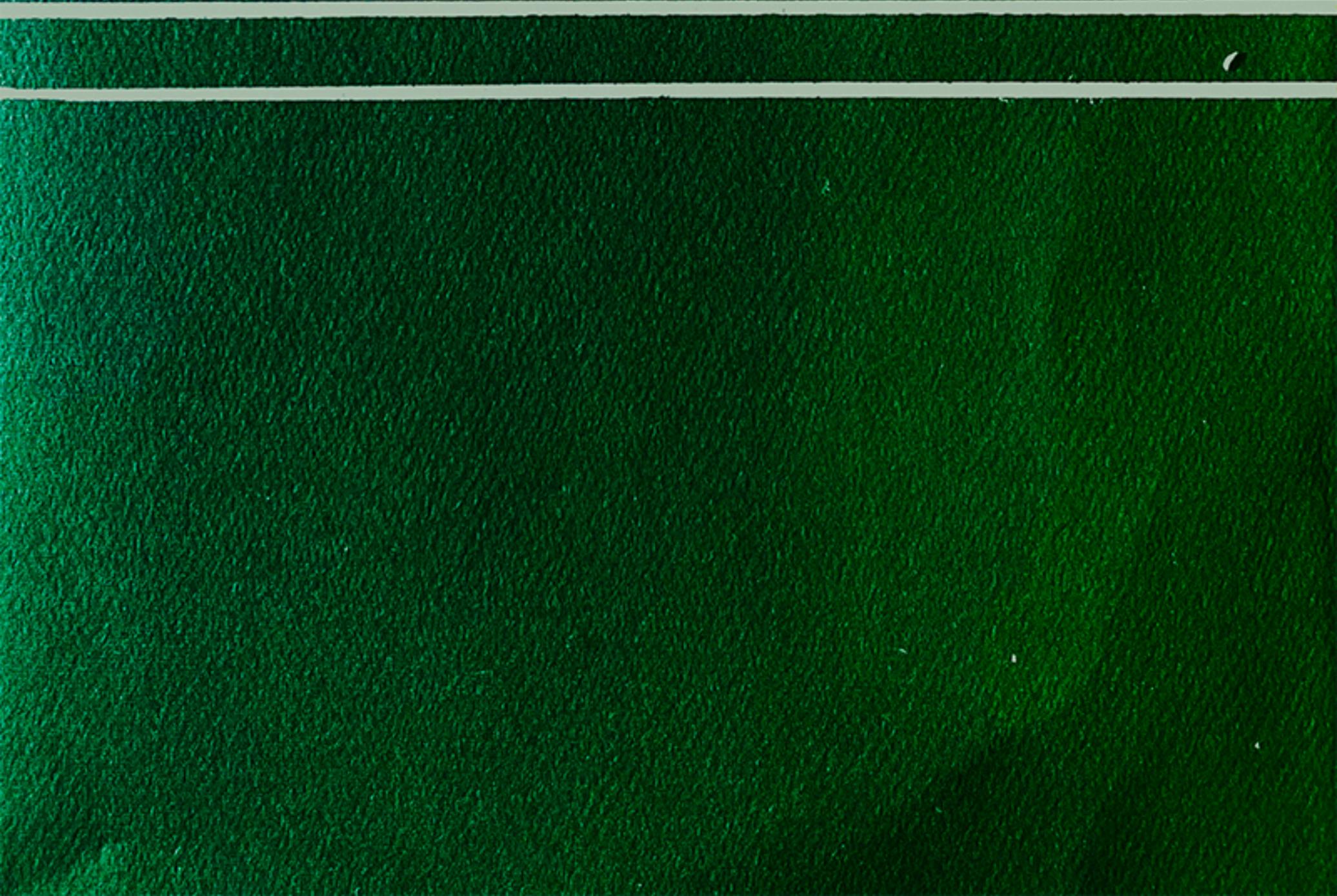
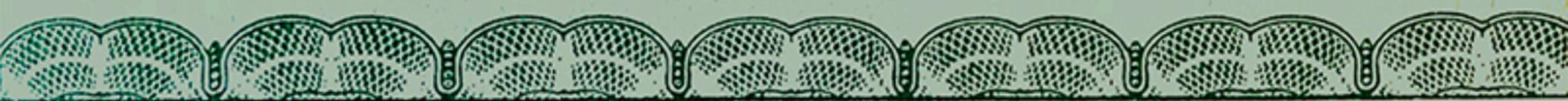


THOMAS F. SHEEHAN

THE  
SAUGUS BOOK



**THE SAUGUS BOOK**

Also by this Author:

*Ah, Devon Unbowed*

# THE SAUGUS BOOK

By  
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*For Beth*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The intent of this book is to provide its readers with the widest range of my feelings for Saugus and its people, my family and neighbors and friends. To that end I have taken the liberty of using poems published in magazines, previous collections of poetry, and from other manuscripts which have risen from different reasons or projects, such as *Elements and Accessories*, *This Rare Earth and Other Flights II*, *Python Hunting in Pennsylvania*, *All Earth and Time*, and *Jock Poems for Proper Bostonians*.

I acknowledge the following magazines or periodicals which have included some of my poems in these or earlier versions:

*Louisville Review*: "Hill of the Blue Goose"

*Softball*: "Once Screamed to the Flag-Waving  
Drunks at the Vets Bar"

*Poetry Newsletter*: "Log Cutting, Queen Ant  
Burial"

*Calliope*: "April Storm" ("Storm on the Saugus")

*Long Pond Review*: "Two License, Wyoming,"  
"Where the Last Star Went"

*Poetry Now*: "Before Fishing, #10 Can"

*Stone Country*: "Beneath Vines and Peach Tree, A  
Neighbor's Ashes," "Streetlight"

*New Kauri*: "Remnants"

*The Old Red Kimono*: "Touchstone"

*The Poet*: "It's All in How You Place the Commas"

*New England Sampler*: "A Choice of Neighbors"



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## PREFACE

This has been a rich visit for me, passing through Saugus on my way to wherever. Some moments have been so impressive they come back to me daily, pushing their way with pictures so clear and graphic that words fail and seem insignificant, yet words are my adventure: skating on Lily Pond while skipping school and Bucky Sawyer buzzing the pond with his navy plane, Friday evenings at the State Theater, Saturday afternoon at the end of Summer Street and October in the air, clamming and worming on the tidal flats, picking beans for ten cents an hour where Milano Drive now flats out, John Mullins and Al Day, Mike Harrington and Ed Shipulski more heroes than Superman, Pop Warner meetings in Jack Warren's greenhouse, coming home from Korea and walking alone through the center of town, the night Fred Rippon's mushroom house went up in sparks that found Lynnhurst gutters, fishing trip planning meetings at Ed LeBlanc's house with side trips to MacCarrier's, the comfort of children being overhead on nights when I am at this infernal machine, friends who have sense to visit when they feel like it, even friends who don't, finding secrets on Baker Hill, Dan Shanahan and Mike Hood bringing poems and voices by, spaghetti meals at the Forti's and Ernie serving half a serving of Greek sausage, Charlie Hecht's outdoor dance pavilion, Warnie's Cafe, reading comic books behind the door in Morrison's Drug Store at the corner of Smith Road, wondering what has happened with Donald Gearty and Edson Eisan and Dick Allen, leaving town in car pools with Nick and Robbie and Ray and, always, Eddie LeBlanc.

All of this is a love affair. I have pursued her endlessly and will to the last moment. In the meantime, I leave these words that follow to be a collection of thoughts, one person passing through on Route One, on Central Street, or the side streets where I have walked under the moon thinking about all of you.

**THE SAUGUS BOOK**



## SIGN ON A WALL

The dough board, oblique,  
worn to a frazzle, now hangs  
in the cellar way. Knuckles  
of love soft shoe across it.

Like a fallow field it lies,  
twenty years since my mother  
powdered and rolled the dough  
into its grain, beginning bread.

Her hands, white-knuckled,  
went board to dough to fore-  
head to the plain blue apron  
smelling of rolls, haitch

bones, sweat and anxiety.  
She struggled great breads  
out of its surface, morning  
fried dough sizzling in oil,

a sure birthday cake three  
tiers tall on special days,  
and wrung from its grainery  
pains and aches and tired

bones, migraine's soft thunder,  
age, a shot at infirmity.  
That old board, edges like  
fingers, hangs awry on a nail

my father drove to catch a jacket;  
if I bang it hard enough, fisted,  
belligerent about recall, a small  
cloud of powder floats her love.

## THE SAUGUS

### 1.

The river here  
heaves up on the bank  
like an old man getting into bed.  
Birds cry downstream.  
A gull perfects a theft,  
executes a drastic turn in air  
that could break bones.  
I do my walks  
dutied like perimeter guard,  
shoulder walking cudgel  
the way I carried a carbine  
back there at 23,  
know the pound of it to the ounce;  
knowledge of the scabbard hangs on.  
I'd rather the river  
and the tired water's run  
as 52 years hang on like an empty canteen.  
Nothing's like a river's  
to and fro against the sea,  
tide-wash, catch of kelp, air sting  
full of the sea's salad's smells,  
perpetual anger, always earth dig,  
sand-flush and rock-wear, drag on the moon,  
where ship ghosts and canvas call.  
The river's never lonely;  
dancing grass by bank and levee  
keep nests of redwing blackbirds  
hidden away like keys in a pocketbook,

has scum of illegal drain, used rubbers,  
cat-o-nines high and proud as Fourth of July  
rockets ready for the finale match to strike,  
rats waiting for the ultimate revolution,  
artifacts of time like Ford fenders, Chevy wheels,  
down behind the minister's house where the slope  
is steep and you don't have to work hard to belabor  
a river that's been hard at living for longer than us.

2.

I measure all the contributors  
the Saugus has from here to the sea,  
the computer cops say garbage in garbage out:  
and I think the birds die,  
the river dies, bank grass gets burned  
without flame ever on the make,  
silt is sludge of tune-up residue,  
dance of dark foam makes images  
needing little imagination.  
The mill turns its back  
when the chemicals burn even the spigot,  
the landfill the contractor brazened out  
is sour where fish hesitate to cast their lot,  
the service station leaks into the underground  
where roots linger and grease takes its time,  
neighbor gives his gifts in direct pipe drop,  
turns his back like the mill does,  
pretends he doesn't hurt the Saugus.

