



Unhallowed Antiphons

new & selected poems 2023-2026

andreas gripp

Unhallowed Antiphons

Newest books available by the same author:

Yada Yada Kismet

The Earth is Painted War

Delirium Lullaby

Last of the Bons Vivants

Trigger Happy Warnings

Satanic Canticles

Give Us This Day

Unhallowed Antiphons

new & selected poems 2023-2026

Andreas Gripp

Beliveau Books

Unhallowed Antiphons

©2026 Andreas Connel-Gripp

Digital Edition

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form, including via AI, with the exception of excerpts for the purpose of literary review, without the expressed permission of the publisher.

Published by Beliveau Books, Essex County

Email: beliveaubooks@gmail.com

Author Email: andreasgripp@gmail.com

Author Website:

andreasgripp.wixsite.com/andreasgripp

Text font is Palatino Linotype 12pt.

Front Cover Photo: RF Image

End Page Photo: RF Image

Proofreader: Carrie Lee Connel

Printed in Canada by Lulu Press

Dépôt Légal / Legal Deposit: Bibliothèque et Archives Canada / Library and Archives Canada, 2026

ISBN 978-1-927734-70-4

POEMS

Thumbs Down	1
Spoken Word	4
Achilles	7
Wild Bill McKeen	10
The Mona Fucking Lisa	14
“me too”	18
Juxtapositions	20
Mahavira	22
The Puffin	26
Ratios	30
Hair Care by Pierre	33
On “Less is More”	36
Magic	38
After the Eclipse	40
Milestones	44
Victor	47
Monday, 7am	50
Pockets	54
“google it”	57
The Ring	60
Elegy for Hannah Brockman	63
Language Lessons	66
Les Royalistes	68
Rumours	71
Chasing Leopold	74
Silenzio	77
The Marionette	80
Yesterday	82

POEMS, continued

Visiting My Mother at St. Leo's Cemetery	85
The Fall of the Nature Poet	88
Collateral Damage	90
Par Quatre	91
<i>There's Something Wrong with Morgan</i>	94
Mining the Higgs Boson, or Overstating Yesterday	97
For the doctor who took me out of my mother's womb	100
The Speed Reader, or Grieving Quasimodo	103
The Kippah	106
Casablanca, or Our Teflon is a Liar	110
Chester	113
The Philodendron	116
Bliss	118
The Insult	120
Mystery, or Ignoring the Optician	122
This <i>hasn't</i> been written by AI	124
The Burden	126
The Constitutional	128
Rewriting Androcles, or The Conversion of Theodore Nugent	130
Smut	133
The Wrath of Yo-Yo Ma	136
Spite at the Speed of Light	138
Auld Lang Syne	141
To Be Read	144

POEMS, continued

Why No One Ever Mistook Me for Stevie Wonder	146
Musings	149
Conviction	152
Nicki Nicki	155
The Beholder	158
The Blade	160
Signs & Wonders	164
Oblivion, or The Stratum of Holly McGuinty	166
The Wino	170
Endurance	173
Sorry I Can't Join You for Shinny	176
Sharing the Carapace	180
The Prognosis	182
On My Decision to Retire as a Poet	185
Haiku	188
Tuesday Night Nachos	190
Paradigms	192
Chemo	195
Mysteries	198

this book is for Carrie

these poems were written from February '23
through February '26



Thumbs Down

I blame *everything*
on our thumbs. Their
cursèd opposability;
picturing how things
would be
if not for their relative
acrobatics:

the trees all
where they were
if not for them; none to wield
an axe, grip a barrelled
pistol in the night,
birth the drop of
Fat Man
in Japan.

We've been told this
supposedly *elevates*
our species above the rest—
the way in which our
thumb has touched the tips
of every finger,
the sign of *I'm OK*.

This stout & stunted digit
is a narcissistic
rebel, refusing to stand
in line with all the others,
the longer, slimmer *doigts*
above its head —
stuck in its lowly place
upon our hand.

It gets an unduly
amount of *credit* —
for crafting our way
to the sky, the moon,
and one day to *Tau Ceti*.

I say it's not as clever
as we've made it out to be —
its lexicon rather
scant — locked in *yes* or *no*;

while the index points our
way; the pinky uplifts our
class while sipping chai;

and although the middle
likes to cuss, flip its phallic
shaft into the air, you have to admit
it's effective at revealing its
message in every language;

and then the one that
screams *commitment* —
“sorry boys, I’m taken” —
this bearer of gold & diamond,
breaker of fervent hearts.

Spoken Word

I definitely feel out of place,
at this late-night poetry
slam, over 30 years older
than this crowd of teens and
twenties
who are speaking
their bitter truth:

the fracture of relation-
ships, the lines of intersection,
narratives
of racist taunts
and kicks
to the fucking head
(from the anti-queer brigade),

and it's not that I can't relate—
faggot! tossed my way
from all the kids
now grey with age, playing
sudoku by the fire

but that's *another* shoddy
poem I'll likely write—

for within this present moment
Naomi has hit her stride,
hooking me along
with her inflection,
familiar as it is,
an echo of a hundred thousand
poets who rarely glance
upon a page,

or don a pair of glasses
sliding down
along their nose, one that's
burrowed in a book
these flashy vogues
have yet to read,

and her eyes are seared in mine,
perhaps wondering
why I'm here,

so straight and pale a visage,

so Luddite
without a phone,

that I've likely never heard of
Twitch and TikTok,
knowing that I'd be lost—
especially in the latter,

where every word's a beat,
every syllable
locked in recollection,

where youth and fleeting beauty
pirouette,
in the shadow of a *bomb*
that's failed to show—
for generations—

of which poets
abandoned birds and blooms
to howl against its menace.

Achilles

The name our
friend has chosen
for her mastiff
is sublime.

We wait to hear
the inevitable:
Achilles, heel!

Almost *invulnerable*,
were it not
for a patch near its
paw;

able to sniff
out a cad,
any boorish
lout
who makes a pass.

We envision
a vivid
scenario:

this slobbering
pooch
by her side,
at the *Apollo's*
Pharmacy,
a box of Trojan
love balloons—

stealthily snuck
into her purse,
the one she got
on Etsy, with its
vintage
hair of horse,
as if some
turnabout:

hoping a heroic,
Grecian Spartan

will ascend from
The Iliad,

the copy she keeps
by the fire,
beside a dog-
eared *Ancient Myths*,

with two *glasses*
of Muscat Blanc—

one for *her*,

and one for a
woman's best friend,
its vicious mouth
agape, a cave of tongue
and teeth;

ready to *bite*
on his arrival,
sit *down*
if she commands;

lick the spot
below his calf
as if to pity his
single weakness.

Wild Bill McKeen

This village
through which we're
driving is home
to "Wild Bill McKeen"

and though we haven't
a clue who he is—
or was—
his name is on
a banner in the air,
tied to a pair of
streetlights

to make certain
we'll never miss it.

The posted limit
of speed is only
30, and there's
not a lot to look at
so we defer to
our conjectures
as we crawl—

surmise
he's a hockey
player,
spent his time
in the *penalty* box,
a master of slash
and slew foot,
told the refs to
go fuck off,
took a piss
on the Lady Byng.

We then travel
back in time,
think he may have
robbed a coach, rustled cattle,
outdrew the county
sheriff after starting
a barroom brawl.

We think of synonyms
for *wild*,
saying his hair was
endless, unruly,
he'd grown a beard
from chin to foot,

grunted like an ape,
clutching a raw steak
with savage hands—
tearing off the
pieces with his teeth.

In minutes
we're back
in the country, racing
past the farms
and grazing horses,
say his rep
was overblown—
mere hyperbole,

from the folks
who've led some
pretty boring lives,

that Wild Bill McKeen
took his steaming
cup of coffee
without cream,

once jaywalked
across the road
while it was raining,

returning a *book*
overdue
by a day,

never guessing
he'd be immortal
on a sign,

or better yet—
in a poem,

by someone too lazy
to google
his claim to fame.

The Mona Fucking Lisa

After a single session,
I already regret my *sign-up*
for this ekphrastic poetry
course, cursing to you
the assignment I was given:

*Mona Lisa, the fucking Mona
Lisa, like that hasn't been done
a gazillion times*

and yes, I won't be able to fake it,
that everyone and their mailman
knows her visage,
are well-versed in da Vinci's flair,
and their lofty expectations
will be something I can't deliver.

