRIBE

When a girl is to be married
the night before the day
she goes to her last boyfriend
in the hut of his family
and makes him love.

This we call

'warming the village.'

If he were to refuse her
(though it has never happened)
for the sake of the groom
who might be murdered
the marriage would be cancelled.

That we would call

'breaking the knife.'

Once a love poem was not a sweater
you knit for someone you already knew
how long his arms around you.

Once a love poem came to a stranger
shy and anonymous secret to tell her
how dark her hair on her shoulder.

PROCESS

Here come the elephants
tied in chains like paperclips

Here comes Silver Longjohns
the wooden-legged centipede

Here comes the dancing bear
famed on seven continents

Here comes the fighting fish
famed in seven seas

Here comes the bearded lady
followed by the beaded man

Here comes the mustached monkey
carrying a paper fan

~~Here comes a tightrope~~
Here comes a tightrope walker
flying from the horses' reins

Here comes a kite-string walker
climbing on the horses' manes

Here comes the music muse
the organist Calliope

Here comes the fortune god
the tattooed man Celebrity

His chest is the shield of Achilles
with its cities of dancing and battle
its fields of plowing and harvest
its pastures of lions and cattle
its circus of golden-foot tumblers
who merry-go-spin like a petter's wheel
and jump and dance and whirl
on their barefooted toes and heel--

There go the elephants
strung in line like railroad cars

There go the fighting fish
swimming round in pickle jars

There goes the organ grinder
pump grind pump

There goes the centipede:
ninety-nine, thump.

There goes the fortune god
turns his back on everyone

There goes the circus process
vanished like the setting sun.

SARA

Your Voice

Where is your voice
when it disappears
in the middle of a sentence?

Does it visit Puerto Rico
or the middle of your mind,
or another showered island?

Your Eyes

When I tease you
your right eye narrows down
and I will say anything

to open it wide,
awake as the other one,
brown as coffee.

Your Likeness

A twin, you tell me--
there is another one
identical to you.

I am agreeable
to Nature's redundancy
and so am I.

Your Body

Who would not want
to carry you for miles
carry you all night?

You are light, light,
we carry you like torches,
we too are all the same.

SOUTH JERSEY ROADS: MAP & A HAIKU

The roads all look the same
fences fields and trees.
The crossroads all come square
the stopsigns come hexagon.
And just past every intersection
in the shoulder sand
is the place for turning back
when you notice that you have to.

The cars spin around
leaves on the water
behind my paddle

STEALING FROM THE ABANDONED DAFFODIL FIELD

(fall)

They are twinned, tripled,
cloved like a garlic.
We steal them with shovels.

They seethe in our buckets,
froth with flaking skin
and their dry brown hair.

(spring)

They have gotten out of line.
They riot like yellow soldiers
retreating from Da Nang.

We steal them with scissors
we throw them in boxes
and quickly leave the field.

This is not the archery of thought
in which the tongue is a double-curving bow
the word arrows from the quivering mind
and the target circles on a bale of hay.

This is not a falconry at kite
or at herons vomiting fish in fear
of the double-spiral genius of the hawks.
This is not talent, hawking itself

this is not the chivalry of chess,
of skillfully contrived unequal war,
advantage played to disadvantaged court:
this is not a sport.

To leave - no harder than
snapping this page straight out
of forty wire coils



VILLANELLE: WORK
for DJL

When I get out from under all this work
if autumn air has saved itself for me
you and I will go walking in the dark.
These odd-dozen jobs are not too hard or stark.
I think the pile will blow away to sea
when I get out from under...
All this work
pretends value. In six tongues we learn to cark,
that, when poems are found in any country
you and I will go.

Walking in the dark--
last time we took the time it left a mark
on us and gave back weeks of loving free.
When I get out from under all this...
Work!
says part of me, in a voice about to crack,
or if it does not, something, maybe
you and I, will.

Go walking in the dark,
love commands at last, and make no more
cramped excuses. Now and tonight, and not
when I get out from under all this work,
you and I will go walking in the dark.

You much-loved gypsy
you are
you are
you are everything;
Men will love you like horses
will beat you and bruises
will gleam on the skin
that already fights to contain you--
But you must think I'm crazy
The love poems fly so careless
from me to your door
to your windshield like tickets.
What must you think of me?
What can you do with me,
blazing at night?
No virgins attend me.
I will never die in my sleep.
I will never be ash in your bed.
You will never need to strain
to hear my heart.

You will be issued

a key.

POEM FOR AN AUDIENCE OF ONE

Yo marry, marry while the chance
bubbles up like champagne out of France
Put on embroidered shirts from Mexico

Yo Hymen Hymen Yo

Yo Hymen Hymenee

Yo Hymen Hymen A B C, sing beginnings,
claim the wedding holiday;

or give me my innings.

won't you fill your virgin rollaway with me?

A thousand girls, while you retained your rights,
sold theirs down the river for a mess of joy.
"My eldest, let me feel your chest,"
said the patriarch; not to disappoint,
she showed his hand her rug of pubic fuzz.
--I asked your age, not who should be anoint.
You answered with, how many times your joint
had gone around. You somehow missed the point.

"Tear. Be terse. Violence becomes the young.

How discursive are the old: talk! talk!"

--Your slated breasts beneath the moon are chalk.