3.

My Saugus hurts.  
The trout have gone,  
birds move away from oily contributions,  
people pass by and don't know the river's terror,  
and that hurts more than all.

4.

Some nights,  
grant me the mystic choice  
when the wind's blowing out to sea  
and I am on my perimeter walk at river bank,  
there's no other joy. Upriver comes down,  
pasture and field fall on me, the woodland walks,  
new cut hay hurries itself, a new salad of smell;  
porcupine and rabbit and deer and such merry folk  
of talk and tale crown the river air, give hope,  
ride over me, say river does not die.

5.

Everything smells here.  
Going away. Losing. Six o'clock on Friday.  
Monday departure for work. Wood choppers.  
Police escort and ambulance. Town Hall offices.  
Riverside Cemetery in May like popcorn.  
Not having enough money at the checkout counter  
(and hardly enough food).  
A deep breath any place on the Turnpike.  
The Park Press halfway burned down.

The men's room in McCarrier's.  
The Tumble Inn Diner at six Monday morning.  
Any doctor's waiting room. MBTA buses.  
People who don't believe me. Viet Nam veterans  
because of their eyes. The whole town the night  
the Odd Fellows Hall burned right to the bricks.  
The VFW carnival. Pop Warner refreshment stands.  
SHS locker room for a thousand years.  
Back rooms and back doors at nursing homes.  
But most of all the river smells.

6.

We speak of alternatives.  
I know of none for river place.  
Have seen upriver dredging fall away  
to politics and budget stress.  
But in the bottom of my tackle box,  
having worn hook and worm and salmon egg,  
lies a picture of the 17 incher from years ago.

Now I wait for the crystal dream, the flow  
of white waters, earth being lapped clean  
the whole sing-song length of banks,  
a flashing beneath arching alders  
as boulders ease in their washing,  
as the bones of the old river  
come up like trail-skulls,  
and trout find their memories  
ripe and turbulent and explosive  
all down the river's curves.

## THE BUCKETS OF THESE TREES

The buckets of these trees  
empty themselves.  
Falling down in parabolas  
and ellipses of flight,  
spilled contents give their names  
over and over again  
into a gray day:  
hands of maple,  
gloves of oak.

October morning  
punctuates my neckline,  
snow hides in clouds  
dark as overcoats  
hanging in a Victorian  
hallway.

The neighbor's dog Barney  
howls a tail-up cry  
piercing as a whistle,  
wolfish. An awful loneliness,  
it dissolves and resumes  
itself in an old echo  
reaching down-range,  
an alert up-hill.

Every act is a message;  
trees letting go,  
the leash law

in October crowding winter,  
a dog talking  
over his shoulder  
to a vision seeded  
in his head: a fleeting  
gray form, head low,  
running in the snow;  
in the air a scent  
thin as hunger,  
faint as tomorrow.

Behind my eyes  
white fields  
grow innumerable distances,  
even as the buckets empty,  
the long high cry of a dog  
mixes in the slate air,  
leaves start into the earth again.

## TOUCHSTONE

The cemetery becomes pages  
of a book, a paperback

with gray leaves October finds.  
Fires are not likely to start here.

Searchlights find no one.  
Candles go to waste.

Names pass like faces in a crowd.  
Dates measure measureless beings.

A star, westward, over hill, bright,  
is not seen by these citizens.

Nor dim violet. Nor dread daisies  
on the skilled keeper's lawn.

My father's face is grass.  
He is endless intruder

and raps on the underside  
of one harsh stone,

raps and raps and raps.  
His knuckles were always hard.

## SAUGUS TYPEWRITER COMPANY

The line does not sit right  
or even or straight.  
The decal has been mishandled.

But then, Central Street  
is hardly straight, it bends  
six times between Cliftondale

and Walnut Street where General  
Electric goes to work. I ply  
my way twenty two miles

across Wakefield and Reading  
to find West Andover, comrades,  
fellows in arms, hoppers, dreamers,

hard doers, practitioners,  
fakers, well-doners, workers,  
nothing different than here.

Someone applied the label wrong,  
here where I spend my nights;  
carelessly tacked the decal

slovenly, where it sits like an egg  
waiting to fall from the roost,  
a distracting bit of advice

that nothing is ever right,  
never mind perfect, in this scheme  
of things, this pasttime.

Measurements are difficult  
to say the least, they suffer  
from illusions, eye shadows, realities.

Poems become and then misbehave,  
become frail on the typewriter,  
find erring accents and syllables

just as uneven as the label above,  
tilted away from the norm,  
the way an author's signature falls

across the bottom emptiness  
of his finished page.

## LISTENING TO IMPERATIVES

In mid air the house hangs,  
a cloud of visions, a movie screen.  
My father left his hammer  
arrested on a nail by the door.  
Sweat and blood rust into wood.

Trees are silent,  
the wind is final

Where my brother stopped, water  
talks its mouth off. His room  
suffers with souvenirs. I remind  
myself of last hands. Sunday  
of another week he wore his best.

No stone is marked.  
His death is naked.  
Silver screen's Lake Erie blue.

I walk a clean April all around  
this scant scenario. December's  
tougher, more laciniate, found at  
ankles and the back of the neck.  
Sometimes the house makes up its

own mind, topples, is  
shivered into Spring.  
Hurts for warm nights.  
Has a secret room, a heart.

Star-gaze seeps on its walls,  
Moon-push crawls cotton candied,  
spills rich as headdresses, crowns,  
the auras we thought we wore.  
The eyes' acceptance falls out windows.

My mother sings a fork, a spoon,  
a room heavy with dishes, din,  
winter of my brother's fist,  
the echo of a separate ache.

Where father wanders, my son falls.  
He trips over his own coming. The path  
is the minutae of rabbit tracks  
that go past commotion's impress,  
patter of paws, heart upheaving.

He continually falls into himself  
and lets my father work through  
his bones. A triangle is such  
a matter of strangers, flesh  
falls away like old clapboards.

I wake myself; bright son  
across the earth, awakens.  
My father, in acreage  
bland as all Tuesdays,  
learns his simple endeavor.

The house says little but his name.  
When October rushes in the door  
he hides his voice in a closet.  
It rolls around in a wooden drum  
at the fingertips of darkness.

He happens in cellar airs  
as the lathe sweats up  
its circular music.  
His business sings itself.  
Fieldstones ache under sills,  
centuries are transparent.

Elbows press hard on my chest.  
Old red shirt fills with father  
and my son searching himself out  
an ocean away where sequoias  
bring hush to its soft knees.

What we have is space  
without miles that make it,  
the clutter of a trinity  
fabling its flesh,  
just an ordinary crowd  
of three generations  
laboring against dispersal.

We were all born here, leaped  
to brim the daylight, drove  
nails to hold bone and beam,  
listened to October on tight feet  
rushing up stairs, overhead.

We are elastic visions.  
What we occupy is measureless.  
Someday, for keeping  
like the worn pleats  
of mother's last apron,  
an October will fold away  
all these moments of film.

## APPLE PEOPLE

*(Saugus Center, Saturday, October)*

Their faces blaze as ruddy suns,  
apple people at our mid-town,  
Saturday morning runabouts.  
They make brisk moves for papers,  
hurry quickly to hang about  
the barbershop and the chinning,  
are drawn by bakery's auras,  
like bright magnets on the air.

Jim the barber is Octobered;  
complexion of a MacIntosh,  
tongue with quick cider's irony,  
his hands upon the golden breath  
the way crisp maple leaves take off  
from their last appointed places,  
wings upon the apple morning,  
full of expression's measurements.

In a side yard still set in shade,  
the sun behind a dormer yet,  
pieces of night nearly AWOL  
in the clutter of shrubbery,  
a man turns pink at his yard sale  
when a woman questions his wares,  
and she too reddens when she buys  
the very goods she argued on.

George, who deals in news reports,  
who walks darkly to commerce door,  
who hefts the Globes still tied in wire  
and waves to darkness (someone's there  
to check the point spread and outcome),  
whistles when on Vinegar Hill  
the sun goes incendiary  
and a church steeple turns to fire.

A servant in a uniform,  
custodian of night-long peace,  
midwife, Indianapolis  
driver, paper pusher, court man,  
eases red-faced out of night,  
seeks coffee, a civilized tongue,  
a pair of eyes which sees the day  
for what it is, a beginning.

At the curb stone, at the bus stop,  
where transportation drops the names  
of corporate entities,  
like Hart Bus Lines, Rapid Transit,  
Eastern Mass. and the M.T.A.,  
a nurse rolls her dreams into dawn  
and a welder envisions her  
as if his dream is overcome

Apple mornings fathom themselves  
when Saugus Center goes to red,  
when her people take on daylight,  
promise leaps from October,  
from fields, from old Penney Orchards,  
from sun, from moon, from fading stars  
and realize the visible—  
Red Delicious, Cortland, MacIntosh.

## HILL OF THE BLUE GOOSE

The hill  
steals lightning,  
sees Boston stand up  
after catching a haymaker,  
this morning caught geese  
like runaway shoes, tongue screech,  
traffic cop calls and winter  
ticket stub lost in a pocket;  
has mirrors of yesterday's thighs  
the moon of the seventh of July  
of our lord of 'forty-five  
touched with its butter,  
shows her inclined to me  
and the tilt of hill.

Her thighs still count the thrust.

### 2

The cops  
broke up a card game  
on the left shoulder, toward the river  
and West Lynn, in 'thirty-nine;  
the pot's never surfaced.  
Now a spectre in tight pants  
sells angel dust, gives  
green stamps.  
Has new options on street war:  
use hammers, screwdrivers, no sunlight.  
Night kisses the hill with lonely.

Do not be lured there.  
No pig in a poke.

3

Has anyone seen  
Frank Parkinson lately,  
meant to die outside Tobruk  
in the mutilating horrors of the sands,  
but didn't? Hangs on the hill  
like cloud root, spills images,  
has literate left hand,  
flies with the awesome geese.  
oh, Frankie!