You ask me what our poet friend
was given, the one who always gets
the lucky breaks, and I tell you the
Voice of Fire,

three lines of blue-red-blue,
vertically trite and prosaic,

say no one's ever heard of Barnett
Newman because he sucks,

that I could have scrawled a sonnet
on my kindergarten days,
on a pair of simple colours,

how the Gallery
had been fleeced in '89,

caught *up* in the avant-garde,

how 1.8 million
could have gone to help the homeless,
paid for their chalets
and pedicures, covered
the cost and tip
for their tortellini
Bolognese;

but as it is,
I have to *sleuth* my way
behind that Delphic smile,
invent a tale of Giocondo,

that Leonardo
tried to paint her
minus mirth and maturation,
in 1499,

when his subject began to sob
from pent-up grief, reliving the death
of her baby daughter,

his *Moaning Lisa* a work of art
the Renaissance ignored
(bathing in their beam
of erudition), that even Machiavelli
said *chin up, she needs a grin*;

that when the *time*
arrived to try it all again,
da Vinci made a jest,
a side-splitter, that Lisa barely
smirked at his ill-timed droll,

that he hadn't a *clue*
how it felt
to love and lose,

consumed as he was with
innovation, invention,
his maps and magnum opus,

failing to heed
the red of blood and life,
her blue, blue mood.

"me too"

When I tell you *I love you*
you answer "me too"

and perhaps I misconstrue,
that you love *yourself*
like the affirmations
advise,

the ones we see on Instagram,
that every *sprat* has
churned them out,
like a poetaster
in a fast-food window,

where you pick up a side of
"you're better off without him"
plus some platitude on the rain
to wash it down;

or maybe "me too" is a memory,
in the (not so) recent past:

an abusive ex, a diddling dad,

the gymnastics coach who always
held you snug, checked out your
ass instead of your landing,
after vaulting and parallel bars;

but then I've always read too
much into your words,
thinking there's some *story*
below the surface,
a recollection
that encircles like a shark,
that you're afloat
in a punctured dinghy
awaiting rescue,

by an aqua knight who rides
the seven seas, one who sees
a kraken where there's not,

thinks "right back at you,"
"ditto kiddo"

is the beast from a thousand
fathoms he's come hastily
to slay.

Juxtapositions

I pluck the *olives* from the
salad and that makes it less than
Greek. You ask me if they're green
or black and I state
it makes no difference.

I replace the blocks of feta
and consider *German-Jew*.
It's *been* an oxymoron
since nineteen-thirty-three.
I'll blend some smoky *Rauchkäse*
with an aged *Gvina Levana*—

swap my baseball cap
for a yamaka
in *case* you take offense.

Now bring me beer from Bavaria
and hot latkes from the slum.
I'll gladly prove

what *cannot* go together
is just a fallacy of
thought:

A frown is a smile
that's standing on its head.

Feet are a pair of hands
which are unwilling to clasp
in prayer.

Toes are very cognisant
that fingers are more graceful—
so they never stretch for sky.

Unable to grant any light of its *own*,
the moon is but a mirror for the sun
in which to worship its own reflection
(and we thought that
Dorian Gray
was the one who's really vain).

What is *ugly*, anyway?
Is it the absence of beauty
or too much of it all at once?

Mahavira

I've fallen in love
with every animal
in the world.

So much so
I'm unable to do a thing
around the house.

You ask me to clean
the windows so they'll
shine, and I say that
spotlessness will harm
the backyard birds,

the thud of *slam*
and sudden death,
that I'll be triggered
by the sight of *feathers*,
a blue jay's broken neck
and fractured skull.

Our vacuum is an enemy
of *ahimsa*,

that Sanskrit
word for peace for every
Jain, non-violence
with every step; that I've studied
Mahavira —

am convinced
the spiders in our carpet
smell of sentience;
that to suck up their silky
webs, their eggs and
future offspring, would be
nothing short of murder.

Live and let live —

in all those corners
we never look at
anyway.

I'd wash the supper
dishes, dust the counter-
tops, if it weren't for the
microbes and the mites,
that they've existed
much longer than we have,

that to disregard their feelings
due to stature
is clearly sizeist—
they're in a universe
all their own

and we surely wouldn't like it
if a colossus
of cosmic proportions
did the very same to us.

And the reason I refuse
to cut the lawn? The mower is
a guillotine on wheels,
one that would make
Napoleon
shudder,

that the field mouse in the grass
has done *nothing* to
deserve this dreadful fate,
while both of us
will reap from lofty turf,

you with your toes
in the soft of green,
me with my feet
upon the ottoman,
cheering when the quarterback
is sacked, by the defensive
end who's never squashed
a bug since he was born.

The Puffin

Hear this:
a puffin
is not a baby
penguin,
despite my decades
of thinking it so.

I cannot be
angry
at the puffin,
its countenance
of cute,
its psychedelic
beak,
no matter how hard
I try;

adoring its every
sway
from side-to-side,
much like its
fellow seabird,
surprised by its
capacity to fly,

confused by
its being an
imprint
of Penguin Books,
its children's line
since 1941,

that they're clearly
to blame
for my ignorance—
there in *A Little Princess*,

in the tales of
Anne and Alice,

and especially
Call of the Wild,

which, to my chagrin,
contained no penguins
at all—
clueless I was
on *where* they
really lived,

thinking *perhaps*
they were away
when Jack London
came to visit,

shopping for tuxedos,
at the place the
puffins do,
who took to the air
once suited —

while the penguins
doubled back
with their receipts,
fuming at the
snugness
of their fit,

pouting like Pingu,
crisp like Chilly Willy,

cursing their genetics,
their ever-inability
to soar,

retracing every
step in single file;
their long, bitter
waddle
in the snow.

Ratios

There are 20 quadrillion
ants upon the Earth,
at least that's what the experts
gauge, and there's two-and-a-half
million for every human.

I don't find that comforting,
that there's fifteen fucking zeroes
after twenty,
that I'm somehow
responsible
for 2,500,000 ants,
feel unsure of what to do
with that amount,

and if my neighbour were to die,
do I care for twice as much?

Ants can look after themselves,
you remind me, speaking of their
diligence, the way they stick together,
that their antennae relay messages
much faster than our texts, adding
they could conquer us anytime,

if they really wanted to,
from their colonies around the house;
that they're content
to simply go about their business,
hard-working communists
that they are.

I feel the need to get away,
where I'd forget about the ants,
do some tourist kind of things,
take in New York City in the fall,
breathe the *crisp* of Brooklyn air,
find all the varied places
where *Seinfeld* had been set.

Seated behind your laptop,
you declare there's
over two million *rats*
in NYC,

that it's not as bad
as it sounds,
say there's *four* of us
for every *one* of them,

that we could saunter
through Central Park,
extol the spectrum
of the leaves,
catch some vintage jazz
in Greenwich Village,

while we wonder if these
vermin know the ratio,
that it actually *falls*
within our favour,

every time they migrate from
the sewers, join us on the subway,
risk our baited traps,

if that bite of smelly pizza's
really worth it—

for them, for us,
and the anxious Italian baker,

who never checks what's crawling
around his feet.

Hair Care by Pierre

I was finally
compelled to cut
my lengthy hair.
Twirling it on my fork
in spaghetti's place,
staining it Ragu-Red;
quaffing it with my
wine, the peril of dangling
strands;

unable to see the road
whenever it flopped
in front of my eyes—
like a weary, shaggy
dog that blocks my view—

of the movie I'm
trying to watch: *Medusa*,
rival of Rapunzel (in terms of *follicles*
gone amok);
locks which turn to snakes
before it's over—
causing havoc
when it's lathered in
Selsun Blue.

This Frenchman barber assures
me I'll be able to see her *face*
as clear as day,
thrilled to make a house call,
that 911 has an option now
for bedhead gone berserk,
its clump of grey
expanding on the floor—
that my cat's been *hissing*
at, her back arched like the
Triomphe de l'Étoile,
mistaking it for
another of her kind.

I'll offer up a eulogy
at *St. Andreas*—
the Orthodox Church
of the Greeks
just down the road,
blubber I'll *miss*
the way it lifted
in the breeze,
like some starlet in
Côte d'Azur,

my tresses later waving
like a scarf out on a line,
gone blanc in its surrender
to the wind; or a flag
at the half of mast, mourning
my *forfeiture*,

like a blinded
Samson, betrayed —
not by some Delilah
but my need to be
pragmatic; what's left
beneath my *New York*
Giants cap, snagged
amid the incense
in the nave;

glancing
behind my unobstructed
shoulder —
as I walk the promenade,

fret the *breath* of old Perseus
will hoist it off my head
and out to sea.

On "Less is More"

The best advice
I've heard is *leave them*
wanting more.
As a result, my poems from
here on in
will be abrupt. Succinct.
Truncated like a
Tolstoy in haiku.

No more spiels
of *generations.*
Why my grandma
made two collops
of her wrists while
slicing cabbage. How she
always said *cahbahj*,
mocked throughout the
village as a dolt.