I beg your bony pardon, Miss Concision.

Cut not to their living marrow, ancient

truths and lies and rumors. Abstractors are legion,

but history is running joy and lesions

and long winded sorrow; not elision.

"Lay your own lines," she said to me
not in her voice, but in the way she sat.
"Everyone packs his own parachute. That,
like the jump, is never delegated.
When air upbraids your silk,
gravity unbraids your ball of string
and gaited slow in mile-boots you swing
you'll need no further reason for the thing."

Blended notes and letters, minced many words,
and took them out on you. Did I wrong
you in all this? Do you so silent long
to say some something for yourself? Permit
me to goad you: Answer me back! The elf
who makes the slippers wonders if they fit
(or hopes they pinch, I elfishly admit.)
I'd like to make you cry before I quit.

Least and last of four I lost that day
I went through hell to write this poem for you,
puzzled hell across the puddle blue:
Hell where the articulate are gagged
and pain is bagged like humus for your garden;
 Again I beg your pardon, I am stiff.
I went to hell in a two-penny skiff
to snatch and bring you back this perfect riff.

In the hodgepodge book, with sever
with several heads, like a master
patting a course of dogs, with vaster
intentions than one can imagine, with sing
with singular love, my teacher has ordered
an end to this still-sitting year's delay
and start of long-playing hard singing day:
Help me goddess now unfold my lay.

The dead line up. The hero stands his ground.
Stories tell the dead. They speak in turn,
not knowing who assigns them turn. Around
their mouths, like chiggers on a fern,
the stories leap and settle, layer and mound
like batshit in the cave at Monterrey.
They talk until there's nothing left to say.
The dead are done. The hero turns away.

Who has seen you since? A fool, who gasped at me

"She has a blackboard in her room at Yale,

She thinks right on it.

Equations and poems. Heavy things

I did not understand."

The nightingale

floors in bamboo temples squeak at guests.

Your sounding boards are your lovers. Requests

the fool, blue as litmus: Aren't there any kinder tests?

Winter solstice: words that frighten one.
Night stands so far from morning,
night is longer than the sleep that we lay into it,
the love we shout like secrets into holes
dug in riverbanks; nothing fills its space
not shortest day, as confident as seeds,
not you, not I, nor any work that breeds---
 goats' ears
 goats' ears
 sing the confident reeds.

I sat one spring before a coffee cup.

I thought that I could never fill it up.

Come walk with me along the matter-dikes
and help remove the sticky fingered tykes:

Let no man dare to stanch an overflow.

"Matter grows under our hands; let no
man say, Come, I'll write a duodecimo."

like love, beneath our notice, let it grow.

I'm back in my block of ice again, I'm cold,
I can't remember why I go to parties,
I'm low, low, low in my twenties
(My teens were better. I miss my nothings.)
It's called a depression, it lasts forever.
I've never had such a lengthy session,
I'm cold as any Russian,
I'm cold as any Leningrader,

eating his ration of endlessly less and less bread--
I know about hunger. They tell us each time
we sit down, excepting only our caviar meals,
that the millions of Leningrad dead
had hunger for their special province,
death as a tree-filled cooperative park,
and never chopped a single tree for bark
to make soup, or fuel to warm the dark,

as their stomachs turned to paper bags
which they careless pasted shut by eating flour.

Why couldn't they, so patient, wait the hour
to bake bread, so lovely, black and sour
that made me fat in Leningrad?
What was it gobbled them dead, punched them
into long low numbered grassy loaves,
and laid them to bake in cold August?

I'm back in my paper bag again, I'm sold,
I am gross, am gross, I am groceries,
I am nowhere growing fast,
but getting here was only half the fun.

I'm back in the siege of Leningrad, my Here,
my Hero-City, lit by the August sun,
I'm back in the iron barricade and snow,
I hear the distant sleds, the lonely run.

NOTES

NOTES

ADDRESS TO THE TWO THOUSAND is a poem for Wesleyan.
L.P. Hartley wrote The Go-Between where my epigraph
appears.

DOWN COLLEGE STREET BECAUSE at the time Tony the Printer
had not moved to Washington Street.

FALLING ASLEEP, ETC. Someone is David Schorr, putti are
the fat little cupids he draws, etches, lithographs,
and silk-screens. Sara is Sara Pasti. Chinnen is Onishi
Chinnen (1792-1851), a Japanese painter.

IN OUR TRIBE involves an African custom I found somewhere.
The poem has only one merit: it makes "make love" a
transitive verb, which English has always needed.

SARA is Sara Barañano.

VILLANELLE. The many kind people who have told me that
I have used cark incorrectly are wrong. Those who claim
to have consulted O.E.D. in this connection did not
read far enough, or are lying.

WINTER SOLSTICE concerns King Midas' barber and his
terrible secret: The King has goats' ears! He told
the hole, and the reeds told the world.

I SAT ONE SPRING: The quote is from Sterne, Tristram
Shandy.

EATING HIS RATIONS, etc. In Piskarevskoe Cemetery in Leningrad are the mass graves of the victims of the 900-day siege of Leningrad.

I'M BACK IN MY PAPER BAG, etc. "The distant sleds, the lonely run." is a translation of a line by Afanasy Fyut: sanyei dalyokikh, odinokoi byek.

THE



END