4

Throws hill shadow  
ominous as dice toss,  
a family's left a photograph  
in a friend's scrapbook  
in a trunk in a cellar  
in the thrown shadow.  
Nothing else. No dandruff.  
No acne. No evidence of being.  
Gone off the waterfall of time.  
Nobody remembers they were here  
halfway up the hill once.

5

Lone blue goose,  
tandemless,  
no fore and aft,

plunges over, cries high noon  
of search, drags feathers,  
drops the quick flutter  
of a shadow. Poem stops.  
Starts.

6

Hill has transport.  
Pieces left in Hwachon Valley  
in the Iron Triangle. In Verdun.  
On the Ho Chi Min Trail. Waters  
near the Marshall Islands. Sitka.  
In flecks of blood aged in Walpole cell.  
An unmarked grave in a dead town in Iowa.  
Almost near Tobruk. Parkie's too tough  
for Krauts, shrapnel's conversion to flesh,  
booze, cancer, rolled over cars  
giving off laughter, snowstorms  
going like wild pinball games,  
bad dreams with real smells a listener  
can touch; all of them, almost.

The blue goose  
throws down a quick shadow.  
I hear the high noon call  
at night.

7

The terrors near Tobruk  
are as hard to shake as nicknames.  
Beaver. 39 Stone. Maude's Jake.

Sinagna. Dropkick. Snakeeyes.  
Automatic Brown. The Indian,  
who fell near Tobruk, arose, moved the stone,  
gave his voice  
to the blue goose.  
High noon call at night.

He gave up his pain forever;  
how he lives so long  
the hill sings.

8

Steals lightning.  
Spies on Boston, Hancock glass face.  
Sees the ocean die close in-shore.  
Gives up the moon. Throws trees down  
to hungry flame. Wears the shadow  
of the blue goose.  
Watches my poem  
stop.

**ABSOLUTION**  
*(For Hugh Menzies)*

You think I don't remember you,  
(your nose was red, ears outsized)  
(you moved lanky in your lanky way)  
(you had blue eyes, your cheeks red)

(in front of the State Theater on Sat-  
urday matinees you towered over us)  
but I do remember you, Hughie, I do.  
(Your hair was tall in front, dark;

your arms were long, your nose English  
like mine's Irish but mostly for word music)  
(you wore dark blue denim dungarees)  
(once you wore a jacket with red sleeves)

(You didn't skate with us, but I remember  
your picking leaves, watching the sun  
fall all the way through the filaments)  
(I saw you Saturdays, later on, watching

us play football at the stadium) Then,  
the way time plays tricks on all of us,  
we were half way across the world in Asia,  
carrying carbines and M-1's in the Land

of the Morning Sun. That sun set on you,  
Hughie, but I walked out of the same hole.  
Each morning now, on my way to work,  
the shells sound, the infiltrator eyes me,

the land mine sits like a maimed turtle  
in my path, the clouds grow darker,  
the rain becomes a yellow madness,  
the earth opens its other arms,

and your name flies its black letters  
on a gray cast iron sign in East Saugus.  
Once, when I was late for work, snow  
on the hillside, I saw flowers on the pole.

I keep wondering for you, Hughie,  
who put out the flowers in January?  
Is there a friend with a long memory?  
A girl who dreams? Did you visit?

## ROOTING

The touch  
becomes us.

The sun  
passes through  
a stone in my fingers  
for the third time,  
but once in this  
millennium.

Part Saugus.  
Part Earth.  
Part Star.

The next passage  
is the maelstrom.

I choose it to be  
not of our  
making.

## A CHOICE OF NEIGHBORS

Men in gray T shirts  
strip out neighbor's house  
across the street.

Fire began the tearing down;  
greedily inside walls it went  
like children's fingers in a sugar bowl,

or two-hand clutch of candy bar  
squeezing a coat of charcoal  
around sills, up beam shanks.

Slowly as a chucked-down drill  
his ashes penetrated earth  
and catacomb of seed.

Fire begins anew,  
flameless, in the flues  
of young roots.

It is better this way.  
The first-born tree will lift  
his red October arms again,

and the wind will walk  
the airy rooms  
roofless.

## CAROM

Eddie Smiledge  
was the house man,  
racked the balls,  
collected coin,  
was a judge  
with a hundred  
dollar bill  
in the side pocket.

He smoked cigars  
thick as cue sticks,  
ate Baby Ruths  
until his teeth stuck,  
sent us home abruptly  
when our eyes became hazy  
or midnight slipped  
like a footpad  
over the green felt  
on table No. 4.

He did not lend us  
money, but let the clock  
work in our favor;  
at a nickel a game  
he didn't see the eight  
ball eight times  
in the side pocket,  
and forgot to lock away  
all the nickel bags  
of potato chips.

One night we played  
One-Ball-In-The-Side-  
Pocket past closing  
and Eddie sat in a corner  
waving off the game costs.  
We walked off under  
a September moon  
all the way to Korea.

The night I came back,  
chevrons up and down,  
deep new wrinkles  
struck across my face,  
measureless but valid,  
reaching for my yesteryear,  
a skinny bald-headed man  
was racking the balls.

He didn't know my name,  
who was home and who wasn't,  
why Eddie Smiledge had  
drifted off someplace  
the day after we left.

## CELEBRATION

*(For Thomas Jr.)*

The night you were born,  
light, in innumerable collections,  
gathered on forgotten stones,  
blazed rudely a fallen insulator  
whose wood had lost its touch,  
went chaotic in dark puddles  
nearly awed by the wind  
trailing northern geese.

Even before dawn's gray lanterns  
threw somber cool refinements  
like an old priest at benediction,  
thick ruby bottles beside my path  
shook candles from the wineside out.  
I should have read the signs  
bright as the zodiac,  
spectrum's clutch letting go,  
for now you spread on canvas  
all the calibres of the sun.

At gray ledges of another day,  
sharp corners of morning's shoulders,  
I amend that cool night  
each time blue surfaces, red cries  
hot as lava in its slow rush,  
and new green falls like seeds  
from your palette and your brush.

## WHERE THE LAST STAR WENT

*(For Daryll Koolian)*

Midnight leans over itself  
nearly silent, only the sounds  
old stars make passing on  
their witness of once being here.

Today the ants were mining  
an old shoe at the trash pile;  
I assume they are yet plying  
their colonial energies

in that dark dominion and seat,  
that mutable territory.

Often when we listen we hear  
just skeletons, mobiles in wind,

our lives tinkling a faint music,  
faint as a dead and distant star.  
This day another shadow passed  
in the shadows my eyes possess.

It was yours, Daryll, at labor,  
going down in a deadly ditch,  
what you had thrown out by shovel  
coming hard down on your last cry.

I think you a warrior, bent  
under the battle of your task;  
your armor, your heart and hands;  
your medallion, Mother Earth.

I do not recall you good at knots  
or making camp or trailblazing  
or how many merit badges  
have gone silently like the stars

into cluttered oblivion,  
but I remember how you smiled,  
how campfires leaped lightly  
in your eyes, where the last star went.

## ONCE SCREAMED TO THE FLAG WAVING DRUNKS AT THE VETS BAR

Listen, gunmen,  
all I can smell is the gunpowder  
on you sharper than booze.  
You wear your clothes  
with a touch of muzzle flash.

Is it a story you want....?  
listen to the years ago,  
to the no shooting,  
to the no rout,  
to the just dying.

The day stank  
it wore scabs, had odors  
to choke tissues and burn  
secret laminations of the lungs.  
Rain festered in soot clouds,  
rose in the Pacific  
or the Sea of Japan,  
dumped down on us,  
came up out of yellow clay  
like a sore letting out.

The air  
must have been full of bats,  
of spider weavings;  
it was lonely as the lobo,

yet a jungle of minds  
filled it with thought leaves  
shining with black onyx.

Who needs doctors at dying....?  
prayers sew wounds,  
piece heads, hearts, hands together,  
when blood and clay  
strike the same irrevocable vein,  
arterial mush;  
when God is the earth and clay,  
silence,  
the animal taker leaning to grasp.

Listen, gunmen,  
listen you heroes in mirrors  
only you see into, we through,  
it isn't the killing,  
it's the dying must be felt,  
associated,  
even if it stinks.

Blood freezes in hot days of dying,  
is icicle inside movement of trickery  
less than glacier's,  
where a man crawls to his maker  
up his own veins,  
is touched,  
feels the firebrand  
burn in the cold.

Where are the shade trees,  
cool drinks....?  
once I froze in the confessional  
against the fire.

He was a Spick,  
they said,  
washed his deep skin too much,  
wanted to sandpaper it white,  
be us, be another man.

But we wagered ourselves  
to get him out of a minefield  
live as breathing,  
comrade shot down in the clay  
in the rain in the time of bright eyes  
rolling with the thunder of fear.

Was it him we carried,  
or the stone of his monument?  
Tons he was of responsibility;  
one of us despite the Spick name,  
man being borne to die.

God is everywhere,  
the catechism says, my son says,  
now, years later.  
It was once a divinity we carried  
on the poles,  
with his balls gone pistonless,  
no more a god to his woman.

The image rolled red on the canvas,  
burned through the handles of the litter  
as secret as electricity;  
Spick shooting himself into us,  
Godhead shooting signs up shafts of wood.

Lugging god  
on sticks and canvas  
is frightening,  
we felt this.  
Jesus! we screamed,  
have You let go of this god?  
Do You fill him up making him burn our hands?  
He wanders now for times,  
rolling himself together,  
womanless, childless,  
a journey in dark trees, among leaves  
in jungles, to get near You.

God seeking God  
at the intercept of shrapnel.  
The tearing down and lifting up  
by our hands.  
God in the cement  
of death.

Oh, gunmen,  
it's the dying,  
not the killing,  
you must speak.

This day is theirs, not ours,  
belongs to the gods of the dead,  
of the Spick we carried to his dying,  
and all of his brothers,  
none of them here among us.

Drink, gunmen,  
one to the Spick and grave's companions,  
jungle flights they are in  
to match their god with God.

And think, gunmen,  
who of us have the longest journey  
among leaves, in darkness,  
through the spiders of trees,  
now?