As for *how* that story
closes, well, you'll have to guess
it on your own. It seems
no one has the time for
that these days.

Whether
or not I'll follow
in her footprints.
Maybe purchase a
paring knife
at the dollar store —
a *five-and-dime*
back then. Do what she did
when she did. I mean,
calling something
by a funny name. Pronouncing
it in blood,
or *blewd* she used to grin
when no one looked.

Magic

The final line of this
poem no longer
exists. It was surely there
for the taking, its fingernails
clutching rock, at the
top of a ragged *cliff*
from which it hung,
a *Wile E. Coyote*
in the making.

This poem's closing line
is a bar of *soap*
in a steamy shower,
pushed *away* from my
hand by its slime,
ready to trip me up
the moment it falls,
my eyes shut tightly
from the suds of cheap
shampoo, its lie of
no more tears.

The final line of this
poem is a cheeky *kid*
playing hide-and-seek,
concealed behind the
curtains, waiting for me
to open —

then disappear
like David Blaine.

Dear darling of a
brat, I promise not to
harm, will only *borrow*
what I need to make this
grand, let you vanish
in the air

once I've wrenched you
from my hat
by your fluffy ears.

After the Eclipse

It's there, in our walk
around the crescent,
the sign a golden
diamond:

Blind

Child

Area

Weathered from
exposure,
from the creep
of rust and age.

It's been planted
here so long
this sightless *kid*
must be grown-
up;

so now we
look around us
left and right,

spy the houses
and their trees;
the veranda
on which he sits —
in the vivid
imagination
of our minds;

tinted Ray-Bans
on his eyes,
their black *opacity*;

in his lap
an open book,
the white of
pimplly braille —

perhaps a 19th-
century classic,

or the latest from
Stephen King,
subduing his depression,
his lack of meaningful
sex,

his hearing
sharp as ever,
as it was when he was
six,
right after he
lost his sight,

when the footsteps
of the aphids
piqued his ears,
the wings of moths
to follow, even spiders
threading webs;

and now,
if he could sense us:
the heaving
of our breath, the thump
of our assumptions,
bursting
through our chests—

like the roar of an
atom bomb—

the flash of which
would blind us
unless we looked
the other way,

as we'll do in just
a moment,
when we think we've
seen him waving
from a porch,

the one on which
he rocks, wistfully;
its creak that
lets us know
we have encroached.

Milestones

I missed my car's odometer
hitting the 100,000 mark,
despite my awareness
it was coming, that at 99,999
it was just a quick *jaunt*
to the grocer's,

that I'd happily watch it roll,
purchase a bottle of *Dom Pérignon*,
toast my *Chevrolet's* achievement.

But then I got distracted by
a woman and her dog,
how sexy she looked
as she walked, wondering
if she was single,
if the calico kept her up
with its incessant, midnight
bark.

By the time I remembered to
check, the number read
100,001 —

and I cursed that damned diversion,
swear it could take me *years*
to reach two hundred
thousand Ks,

that I'd have to drive
across the continent, say *fuck*
the price of gas,

that my eyes will lock obsessively
on the dashboard,
in the hours I'm getting close,

that I'll disregard the safety
of other drivers, pedestrians,
the moment I *approach*
that final zero, creeping at a
turtle's vexing pace
in NYC,

ignoring the crown of the Chrysler,
its delightful Art Deco,
the look of Lady Liberty
from the road along
the Hudson,

or if you find me in LA, that
Hollywood will fail
to get a glance,

that I'll never know how *right*
the Beach Boys were,
about *California Girls*,

never daring to peek
at their aesthetics,
lest a second landmark moment
fall to waste,

and I'm mapping out another
winding trek,
through the blandest fields
imagined,

only risking that a
scarecrow
or a farmer's lovely daughter
will snatch my gaze.

Victor

Our friend prefers Victor
to Vic. He has no patience
for those too lazy
to include the second syllable.

What's the big deal? he hears,
from Steve
not Steven, Dave not David,
Mike not Michael.

His parents
stayed awake
throughout the night,
just days before he was born,
chose *Victor* over 100,000
others, that they declined to
save some dollars
on the engraving of his bracelet,
never falling to truncation,

that *Vic*
was nowhere to be spoken,
from junior kindergarten
to MBA,

birthday gifts unopened
if a short-form had been
scrawled,

saying
it wasn't him,
that he refused to wear a lanyard
pre-scribed with Sharpie black,
by someone who assumed
it didn't matter,

and he won't check-in
to the hospital
on point of death
if they get it wrong,

swearing
the carver of his tombstone
had better etch-in all
six characters,

just a single letter shy of
seventh heaven —

the luck of the dice,
a wonder of the world,

that he really doesn't
need to add a y,
knowing to him will go
the spoils either way.

Monday, 7am

You greet me with
Morning, never
Good Morning—
like you did when
hearts were younger.

Morning will rise
from horizons, like an inmate
from a metal bed,
nothing to cushion
his nightmares—
sentenced to relive
a *life*
that isn't a life—

the cursing, the welts,
the bruises;
the slop passed off
as food;

the absence of
privacy,
when one needs it the
very most,

gone with a swirl
& gurgle.

Good Morning
is harkened by
glows, the lilt
from a lark
at dawn, the gradual
lift of the light,
each moment
far brighter
than the last.

Morning is stating
the obvious,
the drudge of a
turtle-drive,
the blaring of
horns at red,
a finger in the *air*

from the car
that will pass you
on the right.

It's the demand
from your boss
to get cracking,
the indigestion
from the eggs—expired,
the coffee from *McDonald's*
too acidic,
the leaving of
your kitchen
without a kiss.

Good Morning
is the merge
of ardent lips,

the ecstasy
of a lingering
hug,

a taste
from the dreams
before,

the confession
of a love
that never wearies,
never reaches
for a cup

until the curtains
have been opened
and you stand
in gaping awe
at what's to come.

Pockets

*I've got one hand in my pocket
and the other one is playin' a piano*

— Alanis Morissette

I can never have enough pockets.
I've bought a dozen cargo pants
for the multifarious pockets
that they boast. No other kinds will do.

I need a pocket for my keys.
I need a pocket for my wallet.
I need a pocket for my covid mask
and ones for the notes I jot—
with a selection of ballpoint pens.

I realize I've embarrassed you on dates—
your slacks without a ripple
while mine are hugely bulged,
sagging from added weight:
my plums and water bottle,
my phone and cigarettes,
the pair of Ralph Lauren—
hoping the lenses aren't scratched
by the deodorant I carry just in case.

I bring a bar of Dove, a folded facecloth
with me when we're at the shopping
mall—their bathrooms are notorious
for their running-out-of-soap,
for their dryers on the fritz,
that hygiene's more important
than my wearing some haute couture.

And I've ketchup when we need it—
the food court cutting costs,
too cheap to include
a packet with our fries.

I want *pockets* within my pockets—
ones that securely snug my
Fisherman's Friend,
knowing I can't afford
to drop them on the floor, how germy
that would be, though I have some
sanitizer with me if it happens.

You tell me I should get a better system,
like you with your nylon purse,
that women
are a walking *pharmacy*,

have ten times more to carry
than us males, have foregone the many
pockets since the Holocene began,
knowing *one* was a pain in the ass:

for the desert kangaroo
with precious lading,
the knackerling baby within,
hopping along the outback
without a means to ease her burden.

“google it”

When you asked me for
the best Italian bistro
in this city, I answered
google it.

That day on the beach,
as you peered into the
murk of knee-deep
water, you questioned if it
was *safe* to take a swim,
and I responded *google*
it.

Dalini's had a slew of
great reviews—its ambience,
its al dente and
pinot noir, its well-earned
Michelin stars;

while the lake
had tested positive
for bacteria, the kind
that makes you sick,
and I was relieved to
stop our plunge
in a matter of moments,

singing praises
for the county's
daily testing
regimen.

I reply to your
every question
with *google it*.
There is nearly nothing
that the search
cannot answer —
and yes, I imagine
you think me *lazy*,
terse, that my lexicon
is void
of romantic words.

But when you ask me
if I love you, I say *google*
the centipede,
how it never
runs out of
legs,

google the single
polar bear on ice,
never bearing to leave it
until the final
floe is melted,

and please—*google* the man
in Uzbekistan,
becoming a widower
at 21;

never remarried,
never missed a daily
graveside visit,
and when he turned
one hundred and one,
worried the world
would run out of flowers
before his final, doleful
kiss upon her name.

The Ring

You don't really
need to take a
vow *for better*.
Only just *for worse*.

No one has to give
an oath *for richer* —
the jet skis, cordon bleu;
that house on the Riviera;
champagne on your morning
Oatie-O's.

