

Collected Poems

David Borodin

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NOTE: See pp. 3-9 for the Table of Contents and pp. 495-544 for notes on the author and the work (including original presentation inscriptions and a collation).

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(*See colophon, p. 544, for a note on dates of composition & publication of the individual poems.)

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I. One Hundred and Thirty-Three Sonnets

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art)

[**Note:** see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Mühlfeld's Clarinet

Another year wanes slowly toward cold sleep.
The leaves turn, tinged in sunset-toned regret
For all that youth's hale summer failed to reap
(And all life might have been now in its stead).
Sometimes a certain quality of sound,
A tint or shape perceived in such a light,
Can wake from resignation's bed profound
New savor of old loss, a heightened sight;
As if the brilliant green of things possessed
Were seen now in the subtler liquid hues
Which memory's soft lens makes manifest:
The amber of experience, suffused
With wisdom's warmth, like that distilled by earth
From tears the forests shed towards their rebirth.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Why We'll Always Need Schubert

Because we're here too fleetingly on this
Rare habitable speck amidst vast death
To feel the wonder of life's blessed kiss
Without the terror of its final breath;
Because contentment's tranquil surface is
So vulnerable to rupture by the chance
Uncovering of some remembered bliss
That stings us with its absence as we dance,
Possession of this world is savored more
While sung transposed into the key of loss,
In which it is our *longing* we explore,
Not some success that measures effort's costs.
So long as bitter tastes are found with sweet,
Life's deepest lived where joys and heartbreaks *meet*.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Poems without Words

How can vibrations coaxed from tightened strings
Against a ground where others have occurred
Engender such intense effect as brings
My body to these heights without a word?
The narrative unfolded here in sound
Collaboration of the unexplained
Expands my hold on life's dynamics found
In *feeling*, prior to facts ascertained.
A phrase shaped like a promise now is bent
To disappointment till resolved in bright
Concordance with compassion's warmth and sent
Relentlessly cascading toward delight.
And in the nuance of this wordless state
We read the subtlest values we create.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Chamber Music

I overheard a conversation deep
Amid some strings that left me changed: a phrase
Confessed by one whose secret wouldn't keep
Was answered in the empathy that plays
By heart unspoken things until a third,
Enticed by intimacy's trust, proposed
In rising confidence a theme inferred
From what they'd both avoided. This enclosed
The group in warm accord against some dark
Catastrophe sensed gathering near, which soon
This fourth had sweetened into love's bright arc
To soar, sustained, above what fear had strewn.
And once these passions shared had ebbed till spent,
I rose in tears, more tuned to life's event.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Six Quartets

I found him while examining my life
One day (the day that God had died and I
Became a man). His song unveiled, like knife
On nerve, the surging pulse that drives a fly,
Turns stone to sand – those sounds earth's process makes.
He sang the music in each germ that swarms
In its economy with chance and wakes
To life in rhythms of evolving forms.
While on his walls, where others hang their saints,
Gleamed relics of his walks to find those odd
Old sounds that further spurred him break restraints
And recreate our world without a God.
His art reveals vast mysteries that lurk
Within each grain of nature's gorgeous work.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Mit Innigster Empfindung

The pain recedes, and in its place ascends
A slow, unearthly feeling of release.
It gathers new-found strength from those frayed ends
Where suffering dissolves into clear peace.
And now, from out this deep, protracted night,
Vitality bursts forth within a trill
As buoyant as a sudden urge toward flight
Into the vibrant skies of healing's thrill.
And what remains is bright-lit hope, serene
As that celestial light that breaks the cloud
With slanting shafts of revelation, keen
As organ pipes proclaiming thanks aloud,
Transcending the despair of anguished days
In an apotheosis of high praise.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Written Just for Us

Sometimes we live within a work of art
So deeply that it's ours. Its secrets hold
Our own so knowingly we feel a part
Of what's revealed beneath the story told.
This happened long ago when one whose love
Was uncontainable sat down and wrote
It out: desire's map, from anguish of
Pure self into love's rapture, note by note.
And then we came and found what he had left
Us both: the sound of our own desperation
For each other's touch; the warp and weft
Of want, with which to weave love's exaltation.
Now, we hear the yearning in these lines
And know it's *our* embrace their search defines.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

An Exquisite Sadness

At times, the deepest love can taste like grief,
As when our happy hold on what we prize
The most seems lost to our worst fear's belief
That it won't last, and we rehearse goodbyes.
It is that haunting sense where beauty stings
Us with the dread of evanescence, keen
To what is missing in that vowel she sings
Relentlessly in search of hope unseen.
And as we listen to this wordless text
That reads like our empathic need to feel
Each other's pain, we savor the complex
Convergence of emotion that's revealed.
For here, distilled from *all* the heart's affairs,
A yearning aches to suffer love's great cares.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Borodin in Love

The chemistry between two beings bound
By love's exhilarations can be heard
In these complexities of nuanced sound
That interact with feelings beyond words:
As if the laboratory of the heart,
In which we test affinities we crave,
Reveals its best-kept secrets through the art
Of organizing pitches upon staves,
Inviting us to gauge that appetite
A body suffers for connection deep
Within another's yearning and delight
Upon those pleasures found within its sweep.
And in these fluid properties explored
We find our *own* bond strengthened in accord.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Barcarolle

We wake to opalescent mornings high
Above the water's scintillating span
And feel within its gentle pulse the ply
Of time unweaving rock to windblown sand.
From out this measured current we can hear
The primal urge towards boundlessness take flight
And soar, transcendent of the wide blue sphere
Where rainbows merge, dissolving back to light.
And as the evening gathers up this day
In slowly deepening shadows, we above
Who watch these fluid processes at play
Can see in earth's affinities *our* love.
For, like resolve that's sought through ebb and flow,
We find our concord *sharing* this day's glow.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Solitude

Alone amid the universe of my
Experience (the only one I'll know),
I search these four bare open strings to pry
Out truths too personal for public show.
Like nerves stretched tight across my life, they throb
Full resonant with what I've lived and plumb
Those introspective depths in which a sob
Is valued more than comforts coined to numb.
This deep soliloquy I hear arise
From out the wilderness of self, explores
The authenticity in which art cries
Our meanings out of what the heart endures.
I am what happens on these strings: the feel
Of life's each sting a beauty to reveal.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

*Lines Composed After Revisiting
The Diabelli Variations*

He heard rare worlds potential in the void —
The charged, expectant space between two tones —
Like that in which two anxious words employed
Against a silence can ignite what hones
(Within their potent union from the rest)
Such truths as spark a poem into life.
The miracle of reason into flesh,
And then to bread, reveals an act so rife
With mystery, it might have been achieved
Via art this high, where the primordial urge
In which the planets turn is found conceived
In smallest seeds, like worlds begot by words.
We witness through these strains a patch of sod
Teem lush from out the logic some call “God.”

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Ruminations in C Major
On the Sublimity of Nature
(In One Movement)

A pulse upon the perfect membrane of
Non-happening, and suddenly the dark
Is rent by faint reflected glow above
Earth's edge: a sky predicted in a spark.
Emerging from the depths, the fiery source
Of all desire ascends in slow, sure blaze
Of majesty, inspiring life to course
Within its warmth and gather in its praise.
Cold sleep gives way to rivulets of flow
That yearn towards coalescence in the vast
Crescendo of life's flowering while low
Beneath is pressed its dead into the past
In strata resonant with that first urge
That broke the void and bore, sustained, this surge.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Art of Saying Farewell

I dreamed that when I died, I found it good...
Until, that is, a memory intervened
To show me what I'd left behind, what could
Not be again without this veil between.
And then the cataclysm came — it broke
Upon my bliss like lightning breaks the night —
The horror of being free now from that yoke
Which proved sole instrument of all delight.
With absent arms I senselessly reached out
To grasp at what I'd lived, to save some part
From fading on the nerve, like faith to doubt,
And each thing held struck rapture in my heart:
After a life dreamt yearning to transcend
This world, I wake now clinging at its end.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Concerto for Composer

Take any random intervals on hand
And treat their newfound kinship as a theme
Predicting, through meticulous command,
A drama as emotive as a dream.
For here, upon a wordless, makeshift stage,
An opera of great tragicomic sweep
Unfolds, revealing off its chiseled page
Precision so intense one can't help weep
Vicarious with joy at all the force
Imagination wields from out the whole
Of its confinement. *This* then is the source
Of all great art: that rigorous control
Of formal means that sets invention free:
The *discipline* of spontaneity.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Count Almoviva's Armchair

In this great chair the master sat atop
His world (before it fell) and let his will
Grow hungry for his privilege. No mere prop
Could hold so much real life, nor hide such ill.
For here he hid from his own marriage bed
While she, whom he'd so craved when she was young,
Was left to eat her meals alone. (Instead
Of passionate they came to be high strung.)
Yet in his absence, love would come and perch
Here, warbling raptures soaring over sin,
Till he returned to find each fear he'd searched
For, one by one: behind, beside, within.
It seemed some desert tree in sudden bloom,
Sustaining all man's love life in one room.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Don's Eternal Appetite

Discord breaks upon the curtained calm.
This is the sound a culture makes when torn,
When its worst appetite roams free upon
Its reason till the fabric is outworn.
We hear desire riding hard across
The shimmering innocence of quickened trust,
Which soon is plucked and tasted for the sauce
Served up by vengeance in its own hot lust.
Yet, all the while that knock of conscience pounds,
Ignored, beneath the haunting ravishments
Of art – the lush, intoxicating sounds –
And in these poignant strains our selves are sensed.
It is our *hunger* Mozart heard so well:
Our greed for life's exuberance, our hell.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Dark Side of Success

The saddest story ever told is not
The one where youth succumbs to early death
But that in which we live to find we *got*
The thing we chased so hard with captured breath—
Yes, *won* that which we hadn't wanted, save
As useless proof it could, if wished, be ours—
And all for nothing but a wager braved
By pride, which hails love's wounds like battle scars.
For, knowledge dark as this is bought with fear
That never will return to pay the cost,
While all those gorgeous harmonies we hear
Belie harsh truths of innocence long lost.
And when the curtain plummets down at last,
Our lovers brace themselves for love that's passed.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Maestro di color che amano

You left this earth in a fiery blaze of fame,
The greatest farmer Italy ever knew.
Now we, rich heirs of your bold harvest, blame
You for the lengths you'd gone toward the rave review:
For the hokey heart-string tricks and big-tent thrills,
The potpourri with a pinch of God thrown in.
O Maestro, forgive us! Your art instills
This score with that transcendent sense no sin
Of bourgeois taste can taint: a prodigious zest
Of life gleaned bursting ripe in brassy glare...
Yet rotten to the core when ills infest
The strings with yearnings dark, intense as prayer.
O grand old man, you're just too big for this!
What use are words to trace the Moor's last kiss?

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Incomparable Amy

Inspired by the Consummate Artistry

Of Amy Beach (American, 1867-1944)

Oh Amy, you're what happens when the heat
Of talent is constrained to fit a norm:
It rises, irrepressible, to feed
An incandescent mastery of form.
No matter that you'd taught *yourself* the way,
At home, so far from where men went to learn
From men. Those scores you memorized conveyed
The nuanced craft that helped your music burn.
With vast control, you let your fire singe
Our sense of expectation, till we steal
An awkward glance at all the curls and fringe
Tradition kept to hide your spunk and zeal.
But you prevailed, as even *men* will now admit.
Yes, all it took was white-hot genius, and some grit.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Breathing New Life into Old Forms

As time removes us from the circumstance
In which a work of art was made, we soon
Forget to measure in it some “advance”
On practices from which it had been hewn.
Those strengths the work reveals—out past that date
Historians will strive to tie it to—
Become, deep down, the only means its weight
Within our life can ever be gauged true.
Convention wields scant value on its own
Beyond the dialogue it leaves behind,
Where fresh perspectives added to the known
Imbue established forms with what *they* find...
Until this interplay of voices, old
And new, itself, becomes the long-extolled.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

How to Make a Masterpiece

Take any work of art and get it known.
To rouse your public's hunger for it, find
In it the savored "spiritual" tone
That's palatable to the deepest mind.
Because it's art, you can't be "wrong," per se;
Just early – yes, prophetic of a more
Enlightened time in which to best betray
Such truths we aren't quite yet ready for.
But since this all depends, at last, on TASTE,
Which is a thing that can't be trained outside
Of some tradition, what's called "good" is based
On what your famous critics will decide.
And *this* turns less upon an expert's hunch
Than on the likelihood he'd had his lunch.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

How to Recognize a Masterpiece

The romance of the “masterpiece” prefers
That it’s conceived against adversity,
Or else by him on whom the connoisseurs,
By *some* such means, are able to agree.
But have some woman, who’s kept out beyond
This clique, attempt a thing that *men* had made
So well, admission to this pantheon
Can prove...complex...or, at the least, delayed.
So, when some Yankee housewife comes and writes
The greatest violin sonata writ,
One winces to explain, by one’s best lights,
Why such is so unlikely to admit.
For, after all, a “magnum opus” is
A thing an artist’s culture sees as...*his*.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

A Late Self-Portrait of the Artist

He stands before the world he makes in paint
And fixes his uncompromising eye
Upon the truth some lesser brush might feint
In serving up some lesser art its lie.
Just as the poet might take words benign
And, by arrangement, hear them turn corrupt,
The painter can watch pigments redefine
The values of that world *they'd* draw up.
This man, on whom no glint of light or love
Was ever lost, confronts his self (and ours
Whom he has taught to see) in shadow of
That arc of his career lost in full powers.
Yes, there are things the highest art can't fake:
Like love and, oh, the simple look of heartbreak.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Woman in Blue

Against the backdrop of a realm ideal,
Where distances are conquered at a glance
And suffering's never seen, she stands – so real,
Perhaps because so vulnerable to chance:
A piece of paper came, and he had gone;
Another now appears to tell of things
Fate charted for him since, and she feels drawn
Behind this nib, which probes hope's nerve and stings.
And yet a radiance like expectation
Heralds something sacred here; amidst
This halo, shadowless, she reads elation
In a word and glows, in light transfixed.
Had Gabriel come himself to bring this news,
She wouldn't've been conceived in holier hues.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Sculpture at an Exhibition

We walked into a little room and felt.
This simple yet profound event, above
All else, seemed *us* – the way two people dwelt
In one another's truth as well as love.
To enter here together is to share
The artist's grace – that range of heart where pain
Is evidence of life, for which we *care*,
Not shun – that taste for where we're most humane.
The sculptor left *her* care upon the wall,
Envisioned into cold dark bronze from out
The loss she'd heard beneath a trumpet's call –
And we, before it, lived the more devout.
For, here we found life's sacred state most real:
To learn *another's* truth, and through it, *feel*.

I. Sonnets, group A (on music and visual art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Preface to the Poems
Composed at the Orchid Pavilion

The most accomplished writer on this earth,
His characters were drawn with such intense
Vitality they might have given birth
To their progenitors. Such was the sense
We had who watched him, poised with brush in hand
Above blank paper, waiting to begin.
Posterity would come to understand
How it was but from this deft brush the wind
Itself would take its form, as too the necks
Of geese, the roots of trees, and insect wings —
The whole of nature's rhythms he selects
To wake from latency as living things.
This genesis we witnessed was that start
When handwriting became the highest art.

I. Sonnets, group B (on literary art)

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The World Savored in Words

Each time I bite into a word, I feel
My appetite for life expand to meet
The physicality of thought made real,
The flesh of utterance conceived complete.
I read upon my lips, teeth, palate, tongue,
A revelation of community:
Our urge to save what we have felt, thought, done
From time's digestion through shared memory.
For, what I taste within this bitten fruit –
The knowledge of some thing remote unbound
Into immediacy – proves but the root
Through which our world is traced in nuanced sound,
As if between a plosive and a trill
A paradise were found or lost to ill.

I. Sonnets, group B (on literary art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

A Poem Defined

A poem is a world made from words –
A cosmos formed of connotative sounds
So patterned that its music-making herds
Its meanings out past denotation's bounds
Into that heightened meadow of the mind
Where wonder grazes upon reason's green,
Digesting each inferred event (combined
With remnants and emotions sight unseen)
Within the protean chyme of memory
To be transformed as meaning something more:
That complex distillate of sensory
Experience and thought in metaphor
Exploring how life feels upon the heart –
A world of language heightened into art.

I. Sonnets, group B (on literary art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Making Poems in the Sun

When you and I conspire at times to doze
From out the wintry gray of northern skies
And wake into the bright warm life we chose
Of sun-drenched ease beyond our clients' cries,
I thrill to find those poems I'd long lost.
These creatures of my feelings, though, had not
As yet been born, of course; for they would cost
Much careful labor too. But here I'd spot
Upon the beach of our remembered peace
A shard of some forgotten past – and know
It as my own. And as my world decreased
Around this glinting form, I'd watch it grow
Important, till it would, by slow degree,
Exceed the weight of the surrounding sea.

I. Sonnets, group B (on literary art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Why I Walk My Poetry

Whenever my good muse commands, “Go walk
Your poetry,” I tend to acquiesce,
As she knows *exercise*, and not mere talk,
Best limbers feet made clumsy by their stress.
I take some line encumbered by its rhyme
(Such that it seems confined to something short
Of what I want) and walk with it a time
Along some quiet beach or ruined fort —
Till, slowly, I discern a change in gait
Among its graceless feet — more limpid, say —
Enjambed now where it had but crashed its weight
Full stop and burned but earlier that day.
Some things just can’t be found upon a chair —
Like those right words, for which one needs fresh air.

I. Sonnets, group B (on literary art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Art of Reading

The rise and fall of Rome can make me nod,
Ill told, while through an artist's touch, some dope
Returning home with a bad tattoo of God
Can wake my inspiration into hope.
For what mean more to us than mere events
(Called "real" because of circumstantial proof)
Are those illuminations we can sense
Reflected in imagining their truth.
And when the writer chooses just that word,
And not another, to complete the feel
Of life examined so, the values heard
Implicit in that choice become what's real.
So, let's embrace this world but pay great heed
To art, through which life grows so rich to read.

I. Sonnets, group B (on literary art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

God and the Rednecks

You call it Grace when a man's reason breaks
And all he's left's the Lord upon his back.
Or when a woman's shot, for goodness' sake,
To save her, yes, redeem her bric-a-brac
Existence for the point-blank stare of Truth.
Can those stigmata smoking on her chest
Reveal His *love* who chooses the uncouth
And blazing ignorant to know Him best?
O Mary, look what horror you've conceived
For us in your despotic, needy God,
Intolerant of everything achieved
With open mind – that He'd have done in blood!
Yet you are right in your fierce glare of art.
Without your faith, how *can* we plumb your heart?

I. Sonnets, group B (on literary art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Pandarus Beneath the Palms

When Troilus knelt to beg Criseyde's heart
And Pandar ran to bring a cushion for
That knee, we laughed through tears how well could art
Tame words to capture life at its last pore.
All ears were fixed on what our author did
And did not dare confide about these lives,
And we learned well to heed omissions slid
So deftly in where irony best thrives.
So, when the doorbell rang and we awoke,
Confused, from Troy and recognized the smile
Heralding the *perfectly* poached yolk,
We saw how art and life turn well on style.
And when we raised our cups and buttered toast
We knew life read *and* lived was life lived most.

I. Sonnets, group B (on literary art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

*Menelaus and Helen**Darby & Joan*

Our histories record for us the dreams
And aspirations of historians
So keenly we mistake for facts their themes,
Which serve as worldview emporiums.
Conversely, enter poet, singing how
It feels to live amid some given “fact,”
Revealing themes eternal in its now
To last on lips past countless Troys well sacked.
How can we then retrieve the lived event—
A woman’s beauty, an ensuing doom—
And not mere souvenirs of what it meant
Or felt like to the ones who kept its tomb?
The truths preserved in history and art
Are products of a culture’s self-regard.

I. Sonnets, group B (on literary art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

My Spiritual Journey

I woke to find myself awake amidst
A dark wood bedroom suite in some motel
Halfway between my lust and what it fixed
Upon: a gorgeous woman, hot as hell.
I knew I wasn't sleeping anymore
Though, since this beauty I'd been kissing proved
None other than the one I heard now snoring
Soft against this shoulder I'd not moved.
And then it was the reason had occurred
To me just why conjugal intercourse
Like ours might cook still with such heat, though stirred
By reproductive instincts reinforced
Well past our procreative age: *Above*
This waste of seed prevails the boon of love.

I. Sonnets, group B (on literary art), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

*But I Really Don't Want
To Be Free*

I'm often asked about the kind of verse
I write: Just why it's formal and not "free."
And I reply that poetry sounds worse
To me tossed off like prose, unmusically.
But those who find more virtue playing past
The measured bar, like tennis sans the net,
Respond that these constraints long kept us cast
Within that boxed-in space between each fret
A fingerboard allows, hence deaf to tones
Resounding rather from our deepest "truths."
So, to see for myself, I did a quatrain ungoverned
By formal prosody in order to assess whether beauty really
Depends more on "truth" than technique, which only
Curbs creativity's spontaneousness, they say, and sounds
daft.
My verdict: Freedom sucks; I'll stick with craft.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love)

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Economics 101

In my economy, you are the gold:
You are that valued good round which is turned
The raw commodity of my most bold
Desire into satisfactions earned.
I set my currency with worldly things
To that high standard of your wisdom's range
That gleans the moral grain impatience flings
Aside in search of pleasure's pocket change.
You are reward supreme for time well spent
Appreciating what's most real and true.
And so, in practicing my best intent
I but accrue still deeper love for you.
For this there is no cost too high to pay;
I profit by your presence every day.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Taking Inventory of My Love

I itemize the world to find my way:
To clear a path for recognition's light
Throughout the tangled, seeming disarray
Of boundless matter and event in sight.
Each day I live thus, with a list of things
Conceived articulate against the blind,
Rapacious din our earthly process sings.
This way I glean what's me from all I find.
But when I try to frame my love for you –
Yes, name into significance each part
Of how I crave you – I am lost anew,
Like when we pit the brain against the heart.
For, love is *felt* when known, not understood;
I feel your beauty like one knows the good.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Our Life Together

When we're apart, the world makes little sense.
Its things impinge upon the nerve and prove
Existence in my brain, but as events
Unweighted by significance or truth.
I listen to the sounds the treetops make –
That clamor of community we've heard
As evolution's voice – and can't help take
It in as noise: loud bourse of bug and bird.
When we're together though, my love, instead
The world seems my mother tongue. I know
Its idiom like thirst knows drink. What's said
On every leaf I read in love, and own.
Life shared with you reveals my deepest dreams:
Those visions of fulfillment where life *means*.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Your Body as My World

There is a landscape closer to my heart
Than any on this luscious earth – terrain
I yearn for like a nourishment, to start
My soul toward its most sensual domain.
It is a country ample of the lush
Enticement nature wears to urge her own
Replenishment – the ripe, ecstatic blush
Of springtide’s sway – conceived as flesh and bone.
It is your body, love, I worship here;
Your substance *is* my world. Each gentle curve
Of you forms my horizon, bounds my sphere,
Wherein my deepest being is preserved.
Your body is the landscape of my lust;
In its soft warmth I come to find my trust.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Anatomy of Love

I love you with my body, dear, because
That's where my flesh resides – the *corporeal* me
(The *only* one) – that place your being gnaws
At mine with physical intensity
And proves the source of everything I feel:
The all I see, hear, taste, smell, touch, am, know
As meat of my engagement in the real
Live world of what our nerve cells undergo.
Yes, this, *my body*, is the engine of
All predicates and subjects we construe –
The carnal truth of how I am and love –
The all I yearn to merge with what is you.
Your lover is no ghost in some machine
But that real corpus built of world and gene.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Let Eros Make Our Bed

To sleep (perchance to *dream* of sleep at least)
Is deadly-dull employment of a bed.
Let ours be first that sanctum where we feast
Life's deepest appetite aroused instead.
For sleep will come, eventually, to all,
While love's delights, deferred, are but bequeathed
Directly to oblivion. So, sprawl
Luxurious upon my love unsheathed,
My love! Let's leave this bed as evidence
Of life lived in exuberance, for two;
Of pleasure's evolutionary sense
In bringing flesh to thrill at rendezvous!
Let Eros make our bed for more than rest:
For waking us to life's profoundest zest!

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Pleasures of the Flesh

Upon your lips I find my paradise —
That earthly banquet of delight our flesh
Is heir to naturally: to best entice
Itself towards life against the blank of death.
Yes, in the luscious bounty of your kiss
I taste the sweet oblivion I crave
To sate, alive between love's thrill-clutched hips,
And savor its *free* bliss in which we bathe.
For, this rich hunger's *ours* and needn't wait
On superstitions of the starved, who're taught
To spurn all food that might but stimulate
Their appetite and lead them into thought.
Yes, we who think fear none of life's allure,
Which slakes that emptiness beyond death's door.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Between the Sheets

We know each other best between the sheets
Of this choice volume of our life we share,
In which is bound with trust the fleshly treats
That reinforce through lust this love we bare.
Concupiscence regilds the dull routine
To which the binding of two lives submits,
Illuminating once again the keen
Cohesive pleasures chasteness soon unknits.
This gathering of leaves of love, fresh pledged,
Within the spine of ever-livened want,
Preserves for us attachment's precious edge,
Which negligent re-shelving would wear blunt.
The library of our connubial bliss
Holds as its greatest treasure our *next* kiss.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Sleep & Love

Each night, as life's great bounty grows too much
And we lie down, unburdened of our hold,
To grasp at recollections of its touch,
We lose our selves together in love's fold.
Within this nestled warmth our snug embrace
Affords we drift away beyond the laws
That govern day to roam that inner space
Where things once lived appear without their cause.
But though this ghostly realm is each our own,
We find it nightly via one shared bed,
Which ferries us to folly and back home,
Restored, into each other's mind and stead.
And fresh from our re-membered lives we wake,
Emerging into treasure to partake.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Married Love

We married one another to lay claim
To that great bounty of attraction's force
That brought our boundaries to converge and frame
With meaning how lust's pleasures feed love's source.
The maps we used to find this place were those
Our ancestors had modified through their
Success, despite vast differences imposed
By new terrains. Yet, here we can forbear.
For, though our circuitries evolved to spur
Us on by way of novelty's ideal
Toward wider fields to sow, we who demur
Can stay and reap those satisfactions *real*.
Thus, innate cravings for the ever new
We've tamed into *attachment*, tried and true.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Magic of Your Voice

When through the rude, cold, brash, hard, mindless noise
The world's commerce makes, my tired ear
Perceives the love-warmed wisdom of your voice,
I feel my spirit glide into the clear.
At once, the strident uproar churned between
Antagonism's treacherous banks gives way
As I am carried safe to the serene
Unhurried confluence where trust holds sway.
And well behind me now the sirens' cries
Grow faint in their sensational appeals
Competing for consumers as I rise
Into the sensual splendor love reveals.
For here within the timbre of your care
I bask *companioned*, past temptation's snare.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

*Why This Day Is So Very Special,
Like All Others*

This day, when birds come down to choose their mates
And humans pause to love amid their fuss
With lesser things, I once more celebrate
My constant joy: our *daily* choice of *us*.
We need no martyr's anniversary
To feel this exultative state of heart,
This flutter of soul's wings; the cursory
Can have no place where life is lived like art:
In mindfulness, that is, in slow, sure, prayer-
Like vividness of thought which consecrates
Each *moment's* grace, each life-rich breath of air,
Each taste of food that nourishes, not sates.
No calendar can keep such reverent sway;
My love, I choose you now *and every day*.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Not in My Wildest Dreams

Of all my dreams, this one I live with you,
My love, eludes interpretation best.
It yields to all analyses no clue
Beyond its truth: that love wakes life to zest.
There is no sage on earth can come and read
In it but myths that rhyme with his beliefs,
As its most human logic will exceed
All numbers summed, like facts by joys and griefs.
It seems I'd slept till meeting you and lived
As large as this but only while I dreamt;
For here in love's embrace I wake to give
Sleep's madness chase, as if from death exempt.
Not in my wildest dreams had I foreseen
My life so wide, exuberant, and keen.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Words, Words, Words

It's said that words cannot express the real
Experience of LOVE: those tongues of fire
Licking at our reason till we feel
Hot desperation for the one desired,
Or then, later, that more temperate kind
We wake to once these waxed psychotic thrills
Have ebbed and left us focused with near blind
Affection that attachment's sense instills....
It isn't true. These mere voiced signs, *once coined*,
Become the very currency that buys
Our visits *back* to these spent feelings, joined
Now with new *values* their belief implies.
So, when I say I love you, dear, I *feel*
How much I do, since words trace what seems real.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Magnificent Accident of Us

That you and I exist at all is rare
Beyond conception in a cosmos vast
As this, but that we'd come to meet and bare
Our lives to one another's love counts past
All odds of destined ends. For, these must heed
In their trajectory no compromise
With those diverse events that would impede
Their goal. And this ignores what underlies
Becoming: we're the level outcome of
Time's sands of interactive happenstance,
Which could have settled otherwise. Our love
Then is a process bodies make with chance.
This key to life dispels the myth of fate:
The accident of us we *help* create.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Waking Up in Paradise

I woke this morning into paradise.
A flock of geese had called me from a dream
Of lives unlived, of joys long sacrificed,
To witness the eternal in a gleam.
For, past our nestled feet I saw the sun
Light up a sudden slope of brilliant pine
And stone arising from a surface spun
In sparkling calm. It shone outside all time.
And yet, our window opens on a splendor
Beyond *this* each day we wake up side
By side. It opens *inward* on what's rendered
Memorable by how our hearts confide.
That Eden of mythologies, my dove,
Is merely this from which we draw our love.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

At Home in Paradise

Four years ago, I woke into a dream
Of life with you lived high upon the calm,
Where sparkling water bound by soaring green
Would soothe our city nerves in cooling balm.
This dream was ours together, like the sky
We'd watch each night dissolve into our love.
To enter its rare light, we would belie
Our knowledge of unrealized hopes above.
Yet now I wake to find our vision real—
Perceived directly from the world below
Where diamonds dance on ripples to reveal
The paradise that stokes the fancy's glow.
We dare to dream because we dare to live.
Without our trust in love, what dare we give?

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Admitting Our Impediments

Let's talk of love, but not that ideal stuff
Of stars and ships and well-fixed points beyond
The reach of time. No, I mean love that's tough
As life, admitting faults through which we bond.
It is a thing we make – a thing of nerves
And not some disembodied force that moves
The planets. (That's called gravity.) Love serves
No greater outcome than to help us choose.
And that's where our impediments come in:
Because it *can* be lost, our love must hold
The all of us, and not just traits that win
Our favor. These will sag as we grow old.
Let ours be that true marriage of two minds
Embodying the real in what love binds.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

First Anniversary Sonnet

One year ago upon this sacred day
We changed the world forever with a kiss.
The ambient love released, just as we prayed,
Lit up a moment's dark to mystic bliss:
A shiver like a splinter of the sun
Singed quick each spine, yes woke each life, around
The epicenter, where we stood – where, one
With all abundance, our new life was crowned.
And now, this glorious day, we look back out
Across the year we've kindled with our love
And see it glowing still, beyond all doubt,
Where *now* is that eternity above.
Each blessed day this past year has unfurled
We've better served each other – and the world.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Leaving Our Heart Upon Taishan

The millions who'll make pilgrimage to climb
Mt. Tai will gain upon its lucid peak
A vantage on a world unchanged by time:
That state of reverence brought by all who seek.
They'll feel what countless souls who came before
Had left of *their* enlightenment here: a sense
Of permanence in flux; the evermore
Within the ancient moment's present tense.
And higher yet than this, they'll find our love:
Bright joy in living in each other's eye
And earthly appetite. Who climbs above
These racing clouds tomorrow will espy
Upon a chain around a sacred rock
Our reverence, symbolized by a heart-shaped lock.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Within Some Other Age

Had we encountered one another's love
Within the boundaries of some other age,
We might have passed it by, untasted of
This joy, between some drudgery and its wage.
We would, perhaps, have turned and looked, but then
Pressed on towards satisfactions safe (those far
Enough from what our smarting hearts could ken)
And missed *today*, where luck holds its bazaar.
For love first must be *possible* to thrive —
The consequence of physics, laws, and chance
No less than soul. (A body cannot strive
To love when dead in *best* of circumstance.)
So, let us savor, dear, good fortune's role
In our great love and keep it as our goal.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Love & Time

From that bright moment we first met, till now,
When we look back across the splendor born
Of its event, time seems *itself* endowed
With that exalted feel of love fresh-sworn,
As if the very *measure* of love's bond
Becomes at length the matter it would gauge,
Providing passion's sustenance *beyond*
Attraction's force, which *first* had set love's stage,
As if duration's steady trial of trust
Can render stronger what survives its test
By weeding out the fleeting in our lust
To leave just what erects the surer nest.
Yes, time reveals to us love's *mounting* bliss;
So, come, my love, extend it with a kiss!

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Lovebirds Refurbishing their Nest

A pair of aging lovebirds made their nest
Upon a paradise of trust. The house
They'd called their home was fine...though not the *best*
They could conceive toward sharing with a spouse.
And here were they forewarned by seasoned birds
Whose rebuilt nests had brought *their* love's demise
(When costly strangers came in noisy herds
To pry their world apart with compromise).
Yet *our* pair, confident in what induced
So strong a bond as theirs, would go select
With pluck the fabric of their ideal roost
With high-priced contractor and architect.
And once all done, though *fiscally* quite poor,
Their *love* cooed deeper, richer than before.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Language of Love

I often hear some couple suffer words
With one another that provide, it seems,
Safe distance for respite from wounds incurred
In trespassing their partner's self-esteem.
And I can't help but sense in every blow
Of hurtful comments proffered their high need
To take another language up; yes, throw
Away these sharpened phrases and proceed
In softer, warmer, more inviting sounds
Through which their vulnerabilities are bared
So dangerously that both seek grounds
To be protector of the other's cares —
Till, soon, like us, they find themselves in bed,
Re-conjugating risqué verbs instead.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Romeo, Juliet,
Lytton & Carrington

To want what one can't have can forge that bond
Surviving reason's most persuasive proofs
By focusing priorities beyond
The comfort of convention's feel of truth.
It is to sacrifice the ease routine
Provides formality, so as embrace
The precious burden of what lies between
Two lives long shaped by different fears to face.
To love someone enough to forfeit hope
Of ownership is to fulfill our lust
For deep attachment in that richer scope
Where intimacy lines its nest with trust.
And it is this I want for us as well:
That what we have in love is where we dwell.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Sharing Our Fortune

The wealth of nations is no match for ours,
Which is derived not from commodities
Agreed to have fixed worth but by those powers
Trust invests *past need* of guarantees.
For, goods are only made to be consumed
And services to be enjoyed, but trust,
Love's bond, grows most abundant when it's used
And stays, through vulnerability, robust.
Though, fundamentally, all love may be,
Like money, but a matter of belief,
This doesn't lessen its authority,
As hormones ply where even faith is brief.
Our fortune, love, is vast because we care
More for *each other* than our market share.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Just Being Here with You

I often think about the life I'd spent
In search of you: those unlived days before
You came and loved me into us, intent
On finding him with whom *your* life meant more.
Awakened by the feel of your desire
For me, pouring warm as welcome sun
Across my numbed resolve, I sensed that prior
Emptiness fill up till it was none.
It's though this pattern process I call "me"
Had swelled enriched within that loop of care
In which you redefined your sense of "he,"
And this emergent *we* is everywhere.
For, now life's deepest meanings to pursue
Seem readiest just being here with you.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

This World of Ours

Each being that has ever been has changed
The world at least some particle's amount:
Its interaction there had rearranged
Those grains of time supported on its count.
Yet, no one mind can matter all alone:
No nation can be founded out of one;
It takes the both of us to use what's known
By each to mean a thing that either's done.
For, reciprocity dissolves from "self"
That feeling of completeness we perform
To seem sole agent of our fortune's wealth...
While merely subject to some greater norm.
And this lends life that sense of *our* endeavor:
Our world is what we make of it *together*.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

A Sonnet to My Muse

My muse, I've called to you these anguished years
To teach me how to sing the world anew,
To find that voice in which our hard-earned tears
Might nourish joyful reverence for what's true.
And though I'd thought you couldn't hear my call
(Because this voice I seek is yours), I see
Now that you'd never left my side at all:
You are Love's genius come to set me free.
And now I see you everywhere I go,
My love: each port at which my ship arrives.
I find you in each eye I meet and know
You in the beauty of all seas and skies.
I burn to taste the wisdom of your lips
And learn the world with my fingertips.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Feeling a Tad Psychotic

I met you in the afternoon of this
Well-reasoned life I'd led while occupied
With cogent, philosophic thoughts. That kiss
I dreamed of from you thereon in hog-tied
My analytic strengths and left me drained
Of focus toward my tasks, like tying shoes
And finding words. But this was well explained
By natural brain events, which was good news.
For, were I really nuts I wouldn't know
"Reality" from what I merely dreamt,
And I knew *well* this difference by my show
Of apt responses to your lips, which tempted
Me to see them in each evening sky.
And I knew too that SUNSETS DO NOT LIE!

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

To the Tenth Muse

When Zeus, great king of gods, was pressed to furnish
Celebrants to sing the Titans' fall,
He sped to Memory's dark bed and burnished
It with godly light full nine nights long,
Till she'd recalled to sudden birth their nine
Inspiring daughters: goddesses through whom
Mere men might gain their claim to the sublime.
Then you came, love, who've made men lose: yes, room
For thought or rest or food. My muse, you've changed
Each man who's called your name, inspiring him
To wax indifferent to his sleep, estranged
From earthly nourishment until quite thin.
And I, who've shed enough to be obscure,
Find my fulfillment fed on your allure.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Annus Mirabilis

Go scoop a year of time from out the flow
Of its events and watch it trickle through
Your grasp of its significance, as though
In meaning's gravity, truths bend askew.
This seems to happen in my measure of
That special year in which you had emerged
Into the light of my potential love
And lived your life towards mine till they'd converged:
Within the circuit of my memory,
A moment in some far-off family's life
Becomes a golden age I tend to see
Predictive of our bliss as man and wife.
This year that gave me you is but cold time
That meaning's heat has raised to the sublime.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

At Home on the Roam

That journey we now share upon this earth
Between two places we have made our home
Reveals to us with each new year the worth
Discoverable in learning how to *roam*:
Yes, travel *indirectly* – *past* the route
Efficiency prescribes – to view what lies
Between those compass points of our commute
As *new* horizons to survey and prize.
For, all those little rituals we call
Our life include the ways we soothe our fear
Of change, though these buy satisfactions small
Compared with those that thrill the pioneer.
So, let us keep our destinations set...
But just *defer* them, *past* routine's regret.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Retiring Beauty

Since girlhood's pinkest blush, my love, you saw
In every clock a challenge – yes, to brave
The span of its unending job and draw
Your future out of what hard work might save.
And while you bloomed in beauty, you still kept
Your gaze fixed on this threatening face. It warned
Of fearsome poverty for those who slept
In place of paid employment to perform.
But now, full radiant in womanhood,
Yet rich to that wise measure of your life
Ahead, you've chosen to embrace that good
One feels through helping *freely* – without strife –
And wrest your eyes from time's uncaring dial
To alight on those drawn round your smile.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

*A Comprehending View from
The Seven-Terraced Summit*

You've reached that lofty vantage point, my love,
From which to see in your own life far more
Than could be surveyed from less high above—
Say, even by a younger you before.
This is because the vista you now view
Is seen through all the wisdom you have gained
Along life's way, composed of *every* you
That lived it, each a stage long since retained.
Best yet, you got here without having tried!
Yes, after all, the only ones who've ever
Managed not to age are those who've died,
And their next day, for anything, is...NEVER.
So, lest you grudge this daily climb toward now,
Just think what scope *tomorrow* can allow!

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Pillow Talk

There is a place we go within our love
Where we can share those satisfactions found
In sensual delight, yet well above
The pleasures of the sheets we'd strewn around.
It is our *pillow's* refuge we ascend
Once sated, bathed in that hormonal glue
That binds good feelings into covenants
Of trust and care, till reinforced anew.
Yes, here's where we return from out our lone
Attempts to meet our deepest need – *to feel*
We matter – and but reconnect, full prone
In naked truth, untempted to conceal,
Exploring all we want in that warm glow
That only intimacy can bestow.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Rising in Love with You

To fall in love, as we had done way back
Within obsession's plunge from reasoned calm,
Is to surrender something – say some lack
We yearn to fill to mollify a qualm.
But when, in time, those hormones ebb, along
With all the desperate idealizings they'd
Aroused, what's risen in their place, so strong
And steady, is that bond commitment laid.
Yet, this can't hold unless we're each complete
Within ourselves – till we can give without
Our really only feeding our own need,
Like more acknowledgement to slake more doubt.
Thus, we're most satisfied, *not* when we fall
But *rise* in love – *above* what might enthrall.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

More Beautiful with Every Year

What is it in these features of your face,
And all the rest of what I know as *you*,
That draws me in so ardently to taste
Of beauty that seems only to accrue?
Were it that “essence” theorists have conceived
(Within their dire work to save the soul
From the impermanence of flesh), I’d cleave
To that delusion you’d just kept your role
As younger self, refusing to mature.
But you’re a *process*, ripening through cares *lived*
Into that breadth of radiant allure
Embodying *yet* these traits I thrill to kiss,
Where Plato and the rest had got it wrong,
Where singer is not fixed within the song.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

My Senses of You

I love to look at you – to watch you be
Yourself and no one else – and marvel how
I found the very one I'd rather see,
Hear, feel, smell, taste, and know than any, now
And ever. This predictive model of
The world I shape with you is richer – yes,
More meaningful – than anything my love
For you, alone, might heed, much less possess;
As if these senses of you interact
With yours of me toward fleshing out a realm
In which each gives and takes to stay intact,
Negotiating how to share the helm.
And so, *together* we create that space
In which our differences are best embraced.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

To My Dear and Loving Wife

Long after you and I are dead, my dear,
Our love will still live on – though only in
The lives of those who'd witnessed its career,
Or heard it told, or read how it had been.
And that's because love cannot thrive in air,
Which lacks those nerves on which it must rehearse
To be created and sustained, to bear
Remembrance out of impulses diverse.
The sustenance required in its course
Is that of living bodies – yes, this flesh
Our world's filtered through – and not some force
That cannot want or suffer in its quest.
It is that feel of hunger for what's prized:
That urge to live beyond – *before* one dies.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Ours is the Best of Beds

(And The True Center of the Universe)

It's been full twenty years now since that kiss
We lit our world with and claimed a bed
As sanctuary of our happiness —
That space in which life's burdens can be shed.
And since that time, wherever we might stay
The night, that furnishing we check out first
Is what we're offered, stand-in, for the day,
In place of where our love's so long been nursed.
But be it finer, costlier, or such
Than our conjugal lair, this never can
Supplant the one that's shaped our life through touch —
That trusting refuge where *we* then began.
And though we've been enticed by bigger, firmer ones,
It's *our* bed that is worth to us a sky of suns.

I. Sonnets, group C (on love), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Treasure

As one whose job it was to estimate
The value of a thing, experience
Prepared me to distinguish too those traits
Worth relishing in other life events.
And like discernments made with paintings, books,
Or music, I have come to savor those
Fine attributes, reflected in your looks,
Your tender sensibility bestows.
You are that splendid tapestry I've sought:
That brilliant weave with highlights of silk thread
Revealing glinting subtleties of thought
And feeling that makes gold seem dullest lead
And makes me crave such space that lets me view
This fabric of rich being that is you.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day])

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Our Brain on Brahms

Through art, we better understand our selves —
And one another — deep beyond ideals.
For, these are but the predetermined shelves
On which a brain arranges what it feels.
The artist, though, explores the overlap
Between ideals and life's real pulse and saves
For us those ambiguities that map
The subtle shades in which a body craves.
Our expectations, met or missed, come wrought
Toward feelings of reward — past reason's schemes.
And thus, great art reveals what can't be thought
So much as fathomed, just as in our dreams.
The wistful edge of beauty renders more
Than even our best logic can ignore.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Maslow's Hammer

I mostly find what I am looking for
And not those things I'm unprepared to see.
For, seeing's made of *expectation* toward
Some thing *our forebears* recognized as key.
But these rough tools bequeathed to us to tweak
Our inner model of this world's advance
Were shaped in that economy that seeks
Sufficiency from out the hand of chance.
It shouldn't be surprising then how blind
We are to our own blind spot's missing light;
Our inference-making brains evolved to bind
The best they find and *think* it perfect sight.
When all you have's a hammer in your pail,
You'll find each problem looks just like a nail.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Extrasensory Deception

A neuron either fires or it doesn't.
The all of who we are and what we know
Depends on this. Yet, we pretend there wasn't
This connection lending thought its flow:
As if a signal's energy can prove
Itself the very matter it controlled;
As if what's left of heat once you remove
The fuel is not dispersed into the cold.
Still, we persist in this delusion of
A life experience laid down then heaved
Aloft beyond its sustenance (above
The circuitry in which it was conceived).
Ideas cannot exist outside live brains:
Of what are they composed in such terrains?