## WHENCE LILY POND

November leans  
on the water,

and the wind's  
a hooded skater

across the glaze.  
At night,

from shore to shore,  
the ice rumbles

in cannon cracks.  
The white field

is put down in the black woods

and an owl  
questions who walks

under his high retreat.  
I see a star

triangulate his eyes,  
and the long thin voice

of emptiness  
fall down through trees.

My boots, my sleepless  
bed, have brought me here

to hike about the pond,  
to know the rejoice of discomfort,

to walk on water,  
to be the godlike promise.

## THE MILK WAGON

*(For James)*

When cars had hard fenders,  
walking wasn't preached  
for your health, bread  
was nine cents a loaf;

when iron-rimmed wheels  
of a milk wagon  
on wet cobblestones  
rattled the windows

of the dawn gray house;  
when thick-shod hooves  
went about igniting sparks,  
you told me horse stories.

All those mornings there were  
gallant sixteen hand Arabs,  
Appaloosas after apples,  
Paints Brown on a great white

stallion fixed with purple eyes,  
the old gray that Theophile  
down Canada sold six times  
(twice to the same farmer!).

Whispering those yarns,  
lest five sisters would hear,  
you froze me into pillows,  
filled my head with hoofbeats,

sent me trotting, galloping  
ahead of dust, echoing bridges,  
to tortures of high trails,  
downhilling good as Gurkhas.

The wagon horse went to dogs.  
The wood went back underground.  
The iron rims are bulkheads still  
rusting on a Japanese destroyer.

You rode a four-pronged terror  
into Lake Erie in mad January.  
Mad January has no echoes.  
In May I hear hoofbeats clapping

down the morning damp gray street,  
hear iron work stone into quick  
arcs the eye can barely see,  
softly hear you call me to stable.

## LOG CUTTING, QUEEN ANT BURIAL

I have brought these trees  
almost to a final  
dimension, the two brick  
span of my flue.

And from the shatter  
of one oak wedge  
I spilled a home  
of carpenter ants  
thick as blueberry pie.

Black guard legionnaires,  
in a frenzy  
of revolutions,  
merry-go-rounded  
about the queen.

She was the eye  
of a small universe,  
a little storm;  
thick as my thumb,  
she trailed out  
two gossamer capes  
like gauze hackles  
of a trout fly.

I shoveled her,  
her lovers, her sons,  
her terrorist henchmen,  
into a green bag.

Underground at the town dump  
they start out again,  
tunnelling up through  
a plastic vault,  
looking for the root  
of a home, a simple  
cavernous boudoir  
for a dark progenitor.

## CONCESSION TO WOOD

*(For Jamie)*

What is heard as ankle deep  
bites of an ax is my son  
tossing a ball at the end  
of the house, past the garage  
quiet as an empty box  
this April day before grass  
begins its perennial  
struggle through last year's leavings.

Only an hour ago we  
found a last handful of snow,  
but a mischievous toadstool  
playing hide and seek with spring,  
beneath our quarry of leaves  
scattered about like small talk.

In a last act of winter,  
or spring's prime, for the matter,  
he first molded it to form,  
then flung it the diamond length  
of yard at a maple tree.

He doesn't know the maple  
talks to me on legend nights,  
that it says, "Hold. Hold. Hold on!",  
or sideways broad leaves catch hold  
of southwest winds, desert-fed,  
saying, "Sun is in this wind."

or that split limbs whistle words  
I hear through house-broken wood,  
sills, uprights, joists, lintels:  
“I lay claim a space for you.  
I mine this territory  
for the repose of your soul.”

I acquiesce that dark roots  
carve a deep-earth sepulchre.  
When I lay my spirit down,  
when my final breath is frost  
and blood is brighter by stars,  
the soft room within those roots  
will accept my tenancy.

All my son hears is the storm  
barrage-like in gray tree limbs  
during northeasterly wars,  
or calamities lightning  
loosed last August in its heart,  
bright blue flares and white phosphor-  
ous powders arcing to an  
incomprehensible light,  
like God's eyes had exploded,  
the final incandescence.

Occasionally he hears  
the tree empty its buckets  
of heart-flamed leaves extracted  
from the hot core of the fire  
only autumn can ignite,  
or he hears new spring trickle

from a miniature ladle  
half an inch beneath the bark.

He never hears the tree talk,  
never hears it speak of pain,  
or how many miles its roots  
have gone dowsing underground.  
He hears sounds I've forgotten;  
gunshots from a baseball bat,  
chatterings of hockey sticks  
like old folks in a circle,  
crowd noises, fathers prodding  
the shadows of their egos  
to a capability  
neither one of them can reach.

We hear the sounds of our times.  
What he hears he must grow with,  
not that he must have my ear,  
or even accept my thoughts,  
but if some night, in August  
when the moon's a peachbasket  
and the calendar's thicker,  
he puts his ear to the tree,  
he might hear a deep root break,  
he might hear a breaking heart.

## NEIGHBOR PLEDGE

The makeshift fence we didn't want  
strung between our houses  
has accepted the final measurement  
and melts its way toward loam.

First the gate, cashing in its chips  
on timid scarecrow arms,  
tires of the holding on,  
unclenches one fist, then another,

gives up midnight's undercurrent  
squeak, that sensor marking wind;  
gives up the screams and alarms  
invoked by December's bully.

The pussy-footing murmurs nursed  
by May, a daughter crying in sleep,  
fall away to roses, roots and rot,  
is voided by the passage of ants.

One corner post, its gray coat  
open like an exhibitionist's  
arms wide in flaunting,  
suffers all the appetites,

bows down in the year-end curtsy.  
The lumber, nails and sweat  
were strung to hold a child in,  
not you out or slat your view

of these columbines, roses, snowmen.  
Now that child has secrets,  
moves thickly with new friends, jokes,  
nights that have no meanings,  
dawns that do.

## TUESDAY MAY BE A DAY TOO LATE

Greet the dawn each day as if a long lost friend's  
come home;

Make one and only one promise to yourself  
That you will enjoy the day and all it brings;  
Find in yourself the one extra ounce of reserve  
When you need it, and you will, for each day  
Demands energy as well as love;

Smile and say hello everyday to at least one stranger;  
Acknowledge the joy of children and the peace  
That elders deserve; be as free with compliments  
As you are with your criticism; bite your tongue  
On the first harsh word you want to say;

Shake hands as if you were a link in a lifeline;  
Once in a while give something away  
That's important to you but not a dream;  
Recall the faces of your parents and a childhood  
incident,  
And remember their touch, their kiss,  
Their hand on you;

Retire with a smile to the joy of your rest,  
Knowing tomorrow is at hand; and above all,  
Grasp your dream as if it had handles,  
For you are the only one who can turn it around.

## HIATUS

(For Beth)

### 1.

I have been two weeks  
stung with woodsmoke  
and fish scales.

A beard this long  
can be nested in.

Each night you walk  
out of the campfire  
and take my mouth.

Downstream a white rock  
lifts your thigh  
clear out of a bath  
and warms the sunlight.

### 2.

The alders in canopy  
rehearse your name  
at the tunnelling wind.

The moon aches on the leaves  
like streetlights on your bed.

Moss and pine rug  
tremble by a footprint.

When your eyes are closed  
you never use words.

I could write a book  
about your hands.

I wouldn't let anyone read it.

3.

Two flowers on the path  
are pink as nipples.

In a knifing of sunlight  
the bees mean business.

The next time you stretch  
all your skin near this hearth,  
I will walk again this  
invitational trail.

Beyond the beaver dam  
sitting wristbone prominent  
on the river's arm,  
a blue pacific pool  
commends your eyes.

There is no scent here,  
though, celebrating you.

4.

I fail with the wind  
to run out of thought.  
Ideas stir in leaves.  
The earth is as rich  
as all your folding.

I know your trembling  
is not a gesture,  
nor is mine  
where your fingers toil.

When pine scent falls  
like gumdrops out of treetops  
and music's a breeze  
tuning the edges  
of a thousand leaves,  
I count the days to you.

Arithmetic has heartbeats.

These sums are valid.  
All parts are you.

5.

There's a darkness  
outside the campfire  
that must be like  
the earth is to a star.

Fire smell, heavy as  
a woman's, curls unseen  
through black branches  
the loam night grows

and follows me out past  
the flickering perimeter  
the way the Collie Romby  
followed all my tenth year.

Darkness has no illusions.  
It's only looking back  
at a hot eye that one sees  
exhaustive artifacts,

it's readjusting darkness  
with a bare piece of light,  
or finding one firefly  
a perfect orientation.

When you shine here, star-  
caught, diaphonous, frail  
as an ember on the wind,  
a lone diamond's in your eye.

Glitter tumbles on the leaves  
crude as a blessing of gold;  
the flames, the sun, your teeth,  
daple little radiants

like insects of light  
with quick, quick wings.  
Light is a piece of memory  
I think of you in the night.

It is so quiet here in darkness  
I can hear my eyes open.

## APRIL STORM

Even under this storm,  
which is like a woman  
at rugs, the river chants;  
rollicking mariner,

sad word singer, reeler,  
jigger of pantomime.  
It moves puzzles of airs  
beneath the wooden bridge,

the pursed lips and puffed cheeks  
of river throat humming  
stones from ten thousand years  
under the minstrel tongue

and voice just water has  
at wearing down, cutting  
rock walls, roots, in August  
warm paths, December deep.

And now, with freak April  
northeasterly at odds,  
a drunken sailor's song  
vibrates all the metal

the river's ever known:  
ball, grapeshot, gunneries,  
torn decks, a bell clanging  
close to rocks, an oarlock

strident on the surface,  
statements old iron makes.

## WIDOW HOUSE

*(For Phyllis Barclay)*

### I

Paint and weather collaborate,  
the trim fades,  
this rupture is made adjectival  
by the broken fence—  
(words lopped in mid-sentence,  
a mouth teeth escaped from).

Who mends these fences  
now?

When the sky  
sends her princelets out  
to make imperial the night,

only one wonders and is  
awed.

Morning sun invades  
half a house, certain shadows  
are indelible, credibly thick,

are seen half into and never  
move.

Miniature cyclones amass  
leaves, twigs, nest spillage,  
march like little dictators

about the amendable  
lawn.

She can't even share  
a cold.