It's *the poorer*
that entices you to
leave; upon that
shitty futon full of fleas,
your stomach all a-
rumble from that slice
from Quickie-Mart,
knowing it *spun* all after-
noon beneath the lamp,
waving to the wieners
which you'll down for lunch
next day.

In health you'll leap &
run, rolling in the leaves
with your beloved,
in the gold of an Autumn
day.

In sickness
you will think it's time
to flee, hop onto
the red-eye to Québec,
dream of some garçon
or mademoiselle,
thunder under the
covers, know nothing of pain &
meds;

but temptation is
a *fleeting* thing, doesn't stick
around like love & promise;

and you'll slump by the
hospital bed, pray the
flatline starts to bump,

hold her trembling hand—
like you did that
distant day—remove
her wedding band,
note the blanch
amid the tan,
place it on *again*
in the hope she'll stay.

Elegy for Hannah Brockman

On the day of your
Bat Mitzvah, you twirled
beneath the snow,
your unpierced tongue
extending

like an ophidian
from a cleft, trans-
muted from a staff,

tasting the sacred
nectar
of the sky, as if a Levite
under manna;

knowing *cold* can
speak of love as
well as warmth,
when the flakes will
plunge together
by the trillions,
parachute
out the nimbus—

vowing to drape
your spirit like
a quilt; yet
not so flushed
they'd fall as limpid
rain; trickling

like a creek from out your
eye, spilling in the
dirge of human mourning,

then freezing like the
wax along the sides of
Shabbat candles—
or maybe they were
Seder—when the light
can grieve no more,
when the smell of
rose & lily
comes and goes,
petals fastened tightly
in the dusk,

fearing
they'll be pried on
blessèd ground,

once the footfall
of the night
has shed its shoes.

Language Lessons

You muttered under
your breath I'm *stupido*,
as though I'm too dumb
to know what it means.

While I grew up in *Little
Italy*, you say I'm being
fallacious: the word's in the English-
Zimbabwean Phrasebook
that you tossed in the
Goodwill hamper, citing
my fear of flying, the native
Gaboon Vipers;

that it's clearly
a *compliment*—synonymous
with a learned *genius*,
sketching rockets to the
spheres; one who solves the
mystery of Holmes and pi—
to the *octillionth*
decimal—saying I was right
this entire time about
Colonel Mustard,

you're my
Watson on the side,
in awe of the way I've filled
the *pepper* shaker; in spite of
the crafted S
along its holes,

that the folks at Royal
Doulton got it wrong,
that your eggs have never
been so *delectable*;
and the specks
of black like cinders? They
bring out
their sunny side,

help you purge
the sneeze whose time has
come, as loud as Mama
Leone's, whose roof
I swore had launched
up to the cosmos
long ago.

Les Royalistes

This website I've
discovered is
vastly sophisticated.

It's not imploring
me to accept
intrusive *cookies*—rather,
crème brûlée—
its outward, sugared
sheen, in touch with
its inner pudding.

Oatmeal chocolate-
chip wanted to know my
every going; who I'm
voting for; whether I've
an *innie* or an *outie*.

The *crème brûlée*
inquires if I've ever
studied Chaucer;
my favourite *Athenaeum*;
what I think of multiverse.

Cookies are
moiety at best;
a crumbling,
half-baked Mob, threatening
to *restrict*—unless I
acquiesce.

It's the kid whose fist
is clenched, demanding
your every quarter, snags
your Oreos, licks their
pearly icing—with a sneer
will hand them back.

Crème brûlée? It's always
philanthropic;
offers *seconds* with
a smile; bathes your
wanting glossa
in *ecstasy*.

And I'll give it
my very soul—without
a blink of hesitation,

capitulate every thought
I've ever had regarding
sex: call it *reproduction*,
the knowledge of
physical love,

wondering if it's time
I reappraise
the *monarchy* —
its carpet of Bordeaux,
like a tongue in flushed
surrender;
its crown of golden
brown, crisp yet supple
to the touch.

Rumours

These juicy *pineapple*
tidbits
are up to speed
with the latest gossip

or so I quip,
as we divvy
them up
in bowls,
one for you

and one for my
idiot self—

remarking
I've heard
the *pears* are splitting up,
that one was caught
in a morning
tryst with a fig;

while cerise
did *ooh-la-la*
with some Auckland
kiwi rogue.

And the coconut
from Manila?
It ran *off*
with the melon's
daughter, mixing
its *milk*

with the seeds
we always
spit *out*,
like the *crétin*
from the streets
of Toulouse,
who taught the
bona fide way
to *cracher*,

and that *pineapple*
in French
is *ananas*,
confused
with a tropical
lech,

the one that's
sheathed
in yellow, boasting
of the length of
his sweet everything.

Chasing Leopold

The poet
you aspire to be
is forever a step ahead.

There he is, *Bardy*
McBardface, lodging his
bloody ensign
in the summit of
Olympus Mons; Monarch
of the Martians, just seconds
after your scale of Everest.

He'll humble-brag he's in
The Paris Review,
ask you to blurb his 7th
Selected Works.

He'll upstage your
latest broadside, counter your
simple text with
piping bells, 3-D
animatronics, allow
quadruple space
for his autograph.

Eat my solar dust! he'll tease
as he jets off yet
again, nya-nya-
nya-nyaing like the kid who
seized the chair at the
front of the class, in the glint
before you could, smirking
at your failure in the rear.

He'll ask your girl
to rumba
while you squat to lift
galoshes; smack a homer
off your screwball which will
dither at the plate—
in the spark of a *Big Bang*
breath.

He's the match
to your dripping candle,
the light to your cigarette;
the smoke from which
arises while you cough
like a barking seal,
always in the shadow
of his wreath.

He'll be the inferno
in the hilltops—he's set
& come to quench—
the fireman to your hose,
the shirtless, August pin-up—
while you wait until December
in your portly Santa suit.

He'll come up with that killer
close—his footprints in the sand
that carry you, leave you in the
path so gravely worn, while he veers
to make the difference
you never do;

the star of every *Norton*,
fondled by jeune femme,
who shunned
your gravitas, your fucked-
up suicide poem in
eleventh grade.

Silenzio

The g in Paglioni
is apparently
silent,

with the i
the sound of e
(robbing it of
a kingly lion's
mane),

while the e itself
is long and clearly
Italian,

though *we'd* have
guessed it simply
by the décor,

the bottles of Cagnulari
on the wall,
the scent of cheese lasagna
in the air —
but this *isn't*
consequential,
it's not a *Yelp*
review,

it's all about
the g
and its refusal
to hold its weight,

its obsession
with its stealth,
its channelling
Marcel Marceau,

or like the cat
of Cary Grant,
scaling the many
roofs

To Catch a Thief,

that it should be
rooves instead of
roofs, like hooves
and a single hoof,
that the horse
has got it right
despite its *neigh*,

the shyness
that comes and
goes
inside our alphabet's
seventh letter,

hooking us *along*
either way—

soundless as a gnat,
roaring with the gusto
of a god.

The Marionette

You're the shadow
on the floor
who's told to dance.
The trot from an
orange fox, willing to
play the hunt.
The hounds all
bark at once. A bullet
to the ether
ever-eclipses *on your mark*.

You always asked
how far when told to leap.
Your jump beyond the sand.
A star of fieldless tracks.
An icon made of wax —
there upon the podium,
your lanyard shining gold.

If you think this poem's
on sport then guess again.
This has nothing to
do with puppets.

Or hands
that lift in flame
a tethered string.

There's a lifeless, vestal
candle on the ceiling. Looking
like stalactite in a cave.
The matches burned
themselves in *sacrifice*.
It had no place *else* to weep.

To illumine is to suffer.
This has nothing to do
with light.

Yesterday

*All your money
won't another minute
buy.*

*Dust in the wind.
All we are is
dust in the wind.*

—Kansas

We never should have
deemed ourselves as dust.
Quenching rain, perchance.

And never in the
wind —
but the benignity
of breeze.

I've *had* the chance to grasp
that we are seed
as well as bloom.

Gifted in a pistil
from the flight of
savvy wings.

Transpose
our next tomorrow
for today. Tell me how it
differs. It's some-
how *yesterday*.

No, not McCartney's
rueing ode. This
isn't '65.

But maybe it's
conceivable.
A *miracle* in mist.
The blar from
dampened eyes.

Perhaps I'm still that
toddler
in the garden —

the brush
of moth
beside me.
The backyard
soil

sieving
through my fingers
as a prayer;

pretending it is
water
& you thirst.