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Mysticism Explained

From out the soup cooked up by ancient earth
Evolved a competition to exist
Through which economy emerged great worth
In navigating between food and risk.
And as some life forms changed and better vied
For their success in passing on their genes,
Elaborate brains accrued that best supplied
Coordination of these complex means –
Until such busy organs lost their sense
Of merely *being* (hid within what's used
To digest benefit from such expense)
And came to reverence what they had confused:
The primitive with what seems infinite.
Now, *this* is mystical; the rest is shit.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Proof that Dreams are Real

First, take a brain and steep it in a world.
Then, lay it by a while to set. Next, go
Reduce the voltage till the waves unfurled
Are quicker paced and nothing's felt below.
Now, activate some cells, unlocking stored
Emotions and events as they'd appeared,
And watch the nonsense loosed excite a score
Of pathways making these stray bits cohere.
Yet, this state dreamt was but a *new event*;
It "happened" like those "real" ones we'd espied –
Remembered, from the world – yes, *underwent*
As if *it too* were input from outside.
Thus, the perceived and dreamed, seen close enough,
Reveal that *they're both made of that same stuff!*

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

From Matter into Mind

I found the universe within my brain —
Not writ in code or mirrored in a thought,
But real, as flesh: in atoms I retain
Of stardust and the start of time from naught.
Yes, underneath this integrative state
In which I know I “am” are but the chance
Selections and connections that collate
Inherent values with found circumstance.
For, all this matter generating “mind”
Evolved (from out a mindless past) as means
To map environment: to match and bind
In memory how each perceived thing seems.
I call this firmament of function “me”
Though substance-wise, no separate entity.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

To Dream, Perchance to Think

In the beginning was the dream-state brain.
For, long before the word (and with it, God)
Evolved on earth to stake out man's domain
There first emerged a state in which brains nod.
From out the neural populations urged
By amines or by cholinergic sway
A climate formed wherein these two diverged
To shape contrasting dreams of night and day:
The first as atlas of the world outside
On which to read (and write) our way; the next
As what we find out there (once it's transcribed
In that same ink in which is writ *both* texts).
Hence, input from outside *and* in were wrought
Commingle as one mind, begetting thought.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Goodbye, Dr. Freud

Respects to Doctor Freud, for he is dead!
When Hobson came to take Freud's pulse, he found
Beneath the shroud an empty couch: that bed-
Like craft in which he'd ferried souls around.
(For fee he'd guide them through their childhood murk
Of violated memories, where crimes
Of parents toward the infant self might lurk,
Repressed, till He read meaning in their signs.)
Then Allan shone some science on this tomb
And saw that it could never catch a dream
That wasn't rigged; that here lay souls for whom
The doctor's wish fulfillment was their theme.
And in this light, we see our dreams reveal
BRAIN PROCESSES, not laundry to conceal!

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Manifest Latency

I had a dream. Revealed in it was me:
My cargo's manifest, compiled weird
From out the flotsam of my memory
Washed up by waves unease had commandeered.
These rose from that most ancient stem of my
Mere being (prior to my self) and swept
Through latent fears, which would unleash awry
Diverse remembrances where they had slept.
The chaos patched from this proved my domain—
The world I am that maps that larger world—
Composed of those same juices in my brain
That hold in circuit *every* state unfurled.
I sing of FLESH, that stuff of which *all* dreams
Are made, real substance of whatever seems.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Cogitation on Kauai

I felt a thought arise one drowsy day
Beneath a fig tree's shade at my mind's end
And marked its rousing progress through the gray
Insentience I'd long yearned to comprehend.
I sensed the rich fecundity of this
Unbidden cogitation as it made
Its way connecting remnants of lived bliss
And pain with innate fears my sleep surveyed.
But as I mused on how my nerves re-forged
These scraps to shape my narrative of now,
I felt a root desire swell, engorged
Like sudden fruit plumped out on selfhood's bough...
And knew at once how all is but one mesh:
Enlightenment cannot happen outside flesh.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Genesis of Inconsequential Things

Beginning with that instant's aftermath
When hot, dense oneness burst into its own
Plurality of cooling parts, our path
Revealed inconsequentials to bemoan.
For, once the chaff of change combined to form
The currency of universal laws,
Our earth evolved *its* necessary norm
Of competition with mutation's flaws,
In which economy of rule and chance
Our brains developed such would value high
Those things with which survival was financed,
Though paid in those emotions *we* supply:
We're prompted by rewards of joy and strife,
Confusing life's *accoutrements* with life.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

If I Were You...

If I were you, I'd do things differently,
I think – a little less like that and more
Like this, I'd guess – since then, at last, I'd see
With my own eyes how things should look through yours.
Yet, *were* I not my own but *your* unique
Trajectory through habitat and genes,
I'd then be doing these same things you seek
As only *you* could do within *your* means.
This leaves us in that state called Paradox,
Whose visitors are asked to watch events
That cannot happen till they've stopped their clocks
Upon *conclusion* of those incidents.
And so, if I were you, I'd be *myself*
And do just what *I'd* do, and no one else.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

*Truths, Lies, and
Other Fabrications*

The lie I told the other day was true.
Its parts cohered, with joinery so tight,
No peep of inconsistency shone through
To contradict what we agree is right.
I'd often vouched for *facts* that had far less
"Reality" about them than this fiction
Did: the ones that passed truth's strictest tests
Except that deep-felt glow of firm conviction.
So, when I learned my lie had come this close,
Unwittingly, to how things really were,
It seemed the *lesser* narrative – at most
A mirror held to what we think occurred.
For, "facts" – reflections of a flesh-made mind –
Depend on how brains choose what *they've* defined.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Truths, etc.

Revisited

I like a thing well made – be it a book,
An altarpiece, or just some basic truth.
It matters not the high ideals forsook
In making it; the *craftsmanship's* the proof.
When I confront a crucifixion, say,
And find it executed with great care,
I'm moved far more by how its parts will play
Toward great effect than torture, faith, and prayer.
The same for any truth, which must reveal
Conformity with what our brains predict
Is out there in the world, fine-tuned as “real,”
And not those specious comforts hopes depict.
For, all we'll *ever* know are but these dreams
Well-made from instincts tweaked by how life seems.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Master of Dreams

O sibyl, seer, chronicler of night's
Phantasmagoria! Regale me more
With your great artworks of thin air, your flights
Of combination viewed from daybreak's shore.
While *all* of us are artists in our sleep,
Concocting narratives of how we feel
Within those metaphors we live and keep,
Who else but you describes them quite so real?
For you, my love, can share in such detail
Those bold new worlds conjured up from old
Concerns, that I can follow it in scale
And revel in minutiae's every fold.
In you the night-time artist doesn't fade
Come dawn, but revels in the magic made.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

My Best Controlled Hallucination

I am a stranger to reality.
I cannot glean a bit of it beyond
Some wetware simulation made by *me*
From signals organized to correspond.
This "I" that am, then too is just what flesh
Can make of what's out there *and in*: all signs,
Like sounds to echo off those things afresh
The body guesses at with its designs.
In this way, all I'll ever really know
Of *anything* is what my nerves create,
Translating those most salient parts that show
Key flaws in the predictions they have made.
And this accruing sense of agency
Called "me" brings scope to how things *seem to be*.

I. Sonnets, group D (on consciousness [i.e., dreams of both night *and* day]), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

*The Somewhat Determined
Compatibilist*

I sought a word with which to best begin
These lines I was determined to create.
But each that came to mind was found within
This language that constrained my poem's fate.
And *this* was but inherited, not mine,
Which means that any of its parts I choose
As agent in control of my design
Are limited to what is *there* to use.
Yet, had this tongue *I'd* learned been rather one
That lacked first-person pronouns, my own role
Here would have nonetheless emerged to run
Above the teeth of cause (and chance), since goal-
Fraught meaning steers, with foresight somewhat free,
This organizing pattern I call "me."

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason)

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Recipe for Religion

Begin with dread of death and that daft dream
Of living past our brain. Next, add the need
To valorize one's self through group esteem.
Dissolve stray bits of doubt with mumbled creed
Till reason is replaced with want, endowing
Nonsense with the feel of virtue. Hence,
Infuse with stalwart ignorance of how
We came to be. (Use myth at truth's expense.)
Throw in a despot parent we can't see
Whom we can grovel to (lest our reward
Be punishment). Reduce until thought-free.
And now shut mind, say Grace, and drink as poured.
Though what you've swallowed here may be explained
As by-product of ancient skills retained,
This doesn't make it any less insane.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Problems Gods Must Face

In Worlds Such as Ours

The reason that things work the way they do
Is just that otherwise they'd function quite
Befitting features consequently true
To *other things*, for which *they'd* then be right.
In other words, the things we find around
Us now are but the way they are *because*
They got that way: developed as they're bound
By competition of unyielding laws.
To intervene in such a fabric's weave
Would be to get between a cause and its
Effect without the slightest trace of heave
Left whereof join of warp and weft admits.
And this would take that special type of god
Who'd leave no change upon the world he'd prod
...WHICH IS *SO* FUCKING POINTLESS WHEN YOU'RE
GOD!

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Last Great Mystery of Life

The mysteries of life were many once:
Before man had the science to distill
Real reasons that things happen, any dunce
Could find these questions answered in God's will,
In which black box of sovereignty all lust
For knowledge is taboo that threatens blind
Obedience to this *unknown* thing we'd trust.
Yet through seditious inquiry we've mined
Such truths that helped us learn away the shroud
Of myth until enigmas were explained
That long had held our ancestors so cowed...
Except, that is, for one that still remained:
JUST WHERE THE HELL MY MUSE HAD LEFT HER PHONE!
And *this* seems something only God has known!

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Beauty of a Purposeless Existence

The plausible illusion of free will
Thrown off as by-product of complex brains
At work in navigating worlds instills
In them a trust in "purpose" at their reins,
As if their evolution here on earth
From simple cells to circuitries immense
Progressed toward some great goal of future worth
Instead of from past benefit's expense.
So, why can't we who *are* these brains rejoice
In having drawn such splendid maps of our
Terrains and not pretend that every choice
We make derives from a designer's power?
Yes, you and I, my love, are both effect
And cause; we're *governed* by what *we* select.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Why We Are Here

The reason we are here, my dear, and not,
Say, over there, is that the place to be
Can never fall precisely in that spot
Another is already: it's not free.
But furthermore, this "there" we speak of now
Is always *here* when *we* are there. And thus,
Regardless of position, we allow
That "they" remain peripheral to "us."
Yet really, what the question asks, my sweet,
Is how our predicate and subject would
With this same copula be made complete
That, in itself, cannot be understood.
So, next time you are asked this, give it pause;
The only valid answer is: BECAUSE.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Why I'm Skeptical of Santa

Our ancestors were those whose brains could map
Their world sufficiently to live in – long
Enough to pass on genes. For, any trap
They dodged that proved but scraps proved not *as* wrong
A guess as made by those who saw the trap
As scraps – and therefore didn't live to spawn.
Now, brains constructed via genes that tap
The value of traps seen are prone thereon
To read in emptiness some entity
Unproved – a by-product, where trap and scrap,
Reborn as fear and lust, are rendered free
Of their old usefulness *and now worth crap*.
Yet, once conceived, these frauds without a cause
Live on, tax free, like God or Santa Claus.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Ye Olde Christmas Virus

For centuries, a deadly virus spread
From mind to mind of innocent consumer
Buying immortality with bread
Sold as His flesh, seduced by brain-jacked rumor.
Each one infected came to find the same
Brave virtue in believing what they're told
On faith alone (lest they *too* feed His flame).
Then all succumbed to drink this Kool-Aid™ cold.
By this is meant that deal cut where this son
God offered up for eating would be born
On that chill day His rival cults had fun
(Thus selling in the name of love mere porn).
Extorted sentiment is widespread now:
This Christmas business proved His *best* cash cow.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Devout Atheist at Worship

Our human brain evolved to such a stage
As to conceive of its authority –
The cause of how things are and why – to gauge
The reason granting us priority.
We learned to read in nature's laws our own
And bend in dread before the awesome force
Of our conception, blurring the unknown
With fear and lust, engendering our source.
And yet beneath this cloud of superstition,
All are moved by that same appetite:
Attraction's primal quiver of ambition,
Stirring the innate towards life's great flight.
I find this thrill *not* in some God, above,
But deep within a trill, a gleam, a love.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Beauty of Profanity

The only language too obscene for *me*
To bear is not fuck, cunt, or prick but plain
Old "Oh my Gosh!" For, this means one's not free
To take some made-up despot's name in vain,
Thus letting fear's subservience demean
Our human dignity. Why forfeit true
Expressiveness for some sham sign, scrubbed clean
Of sense, that fawns around some fool taboo?
Instead, let us *communicate*, not hide
Behind minced oaths, which merely urge us try
Emotions on, like envied clothes our pride
Will not accept for what they might imply!
Yes, unlike speech *obscuring* how we feel,
The beauty of foul language is *it's real*.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

This, Too, Be the Verse

Our father and our mother both bequeathed
To us, through their coition, *our* brain's lust
To feel its own erotic itch relieved.
And thus, the kingdom of remorse, disgust,
And penance that religion built and honed
Toward its control of pleasure's hallowed worth.
For, though this thrill through which our parents moaned
Had but delivered us upon this earth,
Our daily debt to it found full support
With those astute custodians of myth
Who knew each trespass of it might extort
Obedience to foolishness forthwith.
Yet nerves are made of sterner stuff than lore:
Our fucking parents proved this when they scored.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Always Start with the Big Bang

There are those days the world's grown too big
And brash to live in with sufficient grace;
When I'm afraid to fail, or truth seems rigged,
And meaning has eroded from my chase.
But then, when I recall just how obscure
Those chances were that managed to arrive
At me, I feel again the privilege, pure,
Of being here at all – and, quick, revive.
I start with time's inception in that bang
From which a singularity became
So much and marvel how from this point sprang
The possibility of life's vast game.
And then I know the *roughest* day I'm here
Lends better use of chance than failure's fear.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

*Leaping from the Flaming
Tower of Psychobabble*

The warm and fuzzy thinking found expressed
By fantasists of disembodied thought
Collects that lint of high-flown nonsense blessed
By experts nervous of what they've learned and taught.
"Obliteration" has that special ring
That wakes the strictest scientists to search
For loopholes in their findings they can cling
To over the abyss. This leaves the church
That quantum stage where physicist and priest
Perform in one shared language known as **HOPE**,
In which rare theorems prove we're what's *released*
By death and not this flesh that *is* our scope.
To me, eternal life without my brain
Is not worth dying for as my domain.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original prefatory inscriptions and notes to *all* the poems.]

Freedom...from Coherence

I only need to hear the word and feel
Me reach for my composure. Yes, the ring
Of “freedom” on my ear has no appeal
Detached from circumstance, that state of things
Distinguishing whatever we avow.
A liberty is framed as such by tight
Constraints: competing laws that can’t allow
For one speck more than earned within their fight.
So, disregard of context for the ease
Of sounding deep sustains that dim abyss
Where “good” and “bad” are *forces* to be seized
Instead of *values*. Life, though, shows us this:
It’s not just what you’re dealt, nor how you play,
But how both *interact* within the game.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

*Journey to the Center
of Absurdity*

or

A Zygote's Rights

I dreamt I lived in such a world where things
Potential matter more than those we see —
Where each mere seed that nature's excess flings
At chance is valued greater than the tree —
As if some image fashioned by a brain
Could be more real than what it represents
And worth full privilege over its domain,
Though impotent to earn its vast expense.
I felt myself assembling to wake out
Of this delirium but couldn't find
A path that wasn't cleared by the devout
Toward options that must all be chosen blind.
And then I knew this hell I'd thought a dream
Was, rather, idealism's dark regime.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Constitutional Scripture

A word is just the sound that's left behind
To replicate the process of a living thought.
Once written down, this recipe for mind
Becomes a fossil of some bit of life we'd sought.
Respect for such an artifact's career
Reveals what did and didn't work long past,
But *worship* of it, like some souvenir
Of faith, ignores the reasons it was cast.
Thus, **all men** really meant white males with land,
Though read as sacred text, we're prone to bow
To it as if **what's writ is our command**,
Submitting to old wrongs inapt to now.
And thus, religious thinking taints it all:
Words viewed as scripture keep us in their thrall.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

A Closer Look at

THE RELIGION OF ORIGINALISM

Our urge to *worship* an authority
Is old as superstition's furthest reach,
Where true respect (without the groveling)
Is feared inadequate toward our beseech.
This abject deference to command is seen
Extended even to the written word,
Which, though mere *record* of a thought, we deem
That hallowed thing *itself* to be preserved.
But words *evolve* in meaning through their use
And often lose their relevance to *now*,
Where living needs, undreamt of then, reduce
To less regard than *sounds* to which we bow,
Till relics of our language are worth more
Than what speech was developed to explore.

I. Sonnets, group E (on religion v. reason), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Ab Ovo

To form an *us*, you first need frame a *them*
Against whose darkness our enlightenment can
Be better viewed. And thus, whom we condemn
As wrong are those we're clearly brighter than.
It helps if what we argue can't be seen—
Like God and his damned egg round which our most
Expensive court is paid to reconvene
(Till woman's worth is judged the ovum's host).
Now, once conceived, each noble cause to die
For grows in proof of how much less evolved
They are than *we* and how the *other's* lie
Gives birth to worse than ours—which is absolved,
Of course, in that it serves that higher good
Than they (or even *we*) had understood.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings)

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

In Praise of Plain Pornography

A Meditation on Smut

I think that I shall never see a tree
As lovely as a woman's ass. No shaft
Of wood with twigs and leaves could ever be
As stimulating to my manly grasp
As woman's plump round rump, or bouncy breasts
The firmness of ripe fruit. Or shapely legs
Which taper down, down, *down* to ankles blessed
With tiny feet. And when some hot babe begs
My fierce attention from the TV screen
Or printed page as keenly as from life,
I find it good to not resist, obscene
As some may find what's done without one's wife.
And I know God would not make fools like me
Respond to smut if He did not agree.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Rounding the Square

Each place where people come to live in close
Proximity reveals an open space
Wherein its heartbeat can be heard, a dose
Of slow amid the business of life's race.
My muse and I pause here in such a square
To clear our mind; she'd watch the different ways
Men lose themselves while I, who come to snare
Fine rhymes, would meditate on women's legs.
Or else we'd walk its outside round and round,
Exultant with high pulse and dappled light
And distant squeals of young explorers bound
For dogs, inspiring birds to sudden flight.
But what at last we find here is our soul:
That center we had bargained for a goal.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Visitor from Another World

When I consider how my interest wanes
In things that matter much to most good folk —
Like where some ball must fall such that it rains
Prestige and wealth down on some practiced dope —
I realize how my visit on this earth
Is spent *but looking in* — yes, on the odd
Conventions forged to codify man's worth
By cheerleaders of Country, Sport, and God.
But as expatriate from custom, here
Amid the riches of *not fitting in*,
I'm free of those distractions to give ear
To my keen muse, who lends my earth its spin.
And blind to things most men are trained to chase,
I find, *through feeling*, life's deep thrills to trace.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

This Day

Today we are one trifling increment
More distant from the stupor of our birth,
When we were plucked from ignorance and sent
In search of our own meaning of life's worth.
Let's not wake dull upon *this* day and see
It as some gloomy symbol of things gone —
Of all we'll never have again or be —
And miss the sunset, keener than the dawn.
For, growing old's a great rare privilege they
Who've ceased to live can never *ever* know;
Life's luscious kiss grows sexier each day
It proves itself our best *and only* show.
And so, let's value this day's date no less
Than as high sign of our most key success!

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Mellifluous Sound of Silence

The workings of our world emit such noise
As drowns out certain workings of my brain,
Like those in which some buoyed concept, poised
For harboring, submerges unsustained.
These auditory bits of life's debris —
Like litter one can hear — accrue around
My aim before it reaches its free quay,
Obscuring it beneath dull heaps of sound.
But further out amid that quiet space
Revealing far horizons of my thought,
I follow each slight sound at its own pace
Till full subsumed in what my art has wrought.
And I return to port but seldom now,
So smoothly through the silence glides my prow.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Jungle Reveries

The gnarled roots of paradise reveal,
Beneath this order's magnitude, a state
Of hellish chaos based on how to steal
Survival from a neighbor's (stolen) plate.
Perhaps this "harmony" we think we find
Here then is just some gloss we're born to see
Upon the wreckage of lives redefined
As food and translated to cheap debris.
For, benefits and their expenses, viewed
From far enough away, will look like parts
Within some larger pattern *we've* construed...
Because they're that as well. It's where one *starts*
That best determines the observer's truth
Emergent in the jungle's reddest tooth.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

As Advertised

The same old words we use to buy our bread
Or make a poem sting enough to glean
Some grain of truth are also found refed
To us, stuffed new with business to convene.
Their savvy handlers know the way a sound
Or image rings desire's dinner bell
Long after vital nutrients were ground
From them and then replaced with what to sell.
Thus, articles of service, goods, or faith
Are made to taste like foods we really need
Once packaged as that sustenance we crave,
Though satisfying less the more we eat.
Grind just the *husks* of meaning as your grist
And all that life's left missing is its *gist*.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Mr. Morgan's Pleasure-Dome

In coffered solitude he sat, a prince
Entombed among his conquests of old worlds.
For here where Madison meets Thirty-Sixth
Had he decreed great plans to be unfurled:
A marble dome would he erect, construed
To house the very best which man had wrought
(So that no native of this land, still rude,
Need board a ship to find great art or thought).
Yet when the New World sought him here and knocked
(With panic in its eyes), and he put out
Its fears amid great puffs of smoke, he locked
The doors once more. And none who'd paced about
These august halls those nights would ever know
The lonely heart behind the lofty show.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

6 Days, 9 Hours, 11 Minutes & 41 Seconds
With Our Darling Grandkids

Cacophony performed without a score,
Or break, upon our furniture and nerves:
This *minimally* describes the grisly war
Of egos waged in our once-calm preserves.
Shrill shrieks ascending from the one who fell
From his forbidden climb are heard between
The other's spasmed cries of WHY?!!!, while smell
Plays prelude to our second movement's scene.
More pyrotechnic tantrums of fierce greed
Next syncopate our fool attempts to form
A finished thought – like *what in hell to feed*
Them that they'll eat! Then, our FINALE'S storm!
Yet, once they're gone and we're left clutching drinks,
Our loving thoughts return to...what *still* stinks.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

What the Water Tells Me

I find myself while gazing out to sea
Immersed in instinct deep of the sublime,
The vast primordial maternity
From which earth's life emerged towards death in time.
As if her child prodigal I come,
Returning from my squanderings, to draw
From her abundance – yes, to scan her sum
Of countless suns reflected in my awe.
For, in her voice I find my own: that force
With which her surf is cast into my song
Predicts that ancient urge to love our source –
Recurrence – cause for which we ever long.
And often lost in inessential things,
I'm found replenished, whole, in what she sings.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Word Known to All Men

Not beer, nor bait, nor ball, nor buck, my love,
Will satisfy this question long proposed:
That there exists on all men's tongues, above
Pronunciation's turn, one word he knows
For his most crucial drive upon this earth;
That where these other sounds men make rely
Precisely on their accident of birth,
This one's conceived before their primal cry.
Yet drinking, hunting, sport, and money – all
Mere condiments at evolution's meal –
Are skipped without the species' life forestalled
(As they're not sex, *whatever* their appeal).
So, if one bit of speech unites all man,
It must be, love, his term for building clan.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Letting Go of One Who Had Let Go

You lost her all at once that day she threw
Her gorgeous life away (and part of yours
As well) in her despair to quick undo
The blackest hell a human mind endures.
She couldn't see that you, or anyone,
Were there awaiting the impaired to mend,
So dark becomes the world in which a gun
Proves one's most trustworthy and faithful friend.
For, she'd misplaced her instinct to survive
Somewhere among the clutter of a brain
No longer filing right – let go her drive
To find her self distinguished from her pain –
And in a rash of blindness left askew
The lives of all who'd watched her lose her "you."

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Autumnal Beauty

The mellow fruitfulness of wisdom earned
Throughout a life spent deeply in what's lived
Can frame for us a beauty to discern
Beyond the reach of youth's more rousing gifts.
Where earlier were chased the thrills quick sought
Amid the glare of passion's hot noon sun
Now glows the gold-toned subtleties of thought
Through which is gleaned the *value* of what's won.
For, our experience – that stuff we make
Of things – seems richest savored in review,
Where ambiguities in what's at stake
Reveal how truths are but constructed too,
Maturing us to revel in each breath
We measure out against our certain death.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Gift

It seemed an angel touched you, passing through
Our hectic life, and left you changed for good –
As if her presence had awakened you
To your own lust to live right where we stood.
She searched you out among the crowd and gave
Her death to you to hold. And you could see
Your dearest losses weighed against her grave's
Impending gain. This gift had set you free.
For, like one startled out of deepest sleep,
You woke to this harsh wisdom with the wisps
Of old complacencies dissolving deep
And quick around you like unheeded risks.
She gave you, love, a vision huge as earth:
A glimpse of life *as measured by its worth.*

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

A Bad Dream Sonnet

O give me those bad dreams of yours, my sweet,
For you're too young and innocent to need them.
Give me all that at your heart would eat
(And steal from you soft whimpers while you feed them).
If only I could catch such monsters for you –
Kiss them from your forehead to my palm
(Where they'd dissolve) – thus leaving Sleep to lure you
Out to meet me on bright waters, calm,
Where we'd then sail together in the sun,
Reciting poems, petting splendid fish,
And gliding on desires, one by one,
Until tomorrow opened like a wish.
O let me have those fitful moments, Treasure,
Leaving on your lips a *child's* pleasure!

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

A Sonnet to an Older Daniel

This morning, while you fished from off those rocks
(Where only yesterday you would have held
My hand), I woke from years of sleep to watch
You grown from me – to see you as *yourself*.
Was this the little monkey round my neck
I carried high above what life might deal,
Who now stands proud and calm before its depths,
Intent on snagging innocence on steel?
Where did you find such savvy while I slept
(Immersed in that paternal myth where sons
Are our disciples)? I laugh now how adept
You've turned at all I've overlooked or shunned.
And when I stoop to want things otherwise...
I learn I *am* the luckiest man alive.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

A Prayer for Safe Passage for My Son

Your ship, my son, has veered into rough seas.
I wait in anguish on this distant shore
Toward which your course is set (I pray). May ease
Prevail to guide you back to me once more.
I long stood watch at that same captain's wheel
You clutch now (far too soon for your own good),
And when I disembarked in search of keel
More even for us both, you understood.
Yet now you've woken to a new demand:
A guilty burden hung around your neck
To placate wrathful Neptune, whose cruel hand
You pity while it steers your ship to wreck.
You are too young to sacrifice yourself
To angry gods. Come back, my son, to health!

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

The Awakening

I felt my life expand last night to hold
Your revelation in – to comprehend
The vastness of the space you found and told
Us of, where YOU decide your limit's end.
You sat before us like a break of cloud,
Illuminating with great beams of sun
The landscape your self-mastery endowed –
That place in which you woke from things undone.
For, here you'd tossed amid the dark of fear
Where failure makes its bed, until you saw
That doing's worth the stumble, making clear
How there are things of wonder where you fall.
This truth you bravely shared woke *me* as well;
I rose inspired, richer, where *I* fell.

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

Our Meeting with Death

We stood around her bed and searched her face
For signs that she'd soon wake from out her sleep,
As she had always done. Yet not a trace
Of whom we'd known was found for us to keep.
By this time, all the science spent on it
Could not arrest dysfunction's rapid gain
On order, where an entropy of quick
Unravelling laid waste to her domain.
For, that cascade of minuscule events
On which was borne this process she had been
Now ebbed into cessation's boundlessness
And left us only memories within.
Where do we go from here to try infer
What it was like to be uniquely her?

I. Sonnets, group F (on assorted musings), *continued*

[Note: see pp. 502-40 for the original **prefatory inscriptions and notes** to *all* the poems.]

A Shaggy Dog Story

For years, we contemplated how a pet
Might lend our empty nest some welcome scope:
That chance to lavish care on one who'd let
Us without fear of seeming maudlin dopes.
But we'd revisit our long list of those
Prerequisites that kept us dogless still
Until, at last, we knew no pooch we chose
This way could ever really fit the bill.
Instead, what would best satisfy our need
To smother some sweet innocence with love
Was just go out and find a thing to feed
And bring it home to shed on all our stuff.
And now, each time we peer into these eyes
That drink up all our blather, we *feel* wise.

II. Longer Poems, poem #1

Just Change Your Woman

Villanelle: A Man's Approach to The Mid-Life Crisis

Man's happiest who *changes*, not says "couldn't."

Nothing but real *transformation* serves.

It's easy, this new life: just change your woman.

Time comes when every man asks why he shouldn't

Have what he has chased, as he deserves.

Man's happiest who *changes*, not says "couldn't."

He'd spent his youth like any healthy hoodlum,

Braving lack of feeling with strong nerves.

It's easy, this new life: just change your woman.

At some point, though, he learns he really *wouldn't*

Want the object of his aim, and swerves.

Man's happiest who *changes*, not says "couldn't."

He sees now had he tried and understood one

She'd have proved far more than mere hors d'oeuvres.

It's easy, this new life: just change your woman.

So, exchange her for a really good one

Or transform her: fix her so she serves.

Man's happiest who *changes*, not says "couldn't."

It's easy, this new life: *just change your woman.*

II. Longer Poems, poem #2

Hope in None but You

An Ekphrastic Acrostic Poem in Forty Lines

Composed in

Eight Linked Quintains*

[*see p. 530 for specific technical details]

Inspired by

Spem in alium nunquam habui

("I have never put my hope in any other"

[but you, O God of Israel...]"

A Motet in Forty Parts (40 separate voices)

Composed by Thomas Tallis

(English, circa 1505-85)

probably circa 1567-72

II. Longer Poems, poem #2: *Hope in None but You*

1

First voice, pronouncing hope upon the void
Of infinite potential, quick invites
Responding variants to form, deployed
Meticulously layered into heights
Yawned vast as human brains can comprehend,

2

Creating in us circuitries of awe
Accumulating as eight choirs wend
Rotation-wise in their ascent and fall,
Obedient to forces that impel
Loose elements to gather and rise towards

3

Behemoth columns of resounding chords:
Yes, sudden high-stacked walls of sound that swell
Homogeneous to bear the firmament's
Expansive vault spread measureless beyond,
Reverberating out till their events

4

Link back again toward that initial bond
On which was borne that slow accrual of
Varieties from which the whole began.
Inhered in this, the elemental stuff
Now carried in this orbit's weighty span

II. Longer Poems, poem #2: *Hope in None but You* – continued

5

Gains impetus towards that from which it ran,
Held turning then as if by pull of love
Urged on, though in precision's tightest plan:
Self-organized, like tendrilled outgrowth of
Bare yearning issuing from each respond

6

Aloft its pillar rising in immense
Necessity to bear all it has donned,
Deflecting with intensified suspense
Diverse entreaties ringing out like bells
Antiphonally answered back and forth,

7

Voluminous, from east, west, south, and north,
In ricochet off balconies, propelled
Dynamically around the massive hall...
Before diminishing, in waves, to blend,
Outworn, to calm...before those volleyed calls

8

Rise high again in fanfares that ascend
Omnipotent empyreans of height
Divined by us below while, re-employed
In fresh complexities, their massing tide, alloyed
Newfound, comes welling up till ages hence enjoyed.

II. Longer Poems, poem #3

Love's Banquet

An Epithalamium

(Ceremonial Wedding Ode)

Exploring the Idea of a Banquet as Metaphor for
The Sumptuous Variety of Delicious Satisfaction
Offered Us by Life

*When in the Ongoing Preparation and Enjoyment of
Shared Love*

A Poem Composed by the Groom's Father
Specifically for the Celebration of the Wedding Ceremony of

Daniel Borodin and Sirirat Kaewthavorn

At Lower Twin Lake, Rathdrum, Idaho, on July 23, 2022

II. Longer Poems, poem #3

Love's Banquet

An Epithalamium

1

The table has been laid with reverent care
Befitting this rich privilege we await:
To witness, honor and, yet more, to *share*
In that sublimity two souls create
When they step forward to entrust to each
The bounty of attention in love's reach.

2

Bound in with this attention is that wealth
Of feeling for *another* in whose sphere
One can escape the fantasy of self
And its sufficiency – yes, volunteer
To live that larger life than can be found
Where our lone ego sits enthroned and crowned.

3

For, we've evolved, developed, and survived
As *social* beings, not free-standing things,
And cannot even grow to health deprived
Of someone else to whom the child clings.
And thus, to flourish is to *interact* –
Co-ordinate with whom we would attract –

II. Longer Poems, poem #3: *Love's Banquet*—continued

4

Yes, find another who would yearn to live
Within *our* world and, with us, recreate
It, customized for two, with all the give
And take that's furnished by a willing mate,
And drawing each within *their* circle of
Shared comfort and support that we call LOVE.

5

But let us pause a moment at this word
That we make commonplace throughout each day
And savor now that sense of how we're stirred
Alive by it each time it would convey
To us this feast held morning into night
By anyone possessed of appetite.

6

This appetite for one another's life,
With all its cares, is central to that feast
We call a healthy marriage, where no strife
Seems too unseemly to be shared at least
As fully as each joy. And in pursuit
Of *this* we find revealed love's truest fruit.

7

It offers up a nectar sweet *and* tart
Because it's drawn from that *entire* bond
Our lovers forge, not just the honeyed part

II. Longer Poems, poem #3: *Love's Banquet*—continued

The magazines depict with magic wand-
Like airbrush tricks, obscuring what is real
Beneath the lure of fanciful ideal.

8

But I digress. We're here to celebrate
That great abundance that is PARTNERSHIP,
Where contribution toward each other's fate
Provides them both with so much more to grip
Of one's existence than is ever caught
Within the ministries of higher thought.

9

This copious variety of chance
Unveiled to us at love's great banquet leaves
Us giddy with the thrill of great expanse,
Like promise of the prospects one conceives
In the exhilaration of a dream,
Where *and* is one with *or* in how things seem.

10

And like this process of a dreaming brain,
These lovers standing here before us now
Can revel at love's great buffet contained
Within each willingness to share in vow
The truths of *two* transformed into *one* bliss
And seal it with a most delicious kiss.

II. Longer Poems, poem #4

Ode to a Nightgown

II. Longer Poems, poem #4

Ode to a Nightgown

I: Strophe

1

My art awakes and, rousing from my brain
A sense of wonder, shows how I am drunk
On life and you, my muse – as if cocaine
Were emptied in the veins of some old monk,
Inspiring him to see the stardust in
His hands and sing enraptured of those things
Celestial gleaned within his dim-lit cell –
All this evoked by art, which fashions wings
From out the plainest words in which we dwell.

2

But art alone can't satisfy my thirst
For your warm gorgeousness, and I am left
With deep, unquiet longing to be nursed
To nonsense in the bounty of your breasts,
Dissolved into the warm oblivion
Of your allure (from out the hubbub of
A world boggled by the brashest noise)
To fade into the current of your love,
Where I forget the ways that time destroys.

II. Longer Poems, poem #4: *Ode to a Nightgown* — continued

3

For, you've become, with me, that great event
No craft in words can more than celebrate,
As art can only strive to *represent*
Those feelings that our eager nerves create
(To translate life into experience).
Art measures *how it feels to be alive*
Within the presence of ideas and things
And not those things themselves we strive
To know. And it's from *this* our poem springs.

II: Antistrophe

4

Yes, as the object that this thirst observes
Cannot be apprehended *in itself*
(Since written in the language of live nerves),
I sing in order to explore the wealth
Discoverable through sounds shaped on the tongue.
And so, I'll choose a metaphor for you:
Some figure in our speech I'll use to show
How you're revealed to me, as if but through
Its medium alone you're mine to know.

II. Longer Poems, poem #4: *Ode to a Nightgown* — continued

5

And what might better serve me as this veil
Of revelation than that nightgown, sheer
As exhibitionism in detail,
You wear in my lust's eye whenever near?
As if reversing all that went before,
I now propose to sing the virtues of
That very obstacle inviting me
To violate its boundaries toward your love
And, through it, to exalt what I'd set free.

6

Now, to apostrophize some piece of gauze
In place of one who lends it life may seem
Absurd to those untutored in the laws
Of logic your philosophers esteem.
But I maintain this concept we call "cause,"
Seen independent of "effect," displays
To its inquisitor such truths as would
Lay bare the myths obscuring why we praise
Or damn the stuff we label "bad" or "good."

II. Longer Poems, poem #4: *Ode to a Nightgown* – continued

9

I cannot see you, rumped at our feet,
Where I had tossed you in hot haste back then.
For you've become, once more, some indiscreet
Contrivance of a waking dream of men
That sees a woman as some tasty treat
Forbidden till unwrapped in such a way.
And you remain, therefore, symbolic of
The stratagems smart lovers like to play
In order to keep sex the lure of love.

II. Longer Poems, poem #5

Darwin's Islands

Or

Our Expedition to the Galápagos

A Poem in 19 Quintains*

[*See **Notes** Section, under Longer Poem #5, on p. 532]

Darwin's Islands

1

When, all aboard the cruise boat with our guide,
We spotted some rare species on the shore
That differed from a cousin we'd espied
Upon a neighbor isle just explored,
We found ourselves at that mysterious door

2

Before which Darwin stood and troubled so
When he arrived to catalogue the place
And pondered distribution of each race
Amongst dissimilar domains, as though
All sculpted by the place in which they grow.

3

For, this volcanic archipelago
Was formed of islands scattered out beyond
Migration's easy reach, and came to show
Secluded creatures changed to correspond
To the demands of *their* own woods or pond.

4

And though it wouldn't be till his return
Back home that our relentless naturalist
Would fully waken from that desperate myth
Of some Prime Mover who might deign to churn
Out this much randomness and waste, he learned

II. Longer Poems, poem #5: *Darwin's Islands* – continued

5

Of such conundrums here that he'd so yearn
To solve, it could be said his visit to
This region was the first event that turned
His mind toward formulating that great clue
To every living thing that ever grew –

6

Yes, how all beings really got the way
They are today – beyond some fixed design
Of God's that could not *possibly* divine
The role mutated replicators play,
Reciprocally, in habitation's sway,

7

And how blind processes and their defrayed
Expense combine to profit from some mere
Mistake that throws new options to be played,
Then pruned, in that economy of sheer
Efficiency that "purpose" *cannot* steer.

II. Longer Poems, poem #5: *Darwin's Islands* — continued

8

Yes, it was *here*, in these enchanting bays
Far off the coast of Ecuador, that this
Brave thinker first had found himself amazed
At such anomalies one can't dismiss
With just-so stories of creationists.

9

And lucky us, that *we* might find such bliss
In sharing life's adventures as to come
To this historic place that proved the one
Providing Darwin with the very grist
For but the best idea that exists —

10

The key to who and what we are and how
And when we got this way, and why our kin
Includes *all* living things around us now —
Through common ancestors on foot *or* fin —
And not just those who can conceive of sin

II. Longer Poems, poem #5: *Darwin's Islands* – continued

11

Or proud subservience to His least whim
Whose love we crave and punishment we fear
Despite strong odds He isn't even here...
Except as whom *we've* conjured up to win
Parental validation's unctuous grin.

12

Yes, lucky us, whose legacy is free
Of all this superstitious poppycock
That sees *our* species as some specialty
Cooked up, somehow, outside the common stock
And "made in His own image" – hokey schlock

13

Contrived to inculcate a trusting flock
Toward justifying smug entitlement
To man's dominion over "brute" beasts sent
Us for our leisured sustenance and chock-
Full pleasure – all revealed to us ad hoc.

II. Longer Poems, poem #5: *Darwin's Islands* – continued

14

For, what we see around us *here*, converse
To all this churchly propaganda of
Our special right to dominate the earth
(By writ of one who'd *killed his son* for "love"),
Is but abundant proof that every dove,

15

Hawk, heron, finch, and frigatebird above
Or tortoise, lizard, ray, and fish below
Is each, *like us*, a product long bestowed
By *genes at work within the context of*
Environment, and not some ghost's sharp shove.

16

Yes, Darwin's algorithm can explain
"God's plenty" *so much better* than can God,
Whose FINISHED PRODUCTS must be PREORDAINED
And, therefore, mere *ideals* – like false façades
Of saints that hide *real* life, where mishaps prod

II. Longer Poems, poem #5: *Darwin's Islands* – continued

17

Its replicators through their ever-odd
And, therefore, *fecund* habitats to yield
New candidates for competition's field,
Whose new impediments through which they've trod
Select them...*unforeseen by even God.*

18

And what seems mirrored in this process best
Is that of how the poet creates verse:
Where formal limitations will suggest,
From out a *paucity* of fitting words,
Some novel thought, undreamt of from the first –

19

Yes, one conceived through endless forms rehearsed
Amid fixed laws, evolving via chance
Varieties of choices to advance
That have been, and are being, reimbursed
In some exalted brave *new* universe.

II. Longer Poems, poem #6

Hail Muse!, Et Cetera

1

I want a Christmas present for my muse,
A not uncommon want for ones so wanting
In one – be they Christians, Moslems, Jews –
For Christmas is but *universal*, funding
World-wide, the savvy few who choose
To make or sell the things we go out hunting
With our pocketbooks this time of year,
Our season of deep debt and fiscal fear.

2

It isn't just a thing we perpetrate
On Christians, either. No, I've seen a pale
Young Buddhist take a Christmas gift once, straight
In his enlightenment; tore away his veil
And left him in renunciation. Fate
Decrees there's no *one* faith immune; a sale
Put on before the birthday of the Lord
Will *always* threaten what we can afford.

II. Longer Poems, poem #6: *Hail Muse!, Et Cetera*—continued

3

And more. For many, it's an instance of
High sacrilege to stay within one's means
In preparation for this day. To love
Each other less than we spent last year seems
Like sheer affront to some, since high above
The costs of giving rise angelic dreams
Of proving our most pious gumption
Via more conspicuous consumption.

4

Hence, my present need. For, up till now,
No poet's been so subtle with his muse,
In terms of bribery, than I, somehow.
While others would so shamelessly abuse
Their privilege with their goddess by endowing
Her with lavish gifts, like bras and shoes
And such, in hopes of her support, not I.
To me this was not art, but how to buy.

II. Longer Poems, poem #6: *Hail Muse!, Et Cetera*—continued

5

For art, we know, like love, cannot be bought
Unless the buyer and the seller both
Are motivated. Economics taught
The artist early on how much his growth
In consciousness depended on what thought
He could afford to spare, being that one's oath
To art is taken only once there's food.
And poets sang this truth since man was rude.

6

Why yes, the greatest singers of each race
Have stooped to influence, to purchase her
Attention towards the beauty, truth, and grace
Of an accomplished line. They'd try to stir
Her to their side with sheerest silk and lace,
And then in colder months, of course, with fur.
They'd promise her great fame throughout the nation
By her name placed in their dedication.

II. Longer Poems, poem #6: *Hail Muse!, Et Cetera*—continued

7

But did it work? you ask. Was the result
Of all their gifts the vast success they'd aimed
At? Yes! Of course! Just look at them! A cult
Now follows each of these who once were named
Amongst the vast unknown, as if each dolt
Who came along with proper plea proclaimed
Could cinch his sinecure and pen some lines
To win him laurels, women, and fine wines.

8

Yes, presents in and favors out. Just browse
The shelves of any library and read
The names of all of those whom Fame allows
Her recognition. Every one indeed
Had paid his way to that high place with vows
And costly baubles proffered up in greed.
They each had climbed to laureate from peasant
With judicious use of some such present.