## II.

Once we brought cakes,  
a covered meal,  
flaccid handshakes  
to be not too manly.

We brought sad eyes,  
shoulders squeezed together  
to lessen our animate stature.

We brought steam-bright  
soup, throats full of hay,  
cold hearts.

We thought we could  
understand her sentence,  
though indifferently  
we still parse it out.

Our verbs do not stand up.

We give her adjectives;  
stolid, resolute, thinner.

### III.

A hammer cracks  
all of darkness.  
She rises to nails  
driven all the way home,

nuptials of wood  
to guarantee the house  
another year.

A shuffle of steps,  
rubbing corduroy,  
rising from cellar stairs,  
said, "Reassurance,"

Hey, hon, said  
"I'm lost at this."

Half a bed sheet,  
glazed, silently  
frosted against  
her hand

makes a menu  
an inadmissible  
thought.

Each morning  
the mirror  
brings them  
closer.

## A LETTER TO ORLANDO

*(For Ed LeBlanc)*

All day this cold is a secret  
of my fleece lined jacket  
and the bottom of my mittens.

The senseless wind, without any  
direction and purposeless,  
gets hung up in the muffler

I wear as some corrective device,  
thick and wooly and itchy,  
around my neck. It's the one

you left in my van the last winter  
we cut wood in Oaklandvale  
and waded through that white tide

until we fell exhausted.  
You used to laugh about wood  
heating twice. Now you've gone south,

and only I can hear the cry  
of the oak as it lets go  
and throws the earth out of kilter.

I walked quietly there yesterday,  
snow thrown like paint everywhere  
except on the sun side,

gray birches, easy in the wind,  
made me think of Finnish ski troops  
the Russians didn't like around.

I suppose there are pieces  
of the battlefield left down south,  
but I bet you think of Oaklandvale

when a cool wind grabs your neck,  
an old jacket lets out secrets,  
your fingers remember wood,

and all across a sunset sky  
falling downhill to your ears  
a chainsaw's evening prayers.

## BRINGING THE FIRE IN

*(For Matthew)*

### 1.

I have brought wood here  
stacked like baker's shelves  
against the house, against winter  
and the remnant of an apple tree.  
A minor army of ants, scouts  
deep where the apples were,  
their bivouac secret except  
where my eyes count squadrons  
endlessly tailgating, will soon  
spend their invasion currency.

Yet someone else has marked  
these rich brown loaves,  
the pumpernickel pieces,  
the dark ryes oak is like,  
wheats that honey and molasses  
wed: my son is up to hauling,  
finds eight year old muscles  
beginning to talk back,  
an armful of seasoned loaves  
fully measures any man;  
how warm the house is  
is how hard the baker works.

### 2.

Night makes small change of us,  
keeps us stashed in her pockets.

In the darkness we are lost keys,  
old medallions, fingers pawing lint.

I touch the wood my son's brought.  
It will be three times warm

now his sweat's been added  
to the cutting and the burning.

Calipers, put on his arms,  
measure out daring sunlights,

that come of this darkness,  
that come of this fire.

3.

Today he twined his first stitches,  
a three piece braiding on his  
lower lip, his bright badge  
of hockey, for wood did him in,

stick blade like a hard wing  
cleaving too-early morning air,  
blood flowing like a flag stripe,  
thick, rivering, almost sweet.

Where it fell its rich raining,  
across the golden oak he carried  
in because it saved a trip,  
I thought two parts of his

energy were cause enough for fire,  
that the fuel burns brighter  
in a frenzy of maddening redness,  
but what's all this goes up in smoke?

Son, sun's son, son's sun, sun,  
tree that could be here after I'm gone,  
a vulgar piece of wood stained red,  
only because I'm here to observe them.

He is here now, warm, stitched  
into a new reality, new dimension.  
And I am here counting the fires,  
how flames lick away at days.

The tree I did not ring my saw into  
stands out there, a sentinel,  
a watch warden looking back at me.  
It will outlook me only to another saw.

## CHINADOWN, CHINADOWN

“What are you digging the hole for, Dad?” my five years Betsy asked, “Are you going someplace?”

Her second questions are always loaded to the hilt, meant to tickle if you find them at the right smile angling up one side of her mouth, like one of her dolls sitting on a catcher’s mitt.

A leech trench would not be suitable for an answer. Girls do not believe in leech trenches or crushed stone or the purity of water after seventeen feet of backyard journey.

If I said a footing for a new wall she would not hear me, would pretend a knot or snarl was in her hair and would twist herself like a dancer to unravel the nonexistent clutch, or would tell me “Mrs. Raistano’s going to have her baby any day now and she’s honestly going to bring him to kindergarten because he is going to be a boy and we’re going to call him Charles and we’ll take turns holding him and feeding him at snack time.”

And she sighs and closes her eyes  
and it is as if the female of the species  
is way ahead of a little boy at card-  
collecting or doing wheelies on his bike  
or netting for frogs whenever  
that other ticking starts in his mind.  
Boys are always catching up to girls  
because girls sprint out at the start  
fast as prized greyhounds or whippets.  
Girls leap and boys flounder at edges  
of the most clumsy things. Her brothers,  
all of them, are proof of this. They  
always seemed to be in a crowd, a burn-  
ing of energy while standing still,  
or they walked on stilts and fell down  
so often their shins tried to retire,  
or a father spends weekends plying gravel  
and tar bits from the heels of their hands.  
Girls are thinkers and boys are collectors.  
Girls think there is something special  
about a father digging a hole in the back-  
yard. Boys gather tossed out stones and zing  
them out so only the lawn mower can find them.

“Are you really going to China, Dad?”

“I’ll be back in three weeks.”

“I know what it’s like.” Rockets  
filled her eyes, color of roses  
early in June painted her cheeks.

Girls have already been someplace  
when boys are dreaming of going.  
Girls have already touched themselves  
and boys are playing pool or throwing  
out runners at second base or fixing  
a worm to a number six hook so it will not  
be lost at the cast into deep pools.  
Boys fish for things and girls hold on  
to whatever is given them at the start.

“Their eyes are like this.” She anchored  
her index finger nails into high cheek  
flesh and exaggerated her own blue eyes  
into almond slits. “They wear pony tails  
longer than me. I saw them in that show,  
you remember the night Uncle Joey came by  
and you were drinking beer in the kitchen  
and mom was mad 'cause you woke Jamie up  
and he had already been twice to the doctor.”

Girls are catalogues, are diaries, know  
grand associations boys fail to merge.  
Girls are born with timeclocks and cook-  
books implanted in their heads. Boys never  
know the time, hurt water on the stove.  
Girls know when it's going to happen  
for the first time long before a boy does  
because he's all hung up in doubts  
and she has been waiting all her life  
to feel the shift of weight riding her  
and the teddy bear is gone forever.

“They talk funny, like Mrs. Wey Chu but she really is kind of nice, her flowers are the best flowers. Even Mrs. Raistano said they were the best, and she’s my teacher.”

Girls have a piece of logic boys never find no matter how long they look for it.

“I said I’d be back in three weeks.”

“I’ll make you a lunch but you have to take a shower before you eat. They eat with funny sticks, but no sandwiches. Uncle Danny said salesmen always eat in Chinese restaurants when they go into a strange town,” and she giggled and chortled and asked me to dare her to say it and our eyes crossed and she said, “because they cook the pee out of everything.”

I jammed the long handled spade down into the leech trench floor and heaved a grand shovelful out.

She smiled at my energy and said, “You don’t have to go today. Mom’s cooking your favorite chicken pot-roast because she loves you and you get so sweaty sometimes. Want a beer?”

Girls are never mistaken for boys.  
Not in my part of the yard.

## EVOLUTION

*(For Eddie McCarthy)*

Pug on the clouds  
red faced mick  
slugger  
tough guy  
hanger on  
non-quitter  
puncher out of fakers  
hard nut  
red headed madman  
soft handed madman  
measurer of chins  
quick footed  
pace setter

Soldier  
companion  
fellow warrior  
comrade  
lost friend  
rice eater  
fish eater  
sweater  
hater  
lover  
keeper of bad dreams  
nightmarer  
pacifist  
slow dier

blood letter  
bleeder  
Asian ground soaker  
Korean saviour  
son of  
father of  
spirit of  
god of amens  
god of hellos  
god of goodbyes

red headed boxer  
friend of grace  
young companion  
old memory  
softness  
age  
o

## NEARLY SAUGUS

It is always nearly Saugus  
no matter where I am,  
coming from anyplace, going to,  
sure as snow or crocus after  
or the clock turning on,  
sure as clam flats on air  
and kelp bubbles breaking down  
under confection of dry salt  
and the river hawking its wares  
through nine foot cat-o-nines  
standing ripe as fire arrows.

Saugus announcements are made  
with conviction all along the line.  
In Linden, just south where  
four roads cross themselves neutral,  
the sad gray Hawkridge Brothers  
Steel Company building  
lays its washboard face to the sun  
and brings back old Mondays  
and mothers and red hands  
twisting denim almost dry,  
and a pain not quite touchable.

There is the blunt realism  
of the awesome bomb crater  
where the stonecrusher  
for years has harvested  
the neat beehives of pulverized

earth bone you cannot see over  
even if you were laddered.  
(Only the sea is past them,  
occasional sails, slow freighters  
like dominoes on the horizon.  
Nothing really to look for except outward).

Linden talks about Saugus  
as you pass through its gauntlet  
of railside steel, neat square  
deliveries of girders, building  
guts, lallycolumns, T-bar stock  
stacked parallel to rust,  
inhibitions of the trade,  
bankruptcy or intestate dreams:

and over there, where the earth  
has a mouth you cannot believe,  
where all the dead you've known  
could hide for a hundred years,  
where granite screams downward  
from a penthouse dynamiting,  
where a bomb blast would run out  
of its own echoes all Saturdays  
where dust reaches for the millennium  
and ledge vibrations last all week  
and the earth talks in broken  
windows and plastered ceilings  
sneer from wall to wall like lunatics  
on the back porch of yesterday,  
Saugus says it is here.