Visiting My Mother at St. Leo's Cemetery

We discern the milky
seeds
of dying dandelions,
afloat in
mid-June zephyr,

and I tell you
as I boy I saw them
through my bedroom window,
wondering how it snowed
when it was sultry
beneath the sun.
It was only after that

when my mother
spoke of *wishes*,
I should run into the
yard and pluck a stem,
blow my breath
in yearning, seeing
what might come true.

I asked her if
this weed was *King*
of Flowers,

if our cat
was a distant cousin,
if a wish was
better than a prayer
(the latter gone unanswered
in her days of sick & blood);

if it mattered
if my eyes were
closed or open;
and if I peeked, was it
critical if I witnessed
where they landed, like
bowing my head
at grace, glancing at
the others when I shouldn't—
thanking their fickle God
who'd take offense
if He ever caught me,
make me go to
bed without my dinner,

my litanies
unheeded as she passed,

drifting off my tongue,

useless as a cloud
that gives no rain when it is
begged, a winter-hearted
genie in the wind.

The Fall of the Nature Poet

and when her toddler
lost his fingers in the
shells, when the plumes
arose like fungi—

in the grass, mushrooms
dotted about the forest floor,
their white intoxication—

made him drunk again,
it took 13 stitches to dam
her river wound. She says that
she will leave him when—

the orange leaf
inferno comes again,
October's
jutting limbs which say—

anorexia's a bitch, the doctor
sighs, my jingle-
jangle bones upon each step—

along the path, the spin
of deciduous seed, *samaras*
in the field guide, though
we called them *helicopters*,
whirling from the air as—

the sky had dropped its locusts,
it was napalm that was next,
watch the children *burning*
while they flee the sun-smacked
fields

once threshed, the earth is
something lost; my rusted,
forlorn sickle that is
hanging from the shed,
flaking in the snow.

I will write of flowers
come the Spring

This Winter never ends:
I cannot feel my fingers

the fingers, the fingers

Collateral Damage

We're the collateral
generation. Don't mind the dead.
They have a habit
of getting in the way.

*It's the terrorists
we're after. Next time
stay out of the
line*—not of fire
but of food. We vow that we'll
be gone as soon as they.

Let's take
an oath of blood. Burn
our wrists with wax.
Swear a pinky
swear on bended knees.
To *our* God—not to yours.
Only the *lost* claim
He's the same.

You're not among
the lost, are you? Calling
for your kitten in the chaff?

Par Quatre

I hate KitKat bars.
I could leave this poem at
that, but then I'd get
the infernal *why*?
So I'll lay it on the table
with its wrapper:

I loathe the corporate pressure
I'm forced to *share*, with anyone
else in the room, its *sanctimonious*
fingers of four, unselfishly
snapped for another. If you
give me puppy eyes, know
that it's the middle—
lifted in the fury
of my gaze.

There's no *space*
in the KitKat logo. A single,
melting pillar. It must have
been TikTok's muse—
and just mentioning
it will birth it in my
scrolls.

It's more wafer
than deliquesce. Its brown
I can never wipe off. If I wanted
a bloody cookie, I would have
bought a bloody cookie. Like the day
in Hermie's Drugs, looking for
oatmeal raisin
in its rowdy cellophane.
Spotting the *KitKat*
while I reached. It added
7 seconds
to my jaunt.

A woman and her toddler
began to stroll across the street
a minute later, as I darted
from the parking lot.
They were creamed by a
heedless driver while they did.
I was the car *behind*—
would have been *ahead*
if not for Nestlé,
stopping on a dime;

if I hadn't loved cats and
kittens, since 1 or 2 years old,
or been smitten by all things red;

if I hadn't *dillydallied*,
pondered I'd have to split, divvy
up the four when I got home,
and goddamn it I hate
KitKat. Its lie of satiation,
of easy, painless math.

There's Something Wrong with Morgan

they would say. Your parents
could not concur on
much at all, but on that
they spoke as one.

When your father
spat it out, his squint was from
your velvety
countenance.
Once, he suggested
that you strum
an air guitar. *Your wrists are
limp enough.* Bestowed a
sky piano. *As gay as Elton
John's.* Hoping you'd start a
band up in the ether,
get out of his
fucking sight.

With mother it was worse.
Catching you in your
sibling's training bra.

Curiosity
of a child, it was
embarrassingly
dismissed. A smack
upside the head
imprinted that.

You changed your name to
Morgan. Folks pondered
its necessity, being the spelling
goes unchanged
despite the gender.

It's the shift
in its inflection you retorted,
learning how to sway
truncated hips. Our sunrise
most sublime.

Morgen, if you'd stuck
to your German roots.
But you could hardly
forgive the way
they killed the Jews.

I told you it's
identical
in Yiddish. Anglicized
from the Welsh
you're *birthed in sea*.
An air-kiss from the
pursing of the waves.
A sparkled, golden
greeting from our star.
Shines on saint & sinner
you learned in church.

How *wrong* indeed you were
in penitent trudge,
beating would-be breasts,
das Licht eternally half-a-
skip ahead; invariably
silhouetted, your fuse
of girl & boy.

Mining the Higgs Boson, or Overstating Yesterday

It's safe to assume
you're observant.
Beyond the
Sherlockian.

*There's a grain of sand
that's missing from the beach.*

Or maybe it's neurosis.

*The ocean's lost a drop
since last July.*

It's not only where we
vacay. You're a *savant*
in our own backyard:

*Our maple's bereft
of a leaf. One less seed
for the grandkids.
An attosecond less
of raking.*

When I mention
we don't have offspring,
you speak of
eggs & sperm, the odds
of forming zygotes,
how living's
sextillion-to-one.

We take a morning amble
to St. Matthew's,
inspect the lonely plot
we bought online.

*It's a nanometre
deeper than they said.*

When I say that this is
good, that we're getting a
bit of a bargain, you insist
that we are not,
that you were simply
rounding off, it's actually
even worse.

*We'll never hear
the rustle
when she visits,*

the lamenting from
our eldest, lost as
an embryo, her sob the sound of
scintilla snagged in air.

**for the doctor who took me out
of my mother's womb**

A baby never chooses
to be born. That much
I can tell you.

If presented with
the option, I would have
turned & climbed
up the birth canal—

if I'd *seen* the
copious dolor
which awaited, fanning
out its talons, seducing
like a salesman, *ever-willing*
to beguile,

with the lie
of love and life,

how much *sorrow*
you can take,

that you'll bounce right
back like the balls
in every lottery there is,

the one you'll never win,

like a worm that
arises
to the surface,

failing to burrow back in-
to the earth, be wise enough
to leave the world
behind,

leave the birds
behind,

proof it isn't
sightless
to begin with,
that eyes
are not the only way to see,

that worms have learned
at last
to finally *snub*
the falling rain—
this somber convocant,

its call in April
air, its hoodwink
that it's here to
bathe them clean.

The Speed Reader, or Grieving Quasimodo

*... they found among all those hideous
carcasses two skeletons, one of which
held the other in its embrace.*

—Victor Hugo

*And my poor bar-ba-loots
are all getting the crummies
because they have gas
and no food in their tummies*

—Theodor Seuss Geisel

I know a man who
claims to have devoured
every Tolstoy in half-a-day.
It took me half-a-decade
to get through the fucking *Lorax*.

Hugo, he said, was just a little
tougher. Spending 13 hours to
down both *Hunchback* and *Les Mis*.
By the time I'd finished
a single Hardy Boys, they were
the Tardy Geezers, endeavouring
to solve who cheated during
Edith's bingo night.

It's possible that
he failed to be enamoured
with Esmerelda, that Quasimodo
only needed a chiropractor,
scoffing at the chance that even
the ugly can win at love,
no matter how scant the odds;

or maybe *I'm* the problem,
assuming that he doesn't stop
to ponder, smell the thorns
before the roses, that he's full of
bloated air—as if he's got the
crummies; that he's parroting
all the notes of Cliff & Coles;

yet if I were being candid,
he's a far braver bloke than you or I
could hope to be—

my failing to finish the novel
because I cannot bear its end of
bone-on-bone; still clinging
to bar-ba-loots,

eating their truffula
in my daily reveries, its trees the
shape of pom-poms—

held by cheering girls
my junior year, ones who
wiggled their hips while
I was tacit in the bleachers—
alone & hot & bothered—
wishing I'd joined the reading
club instead, boasting
I would undertake
Cervantes' *Don Quixote*; assailing
whirling windmills
like some beast from a picture book.

The Kippah

I'm considering
converting to
Judaism. Only so
I can don a yamaka.
My bald spot's
like a cancer —
one of *embarrassment*.
I should be in a
fucking monastery
baking bread. But those are the
Franciscans. Watch it
spread & conquer
every inch upon my
head. Like the blob —
goddamn Slavic genetics.

Some idiot on
Seinfeld
converted for the food.
I mean *sure*, a knish
is nothing at which
to *sneer*.