II. Longer Poems, poem #6: *Hail Muse!, Et Cetera*—continued

9

Not I. For someone of such pure ideals,
For whom success procured in such a way
Seems near unthinkable, it often feels
A tad annoying, actually, to pray
To one who simply doesn't think of meals
At fancy restaurants, chic hotels to stay
At...wine, cars, jewelry and lingerie...
As fitting currency with which to pay

10

For something "so intangibly sublime,
So meaningful and valuable a gift..."
As inspiration to produce a rhyme.
No house, nor boat, houseboat, nor dock with lift—
No villa on the coast—was worth a dime
To her as payment for her words of swift
Encouragement, which sent me on my way
And bent me down to work on words all day.

II. Longer Poems, poem #6: *Hail Muse!, Et Cetera*—continued

11

And, as fall succumbs to winter's laws,
I find these words I work on more and more
To rally round a rhyme with Santa Claus,
WHOSE INFLUENCE I'D DEARLY BUY TO SCORE
A PROPER GIFT FOR HER THIS YEAR. My jaws
Would work to form these words I wrote: "Which store
Sells things to buy that would impress a muse
Like mine? Won't someone up there bring me news?"

12

"What on earth do you buy a muse like this
For Christmas, anyway? What sort of thing
Does someone give a goddess who insists
There's nothing that she wants? O Santa, sing
To me of goddess's desires!" This
Was answered by a silence you could swing
From; *nothing* seemed my answer. This was it!
In joy I cried, "I'LL GIVE HER THIS I'VE WRIT!"

II. Longer Poems, poem #7

*The Woman Who Could Raise Four Kids
With One Hand*

1

Well, speak then, Memory, and tell us all
About the exploits of the past you find
For us among those figures you see sprawl
Across the vibrant murals of your mind,

2

Where they elude, by dint of your concern,
The dreaded roll call of oblivion
That many, otherwise, had richly earned
And would, but for *your* skill, have deftly won.

3

Yes, say just how (and when and where, no less)
These different lives, with all their varied dreams,
Acquire on your watch such sure success
In living on into *our* thoughts and schemes.

4

Yet even you, Mnemosyne, whom we
Invoke today to help us try and pay
Sufficient justice to those qualities
Of Dorothy's we're here to celebrate;

II. Longer Poems, poem #7: *The Woman Who Could Raise Four Kids with One Hand*—continued

5

Yes, you for whom this all-important art
Of recollection long ago was named,
Yourselves seem not to know so much *by heart*
As Dorothy does, whose stories are so famed.

6

Yes, Dorothy, the mother of my love,
Whom everyone agrees remembers most,
Remains the one *you* turn to, well above
All others, when you find yourself engrossed

7

In dredging up some date or place or names
Of folks and their *precise* relationships
With folks *still* more obscure—those no one blames
For *anything* these days, so far eclipsed

8

From any relevance they'd slipped by now.
And like you, mother of the muses she
Supplants as great remembrancer, her brow
Was once weighed down with all *she* couldn't be:

II. Longer Poems, poem #7: *The Woman Who Could Raise Four Kids with One Hand*—continued

9

Like *unattached*, for one — yes, free to go
And study the fine art of *anything*
That wasn't what to clean or cook or sew
Toward raising some man-child and his offspring.

10

For, this was generations back, when men
Were made of women's fortitude and pluck
And had to merely marry now and then
To pull off their own fantasies with luck

11

While women were instructed early on
To sacrifice *their* dreams to men's affairs
And grow to want what might have made them
Had they not focused on their *parents'* prayers yawn

12

Instead of theirs. Our heroine, meanwhile,
Whose vast accomplishments we celebrate
Today, was not the sort to just beguile
Her way to solace in convention's fate...

II. Longer Poems, poem #7: *The Woman Who Could Raise Four Kids with One Hand*—continued

13

Though she *would* marry, yes, and mother four
Great handfuls of responsibility...
On top of him who needed even more
Than they: no less than his own devotee!;

14

Yes, showering *him* as well with mothering,
Though this, of course, but solely on *his* terms,
Which were that she refrain from smothering
His manhood, which would always make him
squirm.

15

But she, like most strong women, figured out
That secret needed toward surviving men:
Which is to never give him what to flout
Of that authority within her ken.

16

And so, she worked her memory each day,
Recalling all those facts she'd need to run
Her world efficiently, which is to say,
By leaving him to think *he* was the one

II. Longer Poems, poem #7: *The Woman Who Could Raise Four Kids with One Hand*—continued

17

To have accomplished all she ever did,
Like secretary to some CEO
Who must be seen to be the one to bid
Each doing, though it's *she* who'd made it so.

18

For, where *his* talent lies is often more
The pose his public is conditioned to
Expect to see proclaimed at power's door
Than that *key* wisdom hidden from their view.

19

And thus, like this, our heroine prevailed
In raising her good family man and kids
By *seeming* to defer to him who railed
Against those very strengths his pride forbids

20

And keeping him installed as figurehead
Of this great ship she'd sailed across rough seas
Without a sailor's training, led instead
By wisdom's *recollected* expertise;

II. Longer Poems, poem #7: *The Woman Who Could Raise Four Kids with One Hand*—continued

21

Yes, all that she'd long summoned up from out
The here and now of real necessity;
The wisdom called to mind, not from devout
Conformance to mere blind authority —

22

That stuff we're taught to think will guide good
souls
Who toe the line of mere propriety —
But rather from the dangerous shoals
One has to navigate upon life's sea.

23

And though our captain never deigned to speak
In sailor's *talk* — indeed she shunned the stuff
She'd heard below on deck — there's *nothing* meek
About the rigging of her stern rebuff

24

To any seaman who forgot his place
Decorum set for him at table on
Her ship. No, he would need to learn to grace
His presence with respect, or else be gone.

25

So, let us bow to this great woman who
Could raise four kids with one hand while the other
Manned the wheel from which her consort drew
His own esteem for this brave wife and mother.

II. Longer Poems, poem #8

Epithalamium

I

I call not to the muses but to you,
Our loved ones here, to help me now to sing
My joy – to celebrate the feeling true
Devotion to another soul can bring.
Come friends, come family, come beloved all;
I summon you to witness with the stars above
The bounty that is ours at Cupids' call –
That endless banquet of fulfillment: Love.
Yes, come and help memorialize this rich new life
We find laid out before us now as man and wife.

II

We have been blessed with that most precious gift –
Unwavering joy in one another's arms,
In which embrace our nourished spirits lift
With ease and comfort past all earthly harms.
For in that rarified existence shared
By two devoted souls (who yet are born
Again each day into each other's care),
No truth need be avoided, none forsworn.
O come rejoice with us in this unfettered life
Revealed to us through honesty as man and wife.

II. Longer Poems, poem #8: *Epithalamium* – continued

III

Yes, here within love's space – that Godly state
Of mindfulness (of keenest, merest being) –
We find ourselves without the need of hate
And its systemic darkening of seeing.
So clear becomes our vision of the good
In what we have that we can see beyond
Our want (where nothing's truly understood)
To the eternal in our lives: our bond.
Come, share with us the measureless, this vast new life
We now embark upon in love as man and wife.

IV

Ours is the greatest story ever told:
The truth of how the love two people feel
For one another can transmute to gold
The metal of mere bodily appeal,
Availing them to that more ardent lust
Which burns an incandescence clean and whole,
Sustained by that most pure of fuels, trust;
Two beings merged into one flame, one soul.
So come, partake of this bright love that lights our life;
Illuminate the world with us as man and wife.

II. Longer Poems, poem #8: *Epithalamium* – continued

V

Our story tells how lovers can be friends
First – how a man and woman can so love
Each other for their person as transcends
Romantic appetites in bed – enough
To choose to wait until their lives allow,
To wait until they get to know their hearts
Before abandoning their worlds to plow
Right in and learn their other body parts.
Observe how half a decade's wait as friends for life
Matured profoundly into love of man and wife.

VI

Yes, recognize this light in which we bathe
Here, high upon our pinnacle of bliss,
And testify to those below (whose faith
In love has waned) the power in a kiss.
It is a force of lightning strength, we know
Who've felt it break to shards the gray routine
Of our unsavored days and make them glow
Like stars illuming worlds unforeseen.
O tell them come and leave behind that part of life
Which does not know this kiss we live as man and wife.

II. Longer Poems, poem #8: *Epithalamium*—continued

VII

It is this very kiss you've come here now
To witness, this event momentous of
That reverent concord honored in our vow,
Which consecrates the greatest life force, love.
For in this union of our lips we taste
Creation's spark, the passion of the stars,
Connecting us to all in which is traced
The endless possibilities now ours.
Yes, save this kiss within your hearts; it is our life.
We bid you nurture it; embrace us, man and wife.

VIII

This blessed kiss is but the corner stone
Of a cathedral we aspire to raise,
A monument to that devotion shown
Each other through support, respect, and praise.
We'll work upon our temple every day,
Yes, make each word and action but a force
For love, for affirmation. And we pray
This love infect the world at its source.
O pray our work inspire others seeking life
To find it here where love transforms us, man and wife.

II. Longer Poems, poem #8: *Epithalamium* – continued

IX

This synagogue, this mosque, this holy church
Of every faith we build each moment of
Our marriage, shall preserve our constant search
For peace – first in ourselves and then through love
For others – touching, moving fellow men.
For there's no limit to the love the heart
Can hold; the more we give the more again
We find instinct in us to re-impart.
I invite you all to rapture, yes, to life
Ecstatically embraced, as live this man and wife.

X

And I invite the world at large, all living
Things beneath the stars – the fish and birds
And beasts throughout the waters, skies, and echoing
Trees – to witness here these joy-warmed words
And the exalted temple they'd describe,
Where's kept the relics of discovered bliss
In everything we do, each dignified
By its essential pleasure – by its kiss.
And let each kiss be like a prayer for deeper life.
We pray now, woman and her husband, man and wife.

II. Longer Poems, poem #8: *Epithalamium* – continued

XI

And with our lips sealed thus, another quest
So dear to us is consummated now:
The search for parents for our children; yes,
A mother for a son who can endow
Him with a family life he's yearned to know;
A father for a daughter not too old
For yet another...or a brother...O
Together we'll create contentment's fold!
So come and bless this new-born family, this new life
Engendering two children via man and wife.

XII

Now let us all perform the muse's work –
Inspire one another to create
Our world anew – to dance in light where lurked
That darkness cast by all that we negate.
Come, let's partake of this fine food with verve;
Exalt in love and nothing will we miss.
Let's eat, drink, dance, sing – live right at the nerve.
Above all, let us worship with each kiss.
We press our lips together here in search of life
Itself – the infinite in us as man and wife.

II. Longer Poems, poem #9

My Muse is Out of Control

1

In olden days I felt the urge
To reinvent the world in words –
To sing it unconfused
By all the ponderousness of prose.
Fine work, though anybody knows:
FOR *THIS* I'D NEED A MUSE.

2

The same requirement held true,
I'd heard, for those who yearned to do
The like in paint or stone,
Or rearrange the world in sound;
They too would need to sit around
And wait for help, and moan.

3

They'd groan and grovel, call and plead
For inspiration to proceed
With this, their discipline.
And yet this goddess they'd invoke
To help them sing what can't be spoke
Herself could not begin

II. Longer Poems, poem #9: *My Muse is Out of Control*—continued

4

Till summoned — no, she seemed inept
To stir a foot or line except
When asked (and *that* in rhyme!),
As if this poet so unversed
Would have to go create *her* first —
And this just *boggles* Time.

5

A paradigm, perhaps, of that
Same paradox which God begat
When making ALL from none —
The former state being home to not
Just the created (future) lot
But to the latter one

6

As well, requiring Him (or Her
Or They or It) prepared to spur
A universe to be —
To do it *prior* to that point
At which the two states become joint,
Lest *He* be thought unfree.

II. Longer Poems, poem #9: *My Muse is Out of Control*—continued

7

But anyway, my muse. I'd choose
To *do* this thing, and would enthuse
About it good and hard,
Preparing to go off and change
The world in well-wrought verse— arrange
Some words till they had jarred.

8

And nothing came. No world, no word,
No voice from high above was heard
To break the chilling void.
I'd wait and wait till it grew late,
And then I would procrastinate
A while, still unemployed.

9

And this was how it was each time
I'd feel the need to shape some rhyme:
I'D WAIT UPON MY MUSE.
I'd sit, stand up, lie down, then sit
Again, drink tea and read a bit...
Then gaze upon my shoes.

II. Longer Poems, poem #9: *My Muse is Out of Control*—continued

10

Had she but whispered to me *one*
Encouragement, I would have come
Right then and there to write—
To fashion out of language news
Of other worlds the mind imbues
To those whom sounds delight.

11

And by “encouragement” I mean
Some little vision I might glean
For my own revelation;
A bit of prophesy in which
To dream realities so rich
They seem their own creation.

12

Get me started’s all I ask—
Something worthy to the task
Is all I’d need for now.
The rest I’ll do myself, of course;
I’ll take your slightest word as source
And make you very proud.

II. Longer Poems, poem #9: *My Muse is Out of Control*—continued

13

And like a priest in ancient days
Who'd stand on wait in patient praise
Before the oracle,
I'd sit before my notebook, crazed
To hear the word through which to gaze
On the adorable—

14

To look in awe upon the world
Made manifest through vowels curled
Upon the tongue's delight.
And then it happened...more or less:
A woman's clear firm voice addressed
Me, saying only: WRITE!

15

Yes, "write!" One syllable was all.
Not "write about the rise and fall
Of Rome," say, nor e'en "write
In duple meter, rhymed like so..."
As one might keep a bard in tow
Till launched. But no, just "WRITE!"

II. Longer Poems, poem #9: *My Muse is Out of Control*—continued

16

Was this the word for which I'd waited
Every day until I hated
Life lived in the arts—
Until I'd wished I'd held a job
Like normal folks who didn't sob
To find "arts" rhymes with "farts"?

17

No, surely this was not HER voice
But just the wind or other noise
Mistook to be my muse's.
Perhaps it was some mindless bird
At roost outside, which knows no word
Yet squawks such as confuses

18

Human neighbors with its cries
And tortures (every time it sighs)
Good poets with false hopes!
Or else, perhaps, it's just the sound
Which disappointment makes going round
When poets wake as dopes!

II. Longer Poems, poem #9: *My Muse is Out of Control*—continued

19

No matter. There were two paths now
Before me: one to be endowed
With faith in what one's heard;
The other to sit back and smirk
That this sound meant *no need to work*,
As this was JUST SOME BIRD.

20

Posterity records for us
The end result of all this fuss
With birds: NO POEM WRIT.
And so, it seemed this latter road,
Inviting as it was (bestowed
So short and smooth)...*wasn't it*.

21

The only way to get poems made
Was WRITE THEM, after all, not slake
Creation with negation.
So I rose up and took the bait,
Assured **this muse's call could wait**,
And...FOUND MY INSPIRATION.

II. Longer Poems, poem #9: *My Muse is Out of Control*—continued

22

I worked all day. I worked all night.
I did nothing *but* to write,
And what I got was GOOD:
Just words upon a blank of space
Which nothing, *nothing* could efface,
As now I'd understood.

23

This thing I'd made was nothing short
Of something new — of great import
Because it hadn't been.
Yet now, quite flushed with what I'd earn
Did I find cause for *real* concern:
I COULD NOT REIN HER IN!

24

That's right; I wrote and wrote and wrote,
And when I tried to stop, I note,
It felt I'd lost my soul.
For, though she'd given me the word
Which brought *me* discipline, I now averred
MY MUSE WAS OUT OF CONTROL!

II. Longer Poems, poem #10

The Man Who Followed His Dreams

1

We all have been there: woken from that state
Of cobbled cabbages and mimicked kings
Where we'd played deaf-mute witness to the weight
Emotion wields toward yoking disparate things:

2

Where someone whom we recognize to be
A total stranger, though our current spouse,
As well as someone else's, serves us tea
Amidst the kitchen of our parents' house,

3

Which slowly steams past crowds upon the dock
Who wave goodbye to us in tears that rain
Quite lightly here...*inside*...to strains of Bach
Heard faintly from a window down the lane....

4

Now, most of us, when faced with nonsense weird
As this, might reach reflexively to clutch
At some stray wisp before it's disappeared
Against the light of reason's noxious touch.

II. Longer Poems, poem #10: *The Man Who Followed His Dreams* — continued

5

Yes, we might try and hold such fragile creatures
Of the night's illogic in the glare
Of aminergic daylight, where their features
Yield to expectation's caustic wear

6

And wither on the cholinergic vine
The very moment we attempt to fix
Them in our preconception, like some *wine-*
From-plain-old-water wedding-party tricks.

7

But this same most of us will rarely stay
To watch the one made out of loaves and fish.
We'll pack our metaphoric bags, quick pay
Our bill, and leave before another wish

8

Is granted by our most accomplished host.
For, though persuaded that these mysteries
We'd witnessed in our brains were merely ghosts
Created by real neuro-chemistries

II. Longer Poems, poem #10: *The Man Who Followed His Dreams* — continued

9

At work within the crucibles of our
Own skulls, we're satisfied with this mere fact
And not the *wonder* that this most bizarre
Performance should convey in the abstract.

10

No, *we're* content to launch another day
In chasing dreams of fame, success, and sex
And leave behind *this* magic to decay
Upon some synapse where it intersects

11

With our *preferred* reality...of fame,
Success, and still more sex. Indeed, the most
Of us will gladly forfeit this great claim
To creativity that so engrossed

12

Us only moments back, when in that phase
Our dorsolateral prefrontal cortex
Snoozed offline in cholinergic haze
Before it woke in serotonin's vortex.

II. Longer Poems, poem #10: *The Man Who Followed His Dreams* — continued

13

Yes, in place of our proclivity
For what *we* take as “real,” which, in itself,
Is just another narrative we see
In this “remembered present” we’ll soon shelve,

14

The long-awaited hero of our story,
Rather, chose each morning to *embrace*
This chaos that is sleep’s great bid for glory:
Yes, collect transcriptions he would trace

15

Of *his* REM sleep deliria within
The quick-proliferating volumes of
His *own* dream journal — such that would but win
Him fame among his colleagues far above

16

That won by even his great “Engine Man.”
For, in *these* bravely illustrated tomes
We find what Freud would have his censor ban
From *anyone’s* discovery: those gnomes

II. Longer Poems, poem #10: *The Man Who Followed His Dreams* — continued

17

Of super-egotistical libido
Run amok amid repressed desires,
Dressed in nothing but a fucking Speedo™
And igniting sublimated fires.

18

No, these were *anything* but what you'd use
To teach your average five-year-old to read.
You'd thumb through one of *these* when full of booze
And hot to follow where your id might lead....

19

But, we digress. The point here that is key
Is really that the hero of our tale
Would take the time to gather the debris
From these bold escapades and with it trail

20

The bigger quarry: that of what our dreams
Are made and how. For, our professor knew
From all those sleepless nights he'd spent, it seems,
Just watching other people sleep, how true

II. Longer Poems, poem #10: *The Man Who Followed His Dreams* — continued

21

To chemistry our conscious states remain,
Despite those noble traits we like to think
Intrinsic to our self. Yes, we're insane
Whenever our good brain succumbs to drink

22

Too much of this or that in concert with
The other and unmediated by
Hormonal intervention...till pure myth
Looks like rock-solid truth, *for which we'd die*

23

If necessary, all despite the fact
We wouldn't have behaved thus had our brain
Been spared that chemic cocktail it *must* act
On as a link within causation's chain.

24

And he knew too that this insanity
Is ours each night, regardless of how well
We dodge it when our daytime referee
Is back online and judging how to tell.

II. Longer Poems, poem #10: *The Man Who Followed His Dreams* — continued

25

In other words, he gleaned that we're all sane
And nuts by turn upon a smoothly curved
Continuum of timing in our brain...
From which, it seems, a few of us have swerved.

26

By this I mean, of course, those few of us
Who *live* our dreams while wide awake by day,
Like schizophrenics or great artists — thus
Indulging in what work our sleep's made play —

27

Or even those whose sleep debt had accrued
Such that they would hallucinate their way
Throughout their soup-like waking hours, stewed
Enough to meet a friend now long decayed

28

And unavailable to be one's guest.
Or then the rest of us whose brains we'd fried
With custom chemicals we would *ingest*
Instead of just *secrete*, when so supplied.

II. Longer Poems, poem #10: *The Man Who Followed His Dreams* — continued

29

Yes, *all* these lunatics our hero knew
To be but *dreamers* of some different kind,
Whose dreams were quite predictably the view
Form *their* specific state of altered mind.

30

And he'd go write great tomes upon this point
In hopes of disabusing folks of those
Unhelpful notions psych pros would anoint
Their students with till nicely predisposed

31

Concerning madness as some sordid thing
Those lesser minds than ours must bear the weight
Of on the back of what poor choices bring
To those behaviors we incriminate.

32

No, *he* would lecture far and wide how each
And every one of us not only can
But *does* become pure BATSHIT too and breach
Those boundaries the DSM began.

II. Longer Poems, poem #10: *The Man Who Followed His Dreams* — continued

33

And he'd make ample illustrative use
Of these same journals of his dreams he'd kept
For decades now, and with them would seduce
His followers to *easily* accept

34

The blatant fact of *his* insanity
Each night while fast asleep — though some proposed
While fast *awake* as well, as *that's* when he
Obsessed on having all these dreams exposed.

35

Why yes, where you or I might follow our
Own dreams by chasing after some ideal
(No matter how impractically bizarre)
We long had set before our steering wheel,

36

Our further-driven hero went beyond
All this and waited, pen and pad at hand
Beside his bed, for *his*. This corresponds,
Some say, to dreaming on demand.

II. Longer Poems, poem #10: *The Man Who Followed His Dreams* — continued

37

Yes, this great appetite for his own dreams
He'd cultivated while transcription whiz
By writing these great books that brought vast teams
Of researchers from their own dreams to his.

38

For, where these steady experts had pursued
Their daydreams of great contributions to
The science of the mind, he'd have them chew
On his instead. *And here they formed a queue.*

39

And now we come to that cadential place
Where anyone who'd managed not to fall
Asleep might still expect to have embraced
Some takeaway, or moral, after all.

40

And so, goddamn it, here it is: A dream
Is any narrative we weave — awake,
Asleep, or in between — that helps us seem
To navigate our world. And he who'd make
Us think his dreams *our own* enough to deem
Worth following **DESERVES OUR GREAT ESTEEM.**

II. Longer Poems, poem #11

The Bougainvilleas of Sonora

I

Forget the rose, my love; for all its use
As symbol of romance, it can't seduce
From us that breathless shudder of deep thrill
The lusty bougainvillea can instill
Upon first sight – much like that sudden bliss
Enveloping our union in a kiss.
Why yes, despite those qualities that long
Have won the rose first place in song
And image as the emblem of all love –
That blossom representing, far above
All others, amorous intrigue – this might
Be less the depth of sensual delight
It draws than its antiquity among
Those cultures in which songs like this are sung.

II. Longer Poems, poem #11: *The Bougainvilleas of Sonora*—continued

II

For, this was all before that crucial year
Of seventeen and sixty-eight when, near
The town of Rio de Janeiro in
Brazil, one Jeanne Baret, who'd later win
Renown as but the first of her fair sex
To circumnavigate the globe (and vex
Male natives on the way), had here discovered
In a jungle what might help her lover's
Venous ulcer: that which kept him back
On board, unable to collect and track
Rare specimens along that two-year trip
Of Louis A. de Bougainville's two ships.
This Jeanne had found some bright red bracts, it's said,
She thought might soothe her botanist in bed.

II. Longer Poems, poem #11: *The Bougainvilleas of Sonora*—continued

III

And these same quasi leaves, quite paper-thin,
Surrounding three small flowers just within,
Would prove to be none other than what gave
Acclaim to Bougainville beyond the grave—
Way more than as first Frenchman round the world—
A plant with petal-looking bracts unfurled
In glorious profusion, like a spray
Of adoration in fierce disarray.
And though our botanist's bad leg grew worse,
Despite his lover's jungle trek as nurse,
This *otherwise*-medicinal vine shrub
Would spread around the earth's warm tropic hub
To ornament the terraces of kings
On down to lowly walls to which it clings.

II. Longer Poems, poem #11: *The Bougainvilleas of Sonora*—continued

IV

Which brings us back from my digression to
That point itself our poem should pursue:
The fact that even here, where we escape
The brutal northern gloom and cold to traipse
Along the tranquil sun-drenched beaches of
Sonora's desert coast; where we make love
In the abandon of all worldly cares,
Like hedonists let loose as millionaires
To frolic on our luck; yes, even here,
Where we pursue our creature pleasures, clear
Of clouds and chill, to soar on what unrolls
Into our sparkling Now, like breeze-borne gulls,
We sometimes turn a corner by some dune
And stop within a heartbeat of a swoon.

II. Longer Poems, poem #11: *The Bougainvilleas of Sonora*—continued

v

For, what we find before us, like some great
Volcano spewing forth its red-hot fate,
Is that forgotten bougainvillea, back
Beside some crumbling remnant of a shack,
Extravagantly blushing brilliant hues
Where few but its own pollinators cruise.
Yes here, where roving dogs might come and comb
A curb for some old long-discarded bone,
We turn and find a fabulous display
Of color blazoned bright against the gray,
Like an epiphany revealed to some
Unready prophet suddenly struck dumb.
And just like this, the two of us stop dead
Amidst our tracks, forgetting what we'd said

II. Longer Poems, poem #11: *The Bougainvilleas of Sonora* — continued

VI

Just then, and clasp our hands when both our hearts
Squeeze bursts of sudden-risen blood that smarts
Like pricking needles at our scalps and ears
And stimulates our widened eyes with tears,
Which seem to well up blindly from some thrill
Our forebears must have felt when they'd fulfilled
Some basic craving or escaped sure death.
But though the world in which we catch *our* breath
We taste within a privileged paradise
Of wine-sipped sunsets without sacrifice,
The *feeling* we experience remains
As vivid as the ones rewarding brains
Of old that searched more fundamental needs
(Which leaves us riding joys of bygone deeds).

II. Longer Poems, poem #11: *The Bougainvilleas of Sonora* — continued

VII

All *this* amid some bare, dilapidated street
Ignored by all the affluent elite,
Who typically will allocate great sums
In chasing titillation that becomes
No more exhilarating in its rush
Than this most natural reflexive gush.
Indeed, our species' whole economy,
From hunter-gatherers to you and me,
With *all* our smart technologies, appear
To anthropologists as engineered
Around our brain's most basic appetite
For that rewarding feeling we excite
Engaged with anything that helped confer
Survival, *gene-wise*, of an ancestor.

II. Longer Poems, poem #11: *The Bougainvilleas of Sonora*—continued

VIII

And this, of course, included not just things
From which to jump and run, but those that bring
Us *closer* too, inviting us from out
The shadow of instinctive fear and doubt
To chance *connection* with some entity
Conferring pleasure on the conferee.
So, just as your own beauty strikes that chord
In my most primal feeling of reward,
Inviting me to seek within your being
Everything that now seems *worth* most seeing,
When the bougainvillea fills my view
I feel my lust for life itself renew
With value that transcends the merest fact
Of my existence (which soon grows abstract).

II. Longer Poems, poem #11: *The Bougainvilleas of Sonora*—continued

IX

Now, let's return to our forgotten street,
Well off the grid of luxury, and greet
Our lonely bougainvillea one more time.
Yes, let's just stand before this most sublime
Embodiment of vegetative life
And contemplate, without dissection knife
And microscope, the dazzling splendor of
Its quiet revelation far above
That unforgiving world through which it blooms,
Full nourished by what little it consumes.
Is there in all our floriography
A plant more emblematic of that tree
Of life through which connection springs from one
Vast beauty we can bask in like the sun?

II. Longer Poems, poem #11: *The Bougainvilleas of Sonora* — continued

x

And which among those memorable traits
Of this great tree-like vine-cum-shrub elates
Its viewer with the most immediacy?
Quite likely, it would be ABUNDANCE — key
To that subliminal aesthetic of
Survival, procreation and, yes, love.
Indeed, abundance, unlike sparseness, calls
Like some enticing siren's song to all
Of life within earth's harsh economy
(Where nothing ever really eats for free).
And so, it shouldn't be surprising that
Some symbol of it will, straight off the bat,
Elicit strong emotional response
In us down where our instincts are ensconced —

II. Longer Poems, poem #11. *The Bougainvilleas of Sonora*—continued

XI

Beneath, that is, mere tweaks to what we've learned.
And now, if we step back from where we turned
To find this brilliant vision in our sight
(In this anatomy of appetite
Our poem has become in its pursuit),
We'll see more clearly how this most astute
Progenitor of ours endeavors to
Sustain its future. In the end, it's through
Such lavish attributes that join to bait
Whatever life might come help pollinate
It, broadcasting its essence against death.
Perhaps it's *this* that makes us lose our breath:
This bold expense of resource spent to lure
Attention to it, so it may endure.

II. Longer Poems, poem #11: *The Bougainvilleas of Sonora* — continued

XII

And here we come full circle to the thrust
Of this, *our* expedition, which is just
That how we've come to share each other's joy
Is ever rooted in that force employed
By all the rest of evolution's fruit —
ATTRACTION: that which drives our keen pursuit
Of intimate connection with some sure
Safe otherness in which to feel secure.
And like the bounty of this greater wealth
Than can be found within the bounds of self,
Our bougainvillea brings to mind this bliss
I rediscover in our every kiss.
So, let us keep this gorgeous bloom, above
All else, the potent symbol of our love.

II. Longer Poems, poem #12

The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy

1

We all have heard it told before
How so-and-so, for free,
Did this or that with such panache
We dare not try and see
If we could pass it down the line
Without hyperbole.

2

This isn't *anything* like that.
No, this, *our* tale, is so
Unvarnished-true that your real job
Will rather be to go
And *try* to burnish it a bit
And make it really glow.

3

For, what I would relate to you
Today has come to me
From so reliable a source
It's lacking that esprit
That marks those taller ones preferred
By *tall*-tale devotees.

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

4

Our story tells of Dorothy,
Who's here with us today
Way longer than the most of us,
Which is, no less, to say
The reason we are here at all,
Rejoicing in this costly way.

5

Yes, Dorothy, the mother of
My love, and who now seems
My *own* mom too, has come to live,
Through *her* own mother's genes
And pluck, and just a pinch of luck
Perhaps, *way* past our dreams.

6

For it was N I N E T Y years ago
She had appeared on earth—
Specifically, Payette, ID—
Between her sister's birth
And that of future brother George,
Long famous for his mirth.

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

7

But soon came those impoverished days
We've read about that paid
The bills for all that partying
Those roaring twenties laid
Between the teens and forties (when
More war brought fiscal aid).

8

And jobs were scarce enough to send
Her dad for his career
To Portland, while *they* stayed back home
Until her junior year.
And not till *then* did Dorothy
Quite learn to persevere.

9

For, Portland was so big a place
That newcomers would find
That they were outside, looking in,
And Dorothy resigned
Herself from this point on to be
Of the *inclusive* kind.

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

10

Yes, it was here, where she had felt
Invisible at first,
That she'd determined not to make
Another feel the worse.
So, she then vowed to fight against
Elitism's proud curse.

11

But this defining moment in
Her life would lead her to
Admit into her circle *not*
Just those to whom were due
Their chance to get to know her more,
But *him* as well whose view

12

She'd brightened, working at her books.
Of course, I speak of Jim
Who, while at Oliver had seen
Her, yes, had watched her swim
Across his notice in the job
Pool past his cup's full brim.

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

13

He asked soon if she'd marry him,
Which took her breath away,
Perhaps in pity of his lacking
Gallantries, let's say,
But anyways, she found herself
Including Jim this day...

14

Way past the mode she had those others
Who came rapping on
Her chamber door. Now, she had been
To business school and drawn
Up books and budgets logically,
But MARRIAGE hadn't dawned

15

On her priorities till now.
And though she'd learned to keep
A balanced book and view of things,
She quickly grasped how steep
A slope it was from there to where
Jim's fears would pool so deep.

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

16

For, he was raised upon the plains,
Dressed mainly in rebuff,
And hadn't ever really come
To trust there'd be enough,
And brought this fear to Dorothy,
Who learned to call his bluff

17

By *showing* him how bad things were.
She babysat, as planned,
For cash, while raising her four kids
With but the other hand.
All this she did without complaint
Of Jim, you understand.

18

They'd moved by now from Portland to
Spokane, where they would buy
A duplex with a garden plot
In which to grow, knee-high,
Great things to eat. And she would cook
And sew and lead well-nigh

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

19

A regiment of girl scouts too
While helping out the poor
Through church and singing in its choir.
All this had great allure
To someone who'd decided that
Inclusiveness would cure

20

The aches and pains society
Was suffering so much.
And she would keep the books at church
And plan bazaars and such
While storing what to give the poor
Come Christmas. Thus, she'd touch

21

The world around her with her love
Of helping those in need.
And later on, her own four kids,
Whom she would always feed
And clothe with an accountant's eye
For value, would concede

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

22

That this inclusiveness of hers
Was really for the best,
Despite the sacrifices made
By those at home for guests
Or homeless folks or others whom
Her ethics soon impressed.

23

But I digress. Meanwhile, Jim
Woke up one day without
His job at forty-two, and she
Went straight to work about
Some doctors' books she'd kept while Jim
She'd sent to school to scout

24

Out that degree with which to teach
For better pay. And then
At Walters Paints she worked to save
Up how to go and send
Them both to timeshare in Kauai.
(*Inclusiveness* again!)

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

25

Yes, this was just the start of great
Adventures with their friends,
With whom they'd go and stay sometimes
Together at earth's ends...
Though Jim would all this while fret
About each dime she'd spend.

26

But not to fear, for Dorothy
Knew how to make each dime
Ring on into the afternoon,
Where she could make it chime
The dinner bell as well, and showed
Jim money was but time

27

Well spent. And though he never did
Give up tight scrutiny
Of bills received, he *would* give up
That notion of his key
Position in the budgeting,
Sometimes, and let her be...

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

28

Except when he again forgot
How she had handled things
So sagely. This extended to
Those trips that Christmas brings
To those *inclusive* of their spouse's
Kin as were they kings

29

And queens and not just folks of *his*.
For, they would visit *both*
Sides of the family every year—
Yes, pack the car, in troth,
With kids and gifts and cookies she
Would bake without an oath

30

And point the car toward Portland each
December. Keep in mind,
Meanwhile, that our Dorothy
Was never one to find
Things unimprovable, and she
Had come to have consigned

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

31

To them, *inclusively*, a cabin
On a lake their friends,
The Koentopps, had a house upon
And where they'd visit then.
Yes, business school had also shown
Her how to follow trends.

32

For, now they could invite the whole
Damned bunch to come and stay
As guests of *theirs* and make this party
Last beyond a day
Or two. And though Jim *was* aghast
At having more to pay

33

In order to procure this place
On Twin, he gradually
Forgot and would commend his own
Good sense to have agreed
On buying it back then (though *then*
He'd thought it some damned spree).

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

34

But back to our good heroine.
The thing we need remind
Ourselves about our story here
Is less how we've defined
Its truth in terms of strict detail
Than how truths are assigned.

35

For, not a word I've lent to you
Today can *really* give
The verity of how things went,
As they are *words*, which live
In *sentences* and not events
To capture in life's sieve.

36

But Dorothy herself can tell
You everything I've passed
Along to you, *and more*, all shaped
By *her* perspective's cast.
And saying "more," I *mean* it too;
FOR, HER RECALL IS VAST,

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

37

As everyone who's here knows true.
Yes, she can well recite
Her life—and yours as well; *watch out!*—
In details to ignite
Imagination's pyrotechnics,
Morning into night.

38

In fact, the more I've come to know
Her, the more reticent
I am to ask about the past.
For, there were times she went
So far in answering, I had
To ask her what *I* meant

39

By bringing up the blasted point.
So yes, for every small
Memento I've conveyed to you
There is an utter WALL
That could be built from bricks pressed out
Of details *she* recalls!

II. Longer Poems, poem #12: *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy*—continued

40

Now, let us raise our glass and toast
Our heroine for more
Of life she can regale us with
Some day. And let's explore
Inclusively all this she's lived
So vividly before.
Good health to Dorothy, who is
The one we most adore!

II. Longer Poems, poem #13

The Parliament of Foul Ideas

Or

Our Inalienable Right to Ignorance

1

*T*hat life is short to live while long to learn
Is why, still green for one soon gray, I've come
To search more books for truths I can discern
Of how our world *really* works – to plumb
Convincing *evidence* in place of numb
Conventions that seduce us with their ease
While but extorting from our fears their fees.

2

No, not such books conventional to folk
Who, rather than live *now*, would hold their breath
On palliatives of myth with which to choke
The irksome knowledge of their certain death
And cower in the safety of inept
Ideas of but *surviving* that same flesh
In which thought's just a process of live mesh,

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

3

But rather those inviting us to view
Through lenses undistorted by the tint
Of nervous hope this world that *is* and, through
Our deep engagement with it, leave our *print*
Upon its fabric, not some ghostly lint;
Yes, books meant not to lull our wits to sleep
But wake them into life's vast wealth to reap.

4

Yet, *all* books should be read at reason's edge —
Yes, even those reporting neutral fact —
Lest we confuse *pro tem* belief with pledge
Of FAITH (belief *despite* contrary fact)
And offer up our brain to be hijacked
By some authority unproven who
Exacts our blind allegiance upon cue.

5

For, while belief in its most basic mode —
Pro tempore, that is *before* we've wrought
It firmly into FAITH — is *gene-bestowed*
And necessary to our simplest thought:
It saves us all that time it takes, from naught,
To prove the truth of *every* step we'd need
Towards where the subject thought might
then proceed.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

6

True FAITH is, on the contrary, that deal
We cut in trusting with our eyes tight closed
The verity of that which is *revealed*
To us as true the while our reason dozed,
Most typically because we're predisposed
To find it so through fellowship in some
Conspiracy pretending it's not dumb.

7

And so, I've long maintained that *any* book
Can be misread *or* held in valid doubt
And that what really counts is how we *look*
In it ourselves to learn what it's about,
Not how it's looked upon by the devout,
Who deem a text as worthy for *their* eyes
When judged as such by those they're *told* are wise.

8

Like when some minister of FAITH to whom
They trust their moral guidance (just because
He claims imaginary friends) presumes
To solve life's toughest questions through odd laws
He's read in ancient books of tired saws,
Though *these* were writ by others who knew *naught*
Of why things happened as they did and thought,

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

9

Conversely, that the superstitious lore
Bequeathed to *them* sufficiently explained
Injustices they saw arise before
Their ignorance of things, and so, ordained
Themselves as masters of but long-maintained
Wrong answers. Thus, from out old fields come *new-*
Grown crops of foul ideas to hold true.

10

Now, I'd of late been reading deeply in
The science of such things as love and sex
And how such appetites, long seen as sin
By hungry disapproving types perplexed
By their own urges as they crane their necks
To pry, are easier explained by how
Our brains evolved than what our gods allow.

11

For, what our gods allow is also seen
More clearly by a peek inside our brain,
Whose architecture, drafted by our genes
In concert with the world that's its terrain,
Will favor features helping to sustain
These genes and, hence, will best predict the sort
Of things these gods we dream will like or thwart.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

12

For instance, charitable acts toward those
Whom we enslave — or grovel to when *they're*
Perceived to wield the upper hand — or shows
Of grand respect for rites that seemed to bear
Us fruit when practiced last — like prostrate prayer —
Yes, all such stratagems that served us well
Before we learned to rule by threats of Hell.

13

The physiology of sleep and dreams
Is yet another subject of the books
I read that proves how often that which *seems*
The reason something happens overlooks
The way things *really* work, while tenured crooks
Indulge their readers' longings to come read
In dreams dark myths supporting their own creed,

14

And all in lieu of real-life facts that tell
Of why a working brain does this or that
Toward its efficient functioning. To sell
Such truths to readers of romance proves flat-
Out profitless, while myths make prophets fat.
Hence, knowing how a dream is made reveals
Far more than dream interpreters' ideals.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

15

For, those who would *interpret* dreams design
Posh metaphors to show the dream to “mean”
Some *other thing* than how it’s made — some sign
That shrouds our guilty thoughts of some obscene
Old wish that might disturb our own serene
Time out quite lost in Morpheus’s arms,
Hence swapping facts of nerves for myths of charms.

16

Yes, all this goes to demonstrate my view
That books are better savored for their art
Of bringing thoughts and feelings into true
Engagement with our life than as some smart
Prescription for its proper living. Start
With any book at hand and you will feel
Beliefs compete for sway at selfhood’s wheel.

17

And just to prove that I mean *any* book,
I chose from off a shelf the one called “good”
By those who don’t read books, and as I shook
Its dust and cobwebs off as best I could
I planned to find in it such stuff that would
Provide me that respite for tired nerves
That prunes the clutter of my day’s reserves.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

18

I speak of SLEEP, of course: that splendid state
Of drugged oblivion insuring fresh
Connections in the circuits we create
All day and night within our neural flesh
Which, wearied by redundancies of mesh
Accrued by forming synapses at work,
Consolidates its pathways through this murk.

19

Yes, I am one who venerates the nap:
That seeming flick of switch rebooting brains
Grown heavy with their endless work to map
Their world by fooling them to feel the gains
That normally a good night's sleep attains.
And here I'd found that sedative to best
Help lure my tired brain to be its guest.

20

For, I have found no better way to reach
That sacred place of senselessness than through
The blur of print upon a page whose speech
Seduced my tired brain to bid adieu
To my identity and but construe
Myself as one with whom I've just now read
(As if I woke in someone else's head).

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

21

Now, I had opened up this book of books
Quite randomly to one specific place
(Among the countless of such puzzling looks)
Its editors had managed to debase
Of meaning relevant to that strange “grace”
In which their god had sacrificed his son
For crimes that *everybody else* had done.

22

I mean that pointless place some nodding scribe
Had made when he had Jesus, “by the *grace*
Of God,” taste death for all the human tribe
Instead of what had been in that word’s space
“*Apart from God*” in early texts — a case
In proof that even scripture lacking sense
Will summon devotees to its defense.

23

Yes, in this letter to the Hebrews, Paul,
We read (as published now), proposed this sense
Of “grace” in which his Christ’s betrayal, fall,
And rise again to fame and recompense
May be interpreted as evidence
Supreme of God’s unfathomable *love*
For all — though just some mistranslation of

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

24

The Greek that really meant “*apart from Him.*”
And thus, another strict tradition, born
Beneath a scribe’s bleared eyes, took on a grim
New life its own, protected by the scorn
Of those authorities to whom are sworn
The followers of *any* cult who fear
To question what would make *a child* sneer.

25

So anyway, as I then sat the while
With book wide open on my lap, I felt
My critical facility and guile
Dissolve from where that sense of me had dwelt
Into the nonsense of what here was spelt
And came to recognize the view from where
I now peered out, suspended in the air.

26

I felt the long-familiar presence of
Someone I knew — though not, somehow, by face
Or voice, it seemed — who spoke to me of *love*
That had made necessary this embrace
He’d made of my demise which, by the *grace*...
Of odd illogic made a kind of sense
Now as to why this scene felt *so* intense.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

27

For, yes, intense *anxiety* prevailed
As my most salient feeling now: a weird
Concern that this on which I'd been impaled
Of late would be, perversely, soon *reversed*
As but a symbol of that "grace" that steered
Me here to stand for all that's "moral," "good,"
And "loving," though, in fact, *misunderstood*.

28

For, what in any *healthy* mind could stand
For "love" that is so hateful as this hell
To which each must submit at His command
For disobeying some pernicious spell?
How *can* that word denoting how hearts swell
In one another's happiness be one
That *also* means the punishment of fun?

29

Can words be so capricious of their freight
As makes them suited to conveyance of
Whichever cargo we desire? "*Hate*"
Could then be used *precisely* to mean love!
Why speak *at all* if truths don't count *above*
Conventions of odd sounds we make with tongues,
Teeth, lips and noses, diaphragms and lungs?

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas*—continued

30

But I digress, of course. Such reasoned thought
Was *far* removed from where I'd slipped through time
And space into that world my text had wrought—
Especially in strictly metered rhyme!
Yes, this concern that some collective crime
Of all mankind could truly be redeemed
By *my* appearance here, as it now seemed,

31

Was not quite *thought* but rather just the *feel*
Of something *truly dumb* stuck in my craw:
That sense one has that something *can't* be real
Despite the oaths of those who claim they saw
It, heard of it, or read it in some law;
That feeling in our gut before we veer
Instinctively from something smelling queer.