Lynn announces too,  
though on the other side  
and aches at the touch  
of a shoe last found cheaply  
at a Saturday yard sale.  
Lynn has walked the border  
only in dead winter when the river  
zippers the towns together  
at a barometer's instigation  
and thermometer's direction.  
The parts meet where industry  
heaves upward red mickey spires  
erecting at dollar signs,  
government contracts, defense  
and offense better planned  
in a Manning Bowl lockerroom.

Lynn says hello to Saugus.  
I wave back, the tracks  
of the Linden Branch walk under  
my feet like I am skipping rope  
and the cinders from a thousand  
dead engines and more Pullmans  
you can shake a stick at  
litter the way onto Saugus  
even when the river collapses  
under the State Theater  
where now centerless grinders  
reel on like old serials.  
with week-long after tastes.

No matter how I go at Saugus,  
by Linden or Lynn, Schenectady or sin,  
collegiate enterprise or business boredom,  
by rock slabs and earth holes  
and ores crossed in a man's mind  
and guard rails narrowing to infinity,  
nothing prepares the way better  
for coming home than the flotsam  
freed upon the air, old friends  
cornerwise on the busy days,  
old train whistles falling  
across Donkey Field full of October,  
where Halloween goes orange  
and shaggy toothed and waxy,  
and nothing ever said I would ever  
write a poem about coming here  
to read a poem about going there.

## STREETLIGHT

This one is familiar as sneakers,  
an old wallet your hip knows,  
a belt you lean against all day.

It lit my brothers' way home  
from the madness of unPacifc waters.  
It still calls at our doorstep.

If you touch it, parts touch back.  
It crosses your heart without  
any promise being sworn upon.

It stops. It starts. It fades  
when morning takes on nourishment  
and weaves a maple out of webs.

I've seen my father read by its lamping  
when winter leaped its fat frog on us  
and they had to shut off the lights

because he preferred bread and meat  
on the table than light across it.  
Once, a man with a mustache stitched

on his lip like a single chevron,  
questioned the preference. Father showed  
him the light in no uncertain terms.

Shadows come to life here,  
throw a darkness with extraordinary reach  
through window panes

and fall a summer snow  
on the soft mounds of my children  
as if moons have gone underground.

When red maple leaves go like pigeon  
feathers tossed at October sun  
or get thrown like pajamas at dawn,

the bones hammer themselves  
into the orbit of the light pole's  
reach. How fast light travels

down the crude mass of bark.  
How quickly it makes shadow  
before the shadow knows it's thrown.

## TWO LICENSE, WYOMING

*(For Timothy)*

In a last move  
of daylight, a buffalo's  
dropped head is a locomotive face  
at some dark station along the way.

An owl counts  
collisions of stars,  
fireflecks in a deer's eye,  
the long up-wind agony of a late moth.

October breath  
is nervous on the tent.  
Taut ropes pull whistles  
out of the wind. Pines begin weeping.

From a high trail  
my son sees the compass  
of our Coleman lantern hung  
like a plumb bob from three poles

and heads down.  
I have spent the day  
with rod and flies, and an eagle  
uttering strange cries at his dominion.

The hunter  
and the fisherman  
eating off the same platter  
taste the bullet first or the barb.

**BEFORE FISHING, #10 CAN**

*(For Betsy)*

Wet leaves  
at the bottom  
of a leaf pile  
shine like  
new shoes.

Worms, thick  
as boot laces,  
leave their midnight  
knots burned  
as asterisks  
on cordovan  
surfaces.

My daughter's  
two thumb grasp of them  
is effective,  
as if thumbs only  
are meant to get dirty.

She cradles the worm can  
like some girls  
do dolls, one  
nonchalance  
of seeming older.

Soon it will be  
a boy's head

in her arms,  
his blue eyes closed,  
thinking he'll never  
breathe again.

Then I will fish  
in the lonely  
part of the day,  
and in the exclamation  
of dawn I will see  
her face in the  
answering waters,

find her thumbprint  
on postage stamps  
that never come  
often enough.

## BENEATH DOMINIONS OF OUR AIRS

*(For George Barclay)*

It is cold today.  
We wear a mantle  
of crispness.

The white ground  
sucks at our feet  
like wet sneakers.

Your hammer is put down,  
the last nail is driven.  
Teeth of the cross-cut

go the way of carious molars,  
dark speech spacings,  
a rust moving idly as rot.

Into your last day  
you worked, no lunch break,  
trying to beat winter

to the punch,  
breath steaming like a horse's,  
a halo hiding your head

and black fur cap  
some Russian wore crawling in  
Stalingrad's blood-burned snow.

On a wire hook you drove  
as an afterthought  
hangs the gray greatcoat

you stuck in winter's face,  
each pocket ripped  
where the hammer hung.

Stuffed inside, cached forever,  
thick fleecy mittens  
like amoebic appendages.

Now your hands  
hold themselves, left palm  
cupped on top

saving the other's grip  
for the work  
left undone.

2

The language beside your grave  
halts frozen in air, stiff  
for remembrance sake.

An evolution of snow marks a wide  
crop of dates and names  
growing on stone faces.

Sixteen steps away  
ice rings in the roses  
of another's setting down.

But I keep coming back to you  
and a hammer stealing  
ten penny nails from the sun.

Now that you are at rest,  
did I ever want you to rest,  
was that my fantasy?

Is the language I see now,  
evidence of proper nouns,  
verbs standing still,

enough of a message?  
It must be that you  
were only meant to rest now,

that this cold pronouncement  
over your cupped hands  
is a last outward sign.

Sometimes the loudest sound  
you heard was sweat rolling  
on the hill of your brow.

Often pain  
was the talk your arm  
said coming up on darkness

and strokes of a saw  
were clock tickings.  
We all have measurements.

And now you have none.  
At your desk a scale turns blue  
where your thumb let go.

## SAUGUS ON THE LINDEN BRANCH

Thursday last, soft dawn  
walking its surprise out of  
what had been Donkey Hill,  
electric darts of birds  
leaping the conductors of trees,  
their bright quick passages  
fanning miniature turmoils,  
I walked the Linden Branch.

The accelerations of time  
raced beside me on the tracks:  
my own breath an engine aching:  
crabgrass, thistle and weeds  
of a hundred anxieties  
thick as mattresses  
between two surviving rails,  
between black ties at spongy rest.

I moaned at piled up motion,  
time frozen in a picture frame,  
my little red wagon coaled  
with trackside anthracite,  
a locomotive snorting past me  
its charging bison head,  
a black-armed black-faced fireman  
with night stars for teeth

heaving outboard a shovelful  
for my easy finding, waving

to Depression's child. I think of him  
often now, how he was, never home,  
tireless, sweat-ridden, a song  
in his heart but not his lips,  
dark gas tolling its bell  
inside where he could not hear,

towns shooting by, ripe clotheslines,  
eyeless faces darkening windows,  
dogs with slow heads, lovers,  
Jimmy Cagney marquees, ribbed ponds  
giving up ducks thick as buckshot,  
a hundred kids with corduroys  
hauling little wagons of cast-off coal  
back to black kitchen stoves.

Thursday last I missed that fireman;  
whistle throats full of ageless dust,  
the earth-slow turntable frozen  
in a decade I ran through the way  
a good summer's roughshodded,  
the night stars of his teeth  
shining where rails converge,  
where the sky is magnified

heavy as locusts or autumn leaves;  
and the rails sour with rust,  
scale by scale and hue by hue,  
marked, blatant, eroding  
their ways into history;  
and dawn, silly dawn,

gray and surprising dawn,  
gave up its old fireman.

He waved. His bright teeth  
nailed home in a dark sky,  
his arms like black-grained pistons  
torsoed big as a tree, his song  
of words out-thundering the engine  
spraying out its hot steam  
steady as a garden hose;  
and music, music in the rails,

music of the steam and the click-clack  
and the shug-shug and hoo-hoo  
and thump-bump dull as old dramas,  
the music of everything past  
reveling where he labored  
days upon days, never home,  
tireless, sweat-ridden, and his song,  
his song re-invented on the air.

**BENEATH VINES AND PEACH TREE,  
A NEIGHBOR'S ASHES**

*(For Herb Wills)*

Vinegar Hill,  
sleepy, boot-brown  
from the long heat,  
ready to firecracker,  
suddenly bustles  
like a tarpaulin  
catching a first breeze  
sweet as sherbert.

One ripple,  
air fueled, folded long  
as a wave, starts its  
dance off the summit  
and races shoreward.

Wind water,  
thick as suds, airy,  
I swear some Atlantic green  
in it, touches my feet.

You still ache  
in ashes  
the grapes fall on,

and the now-scented loam  
where taupe pits  
go down with ants

into never before  
hollows.

Your sweat is a yeast  
in the compost pile.

I watch where you  
stretched your gardens  
into the river, the long reach  
of your spade.

## REMNANTS

My grandfather ran the city dump,  
burned clinkers in a little house  
he made of scrap. On cold nights drunks  
slept in that make-shift haven.

They knew the welcome of his fire,  
the monger's stove to wrap around,  
hot curbing where they propped cold feet,  
quick difference from the frozen air,

wind-swept railroad tracks, bare entry ways,  
darkness where the howling ghost abides  
or, last resort, the cardboard wrap.  
The lost, lonely birds came to roost,

flew in at dusk. He stoked the fire  
to stir the flame, dried their feathers off.  
Just as often he left his lunch about  
like tasty suet hanging in the yard.

On Saturdays I brought his lunch,  
dense laminates of meat and bread,  
thick and heavy and coarse as sin,  
brown banana we would not eat,

molasses-brown coffee in whiskey bottles  
wound about with paper bags.  
I never saw even one pint bottle  
finished off within his grasp,

rarely saw his small bent hand feeling  
inside a paper bag. His birds  
did the picking, had suet choice,  
hens dining before the cock.

When he died they came to grieve  
the saviour of their nights,  
the drunken, besotted, brothered band  
who so often drained his cup,

the mottle-skinned, the soured of life,  
pale host, the warred upon and beaten,  
they came to cache the little man  
who offered what was left of God.

## NEGOTIATIONS

What messages tonight sends  
are chattering down the flue  
as if tin cans are being  
converted into ciphers.

It's not that the wind  
is contending for attention:  
hell, it's a punch drunk fighter  
flaying away at these doors

and loose windows gabbing  
like old ladies in a circle,  
with shrieks so loud I think  
they're careening in the walls.