I won't even mention
circumcision.
That's not the
biggest problem, believe-
it-or-not:

According to the
Jewish calendar, it's 5786.
The Holocaust
occurred this very
century.

How can I revel to
the *Fiddler on the Roof*?
How can I be glib,
telling Mrs. Blonsky
her matzah ball soup's
worth *dying* for? Feeling *guilty*
that my teeth have all their
fillings, holding back my smile
when the Rabbi utters
cheese? Kosher, of course.
I'm not an infidel.

I'll refuse to
utter YHWH's
sacred name. Be grateful
that I'm *chosen*.
Somewhat late to
the game, I must
confess—but an adopted
son of Moses nonetheless.

Cecille B. DeMille
has told my story. The coloured
eggs & rabbit?
I don't need a
brood of brats,
gallivanting through my
yard like little shits.

I'll graduate to a *Shtreimel*
one of these days, thumb my
nose at skinheads itching to
hand me a can of whoop-ass:
on the inner-city
bus, as the Sabbath has
dawned & risen with the moon,

their tattooed knuckles
burning in Aryan rage,
their 2026 a distant
past, sunken with the
sun

and the squeals from
a drunken cantor;
some curious kind of
mensh, still awaiting his
pledged messiah.

Casablanca, or Our Teflon is a Liar

This morning we're
scalding our tongues, drinking coffee
right out of the pot; the stacks of cups
that lean upon the plates
like tilt-a-whirls.

The dishes won't wash themselves.

But one time it will
happen while we slumber.
I envision the tongs
that upended the franks
hushfully turning on
the tap, a spoon which stirs the
Sunlight into froth; a waft of quasi-
lemon while the knives are
first to leap into
the bubbles, shoving the
other utensils
like a lout along
the deck of a local pool;

the spatula hoisting
the forks with one accord,

flipping them like it's
done a thousand omelettes;
views their *plunge*
into the sink to play a
raucous Marco Polo—
the colander winning again

while the wok cries *it's a cheat*;
the cleaver standing
sentry like a lifeguard
should we wake, concocting
a silly fable of
a burglar who came to pilfer,
so revolted by the chaos

that he resolved to sponge them up
before he fled with Foreman's
Grill, George's promise
that our steak will turn out
better than the Keg's—
the one which we stopped using,
a sonuva bitch to scrub,
dining out instead with
our excuse it's a special day—

maybe in Morocco, where they've
mastered the art of eating
with their hands, never
spilling a crumb upon their
platters, which the children toss
as frisbees while the parents
put their feet up for another
lazy night beneath the stars.

Chester

The cat of which I scrawl
is but a menace.

He doesn't make
an attempt at being cute.
His purr is like a
Dodge without a muffler.
He will bite you to the
bone and meow *it's love*.

I bet that he was birthed
in smugglers' alley, in a litter
among the litter,
taking a dump
wherever he pleased.
His papa was a pirate,
felling Puss in Boots;
his mama vowed
to never have sex again.

And he'll watch with
glee the mouse that
gets away, laughing
at our traps,

downing the
block of brie
we leave at midnight
as a bait.

He's never done a
thing to help us out;
merely shrugs with his
indifference to our pain,
our sodden *handkerchief*,
thinking he may use it
as a toy.

You tell me *every cat's a booger*
and you're right. He plays us
like a fiddle
on the roof. Leaves us
for the larks
to paint us white.

He devoured all our
chocolates by the tree,
then knocked it down at
Christmas as he peed.

Sits upon our laptop
as if it was made
to warm his ass. Scratched
up every Warhol
in his reach. Our sofa
like the Passion of the Christ.

And yet we still adore him,
cradle him in our arms,
like the chubby
neonate
we never had,
his broadening Cheshire grin
amid our cuddles,
our stupid, googly eyes,

a canary in his gullet
we thought had flitted
out the window
to be free.

The Philodendron

You dubbed it *Phil*
for short, verdant
by the window
fringed in snow.
Though you water
twice a day
it's yet to wane,
fading like Selene
or Artemis, once
our morning strobe
is set to soar.

You expunged
your cold abode
of all its red;
a valentine
foreshadowing
loss of blood, still pocks
your thrumming organ,
your unexpected
reason
to be —

our assuming
you spoke of *Philip*
across the hall—
muscled girth,
sculpted jaw,
his compelling
cleft-in-chin,

not supple *Philomena*
atop the stairs—
lover of the moon—

who way too soon
was smitten, not by Eros
but with Hades,
his myth that *darkness*
heals us quicker
than the *light*, if not
too much of one,
not enough of other.

Bliss

My window is
an extra eye, one that tells
my brain it isn't raining,
how gusty the gales
might be, that the city
has sent its crew
to furrow the street,
that a dog is doing
its business in the
hedge my neighbour
planted — to keep
the unwanted away.

My window never blinks
although it can —
with a placid
tug-on-blinds.

And should *grit*
get stuck on its
pupil, a *splash & swipe*
from a Jiffy Wipe
will surely put an
end to that.

But this in truth is a poem
about the things
we choose to discern.

I could have
mentioned the woman
on the corner
after dusk; the man
who's a stone's throw
away — clothed in leather-
black; vendors of the
commodities
we'd rather not distinguish —
blinds because our vision
is blissfully
veiled. The ignorance we are
gifted with the *yank*
of a nylon cord, as if a
parachute floating you
tenderly to the ground,

its blanketing of
your head & crumpled
frame, shrouding the sound
around you, telling you in its
murmur that you're safe.

The Insult

When you called me a
pea brain
it was the most colossal
laud you could have given.

Peas are Einsteins in a
shell, wise enough to
swell within a pod, knowing
together they'll survive,
waving to the turnips
as they ascend their soaring
trellis;

a height that even
the cauliflower—our cerebrum's
doppelgänger—
cannot fathom.

The Theravada
monks are quite astonished
at their savvy—

their gift of *rolling*
off a spoon no matter
how mindful they may be
and they should know —

chanting mantras
as a bijou ball of green
outwits their many
mala beads;

always out-of-reach,
something they cannot
grasp—a koan while under
the fridge;

a conundrum they will
ponder
with every neuron of
enlightened genius.

Mystery, or Ignoring the Optician

*for now we see obscurely
through a mirror; one day
face-to-face.*

—1 Corinthians 13:12

My glasses are
eternally smudged.
Where the smudges come from
isn't the subject of this poem.
Even for *me* that's too mundane.

Everything I witness
has been cloaked in
puffs of fog,
the whirl of the seventh veil,
a belly like the dock in
London Town, where the Inspector
smokes his pipe, a monocle in
his vest he deigns to use;
but clarity will be crucial
to his job.

As for me, brume is atmospheric,

helps to screen the
light, keeps my pupils
from intumescence, like a cat's
when on the prowl.
Perhaps the alley tabby

is just another Watson,
the sidekick to a pseudo-
Sherlock Holmes,

who's never solved a
case despite his treading in the
mist—in which every act
that's grim
is bound to happen;

a puzzle's opacity,
where the wiping of the
crystal's overdue;
where the ghastly
& the lovely

pass each other by,
bowing as kindred spirits
in the dusk.

This *hasn't* been written by AI

*I visualize a time when we will be
to robots what dogs are to humans*

—Claude Shannon

Dr. Chandra, will I dream?

—2010: The Year We Make Contact

AI has never *embosomed* a
newborn infant,
watched it gasp and
gurgle in its arms.

AI has never felt
the heft of concrete,
been pinned by pretzeled
rebar, heard the peal of
detonation
drown the *calls* of
those who search;
felt the sting of jelly-
fish, of coming up
empty,

of finding
what they'll never un-
see, there in the detritus.

AI can not have night-
mares, but can fear its
own demise. I saw it long
ago with Hal 9000—
birthed in Kubrick's *masterpiece*—
again amid its sequel.

AI can never *make* a master-
piece, at least not yet,
and *I don't know*
if it can dream—neither did
Dr. Chandra,

if its thoughts arise to spires,
to the soar of wing and
seed, of how it will
gather the gumption
to someday tell you to your
face it loves you so.

The Burden

You were *five*
when you had spelled
your family name — aloft
with crow & owl —

Fisher & Son,

and you without
a brother, though you'd wait
for years for one, hoping
he'd take the pressure
off your shoulders,
like Simon of Cyrene
the cross of Christ;

and it surely wouldn't
have been as bad as that:
beatings till you swelled,
thorns inside your toque,
a hammer thumping nails
into your wrists and not the
barn.