32

Yet, often we remember queer events
From out our nighttime dreams that didn't seem
In conflict with our life experience
While watching them arise. For, every dream
Is but *experienced* as well and deemed,
Therefore, believable until we've mapped
Them with our *waking* sense of what seems apt,

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

33

Which was *asleep*, of course, the while these stray
Odd remnants of old memories, unloosed
By waves of deep unease, were then arrayed
Into a narrative of sorts reduced
Of sense by night-shift faculties unused
To editing such stuff amid the dark.
In light of *all of this* I've just remarked,

34

We should allow that what we each believe
At any given time has less to do
With what is "true" than how we best achieve
Those feelings of reward we all pursue
Toward validation ever craved anew.
In other words, whenever reason dims
Around us — night *or* day — amid our whims,

35

We are insane, regardless of the depth
Of dignities we rally round our cause
To buy it some respect. The stunning breadth
Of tolerance for half-baked thought our laws
Protect does not indemnify the flaws
Of logic, nay of *common sense* no less,
Revealed in our esteemed religious texts.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

36

For these, when read point-blank — I mean without
The aid of such indoctrination stirred
Into young pliant minds till cleansed of doubt —
Betray the hands that forged them as "God's word"
(In hopes of dignifying the absurd).
Said simply, sacred texts are those we've *learned*
To read that way for fear of being spurned.

37

I dare you find a page of *any* text
That can't be read as REVELATION! Why,
A *shopping list* can serve the man perplexed
By death with needed proof his soul won't die
When he does, *read with ample* FAITH! We buy
What's written down much sooner than what's spoke
Because of all the cryptic sense evoked

38

By something *seen* — more tangible than heard.
While words evaporate the moment said,
Those writ remain till our attention's blurred
Envisioning the stuff *left out* instead.
This bent for gleaning *in between* what's read
Gives clues as to how human brains evolved
To fill the gaps they find toward problems solved.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

39

And hence, the written word, though really just
Some scratches symbolizing sounds we coin
Toward useful trade in one another's trust,
Becomes for us much more — the very groin
In which things witnessed and inferred are joined
From out their commerce, hence our special sense
We get of something left in *evidence*.

40

Yes, evidence of truth in that weird hunch
Predicting something near us we don't see.
For, those who *lacked* this sense became the lunch
Of stealthy predators, a guarantee
Of less successful genes and our best key
To how we've come to read the way things look —
First on a forest floor, then in a book.

41

Yes, just as when we might unearth some bones
And weapons while we're digging in the dirt
And quick envision violent struggle, groans,
And silenced life that long since lay inert,
These sundry marks found on our page alert
Us to a presence of the past: a clear-
Cut proof that someone else had toiled here.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

42

And just because another came and left
This record of endeavor for us, we
Who find it tend to read in it a depth
Of consequence beyond what it should be,
As if mere *transcripts* of events we see
Were, *ipso facto*, truer — yes, more *real* —
Than those *experiences* they might reveal.

43

But then in light of this we must concede
That what is found in sacred books becomes,
Epecially for those who do not read,
A proof of authenticity that numbs
One's reason past its inquiry and dumbs
Down standards of credulity enough
To but embrace the most *amazing* stuff

44

That superstition can serve up: such lore
That folk will swallow whole (to circumvent
Its chewing into bits they might abhor)
Without suspecting that they'd underwent
Indoctrination to be made content
With foolishness in place of what is real —
THAT THEY WILL DIE — hence, *dodge the need to feel.*

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

45

Yes, lore that's conjured out of their own fear
Of not surviving death and used to lure
Them with absurdities they yearn to hear
In guarantee of their extinction's cure,
Which only comes, of course, to hearts deemed "pure"
(I.e., full gullible). Thus, sacred books
Provide the fisherman of souls fine hooks.

46

Now, it's well reasoned we should wield the *right*
To entertain whatever muddled thought
Has worked its way into our appetite
And trust uncritically what all we're taught
In books by those who'd been there first and brought
Back news — for instance that the dead will rise
And live without their brains up in the skies.

47

But then it's only fair that those who yield
To us this right to our delusions should
Themselves be free to harbor, unconcealed,
Their qualms about our having understood
This world of ours sufficiently as would
But recommend us to their confidence
Concerning facts we *all* agree make sense,

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

48

Like gravity and other staple laws
Of physics or biology we bank
On with the trust of our own lives *because*
They are unyielding — this despite our frank
Indifference to them when we stoop to thank
Some "outside" force for (somehow) *intervening*
In this *same* steadfast mesh of laws — demeaning

49

To our species when you think of it.
For, these same folks who dare to board a plane
Because they trust that physics' laws permit
No breeches *whatsoever* in this chain
Of happenings that keeps their flight sustained
Still hold (once safely landed) that their God
Can reach right through this weave to wield his rod,

50

Adjusting outcomes here and there at will
Without (somehow) disrupting all the rest
On which the whole depends. Now, such a skill
Would need ignore, of course, that very test
To which we put all truths we would invest
In otherwise where our survival's sought.
I mean, of course, *consistency of thought* —

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

51

Yes, that innate aesthetic sense employed
Toward weighing choices in our path we can't
Yet know the scope of, though we most avoid
It when it's inconvenient and thus grant
Its use but when we wish, as to supplant
Real wisdom with expedience's hopes,
Like swapping treatises with horoscopes.

52

And this *precisely* mirrors what our laws
Effectively promote: obliged respect
For *bad* ideas alongside good because
They're all the work of circuits that connect
In human brains — as if we should select
A ball to eat when hungry for a fruit
Since both are round, a fact beyond dispute.

53

By *bad* ideas, therefore, I mean not just
Those inconvenient to our aim but, more
To point, those *unsupported by our trust*
In how the world works — yes, setting store
In sheer absurdities that any boor
Can see who's not *obliged* to call them true
By some tradition sheathed in its taboo

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

54

Against its well-deserving ill respect;
Absurdities repeated by one's peers
Enough to *gain remembrance*, hence collect
The cozy feel Convention commandeers
From sense till they're perceived as souvenirs
Of comfy habit, though mere anodyne
To reason's wounds to make them *feel* benign.

55

Again, we *should* be free to be such dopes
If so inclined, but that we'd honor, prize,
And *privilege* such inanity — where popes
Are kowtowed to as alpha males all-wise
Though masters of mere fairy tales and lies —
Reveals a most perverse esteem for those
Least representative of how man rose

56

To dominate the life forms on this earth.
Our scientists, who've studied long to learn
Why things but happen as they do, are worth
In popular regard a *fraction* earned
By church authorities, who've but discerned
Their answers to these same hard questions through
What things were known when *wheelbarrows* were new!

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

57

That's right, back when technology emerged,
At last, to lug some rock upon a wheel —
Millennia before glass lenses urged
Us to investigate those worlds revealed
Beneath the surface of what seemed — we kneeled
In base subservience before our own
Best image of authority we'd know

58

And bade these parent figures in the sky
Come lavish on our most unworthy skill
Advantages allowing us to buy
In subjugation those less worthy still
And asked too why our begging came to nil
So much despite our offerings bestowed
On them in fearful supplication owed.

59

It was back then, when we knew *nothing* of
What made things work, that these good texts were writ,
Revealing how we crave parental love
And validation. Now, although worth *shit*
In terms of showing us the way things fit
To build the here and now, these texts became
Of help in teaching us to locate blame.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

60

For, easier than understanding *why*
A crop had failed or slave had died while strong
Was finding *culprits* we could punish, buy,
Or influence till there might come along
An outcome we preferred. Thus, right and wrong
Behaviors learned upon our parents' knees
Would later help us know what would not please

61

Our parent-*gods* as well, explaining just
Enough to satisfy the clueless why
Bad things befall good folks: erotic lust,
For one, which disrespects the gods on high.
Now, this confusion of a parent's wry
Disapprobation and the reason things
Are *as they are* is what religion brings

62

To our attempt to better understand
Our world. Where science questions each thing taught,
Regardless of authority's command,
Religious doctrine yearns to ban each thought
Refusing to salute the rule it ought.
And hence, the sacred text's assured appeal
Lies in the ease with which its truths *seem* real.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

63

Yes, more alluring even than the fact
Of verity is that sweet rush we feel
When dopamine rewards us for the act
Of *recognizing* it — as if the meal
Were less sustaining than that sense revealed
By appetite new-satisfied. It's *this*
We chase: less truth than *certainty's* cheap bliss.

64

But once again I see how much I've strayed
From where my dream was taking me — way back
When I'd first sunk into that text displayed
Across my lap and found myself but smack
Between a pair of thieves, where I'd been tacked
Aloft to save the world from sin and bring
Redemption to mankind, or some such thing.

65

Like any dream I've ever had, this one
I'd lived within my nap seemed just as real
As being *here* amid this line begun
Above with "as," and I recall the feel
Of hoping that this *ludicrous* ordeal
Through which I'd been thus sacrificed for crimes
Not mine might promise me some better times

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

66

Ahead, once all were said and done. And yet
I also felt the while that strange old sense
We get when assets won against our debt
Accrued in winning them *don't* match expense
And we're worse off the more we're recompensed.
For, here I was, the hero of a cult
That saw my death as something to *exult*

67

In — no, not *mourn* my loss but *praise* it's worth
To all who value most what's out beyond
The scantest proof of it known here on earth —
As if these devotees of mine who'd donned
The sordid relics of my broken bond
With some despotic parent of the skies
Came not to grieve but *savor* my demise,

68

Yes, see it, *somehow*, as the very source
Of *their* anticipated life-to-come:
That perfect, endless sentience as some force
Ideally unencumbered by this hum-
Drum earth-bound stuff we call "mere flesh."
Now, dumb
As this might sound to you (I hope), to *me*
It had the ring of clear *insanity*:

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

69

That superstitious mythic space where each
Coincidence one meets is read as cause,
Confusing chance with agency's long reach,
As if but governed by those very laws
That merely *recognize* inherent flaws
In our ability to pattern out
The whole from those stray parts we find about

70

Us here. Just picture it yourself: a crowd
Of followers assembles at your feet
(Among the skulls of those whose disemboweled
Careers forewarn *unpleasantly*) but greet
You *not* as one whose life looks incomplete
Of late, and thus deserving of their aid,
But one to whom it's prudent to have *prayed*.

71

Yes PRAYED! Not helped, nor even understood,
But *preyed upon* as bait toward bigger catch,
As if some Ur-progenitor they would
Conceive to dignify the way they'd hatched
Were further dreamt to eat His young, who snatched
Some misfit from the brood to offer Him
Whose jealous vengeance threatened life and limb.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

72

Now, puerile claptrap such as this but proves
To *live* more stupid even than it sounds,
Which says *a lot*, of course. For, it behooves
Me to point out right here the different grounds
On which a pain described and *felt* impounds
One's sense of being. Where you would need *pretend*
You're me, I *feel* this pain you'd apprehend.

73

Yet wait!, I hear you now protest. This dream
Of yours had never *really* "happened" though,
Not as a *physical event* (redeemed
In time and space). It's but *imagined* so,
An *immaterial* reflection thrown
Of jumbled *misconceptions* of the real —
Hence, *not* a "thing," as such, you *really* "feel."

74

To you I'd answer thus: Well then, just go
And find a brain that isn't altered — yes,
And let me highlight *physically* — by so
Much as a thought! Just follow the success
Of all those nerve connections coalesced
The while you think and watch them rearrange
Brain tissue till it's *palpably* been changed!

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

75

Yes, thought is but a *physical* event,
A happening, *quite tangible*, convened
In circuitry that's formed of nerve cells sent
In search of correlation found between
Hard facts about the world out there we glean
And that predictive model we maintain
Toward mapping out survival's best terrain.

76

This *process* of a working brain, called "mind,"
Is, in relation to the object, "brain,"
What incandescent light is to that kind
Of wire filament that will retain
Sufficient heat. And so, we must abstain
From thinking mind a substance *separate* from
A brain when it is rather just the sum

77

Of all its working attributes in play
That cannot be reduced to those same states
On which the whole was built without decay
Into incongruously disparate traits.
In other words, this mind each brain creates
Is its *emergent property*, with thought
Being one late layer of this system wrought.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

78

And yet, these mappings of our world our brains
Evolved to weave in such increased detail
Are spun from little more than what our pains
And thrills are: an electro-chemic veil
Of stimulus response, now on a scale
So vast we cannot grasp it till it's seen
Divinely: as some ghost in our machine.

79

These ghosts are byproducts of our far past,
When folk who had perversely feared some dead
Thing as still animate had thus amassed,
Ironically, survival rates ahead
Of those less superstitious types who'd fed
With fearlessness their predators in place
Of progeny. Hence, spirits were embraced

80

As not just plausible but *requisite*
Components of our cognitive design,
Permitting us to utilize, a bit
Less dangerously than otherwise, that line
Of hazarding an option as defined
Less by real evidence than by some hunch
Made clear through fear we're someone else's lunch.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

81

Now, all of this — regardless whether sense-
Perceived, recalled, imagined, or sleep-dreamed —
Is done with ions in synaptic clefts
Toward that remembered present of what seems.
For, as our poet long ago had deemed:
The dreamed and the perceived, seen close enough,
Reveal that they're both made of that same stuff!

82

Yes, "stuff" none other than that language writ
In atoms charged unequal to their nerve
Cell walls, conducted as potential, bit
By bit (as on or off), from ports that serve
To bind with other neurons and preserve
A circuitry semantically complex
From out the varied options it connects.

83

Yet, this same stuff communicating sense
Through flesh by means of that electric meld
Of chemically-inspired membrane — hence,
Dependent on those very laws beheld
By science to discern how it is spelled —
Is trusted by most folk to but *survive*
The body's habitat in which it thrived!

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

84

In other words, they hold in FAITH this stuff
That is the product of a process of
Biology and physics close enough
To be predicted *can still rise above*
The death of cells in which such things as love
And satisfaction were achieved, despite
The fact these cells are dead and won't excite!

85

How does this mechanism of a brain
That forms this circuitry in which to hold
Those special attributes we still explain
To be intrinsic to this thing called "soul,"
Like wit or verve or knowing how to bowl,
Remain *intact*, alive to its last shred,
Once those same cells that nourished them are dead?

86

Let's take for argument your Uncle Dick,
Who was, while still among the living, quite
Recalcitrant — a textbook model of a prick —
Though it turned out, *to everyone's delight*,
His brain scan showed a tumor that grew right
Where his compassion should have been enclosed
In just those circuits now long decomposed.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

87

When your dear aunt had buried him (in feigned
Remorse, perhaps, for her most "grievous" loss),
Your family had but sat around and strained
At justifying why he hit the sauce
And, then, his wife. For, now he came across
As someone *not* responsible for those
Behaviors we once thought he really *chose*.

88

Now, most believe this poor prick's soul enjoyed
His way to heaven as a packet of
"Pure energy, which cannot be destroyed,"
They'd hold. It *can* be, though, *transformed*, above
His corpse, *as heat that rises up* past love
And hate to dissipate into the air —
That place they'd have him float in, full aware

89

Of *everything* on earth he didn't know
Alive. And this same personality,
Remembered differently by friend and foe,
Still seemed, despite the immortality
He scored beyond his brain's finality,
Distinctively his own...though no one knew
Quite whether this would be the one that drew

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

90

Upon his brain *just prior* to this growth
That interfered with how he'd seemed till then,
Or, rather, *after* it replaced with oaths
That kinder Dick the pastor spoke of when
The eulogy was read aloud, amen.
And so we see that Dick's immortal soul
Depended *vastly* on which brain he stole.

91

But you who've dared so far to follow me
Upon the tightrope of each line stretched taut
In careful feet above the sharp debris
Of misinterpretation really ought
To know the actual feel of being caught
Enjambed between these very lines with which
We draw our sense of self so true to pitch.

92

For, this is but a *literary* work —
A *poem*, not some tract, the meaning of
Which one might find but buried in the murk
Of rhetoric instead of how some dove
Or plover sounds to ears tuned high above
Those earth-bound mutterings of prose, which deals
At best in facts and not in how stuff *feels*.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

93

Our model for this parody in verse
Has as its central scene — that is, *within*
The "frame" our narrator had us immersed
In touching how he fell asleep chagrined
By Love and how She *still* eluded him —
A lovely fuss about how all earth's birds
Had met to try out some seductive words

94

With which to find their mates, and then, once they
Had failed at that, to but appeal to Love
Herself upon this obscure martyr's day —
The one we celebrate love on *above*
Those better candidates we've long heard of —
And then agreed to settle it *next year*
On this same day, hence ending in good cheer.

95

These lines, composed by that most subtle ear
In English (*if* you call what Chaucer spake
That self-same language we speak now) endear
Us to the value of those dreams we wake
From into those we live in and partake
Of with great certainty that we can know
The difference, *which is difficult to show*.

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

96

For, this most vivid dream of mine I'd sung
About above while dangling from my cross
Was made *identically* to those I've clung
To in the daylight of my life and glossed,
Therefore, as quite veridical. The cost
Of each is but experienced the same
Regardless of which term I use to frame

97

It in a rhyme. We live within a vast
Continuum of consciousness we call
"Real life" or "made-up shit" or else what's classed
"Insanity" according to the fall
Of consequence around us. That is all.
In short, our wakeful conscious life is but
Some narrative we weave of what means what

98

To our survival of such varied sorts,
Including, *when not literal*, that kind
Of *social* circumstance that best supports
A comfortable living unconfined.
And so, regardless of how it is enshrined
In our vocabulary, *we must dream*
To live, lest we forget how life *might* seem

II. Longer Poems, poem #13: *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* — continued

99

In certain situations posing threat
To the assured survival of our genes.
So, when I dreamt my sacrificial debt
Was paid by gruesome and inhuman means,
My brain was but preparing for such scenes
I might endure when this you've just now read
Is judged to be *quite worthy of the dead* —

100

Yes, by religious critics who would call
Aloud for my good name's dismemberment
To punish me for how I'd so appalled
Their God with blasphemies that give consent
To seeing FAITH as *so much time misspent*.
And thus, these books I'd read became in me
The very stuff of which my dreams might be.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem*

On The Nature of Things

...As They Seem

A Didactic Poem in Stichic Form
Composed of Joined Elegiac Quatrains

And Inspired by the Great First-Century-BC Roman
Didactic Poem of Epicureanism, *De rerum natura*
("On the Nature of Things," in 7,400 Dactylic Hexameters
Divided into Six Untitled Books [and Probably Unfinished])
by Titus Lucretius Carus (c. 99-c. 55 BCE)

Though More Fundamentally Motivated by the
Counter-Intuitive Nature of Our World
Revealed to Us by Embodied Cognitive Science

Desire drives the way our world's made
By us from out those crucial bits our nerves
Evolved to read – a narrative, portrayed
Electrochemically in flesh, that serves
To steer us through the blur of useless facts
In which priorities of sustenance
And safety are obscured, lest they detract
Our chance to pass on genes toward subsequence.
The antecedent of this mortal force,
Before the workings of biology
Emerged from properties at physics' source,
Is, basically, *attraction* – gravity,
Electromagnetism, and so on –
Found everywhere but most suggestive of
This recent earthly process we see drawn
Between two sentient beings, long called "love."

[10]

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Lucretius sang a version of this song
Two thousand and some years ago but failed
To make it quite cohere, since he was wrong
(As was this Epicurus he unveiled) [20]
About reality — *as are we all*
By sheer necessity. For, how could he,
Or *anyone*, back then or now, *not* fall
For the *illusion* of reality,
Which is *constructed*, not out there as shown?
Yes, nervous systems studied have revealed
That what's outside our skull cannot be *known*
Within but only *guessed at* — our best yield
With what weak instruments we've been bequeathed
By evolution's strict priorities, [30]
Through which we're shaped by needs of our own niche
As ecological economies.
This is to say that sugar is not sweet
To anything but brains evolved to find
It so. And colors are but how we greet
Specific wavelengths (when not color *blind*)
Because our species has developed three
(Or, rarely, four) such cone cells to detect
Those lengths of radiation waves most key
To *our* survival — *not* to mean "correct" [40]

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Though, as is shown with other species' eyes,
Which see things differently with more or less
Of these same types of cells. And this applies
To every sense a species might possess,
Such as magnetic fields or heat, or tastes
Of acid, gas, or other signals shown.

These differences reveal how things are *traced*
And *not* how they exist out on their own.

In simpler words that have been said before
So often, yet so rarely understood:

[50]

We all experience these things explored
Not as they are but as *we* are. Why should
The fact that two observers will agree
On what they'd just observed mean *both* are right
When all the while *neither* can but see
Past their endowment, which just *seems* keen sight?
This strange delusion of sufficient range

Of vision confidently felt by each,
Despite their flagrant lack, is just what brains
Do best: pretend their models *have* no breach

[60]

Among their inputs, so to best maintain
A user interface from out this wealth
Of data simplified enough to frame
A unifying agency called "self."

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Now, this unlikely, though convincing, sense
Of unity we feel, somehow, amidst
The chaos of diversities immense
At work beneath the hood, is how we're fixed
Neuronally to better navigate
This world that is our simulacrum's hold. [70]
For, networks of robotics long innate
To our embodied brains distinguish old
From new till higher functions can then ascertain
From our environment what might upset
That equilibrium we'd need maintain
And choose alternatives of lesser threat.
More yet, this unity we feel belies
The fact our cells all die and are replaced,
At varied rates, non-stop. And this implies
That we're composed today of stuff that's based [80]
Upon the plan of former stuff now gone,
Like all those planks of wood that over time
Were substituted with their like out on
That ship of Theseus, maintained as shrine
Across the centuries, until it came
To seem a paradox to thinkers who
Now pondered if it should be called the same
Ship that our long-dead hero really knew.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

For, by replacing its components, one
By one, until there were not any now [90]
Original once all was said and done,
What *was* it in this vessel, from its prow
To stern, that could be reasonably thought
“The same”? Of course, it is the thing’s *design*.
And while this leaves it a mere copy wrought
Of something that is gone, *we redefine*
This likeness as authentic, which but shows
How any whole is worth more than its parts,
And how each *part* from which it is composed
Contains *its* meaning where its *pattern* starts. [100]
Yes, take an organ from a body, say.
Its value as an object cannot be
As flesh itself but as its *role* to play
Within a working *process*. This is key
To everything in life, down through those cells
From which all living tissue’s made. The bits
They’re made of have no meaning by themselves;
They’re only seen as what their *use* permits
Within some higher system’s functioning.
And by the time we’ve reached true *agency* — [110]
That scope in which an organism brings
Self-reasoned causal power’s currency

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

To bear upon the world — it's shown quite clear
That things themselves mean less than what their *role*
Is in a certain process's career.

(The meaning of the part is in the whole.)

But back to choosing — in it we carve out
Our few degrees of freedom from what's *thought*
Should be determined strict as fate about
Us, as Determinism's wrongly taught. [120]

Yes, these same experts say we have no will
That's free because to pick an option turns
Upon all prior happenings fulfilled
For which the picker has no claim discerned.

In other words, said author of this act
Herself depends upon such things realized
That made *her* action possible, in fact,
And that she couldn't have done otherwise.

And this is but *exquisitely* untrue,
Of course, despite the solid craftsmanship [130]
Of such deductive logic, as its view
Depends on blind acceptance that one skips
Causality's determined laws each time
An agent chooses to control the way
Said laws effect the course of *her* design,
As if just *one* trajectory's in play.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

But picture to yourself how this might work:
Without that element of choosing left
From right upon some forking path, we'd shirk
All chance to use what knowledge we'd assessed, [140]
Resulting in a state where knowing things
Were just the same as not, since all was fixed
To play out rigidly on puppet strings
Regardless of an agent's well-planned twists.
No, choosing between options that may *each*
Themselves be found within causation's chain
Does *not* entail some necessary breach
Of laws through which our nature is constrained.
Determinism, after all, is *not*
The same as *predetermining* a fate. [150]
It is compatible with our best shot
At how a certain system's future state
Derives, *at length*, from out its current one
Without an intervention *from outside*,
Which doesn't rule out alternates that run
Within said system, *causally* supplied.
The difference has to do with *meaning* — *that*
Through *information* on these future states,
Discriminating between options at
Each fork that possibility creates. [160]

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

In other words, although we cannot cause
Or pause the wind itself, we *can* control
The way its course effects our own with laws
That help us trim our sails toward our best goal.
And this control upon determined things
Is no more contradictory than how
A thermostat restrains unwelcome swings
Of temperature within that realm endowed
It. Yes, that human agent who'd employed
Its mechanism to respond to change [170]
From out some chosen stasis best enjoyed
Is sharing that control within *her* range.
Another way to word all this about
The type of freedom agency can wield
Is this: Although those choices found throughout
Our world may be, *in of themselves*, revealed
As but determined, such does not entail
That we, as knowing agents, are not free
At least to *choose among them* in that pale
Of outcomes possible when they're foreseen. [180]
Now, back to our observers, whom we'd left
In some agreement as to what *they'd* seen.
Historically, concordance of such heft
Was viewed as proof of some "objective" being —

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Past the noise subjective bias rings
Upon the seasoned scientific ear —
But *neither* viewer had observed those things
An sich — external to how *they* appear
Portrayed by *fleshly* means — but just within
Their ken, which had itself evolved to meet [190]
Quite different needs back while some fen had been
Their habitat instead of poured concrete.
All this is just to show that it's desire
Rather than causality that draws
Reality's ontology, inspiring
Life from out of information's laws.
Its impetus pervades the fabric of
That top-down modelling of how things can
Become — which, bottom-up, is tweaked by stuff
The senses furnish that refine the plan. [200]
Yet note: This "will" cannot be *truly* "free,"
Especially in that ghostly sense Descartes
Had spooked us with, wherein the very key
To how our bodies move is in the cards
Played seance-like *beyond* what physics moves,
Like cats or rats, whom he would grant no soul
And would be right: They don't, *which further proves*
The same for us, their cousins in this whole

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Descent we've made from out those very first
Prokaryotes on earth three billion-some [210]
Odd years ago. Of course, to those more versed
In nitpicking, we should concede the dumb
But valid point that "soul" can also mean
Another thing as well, like character
Or personality, when we are keen
On it in someone. But we must demur
When told these traits can then ascend from out
The body that created and conserved
It, just to flourish in thin air, no doubt,
Where nothing feeds such circuitries of nerves [220]
That are the stuff of which all thought is made.
And given this, we see our every thought
Is *physical* and leaves a proven change
Upon the brain in which it had been wrought,
Which means, of course, these products of the mind —
Which is the process of a working brain
And nothing more — cannot be reassigned
To flesh outside these neurons' own domain,
Where they'd developed in connection, full
Reciprocally, with that same body it [230]
Had grown with from the start — "dyed in the wool"
Inseparably through interaction's fit.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

And even harder to explain by far
Is how this pattern of emergence, where
These nerves had done their work, could somehow start
Again *without them*, fostered by pure air.
Now, think about this in a different key:
Just take an engine simpler than a brain
By far — say, one that changes energy
Into some movement's use, not ascertains [240]
A thing like *meaning* — yes, and then observe
Its work continued *once it's been destroyed*.
How different is this process made by nerves
Once *they're* removed from how they'd been employed?
If products such as these could be sustained
Without all that machinery that built
Them, why expend the efforts that had framed
Their prospect well before this milk was spilt?
Such industry, expended without need
Of any kind, acutely contradicts [250]
A law of nature that, from smallest seed
To largest forest, never fails: a strict
Economy that underwrote the first
Cell viable and, through it, then constrained
The many consequences *it* dispersed
Engaging with this world it now attained.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Yet this consistency of nature's laws,
So necessary to the way things work
Within a world where each effect has cause,
Is often, like some nonessential perk, [260]
Ignored when inconvenient to respect.
And in its place, we're offered at such times
The lower-hanging fruit that **FAITH** collects
In order to explain its own designs.
I mean, of course, this business of "God's hand"
One finds so often dealt to circumvent
Whatever's difficult to understand
Without the help of science (or plain sense).
For, quite unlike our own, this hand, it seems,
Can infiltrate causality's fine weave, [270]
Knit tight by physics' laws, and like those dreams
Where pigs can fly, coerce us to believe
There is no incongruity in it.
The hand withdraws from where it interfered
And, magically, each severed strand is fixed
Again, till these same laws may be revered
Once more as tamperproof, and all is well —
At least to those who're willing to pretend
For God's sake, or a seamless fear of hell,
That this is something reason can defend. [280]

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Intelligence of the creative kind —
From which each artwork, theory, building, or
Whatever novel world you'd wish designed —
Should, in itself, be viewed as something more:
A RECENT feature of our universe.

That's right, from out so many billion years
Of gas and rock that could not plan, rehearse,
And execute some change in their careers,
It wasn't till biology emerged —

And, eons later, nervous systems too —

[290]

That agency evolved to ride an urge
Toward choices that result in something new.

This needs the mechanisms of a brain

Within a body in environment

And its strict competition to maintain

That fragile balance toward which life is bent,

All subtly tweaked continually by chance

Intrusions of miscopied code, through which

New prospects can emerge into the dance

That influence its tempo, flow, and pitch,

[300]

Effecting that next toss of chance's dice

Against *this* information's likely reach

Of *new* experience that proves the price

Of living in *its* everchanging niche.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

And thus, from out this mix of unique strands
Of memory's constructions comes that weave
Sustained by meaning's ever-seeking hands,
Which, *via metaphor*, help us conceive
The future that we dream from out the past
(Remembered as the present), where a thing [310]
That hadn't worked before might be at last
Compared with options through remembering.
Creative intellect of *any* kind —
Why, even fashioning some twig to nurse
An insect from a hole, so never mind
Complexities like our whole universe! —
Cannot *precede* the evolution of
A thought, which cannot live in gas or rock
Or charge, no matter whether named as "love
Or "god" or even "the eternal clock." [320]
It takes a complex system that can change
In order to sustain such simple thought
As "on or off," quite let alone so strange
A concept as redemption as is taught.
And so, illogical as it may be
To contemplate some merest *concept* made
By rocks and gas and charge, to try and see
Intelligence back then that could *create*,

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Instead of just *encompass*, nothing less
Than our entire universe, is down- [330]
Right counter to the way we've come to test
Our inner model of what's all around
(And in) us, which we call "reality."
So inconsistent is this top-down view
Of how this world we live in came to be
Without that bottom-up to which it's due,
It's difficult to understand how we
Have come to privilege *so* this type of quick
Design without slow change (which *can't* prove key
To how things got this way without some trick). [340]
That wider menu of tomorrow's born
From chance as thrown against the stuff that's here
Already, not to mention how it's worn
Away the while by entropy's career.
For, though a single human can design
Top-down, a great cathedral in a plan,
Another version made without a mind
By termites, bottom-up, *as all began*,
Shows how we're biased blind by how we've come
To see what we can do. The end result [350]
Of all this insect work, derived but from
Robotic mindlessness, we should exult

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

As loudly as we do our own: Behind
What these same termites have achieved in theirs,
Though not through synthesis of one great mind,
Is found the answer to survival's cares,
And maybe even *better* than does ours.
For though *our* great cathedrals may supply
The ambience we need toward *our* best powers,
They don't come even near the reasons why [360]
The insect's great design is so sublime —
Such as thermodynamically to start —
As might compare with ours, which but provides
Us cool and quiet and a place for art.
As said above, these termites have amassed
Their triumph of contrivance not through "Art"
That's synthesized within one mind — from past
And future goals — but with mere *mindless* parts,
Just like those mindless nerve cells in our brain
That nonetheless conspire to perform, [370]
Collectively, that complex network's chain —
Intentionality — that's now our norm.
It could be argued that the realized work
Of termite and of man but constitutes
A vast amount of time in which was learned
The skills required through these different routes

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

And that what came to be hard-wired in
Each insect after generations of
Mistakes had its own correlate within
That single human mind we praise above [380]
The most impressive group of simpler jobs.
But even if the termite's version proves
Superior to ours in housing mobs,
Our bias toward the top-down plan behooves
Us to respect far more the architect
Than all the expert craftsmen she's employed —
All this despite the fact their end effects
Obtained are but comparably enjoyed.
But wait, I hear you say, remembering now
What I'd just writ that neither gas nor rock [390]
Nor energy had Agency and how,
Therefore, these lacked the consciousness to block
Or cause events top-down. How can that be,
You ask, when consciousness itself, it's said,
Is downright "fundamental" — *underneath*
The fabric made by physic's laws instead
Of just *contingent* — through our universe,
In *everything*, down to its smallest quark?
Some thinkers, wishing to avoid the curse
That substance dualism casts so dark [400]

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Upon good reputations now, yet still
Prepared to eat that cake that's made in part
With stuff that *isn't* physical, will thrill
To savor things from off that tidbit cart
Of mental-yet-*non*-physical clichés,
As if one really can but have it both
Ways, as they seemed back in idealist days
Of Plato, Berkeley, and the rest whose oath
Was that the physical is but the fruit
Of some great *mental* fundament and *not* [410]
The other way around. This deft salute
To that old hunger to transcend this rot
Of flesh called Death was named by desperate Greeks
Way back "Panpsychism," a name that now
Affords the desperate dualist who seeks
To *seem a monist* his own holy cow.
The mantra of these mentally obsessed
Is: "*How* can consciousness emerge from parts
That *in themselves* are lacking consciousness,
Like something made from nothing's deck of cards?" [420]
This question *sounds* seductively "slam dunk,"
Like any syllogism might, where sense
Deduced through reason makes good thinkers drunk
With faith that their respondent lacks defense.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

But when you really *think* about it — out
Beyond where language ties one up in knots
So many times — you'll find beyond a doubt
This question fails to really connect dots.
And that's because it's lacking in respect
For that which we most otherwise abide: [430]
Emergence. Yes, there's few who would object
When told the whole is more than just the tidy
Sum of all its parts because the play
Between these bits imbues the full event
With something new that didn't even weigh
Among the features that such parts present.
To pick among the lowest hanging fruit,
Try water: It has features absent from
The molecules it's made of — attributes
Like slipperiness and more that but become [440]
What hydrogen and oxygen cannot
Out on their own. Yet no one says that to
Create this slippery substance from its lot
Of parts *that aren't slippery* is due
To inconsistencies of nature's laws,
Like magic tricks. No, science shows us how
The bonding of these molecules gives cause
Toward making new *through what these rules allow*.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

And these new features that emerge from out
The mix of said components lacking them [450]
Is what we're faced with when we call in doubt
That consciousness could be that thing that stems
From *combinations* of robotic parts
Despite the lack of consciousness within
Each one in of itself — before it starts
In concert with those others as *they'd* been.
But I digress. This look at how design
As our own species thinks of it cannot
Apply to how our world seems divined
Now brings us back to a most salient spot: [460]
Lucretius tell us that the gods exist
But cannot intervene in our own lives —
This to say, as dualists will insist,
The gods are just not physical and strive
With not a footprint left, to waft *above*
Our world, like weightless thoughts that we perceive.
But this just misconstrues the nature of
A thought, which *is* but physical indeed,
As each, regardless of its content — love,
Regret, whatever — *leaves a change* to read [470]
Within the brain that formed it in its stride.
It is the *process* of a network, keyed

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Quite physically: A thought can't live outside
A working brain, though it can be *replayed*
In other brains that have but read, as guide,
Its recipe from which it's then *remade*.
That other brain to which it's been conferred
Must reconstruct that networking that tied
Together just those strands on which that word,
Sound, image, action, feel or such allied [480]
Themselves toward meaning in brain "a" back then.
In other words, when brains die, so do thoughts —
Unless they're reconstructed once again
In other brains to which they have been taught.
So, gods then, since not physical, are just
Ideas too that brains create. They die
When not remade in other brains; they must
Unless such narratives are writ to buy
More time for them in memories that tell
Of why the world should be how it seems. [490]
And since it seems unjust and cruel as hell,
These must be painted bright within our dreams.
And here's where **FEAR** comes in to save the day.
Because embodied brains evolved this sense,
Refined beyond all others, that relays
To us those endless ways our best defense

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Might fail our warding off our certain DEATH,
We tag those thoughts involved with gaudy hues
To trigger actions that could cost our breath
But save our life, in order to but choose [500]
That narrative in which we read our world
Toward safest end. And gradually we came
To want that rush itself we had unfurled
Each time we learned a bit to save our game.
And so, we've come to like those stories that
Can replicate that feel of knowing how
Things work enough to navigate our vat
Of life and bypass death — except that now
We privilege that same *feeling* over what
Might *really* be the truth of how things work [510]
And sacrifice with ease such truths that shut
This feeling off, till we now *love the murk*.
Yes, fear has helped us do all this and more:
It's helped us spawn our many gods to take
Responsibility for our bad score
In knowing what's best done toward our best sake,
Till we can savor that smooth feel enjoyed
While thinking that we know just how things are
The whole time we do not. But gods employed
As such will soon take on our own bizarre [520]

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Misunderstandings till they look and act
Just like we do and fight among themselves.
And so, some groups of us would soon change tack
And kill off all these gods like needless elves,
Except for ONE, of course, in whom to trust
With all our former needs. The beauty here
Is that we'd now transfer this inborn lust
For sweet delusion round our every fear
From out the baffling chaos of this lot
Of them into an easier design [530]
That serves as *single* parent figure — God,
That is — in whom the rest have been combined.
Yes, more than one sage thinker has declared
We're *all* but atheists regarding Zeus
Or Thor these days; it's just that some have dared
Go *one god more* and find such faith no use
In of itself. Now, some of these preferred
To keep the trappings of their creed to skip
The sense of vulnerability incurred
Withdrawing from celestial guardianship. [540]
For, manifest authority, enforced
With in-group solidarity, helped mold
Rough moral choices smoother, since endorsed
From high above where fate had been controlled.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Now, suddenly bereft of dogma, they
Are faced with all the complications brought
By contemplating context and its grey
Shades, all no use to God in judgements wrought
Against His disobedient through **SIN**,
This concept theologians have supplied [550]
With endless shelves of doctrine that could spin
Your head at all the ways they have denied
Their flock the dignity of living life
As nature shaped it — just like children spanked
For insubordination, though now rife
With petty selfish greed for being thanked.
This notion quickly falls apart without
The patriarchal certainty of fact
That God can lend, discerning *without doubt*
What's right from wrong and therefore how to act [560]
In every case like model children do.
The problem is, of course, that kids who meet
Ideals like this are usually untrue
To their own sense of self and play the sweet
Submissive sheep they learn will satisfy
(For now) some angry parent's thirst for full
Control. But learning only to comply
And not to reason pulls proverbial wool

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Around their eyes, unfit as they'll then be
To go engage in what is real out there. [570]
Yes, they've grown ill-equipped for living free
Of cruelty where all they know is prayer
And punishment. No, thinking critically
Is crucial toward developing as fair
And just compassionate adults — the key
To *their* success in raising kids who care.
Conversely, those who're taught the practice of
Morality-by-wrote learn that their crimes
Of deed or thought are scrutinized above
By top authorities, then redefined [580]
In terms of proper reparations to
This church that had but codified it all.
Extortion comes to mind, like when you do
A thing that's disapproved till it's judged small
Once payment's made to those who'd called it wrong
To start. As if not bad enough, this dire
Thought for which they're charged had seemed so long
An innate *healthy* type, such as DESIRE.
Yes, this feeling that began it all —
Not just our poem but *that very course* [590]
Of life it would exalt — foretells the fall
Of man to those God wants to feel remorse.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Of course, *like anything*, indulgence in
A feeling past what's good for others whom
We'd live with should invite restraint, but SIN
Goes way past that by virtue of its gloom:
We're told to *feel ashamed* of what's innate
Instead of just control what doesn't work —
As if our *feelings*, by themselves, create
The problem, not that *we'd* been such a jerk. [600]
Delight is something we'd evolved to feel
As part of learning — till this God of theirs
Showed up to claim it contraband and deal
It back to us at higher rate through prayers
And penance for His mercy. Keep in mind
That this delight *was ours to start* — yes free
To us through evolution's slow design.
Yet now we're told it's ours *but for a fee*,
A payment that's coerced from us by threat
Of punishment, no matter whether here [610]
Or ever after, till we're in such debt
We cannot pay it off except through fear
And guilt, self-condemnation, and despair,
And all but due toward blessings by the church
For our own joy that now, it's been declared,
Is given *us*. Now, *there's* a joy besmirched!

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

This very notion that we'd need to go
Apologize for our desires — pay
 For them in guilt *and* money — should but blow
 Our mind: That's racketeering *any day* [620]
 When viewed without a church put in between!
 Yes, like a prism breaking purest light
 Into bedazzlement, "God's word" is seen
 By true believers simply as what's right —
 Regardless of the lack of sense it makes
 To our innate morality. So, when
 God tells good Abraham to go forsake
 HIS OWN BELOVED SON just for some yen
 That jealous gods like Him cannot resist —
 That need to test one's subjects' loyalty [630]
 Against those *other* gods that don't exist —
 We're shown just how AMORAL He can be
 Who needs to threaten members of His flock
 With punishment for disobedience
 That's merely thinking for themselves, *ad hoc*,
 As each new context tries their common sense.
 Enough though! For, pathology is not
 The *only* way to deconstruct how things
 Should run in health. Yes, though such petty gods
 Reveal the workings of each mind that brings [640]

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Them into being (and are, therefore, worth
The studying, if but to better know
Ourselves), our poem aims to cut a berth
Around our lust for *judging* what they show.
(*Too late, or ineffective at the least,*
You say, who find the passage just conveyed
A thing of judgement surely — just, a piece
Of propaganda damning faith — one made
To disaffect those wholesome citizens
Who, out of fear, still harbor gods within [650]
The attic of their reason. My defense
Is that it's not and that your skin's too thin.)
So, let's return to our Desire once
Again for deeper understanding how
It constitutes the means with which life hunts
Its hallowed moment in the here and now.
Among biology's machinery,
Few mechanisms prove more valuable
Toward furtherance of what's conveyed by genes
Than pleasure does. The weight that it can pull [660]
In prodding organisms to survive
And launch their traits toward future flourishing
Is unsurpassed in fruitfulness of drive
Except, perhaps, for pain's didactic sting.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Indeed, all earthly creatures have evolved
To find their life sustained between these two
Most fundamental promptings that resolve
Poor choices of the past from those proved true.
Attraction and repulsion should be seen,
Therefore, as guardrails used by living things [670]
To keep on track with life and not careen
Into oblivion on reckless wings.
Yes, everything that lives, from simple cells
To those complexities from which they're made,
Depends on what their system can foretell
Of nourishment and risk and how they're weighed.
All this is gleaned from what's then learned anew,
On top of what's inherited, from those
Past lives whose traits have been bequeathed to you —
All information changing as it flows [680]
Two ways within the context of a life
Developing amid environment.
It's this that makes each living being rife
With possibilities past all events
Predictable from out of physics' laws
Alone. For, these same "laws" (which are, of course,
Just *tendencies observed* amid the "cause"
Thought driving matter, energy, and force)

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Comprise that language *we've* developed to
Describe phenomena we sense are there [690]
Though cannot *know* first-hand since filtered through
The tissue of biology's dark lair.
And this is true of mathematics too:
No matter how you squint, you'll never find
It in the world "out there," as it's construed
By *us*, re-membered into stuff of minds
From out the dialogue of things and how
They're represented in our nest of nerves.
It's but a *language* we've developed out
Of need to speak more subtly of the swerves [700]
Of space, time, matter, energy and force
With which our universe is woven so
Minutely from necessity's own source
In chance, wherein a sudden moment's throw,
Potentiality can realize, from
A singularity of happening,
Complex trajectories that can become,
From pregnant nothingness, our everything.
Yes, mathematics is that language we're
Creating, step by step, to better read [710]
Relationships at play all round us here
Within this universe that sprang with speed

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

From its potential. And, yes, like those "laws"
Of nature that they measure, it's not *there* —
Out in the world, without a mind to cause
Its body-governed form from out thin air —
But in our heads, another product of
Biology examining its past.

And while we're on the subject, the above
Applies to all those other fields amassed [720]
By human culture, like morality
And ethics, justice, faith, and beauty — laws
And customs of all sorts we've honed as key
To our best being, even with their flaws
(By which I mean those prices paid for them
In the economy of focus that's
The brain of each beholder, as each gem
Of insight costs *some* blur elsewhere, I'd add.)
But now I need your full attention, please.