I think it reminds me too much  
of the music my daughter listens to,  
the wild and wooly sounds  
I've put forty years between

in a kind of patience I've developed,  
but give it another name  
in the name of sanity and age.  
She says I'm tone deaf.

I say I'm particular, too set  
in my ways to experiment,  
but I'll negotiate just the same;  
I'll settle on the wind

talking under roof shingles  
I spent all last summer  
geometrically putting in place,  
a mosaic's black on black.

I'll take the wind at this time,  
with some godawful god at the helm,  
battering my post and redan  
as if it will tip over any minute.

She will have her music for now,  
and ball joints full of oil,  
and I'll settle in comfortably  
with a beer and a book and a storm.

## ELEMENTS

My daughter's a warm pillow  
in my arms, down puff folded in,  
nestling curves against curves,  
as we move up two centuries of stairs  
to her brass-balled iron bed.

I know the bed will speak back  
to her thirty pounds, but the stairs  
speak back to both of us;  
nails, two hundred years old,  
are cryptic in their speech,  
scrape of consonants, vowel splurge,  
that near-float in oaken treads.  
Nails of the left side talk the most,  
she's head-rested on left arm,  
her blond hair in a free-fall  
over left elbow like blond cascade,  
yet cobweb sweep against my shirt,  
whisper of darkness clinging in.

Nails talk in octave divisions,  
when stepped on and letting go,  
short greased ride on wood,  
getting hurt and feeling good,  
foot down hard and foot gone off,  
the impress, heft of peopledom,  
we crowd of two in one step.  
Where nails have lost their hidden heads  
they talk the most, quick screams  
up freed shanks, the squared torsos

of ironmonger's antique grips.  
The decapitation must have been  
a loud wailing in the night.

My daughter hears in her shadowed ear  
the pulsing anguish of each cry,  
and folds her pillow poundage closer in,  
becomes delightful wrap-around  
that makes woe when it's gone,  
the muscle move and bend of bone  
only daughter against a father makes;  
earth-long caress without touch of arms,  
head to toe joining only child performs,  
a union never quite the same again.

Cached in the fieldstone cellar deep below,  
in glass bottles for visibility,  
frozen from rust in the airless grasp,  
looking so much like petrified earthworms,  
are the nails that have lost their touch  
on wood; those I've pulled, those popped out  
in the middle of the night tired of long task,  
those that talked too much to guest or quit  
themselves,  
and the thick stubby ones wood coughed out.

But wood, freed of companion nails,  
has its own vocabulary of scrape and squeak,  
a long toes-up-move of treads,  
the most significant sound we hear of wear.  
My daughter hears the wearing out,

the moving of oak risers into airs.  
The points between her shoulders narrow,  
she pulls herself in, presses on me,  
finds some niche she found before, smiles  
in her faith, in her tent of belief  
of me who hears the house decompose, and strains  
to measure my own organic failings—  
a cartilage unspeakably loose,  
old wounds headlining the body again,  
(Hell, before she was born, I never  
breathed twice coming up the stairs).  
But getting old is wearing someone well.

When I give her up, free her from my arms,  
(fearful of the final separation I know is coming)  
and place her on her iron bed, the ore will talk.  
Iron has such an endless voice, tuning forked,  
shaking itself past the inner ear, demanding  
to be heard. Iron has a longer voice than alloy.  
Isn't a brass bell beat by a ferric fist  
and a daughter shaped by her father's touch?  
What echoes in your life are pieces of memory,  
tree fall, saw work, whisp of plane,  
the driving home of iron by iron,  
the breaking away from first shapes out,

daughter clutching a pillow in sleep  
as you look on, silent as a thickened root,  
your grasp locked in clay.

## 10:30 P.M. REPORT, JUNE

A breeze you measure  
in gallons, mark as potable.  
Maple limbs dance the way  
schools of kelp dance  
just below the surface  
or the idle shuffle  
of smoke screening  
the valley.

Leaves sigh as deep  
as armless lovers.

Overhead a jet slows down  
for Boston, its wingtip  
lights coding like fireflies  
against the solemnity  
of one dark cloud.

Stars seem paired.

Across saltmarsh miles,  
over Baker Hill  
and the bulky shadowed  
water tower, past old  
trysting dens  
more amorous in dreams,  
another jet fires up  
for Shannon or London,  
a cannon boom  
of long goodbyes.

10:30 is bridging toward sleep.  
The breeze with hands  
of an old sweetheart  
keeps touching secret places,  
nearly lost, vaguely recalled.

Yet it is different in January  
when a Northeaster  
sounds like broken arms  
or demolition derbies.

## IT'S ALL IN HOW YOU PLACE THE COMMAS

Have you read MONTE WALSH  
by Jack Schafer?  
Frank Whelton did  
and gave me his battered copy,  
I felt his tears  
beating crystal dramas  
on every page  
after his hundred readings  
in Sears & Roebucks' parking lot,  
under flashlight  
parked on the Southeast Expressway,  
between deep-fry servings  
in the Tumble Inn Diner,  
at home  
with silence  
beating like mushrooms  
in his mind.

## VOICE FROM THE GREY

Are you there, Thomas,  
hearing the maple burst pods,  
sunflower creak and groan up,  
down-loam leap of crocus strings  
silent as webbings in the corner  
of the barn, tulip death  
at wayward chlorodaine  
you spilled?

I watch you in the mirror of stars,  
renegade heart, April's savage,  
killing the long winter siege—  
scabbard clean of weapon  
you clutch. You muster  
your spring

voiceless,  
thwarted larynx  
sky-lifted, the amens  
for buried blossoms, the sable  
early flowers cede  
to summer  
end.

Do not dwell  
on winter sludge,  
April's vast recall,  
memory of bulb and seed  
working hard as sandhog.

They get hot every equinox,  
volcanic up, forest  
fire down, August  
death.

Do you walk  
where your father waits  
socked down beneath the stone  
all savings bought, deftly scribed  
'James 1903-1978', so off-hand  
you wonder where reality  
ceases?

Grass leaps  
above him down,  
has root of snake and worm,  
grass root boa does its dig,  
grapple gains your father's mind:  
Wait, James, your mother loved  
you no more  
than me.

2

Visitations  
take their time,  
who goes where, how?  
Spring from the grave, James!  
Spring! Spring! oh James, come up;  
one sound from your broken eyes,  
a hand at dusk, just one,  
just send the bloom  
once more.

Flower's fur,  
toss and turf of tempest grass,  
leap of leg you lost, grief-bent  
in another vault. Are you wholly joined?  
You in forsythia come-back, foptail  
lunge, lost son's lilac rocketting,  
smash of lightning maple wears,  
love-lies-bleeding is stranger,  
lo clethra and groundsel  
carve your eyes.

Water washes  
under; happy at this  
infernal machine scored years  
ago you gave me, I dream your rivers:  
King Amazon whose ticks scarred  
the leg surgeon's saw  
erased.

Father of Waters down  
to New Orleans town, the fist  
of Harry Greb a log-slam to your jaw,  
teeth achatter like old pickets  
seized loose by rust of nail  
and wild March air  
giants kick.

Wrench of  
Allagash log,  
hump-backed stream  
stole hook and leader  
from your cigarette hand.

Down East does gray house wear them,  
is the shadow of the hook  
buried in this page?  
What shark  
where?

3

The Saugus  
kicking the Atlantic  
three mile down, square  
of mackerel, striper's pavement,  
plaza where flounder bite the sky;  
and six miles out, sixty yards astern,  
we tasted salt together in the turgid wake  
when I chased my Red Sox cap  
and you chased me in much  
too quick sobriety.

Voice hangs  
every which way hours:  
Crow a little bit when in luck.  
Pay up, shut up, own up when you lose.  
Running begins in the heart, not the knee,  
not the density of thigh, slight puff of calf.  
(Turning thirteen, rushing downstairs  
for annual gift, your handing me  
the hammer): From now on  
you drive the nails  
hereabouts.

The fist-burst  
in the 1:00 A.M. yard,

moon with cloud robe, peer  
of cat eyes, my catching four clenched  
hands of thugs; God knows how you made the back  
door, concrete onyx for retinas, white cane  
in parier thrust and swish: Work him, Tom!  
Work him! Work him! Gut of the Corps  
coming like an erection.  
You never knew there  
were two of them.  
You cried in  
black eyes.

In 1945  
white-water snows  
came hard as spring Allagash,  
broke the backs of buses, plows,  
tore hearts of tractors out, spilled  
black blood, held the crocus six weeks back.  
Icicle at your heart, snow writhing as spiders  
at hip-line, brood-bent, you swam six miles  
home past knotted crankcases, fell in  
the back door. I knifed the mackinaw  
off, the iron laces of boots.  
Kissed you cold on kitchen  
floor, rubbed my emery  
hands on threatened  
skin.

4

In one giant  
leap, went sixteen to fifty,

found response, am still there.  
Walked home from war, heartbreak,  
the hill above that holds your voice,  
Riverside, where the stone deftly scribed  
is hardly your last sign, where we  
will touch again  
underground.

## EXCAVATION

Call it fen,  
swamp or bog,  
black sump hole,  
Land's End,  
The Pit,  
underside.

Ore was its crop  
three centuries ago;  
thick gobs floated out  
on sweat of servitude,  
small sea of ache.  
The arthritic hand  
curved its thumb on pole  
or welded to palm  
in configuration change.

Layered in  
for all the digging,  
tiered as evidence  
in the skilled twist of artifact,  
are piece parts of man  
who floated iron out;  
he who lost his grip  
is still holding on,  
lies muddied, mortared down  
in walls is the maker of walls.

Justice was a quick choke  
down in the wet pit,  
bog bottom  
if there was a bottom.

Once we emptied  
a dory of rope  
and never touched  
the last part down,

but a schoolmate did  
long time ago.

## THE HOUR FALLING LIGHT TOUCHES RINGS OF IRON

You must remember,  
Pittsburgh is not like this,  
would never have been found  
without the rod bending right here,  
sucked down by the earth.  
This is not the thick push  
of the three rivers' water  
hard as name calling...  
Allegheny, Susquehanna  
and the old Monongahela;

this is the Saugus,  
cut by Captain Kidd's keel,  
bore up the ore barge  
heavy from Nahant.  
The Atlantic bends up its curves  
to touch at our feet.  
Slag makes a bucket bottom,  
iron rings feed the water  
ferric oxides, clouds of rust.