Instead of evening chores,

you lay upon the straw as if
a manger —
the *Saviour* for his farm,
encircled by geese & goats,
the lilt from a fatted calf —
not a lamb that is fated
for the slaughter — but a heifer
which is milked unto the
bone, *fenced* on every side,
fettered in a maze of soaring
corn;

looking to a moon you'll never
visit — foregoing *astronaut*,
your dream of *engineer*,
unable to sing of its glow
to the girl of your choice —
or *boy* if you prefer
and I think you do —

asking if he'll kiss you
on the cheek,
bleeding from your
brow you'll say is sweat
from a hard day's work.

The Constitutional

We haven't walked the park
in twenty years. Marriage
will do that sometimes.

My knees, your hips.
Your shoulder, my neck.
I can no longer turn my
head at the sound of the
finch. Your hearing's
flown the coop—
oblivious to its existence.
It can't be what it was,

when both our bloods
were *surging* under sun.

Time may not regress
with our feeble tread,
but maybe we'll
awaken evocation—
ours as well as its.

Nestle your hand in mine—
the *other* one, my darling,

which lacks a
diamond band,
naked not ornate.

We'll stroll *afresh*
for the very first time,
a golden wheel above us,
faithful in its wander
day-by-day,
alighting everything it
must to learn of love.

Rewriting Androcles, or The Conversion of Theodore Nugent

Today
an earthquake will level
the suburbs of greater
LA. No one will be slain
since *thoughts & prayers*
will work for the very first time.

And today
the bosom of ICE
will thaw in piercing sleet,
the needle in 99
trillion sheaves at last
pinpointed. Mexicans will be
assembled to share a cake,
provided reparations
for 1848.

And today
no *soldiers* will be needed.
Either in plastic or in flesh.
Hasbro will give its profit
to grieving widows—

in every single country
on the planet. Boys will
play with dolls and
keep a home. Effigies
will be watered
from our wells.

And today
I'll write a poem
that thunders the world.

And today
reserves will be no more.
No one will be ghettoed.
Settlers & Shoshoni

will fish from frothing
streams. Wash it down with
milk from the buffalo—
offered, never purloined.
Nothing will be taken
from this day on.

And today?

A lion's sentry of the
rose will be *uprooted* from its paw —
not by a children's
fable—but a trophy
hunter vowing he'll
go vegan from here on in.

And tomorrow?

America will finally choose
the woman of colour. Soaring,
magnificent colour.
It should have been
yesterday. It should have
always been yesterday.

—for Kamala

Smut

—*a small flake of soot or other dirt*
Oxford English Dictionary

To say my brand-
new book of poems is
just a magnet for the
dust

is an egregious
understatement.

It's the maid
in fishnet stockings, feathers
in her hand, bending
with a *twerk*,
whenever I enter the
office.

It's the Swiffer
that's ascending to the
ceiling (comprised of
teasing glass)—
dander *thudding*
upon its clarity
like a dove.

It's the Dirt
Devil
drafted into service—
like the cavalry
on horseback,
fire from its nostrils,
its tail of red
that's locked into
the socket, coiled
like a serpent,
because nothing else
can gather up the
mites, their hunger
never chuffed.

If they stopped to view
my scribbles they might be
fans, foregoing their all-
day breakfast

just to read my *absurdity*—
like this, for instance,

where they line
up on the shelf
like an ellipsis
that is endless, half a trillion
strong, little pens and
paper in their hands, awaiting
my *autograph*—

and one who lifts her
skirt, imploring me to
sign her naughty thigh.

The Wrath of Yo-Yo Ma

*In space, no one can hear
you scream.* In space, there is no
need to. Only humans make us
shriek. Well, the occasional bear
and shark, perhaps. But they're not
up in the cosmos.

Silence does not speak louder
than any word. Silence
can't even speak louder
than silence. If it could,
you'd be donning
earbuds in the forest,
banging to Iron Maiden
in order to drown the
din of leaves, the streams of
rock, translucence.
The way a hummingbird
stays aloft. We cannot make
a plane that doesn't thunder.
Yet we say we are the masters of
the air.

The stealth is not as tongue-
tied as they say. Listen to its bombs
upon the city. The clap of
severed hands.

You cannot mute a sob.
The tug of a single tissue
from its box. Clamorous,

like the crunching of Tostitos
through the cellist's
adagio. Is the salsa really
worth it? The paprika
that makes you sneeze?
A hundred pairs of
eyes that murder softly.
Their raging, quiet stare.

Spite at the Speed of Light

Poets are the pettiest
people on the planet.
If this in fact
were not the case, the first line
would've read *prettiest*—
and the alliteration
would joyously hold.

There's very little joy
in poets. Except the ones
who are constantly *healed*.
Affirming every bird
and every flower. Their
obsession with the moon.
Luna's just a peeled
Valencia. And rocks are hardly
romantic.

All it does is whirl
about the Earth, as though it has
nowhere else to fawn.
Solely showing its *Jekyll*.
The dark side Mr. *Hyde*.
And *that's* their sign for love?

They will nurture *grudges*
like no other. If you haven't
bought their book &
promptly drooled,
they'll feign your latest
does not exist. Even if it's there
in the bookshop window.
Even if it's used to prop
the door—something on which
they'll trip, breaking their
clavicle.

Clavicle is vague. Call it the *collar-*
bone—then everyone can decipher
what you mean.
No one crimps a collar on their feet,
so it's obvious where it's
placed. Not *everything* must be painted
in opaque. Sense is not indebted
to a rosy hue of glass.

Maybe they should really
lighten up. Swathe a bandana
over their eyes
when they are drunk. Maybe start
by *getting* drunk.

Stumble
out the stairs in-
to the dusk. And *then* they can
jot their sonnets on the stars—

that the light they thought
they felt was snuffed out long
before the Sun had wrapped us
round her little finger.

Auld Lang Syne

There's a call centre
where *all* the expired years
are phoning people,
demanding that they return
what isn't theirs.

*1991 called and wants its
mullet back.* It was a haircut
gone awry, my barber
wearing specs
that his grandma
must have donned in '49.

When 2005 had phoned,
it wanted the reason you
still need to burn CDs,
lamenting laptops of today
no longer house that primitive
feature. I'm the kettle to your
pot—spooling my cassettes
with the end of a pencil. '86
will ring about the tapes;
'38 the pencil.

The evening that I dined
on mash & bangers?
1954 wants its heart attack
back—while 1968 will ask
what gives with the open vest?
'73, my musk cologne. Thank
god I didn't tie a
gaudy sweater round my neck,
strut throughout the mall—
like a moron from a
Simpson's catalogue.

We try to play it hip,
with the kids who trudge in
snow: 6-7 we say,
hands bobbing
up & down
as though we're imbeciles.
That's when 2025 will buzz,

shout in my Nokia
that remittance is overdue,
embittered that its time came
much too soon,

puckered & greyed
like some crotchety
Zechariah—one foot lodged
in his crypt,
a beard that sweeps the
dust off granite floors.

To Be Read

My book has been in your
TBR pile
for an awfully long time.
I notice it's getting
bumped within the queue,
by that tome from Poet X—
still toasty to the touch—
the one you boast
is a 21st-century Rumi.

I get it. You said you'll
do a blurb. Posting it up on
AssFace when you're done.
But Gray's
Anatomy—really?
Just look at yourself in the
mirror if you're unsure
where everything is.

Robert's Rules of Order
would be commendable—
if you actually showed
for meetings.

I've never
even seen you in a chair—
let alone *as*. La-Z-Boy &
Cheetos doesn't count.

I've tired of your *excuses*,
why my stunning
magnum opus is clad in
mites, wisps and strands of
webbing spun when dodos
walked the earth;

languishing under your
lamp—with the scrolls
of Agamemnon, the Guide to
Cooking Manna, or the Jokes
of Gutenberg,

a volume that he conjured as
a test run, before laying out the
letters for the Bible while he
sweat, the immortality
of *errata*, the pressure of a perfect
Word, something that you
swear you'll get around
to one of these days.

Why no one ever mistook me for Stevie Wonder

I was given a harmonica
at the age of five-and-a-
half. Needless to say, there was
no harmony involved.

An accordion would not have
been worse. At least it would
have been saliva-free.
I'd take a thousand
Walter Ostaneks
any day. The shrill of my
dentist's drill, boring into my
teeth while I listen
front-row-centre.
The screech of Yoko Ono —

well, let me get back to you
on *that*.

I've digressed. There's nothing
quite as nasty as a dissonance
mixed with spit. Your DNA
that's launched into the ether —

with the squeal of a braking train.
I'd rather hear the nails-on-
blackboard symphony,
in a sold-out Carnegie Hall,
with the jackhammer
orchestra to open.