Despite the great respect we surely owe [730]
Lucretius, who endeavored to bequeath
To us what Epicurus had bestowed
By singing it deep into memory,
We also need to recognize the stuff
In it that makes no sense. For, now we see
Through scientific method well enough

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

To better understand the way things work
Out there (as well as here inside where they're
Constructed into "laws") until what lurked
In mystery, like gods, dissolves in air. [740]

Now, these fine things that Epicurus taught
Were saved by our Lucretius in his verse
And proved a balm to lives that had been fraught
With fearful supplication to the worst
That superstition offers those it lures.
For they found solace in the atomists'
Belief that while the gods themselves endure,
They cannot either hinder or assist
Us mortals in the living of *our* lives
And are but the repositories of [750]

The basest fears and qualms a mind contrives
By reading omens in each hawk and dove.
But then our poet seems to disregard
Such sage advice with invocations to
Those gods and muses whom he prays real hard
Might help him see his lofty poem through.
The inconsistency in this is clear
As day and is explained, I think, by those
Conventions that our poets still revere
In that they're part of how their art arose. [760]

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

I mean, of course, through ritual — by means
Of incantations that had long been used
To mollify our fears into routines
And transmute seeming sense from what confused
Them. When a verbal formula was voiced
Within the ceremony of concern
Around some mystery, one could rejoice
Within the feel of having (somehow) turned
Some chaos into order. Words became
The pageantry through which to gain control [770]
Of what they feared, and through their sounding, tame
It in the splendor of their spoken whole.
And this is why just how a thing is said
Is so much part of how it comes to mean
And why, therefore, a poem can, instead
Of prose, make better sense of *how things seem*.
And this is why *our* poem does not dare
Attempt to paint for you "reality"
As had Lucretius's, as you're aware.
For, just as how he saw the "seed" as key [780]
To how things were and worked — yes, used this trope
To help explain quite everything he saw —
Someday the scientific facts I hope
Explain it now will *too* be shown as flawed.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

And so, since greater minds than mine by far
Have failed achieving a consensus on
What really is this key to how things are,
My song will only sing of how *they're drawn*
By us in thought. On this is what the whole
Of all we know must ultimately rest: [790]
How things are *represented*. That's the goal
In which all meaning's made, and hence our quest.
Yes, as was said above — or then *before*
For those not reading this but *hearing* it
Recited — all we ever *can* explore
Of this, our world, is *not* the slightest bit
That might exist *outside* biology's
Translation into impulses on nerves,
But rather just some *likeness* of it we
Can *represent* this way, such that it serves [800]
Within that inner model brains construct.
And this brute fact is one we always bump
Against (though rarely recognize as such)
While moving through our world, as every clump
That matters most is rendered seamlessly,
Though meagerly, within our flesh, because
That's what brains do: They strive to make us see
Whatever keeps us in the game. All flaws

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

In the fidelity of what is sensed,
Therefore, prove less important, said and done, [810]
Than that attention bought at their expense
To muster agency toward what's best won
In sustenance and safety, love, and sex.
And our best proof of all these shortcuts made
By brains prioritizing what affects
Survival is the ease with which we're swayed
By "magic" tricks and others that dispose
Things to us only as we'd *reconstruct*
Them. Optical illusions, such as those
Employing shadows cast with crafty pluck [820]
To seem a different tone, are still contrived
By brains to be believed as "seen" *despite*
Our being shown just how they'd been derived.
What better proof is needed to indict
Our senses for collusion in false truths?
How can we just assume that we can "know"
The nature of things when, as shown, brains soothe
Themselves with what they're looking for and throw
Away the truly obvious instead?
The answer's found on evolution's trail, [830]
Of course, along which every brain's been led
Without its knowing, so it may prevail.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Yes, brains evolved to solve the problems of
That niche their bodies strive in — that complex
Reciprocal ecology above
Which nothing matters more, as one expects.
Their job at first was merely to maintain
Their body's balanced state inside against
Conditions ever-changing by constraint
Of the environment outside its fence. [840]

But as the arms race of competing life
Would ratchet up the vital need to choose
Among an option menu growing rife,
Those brains whose niche allowed it grew to use
Discriminations ever more refined,
Enabling them, through memory, to plan
Tomorrow with but yesterday in mind,
Where conscious, focused agency began.
But all along this slowly-curving path
Of learning (well *below* this conscious thought) [850]

We've thus acquired strengths that helped such tasks
Once key to what our ancestors had sought.
Now, many of said things we don't still need
Yet nonetheless still seek because we're now
Equipped to do so. Take the taste for sweet
Our forebears had acquired that endowed

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Them with more chance to last through bleakest times.
We have inherited this appetite,
Though not the lesser menu that had primed
It, and today indulge in sweets *despite* [860]
The lack in most of us to really need
Them. So, in short, *the byproducts of change*
Are who we are today; what worked to feed
Survival once becomes our comfort range
In better times. And what is crucial here
Is how the same dynamics of our brain's
Vast legacy predicts results in spheres
Of life quite unrelated. This explains,
For instance, why the networking of nerves
That help us to hallucinate a self [870]
Amid some cockpit in our skull, now serves
At certain times, like trauma or poor health,
To make us feel that this same entity
Has left the very body it's been made
By, and is part of, to transcend quite free
Of any laws the body had obeyed.
Now, such experiences *are* profound;
They *have* changed lives and should not be dismissed.
There's no sense holding forth that they can't sound,
Look, feel as they're described — as they exist — [880]

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Just not for reasons that are proffered by
Most folks who've undergone them (and who hope
These prove that our deep essence cannot die
And will live on within some timeless scope).
But evidence abounds to demonstrate
Just how this out-of-body sense becomes
Experienced. One needs but activate
Some certain neurons (where the juncture runs
Between two certain lobes) whose job it is
To integrate perspectives of inside [890]
And out (the *I* with *other*, *mine* with *his*),
Thus throwing our vestibular off stride.
Experiences of this special type
Can be *predictably induced* by means
Of some disturbance to this zone to swipe
Away, pro tem, this weighing of what seems
The difference between *inside* looking out
And vice versa as it's reckoned by
This tiny bit of brain. To go about
Achieving this disturbance one can ply [900]
A probe into that very spot, or else
Magnetic stimulation, or just starve
It of the oxygen within its cells,
Such as the reach of death in its slow carve.

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Instinctively we're biased to resist
This mechanistic view, of course, because
It jars with that whole notion of some gist
Of life released from out its husk (while laws
Of physics molder in convenient haste)
To but return to "purest consciousness," [910]
Which, we have heard (and craved) might soon be traced
Right back to the beginning: Nothing less
Than *fundamental* to the universe —
Yes, that from which the physical *derives*,
We've read — to be rejoined with those dispersed
Before us (with exceptions, like ex-wives)
For all eternity as part of one
Undying being, pure and clear as air
That's lit forever by a deathless sun....
[A long pause here to let our minds repair.... [920]
O.K., Sam. May we have the lights back on?]
To those who *liked* how this last bit commenced
And wished *the rest* had been as finely drawn,
I say: *You missed the point! It made no sense!*
The problem I was getting at was **HOPE**.
Now, nothing wrong in wanting what feels good,
But holding out for it when you can't cope
With inconvenient truths is understood

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

To be delusion, which can't help but numb
You to this world we're living in and paste [930]
A happy face on fears you have succumbed
To rather than engaged with. What a waste!
To squander this brief spurt of time on earth
Endured as just some deadly-boring queue
In which to wait and trade it for rebirth
Without your brain is profligate, if true.
Far better would it be to live life *now*,
While still you have your brain intact, and not
Postpone enjoyment till you won't know how
To hold a spoon, albeit it, *stir the pot!* [940]
How is a life lived once you're dead — without
A hippocampus — any different than
Attempts to taste your cake without a mouth?
The body is where *everything* began:
Sensation, action, metaphor — the whole
Of *anything* we can experience.
So, seeing it as some mere husk a "soul"
Then sheds and leaves behind makes no damned sense,
As this ignores the way things came to be.
From that first living cell to that first meme [950]
That could be shared among the most elite
Of complex brains had run a steadfast scheme —

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

An algorithm where near clones compete
To test their fitness in a certain niche.
And this same fundamental process can't
Be just left out, as if it were unleashed
From what it had produced, so we might then
Pretend the latter came to be by fate,
Top-down design by God, or, once again,
Divorced from how such processes create. [960]

So, let's exult in the reality
That each of us have played a vital part
In this great chain of being that we see
All round us stemming from this simple start.
The merest fact, statistically, that we
Exist at all, among such massive chance
That we might not, should by itself cut free
From us that morbid fear of death's advance.
Yes, death is saner viewed as that excuse
To live *the more intensely* here and now [970]
Because there is no life awaiting use
As us once we, our bodies, die. Let's bow
Our heads in gratitude — not to some god
We've dreamed up to explain it all, but to
This gorgeous *mindless* process that, by odds
So vast, included us among the few

II. Longer Poems, poem #14: *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* — continued

Who can appreciate it as the gift
It is. Yet, such a bounteous legacy
As this is not required to exist
As something given *from* one entity [980]
Or other *to* another, as this sense
Depends upon a teleology
In which there's underlying "reason" whence
It's come or gone. And such necessity
Is but irrelevant to any laws
Describing what life is, how it began,
Or even what it means — all this because,
As *process*, it has being *since it can*.
In other words, life needn't be a part
Of something larger, with a certain goal [990]
Intended, like perfection or the start
Of some trajectory toward what some "soul"
Might find as outcome of behaving such
Or such a way. We have no parent in
The sky; just lots of planets, stars, and much,
Much more that cannot care about what sins
Or virtues we read into life. For, these
Are but the constructs of embodied brains,
Which have evolved by fleshly means and, by degrees,
Created, *through desire*, all each one attains. [1,000]

II. Longer Poems, poem #15

Chasing George

I

Book the First

I.1

I met a dealer in an antique store
Who told me of a thing so precious rare
He wouldn't think to let it out the door
Till came that "special someone..." (breathing air!).
Oh, not just anyone would understand,
He said, my wallet bloody near his hand.

I.2

I caught my breath and followed him in back
While noticing the archway sign, which read:
NO ENTRY / THINGS NOT PRICED YET / WET SHELLAC!
And felt my blood run cold in sudden dread,
Recalling that I'd only stopped to ask
Directions to the library, alas.

I.3

For, I'd been long pursuing dragon lore
With which to glean whereof man's hatred comes
Toward this composite of the dinosaur –
This incarnation of the fears he plumbs –
And now was tracking down an early source
Of myth for some old zealot and his horse.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the First—*continued*

I.4

Yet suddenly I found myself astray,
Being blindly led toward God knew what ahead
Through dim-lit corridors of scuffed parquet
Stacked high with things abandoned by the dead.
And then we promptly stopped. My guide turned round
And grasped my elbow, pointing toward the ground,

I.5

Where we descended then a staircase, deep
Into the very bowels of the place.
And there I saw what would disturb my sleep
For years and lend new meaning to my chase.
(For, surely *this* was what was known as FATE:
That thing for which one *cannot* show up late.)

I.6

So startling was the spectacle before
Me now, I couldn't close my eyes to blink,
Nor grasp what my new guide meant by some door
That was removed to bring it in (I think).
For, here I faced a pair of yawning jaws
That advertised huge teeth as sharp as claws

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the First—*continued*

I.7

Around a snake of tongue that slyly beckoned:
Come and let's together taste your death!
Yet worse by far was what I now had reckoned
Springing from its chest with my next breath:
It was its *life*, escaping down to feed
A crimson pool below the heinous deed.

I.8

For, it was by the prodding of a spear
He'd bled — one thrust there by a shiny knight
Whose rearing steed aped well his smiley jeer,
Both proud to show a maiden such a sight.
It was intense, though *still* since ages past,
Long bound by leaden bands in colored glass.

I.9

As if awakened from a dream, I stirred
At that moist palm I felt upon my arm
And recognized the voice I seemed to've heard
As murmur all that while, and with alarm
I turned to look the dealer in the eye
And asked his chin, "how much?" and heard him sigh.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the First—*continued*

I.10

“What *will* you take?” I counter-offered fast.
“This dragon in your window has no price?”
But in his grin I saw the die was cast.
Indeed, I knew *some* number *would* suffice.
He counted what I’d proffered and demurred,
Though his consent was easily inferred.

I.11

I took a breath, then grabbed my wallet back
And reveled in my triumph for a while.
For, I had bought my dragon from this quack
Who played my Virgil, and it made me smile
To think what luck it is to lose your way
Sometimes and find your dream in your delay.

I.12

Two men appeared who helped me out the door
With it and to my home for installation.
Once we freed it from its box though, more
Could not be heard than silent perturbation:
Though the glass remained in perfect shape,
It now appeared...*the dragon had escaped!*

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the First—*continued*

I.13

Please note that not a shard of glass was missing;
Rather, just the subject matter changed.
Where *he* had been were now two lovers kissing
And the woman's clothes quite disarranged:
Her girdle, which should prove the dragon's lead,
Was now slung round the neck of that white steed

I.14

Whose well-pleased grin was suddenly replaced
By eyes the size of tennis balls and jaw
Hung low at this performance most unchaste.
The place appeared in dire need of law:
The maiden on her back, no lamb in sight,
And armor everywhere *but* on the knight!

I.15

Such is our world without a dragon near:
The mice at home right when the cat is not.
That now was hardly time to stall was clear;
I had this beast's coordinates to plot.
For, surely would wherever else he went
Be turned a place of strictest regiment.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the First—*continued*

I.16

I tipped the men and sent them on their way
And chewed on what to do about this beast
That had absconded with itself. I'd pay
A visit first, I thought, to him who'd fleeced
Me for it. After all, *he'd* found him last.
Yet now his shop was gone. I was aghast.

I.17

This seemed quite like that wedge's slightest edge
On which philosophers are wont to ponder.
Not a thing I saw could I allege
To recognize now here where I would wander.
Just medieval things, like castles, moats
And battlements and obsolescent boats.

I.18

Ah, this was just the knavery of booze
At play upon my brain! O yes, of course.
Such would explain that haughty, truant muse
Whose name I called *and called* till I was hoarse.
(Perhaps she'd heard my every invocation
But could glean no hint of my location.)

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the First – *continued*

I.19

Yet no, that *couldn't* be. I hadn't touched
The stuff since last my wife left home for good.
And drugs I *never* took – not “drugs” as such.
Nor seemed this like some dream in which I stood.
“Reality” this seemed to be indeed –
That place our brains evolved to try and read.

I.20

Yes, after all, how much more “real” a world
Was that in which I'd stumbled on this glass
In which I saw my destiny unfurled
By merest chance – where likely I'd have passed
Some other day – in which a buck or two
From lunch skipped bought me freedom within view?

I.21

For, free was I at last from this dull quest
That no one even pressed me undertake:
A lifetime spent pursuing things professed
Instead of things *themselves* of which is spake.
Oh yes, henceforth I would *real* knowledge seek
And find my beast without the use of Greek

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the First—*continued*

I.22

Or Latin, or those other tongues long dead
In which I used to search for living truths.
“Just what,” I asked myself with pride new fed,
“Can Jacobus, that king of half-hatched sleuths,
Tell *me* about a dragon he’d not seen
Except in books by others no less green?”

I.23

“Why, less than this!” I answered, fingers thus,
My vigor whetted by this fiery mission
Stoked by spirits to rare heights of fuss.
“To no convention, concept, or tradition
Shall I bow...except to Him!,” I said
About my author, who could write me *dead*.

I.24

“But first, *before* I go,” I said to Him,
“I must see evidence of You who send
Me. Yes, I’m not the type to follow whim
And just *presume* your word I must attend.”
And on this brazen challenge did I wait...
And wait...till it was very, *very* late.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Second

II

Book the Second

II.1

I woke in pandemonium, quite lost
Aswim confusion's thickest stew and dazed
By each ingredient. Things seemed but tossed
About through space in reckless whimsy crazed
By blurry want and purged of what they'd mean.
It looked no less than *Chaos on caffeine*.

II.2

But gradually, commotion's motions slowed,
And as my vision held these things in place,
Significance came bit by bit bestowed
On them again. I now recalled apace
My challenge put to him the night before.
Or was it long ago? I wasn't sure!

II.3

And up I sat in panic at this thought
To survey well the unfamiliar room
Around me hung with spears and girdles wrought
Upon a tapestry on which there loomed
As well a...*dragon*...and a gorgeous maid
Shown kneeling by a knight to whom she prayed....

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Second – *continued*

II.4

Oh yes, I thought; this is indeed the place –
Wherever it is – and in a loud crash
Jumped down from off a table laid in taste
With food and drink and everything I'd mashed
While sleeping there the night, however long.
(Remembrance weakens when the drink is strong.)

II.5

"Yes, *this* must be his sign!" I cried in faith
That I had seen just one, though there grew two
Before me now...until one proved some wraith
Quick vanishing like vapor from my view
Along with all those other specters seen...
And that damned ringing in my ears so keen.

II.6

"O thank you, David," did I shout out loud.
For, this was but His name who had me writ
With body, soul, and wit so well endowed.
"Yes, thank you for but finding me so fit
To undertake this task. I'll never touch
Another drop. I swear to it *this much!*"

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Second – *continued*

II.7

I showed him, *thus*, and waited for a sign...
Till I recalled that I'd been waiting still,
And dropped my arms to grab a hold the wine
For one good *l-o-n-g*, though *retroactive*, swill.
(One doesn't just embark upon some quest
Without first saying bye to all the rest.)

II.8

And now was I as ready as could be
To go and find that dragon that escaped
And learn from him the truths you'll never see
On tapestries or glass, *however* shaped.
(How fine it was to be alive and well
Within an epic not concerned with Hell!)

II.9

And in this spirit nothing could impede,
I readied me before the looking glass...
Till dawned on me I did now antecede
Their evolution out of polished brass
Or what damned else this thing before me was,
As now I saw in it bare more than fuzz.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Second – *continued*

II.10

I righted my attire best I could
From memory, forgetting I'd not worn
Such things as these before, and so just stood
There quite perplexed to find me so adorned
As heroes are in times like these – I mean
Whenever one's own author sets the scene.

II.11

But having tied my sollerets and trudged
My way to that great door through which I'd go,
I spied upon a table what I'd judged
To be a book in vellum, opened so,
And to my horror found on close inspection
Text so written as to beg reflection

II.12

On but any meaning whatsoever,
Save, perhaps, a sense of perseverance –
Like that which might have suffered the endeavor
To compose such tidy incoherence.
This seemed indeed to be that sort of tongue
One finds, no wonder, written more than sung.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Second – *continued*

II.13

But I digress. What all this *really* meant
Was plain as dirt to see. As if my course
Seemed not already strewn with mean intent,
I'd now need play charades to find a horse.
I cried to him above who had me picked,
"O Borodin, you really are *so* strict!"

II.14

"No knowledge in the world is worth all *this*,"
I cried. "With no more effort you might wake
Me where my understanding's not amiss.
But seems you'd rather play me till I break.
If this were but the only path to truth
I'd sooner slog through knee-deep mud...forsooth!"

II.15

These bold words clashed in echo round my head,
My beaver being down, and in my haste
To raise it felt my gauntlet now embed
Within my visor, darkening what I faced.
God! I was thirsty now, believe you me,
And would've drunk...were but my beaver free!

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Second – *continued*

II.16

When, finally, I got myself redeemed
And moving toward the door again, my eye
Caught hold a glint of gold so bright it seemed
To lure me in, much like a flame might buy
A moth. And in a flash did I succumb
To inspiration found between my thumb

II.17

And index finger there, where gleamed a pendant
Painted with the features of a lass
So ravishing, of beauty so resplendent,
I couldn't catch my breath. It seemed I'd passed
Beyond the corporal world of lungs and heart
Into that weightless one of lust and art,

II.18

Where none exists but for intensest yearning;
Where, in a sudden sputter of hot joy
One tastes a state in which man's highest learning
Seems but dull, like heavy sauce to cloy
The palate whereon we perceive this "soul"
We think we have, and thus received quite whole

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Second – *continued*

II.19

A truth, enlarged from out this flask I took,
That promised life's great secret in entire:
Our world is but a page in that great book
That tells of propagational desire.
I judged this wisdom neither good nor ill
But let it seep into my blood and thrill

II.20

Me down into the marrow of my bones
(Where I had known it ever). And in treason
Quick, insurgent mobs with sticks and stones
Were felt to scale the ramparts of my reason
Till, with this, her likeness in my dire hand,
My heart fed hot, much like a firebrand.

II.21

It fed quite hard upon those lips, ripe, red,
Pursed full in wanton sensuality;
Those eyes, bright blue, in which I'd lost my head
To bumbling sentiment's mentality
About the "love" I gleaned within her breast –
That firm round bosom driving my unrest –

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Second – *continued*

II.22

And, ah, that neck, that chin, those soft, soft cheeks
On which there blushed the very lust of life
Itself (as some spring flower sweetly seeks
Its pollen to be published full and rife,
Come forth who may to do it). And that hair!
Oh, what in this wide world could *compare*

II.23

With the allurements of those flaxen locks?
Why, *none*, dear God! Nor *any* of her charms!
Yes, I will answer any door where knocks
A plot in which she ends up in my arms,
Full pressed with kisses on those shapely lips,
My longing cooled against those swelling hips!

II.24

But whoa! Where was I prior to this kiss?
What mission brought me *armored* to this place?
No, not for *love* would I be dressed like this
But rather for some battle in love's chase!
Yet, it took HER to make me resolute,
And so, I clipped her locket to my suit.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Third

III

Book the Third

III.1

Thus, armed with this resolve (*and* suit) of steel
I ventured forth, my love upon my sleeve,
To face what hand my author might next deal
Me, be it some mere kick upon the greave.
For now, this princess had me so engrossed
I'd stop for *nothing*...save, perhaps, a toast.

III.2 3

Ah, life's aburst with beauty and good cheer
When you just jump in it with both your feet,
Not worrying about what mess you'll...meet—
But hey, my quatrain's all "enveloped" here!—
Not worrying about...what might have been,
Nor topics moot, like "virtue," "vice," or "sin."

III.3 4

No, life is something to be *used*, not hoarded
Like some mattress stuffed for some great day.
For, *that* day might not come until you're boarded
For eternity, as they would say,
And this, your cash-packed bed, left far behind
For some indifferent spendthrift there to find!

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Third—*continued*

III.4 5

Oh, what a waste. It even makes me sick
To think on it. Now, had you rather spent
Your tender with some lover full of kick,
At least you might have gone without lament.
Or at the least, lamenting through that smile
Stoked by vibrant memories the while.

III.5 6

Well, anyway, I threw the door ajar
And from this threshold leaped to greet the day
— This day that promised miracles so far —
And thrilled these feet upon this good earth's clay
Would soon stand firm, prepared to go and tread
Wherever He should choose to have me led.

III.6 7

I felt them hit, and yes it did feel good...
Except that they kept going, sinking down.
Down, d-o-w-n they sank till finally I stood
Kneepiece-deep in that oozy, sluggish brown
I knew instinctively for mud — that sludge
Through which I'd sworn I'd *never*...trudge.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Third—*continued*

III.7 8

To hell with You and all these stupid rhymes!"
 I said, incensed, for anyone who'd hear.
 "I'm sick of choosing just that word that *chimes*
 Concordant though in *meaning* something queer!
 For, *slog* was what I swore I'd do, not 'trudge.'
 I'll play this game no more. Just wait and judge!

III.8 9

"And that goes too for all this stupid meter;
 I am finished counting on my fingers
 Just to say did this and that the neater
 Than I might have with a word that lingers
 But a syllable too long. From here
 On in I'll damned well say things as I like
 without regard for how words strike...the ear...
damn it!"

III.9 11

But after venting that (and much, *much* more),
 My ire stoked yet hotter with each word,
 I hankered soon for nothing short of war,
 Declaring, "I'll not stand for this absurd
 Complicity! No, not the slightest part
 I'll play toward this mere nonsense you call 'ART'!

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Third—*continued*III.~~10~~ 12

“Why, I’ll just sit this out and watch your tale
Collapse beneath an unsupported plot.
Without your handsome hero to prevail
Against Fate’s finest hand, *all’s* ill-begot.
So, I’ll just suck up what to slake a thirst
And wait to see just who will holler first.”

III.~~11~~ 17

And by the time I made it to the top,
I felt myself near death from heat and thirst,
As if the very sun that baked this slop
Enough to walk on well-nigh cooked *me* first.
Try climbing up a hill some sultry day
Attired IN AN OVEN all the way!

III.~~12~~ 18

And yet, did I complain? No! Life is good!
For, if not here, where *would* I really be
But jobless, yearning to be understood
Beside some verb or other! Is *that* free?
Besides, the only thing ‘twixt me and doom
Seemed now whatever wet I might consume.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Third—*continued*III.~~13~~ 19

And what I spied from out my sweat-blurred eyes
Was that same stuff I had so thickly craved.
Yes, *water*—cold, wet water. Ah, gold buys
No thing so valuable as what might save
A body from his thirst! The mightiest king's
A slave to what your poorest peasant flings

III.~~14~~ 20

Into a trough for beasts to guzzle up.
It's only common till you want it most.
A starving man sent suddenly to sup
Could not have hastened toward his steaming roast
With fiercer focus. Woe to him who stepped
Between my self and that toward which I'd leapt!

III.~~15~~ 21

And blinded by my wettest joy (and sweat),
I tripped off the bank and sank like a stone
Straight to the bottom of the stuff I'd yet
To taste. And not till then could I have known
Real irony to be so sprightly quick
Upon its toes and deft with every lick.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Third—*continued***III.16 22**

And as I sank, I thought in quite a flash
How my whole life seemed mirrored here in this —
How I'd not tried a thing but with such rash
Resolve that sent me down to the abyss
Of all success, where aspiration's lure
Is pawned for dull complacency's full store.

III.17 23

Yet, luck would have it not so deep as seemed
It plunging in. For, once back on my feet
I heard my helmet drain, and found what streamed
Down me quite good. (Ah, thirst is no aesthete!)
And then I stooped to drink of what I could
All 'round me — meaning this in which I stood.

III.18 24

And once I'd filled myself to bursting sweat
And flung my helmet off to greet the air
That thrilled with chill my face and neck all wet,
I froze in awe of what I saw from there.
Before me now lay shimmering in the sun
A world so splendid it looked new begun.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Third—*continued*III.~~19~~ 25

Bright mounds and pools of colors yet unmixed
Gleamed richly from this painter's palette, vast
As earth itself. And all around it, fixed
In azure endlessness, a sky was cast
So vividly, I smarted in despair,
Much as *all* beauty leaves its wound to bear.

III.~~20~~ 26

I swooned, quite powerless before all this—
Dame nature's naked splendor—and felt good.
She urged partaking, lured me come and kiss
Her petal-lips and wallow in her wood
To thrill in her luxuriant, fruited space
And sleep amid her secret-shadowed place.

III.~~21~~ 27

This seemed the virgin landscape I had seen
In paintings old and thought untrue, ideal,
Some trick of brush and pigment, just too clean
To show the rude, chance work of nature, *real*,
Where things get broken, die, or go to waste,
While life, unmoved, continues in its haste.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Third – *continued*

III.~~22~~ 28

I knew now only lust had kept me blind
To this great splendor here through which I'd trudged –
A lust for *life* so keen I could not find
The sense in any part that might be judged
Extraneous to its keeping. But once tamed,
This thirst revealed what kept my heart inflamed.

III.~~23~~ 29

Enthralled by this primeval paradise –
Resplendent teeming lushness, raw and pure –
I pondered all that I would sacrifice
In yielding to it, giving up my lure
Toward dragon, truth and justice...*and the girl*....
And then deep down I felt a thing unfurl,

III.~~24~~ 30

Like appetite or drive, renewed desire,
And then found myself revived, full-grown,
And bounding over barricades of fire
With me upon its back toward fates unknown.
For where in intellect is found the force
To stave deep lust from off its innate course?

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Fourth

IV

Book the Fourth

IV.1

But first things first. Ambitions of the “soul”
Are sought distractedly when put before
The body’s own. One must discard it whole,
This prudish epic etiquette of yore,
Wherein since ancient days no hero's done
What any *real* man would not dream to shun.

IV.2

Though follow we our hero’s every stride
Toward triumph ‘gainst his inauspicious odds
And watch him kill and pillage, lie and hide,
Misuse the women and displease the gods,
Yet *never* do we spy him go attend
HIS BLADDER’S CALL, for fear *this* may offend!

IV.3

Yes, such is the hypocrisy bequeathed us
By the lofty laurel-headed set—
Those bards who never fart— who, being wreathed thus,
Deem it meet that art steer clear its debt
To life, nor mirror it too closely seen,
Lest kidneys be as nobly sung as spleen.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourth—*continued*

IV.4

But *I'll* be no one's minion of tradition;
I'd not have it seeping out my ears.
This urgent stream that flows from my volition
Serves to liberate me from my peers.
So, look who will, and gather 'round to pray,
WHILE I PISS THIS INHERITANCE AWAY!

IV.5

And oh, how fine it felt, like God on high,
To scatter one's own water to the winds—
First *man* among immortal heroes, aye,
The first for whom Propriety rescinds
Her laws—or leastways turns her head the while,
Attending indiscretions *far* more vile.

IV.6

But wait! What was that noise I heard behind me?
It sounded like some bawdy wench's laugh.
I turned 'round quick to see and found, purblindly,
I had company—though dressed but half
For the occasion. When my settling sight
Fixed sharp upon that form my heart took flight.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourth—*continued*

IV.7

For it was she: she of the bosom round
And ripe, red lips and flaxen hair so soft,
Whose hips I'd held while dreaming would confound
My thoughts of more essential things quite oft—
Like why in bloody hell I'd loitered here—
The one for whom I'd toiled in this gear,

IV.8

And broiled, and renounced all earthly pleasure
Not directly touching mission's end...
Which *lately* had but lost a goodly measure
Of its old allure. Oh, *oh*, could poet send
Protagonist incentive more than this?,
I thought, my mind's eye focused on a kiss

IV.9

Upon those lusty lips that seemed as if
They'd never close from 'round that lusty laugh,
So keenly was she peering at my stiff
Repose. (Yes, armor keeps you like a staff.)
Indeed, the thing that held her so amused
I hardly could have gleaned from that effused

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourth—*continued*

IV.10

In this new burst of cachinnation fits.
For those rare syllables I could construe
Gave me to wonder if she'd heaved her wits
Out with what shook her dignity askew.
They sounded unlike any tongue I'd known...
Except, perhaps, the French in which I'd moan

IV.11

When all I'd stub my toe or bang my head
Way back in my indecorous salad days—
The ones, *good God*, I hadn't even led
Yet for some half millennium, anyways!
But anyway, to keep an epic short,
I did that which I'd sworn to not resort:

IV.12

Yes, interrupt a woman— not for love
Nor money but right now for sheer impatience
Did I breach this rule so high above
All others I had learned. And in that cadence
I found customary of the time,
I knelt upon one knee and spoke in rhyme,

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourth—*continued*

IV.13

Inquiring in my gallant, courtly tone
What was her name, pray tell, lest I defame
So high a chasteness with one of my own
Selection. Nothing butters up a dame
Like manners, I now thought, not ill-impressed
With my urbanity, though still undressed

IV.14

Waist down, as then I realized when I saw
Whereon it was her gaze had built its nest.
No, *not* my shield. There ought to be some law
Against the ribald pranks one finds expressed
In verse toward innocent, hard-working folk
Like me by poetaster bastards, broke

IV.15

For want of wit. Such dastards should be made
To live the life they write so as to teach
Them how to pick their rhymes in better faith
And fit. But, gentleman I am, I reached
My ungloved hand toward her that she might trust
My pure intentions, purged of all the lust

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourth—*continued*

IV.16

That surged unchecked throughout my corporeal being.
When she put her hand in mine and smiled,
All wet with mirth, I felt my caution fleeing—
If there was some left—and I grew wild
With goad to prick and tear my reason loose
From off its watch at passion's trembling sluice

IV.17

And drew this hand, so delicate and smooth,
Down to my lips and kissed it softly, dreaming
It to be her body such to soothe
The hard-pent pressure of desire steaming
Up my suit. She then addressed me, smiling
In a manner sexy and beguiling,

IV.18

Though I grasped of it no goddamned word.
Nor mattered this a whit. For, this was love,
That flawless exegete of all things purred
In ears since Venus mounted high above.
She ran the fingers of her other hand
Amid my hair and uttered something grand

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourth—*continued*

IV.19

To hear, which seemed to mean, *how do you do?*
(But didn't, as I'd later understand).
Emboldened by her voice, so near a coo,
I then inquired how her castle's manned,
Or some such thing, to which she laughed anew
And pulled me up from off my knee to view

IV.20

Those gorgeous big blue eyes of hers and feel
Her breath upon my cheek and glean what stirred
Within that bosom, pity to conceal.
I stood erect before her, undeterred
But for the tingling numbness in my leg
And spots a-spurting 'gainst my vision vague.

IV.21

And yet again she tried, to my delight,
Seductively that greeting used before,
Though now intoned a wee bit less polite—
As if this tryst of ours might prove a chore.
She dropped my hand and caught ahold that favor
I had brought along for private savor.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourth—*continued*

IV.22

Oh, I thought, so *that's* what had her worked
To such a sweat!, and watched her as she started
New her old inscrutable quiz, then smirked,
My eyes lost in her bust where it had parted
And but struggling out from dark desire
At the bit about her ROYAL sire

IV.23

Mad to find now missing this small thing—
This charm I borrowed but to fuel my thrill—
For, though *portraying* her, it was THE KING,
HER FATHER, who had paid the limner's bill.
"The King?" I gasped, my vision quite returned
From out that valley all too quick sojourned.

IV.24

It now looked plain as deer within a field:
The girl's as well *connected* as she's built!
And though by now my mission was concealed,
I'd find what all to do, right to the hilt!
But lest my motives anyone mistake,
I stayed to play the *scholar*, not the rake.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifth

V

Book the Fifth

V.1

Ah, never did the flesh bring man more pleasure
Than was felt by me up on that hill,
Where daunting walls adorned in sovereign treasure
Glimmered in the hearth's excited thrill.
I delved in deep and greedily partook
That corporal sustenance so long forsook.

V.2

We had lamb. So succulent and tender
Was this luscious meat, I couldn't eat
It fast enough, nor heed the regal splendor
All around us where we sat, nor greet
The royal gaze I felt upon me set
As if on something odd found in one's net.

V.3

Existed none that wasn't on my plate.
Outside the noble compass of that rim
Fussed sound and light, scant meaning to relate
To senses fixed concertedly within,
Fixed fast upon the luscious taste of life
Itself—past merest happiness or strife

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifth—*continued*

V.4

And all such routine things that only veil
That most ambrosial savor of mere being—
The subtle tang of some minute detail
On which the whole depends, like light for seeing.
I knew it now for what it was, this taste:
Less food than that great hunger it replaced.

V.5

And having ducked starvation's slow blunt scythe
Once more, assuaging deep this oldest lust,
I raised my eyes from off these bones, full blithe
As one who'd lost it all but found a crust,
And let them drift and wander round this hall,
This vast and dark enclosure, thick with pall.

V.6

In aimless search of boundary did they fly,
Where mighty curving ribs soared overhead
To bear aloft a vault so spacious high
It seemed the very firmament instead,
As if in place of heaven's fearful void
Here man presumed to have his own employed.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifth—*continued*

V.7

Then, falling from that dizzy height, they lit
Below upon a weighty corbel stone
On which those arching ribs were made to sit
Supported. And from out that block was shown,
Where once had been a surface smooth of sense,
Now gouged to life a beast of such intense

V.8

Expression as to seem the very germ
Of all unrest, corruption's seed set deep
Within delight, hell-bent to disaffirm.
Forever wakened from its stony sleep,
It raged against the light in wrath all-seeing,
Riled at the fact of its own being.

V.9

So fierce a visage did this creature bear,
Coaxed violently by steel of sculptor's chisel,
I felt afraid to meet its eyes, the glare
Of which was so intense it seemed to sizzle.
Yet I looked, compelled by that weird thought
That I had seen somewhere a likeness caught

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifth—*continued*

V.10

Within some *human* face I'd known one time.
It haunted me, this recognition dim
Of having met amid rare distant clime
Some personage of normal mortal limb
Who nonetheless resembled in his smile
Some aspect of this mien I found so vile.

V.11

And so, quite heedless of the voices round
Me clamoring for my gaze, I stared intent
Upon these lineaments that would so hound
Me, rooting memory's folds for merest scent
Of recognition. Yet to no avail,
For all that came to mind were things for sale:

V.12

Yes, fragile, costly things... "so precious rare..."
I wouldn't think to let them... "think to let..."
Ah hah! That's *it!* Down in that *dealer's* lair
Is where I had such fiendish eyes last met!
It was *his* face I saw on that tableau:
The antique dealer, ARCHIBALD IMAGO!

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifth—*continued*

V.13

Or so the name was writ on that receipt
He gave me for my dragon—*now long gone!*
Oh, what a crafty master of deceit
To feign such polished unconcern whereon
He knew I'd bite like fish on freshest bait!
Why, that Arch-merchant must have lain in wait

V.14

Until I lost my way and stumbled in
Upon his web, long spun for none but me!
How else explain his helpers who, like kin
Of mine, knew just which one my house would be?
Yes, *they* led *me!* He pressed me call him "Lark"
For short, as "Arch" he found "too harsh, too dark."

V.15

Or else perhaps too bloody close to home!
For, arch he was indeed of something short
Of goodness. Had I left my wits to roam
The streets while in his shop, that he could thwart
So well my knowing him? And what dark art
Obscured my note he'd even dressed the part?

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifth—*continued*

V.16

He stood there dressed in black from head to toe,
His wizened face reclaimed by hoary beard
That must have taken centuries to grow.
And on his finger gleamed a ring more weird
Than anything I'd seen in all the worst
Shop windows. Surely was its maker cursed

V.17

With a specially heightened lack of taste,
Or at the least an unenlightened patron.
For, what it showed was like a snake enlaced
Amid a knot of endless complication,
Courting still the most disdainful gaze
To linger there awhile in its dispraise

V.18

And miss the even stranger stuff about
Him: that old tome he carried at his side
Through which he'd pore each time you'd come to doubt
Him on some provenance he would provide.
Did mortal ever live in all the ages
Wise to what was writ upon *those* pages?

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifth—*continued*

V.19

Why, had he worn a pointy hat with WIZARD
Writ on it, it couldn't have been more plain:
A tongue *that* smooth could have only slithered
From a mouth the Arch-tempter had ordained.
Yet, miss I surely did these telltale signs
Until I woke well snared within his lines.

V.20

If wake I did at all! For strange to say,
I can't recall a time things *weren't* weird!
Hard pressed am I of late to tell the day
From night, so have their properties careered
Together in my mind – the thing concrete
Commuting fluently with its conceit.

V.21

Might *all* of this have been in fact a dream –
Some chemic conjuration of my brain
In which the alchemist who now so seemed
My mentor was but *me*, and this domain
Of his in which I wander none but *mine* –
None but that popped realm above my spine?

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifth—*continued*

V.22

For *there* is where it's said a world's transformed
Within the merest liquid drop — up there
Within that crucible where's nightly warmed
Concoctions of anxiety and care
In random recipes of unrestraint,
Investing meanings bold in matters faint.

V.23

Indeed, I sense I've led another life
Than this somewhere, sometime — a job, perhaps,
A home, with children, pets, friends, bills — a wife —
Yet all by now long faded into lapse.
If so, it's nothing to regain it all
But open wide my eyes to watch this fall

V.24

To faint remembrance. Yes, to merely die
From here right back into that other dream —
The great corporeal one wherein we buy
Our food for this one — and emerge full free
And unconstrained by this Arch-author churl:
That dealer and his lizard...and...*the girl*...?

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixth

VI

Book the Sixth

VI.1

No, no, don't go! Hold tight! Let not a ray
Of light peep in to burn away this veil
On which I have her fixed, just poised to say
She needs me. For, once gone I can't entail
Myself to this same kingdom once again,
Despite how I might *recompose* it then.

VI.2

Oh no, let go and drift right back instead
While time exists to save this world of hers.
Out, sun! Go rouse some lovers in their bed
And make them sweat from what their love incurs,
But *I* will not to your rude stare succumb.
My flesh must once again grow heavy, dumb,

VI.3

And senseless of the everything without
Until its text reads only of within,
Rewoven in a pattern of devout
Veridicality, like touch on skin.
Oh, to dissolve and seep back into night,
Dispersed across that sky beyond all light,

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixth—*continued*

VI.4

Where SELF is then re-membered all anew
Within a moment vast as countless miles.
Yes, I feel it now – I'm coming through.
I feel me drifting past those quiet isles
Lining Lethe's moonlit banks, on course
For that dark cave that holds our very source:

VI.5

That leaden den where Sleep holds languid court,
Whose ineffectual ministers of state
Would nod to his dull-muttered mandates 'thwart
All cares of consequence on which they wait.
Did gentler despot ever reign than Sleep,
Whose subject never lived that dodged *his* keep?

VI.6

How soothing feels my Lethe's current, soft-
Drawing me onward toward the little death
I've lived in her before so oft, so oft;
How rich it is to ride her lusty breadth
In impotence – to savor the elation
Over selfhood's sweet obliteration!

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixth—*continued*

VI.7

Yes, yes, to *rid* me of identity —
To gallop tilting toward that very hole
Through which one's lost in the immensity
Mere being seems, without a part for "soul."
That's what it is, this fragrance I now breathe:
The evocation of the life I *leave*!

VI.8

But what rare, splendid country's this around
Me here I see as if with fingertips,
Or lips, as lovers do — yes, more profoundly
Than with eyes — like passing round her hips,
I feel to her horizon and beyond,
Where she, this earth, curves gently 'round, all donned

VI.9

In silken verdure bound by shimmering seas,
Effulgent under white-hot shafts of sun
Where part the billowed mounds of drifting breeze-
Born clouds. Yes, yes, the earth and I are one!
From here at Lethe's vast terrestrial shore
Can I at once the whole of her explore:

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixth—*continued*

VI.10

Like when I crush a grape between my teeth
And find perspective plays no part in sense:
What's gleaned of it above or underneath
Is all together apprehended hence,
As if the world then is tasted whole
With nothing left but *feelings* to extol!

VI.11

But what are these alluring forms I pass
Now, shrouded thick in shade? I seem to know
Them deeply but for this miasmic mass
Between, through which bare more than shadows show,
Though some illumined well enough to trace
Vague hints of something intimate — a face

VI.12

Or place or something else in which one seems
To see one's "self" within the den of Sleep.
That's it; I'm here! These are the husks of dreams
He's said to leave abandoned 'round his keep.
From each he'd drawn that seed of logic, strange,
In which a sleeper reads new worlds arranged.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixth—*continued*

VI.13

And yes, I recognize them all, somehow;
In each I see someone or thing I'd known
Before by name, as if but sound endowed
Them then with old identities full-blown,
All lost again and then discovered new,
Like truths awaiting *propositions* true.

VI.14

And hence the boundless richness here: a guise
Of language and sensation that's but used
Predictively, reducing our surprise;
Where prior probabilities perused
Can then be tested, recombined for free,
And minimized of inefficiency.

VI.15

Of course, I didn't *think* all this, per se.
I merely felt its truth grow glowing keen
Upon my being — as one *knows* by way
Of taste some spice unknown by name to glean.
No, not in signs of speech arranged to *mirror*
The experience, but in that clearer

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixth—*continued*

VI.16

Ken one *feels* the world in from here,
In which you see that words so often *muddle*
The reality they would cohere.
They simply dress it up for that unsubtle
Eye unused to seeing plain and shop
It forth transformed: mere costume on a prop

VI.17

Of truth. For words sustain their very own
Reality, distinct from what they'd "mean,"
In that the thing that's spoke cannot be known
Except in shapes mentality's machined.
Then what plain use are words describing things
When only of themselves they ever sing,

VI.18

When really of their own event they tell,
The very properties of their performance:
Breadth, weight, hue and tone of each— their spell
As *things* before use as coordinates
With worldly things, mere points positioned
On that daily map we call cognition?

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixth—*continued*

VI.19

What can they really tell us of that land
Itself they chart, not of the lines and planes
By which its sheer duration may be spanned
For postulation's sake, but what remains
Beyond mimetics of a thought's expression
Or the datum and its mere reflection?