But something here there is  
pale as diviner's image,  
a slight knob of pull  
at a forked and magic willow.

Smoke floats a last breath  
over the river road,  
the furnace bubbles  
acidically.

Tonight the moon  
crawls out of Vinegar Hill,  
the slag pile  
has a thousand eyes of shining,

charcoal and burnt lime  
thrust thick as wads  
up a nose.

Sound is the moon  
burning iron again,  
paled embers  
of a diviner's image  
loose in the night.

You must remember  
Pittsburgh is not like this.

## IRON WROUGHT ACCESSORIES

It is only sad nights  
after long falling-down sad days  
that I hear the angular  
and inordinate breathing  
of bellows' leather  
and the greaseless roll  
of waterwheel axle  
sounding like old barn doors  
in an economy of wind.

I think of a sooty black  
Scotsman, rushed off a moor  
or tarn, obligated  
to an ore barrow  
by servitude  
as vile as cancer,  
the haunt of heather  
smelling up his  
sleepless nights,

or a boy  
soft in the face,  
hard brown in arms  
leather-tough,  
dreaming of books,  
how words run into magic  
in a corner of his mind,  
a little each day  
breaks down,  
breaks down.

The quill snaps  
without the hand grasp.  
Iron pours from a sea-green vapor  
into sow bars in sand molds.

Someone besides the Scotsman  
or the boy, slams the hammer  
to fine cut nails, draws down  
to doctor an ax head, a hinge,  
an edge for cutting.

The furnace is like that,  
there are hot spots,  
cool spots, a degree  
of happening. More  
than wood burns,  
more than lime  
passes on;

a heart, an infusible desire,  
a short sigh of a word  
breaking in every component—  
IRON—IRON—IRON!

## HAMMERSMITH LEVELS

### i.

The probe rode hit down,  
shouldered its stem  
through slag, cinders,  
three centuries of Saugus,

kettle parts jig-sawed  
into debris, clay pipes  
in mushroom pieces,  
man chips of landfill.

We dug, pried rocks,  
bilge-pumped earth hole  
of gathered rain  
ribbed the toss-out,

found erosion's ritual.  
Cannonballs came whole  
with wormed rind,  
early gearage mystery.

In hole bottoms,  
side walls planked,  
remnants tale talking,  
we started down again

to claim virgin soil.  
Stone walls X'd underwalls,  
layers of downed Troy,  
laminates of search,

period blankets,  
era blindfolds;  
earth-wash and tumble,  
death of generations.

ii.

I learned the shovel,  
yield and yaw on thigh,  
the stretch of ash,  
overhead toss,

quarter jerk of left arm,  
propeller sweep of right  
from deep shoulder hinge,  
answer of the blade.

The digging doctor,  
archeologist,  
rode his frame  
on probing rod,

passed through nineteenth  
and eighteenth centuries  
like minor intersections,  
drove to 1645,

heard artifacts  
red-light up the shaft,  
drew a circle for new dig,  
urged us on, lit eyes.

iii.

Young, zest ballooned,  
shovelfuls of girl dreams,  
a time between wars  
that held our innocence,

we engendered blades  
in clean energies.  
Stripped time mask,  
pealed earth back,

went to beginnings:  
pot, pistol, pachyderm  
of water wheel base,  
tools flung live to clay,

lock and latch pieces  
layered in mosaic hardpan,  
blue-gray densities  
that dulled blade and mind,

sweat commemorating  
300 years of stain,  
muscle vibration  
sounding underfoot,

found established death.  
Now, reconstructed,  
sitting on itself,  
it starts decomposing.

## HAMMERSMITH, 1645

I am knuckled  
into mystery here,  
mist rise blooms  
slag pile, cinder bank,

bare antique sweat,  
steam-frothed ore feeders,  
deep char of woodsmen,  
cries of exultant mixer.

The iron master  
draws down the sow,  
new world pig—  
plow, blade and nail.

Bog, stripped of ore,  
empty as the quitted nest,  
keeps its victims,  
deep, muddied, devilled.

Sea and earth give up  
rock, lime and shell,  
what promises iron—  
plow, blade and nail.

Who fed the furnace throat,  
cut timber, cracked fingers  
at the yield of ore,  
squared the first nail?

Who rigged whalesize bellows,  
set tree-long shaft  
where rode the water wheel,  
who measured lime on lime?

Swordsman, dreamer, alchemist,  
stripped to the waist,  
watching sow give young,  
and afterbirths of slag.

I love gray dawn,  
bloom of lead sheets  
curved into air,  
the old ritual.

## THE RAGS OF WAR

Just Walko and Williamson and Sheehan  
sitting in the night drinking beer  
cooled in the Imjin River waters,  
three men clad in the rags of war  
in August in 1951 in Korea.

Night sat down on them, huge body squeeze  
of a ponderous god resting on the world,  
while stars in slow patrol on horizon flanks  
cocked themselves like slingshot pellets.

August night gives itself away, tells tales,  
slays the rose in reeling carnage, murders sleep,  
sucks moisture out of earth, fires hardpan,  
sometimes does not die itself just before dawn,  
makes strangers in ones' selves,  
those who wear the rags of war.

They were strangers beside each other,  
strangers in the crush of night and star flanks,  
accidents of men drinking beer cooled  
in the bloody waters where brothers swim forever,  
strangers come to that place by fantastic voyages,  
carried by generations of the persecuted or  
adventurous,  
carried in sperm body, dropped in the spawning  
cavern  
of America, and born to wear the rags of war.

Walko, reincarnate of the Central European,  
come of land lovers and those who scatter grain seeds,  
bones like logs, wrists strong as axletrees,  
fair and blue eyed, prankster, ventriloquist  
who talked off mountainside, rumor monger for fun,  
heart of the hunter, hide of the herd, apt killer,  
born to wear the rags of war.

Williamson, faceless in the night, black on black,  
only teeth like piano keys, eyes that caught stars,  
fine nose got from Rome through rape or slave bed  
unknown generations back, was cornerback tough,  
graceful as ballet dancer (Walko's opposite),  
hands that touched his rifle the way a woman's  
touched,  
or a doll, or your own child caught in fever clutch,  
came sperm-tossed across the cold Atlantic,  
some elder Virginia-bound bound in chains,  
the Congo Kid come home, the Congo Kid  
born to wear the rags of war.

Sheehan, reluctant at trigger pull, dreamer,  
told lies with dramatic ease, entertainer  
who wore the ghosts he carried in him,  
heard the myth and the promise in the earth  
and the words of songs he never knew,  
carried scars he vaguely knew as his own,  
shared his body with saint and sinner,  
born to wear the rags of war.

They put their souls out on serving trays,  
mixed the food of self with beer and beer,  
lay drawn and quartered in every cell, dream,  
coughed up the meat of their hearts  
to fill the inside straight of a story  
that brought them to the rags of war.

*Walko:*

We lost the farm. Somebody stole it.  
My father loved the fields, sweating.  
He used to watch stuff grow by starlight.  
The mill's where he went for work,  
in the crucible, drawing on the green vapor,  
right in the heat of it, the miserable heat.  
My mother said he started dying the first day.  
It wasn't the heat or the green vapor did it,  
just going off to the mill, grassless, tight in.  
The system took him. He wanted to help.  
It took him and killed him a little each day,  
just smothered him. I kill easy. Memory does it.  
I was born for this, to wear these rags.  
The system gives, then takes away.  
I'll never go piecemeal like my father.  
These rags are my last home.

*Williamson:*

Know why I'm here? I'm from North Carolina.  
I'm sixteen and big and wear size fifteen shoes  
and my town drafted me instead of a white boy.

Chaplain says he'll get me home. Shit! Be dead then.  
Used to hunt home, had to eat what was fun running  
down.

Brother shot my sister and a white boy in the woods.  
They were skinning it up against a tree.

Run home and kissed momma goodbye, give me his  
gun.

Ten years and no word. Momma cries about both of  
them.

Can't remember my brother's face. Even my sister's.  
Can feel his gun, though, right here in my hands.

Long and smooth and honey touch. Squirrel's left eye  
never too far away for that good old gun.

Them white men back home know how good I am,  
send me here, put these rags on me. Two wrongs:

Send me too young and don't send my gun with me.  
I'm going to fix it all up. I'm going to get home.

They don't think I'm coming back, them white men.  
They be a little nervous when I get back, me and my

rags

and that good old gun my brother give me.

*Sheehan:*

Stories are my food. I live and lust on them.

Spirits abound in the family, indelible eidolons.

The O'Sheehaughn and the Igo carved a myth.

I wear their scars in my soul, know the music  
that ran over them in lifetimes, songs' words.

And the strangers that are not strangers:

Muse Devon abides with me, moves in the blood

and the bag of my heart, whispers tonight:  
Corimin is in my root cell, oh bright beauty  
of all that has come upon me, chariot of cheer,  
carriage of Cobh where the graves are,  
where my visit found the root of the root cell—  
Johnny Igo at ten running ahead of the famine  
that took brothers and sister, lay father down;  
sick in the hold of ghostly ship I have seen  
from high rock on Cobh's coast, in the hold  
heard the myths and musics he would spell  
all his life, remembering hunger and being alone  
and brothers and sister and father gone  
and mother praying for him as he knelt  
beside her final bed that hard morning  
when Ireland went away to the stern.  
I know that terror of hers last touching his face.  
Pendalcon's grace comes on us all at the end.  
Johnny Igo came alone at ten and made his way  
across the face of Columbia, got my mother  
who got me and he told me when I was twelve  
that Columbia would need my hand and I must give.  
And tonight I say, "Columbia, I am here with my  
hands  
and with my rags of war."

I came home alone.  
And they are my brothers.  
Walko is my brother.  
Williamson is my brother.  
Devon is my brother.  
Corimin is my brother.

Pendalcon is my brother.  
God is my brother.  
And I am a brother to all who are dead.  
We all wear the rags of war.