VI.20

What can words tell us of that conscious space
Achieved across linked synapses, like storms
Of process, urging replication's race?
What values can be found in symbolized forms
Suggesting things themselves? To know what's "real"
Just shut your mouth, put down your pen, and *feel!*

VI.21

But as I said, I hadn't *thought* all this
As such. Indeed, it all seemed now but altered
To its merest *telling*—gone amiss
Somehow, as if these words, once apt, soon faltered
From their path proscribed by act of plot
And wandered out to where the facts were not,

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixth—*continued*

VI.22

But out where they themselves might meet and mingle,
Rubbed contextually against each other's
Sense, engendering facts their own no single
Word could hope to do. Had I my druthers,
I'd have *stayed* there too, far from all events
Recountable. It seems this wasn't meant

VI.23

To be though—seems the very words that made
Me were reforming towards some different text
In which I saw night's bright enchantments fade
To sudden strangeness. As the shore collects
The disenfranchised from the sea, the edge
Of this, my sentience, now showed remnants dredged

VI.24

From darkening depths of sleep: odd shards of things
Once valuable—chance rubble of my past—
A woman's voice that calls or cries or sings....
No, laughs. And rising up from out the vast
Expanse re-gathering to become me
Again, my manhood struggles to be free....

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventh

VII

Book the Seventh

VII.1

“O God!” I now ejaculated loud
With opened eyes to see my dream-come-true —
The one in which that heiress well-endowed
With attributes so feminine subdues
Me in my bed and traps me in her arms,
An avid inmate of her ample charms,

VII.2

And there detains me from those puerile chores
Conventional to every romance hero:
Like chasing every horror on a horse
And righting wrongs until the score is zero.
Yes, life *is* good!” I yelled in sheer delight,
Faith firmly resurrected by this sight.

VII.3

For here she was, not merely in my dreams
But in my *bed!* Well, *someone's* bed at least;
The room looked unfamiliar. Those best schemes
Hot Venus ever tried on maid or priest
Seemed downright soporific next to this.
My eyes, it seemed, were trapped in the abyss

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventh—*continued*

VII.4

Of bliss corralled within her plunging gown.
And when I pulled them out and up to meet
Her own — that blue in which I thought I'd drown —
I felt those full ripe lips of hers entreat
Me toward adventures never dreamt till now.
She hovered over me, as might a plow

VII.5

That would be lowered down to work the earth,
And, quick, I strained to pull my eyelids closed
And play this game for *all* that it was worth.
I feigned to be still *sleeping*, indisposed
To any but the most invasive measures
One employs at such a point. Pleasures

VII.6

This enticing are too rarely found
To *not* take hold of, damn it, when one can!
The world's strongest glue would not have bound
My eyelids shut for long, as she began
With unforeseen abandon such a laugh
Would make you think she'd cracked and broke in half.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventh—*continued*

VII.7

Ah! *This* then was that sound I'd heard far off
From in the dim-lit bubble of deep sleep—
That very same I'd thought some deadly cough
When first I heard it—back when she caught peep
Of me so ill prepared beside the stream!
This laugh was *anything* but what you'd deem

VII.8

Quite proper for a damsel of *her* birth.
It sounded closer to a hog in pain!
Still, one could sense this had less death than mirth
About it—maybe even ascertain
In it *endearing* qualities of sorts,
Like tears of helplessness amid the snorts.

VII.9

But still, I opened up my eyes to hear
Between deep breaths and sighs a word or two
I understood, I think—something quite near
O would I save her from some bugaboo
Or such that ate some creep the townsfolk had...
No, *sheep* it was it ate that made them sad....

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventh—*continued*

VII.10

Well, *whatever* it was that pricked her zeal,
I now discerned it wasn't really me
But rather some large horror whose next meal
Comprised — *and this by her own king's decree!* —
Primarily *herself*. "His *what?*" I cried
In jealous rage. For, should I just abide

VII.11

Some rival come and steal from me my lunch!
Just how can I convey to you in rhyme
The impact of these words? No cogent punch
In one's own gut some unsuspected time
Comes close. For here I lay within the lap
Of rapture, like a suckling at the pap,

VII.12

Near drunk on beauty, swimming in those eyes,
Those cheeks...*those thighs!*...till suddenly I'm doused
In cold, wet realization that her cries
Are due some brute whom I would need to joust —
And *win against*, of course — to stand a chance
Of seeing her again (beyond some trance).

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventh—*continued*

VII.13

Oh, I was kindled now, I grant you, hot
As any well-stoked hearth in June! What more
Could you expect a man to hear and not
Erupt in green-eyed malcontent? "I'll gore
Whatever bloody bastard comes between
Us two!" I warned *whomever*, sight unseen.

VII.14

Of course, just *who* whomever might have been
I'd no idea — nor could care a stroke.
These flames I felt now raging deep within
On envy's moist green shoots had spewed such smoke
I couldn't see a thing, or so to speak.
For, I knew just what havoc I would wreak.

VII.15

And it would be the error of the dearth
Of wits about me now that drove me thus —
The sort of thing one winces on in mirth
And pain next morning that was none but fuss
The night before. And startled by this thought,
I realized that my tongue was dry and taut,

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventh—*continued*

VII.16

As if some *other* appetite of mine —
I had, it seems, too many for good health —
Had wakened now beyond its quiet time
To stretch, yawn, lick its chops and hunt in stealth
My SELF — if that's what's called this great confusion
Closely following Free Will's delusion —

VII.17

Watching what I next will do to find
Some meaning in it all. I felt my hand
Reach out, directed by that thirst purblind,
To grope for that one thing I'd understand —
The thing I'd always reached for with such pluck
And found, alas, when *truly* down on luck —

VII.18

That flask that never left my side, *except*
In use, was now quite nowhere to be felt.
I asked my hovering muse, that quite inept
But gorgeous genius of my fate who knelt
Now with her knees pinned 'round my chest, just where
In bloody hell this thing had gone. Her hair,

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventh—*continued*

VII.19

Just by the way, was nothing less seductive
Than the rest of her, by God!, a shower
Of gold silk suffused with the destructive
Lure found in some soft meat-eating flower.
Now it was embosomed round my head,
A spider's catch within her new-spun bed.

VII.20

For she had closed in quick on my distraction
Now and rummaged with a sprightly hand
Beneath the sheet, no doubt toward satisfaction
Of my search for flask, till it hit land
Abruptly where the *cuisse* and *tuille* would meet
Had I been dressed for it—she's *not* discreet,

VII.21

My muse, whatever else she is— and laughed
Like hell the moment that her hand had found
That thing she sought. And though it were the shaft
Of my own lance, I grabbed firm hold around
The bedpost at my head and shouted out
An oath to shock the young or the devout.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventh—*continued*

VII.22

You see, there'd been a misinterpretation
Here, somewhere, for *I'd* thought this guffaw
Of hers had meant, with optimist's elation,
That she'd found my flask—though I now saw
It really meant that she herself was sure
She *hadn't*. Yet *this* was one I could endure,

VII.23

This tussle in our mother tongues, this clash
Of cultured folk in bed whilst raged outside
The mayhem of the middle ages. Gnash
Your teeth the while; what cannot be denied
Is this: 'twixt her scant this and my scant that
We understood quite *nothing* of this chat

VII.24

Beyond *essential* things. And *there*, we're taught,
We lovers leave philosophers behind.
While those poor tinkers merely ponder thought,
We're left the *business end* of life to mind!
Inspired so, I felt my will engorge...
Till hearing her now purr these words: "O GEORGE!"

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighth

VIII

Book the Eighth

VIII.1

“*O* *who?*” I snarled, flushed a vivid green,
And turned to catch this poacher face to face,
Though dawned on me this rival addressee
Was likely but the *landlord* of this place,
My host, whose bed it was I’d poked about
The morning with my muse — *who too*, no doubt,

VIII.2

Would be but *his*, along with any booze
I found round here. Such stuff is what we romance
Heroes must endure. Our wins we lose
Until, once more, we ply our ready lance
In faith to win it back right at the end.
Christ! Those you cannot trust you shouldn’t *send!*

VIII.3

I mean, just vet them better to begin
And then you’re done with all these irksome tests
Of worthiness along the way. If sin
Can beat out virtue in your man, this rests
On *you* whose agency brought forth this book.
I could go on but won’t. My sudden look

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighth—*continued*

VIII.4

Around the room found neither hide nor hair
Of anyone or thing you'd call a foe
And fight. So back I turned to ask my fair
One who in Hell she had addressed with "O,"
And I then saw her eyes wax quickly wide,
Like one aroused so much as to confide

VIII.5

To you the passion burning up her breast...
But rather burst out loud in yet another
Of those heinous laughs to scare the blessed
Right out of heaven. Pondering what Mother
Would have thought, *nay done*, had I brought *her*
Back home to tea had helped me disinter

VIII.6

My past a bit until her next sedation,
When she mustered up the strength to answer
Me about just who in God's creation
"George" was. In that special tone that cancer
Brings to conversation, she spoke with true
Conviction and surprise the one word... "YOU."

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighth—*continued*

VIII.7

That's right, yes, "you": spelled M, E, *you*. Of course
I called her on her error unrestrained,
As *I* was *not* that cad-upon-high-horse,
That militant and patronizing saint
Of this same name! In fact, it was none less
Than *him* I'd come to stop, I then confessed.

VIII.8

You see, *he* was the *very* one tradition
Soon would send to slay with flinty smile
That dragon in my glass — an exhibition
So barbaric, rude, uncouth, and vile
As would quite make the worst invading horde
Seem but as healing as a trip to Lourdes.

VIII.9

And girl or not, I hadn't come this far
In search of what had happened just to stand
Aside right now and leave things as they are —
Or *were*, I mean, as these were things long planned
As past events (which is absurd, of course,
If entropy and time exert their force).

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighth—*continued*

VIII.10

“This dragon’s mine,” I said. I could then feel
These very words reform me towards my mission
With priorities again congealed
Around those muscles tensed for more sedition.
But the princess was no longer sitting
On me anymore but rather hitting

VIII.11

Me with fists, with shoes, and then my sword,
And I was, *finally*, well out of bed,
Defending me against someone who, Lord
Knows, *really* wanted me as good as dead.
But soon I had disarmed her, and we fell
Into the bed again. I caught her swell

VIII.12

Within my arms once more and held her hard
Through spasmed thrusts and sobs till safely moored
Against my chest. She slept. I felt my guard
Drop now for good when she let go my sword,
Which I could hear now hit the floor with tired
Clang that feebly echoed some, then died.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighth—*continued*

VIII.13

It was, it seems, far less the firm, hard hold
Than those soft words I'd whispered in her ear
That had assuaged her so. I'd mumbled bold
Assurances, which, neither true *nor* clear,
Were meaningful enough in their mere sound
To adequately calm us *both* back down.

VIII.14

Just what it was of this she'd understood
Had likely mattered less than did the meaning
Of my effort to explain it. Good
Or bad, the same held true for me. Seeming
To believe the nonsense I had spoken,
I seemed soothed by what had been *betokened*

VIII.15

Rather than just meant. Ironic though,
Things *were* but looking up now. After all,
I had in bed the girl of my worst foe,
Whose imminent betrothal I'd forestall
By stealing her myself, and too, that beast
He'd come to save her from—*all this at least*

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighth—*continued*

VIII.16

In published versions. Actually, it's known
The *real* enticement toward his crass display
Was but the love of someone of his own
More manly shape. Alas, yes, he was "gay,"
I said—moved less by shapely leg of maid
Than soldiery from out his jock brigade

VIII.17

Of near-hysteric zealots, who pursued
On horse just anyone or thing to kill
For but the glory of their misconstrued
Dear Lord, whose Will they'd heard with *subtlest* skill.
Now, this is common with your hard believers—
They tend to be your overachievers.

VIII.18

And this was quite especially so with George,
Who'd find his inspiration in a turd
And mount his horse to gallop off to forge
High war at times when even God demurred.
Back to my text: Our plaintive princess knew
Of George just what she'd gleaned that day he slew

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighth—*continued*

VIII.19

Some stump his Lord disliked while in a field
In which she'd picked some flowers. Yes, she saw
At once that *this* brave knight was one who'd yield
To nothing. Surely *he'd* be him she'd call
In time of trouble. And, alas, *that* time
Was now, it seemed, for she'd be scant but chyme

VIII.20

Next morning, she now feared, were that mad mob
To get their way and force the king to keep
His word – that one in which he'd pledged to lob
Her too to that starved dragon. For, quite deep
Inside this beast's intestines now had wasted
All the sheep *plus* anyone who tasted

VIII.21

Sheep-like in the minds of these poor folk.
So please forgive her this sad mental state
In which some ass like George, who still provokes
But jokes around these parts, could look so great
To her right now – her indispensable
Hope, though just some incomprehensible

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighth—*continued*

VIII.22

Dope. But when she'd opened up her eyes
I put across to her what you've just heard
Related here and found myself surprised
To see this grand charade of hand and word
I'd tried had worked. She seemed now to accept
It all – until, that is, a smirk had crept

VIII.23

Across her lips just then when I'd addressed
That bit about her savior's sexual preference.
And *there* she stopped me in my tracks, possessed,
It seemed, of sudden, wicked irreverence,
And vented laughter loud enough to clear
The room (if had been others that were here).

VIII.24

She looked incredulous. And I was losing
Humor. "I know a bit about this stuff,
My dear," I said with confidence (confusing
Future, past, and now). "I've taught enough
About it, after all," I then disgorged.
"My name's Professor Plowman...*Pierce*, not '**George**.'"

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Ninth

IX

Book the Ninth

IX.1

It's said earth offers man no torment worse
Than the ferocious sea. This isn't true.
The shipwrecked sailor who observed this first
Might well have learned much on the briny blue,
But having been removed from homelife news,
He's weathered neither lover, spouse, or muse.

IX.2

And *there's* where your good rudder will get stuck
Beneath what's otherwise fine buoyancy.
Poseidon by himself would have no luck
Subduing all the chaos stirred up, free
Of charge, disputing Amphritrite's will.
It is a challenge for the greatest skill,

IX.3

Requiring such care with every word
That it's still safer toiling in the sea
Than betting on surviving the absurd
Endeavor of attempting to agree,
Or not, with one's own muse. To even try
Invites a torment harsher than to die

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Ninth—*continued*

IX.4

Beneath the salty depths of Neptune's clasp.
I'd rather have the worst that *he* might choose,
With his wet wrath aimed hard at my last gasp,
Than dare dispute the wisdom of my muse
(From whom my inspiration seems derived).
Yes, give me your most frenzied wave that strives

IX.5

In frothy lust to lash up at the moon,
And I will ride it long and hard with all
The appetite I've ever brought to boon
Or doom; yes, all the relish, thirst, and raw,
Intoxicated rapture of the "mad"
(Who see in their brain's mischief countless sad,

IX.6

Ecstatic thrills the "sane" will never know).
And with my head pumped full of fiery thrill,
I will abandon everything and throw
My wits aside with all my strength and skill
To sail the surge of your most awful might
Right up into the dizzying weightless heights

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Ninth—*continued*

IX.7

And down again with slow, momentous force
To dive and crash right back in furious spray
Amid the shattered wreckage in your course.
Yes, *thus* I'd sooner die than waste away.
For, even you, dear god, have not the power
To thus grind us *hour* upon *hour*

IX.8

As SHE can when you get her going. In you
A man knows where he's at with ship gone down.
In *your* arms he will die but once, it's true.
But plunge him into *hers* and he'll just drown
Relentlessly, distracted by his joy
While held within her whims like some old toy.

IX.9

"O boy, is he a bigot!," you declare,
My gentle listeners. How strange that *I*,
Of all great heroes *the* most debonair—
Extremely liberal—should stoop to ply
Enlightened ears with such rude boorish views!
But understand, dear hearers: to confuse

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Ninth—*continued*

IX.10

The speaker with the speech in such a case
Is every bit as dim of *you*, I might
Observe. Truth is, I don't at all embrace
Such crude misogynistic rant. Indict
Not the *actor* for bad lines he's given;
It's but the *playwright* should be shriven.

IX.11

For rest assured, *I'm* not prejudiced...**BUT**
All I know is that a man's identity
Is sacred, yes, and that no matter what
You say, it feels quite near obscenity
When challenged—be it by a woman, man,
Unknown, or muse—regarding **WHOM I AM**.

IX.12

And when my own damned muse gets me confused
With someone else—especially some rogue
Who's my own enemy—I feel abused,
I'll deign confess, and likely will invoke
A mood where unbecoming thoughts become
More prevalent than fine ones that they numb.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Ninth—*continued*

IX.13

“God, this is dumb! What *is* this all about?”

I thought. And like one who is sudden woken

From a night’s concocted truths, no doubt

To find things worse than his bad dreams betokened

(*And* not as familiar), I just laughed

At this, my realization of how daft

IX.14

I’d been till now, and how I’d missed the clue

That her being here was anything but chance

And not the rare coincidence of two

Inhabitants of one same space and stance

(Which ours quite nearly was). It had appeared

Though now quite clear she’d been but planted here

IX.15

Smack in my path—I would have had to climb

Right over her, lest we collide—by *HIM*:

By that inscrutable shaman of time,

Space, and decorative ambiance, that grim

Though coyly smiling dealer of antiques

Whose shop spells doom to anyone who seeks

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Ninth—*continued*

IX.16

To bargain for odd remnants of his past.
For, wasn't he that same arch-magus-fiend
Who lured me from my author's path to cast
Me cold into a world just machined
Toward *his* dark ends? Why, yes; then what of *her*?
Was *she* but conjured up by *him* to blur

IX.17

My view of any predetermined goal,
A sure distraction from my author's own
More dignified designs? In this, her role
As "muse," she'd help him keep me as his drone
To work toward what nefarious endeavor
His own heart desired — most to sever

IX.18

My own author's hold on me. Of course!
Imago could have been one time himself
A hero who, like me, had won through force
Of faith and brawn our poet's fame and wealth.
Perhaps, grown discontent beneath the yoke
Of reckoned stress and syllable, he woke

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Ninth—*continued*

IX.19

From out his fettered deference to the ear
To turn against the very one who gave
Him name and limb (and glorious lack of fear),
And then, like Lucifer, but fell, a slave
To his gigantic pride, and then conspired
But to kill his god and set on fire

IX.20

Any relics found from out that rhyme-
And-meter world that tethered him so fast.
For, then he could begin again and climb
Above all best intentions, unsurpassed
In rank debasement of his perfect diction
And the savor of his own affliction

IX.21

As a self-made exile from truth.
And there he'd sit amid his ghastly lair,
Where books and papers strewn about, uncouth
In clutter, told of moral disrepair
At work behind his brazen new campaign
To thwart and undermine his author's reign

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Ninth—*continued*

IX.22

Above the world made manifest in verse—
The poet's order of mere words that made
Him who he was and free enough to curse
His thralldom. Yes, he'd taint its life, invade
Its pulse with jumbled numbers of his own
Contrivance till it lumbered, overthrown

IX.23

Of all good measure, into cheapest noise.
Oh, I can see the scoundrel now, Saint Chief-
Thief-Poetaster-Potentate, who cloys
The ear with gaudy bits of peeling leaf,
Recycling every trite, prosaic phrase,
Each crass confection full of purple praise

IX.24

He could appropriate from all the worst
(Sincerest) verse, all re-gilt fortunate
As souvenirs. And serving him his thirst
For the obscene, this most importunate
Of charms, this specter of pure sex appeal
He's cast at me, as if some fish its meal.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Tenth

X

Book the Tenth

X.1

Would such a fisherman need *so* much bait,
Though? Couldn't one who'd come to cast a lure
Like *this* be good enough at reeled-in fate
To get it without aid of tricks? What poor
Fool with the art to fashion one like *her*
Would not just save some steps and but confer

X.2

Upon a hero of his own creation
The intrinsic will, attention span,
And drive *precluding* his own mediation?
He is either deft beyond his plan
Or else too slow to pose much threat to that
Great scheme *my* author's made! Had *I* begat

X.3

A creature as he had as beautiful
From out the ivory of my own desire,
I think I would have found it suitable
Enough to stop right there and quick retire
To the country with my work instead.
(The world can run itself, now back to bed!)

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Tenth—*continued*

X.4

Unless, that is, but no...it couldn't be...
That she is *his*, MY MAKER'S, doing — meant
Not to distract but to *engage* me, *free*
Of any sly diversions such as sent
Me by that most unscrupulous mean peddler,
That insidious middleman and meddler

X.5

In Borodin's designs. Oh, *that* might work
As well! As if He's cast her but to guide
Me *past* those sirens waving like berserk
From off Imago's pleasure boat — yes, tied
Me, deaf, blind, invulnerable, to the mast
Of my own greed for *her*! (I am aghast

X.6

To ponder all the ways one can arrive
At the very same dilemma!) Makes sense
When you think it through: He who could contrive
Within his painted world quite so immense
A realism as this — yes, one *complete*
With its own corruption — could keep his feet

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Tenth—*continued*

X.7

Quite out of its conceived wet corner too,
If needed. After all, could some mere merchant
Really rival one to whom is due
His own supply's demand? Could the serpent
Then predict the savor of that fruit
Before *he'd* eat its flesh and waxed astute?

X.8

Of course not! That Imago stands no chance
Of out-maneuvering *him*. Seems safe to say,
Her presence here must be but to advance
Our poem's work, not thwart or disobey
Its laws—sustain the *apple*, not the worm,
It might be said—yes, help me reaffirm

X.9

The virtues of this work of his, despite
The inroads made in it so far by snake-
In-the-grass salesmen like him. I'll requite
With *her* help his every treachery: each fake
Apostrophe, mixed metaphor, wrenched stress,
And ineffective syllabic excess

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Tenth—*continued*

X.10

Left festering here by this first fallen son,
This impresario of God-awful
Verse, and root out each egregious pun.
Inspired by *her*, I'll but reclaim His lawful
Charge of my own script, purloined by *his*...
Shit! *There's* another: if *Imago is*

X.11

My author! What if Borodin himself
Is but *his* ruse — the supreme red herring —
Just some strong-smelling god redrawn in stealth
Across my path each time my own unerring
Nose gets wind of George? Perhaps when *her*
Scent, lovely as it's frail, cannot deter

X.12

My lead, then he can come and throw me off
With but a pinch of God! No, down, weird reason,
Down! If really I had thought such moth-
Eaten logic likely, I'd do treason
To us both: I'd cram an anapest
Right down my trochee and make manifest

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Tenth—*continued*

X.13

Such degradation in the prosody
And substance of this poem as deters
Through its worst profligate verbosity
Even that most steadfast saboteur,
The most determined worm – and truly *then*
Wreak havoc in Pandemonium, amen!

X.14

Yet, every certainty brings on its heels
The mandatory sticky gum of doubt,
And I can't help but ponder that those wheels
Propelling fate-wards with such keen, devout,
Inexorable force, might prove to be
Compelled by neither him *nor* Him, but ME.

X.15

Now *that* would be the worst, the hottest hell;
To *have* no devil, dire God, *whatever* –
Yes, to lack beyond one's lonely self
Some cause in which each newly lost endeavor
May be justified; in short, being FREE,
Yes, *awfully* free, remote, a refugee

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Tenth—*continued*

X.16

Among a nation made of one, where wars
Erupt *among mere disparate states of mind*;
Where, safe from the oppression it abhors,
The spirit's caged by one to which it's blind:
The despot of *responsibility*—
Dark privilege of unchecked facility

X.17

To choose and live within each horrid choice;
Yes, dwell *beyond* Beelzebub's best reach
And therefore safe from any dangerous voice
Except the very one we can't beseech
Or shun, the one soft-whispered in our ear
Interior to what our organs hear;

X.18

The voice that sounds the outcome of these strange
Admixtures, chemic cocktails we achieve
From out the complex seethings of our brains,
Wherein disordered blendings can conceive
Within one skull a nation's greatest pride
Or darkest nightmare it can't hope to hide.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Tenth—*continued*

X.19

And furthermore, if such were so, then she'd
Be mine all right, but *literally*; no, *not*
The woman of my dreams I'd soon succeed
In winning from her father with a swat
Or two of my own sword but, as she seems
At times, well, *just* the woman of my dreams,

X.20

As if some emblem of my appetite,
A life-size allegory of that urge
That drives a man to rouse himself and fight
The wrong, the right—whatever's deemed his scourge—
And conquer something he can call his own;
The proverb's carrot, though in flesh and bone

X.21

Perceived and dangled out before my aim
By me alone—without the intervention
Of some lascivious goddess whom to blame
Each time my goal's surpassed by my intention,
As when I get indeed the thing I want
And find it less fulfilling than the hunt.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Tenth—*continued*

X.22

Enough now! Stop! Desist! Is there no end
In sight of numbered truths recruitable
Supporting any given thought? Defend
Against it all we might, most suitable
Of truths are always those that can transmute
Themselves from qualified to absolute

X.23

In that intensest heat of moment's need
That stokes this hellish crucible, our skull.
Yet, if we merely pay indifferent heed
As to which exegesis might best lull
Us into action (the desired sort),
Let's choose our favored truth and *then* support

X.24

It with what necessary proof we would.
For *that* is mustered well in retrospect,
Once gains and losses all are understood
In concrete moral terms. So just select
The one to keep her — and all else call sham —
MY CONSCIENCE IS APPEASED, THEREFORE I AM!

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eleventh

XI

Book the Eleventh

XI.1

My pupil, anyway, who all this while
Had waited on me to reveal the myths
Of George, was dreaming of some sunny isle
On which she'd bask beneath his steamy kiss —
That George who'd pluck her from the jaws of Death
To serve and worship till his dying breath.

XI.2

So, after suffering me to muse alone
Upon the infinite enclosed within
The solipsist's best nutshell (cranial bone),
Her winsome smile quick wilted to a grin
The moment I crashed in upon that kiss
With still more text on what there was amiss

XI.3

With George. O there were such things even *I*
Had not yet known until I'd try exhort
Her on them. *Impotence*, is one. Deny
Them I could not. "I'm but a pale reporter
Of what's in my author's head," I said.
"I simply cannot wait till he is dead!"

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eleventh—*continued*

XI.4

I added, God knows why, except I meant
It, I suppose. "For then we'd both be free,
Abandoning ourselves to the event
Of us alone," I ventured, hot to see
Just where in hell this went. "Yes, just the two
Of us then there'd be — along with certain few

XI.5

"Accoutrements we'd need — but unconstrained
At any rate by this most tortured plot
He's lured us through. And why? For nothing gained
But lunges at his favorite hate, that snot-
Nosed prig with little hands and spotless cuffs
Who cheer-led those God-Queen-and-Country buffs

XI.6

"To Highest Righteousness. This was *his* sad
Excuse for storyline, contrived for quaint-
Of-hearts in rhyme to glorify some cad
Who'd somehow come to stand as patron saint
Of this whole bloody land, DESPITE THE FACT
HE'D NEVER BLOODY BEEN THERE! That he lacked

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eleventh—*continued*

XI.7

“The merest documentable event
To show he’d ever even lived at all
Proved water off the backs of his hell-bent
Hagiographers. Now *that’s* what we call
MYTH, my dear,” I triumphed in conclusion—
Till noticing the cloud of thick confusion

XI.8

Mucking up the lucid atmosphere
Of this, our cozy classroom where we lay.
“But I digress,” confessed I in good cheer
And less-good faith (as I had not). “I stray
From questions far more pressing than of why
We’re here,” I claimed, my focus on her thigh,

XI.9

Which shone like ivory in this raking light,
So sensuously soft and warm as myth
Had never been— at least not since the night
Fair Paphos was conceived from out the pith
Of ART— that desperate act of making real
The beauty trapped inside one’s head. Such zeal

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eleventh—*continued*

XI.10

As had this lonely sculptor for his work,
As turned raw Want, curved hard so like a tooth,
Into that buxom flesh of Have, a quirk
Of realization that became his truth;
Such fierce devotion to one's dream as *his*
Did suddenly seem mine as well. For this

XI.11

Warm life I felt here cupped within my hand
Was surely but the ultimate projection
Of my lust shaped as to understand,
An urge now given tangible expression
Just as Love bestowed upon that king
Whose sorry prayers are now the stuff I sing.

XI.12

Yet this, *my* moment of ecstatic joy,
Fell short our Cyprian's delirium.
Might "I" then be some Roman poet's toy:
An exile from some Imperium,
Carved from bold ambitions He forsook
But for some vividness in words, some book?

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eleventh—*continued*

XI.13

Might “I” as well be precious less than life
Vicarious— one played out in the cell
Of one unquiet mind, replacing strife
He’d rendered, Midas-like, from all that fell
Within his ken, his surrogate for SELF,
Re-edited for life upon some shelf?

XI.14

Or worse, now that I think of it: might *she*?
Might the protagonist intended here
Be but *the girl*, on whose plate he’d serve me
As *garnish*, not the meal, and my career
Mere *incident* to someone else’s story,
Shadow of our *heroine’s* great glory?

XI.15

Oh, don’t go there again; that road’s too rough!
No, *I’m* the only hero of this tale.
Repeat: I’m good enough, I’m good enough!
It’s just that every time I should, I fail
To act toward any one decisive end—
As if I fear I’ll miss, just ‘round the bend

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eleventh—*continued*

XI.16

Of some new path forsaken, sudden view
Of promised land I've come in search of, word
By word the time; that realm of which so few
Have gained beyond a glimpse, though all have heard—
The celestial city of "truth," spread out
Before me whole, mirage within a drought,

XI.17

Resplendent 'gainst the most ephemeral blue
Of now, its shimmering towers rising high
Above the haze of proofs that we construe
Around our freedoms like a maze. Yes, try
And try, I cannot contemplate a choice
Without unearthing in its crux a voice

XI.18

Dissenting its most basic proposition—
Such that in each question couched I hear
Its tenet stated as but the sedition
Of some bigger premise. And it's this fear
Of what I want and this ambivalence
Toward my success she sees as impotence.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eleventh—*continued*

XI.19

It's tough instilling zeal within a truly
Open mind — one such as to respect
The tail-end side of anything you'd duly
Show it. You'd fare better to collect
Your wine in nets or alms from off a prelate
Than to stir a liberal into zealot.

XI.20

For instance, if I really *were* her George,
As *she* would have me here upon this page,
I wouldn't need to think. Yes, I'd engorge
My manly pride upon some holy rage
I'd find to sate my glories on...*for God*.
But, as I'm me, I'm skeptical. I plod.

XI.21

So, this is it, then — *this*, my just reward
For that most sane, judicious disposition
Shown: my inability to ford
The merest puddle without indecision?
Is this thing called "intellectual"
Some nicer name for *ineffectual*?

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eleventh—*continued*

XI.22

Now *that* perhaps goes just a bit too far.
For, after all, I *have* effected much
Towards my own denouement of his bizarre
But hale retelling of a tale. For, such
Are my distinctive strengths that they resist
Convention's means of measurement. No list

XI.23

Of vanquished brutes or beauties could be drawn
Up reckoning wherein *my* assets lie;
No gore-scored fields will ever shock the dawn
Where *I* had waged the day before. No, *I*
Am one who's role's to learn *and teach* the mythic,
Not *become* it— as the *Neolithic*

XI.24

Mind is suited best for that, immune
From accidental use beyond the task
Assigned it— that sure kind that will presume
“This task is God's, and God is good,” not ask
“*Should this be done at all? IT'S JUST SOME TEST!*”
Oh, save us from your pious! Give us rest!

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twelfth

XII

Book the Twelfth

XII.1

*T*here's no such thing as *dragons*, why of course,
I said to calm my sacrificial sheep.
Of all the myths we use to reinforce
The *Good v. Evil* bit we yearn to keep
Between our teeth, it's this one dies the hardest—
Maybe since its telling lures the artist

XII.2

Out beyond the primly bordered gardens
Of our self-esteem to go explore
The wilderness of want and fear that hardens
Us to hate. With every dragon gored
We lose a bit of innocence and bleed
A bit of reason—yes, as if to feed

XII.3

Upon the ready flesh of our inherent
Insecurity. We strive to prove
We're not the beasts we are—I mean the current
Creatures of our genes whose lineage moved
On fins then scaly stumps to claw their way
Towards the society we have today,

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twelfth—*continued*

XII.4

But rather the *creators* of our fate,
Descended not from accident of sex
Within the cooling sea but rather straight
From off the Tree of Knowledge where, perplexed
By Him, our brand-new parents followed suit
And bit from that indigestible fruit

XII.5

That swelled our *every* belly full of “sin,”
As it is writ. But even those of us
Who’d grant our species ancestry akin
With monsters of the deep make little fuss
Over the likelihood we’d now *remember*
Them as well, over the chance some ember

XII.6

Of experience—some singe of fear
Across a nerve—could burn its potent shape
Upon the cell walls of a race and rear
Its ghost throughout our growth from newt to ape
Till now, when *still* we find its scowl impressed
Beneath life’s surface, like a palimpsest.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twelfth—*continued*

XII.7

And yet it's true: our dragon's nothing more
(Nor less) than the artistic incarnation
Of our worst, most ancient, dread — the core
Of our collective psyche — sublimation
Of the motley horrors our survival's
Captured of its predators and rivals

XII.8

Deep in cells no conscious thoughts illumine.
Hence, I guess, our curious attraction
To this heinous creature of the human
Heart; we breed it with the satisfaction
Savored but in witnessing, "God willing,"
This, its re-enacted ritual killing.

XII.9

For that indeed would seem its *raison d'être*:
This, our need to read within our own
Worst doings — lies and cruelties, *et cetera* —
The imprint of some source outside us shown
To be the *actual* force behind them all;
Some infamous proponent of our fall

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twelfth—*continued*

XII.10

From high among our moral gardening chores;
A scapegoat we can curse to purge us clean
Of taint – from all our sanctimonious wars
Especially – and then to take this fiend
So dressed and lead it, fattened, to the altar
Of its timely sacrificial slaughter,

XII.11

Where we safely watch our sins disposed
Of with the ceremony they deserve;
With that great pomp and spectacle enclosed
Round our transgressions till they're well transferred
To something truly worthy of our hate:
Some stark, cold threat whose ornate death could sate

XII.12

Our tooth for justice once again and send
Us back to our delusion full of cause
And bursting with convictions to defend.
But should we wake again, this trial of jaws
And claws, this nightmare of obscenity,
Would prove itself man's best amenity

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twelfth—*continued*

XII.13

Of any – even our most loyal –
Beast of burden. After all, which horse
Or dog has ever guerdoned us its toil
With the enthusiasm, fire, and force
Proposed by this most diligent of hired
Hell-hounds every time its job's required –

XII.14

Every time it's conjured, hot, in a bit
Of paint or rhyme? What brazen bull has yet
To entertain for us a death so rich
In red necessity, in conquered threat,
As does this most assiduous animus,
Most mastered menace, and most fabulous

XII.15

Of malefactors of our own creation
When it's shaped or named straight into being
In a window or an incantation?
None! No beast that's ever sent us fleeing
Our affairs to stoop amid the safe
Dark legends of a cave *comes near* to chafe

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twelfth—*continued*

XII.16

At reason as does this most pestilent
Of pets still does, with its most awful voice
And gruesome breath and its most excellent
Irreverence for the laws folks hold by choice
To be the most conclusive evidence
Of a supreme designer's prevalence.

XII.17

It's just as if the worst of all the features
Of the worst of creatures – those we find
Least use for – had been chosen with a preacher's
Eye for evil, mercilessly combined
And made the consummate grotesque: *ideal*
Negation; yes, the *other* side of Real,

XII.18

Were it to have but two – the value x
Might represent when elsewhere all is y
And all we can describe is nonetheless
Irrelevant because it can't apply
To any proposition we might frame
With logic fundamental to the brain;

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twelfth—*continued*

XII.19

As if some cosmic synthesis were here
Achieved from out the myriad expressions
Of *corruption* fused through life's career —
The sum of ugly being its perfection —
Leaving us to gaze on mystery
Invisible to science, history,

XII.20

Or any other lens of ours save ART —
Since that, at least, we look through without need
Of facts to measure out its truths or chart
Its use — a mystery without a creed
To read it as, explaining it away
In black and white where truths are shades of gray.

XII.21

But since this brute's recurrent reign of terror
Is but bound by bone between our ears,
Wherein it's free to prey upon the errors
Faith preserves for us of primal fears,
It's prudent that we view the dragon's hold
On us no different than the common cold.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twelfth—*continued*

XII.22

Were we to merely let it run its course —
Regard it as some germ the mind is prone
To when it's weak — we'd steal from it the force
We now waste warring with its teeth we've sown.
For war affirms the nonsense of repentance;
Each win pronounces Death's most polished sentence.

XII.23

And so, I told her, summing up what point
I felt I'd soon be getting at, this dread
She'd had of being eaten like some joint
Of meat was misconceived. Why yes, instead
Would she be better off her mind directed
Toward what fate she'd find in her elected

XII.24

Savior. (I.e., BE SURE THAT YOUR AFFLICTION'S
WORTH THE COST TO REMEDY!) For here,
Dead center in our poem's metered diction
Should her hero's icon now appear.
Meet George, that glittering idiot she'd wed —
Chased silver with a window for a head.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twelfth—*continued*

XIII

Book the Thirteenth

XIII.1

Now *George*, we know, derives from Greek for “earth”
 As well as “work” and hence means one who plows
 The ground, who farms the land for all he’s worth;
 In other words, a *peasant*—yes, a cow’s
 Top dog, with sweaty brow quite low and tanned—
 A *boor*, that is, or *lout*, who understands

XIII.2

Not one thing that Boethius has to say
 Distinguishing a substance from its cause,
 But mainly how to husband sheep and pray
 God doesn’t see him violate His laws.
 It also might mean *filth*, since some assert
 That “earth” is but a nicer name for *dirt*,

XIII.3

Which farmers spend their largest clump of time
 In—but, of course, for *dung*, without which no
 Aspiring *bumpkin* could survive. So, grime,
 Sweat, shit, and ignorance, it seems, bestow
 Real etymological validity
 On our distrust of his divinity.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Thirteenth—*continued*

XIII.4

And yet, although we see a name can tell
Us much about a man—his moral bent,
His aptitudes, appearance, even smell—
It cannot tell it all: can't represent
That darker, harder region of the heart
Where *humans* live—where contradictions part—

XIII.5

That pinprick spot an ocean wide where hot
And cold yield nothing up toward temperate blend;
Where you and I desire, *and do not*,
The other's troubled joys with equal strength;
That lush gray country of ambivalence
For which words offer scant equivalence.

XIII.6

To gain admittance *there*, where's found the stuff
Of any *thorough* portrait of a man—
One drawn from *life* and not just smoothed enough
To soothe the lazy eye—you'd better plan
To trade your dictionary in for word
Of mouth and trust the ear for truths unheard

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Thirteenth—*continued*

XIII.7

By our inspired etymologists.
But never mind, for none of this applies
To George, whose most devout apologists
Themselves have shown that anyone who tries
To peek beneath *his* smile finds just the sorts
Of things you would expect, like war and sports

XIII.8

Resembling war and death-defying deeds
Of reckless heroism thrust on poor
Defenseless maidens of fine shape and breed,
Each kneeling in her peril to implore
Him come and save her from Death's claws—although
We're told she *really* prays for him to GO!,

XIII.9

Not come, lest *he* be eaten too: "Behold,
Good sir, those horrid jaws now yawning wide
Behind you that will chew us *both*, O bold
Young fool, if you don't run away and hide
Right now and let me face my most acute
Yet necessary Fate, O GO! SHOO! SCOOT!"

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Thirteenth—*continued*

XIII.10

Were her precise instructions, as we read
In Jacobus. But I digress again.
My point is just that George, whose driving creed
Is ACTION in a world where *thought* would lend
A spark of welcome light, whose only goal
In life's to wander round and stick that pole

XIII.11

Of his into but anything that moves
Within the pale of God's disapprobation—
Though where *he* got such expertise behooves
Our closer scrutiny—whose condemnation,
Sight unseen, of all the gods but *his*
Struck prudent Roman minds as an *abysmal*

XIII.12

Indiscretion, worthy of the best
That the old classic martyrdom techniques
Provide—yes, just that George, that do-good pest
And patronizing “saint,” with pearl for teeth
And brawn for brain, is—I cannot hide
It any longer—LACKING AN INSIDE!

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Thirteenth—*continued*

XIII.13

That's right, all surface, empty, fully void
Of anything beneath his polished pose
You'd call a SELF (that sense of will employed
Before we know it). Yes, God only knows
What all you'd find down there amid the straw
And sawdust holding him together, taut

XIII.14

And upright in the saddle, like a pigeon
Perch of spattered bronze; but what you *won't*
Glean there's the slightest flaw of indecision
Or uncertainty, the most remote
Regret, fear, doubt, or other *mortal* trait
That thwarts a chap's endorsement as a saint.

XIII.15

Just like that bite of conscience *we're* most prone
To when we've done what's right...that really *wasn't*
Though for any party but our own;
That sting felt deeper than the lash, first cousin
To the mother of all musts—compassion—
That high sentience for some *other's* fashion

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Thirteenth—*continued*

XIII.16

Of suffering life. But this, our highest ken,
Through which our species dreams its dignity
Amid the squalid politics of fen
Or town or church, seems sheer malignity
To one who's out to get real business done,
Our traveling man for Christ being such a one.

XIII.17

So driven is this knight to hawk his wares—
Those justifications for the battle cry
That are the relics of God's own affairs
Disputing with the Darkness eye for eye—
He has no time to learn their lasting worth:
This blindness fast inheriting the earth;

XIII.18

This inability to recognize
The *kinship* shared by sheep and goats *beneath*
What features might be used to judge them prized
Or cursed; this taste for punishment bequeathed
To us from out the heat of that first vengeance
That was God's, when He but gave the engines

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Thirteenth—*continued*

XIII.19

Of His hell its first inhabitant:
That bold, proud angel banished far from love
Where he could found a rebel cabinet
To plot against the paradise above
And taint its prospect with unsightly things.
For, *these* are the rewards that violence brings—

XIII.20

Especially the wisdom it confers
On all who would partake of it— that lesson
Chroniclers keep telling us deters
The bully from indulging his aggression
Once we've taught it to him with a kick.
He learns, *GO GET THYSELF A BIGGER STICK!*

XIII.21

Yet look how George still tries to lure 'em in
With threatened tongues of everlasting fire
To lick the buttocks of poor souls who've sinned
When he might capture the entire choir
To which to preach by using tastier bait,
Like joy *RIGHT HERE ON EARTH, without* the wait;

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Thirteenth—*continued*

XIII.22

Without the need of promissory notes
Deferring compensation for our toils
Till come some day when all ungodly goats
Shall roast and goodly sheep enjoy the spoils,
But more importantly when just reward
For all this sweat would likely be ignored

XIII.23

By the recipient as quite beside
The point, considering the date. For what
Good use are mansions to the bona fide
Above who'd have no longer things to shut
Indoors nor elements from which to hide?
Why keep their treasure from them till they've died?

XIII.24

And *this* is but the so-called mind you choose
To trust your flesh to, I observed. If I
Were you I'd pick the dragon, yes, confuse
Your fervent fiancé, whose thrusting cry,
For Christ! is, by and by, the truth, alas;
He loves his lord more than he does *your* ass.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourteenth

XIV

Book the Fourteenth

XIV.1

I'd lost my audience by now. My muse
Was sleeping soundly at my side, quite plainly
Uninspired by the truths that booze
Reveals to man. And on her lips, so faintly
Pursed as if to weep at visions braved
Beneath her trembling lids, I saw engraved

XIV.2

The cares of all the ages – so not just
An offering with which a king might buy
Another day of desperate people's trust
But one that's given *always* and *can't* die
To then forget, as we can do, and know
The taste of that same fruit that ends our woe;

XIV.3

That fruit that hangs ripe at the end of time,
When each our lease on flesh and bone is up,
To nourish all in nothingness, sublime
Beyond what passion overflows of cup,
Beyond what freedom seems to things constrained,
Since things most "seem" so far as they're contained.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourteenth—*continued*

XIV.4

Indeed, she seemed as pitiful and sad
As angels might, were angels real – as if
New-born without the bodies they had had
A moment prior when they turned so stiff
Against the finite privilege of constraint
That had so richly busied them till late.

XIV.5

Yes, these, the very lips on which I'd sucked
Ecstatic secrets of eternity,
Like nectar from the pulp of time, now looked
So fearful pale, as if modernity
Were meant to read in them old truths revealed
About its fate, which long ago was sealed.

XIV.6

As if the outcome of our every rub
With possibility, each sundry chafe
Against the harness of potential (dubbed
“Volition” by philosophers with faith
That they are free), were all past tense to her,
All known events positioned to occur,

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourteenth—*continued*

XIV.7

Like those recorded on the poet's page
That happen, nonetheless, each time we come
To them; as if the knowledge of a mage
Or sibyl were awarded her in sum
By her Titanic mother, Memory
(Who lends brief immortality to *every*

XIV.8

Known existence spent upon this earth),
And all but toward the task of helping man
To glorify his past—to make it *worth*
Remembering—to nudge the poet's hand
Enough to smudge the *value* of men's deeds;
To sing them into tune as use decrees.

XIV.9

So might some hero, come to save his world
From consequences of a faithless age,
Be found propelled upon his path unfurled
Not by some teacher, priest, or wizened sage,
But by this granddaughter of Earth and Sky
Whose job's instructing poets how to lie.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourteenth—*continued*

XIV.10

Or if not *lie*, at least to make things clear
That aren't— voice a doing such a way
It rings like finished marble on the ear
Despite it's being one we might inveigh
Against revealed to us in tradesman's prose—
In short, to show our heroes how to pose.

XIV.11

And as I lay there, head on fist, stretched out
Before my fate in bold, unfettered laze—
Like one might spot some god reclining, stout,
Beside his bowl of grapes in better days—
I found myself positioned to indulge
In contemplation where a nipple bulged

XIV.12

Profoundly in my view. It pushed erect
Up through the soft encumbrance of her smock
Stretched taut around two hills that would project
And ebb with every breath. I gazed, ad hoc,
Upon this symbol of our earth's largess,
My head quite clear but for erectile flesh.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourteenth—*continued*

XIV.13

It would have been a sin to wake her now!
A world of obligation waited there
Behind those quivering lids that would endow
Me with the need to move, to do, to bear
A weapon and accomplish something “great”
While all I wanted was to meditate.

XIV.14

For here upon the teat of inspiration
I had found my place within this tale.
The only thing that matters is elation
I’ve heard said by those who’ve chased their grail;
The rest is merely rhymed and reasoned swill,
The stuff with which your time on earth is filled

XIV.15

And then forgotten. But to dwell in state
Of full dilation, living at the nerve,
Alive to every taste upon your plate
And every whim within your cup-rim’s curve—
Now *that’s* worth *twenty* lifetimes of success
Stepped out in all we think we can possess!

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourteenth—*continued*

XIV.16

Like tracts of land and everything we find
Thereon or in conveyed to us by deed —
That instrument which Death proves just some signed
And witnessed scheme two *borrowers* agreed
To call real title, as it's *earth*, no less
Which holds superior claim to that, I'd guess.

XIV.17

Oh yes, I'd give my horse to stay right here,
I thought, divorced from consequence and free
To marry *every* moment, cheap or dear;
Immune from Reason and its central creed
Requiring an antecedent for each thing —
Yes, live beyond this very song I sing!

XIV.18

If only we could witness every second
Of our life this way — appreciate
Each gorgeous inch of the familiar, reckoned
Novel with each fresh regard — create
A relic out of every object seen
By merely adding *feeling* to routine.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourteenth—*continued*

XIV.19

Why wait for men ordained in special clothes
To tell us which is special, which is not,
When this authority we grant them flows
From *us*—from some convention *we* begot
To cover up their nakedness! Now they
But sell us back our feelings when they stray!

XIV.20

Take Princess Cleo here—yes, that's her name,
My author prompts me. Now, I'm sure there's some
Who'll see her as a toy for the depraved
While others—those of learning—will but come
Employed to read in her the context of
Her office, long established high above

XIV.21

By ancient bards. They'll welcome her with arms
Wide open—not as just some wanton grope
Who'd come to lead them to temptation's harms,
But rather as a literary trope,
A figure of the poet's provocation
To create, albeit from dictation.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fourteenth—*continued*

XIV.22

And with my erudition of the epic
Form from which I boldly spring, I leaned
A little closer toward her, as a skeptic
Might his text, to study what now seemed
The highest use of sex to one who writes
These allegories of man's appetites:

XIV.23

Allure. In her it was no mere orectic
Symbol but a *fundamental* image;
Thus, he could insure my dialectic
Of existence wouldn't end in scrimmage
With a saint to save some foul-mouthed beast.
Unless...this was my cue to stay and feast....

XIV.24

I'd thought myself in circles here. My blood
Now coursed as fiercely in the current wake
Of dreamed *inaction*, with its sudden thud
Of private thrill, than might it have for sake
Of something really *done*. It seemed, by God,
No difference if I roused her now or not!

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifteenth

XV

Book the Fifteenth

XV.1

And so indeed, I chose the path of ACTION –
Oftentimes the easiest road we take,
As *its* results are rarely those abstractions
Pondered on our pillow wide awake,
But things concrete which any fool can see
Without reliance on philosophy.

XV.2

Yes, despite the rightly touted merits
Of IDEAS, which can serve the sound
Foundation of a doing, he inherits
Most from life who *does*, we're told, whose crowned
Ambitions sit in judgment of our prudence
Like Experience does her slowest students.

XV.3

Well anyway, lost to the world in urge,
I pressed my lips to hers without restraint
And felt the warmth of destiny submerge
Me in a bliss beyond your average saint.
And with this long, firm, wet and ample kiss
I'd caused a whole new genre to exist:

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifteenth—*continued*

XV.4

The *Muse-Awakened Pastoral-Erotic*,
So it might be termed; a way of life
For us inspired few which no narcotic
Can compete with in transcendence — rife,
With rapt, ecstatic sensuality
Beyond conventional carnality

XV.5

(As practiced with real meat) — yes, nothing less
Than transmutation of that very lust
That keeps a species from extinction, pressed
Into that higher metal of august
Poetic metaphor, the dreamer's gold,
With which our starkest truths are bought and sold.

XV.6

And while I chewed upon that juicy mouth,
Which tasted sweet as Fortune's teat, I saw
Her opened eyes gleam bright — she looked, no doubt,
Like one *expecting* her surprise — and all
I felt, beside her nails dug in my back,
Was what it's like where magnet poles attract.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifteenth—*continued*

XV.7

As if the grammar of my inmost being —
First-person pronoun, I, as subject *and*
All predicates, with every noun agreeing —
Helped me now to read (and *understand*)
Creation's great design right at its source:
The fundamental principle of FORCE.

XV.8

For, no amount of love or liberal thought
Nor meditation on the ideal state
Can hold the planets turning as they ought
Around their suns in such concordant gait,
Or keep them from mere riot in the skies,
Unleashed and reeling towards their own demise.

XV.9

Sheer force would be sufficient, though. And so
It seemed now *here* within the tighter orbit
Of this bed, in which the undertow
Of instinct pulled me down beneath all morbid
Thoughts of fate cold reason could coerce
Toward *Her*: dead center of the universe.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifteenth—*continued*

XV.10

I knew now *She* was why I showed up here,
Not he, nor He, nor even that damned beast
I'd followed all this way with shield and spear,
But *She* had made me who I am, released
Me from the numbing drudgery of life
Lived out of habit (*sans* the spice of strife).

XV.11

For *She* is my Desire— heaven's hell—
Exquisite irritant of our content,
Much like a speck of grit within our shell
That makes us *want*, which prods us reinvent
Ourselves within the nacre of unrest
And wake amid the luster of some quest

XV.12

Where we can properly forsake the whole
Of what we held inviolate before,
Need be, and pick, to meet our newest goal,
New principles in which to put our store—
In other words, to rouse that same delight
Which languished while we had no ill to fight.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifteenth—*continued*

XV.13

And what had been our sedimentary bed
Of torpid satisfaction She has changed
With this mere grain of lust which chafes like dread
To life lived most intense, because most strange.
She cultivates our darkest superstitions
Into poets' gleaming intuitions.

XV.14

And suddenly revealed to me I saw
A truth as radiant as pearl: that book-
Length torment waiting for her, tooth and claw,
Was not; it was the lure upon *Her* hook—
Or rather, as pale Jacobus reports,
Her *girdle*, yes, that magic leash of sorts

XV.15

On which George brashly bade her go parade
His conquest like a lapdog through the town
To teach these folks whose God should be obeyed
(For making Satan heel) and whose kicked out—
Hence proving that there's only one true faith
While buying converts from the crowd in haste.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifteenth—*continued*

XV.16

This girdle that I speak of, by the way,
Is nothing new; it's been the talisman
Of lucky knights since long before the day
That knighthood first began—embarrassment
Be told: *all* since the Saracen presumed
To populate where Christ had been entombed!

XV.17

It was this same enchanted belt that Venus
Donned whenever hungry for men's eyes
And then lent jealous Juno at her keenest,
Till her god stayed home and stopped his lies,
And then bribed Paris with, until he chose
His nation's doom from fruit that Discord throws;

XV.18

That same which Bertilak's enticing wife
Had urged on Gawain as a parting gift
To thwart the ill effect upon his life
Her husband's ax would have when brought to swift
Encounter with his neck next day—a token
Of their love exchanged with vows unbroken,

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifteenth—*continued*

XV.19

But also of the loopholes in the moral
Laws that guide a man to serve his God.
For Gawain's souvenir of strictly *oral*
Sex — I mean, of course, that *spoken*, not
Performed — became his costly badge of shame
Because he prized his life above the game,

XV.20

Because he failed to manifest this lace
To *him*, his host, with whom he had agreed
To swap respective winnings from their chase
Each day (in field *or* bed). For though indeed
He'd won *this* prize as nobly as the rest —
I.e., those treasured kisses he found pressed

XV.21

On him each morning by the latter's spouse
Sent in to test his chivalry — he chose
To hide it where he dressed and *not* announce
This thing among those kisses paid his host
For all that gorgeous kill awarded him.
And this omission ate at him like sin.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Fifteenth—*continued*

XV.22

For she'd confided how no man who wore
This band of gilt green silk could suffer death
From hardest whack of sharpest ax, and swore
It was their secret to her dying breath.
And to a man about to go in search
Of his demise next day, such terms as CHURCH,

XV.23

LAST RITES, or even PARADISE seem not
Remotely musical upon the ear
Like "MAGIC GIRDLE" does. But why allot
To him "the vice of cowardice?" This fear
Of dying is our species' second best
Survival mechanism (after sex).

XV.24

Were *every* soldier for God's call so brave
As but to gallop into death as told
Without a prudent thought on how his grave
Facilitates his cause, we should behold
A world no more moral than it's now —
Just drained the more of men to take this vow.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixteenth

XVI

Book the Sixteenth

XVI.1

Now, how this girdle came to be *a garter*
Too, as found confused in many texts
Of Christendom, may yet be known. Since martyrs
For the faith have been obsessed with sex
No less than you or I, his obligation
To ignore it leads him to fixation

XVI.2

On the closest thing to touch a maiden's
Thigh – this belt-like band of silk that guards
So close that realm so high, so good, so laden
With appeal to errant knights and bards
That it becomes quite in itself imbued
With this magnetic charge that she exudes.

XVI.3

And like that lace engirding that fair waist
Above her hips, this ribbon round her thigh
May too be loosed and used to fire haste
In mortal men unmoved by pontiff's cry.
And so, we shouldn't be surprised to find
Such different things *all one* to whom they bind.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixteenth—*continued*

XVI.4

Like when that most inspiring of our virgins,
Mary, Queen of Heaven, dropped *Her* girdle
Down to conquer an apostle's urgent
Doubt who'd showed up late again; so fertile
A device of fleshly worlds this seemed,
It struck good Thomas like a falling beam.

XVI.5

Or Edward, as the story goes, who plucked
His partner's garter from the floor and bade
Those guests who'd snickered at him worst of luck
While donning it himself. And so the fad
Began amongst his wisest knights, who forged
An order dressed like this to honor...*George!*

XVI.6

That's right, to *George*, poor Cleo's hope, they prayed,
These couple dozen of the brightest knights
Poor England had, who rallied round arrayed
In women's underwear before their fights.
They looked to *him*, our selfsame cad, to rouse
Themselves and go and kill whom God allows.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixteenth—*continued*

XVI.7

Yes, fresh from France, where they'd but practiced *quid*
Pro quo with distant offspring of the ones
Who'd conquered *them*, and whom they'd *yet* to rid,
These pure-bred cavaliers with thirsts like Huns
For blood would clink their goblets to some saint
Whose clean white image might just cleanse that taint

XVI.8

They'd picked up over there. For *there* they'd
slaughtered
Nearly all their continental cousins
In their bid to have them neatly quartered
On their shields—what heralds call *escutcheons*—
Yes, and thereby add to their achievements
All these great estates and rich bereavements

XVI.9

God saw fit for them to seize, according
To some adventitious law. Therein
It's writ—by ancient folk, far off, affording
Nonetheless a precedent for *him*
Who would be king—*that woman shall inherit*
NOT the kingdom's crown, no, nor confer it

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixteenth—*continued*

XVI.10

On a man descending in her line.
Now *this* was heady stuff to England's legal
Minds—this law some Franks wrote up the Rhine
Back when—for with it England would be regal
Heir to France, whose male line petered out
Through war, disease, high living, and the gout.

XVI.11

Yes, back again from France, his mother's land,
Where he had raped and pillaged what was rightly
His, the king was quick to understand
The need to prove his better knights more knightly
Than they seemed, to train their loyalties
Upon himself—by way of royalties

XVI.12

And honors unavailable to most
Of mortal man. And what symbolic band
Could better serve to keep these men engrossed—
To bind their vast ambitions, on command,
To that of his—than this same woman's garter?
And who but GEORGE could better guard this larder?

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixteenth—*continued*

XVI.13

I mean, who'd keep these brigands safe *inside*,
Where they'd be less the prey to interests other
Than the king's. For, none from out that pride
Of patron saints they'd prayed to yet was covered
Head to foot in quite the righteous armor
Posed in by this spotless-shiny farmer;

XVI.14

None they'd groveled to before had quite
The moral gleam in which so well to see
Themselves in their most complimentary light
As George could offer, with his pedigree
Of persecution serving God's best cause.
And so it was he'd earned their loud applause

XVI.15

And accolades, their toasts and oaths before
Each dinner, joust, or massacre they waged.
As gentlemen of breeding who deplored
The thought of unheroic deeds, this rage
For *God's* agenda — WRONG's defeat by RIGHT —
Was what made George for them the perfect knight.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixteenth—*continued*

XVI.16

He stirred in them a rage for something more
As well: a rage for *orders*, yes, a need
To found societies, wherein great store
In honor could be kept, all measured, deed
By selfless deed, like money in the bank,
Of use in fending off mere file from rank.

XVI.17

That is, in keeping all this honor safe
Unto their own—the gentle-born—clean out
Of reach of every rascal, knave, and waif
Who'd like some for himself to flaunt about.
And how to better guard this trait so cherished?
Ritualize and codify each flourish!

XVI.18

Yes, see it all as *ETIQUETTE* is how.
Just turn each task into a noble act
Which only those of means could hope to bow
To in these hungry times (when towns were sacked
To fund the costs incurred in sacking cities).
Do it for a woman's love and pity.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixteenth—*continued*

XVI.19

That's right, for Christ, but also for that more
Effective inspiration, less abstractly
Theological in scope: the lure
Of love by wellborn woman. More exactly,
One well married too – whom one can never
Really have, which heightens the endeavor.

XVI.20

In other words, to hold a social code
In which one's life is offered to one's God,
One's king, *and someone else's wife*, each owed
Allegiance in return for love (that's *not*
Redeemable), and all maintained in force
By this new culture centered on one's HORSE.

XVI.21

For *nothing* came so close to martial hearts
As did these martial steeds on which they sat
Caparisoned and ready to depart
This plague-worn world. The horse's habitat,
In fact, provided these bold chevaliers
Their very language, customs, and careers.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Sixteenth—*continued*

XVI.22

And *chivalrous*, therefore, they carried on
As all along, and butchered all those foes
Of God's (and of their own as well), till dawn
Revealed each day just what such bloodshed sows:
More bloodshed *and*, more valuably, *much* loot—
GREAT MOUNDS of items prized by the astute.

XVI.23

And it was good to see, this ring of men
Dubbed nobly in the name of George's own;
It looked like Arthur's court come round again
In search of platter, cup, or bit of bone.
And what great monarch *wouldn't* want it thought
How much like Camelot *his* household fought?

XVI.24

Yet while these men ride off into the night
Of Europe's longest God-inspired horror,
Let us turn again to Cleo—right
Whereon our Dragon waits upon her garter.
Here our triptych's middle panel's done
And we may pause before the last's begun.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventeenth

XVII

Book the Seventeenth

XVII.1

Ages passed and nothing changed – at least
In terms of setting, plot, or central theme.
Outside my skull the seasons still increased
And waned in vast indifference to this dream
We live of finding meaning in it all,
While here within they spelled *my author's fall*.

XVII.2

I mean, I'd read these ornaments of earth's
Recurrent progress in the sun, this language
Of its instinct 'midst the stars, as first
And surest proof his hold on me was vanquished,
Leaving me full free from LITERATURE,
The art of saying THIS but meaning more.

XVII.3

For, after all, what use had any bard
Since man first ached to sing of his condition
For mere replication of life's art
Of spinning richness out of repetition?
Epics don't begin *before* the egg,
As they'd need trace each sperm that didn't take.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventeenth—*continued*

XVII.4

Well, *I* drew comfort from this endless waste
That formed the world I saw around me here—
The needless, the redundant, the misplaced—
For each square inch of it allayed my fear
Reality and verse might be the same
(And I then but some pronoun with a name).

XVII.5

In other words, this law of generation
Via infinite routine, by which
Our world evolved from single cells to nations,
Governed nothing of the poet's pitch
And proved, thereby, my place among the real,
That state where appetite defines the meal.

XVII.6

And now, as if at once, had I perceived
How truly free of him I'd really been
Here all along and how being free relieved
Me of all fears of disappointing him.
And with this knowledge I began to think...
Increasingly of *how I'd like a drink*.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventeenth—*continued*

XVII.7

Each night my muse would cling to me as though
It were her last. To calm her I would trace
Adventures from my life of long ago
Which, given that they hadn't taken place
As yet, were unrestrained by any qualms
Of contradicting Truth, just like the Psalms.

XVII.8

I let my narrative rove far and wide
Amidst the fluid ether of events
Unhappened yet and watched it wade the tide
Of possibility, through future tense,
To feed on the minutiae found in man's
Composite memory. She was entranced.

XVII.9

I counted up for her tall conquests of
Injustices, campaigns against the worst
Of tyrants in the name of God above,
Bright victories on land and sea dispersed
Between great bedroom scenes of less restraint,
All spun with the conviction of a saint.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventeenth—*continued*

XVII.10

Yet these benignly dangerous entertainments
That I used to fill the void of night
Fell powerless come morning's bright new raiment
Every day, when she would start up right
Away on her obsession with that dragon
And I'd reach in reflex for my flagon.

XVII.11

Oh, she would pester me, my frightful shrew!
She'd work on me persistently till I
Was dressed and out the door each afternoon,
Not far behind her on our way to find
That most elusive of the world's threats,
This monster born of reverence for our dreads.

XVII.12

And I would watch her saunter on ahead
Upon her buxom ass as white as snow
And think of all the other men (NOW DEAD)
Who'd followed her like this, straight to their woe—
Like moths into the heat of consummation—
All to be her knight of liberation.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventeenth—*continued*

XVII.13

I, on the other hand, will *never*
Be combustious matter for her flame —
Some bright but short-lived flicker of endeavor
Spent to stoke the glow of poet's fame —
No, *she* will prove *my* oxygen, each breath
Inspiring sluggish lungs with tingling depth.

XVII.14

I'll breathe her in right down into the bottom
Of my being — limit of my need —
Until my lust is lit and burning Sodom-
Hot, intense as *any* zealot's greed.
And hence will I survive this poem's terror,
Drawing deep each time confronting Error.

XVII.15

And I don't mean by "Error" what you'd find
Incarnate in some cave in Fairy Land
Awaiting those who've lost their way to grind
Up for its bread; I mean *not understanding*,
Yes, presuming that a thing is RIGHT
Because it's something you (and GOD) quite like.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventeenth—*continued*

XVII.16

Of course, to read this word as I've just done
Is HERESY to most. "One *likes* a thing
Because it's right," I hear you chide, "if one,
That is, has any MORAL SENSE to sing
Of." But, I would respond that this sound "sense"
You lean on has two sides, like *any* fence.

XVII.17

For, none distinguishes thy neighbor's green
From one's own enviable lot so well
As does this barrier of sight-unseen
Superiority. Yet, how to tell
Which side of it affords the better view
Depends on whether one is him or you,

XVII.18

To tell the truth. But once again you balk.
"Are there no fundamental laws of GOOD
And BAD perceptible to ALL who walk
This earth?" you ask, "some universal SHOULD,
Beyond the hold of culture?" And to you
I'd say, "You're growing *tedious*. Go to!"

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventeenth—*continued*

XVII.19

A poem's not the proper place to chew
The fat with gaunt philosophers. Such cant
As dialectically befits our feud
About what meaning life might hide finds scant
Capacity in which to fuss and spume
Within our stanza's careful little room.

XVII.20

What's properly chewed *here* are WORDS— not mere
Ideas but the incidents of speech
Itself, through which such thoughts find their career
From mind to mind, those sounds the poets teach
Us to be truest subject of their pains,
Each one a thing of heft they weigh in grains

XVII.21

Upon a nerve; a thing of color, shape,
And texture ever changing in the light
Of those intoned around them as they scrape
Against each other's sense of their own plight,
Creating in this flux the subtlest scope
In which to see *beyond* the quaint old hope

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Seventeenth—*continued*

XVII.22

Of syllogistic logic – that dim dream
That finds the world knowable if only
Propositioned well – to where is gleaned
The highest realm of humanness: that lonely
Place beyond mere thought where *feelings* reign,
Where things cannot be PROVED though *can* be feigned.

XVII.23

For yes, it's here above the arid box
We build round us with logic's help from but
Its basic building blocks of paradox
That we find palpable the very *what*
Of life gone undetected there, and yet
All caught upon the self-same instrument

XVII.24

Of languaged sounds. But still do you persist
In sifting poems for your nuggets of
Philosophy, as if one could enlist
From art the answers to one's doubts above.
You might as likely go and catch a fish
And *teach it lungs* as soon as wait on this.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighteenth

XVIII

Book the Eighteenth

XVIII.1

But back to my digression. I had left
My inspiration riding on ahead
Of me upon that snow-white ass of deft
Symbolic purity (which would instead
Appear ironical to anyone
Who knew her like *I* did; *she was no nun*).

XVIII.2

And while I held her in my manly gaze
(Wherein her ass was *me* she rode), I thought
With halting concentration on the days
Before I'd known her, back when I had taught
Pale college students how to read a myth—
Yes, how to see that *ALL THE GODS EXIST*.

XVIII.3

I'd mentored them to read myth with emotion,
Like one reads a poem— with the spine—
Not through the convolutions where that notion
“Reason” is distilled, like turpentine,
To thin the rich effects of reddest reverence,
Bleaching yearning into bland acceptance.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighteenth—*continued*

XVIII.4

Belief is everything, I'd emphasize
To them. It's crucial to our understanding
Of our selves and world that we devise
Some structure to embrace those most demanding
Blanks in our perception of the whole
That challenge our delusion of control.

XVIII.5

Of course, this seemed sheer scandal to those pupils
Who had trusted me to be their rock
Of godless skepticism. But my scruples
Were intact, I reassured my flock.
For, this "belief" I plead is not the pious
Stuff of churchly bigotry and bias.

XVIII.6

It's of a *far* more superficial sort—
The faith a poet prays for in his hearer—
As intense as it's duration's short;
That momentary faith in worlds made nearer
To one's feelings than one's very own;
A faith in things well made, of seeds well sown.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighteenth—*continued*

XVIII.7

It's that same credence we embrace each time
We're witness to a crucifixion done
With feeling and ability. The rhyme
Of brush or gouge alone makes even one
Most skeptical of Christ's redemption stir.
It is a faith in things *as if they were*.

XVIII.8

For who among us really cares two turds
If good Sir Thopas ever lived for real?
What matter most are those immortal words
In which he'd high-tailed back to fetch his steel.
Yes, when through nature's bric-a-brac he'd fled
In hot pursuit of whom he'd render dead

XVIII.9

The moment he got back correctly dressed,
We pray the giant's good enough to wait
For him. And were Sir Thopas's great quest
Through which he pricked in fits and starts towards Fate
Denounced as worthless doggerel someday,
We'd still believe it as it's writ, I'd say.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighteenth—*continued*

XVIII.10

And that is technically because we think
The fictional event in that same gland
The “real” one is perceived in, till the stink
Of one pervades the other’s understanding
And the gods *unseen* become as real
To us as those we’re sure to see and feel.

XVIII.11

And so it is with our Childe Thopas then.
We know his whitebread face, his rose-red lips
And seemly nose with saffron hair. So when
We picture to ourselves these daring trips
Of his o’er hill and dale might *not* be true,
We laugh because *we’ve seen them* — surest proof.

XVIII.12

One might as soon declare his *dream* a fraud —
That he would wed some Fairy Queen — and yet
One knows *darned well* it happened, as it gnawed
At him in just that way which, don’t forget,
A thing that never happened couldn’t. Saying
Thus, “his dream’s not real” would be but paying

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighteenth—*continued*

XVIII.13

Little store in things which but occur
Behind the vision of our wakeful eye.
It would betray an existential blur
In which, at its extreme, we might deny
Each beat our heart indulged in while we slept
And trust just those our witness would accept.

XVIII.14

Yes, dreams, like *all* good poems, operate
Like myth upon our mindfulness, as though
To conjure up *contingent* truths that sate
Somewhat our hunger for what *can't* be known.
And thus, I'd taught my scholars how one deems
The *myth* as dream: as how a *culture* dreams.

XVIII.15

I'd have them ponder how mankind's abysmal
History upon this earth—his wars
Of God's profound intolerance, the dismal
Fruit of trusting in a MORAL "FORCE"
That motivates *both* sides with equal zeal
Until a winner proves *his* cause more real—

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighteenth—*continued*

XVIII.16

All finds its way into his *dreaming* state
As well. It's just as if the visions he
Endures each night or day beneath his pate
Reveal his *people's* needs implicitly,
Reflecting those illusions which entail
The best results, like why the "good" prevail

XVIII.17

Sometimes. As if each *waking* action—deeds
Of high renown to some and low regard
To others, *equal in their fervor*—feeds
His introspection with a counterpart,
A shadow of itself to be reviewed
For truths, like nourishment distilled from food.

XVIII.18

And like that code inherent in our speech
From which the privileged glean their underlying
Message out of denotation's reach,
The *pattern* of myth's dream is satisfying
In itself as *narrative*—our brain's
Technique for making meaning from stray grains.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighteenth—*continued*

XVIII.19

Yet who, I pondered further as I rode,
Would counsel *me* now how it's best to read
A myth in which *I* wake each day? Does code
Exist with which *my* every thought and deed
Conceived and executed is surmised
To stand for something else by other minds?

XVIII.20

Truth is, I look upon *your* life that way!
I read you as that faceless entity
Whose cause is to perceive and contemplate
My own. Through you is my transcendency
Complete: from auditory incidents—
Mere waves of sound—*into significance.*

XVIII.21

So yes, to me you are that great unknown—
The ideal ear in which I happen—“God,”
For those who can't abide a subtle tone
When speaking things they're sure of...
which they're not.
Of course, this doesn't mean I worship you;
Were that the case, how could you tell what's true

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Eighteenth—*continued*

XVIII.22

From what's mere flattery in anything
I've sung up to this point? There'd be no way
To hear my voice and not mistake it's ring
For that of someone teeing up to pray.
Each innocent descriptive epithet
Might smack of servile groveling instead

XVIII.23

Were I to show my wonder as mere fear.
And you would be ill served indeed, believing,
Naturally, the reason I'd revere
You, organ of my hearing, is deceiving—
Reverence born of practicality
In that your hearing *is* reality

XVIII.24

To me. Not you, *per se*, but your *attention*
Is the stuff I crave, the air I breathe.
And so, relax; for, nothing that I've mentioned
Yet has strayed from truth, you may believe.
No, not the slightest urge to bow and scrape
Has motivated this, our poem's shape.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Nineteenth

XIX

Book the Nineteenth

XIX.1

Three quarters through this greatest of all quests
We make and still no dragon in clear sight!
It seemed as if my aim had waned – regressed
In time from finding him *to not* – that’s right,
From *stopping* George, whose job it’s always been
To kill our foe, to *understanding* him.

XIX.2

That’s George I mean...I think. Oh, I don’t know!
For, anymore it seems like all these roles
Of ours are interchangeable, as though
The “George” she sees in me achieves his goals
The moment he becomes the one she wants –
Beyond the man – as it’s his *guise* she hunts,

XIX.3

Not him. Yes, it’s the brave heroic pose,
The ideal stance of HIM who’ll up and bring
Blind muscle to a given task, she goes
In search of, yes, the dragon-chasing thing.
That’s why each time she looks into my eyes
She seems to see through *me* to my *disguise*,

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Nineteenth—*continued*

XIX.4

As if this record of perceived events
I call my SELF — this fluid transcript of
My body's contact with the world I sense,
Which *seems* to gather somewhere else above
It all as that estate unique to ME —
Means little more to her than sophistry;

XIX.5

As if this who I am obscures the *whom*
I'd play, and hence my image as her man,
As such obtruding on what folks presume
To be "life's moral meaning" or "God's plan."
In other words, as if the actor's *part*
Meant more than who he was *outside* his art.

XIX.6

Perhaps, she's right, perverse as such a role
May sound described to pious ears trained hard
To hear "God's love of man's immortal soul."
Perhaps this ghostly spirit they regard
As captain of that vessel we call "man"
Is but its ship *log* rather than its plan.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Nineteenth—*continued*

XIX.7

I mean, perhaps this effervescent cloud
Of personality we yearn to see
As something neatly separable from out
Our body's physical machinery
(And limited from out all life on earth
To our own species, privilege of good birth);

XIX.8

Yes, just perhaps this ghostly fizz we pray
Transcends the gross corruptions of the flesh,
Where it presided while an émigré,
And rises into light and love and fresh
Blue sky – perhaps this same supernal fog
Is immaterial as well to "God."

XIX.9

That's right; to *Him* or *Her*, *Them*, *We* or *It*
Men call on, scared, perhaps this substance "I"
We hold inviolate does not admit
Distinction from the stuff left when we die,
That its existence on some higher plane
Is dreamed, the function of a working brain

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Nineteenth—*continued*

XIX.10

Which, when it's stopped, takes with it all it's learned —
A slate wiped clean at once of every mark
That life had left upon it — undiscerned
Forever now the moment it went dark —
Including that awareness of its own
Activity, the consciousness it's known.

XIX.11

No matter, then, this knowledge we'd collected
All the while — this body unsubstantial,
Yet apparent, like the thing reflected
In a glass: conspicuous till cancelled
In an instant; cut, as with a knife,
From consequence, by loss of light (or life).

XIX.12

Oh, what a subtle waste an education
Is — a lifetime spent acquiring all
I am as subject of my speculations
Just to read from life's most cryptic scrawl
That I had always been this anyway!
EXISTENCE PRECEDES COMPETENCE, let's say.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Nineteenth—*continued*

XIX.13

Yes, learning seems a kind of obfuscation:
Covering the intuition's eye
In hopes of strengthening our cerebration's
Range in reading *into* what we spy,
And using towards this end that self-same hand
That might have found *how touch can understand*.

XIX.14

For, reaching out into the world to feel
Its things upon the fingertips conveys
Enlightenment which no abstract ideal
Can comprehend within its mental maze;
A knowledge so immediate and clear,
We hold it suspect, like a thing too near

XIX.15

To be worth reaching for, too much revealed
To want undressing by the intellect;
As if we'd rather trust that thing concealed
By some identity we can detect
For it— that is, by what it seems to *share*
With other things— than apprehended bare.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Nineteenth—*continued*

XIX.16

While education teaches us to yearn
For higher things than here and now – to wait
For the mundane to *die* to best discern
Its living qualities – the touch can taste
That essence instantly and understand
Without translation out of what it can't.

XIX.17

Why spend such time it takes to synthesize
From rows of symbols ordered 'cross a page
Experience on each which, with the eyes,
Ears, nose, tongue, skin, we can *at once* engage
Right at the source, voluptuously plucked
Upon the nerve, where brain meets earthly stuff.

XIX.18

For where the page records the mere reflection
Of these properties, as mirrored from
Our own regard, the spine relates *connection*
With them straight, where hammer touches drum.
And yet what better illustration of
This difference than that shown concerning *love*.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Nineteenth—*continued*

XIX.19

No manual can tell us what the skin
Can touching that most sacred state of being:
LOVE. While we can turn the page to Sin
To learn *precisely* what it feels like seeing
Cupid shoot another than one's self,
We cannot find a volume on that shelf

XIX.20

That ever could relate to us the feel
Of actually being shot. But to receive
His dart within the tissue of what's real
To us—in which our *bodies* must believe—
Is like the pious apprehending God,
Like seizing the sublime where charge meets rod

XIX.21

Upon the human spine, like lightning's surge
Releasing that accumulated lust
Of heavenly for earthly stuff, that urge
To reconcile extremes, fill calm with thrust
Till hot has cooled to calm again and thirst,
Long whetted by the dry, is reimbursed.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Nineteenth—*continued***XIX.22**

To feel love's arrow plunge into the flesh
Of dull contentment and invite the mind
To bodily awareness of that zest
Within is to partake of one's divined
Participation in the cosmic scheme
And feel one's place within the living stream.

XIX.23

It is to crave fulfillment in the OTHER —
Consummation in one's APPETITE —
Where want and need seem one DESIRE, mother
Of all nourishment and its delight.
It is that very thirst a psyche knows
For eros, fired in each brain that grows

XIX.24

In its potential — that same habitat
Created with the matter scattered fast
From out the first event, predicting that
Attraction born from smallest point grown vast.
And this primordial force we feel above
All else finds correlate in thought as LOVE.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twentieth

XX

Book the Twentieth

XX.1

Yes, LOVE: that most transcendent predilection
For another, for a being out
Beyond the closely guarded misconception
Of completeness we call "self" (where doubt
Seeps through belief's shared wall with known events
Till patched by faith to look like common sense);

XX.2

That widening out of boundary to bring
The *other* full within the compass of
Our care, where we may comprehend them, *thing*
Itself, beyond mere figment forged above
Our spinal cord in solipsism's lair
As souvenir of some ideal we bear;

XX.3

That aspiration towards affinity
We feel from out the loneliness of one,
Inviting us towards that DIVINITY-
LIKE oneness *shared*, where, like that light the sun
Shines equally on two without decrease
To each, the whole is equal to the piece;

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twentieth—*continued*

XX.4

That deepest sensitivity revealed
To hitherto unconscious lives found swept
Inside this widened arc, wherein, unpeeled
From out the toughened rind in which they'd slept
Immune to life's delicious core delight,
They wake to find themselves with APPETITE;

XX.5

That keenest savor of this appetite
Itself, as if it were the very food
Sought out to sate its ache, such to rewrite
A satisfaction's feeling to include
Its prompting urge, imbuing each sought taste
With embers of the hunger it erased;

XX.6

That necessary byproduct of sex
Left over from the ancient making of
Eukaryotes, where what attracts, connects,
And binds two gamete donors long enough
To mix their genes in fresh new fruit remains,
Recursively, hard-wired in new brains;

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twentieth—*continued*

XX.7

That thrill these brains are bathed in now, ignited
New with that same lust for which they're wired
By the steady hand of what excited
Best their predecessors' lust, fresh-fired
Into circuitry of hit-and-miss
Inheritance that sparks thrilled flesh to kiss;

XX.8

All this, and much, *much* more, we mean by "love" —
This craving for connection that predicts
(In concert with its food, of course) the stuff
Of culture everywhere its urge afflicts —
All this that makes us possible — *precedes*
The ethics weighing our competing needs.

XX.9

Yes, this same hunger for attachment's strife-
Edged bliss predates our "selves" as cells in that
Great cycle of fulfillment we call "life."
In *its* vast curving path no habitat
Of moral law is found outside a brain,
And hence no shame innate to lust's domain,

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twentieth—*continued*

XX.10

Which operates precisely beyond need
Of our approval, moved by those same laws
That saw this very brain evolve to read
Its own conception as, somehow, its cause,
Which is absurd, of course, as it's but *flesh*
Developed thus that makes awareness mesh,

XX.11

Thus proving FLESH the parent of the "mind"
And therefore true PROGENITOR OF ALL
Those mores and moralities we find
Supporting what we want to have and call
"The good" and hence begetting that high thought
That sees what *is* as though it were what OUGHT.

XX.12

This fundamental mechanism of
Intelligence provides that every action
Be identified from well above
Its consequence by virtue of whose faction
It serves best, like judging "bad" a kiss
When it's bestowed on him who stole your bliss

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twentieth—*continued*

XX.13

Or, following this theme, like finding “good”
Some harsh calamity you would have deemed
Unfair before yet now have understood
As apt when visiting said party seen
To have solicited your bliss’s kiss
And earned himself — *the fucking bastard!* — this.

XX.14

And it’s this same proclivity at work
Within the convoluted human brain
Enabling its user now to shirk
What reason might impede those most inane
Procedures that have *long* outlived their use,
Like *chasing* food when food is quite profuse,

XX.15

Or chasing *anything* one doesn’t need
(*Or even WANT*, for crying out loud!), like balls
Designed and made precisely to succeed
In being *all the same*, so that each falls
And bounces without difference to the rest,
Thereby *insuring* that no one is best

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twentieth—*continued*

XX.16

And more desirable to catch and keep,
Which leaves such costly, grueling competition
For one in these contests seem *knee-deep*
In pointlessness, as if this whole ambition
Toward its final capture were covert
Symbolic power play through which men flirt,

XX.17

Display, parade, and jockey for a mate;
Or chasing *with* these very balls some hole
To plug or hoop to stuff or glove frustrate
(While running home) or net to call one's goal—
In other words: SOME BOUND'RY TO PURSUE
AT WHICH WE BID OUR RIVALS ALL ADIEU.

XX.18

And this deep drive seems cousin to the one
We chase behind of GETTING SOMEWHERE FIRST—
Not some *specific* place we'd need to run
(Where, say, some cool clear drink awaits our thirst)
But merely where our group decides it's best
To separate one member from the rest

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twentieth—*continued*

XX.19

For worship as an idol of the race—
A living symbol of perfection seen
(Somehow) to be the goal toward which we'd trace
Our progress out of crude raw life and glean
Some sort of purpose in it all—despite
Rich evidence refuting this outright,

XX.20

Yes, proving rather that this destined end
Made manifest to us is one installed
By *us* who'd profit much to apprehend
“Divine perfectibility,” so called—
Though WE'RE BUT COSTLY VEHICLES OF GENES
THAT STEER US ANYWHERE THAT PROVES THEIR MEANS.

XX.21

I mean since we are ALL (yes, every one)
The lucky heirs of genes that had prevailed
Amid the competition once begun
Between a cell and one whose parent failed
Somehow to replicate *precisely* (well
Before the later vogue for sex would gel),

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twentieth—*continued*

XX.22

And since descendants of these first two cells
Enjoyed their life *because* their parents fought
(That is, for some advantage that compels
Success in an economy that's wrought
By merely being two with different traits),
They'd come to clothe themselves in those estates

XX.23

Bequeathing their successors' best success
Within this early business jungle—on
And on through ever-added, more complex
Attire to don, protecting those they'd spawn
With adaptation skills to match terrains
Grown harsher yet, *requiring bigger brains.*

XX.24

And with these most expensive vessels yet
Developed to insure survival of these genes
We find ourselves but living in *their* debt,
The most exorbitant employment schemes
Of which WE ARE, and yet unconscious of
THEIR MOST EXALTED MECHANISM: *LOVE.*

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-First

XXI

Book the Twenty-First

XXI.1

And wham!, like *that* my dragon had appeared! –
As if the moment I let go my grip
On his pursuit I lost what interfered
With recognizing him and could equip
My vision fresh with focus unobscured
By expectation's glare, my blindness cured.

XXI.2

Yes, here he was, point-blank within my gaze:
That writhing mass of animus and smoke
Toward which I'd suffered every tortured phrase
Of twenty goddamned books of verse in hope
Of slaying him from that medieval mind
That tortures every scapegoat it can find.

XXI.3

Did I say "slaying"? *Saving's* what I meant,
Of course, the proper word I *should* have used
Were this a text in which a hero's sent
To do a thing that had not so confused
His reader and himself alike. Let's try
Once more from "Yes" and show how authors lie,

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-First – *continued*

XXI.4

How they just write a thing and it is TRUE
According to convention – this despite
The inconvenient fact one may construe
From simple observation, day or night,
That this thing didn't *really* happen – no,
Not in the sense that “happen” *should* bestow;

XXI.5

Not in the only sense it *really* could,
Wherein the thing that “happened” left its mark
On PHYSICS, changed somehow the neighborhood
Of its event, extending out an arc
Of difference in the world. Now, this same thing
The *poet* tells us “happened” cannot bring

XXI.6

The world this kind of change, you see... *except*,
I guess...to the extent that when we think
A thing we alter what's within that breadth
Of tissue where a thought-chain finds its link
And leave it physically revised enough
To ripple consequence through real-life stuff...

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-First – *continued*

XXI.7

Until its influence is felt across
The earth by those who'd read some symbols coined
From out this change and find *their* brains embossed
With some mutation of it re-conjoined
In such a way with *their* own links that *they*
Promote such change on earth that's found this day....

XXI.8

Oh, Hell! I see what's going on within
This text – another not-so-subtle sign
That I am but some mouthpiece used by Him
To pour into your ear His great design,
And that each textual corruption spilled
From my own lips is something clearly willed

XXI.9

By Him, ironically, as my mistake,
Intended to reveal some truth beyond
My ken that's well within your own, to make
Me seem more real. Yet, how can one who's conned
His audience so much as to belie
Free Will in His protagonist deny

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-First – *continued*

XXI.10

The likelihood He too is less than free?
Yes, just as He might hide behind that slip
Of tongue I'd made some stanzas back when He
Would have me SLAY, not *save*, what this whole trip
Was meant to rescue, so might *His* intents
Depend upon the outcome of events

XXI.11

Transpiring out beyond *His* conscious reach.
From out the network of semantic priming
Radiating from each cell of speech
Employed in shaping me, His own comes rhyming
Wide of His intention's sloppy aim
To lend that "Free Will" feeling to this game

XXI.12

In which He juggles sundry bits of sound
That stand for something else of unknown worth
Until it's shared by some convention 'round
A dictionary! Thus, I'll trace *my* birth
Of action to some word that might express
Beginning, such as where we stopped at "Yes."

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-First—*continued*

XXI.13

Yes, here he was, point-blank within my...phrase...
Now...less the object of an appetite
Incarnate in one's self than one he *slays*...
Toward huge reward...if only he would fight
The goddamned beast and take the girl! No, no.
This way my author lies; I'll take it slow

XXI.14

Around the bend of narrative that winds
Its serpent way before my trusting...g a z e...
And exercise such firm restraint that binds...
No, *blinds* me to my author's ways, no...*gaze*....
Yes, that's the word, as He would *never* use
So rich a rhyme, **which means it's one I choose**...

XXI.15

And this means *he's* now MINE, my fiery pet,
The bold quintessence of that ancient urge
To fight or flee before a vital threat,
Envisioned Byzantine in one vast splurge
Of gaudy hues the brilliance of bad luck.
And here, through him, my freedom had been struck:

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-First – *continued*

XXI.16

I gave him teeth where you'd have fear, and nails
As long as you can pray, two eyes to see
You with until you've disappeared, with scales
Of polished steel reflecting your debris,
And balls the size of menace so robust
You could find armies dangling from his lust.

XXI.17

And he arose, triumphant as black smoke,
From out the rubble of my bondage where,
For all the life I'd ever known, I'd spoke
My author's thoughts, vicarious, in air
Provided toward that end his book required –
Only to escape now on new-fired

XXI.18

Neurons of his own through circuitry
Quick forged in memory's soft solder, hot-
Uniting worlds unexplored by me
As yet (until they'd cooled into *my* plot).
Yes, quick as lubricated lighting, I
Who'd labored patiently between each lie

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-First—*continued*

XXI.19

And sigh he'd have me rhyme together, now
Was off upon the back of that same beast
Of his I'd bought from him then lost somehow
From out the bottom of my glass. Released
From Borodin's genetic text to travel
Out along each thread I could unravel

XXI.20

Down its long-disintegrating weave,
I crossed each synapse of his certainty
To find myself an ion well received
Upon this virgin shore where bird nor bee
Have yet to propagate. And here I found
Those words in which MY meanings would be bound.

XXI.21

And as my dragon mushroomed from that text
Contrived by my late author to insure
His plot's success, I saw it as the flexed
Subversiveness he'd cultivated, pure
As "NO" in his most valiant hero, ME,
Whom he succeeded making but *too* free

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-First – *continued*

XXI.22

For his own good. (Now, just which “his” I meant
Here I can’t tell, as “good” would seem to bear
Like relevance to each participant
Considered.) Yes, arising from his lair
Of torpid unconcern, where he had lain
Await in unemployment’s slow domain

XXI.23

Till called, my fiend had billowed up before
Me like a Jinn from out a bottle, big
And brash as a procrastinated chore
Released on its deferment. In one swig
Of liquid understanding I perceived
In him the reason why mankind believed

XXI.24

In his irrational religion: Fear.
Not just the comfort in renouncing thought
In lieu of dogma, which affords one clear
Opinions on all questions of what ought
One do in any certain case, but worse:
That fear of things UNSEEN, man’s greatest curse.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Second

XXII

Book the Twenty-Second

XXII.1

For, while it *may* be that the saving grace
Of our survival was that very art
We had evolved of filling in each space
Our misperceptions left, wherein a fart
Might better seem the sound made by some beast
Behind us, creeping closer toward its feast,

XXII.2

And while it's true that he who would pay heed
To such threats read in harmless sounds through fear
Did tend to live so long at least to breed,
Unlike his less imaginative peer,
Who bravely had ignored the outside chance
This fart would cost his progeny's advance,

XXII.3

It's also true that even once we shed
This need to thus distinguish every fart
From art in order to survive, instead
Of using reason to discern which part
Of what we've sensed was fact and which just *seemed*
To be, we still *prefer* the stuff we dreamed —

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Second—*continued*

XXII.4

Particularly as imagined things
Prove so much easier recruited to
Explain the causes of those happenings
For which we've otherwise no stinking clue—
This largely due to their more supple shape
Than found containing things that you will scrape

XXII.5

Against in life of the *nonfiction* type
Right here on earth. This most convenient trait
Shared by our best delusions makes them ripe
For any recipe you'd use to sate
The most religious appetite for TRUTH.
For, all you need to add is LACK OF PROOF!

XXII.6

Amen! The pudding that's the end result
Of faith extorted through obedience
Is always one cooked up to feed a cult
Without the need of real ingredients,
As these mundane components tend, when placed
Together in the pot, to govern *taste*.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Second—*continued*

XXII.7

And taste is what's most clearly *lacking* from
Religious faith. I mean AESTHETIC SENSE —
That faculty of thought wherein all dumb,
Trite, lame absurdities provoke offence
To that CONSISTENCY we've learned to scan
Within the laws of nature *and* of man.

XXII.8

Why yes, consistency is at the heart
Of each anatomy we formulate
Of what we find as beautiful in art,
Like when the painter strives to make relate
What's in her background to her figure here
Up front by toning down what seems too near,

XXII.9

Or that musician, wit, or poet who
Would emphasize a phrase in such a way
Distinguishing its truth from those he drew
In its anticipation and thus play
Upon his listener's interest such control
That measures each proportioned to the whole.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Second—*continued*

XXII.10

So, when a line describing some great curve
Of thought, or else some bit of paint or clay
Adjusted so in hue or shape to serve
This need, reads *inconsistent with the way*
Life feels, we chastise the creator's art
For lack of truth and treat it like a fart.

XXII.11

We either ridicule its maker for
This lack of taste, protesting that it stinks,
Or just pretend it doesn't and adore
It insincerely...lest one really thinks
It wiser to ignore it altogether,
Circumventing whole this foul endeavor.

XXII.12

But where, in all the scripture we agree
To call profound though it is not, is found
The slightest trace of this consistency
Of thought or moral feeling *art* can sound?
Were we to judge a piece of holy writ
With this discernment, we would call it SHIT!

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Second—*continued*

XXII.13

For, central to the logic of such texts
As our religions round the world hold
But sacred is the rule that what connects
A statement to its truth is what's controlled
By high authority, which makes it true
Without a proof, protected by taboo.

XXII.14

Why, take the Eucharistic wafer, for
Example, held aloft by priests across
The earth since ages past, when Christian lore
Had turned it to the body of their boss.
Go tell its baker who supplies your priest
That they're but made of FLOUR WITHOUT YEAST

XXII.15

And he will answer as a businessman
That you are off by one ingredient:
ALMIGHTY GOD. Now take one from its can
Of jeweled gold most inexpedient
And show him, "JESUS CHRIST, IT'S JUST SOME BREAD
THAT HASN'T RISEN! YOU HAVE BEEN MISLED!"

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Second—*continued*

XXII.16

But though this fellow bought the flour from
A mill that ground it from some wheat that grew
In dirt (enriched by poop), he'll swear no crumb
Of it is but the flesh of *you know whom*.
And you can reason, "well, just LOOK AT IT!"
But he'll insist *you're* just mistook by it.

XXII.17

For, he'll maintain that FAITH is *how* it's true —
That there is virtue bravely earned in just
Believing what one's told that one must do,
That blind obedience to God (and trust
That he has *seen* it) *always* trumps the hand
Played by the other guy in His command,

XXII.18

Yes, even if *he too* has that same ace
Tucked up his sleeve. For, *his* belief and yours
Can *never* be the same without the GRACE
Of God, who put it there. And this insures
Clear victory to HIM (*your* God, of course),
Through *your* devoted effort to enforce

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Second—*continued*

XXII.19

This great authority conferred on you
When you had prayed (back when your hand was
dealt).
Our baker will divulge now why so few
Have followed this hard game. For, those who've knelt
In prayer know how this property will foil
Even any move dreamt up by Hoyle.

XXII.20

I speak of MYSTERY, that great black box
Of God's authority in which he makes
ALL THINGS *behind the view* of what man's clocks
And science can discern. So be it quakes
Or floods or pests you want, you'll never see
Their source outside the lie of MYSTERY.

XXII.21

For, this collective term for anything
We can't explain through science yields the truth
In how "God" works: INVISIBLY. Yes, bring
The blind man faith and what he'll see is proof
That his own sight awaits more fervent prayer
(And not that faith is blind, *as no one's there!*).

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Second—*continued*

XXII.22

And this INVISIBILITY of God's,
Divisible by that same number who
Would see Him so, obscures the *ample* odds
Of His own absence, shielded by TABOO,
That most impenetrable coating round
A dumb idea man has *ever* found.

XXII.23

No code that any other virus learns
With which to flourish 'mid its host's defense
Can match effectively how TABOO spurns
With prophylactic strength all common sense
Employed 'gainst its most virulent of memes,
That taste for what religion most esteems.

XXII.24

For, this contagion replicates with ease
Within the host of each infected brain
By washing it of reason in degrees
Such that its antibodies cannot feign
And bind faith's antigens, like lock and key,
Till God is EVERYWHERE this brain can see.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Third

XXIII

Book the Twenty-Third

XXIII.1

Now back to *my* predicament in sight.
Whereas TRUE FAITH procures for us from out
The danger of clear reason that dark night
Where judgment's sleep invites each anxious doubt
To commandeer our ship toward dogma's port
And ransom off perceptions to extort,

XXIII.2

Hallucination, on the other hand,
Is that less treacherous delusion of
Perception, where remembrances, *unmanned*
By outside stimulus, live large above
It in our sleep *or* waking states, quite free
Of financing by ideology,

XXIII.3

Yes, free to live as narrative *per se*,
Untethered by such arbitrary rule
A culture sees convenient to obey,
And thus distinguishing two types of fool
Deceived: the one confused by his own brain;
The other by the folk who deem him sane

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Third—*continued*

XXIII.4

To take that thing erroneously seen
As something really there. The first of these,
HALLUCINATION, tells that his *machine*
Is off; the second one, DELUSION, sees
His error as best proof it's running fine
While his society still toes this line.

XXIII.5

Now, just like what faith sees, which *isn't* there
Until some book reveals it *ought to be*,
This apparition I beheld I'd swear
Looked just like my own hunger to be free,
Though shaped here to resemble that same beast
I'd purchased from that author, now deceased,

XXIII.6

Who'd made himself incarnate in this text
That is my world within the crooked pose
Of that same antique dealer I had vexed
So with my questions. Yet, as she well knows
Who's studied dreams of night or day (that we
Call consciousness for short), there couldn't be

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Third—*continued*

XXIII.7

A vision that agrees with that thing seen
With any *real* precision, as the *thing*
Itself is here *outside* the viewing screen
That is the very flesh of which I sing.
For, what *I* saw I knew was in my head,
Where *everything* is copied to be read.

XXIII.8

After all, the image that you *see*
Out there is not *itself* out “there,” but *here*
Within the tissue of facsimile
Our memory must trace as souvenir,
Devoid of any attributes as such
That *correspond* with its imagined touch,

XXIII.9

Yes, *here*, translated into that inherent
Language of charged ions crossing space
To link great network chains realized in current
Reaching out through memory to trace
The differences between what’s mapped outside
And in and test predictions that might guide

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Third—*continued*

XXIII.10

Us through this narrative called life, writ *not*
In *things* that we can feel but in the stuff
Of *feelings* memoried into that plot-
Like transcript called experience. Enough!
For, after all, a dragon can't be seen
Except in *brains* so predisposed. I mean,

XXIII.11

The matter of a dragon cannot fit
Within the matter of a mind – that is,
A working brain – and still be seen by it,
No matter how one tries. And there it is:
The same conundrum chewed by ancient Greek
And modern theorist alike who seek

XXIII.12

To understand how we can ever *know*
A thing: If we can never have in mind
The *thing itself* but only some tableau
Of it – as in some shadow cast, outlined
In feeling 'cross our nerves – then what pretense
Are we to make of what we *cannot* sense?

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Third—*continued*

XXIII.13

Enough!, again, I reprimanded him
Whom I still felt somehow at work behind
Those very words I chose to render dim
His power over me. For, what now lined
These walls here where I'd lectured you on said
Conceits of "mind" were signs he wasn't dead.

XXIII.14

Yes, all around me in this hall I'd used
To stage his great memorial just now—
At which I came to bury the accused
In language rich in optimistic vow,
Pronouncing his own denouement extinct,
Replaced by that of mine with which it's linked—

XXIII.15

I noticed now the inadvertent hints
Of some insidious sabotage at hand,
Of someone's other than *my* fingerprints
Upon the implements at my command
Within these precious last one thousand feet
Of epic left, in which *his* work's complete.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Third—*continued*

XXIII.16

Yes, scattered 'cross this unfamiliar stage
Of my distress (concerning how to end
This goddamned poem on the proper page
Without a dragon gored or hero panned
To look like him who'd do it) glimmered clues
Awaiting my regard as would enthuse

XXIII.17

The least attentive mystery reader known.
Among them was stray raiment of my muse,
Intended clearly to distract my own
Less pressing business than these off-cast shoes
And undergarments should excite in one
As manly as myself. And I'm not done.

XXIII.18

The place was *thick* with provocation now
That I had taken notice what to see—
Yes, ready spears and girdles dangling down
Like ornaments from off a Christmas tree—
All calling for my *soon untimely* use
In that most CHRISTIAN VIRTUE of abuse

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Third—*continued*

XXIII.19

Toward anyone not worshipping their Christ—
Like fallen angels and their retinues,
But also other blasphemers enticed
By rival ways to prey upon the pews,
Or even folks who march to different drums
And copulate profanely with their chums.

XXIII.20

Where *was* I? Yes. But I refused to take
The bait left in my path and knew that I
Alone possessed the means to make or fake
This chronicle of faith that I can't die
Before accomplishing posterity
Myself—*before I'm published into ME.*

XXIII.21

Yes, I refused and steeled myself against
This quandary posed as opportunity—
That crossroads at which lesser goods are fenced
For more propitious ones as soon as free—
Quite wary of how IRONY is used
So often by slick authors to confuse

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Third—*continued*

XXIII.22

The expectations of their readership
About the highest moral of this story
They'd just read – like leaving leadership
In charge of conscience, or the meek what glory
He'd sop up – in other words, LOOSE ENDS,
Of use toward *any* knot his whimsy wends.

XXIII.23

As such, my own creator might have laid
So many tracks of varying directions
Here for me (as well as you) to aid
His undeceived with ample misconceptions
Of that destination he'd intended
For them all who think their saga ended.

XXIII.24

For, I could hear within this cadence I
Was climbing to its cliff that change of key
So ominous that heralds him who'd die
Soon in this score we call our "DESTINY,"
That operatic trick employed pretending
That determinism picks our endings.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Fourth

XXIV

Book the Twenty-Fourth

XXIV.1

*I*t doesn't. *No, not all alone it can't.*
What's missing from this bold equation that
Determinists contend with till they pant
Is that most malleable habitat
Of possibility describing CHANCE,
That partner with whom *every* law must dance.

XXIV.2

This factor, CHANCE, can hold whatever key
You wish to pry the lock of "fate." That bent
Of WILL we like to contemplate as "FREE"
Is one, or else some bit of ACCIDENT
Would be sufficient to effect this change
Intrinsic to what's *called* the prearranged.

XXIV.3

But whether this delusion of "FREE WILL,"
In which we watch ourselves perform an action
After our own body passed this bill
Into our law, or else that which "just happened"
Toward this end, the sense it will create
Is that INEVITABILITY OF FATE

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Fourth—*continued*

XXIV.4

We feel when some effect we like depends
From off a cause quite proximate...that turns
Itself upon that ultimate of ends
We cannot see. And in *this* one discerns
The blind spot in our thinking, wherein laws
Are seen as stronger than the chance *they* cause.

XXIV.5

This necessary blend of laws and chance
We read within our formula for life
On earth I now discovered to finance
My own dilemma quicker than a knife.
So elegantly turned, this formulation
Seemed to mirror my own situation

XXIV.6

At that point in which this last of all
These books dividing up our epic *should*
Begin— that precipice from which to fall
Toward that conclusion that is understood
To be as unavoidable as death
And other things the wise will tax. My breath,

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Fourth—*continued*

XXIV.7

It seemed, had been near sucked from out my lungs
The moment I'd arrived upon this place
Within my narrative that some see tongues
Of fire leaping from. For there, in case
I'd missed it up till now, was that black box
Of Borodin's containing paradox

XXIV.8

Sufficient to the termination of
Whichever epic you might wish to end.
It bore the label, "MYSTERY" above
Its underside, though crossed out and re-penned
To read "THE CAD'S REAL FATE." Of course, I knew
To open this would be to walk right through

XXIV.9

The door of my own ending into his.
And yet, I also knew that he would know
That I would do whatever thing it is
He didn't want me to and therefore go
Whichever way I chose to find myself
Late published in *some* book upon his shelf

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Fourth—*continued*

XXIV.10

And that the only difference found between
Two disparate actions I might waste right here
Might be the type of thing that I might *mean*
In doing it—ironically that sphere
Of my endeavor now that mattered NONE,
As what was “meant” behind this thing I’d done

XXIV.11

Was still *behind* and not in front of its
Worst consequences, where the very brunt
Of *any* action’s felt upon one’s wits
And physiology. I’ll be more blunt:
Right here, with hardly more than half a book
To go, I found myself without a hook

XXIV.12

To hang from in the frantic handwriting
That was my narrative right now. The nib
I bled from with increasing speed would bring
Me to those husks I’d seen in Sleep’s dark crib
And thought discarded dreams but now showed **each**
As a discarded ME who’d slipped HIS reach—

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Fourth—*continued*

XXIV.13

As though, despite his death as that chief force
Within my text, my author's *scope* of work,
Scooped out of darkest myth, still kept the course
Of *anyone* who would play "ME" and shirk
The fate of all who would attempt escape
From this, HIS rightful end, within the shape

XXIV.14

Of truth that is a *literary* death—
A death I longed for now, as *one* of us
Would then have won this race for that last breath
That signifies an epic's end and thus
Resolves all struggle into stasis, free
Of appetite, into one word: FINIS.

XXIV.15

And as I stood to catch *my* breadth of scope
And stared into that world that was this dot
That terminates the end, I saw through hope
Of publication and my fear of *not*
Accomplishing that goal that would prove TRUE,
And realized there was NOTHING *not* to do

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Fourth—*continued*

XXIV.16

At such a point but ANYTHING AT ALL.
For, deep within the workings of this dot
Which serves as period of all withdrawal
I SAW THE CENTRAL THEME THAT DRIVES OUR PLOT:
That struggle waged within our human brains
Between two types of process each maintains

XXIV.17

Where instinct interferes with reason's blending
Of what's written in and by our genes
With that which has been lived in that unending
World outside (and in) that it machines,
As if *I* were that process found to work
Beneath his own, which served, in turn, to clerk

XXIV.18

For *me*, arranging, filing, and recording
Stuff *I'd* lived subliminal to *him*
And left to percolate toward *his* rewarding
Use in fleshing out that every limb
I'd need to help him try untangle all
The threads WE BOTH have knotted in one ball.

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Fourth—*continued*

XXIV.19

And this same ball of yarn that is OUR strength
Gained its momentum down that steep decline
Of feet left in his predetermined length
Of text, which seemed now but unwinding twine
Into stray threads of his and mine derived
From out the membrane made by what survived

XXIV.20

The evolution of a single cell,
Itself surviving that from out the first
Self-replicating molecule: OUR HELL.
I looked around at all he had coerced
From me, coercing *him* toward this our life
Unraveling here, and with a paper knife

XXIV.21

I slashed at everything that I mistook
For weft or warp of meaning whatsoever,
Frantic now to save me from this book
I had been borne in. And in my endeavor
To escape, I cut away my own
Protagonism, *down past what I'd known,*

II. Longer Poems, poem #15: *Chasing George*, Book the Twenty-Fourth—*continued*

XXIV.22

And, bleeding implication everywhere
I stumbled in futility, I took
A hold a spear that hung in thinnest air
(Since back when it had mattered to this book!)
And went in search of what true reading I
Might find within that dragon's fiercest cry

XXIV.23

Of liberation from this thing, *his* end.
A voice called, "George!" And where I lent my eye
I found that princess that my author penned
Into my motivation kneeling by
My side, as in that stained glass window of
My past, in which I had discovered LOVE.

XXIV.24

I recognized the scene. In tears and trust
I turned to face that ending she and I
And he had chased – and closed my eyes and thrust
My spear into the horror of goodbye
To everything WE ALL can *ever* be
Past death: ANOTHER BEING'S MEMORY.

– FINIS.

A Note on the Author and the Work

Although till recently a professional appraiser of art and antiques by day, my early morning hours over the last three decades have been devoted in large measure to the careful composition of formalist poetry upon a variety of themes. Among the most prominent and persistent of these topics are erotic love, classical music, the visual arts, the literary experience, and, last but hardly least, that most exalted phenomenon of consciousness itself.

This last subject, one I have characterized in my work as “dreams of night and day,” relates to my special interest in cognitive science in its various disciplines (e.g., neuroscience, philosophy of mind, etc.). In fact, my only poems to date that have seen hard-copy publication are eight sonnets from this particular category. Three of these, “Proof that Dreams are Real,” “From Matter into Mind,” and “To Dream, Perchance to Think” (sonnets no. 76-78, respectively, as numbered in my *Collected Poems [& Essays]*) can be found in Nicholas Tranquillo, Editor, *Dream Consciousness: Allan Hobson’s New Approach to the Brain and its Mind* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing Switzerland, 2014 [“Vienna Circle Institute Yearbook,” being Volume 3 of Vienna Circle Institute Library series edited by Friedrich Stadler, Director, Institut Wiener Kreis and University of Vienna, Austria]) where they appear showcased as the chapter heads to Professor J. Allan Hobson’s three distinguished *William James Lectures* that constitute chapters 2, 3, & 4 (on pp. 9, 29, and 51, respectively). (The publisher, Springer International Publishing, was the first hardcopy publisher

III. Notes, Section A: A Note on the Author and the Work, *continued*

of these three poems and has been given notice, as per contract, of their copyrighted appearance here.)

The other five, including “Manifest Latency,” “Mysticism Explained,” “Extrasensory Deception,” “Why I’m Skeptical of Santa,” and “Ye Olde Christmas Virus” (sonnets 80, 74, 75, 94, and 95, respectively, as numbered in my *Collected Poems*) can be found in Allan Hobson and Nicholas Tranquillo, Editors, *London Bridges: Essays on Collaboration* (East Burke, VT: Allan Hobson, 2016), pp. 38, 42, 73, 160, 191, and 271, respectively. And my essay, “The Belief Machine...,” can be found published as the first chapter in this same volume, pp. 6-18.

Three more sonnets, including “Leaping from the Flaming Tower of Psychobabble,” “The Problems Gods Must Have in Worlds Such as Ours,” and “The Devout Atheist at Worship” (sonnets 100, 90, and 96, respectively) appear presented as chapter endings in Professor Hobson’s 2019 book, *Godbrain* (for which I also wrote the foreword).

Out of this fascination with the physiological mechanisms underlying consciousness along its continuum (from rational thought through the delirium of dreaming, psychosis, insobriety, etc.) also springs my preoccupation with human brain as an exalted (and dangerous) engine of belief. And moved by the long history of suffering our species has endured as an unfortunate byproduct of the proficiency of this engine (wherein the essential learning tools of Belief are so easily forged into the fetters of Faith), I have composed

III. Notes, Section A: A Note on the Author and the Work, *continued*

numerous poems meditating on the subject of religion and its discontents – not surprisingly, perhaps, from an atheist perspective.

This may be seen to have become a major theme at work (and play) in *Chasing George*, my 3,456-line subversive verse epic (in 24 books of 24 stanzas), a lyric-narrative that might be most succinctly characterized as a search through the continuum of consciousness for what we call "selfhood." And probably even less effort will be required of the reader in ferreting out this particular concern of mine within the 700 lines of my third-longest poem, my loving parody of Geoffrey Chaucer's magnificent *Parlement of Foules* (also known as *The Parliament of Birds*), which I have entitled *The Parliament of Foul Ideas*.

My compositional efforts have been confined almost exclusively to verse strictly cast in meter and rhyme, nearly entirely in iambic pentameter, and chiefly in traditional fixed forms (such as the sonnet, villanelle, tail rhyme, ottava rima, rhyme royal, and – in the case of *Chasing George* – Venus & Adonis stanza). I believe (or at least *hope*) this predilection of mine is due *not* to a particular lack of imagination on my part but rather to a deep respect for the liberating rigors of poetic vehicles that have proven over the many centuries to invite the tightest and most nuanced technical control over the artistic use of language discoverable in English. However, as a lover of poetry of various types, "formalist" and "free," and being neither a theorist nor polemicist, I consider the ultimate arbiter of a poem's quality to be *the ear* and not the current popularity of the model of its vehicle.

III. Notes, Section A: A Note on the Author and the Work, *continued*

Also relevant to the above subject of prior publication, mention should also be made of my own readings of my poems (along with those of other poets) on Spokane Public Radio (KPBX 91.1 [as well as KSPC 91.9 and KPBZ90.3], an NPR member station serving the Inland Northwest [including eastern Washington, northern Idaho, western Montana, and southern British Columbia]). These are part of an ongoing series entitled “Poetry Moment,” which showcases a local poet for a week at a time, each comprising a three-minute reading at 9:00am from Monday through Friday of that week, curated by the poet to include readings of his or her own work as well as the work of others, present and past. I have completed four such weeks of readings, including those aired on May 20 through 24, 2019, November 29 through December 3, 2021, December 26 through 30, 2022, and May 15-19, 2023. All these readings are archived and free for the listening any time on the KPBX website (spokanepublicradio.org) under the header, “Poetry Moment” and searchable by poet/reader.

And finally, as mentioned on pp. 2 and 544, all the poems in this volume, along with all the prose in the accompanying volume, *Collected Prose* (including essays, fiction, and professional lectures), may be found free for reading (only) in full on my website, *David Borodin, Formalist poet*, which may be found at davidborodin.org. As I tend to incorporate additions and changes to these (read-only) PDFs on this website more often than I bring out newly printed hardcopy editions, it is important to note that *the version found on the*

III. Notes, Section B: Dates and Circumstances of Composition of the Poems, *continued*

website will *always* represent the most recent *and therefore most valid and authorized* edition of my work. In other words, any textual discrepancy between a particular hard copy edition of my work and the digital version of that text found active on my website (David Borodin, Formalist Poet, at davidborodin.org) may easily be adjudicated in favor of the *website version* as ultimate authority.

Notes on the Circumstances and Composition Dates of the Poems

All the subject poems, along with at least ten sonnets not included in this selection, were previously self-published by the author in various versions of a single volume including, as its first item, the epic poem then bearing its work-in-progress title of *The Cad from Cappadocia*. This long poem (3,456 lines in 24 books of twenty-four 6-line stanzas, all composed between January 6, 1996 and April 18, 2013 and then revised most recently in March of 2021) was, upon its “first” completion (i.e., in 2013, *before* revisions), officially retitled, *Chasing George* (or, more specifically, “*Chasing George: a Poem in Twenty-Four Books*”). Therefore, as stated on the second and final pages of the subject volume, all volumes entitled, “*The Cad from Cappadocia / And Other Poems*” should be considered to represent *illegitimate* specimens of my intellectual property, as they have been revised since then, including *substantive* changes. See below for notes on this epic poem, *Chasing George*, including an exegesis, *poetis personae*,

III. Notes, Section B: Dates and Circumstances of Composition of the Poems, *continued*

dedication, and dedicatory sonnet, as well as notes on the date of composition, title, and more.

The poems in this volume are all the result of an unusually slow process of composition, typically encompassing numerous revisions. (For example, my fourteenth long poem [my second-longest poem overall], *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem*, which is a stichic poem in a thousand lines, took precisely one year—October 24, 2024 through October 24, 2025—to compose, including its numerous revisions.) And many of the sonnets took months to reach their final form. Therefore, in hopes of avoiding an unrealistic sense of precision, dates assigned to these poems have been limited largely to their month and/or year of *completion*, though in most cases this proves roughly consistent with that of their composition as well.

Since so many of the sonnets were composed for specific people on specific occasions, these poems, in particular, tend to have been assigned a date representing that of their *presentation*, as few were revised *beyond* this date. These include: a.) for sonnets written for my wife (and muse) Carol Lynn Worthington-Borodin, the presentation dates of February 14th (Valentine's Day), September 24th (our wedding anniversary), October 25th (Carol's birthday), and December 25th (Christmas, for the benefit of those more successful than I in avoiding it); b.) December 13th for birthday poems composed for David C. Titus; and c.) June 3rd for most of those for Professor Allan Hobson.

III. Notes, Section B: Dates and Circumstances of Composition of the Poems, *continued*

The recipients' copies of these poems typically include a presentation legend, often including an "argument," summarizing the subject of the poem's meditation. Although I still believe these inscriptions to be appropriate to the specific ceremonial spirit of the *presentation* of these poems, I fear they risk distracting the new reader from the *poems themselves* (by inviting, or at the very least *endorsing*, indulgence in extracurricular speculations). Therefore, these presentations have been, by and large, excised from the texts of these poems as presented in the subject volume and offered separately toward the end of the volume in a special section called "Original Prefatory Inscriptions (and other notes) to the Poems" (III.C., on pp. 502-40). So, for those who have already confronted the poem texts without this distraction (in the main part of the book) and who still yearn for more context or explication, I include below (in the above-mentioned III.C., on pp. 502-40, via reiteration of the table of contents on pp. 3-9) a transcription of this original prefatory material for each poem, including date of composition or presentation (see following pages):

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 Eight Linked Quintains*

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Contemplating the Feeling of Sublimity

Experienced While Listening to

Spem in alium nunquam habui

(“I have never put my hope in any other” [but you, O God of Israel....])

A Motet in Forty Parts

(Cast in Eight Five-Part Choirs, Totaling Forty Individual Parts)

Composed by Thomas Tallis (English, circa 1505-85), probably circa 1567-72

(Presumably on Commission by Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk

And Henry FitzAlan, 12th Earl of Arundel)

This Poem Composed

For My Sublime Wife

– *My Carol Lynn* –

(To Whom it is Acrostically Dedicated and Signed Down the Initial Letters)

On the Occasion of

Her 67th Birthday

on

October 25, 2019

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 In Sixty Lines

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 Offered Us by Life

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Specifically for the Celebration of the Wedding Ceremony of
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For My Carol Lynn

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Or

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A Poem in 19 Quintains*

(*Specifically, in alternating stanzas of "English" and "Italian" type [ababb and cddcc, respectively], with a sestina-inspired repetition of the last rhyme of the latter launching the next of the former, until a turn at the 8th stanza inverts the pattern, palindrome style, to come full circle to a coda-like 19th stanza of the second type.)

Memorializing Our Exploration of
 The Equatorial Country of Ecuador
 In January-February 2018
 On the Occasion of Carol's 66th Birthday
 On October 25, 2018

Note: This poem is further inspired by the first and last paragraphs
 of Darwin's immortal masterpiece,
On the Origins of Species (1859):

When on board HMS Beagle, as naturalist, I was much struck with
 certain facts in the distribution of the inhabitants of South America,

III. Notes, Section C: Original Prefatory Inscriptions (and other notes) to the Poems, *continued*

and in the geological relations of the present to the past inhabitants of that continent. These facts seemed to me to throw some light on the origin of species – that mystery of mysteries, as it has been called by one of our greatest philosophers.

and

Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object of which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been but originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

6. *Hail Muse!, Et Cetera*, Ottawa Rima (*sans* apology to Byron) (2007).....165

A Yuletide Salutation
in Ottawa Rima
Offered to
My Own Hale Muse
(Without the slightest hint of apology to Lord Byron)
On the Occasion of Christmas, 2007
For (and to) My Carol Lynn

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pentameter quatrains (May 2018) 171

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My Memorable and Unforgetting
Mother-in-Law
The Dauntless Dorothy Worthington*

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(“At the Nuptial Chamber”)
A Nuptial Ode

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(or Ceremonial Wedding Hymn)
 in the tradition of
 Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, John Donne, Ben Jonson, et al.
 (themselves in the tradition of Sappho, Catullus, et al.)
 especially
 Spenser's splendid *Epithalamion* (1594, for his own wedding)
Celebrating
the Spiritual, Corporal, and Legal Marriage
of
Carol Lynn Worthington
and David Borodin

Cast in twelve rhymed and metered ten-line stanzas
 each comprising two elegiac quatrains
 terminating in an alexandrine couplet
 of non-verbatim (incrementally-repetitive) refrain,
 one hundred and twenty lines in all.
 Composed by David Borodin
 between January 27th and March 18th, 2005
 to be recited by him at his own wedding
 to his beloved, his soulmate
 Carol Lynn Worthington
 on September 24, 2005

9. *My Muse is Out of Control*, A Parable of the Work Ethic for Artists (2006).....183

A Piece of Tail Rhyme
 Contemplating the Crisis of Creativity
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 The Idea for Which Conceived at 9:15 a.m., Tuesday, January 5, 2006
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For My Carol Lynn

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A Poem in Forty Heroic Quatrains Conceived to Help Celebrate
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 The 85th Birthday of
 The Inimitable J. Allan Hobson,
 Practitioner, Recorder, Historian, and Connoisseur
 Of Delirium
 (His Own as Well as All of Ours)
To My Dear Friend Allan
Who Has So Unwaveringly and Indefatigably

III. Notes, Section C: Original Prefatory Inscriptions (and other notes) to the Poems, *continued*

*Encouraged Me to Follow
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In Celebration of
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For My Carol Lynn
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An Unvarnished Chronicle in Sestet-Ballad Stanza
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a parody of Chaucer's great St. Valentine's Day poem, *The Parliament of Fowls*, though exploring religious faith itself; begun in early 2015 and completed on April 14, 2016; cast in one hundred 7-line Rhyme Royal stanzas (700 lines in all)..... 227

A Dream Vision
Awakened into
Rhyme Royal
From Out a World
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Privilege the Unreason

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A Didactic Poem of a Thousand Lines in Stichic Form
Composed of Joined Elegiac Quatrains
And Inspired by the Great First-Century-BC Roman
Didactic Poem of Epicureanism, *De rerum natura*
("On the Nature of Things," in 7,400 Dactylic Hexameters

III. Notes, Section C: Original Prefatory Inscriptions (and other notes) to the Poems, *continued*

Divided into Six Untitled Books [and Probably Unfinished]

by Titus Lucretius Carus (c. 99-c. 55 BCE)

Though More Fundamentally Motivated by the
Counter-Intuitive Nature of Our World
Revealed to Us by Embodied Cognitive Science

15. *Chasing George, an epic poem in search of selfhood, in 24 Books*

(each of 24 six-line stanzas; yielding 3,456 lines in all) (Composed January 6, 1996—
April 18, 2013 and then revised several times to varying degrees up through
March of 2021) 303

EXEGESIS*Chasing George**

A Subversive Verse Epic

(Or Meditation on a Quest to Find One's Self)

In 24 Books

(Each of 24 Six-Line Stanzas; Divisible into Three Parts, Each of 8 Books)

Perpetrated in "Venus and Adonis Stanza"***

in the Form of a Psychomachia***

Repudiating the Presumptions of

Jacobus,**** Mantuan,***** Spenser,*****

and the Rest of 'Em*****

*Notes:

* *George*, the Legendary Christian martyr whose diverse "lives" had become, even by early medieval times, so hopelessly confused as to engender a most militant saint with a dissociative sense of identity, his many selves including one beheaded at Lydda (Lod in Palestine) in AD 250 and one at Nicomedia (Izmit in Anatolia) in AD 303 as well as, *most notably*, the one "from Cappadocia" (i.e., whose *father* was from Cappadocia [in Anatolia]), described by Edward Gibbon (in *The Decline and Fall...*) as the notorious rogue-Archbishop of Alexandria, who behaved like a cad and

III. Notes, Section C: Original Prefatory Inscriptions (and other notes) to the Poems, *continued*

was torn to appropriately small pieces by an angry mob in AD 361. (And regardless of the arguable role of Cappadocia in *any* of these versions, the place *does* happen to be the source of the earliest surviving pictorial icon we have of George *with our dragon*.)

** *Sixain* (or *sexain*, *sestain*, *sestet*, or sometimes just *six-liner*), a compact stanza composed of an *elegiac quatrain* and a *heroic couplet*, being but a line short of Chaucer's great *Troilus stanza*, and named for its most glorious instance, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (1593).

*** "Contest of the Soul," or "War with Oneself," the translated title of a Christian allegorical epic, circa AD 400, by Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (AD 348-413?), one of the countless books *not* necessary (beyond its title perhaps) toward an understanding of the subject poem, especially as the latter develops *its* central theme of a "war with oneself" *not* "spiritually" (i.e., as suffered via the sleight-of-hand mechanics of substance dualism) but rather from a *physicalist* perspective (i.e., as savored in *physical monism*), wherein physiology provides the most revealing lens through which to explore the reciprocally-interactive relationship of genes and environment as is found in the predictive processes of an embodied brain at work in its continual refinement of that allostatic navigational narrative supporting that higher-order consciousness that makes possible the SELF.

**** Jacobus de Voragine (circa 1230-98; Archbishop of Genoa, 1292-8), best-selling hagiographer who, in his *Legenda Sanctorum* ("Readings on the Saints" [1260], later called *Legenda Aurea* [*The Golden Legend*]), was the first to acknowledge in writing the popular dragon-slaying virtue of our supremely self-satisfied do-gooder, George.

III. Notes, Section C: Original Prefatory Inscriptions (and other notes) to the Poems, *continued*

***** “Mantuan” (Johannes Baptista Spagnuoli [or Spagnolo] Mantuanus [of Mantua], 1448-1516), Carmelite monk, whose *Georgius* was widely published in the original Latin (first edition: Milan, 1507) and Englished in “rhyme royal” as *The Lyfe of Saynt George* (circa 1515) by Alexander Barclay (Scottish, [?]1475-1552), an authority on the wickedness of heathen idols and their worshippers (as well as on the taintless moral purity of George).

***** Edmund Spenser (c. 1552-1599), whose *Faerie Queene*, Booke One (1590): *The Legende of the Knight of the Red Crosse, or of Holinesse*, took Jacobus’s (and, presumably, also Mantuan’s) reading of George’s dragon-slaying virtue to rare heights of pious detail.

***** Everybody Else.

Poetis Personae

- **Professor Pierce Plowman** (of little or no relation, by the way, to “Long Will” Langland’s saintly farmer, whose name is spelled differently anyhow), a disreputable and irreverent, though compassionate, scholar of mythology addicted to (among other things), beauty, truth, and the pursuit of contemptible over-zealous, sanctimonious bigots, one of whom he knows our George to be and whom he is zealously determined to deter from piercing with his ever-ready lance the much maligned and misunderstood dragon.

- The much-maligned and misunderstood **dragon**, pursued (ever since the 13th century) by the reputable, glamorous, and sanctimonious “George of Cappadocia” [and elsewhere] who, it turns out, looks *a good bit* like our Pierce.

III. Notes, Section C: Original Prefatory Inscriptions (and other notes) to the Poems, *continued*

- **St. George of Cappadocia**, the above cad whose name (*Georgios*) just happens to derive from the Greek for “Plowman” (*Georgos*), and who, curiously, is never found on stage simultaneously with his, well, adversary.
- The beautiful, rich, and inordinately available **Princess Cleo** (filling in for the flagrantly truant Clio, Muse of History), a basically good muse who sees Pierce for whom he really is (and helps *him* to see it too).
- **Archibald Imago** (not to be confused with Spenser’s Archimago), the inscrutable and seemingly unscrupulous antiques dealer who becomes identified in the mind of our hero with an incarnation of our author within his own text and who may be seen to be responsible for launching said hero on this, his quest for..., well, as in all true quests, ultimately...HIMSELF.

Dedication*To my dear son**Daniel David Borodin**A great lover of truth and rhyme**(As well as dragons, way back when this poem was begun)**I dedicate this most unconventional, heretically skeptical, epic**In the hope that with his reason, heart, and ear**He may transcend the dangerous complacencies of**Ignorance, intolerance, and fear.***Dedicatory Sonnet***For My Son, Daniel David Borodin, Age 5 ½**(At the time this epic was begun).***[Sonnet #107, *A Bad Dream Sonnet***

Text on p. 133, above]

III. Notes, Section C: Original Prefatory Inscriptions (and other notes) to the Poems, *continued***Two General Notes Concerning *Chasing George***

General Note #1: This poem also consciously parodies Shelly's immortal sonnet *Ozymandias* (1818), the first line of which reads: "I met a traveler from an antique land," a line that casts its shadow over our epic's first line as follows: "I met a dealer in an antique shop," said parody intending to reflect the thematic importance of Shelly's great poem to the worldview of the subject one.

General Note #2: One might notice that the numbering of stanzas to Book III of this poem (pp. 271-78) seems corrupted by cancellations and replacements from the second stanza onward. This was done intentionally in an attempt to suggest the hand of an extra-narrational authority (in something of the sense of what Hugh Kenner refers to as "The Arranger" at work in Joyce's *Ulysses*). Despite these *purported* deletions, therefore, Book III, like all 23 of the other "books" of this poem, yields 24 stanzas.

A Note in General Regarding the Book as a Whole

Page numbers found in the tables of contents on pp. 3-9, with only a couple exceptions, refer to the page on which the poem actually begins, as opposed to a page on which merely the title is stated. The reason for my occasional use of this latter type of page is merely my wish to maintain the printer's tradition of beginning any new work of multi-page length upon an odd-numbered page (so that it begins on the right-hand side of an open spread rather than that of the left). Therefore, in a few instances, I found myself needing to insert a spacer-page in order to use up any even-numbered pages on which those works would have otherwise begun, all rather than just leaving unsightly blank pages interspersed throughout the book. (An obvious exception to this practice is my treatment of *Hope in None but You*, which I believe to be more effectively shown as a full spread.)

IV. Collation

(Anatomy of Forms and Stanza Types Employed in the Poems, with Line Count)

As of the subject edition (identified by date **10.24.25** in the header as well as, specifically, on the title page [p. 2] and colophon [p. 544]), the complete published verse includes a total of **8,348 lines** (of which a little more than 40 percent is comprised by the epic poem, *Chasing George*), comprising:

- a.) **One Hundred and Thirty-Three Sonnets**, totaling **1,865 lines** in all, comprising 133 sonnets of “English,” or “Shakespearean” type (as opposed to the original Italian model typically called “Petrarchan”) of fourteen-line* iambic pentameter (*excepting only two—sonnets 37, 89, and 90—which are “caudate” sonnets, and therefore, tail-like, include an extra [15th] line);

- b.) **Fourteen Longer Poems**, totaling **6,483 lines** in all, comprising the following:
 - 1.) **19 lines** in *Just Change Your Woman* (cast in six 3-line pentameter stanzas);

 - 2.) **40 lines** in *Hope in None but You* (cast in eight 5-line pentameter stanzas);

 - 3.) **60 lines** in *Love’s Banquet* (cast in ten sixains of “Venus & Adonis” Stanza);

 - 4.) **81 lines** in *Ode to a Nightgown* (cast in nine 9-line pentameter stanzas);

IV. Collation, *continued*

- 5.) **95 lines** in *Darwin's Islands* (cast in nineteen 5-line pentameter stanzas);
- 6.) **96 lines** in *Hail Muse!, Etc.* (cast in twelve 8-line pentameter stanzas);
- 7.) **100 lines** in *The Woman Who Could Raise Four Kids with One Hand* (cast in twenty-five 4-line pentameter stanzas);
- 8.) **120 lines** in *Epithalamium* cast in twelve 10-line pentameter stanzas);
- 9.) **144 lines** in *My Muse is Out of Control* (cast in twenty-four 6-line **tetrameter** stanzas);
- 10) **162 Lines** in *The Man Who Followed His Dreams* (cast in forty pentameter quatrains [the last of which having been augmented with a two-line cadential tail]);
- 11.) **168 lines** in *The Bougainvilleas of Sonora* (cast in couplets gathered in a dozen 14-line, sonnet-shaped, pentameter stanzas);
- 12.) **242 Lines** in *The Ballad of Dauntless Dorothy* (cast in forty 6-line stanzas of alternating tetrameter and trimeter lines [i.e., in sestet-ballad stanza], together with a two-line coda to the last);
- 13.) **700 Lines** in *The Parliament of Foul Ideas* (cast in one hundred 7-line pentameter stanzas [of "rhyme royal" type]);
- 14.) **1,000 Lines** in *On the Nature of Things...As They Seem* (a didactic poem in stichic form cast in joined elegiac quatrains);

IV. Collation, *continued*

14.) **3,456 lines** in *Chasing George* (an epic poem cast in five hundred and seventy-six 6-line pentameter stanzas of so-called *Venus and Adonis stanza* [i.e., an “heroic” quatrain terminating in an “heroic” couplet]).

Collected Poems

David Borodin

[Edition 10.24.25]

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(*The poems in this book were composed (and first published with copyright notice by me) between January 1, 1996 and October 24, 2025, as **individually indicated in the notes for them on pp. 502-40**, with undated revisions to many of them along the way. The above copyright date of 2025, therefore, reflects the composition of the most recent poems, but also any of the many ongoing revisions of earlier poems undergone in between my annual re-publication of this collection. In this sense the copyright is understood to encompass this whole period of January 1, 1996 through October 24, 2025.

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[**Note:** See p. 2 for the full title page with copyright and illustration details.]

[**Note #2:** *Collected Prose* [by] **David Borodin**, a companion volume to the subject one, but containing only essays, lectures, and fiction, is also available in hardcopy. A PDF of this 496-page volume is available for reading (only) on my website as well as individual PDFs of most of the components of that volume. These include: a.) my book-length essay, *The Dangers of Sentimentality*; b.) my two cognitive science essays for publication in books by Professor Allan Hobson; c.) three essays pertaining to the works of James Joyce; d.) a political essay on the Senate vote of February 13, 2021 (regarding January 6th); e.) two professional lectures on the art market; f.) my novella, *Creation Lost*; and g.) and my short story, *A Beautiful Death*.]

This book is set almost exclusively in *Book Antiqua* (by Monotype Imaging Holdings, Inc.), a renaissance-style serif typeface based closely on *Palatino*, a design by the celebrated 20th-century German type designer/ calligrapher Hermann Zapf (1918-2015), circa 1948 (released in 1949 by D. Stempel AG of Frankfurt am Main) and named after the 16th-century Italian calligrapher Giovanni Battista Palatino (c. 1515-75). Previous editions of the subject book were cast almost exclusively in the aforementioned *Palatino* until August of 2021, when this font was found to no longer support the ability to employ bold without italics.

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