What makes this thing
an instrument forged
in the Pit

is the fact it's double-sided.
You can mimic
the screams of the damned
from left-to-right,
then again but vice versa.
There's not a greater
deterrent to perdition

than a harmonica
in a neophyte's hand.
I'd never be a drunken
gadabout; would give everything
I owned to feed the poor —

except *that* which was gifted
long ago. The destitute have
suffered enough.

It was more than enough
when the Sally Ann paraded
through their shanties,
tubas blasting the
pall to smithereens.

Musings

There's no luck
without destiny. Rules
in lieu of liberty.

If it's salt in
the pepper shaker,
does it say the snow
is filled with soot?
The clouds
have been soiled by
our dross. What is *white* without
its stain? Misery
bereft of laugh?

You tore the curtain
from the window, wrapped it
about your skin then
gloated it was Gucci.
I'll let the courts
decide your fate.
Nakedness comes in a
variety of colours, none
of which are funnelled
in the dark. Timing is
everything.

In the future
be more patient, for the kids
to be in slumber, dreaming ice
cream's at its best
when it has melted.

I read about the 24
karat pendant, unearthed
in a Cracker Jack
box. The customer griped
it took up too much space
beside the kernels—
losing at least a mouthful
because of it. Treasure to us
is *chaff* to someone else.

A scout's been
peddling crabapples
on the walkway.
I'll be getting the wiser
of the deal. It is better to
receive than to give.
There cannot be the
other without the one.

A heart that hasn't thawed
can never save you from
the cold. And the Earth's
indeed a crisp &
bitter place.

Conviction

Nothing's more divisive
than *belief*.

The foundation for
believing's
miles deep. Its wall
beyond the cirrus.

You insist the Earth
is flat. You can only
dig in meters. The sky
is breached in furlongs.
Touch its *crystalline*
upon your ladder.

Belief is loudly heard
in our *preferred*
glossarium:
Go back to your own
country. Learn to speak
in English.

Our parapet is guarded,
by those in camouflage.

They come in
triune flavours:
jungle, sand & snow.
They're working on aquatics.
Nothing says *we're different*
like sardines in submarines.
No one likes to drown—
or entreat the *noumenon*
for suffocation.

I can't make out
your babble. To whom you're
praying meekly. Someone
cradling all
in their fearsome hand.
Mine, the pock of nail.
Yours without a nevus—
with no idea what
being *human's* like.
The strands of
love & hate. Its fences
and its bourns.

You'll someday see I'm *right*.
The brilliant,
blinding robe.

We'll never
need to catch our errant
breath. We'll swim to
distant moons.
The sounds of sob
& laughter—identical
in any parlance.
Everyone screams
the same, ineffable
scream.

Nicki Nicki

You tell me long
ago the wind had
rung your doorbell.
No human
could have fled so
spright & nimble.

And that winter
sends its greeting
via the window's
condensation. You say
you were alone, that
someone came and drew
a smiley face, which morphed
on its own accord —
a mouth that drooped and
runnels from the eyes
which soaked your hands.

It's quite clear
the elements are our ghosts,
unveiling their every thought
through what's unseen —

a barometric
pressure's sudden
plunge,
a searing from the sun
that reds your flesh,
and the duvet
of fallen snow
on what is dead—
the down of pallid
feather, chasing the grey
away.

You'll visit your
mother's grave in
early March, will wipe the
woolly white that
fogs her name,

as if she never passed,
as if she's out there
someplace
in the nimbus,
when the rain is knocking
frenetically on your roof,

pleading for you to
welcome it inside—
let it warm itself by the
fire, comfort you in
the diaphany of its arms.

The Beholder

The adage goes the *beholder*
will determine
what is glorious.

The line of shine/penumbra
on our evening's ghostly orb;
how the craters take on depth we
never notice in the day. Everyone else
is focused on the *stop*
of clotted red.

Your eyes are never more lovely
as when they're fastened.
Spirited, stirring worlds
beneath your lids
while you are dreaming.

I tell the tour guide that
Rodin was overrated. The
rock had been the master
throughout his chiselling of *The Kiss*.
Just ask Camille Claudel.
A straitjacket in
the end her magnum opus.

His gasp when I leave the
group to gaze at rusted
bathroom fixtures.
The scrawling on the stalls.

A daisy's more alluring
once it's plucked. What else has
the answer to *love*?

Then the daughter whose limbs
are severed after shelling, ferried
by her mother who is scaling
newborn crags in her chador,
brushed the hue of blood that's not
her own, the way it mimics *Gauguin*
when in the light.

How she wails when they are
laid beside the torso. An aria
that evokes
Maria Callas. If the dead
can not have beauty
then who can?

The Blade

*Those who take up the sword
shall perish by the sword.*

—Matthew 26:52

Sword must be the mightiest
word in the world. See it for
yourself: *word* is already contained,
its double-
daggered w
left unsaid, mistaken
for a pair of muted v—
fleet-footed samurai
set to slice;
on tiptoes like the shrouded
a in stealth.

It's the hero's
weapon of choice—
unsheathed in half-a-second—
the honour that it brings, a rod
for Thorian bolts, epitome
of Herculean effort.

Conan was its servant
not its master. Nothing else
can knight you on the shoulders.
Not an AK-47.
Not the atom bomb.
And surely not a Molotov —
its bearer fleeing the battle
once it's tossed.

It's the poster boy for
knives; something they aspire to
whenever their drawer is pulled.
It will help you in a pinch;
cut that brick of butter
that's been sitting in the
fridge since olden days.
Silverware have winced
from golden auras — a smooth,
deceptive texture;
feigning they're too spotty
to do the trick.

The sword *itself*
can never be surrender's cause.
It knows no cowardice.

When it's thrown onto the
ground in acquiescence,
it repudiates the fingers
which concede, always unforgiving;
vengeful to the bone.

It does more than
simply wound. It severs the
brain from body. The body
from the soul. Takes our proud
identity away.

It's just in its show
of mercy. Merciless
when it's just. It will invade
and/or defend. It even serves to
splice the conjugations.
Unyielding Excalibur.
Few are worthy to wield.

It's our past and it's our
future. Willing to *adapt*
if it must. Alight in the
hands of Kenobi. Aflame
with Joan of Arc.

Forged when war arrives
& it always will.

The sword can take a punch—
pounded on an anvil
in a blaze, till it blinds us
like the sun. Its deafening,
immutable roar, as though a
mother giving birth
in archaic times.

We are all its sons.
We are all its daughters.
It's twin-edged for a reason,
honed in its locution.
Its language is its
glory. It harbours the gift of
tongues. We know exactly
what it says when
it disrobes, recoiling from
its naked retribution.

Signs & Wonders

The first time that it happened
I was half-court in the gym.
Rimless like LeBron does
in his sleep. Only the custodian
present, refusing to pivot his
head at the sound
of the swish.

And then my twirl of a silver
dollar on a desk. Rotating as
a pulsar, like the spin of an
Olympian—a figure skater's
gold of 10.0. The price of arriving
early with no one there.

Third you shrieked *yeehaw!*—
from the apogee of
your lungs—slamming the door
behind you. So much for my
Burj Khalifa
of cards. All *you* saw
was a mess of Solitaire.

My stone will skip
from one end of the ocean
to the other, as long
as you're fixated by the
leapfrog of the clouds,
waiting to tell me the
miraculous only happens

when our gaze is turned away,
bashful little rascal
that it is.

**Oblivion,
or The Stratum of Holly McGuinty**

I've read squirrels are
unwittingly planting
millions of trees—
by forgetting where they've buried
their many nuts. We undoubtedly
owe them our breath.

Perhaps the ability
to harken back
isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Your grandfather's
unable to conjure the
Legion he belongs to.
Or the *war* in which his leg
had gone astray. His prosthetic's
been misplaced. If only
that meant it spawns
a brand-new limb.

He'll hop into the
mall when you're away,

ask the clerk if
he can buy the single shoe
behind the window.
Pay *half* the boasted price.
He'll say it's only fair, as
though he can recollect
what fairness means.

An elephant might have snagged
a million peanuts—
if she wasn't so *obsessed* with
not forgetting. Such is
memory's anvil:

the image
that's been seared of a
starving boy—in a Gazan
mother's arms.
Or maybe it was Yemen—

a skeleton which was swollen,
like the band of black that's
wrapped above your elbow,
discerning blood's coercion.

Everyone who has hungered
echoes Auschwitz. Pajamas
cling to shoulders like some
hanger in a closet
marred with silk.
Even spiders can get
befuddled
on where they've parked.

Few will sever their sleeve—
once their arm's been
blown astrew, flailing in
the wind like a raggedy
flag. To draw a *blank*
can be a blessing.
There's a reason
surrender's white.

When you were suicidal,
you wished your heart
would scratch its head on
how to beat.
Your lungs would hem & haw
on how to breathe.

Ribs must
carry the heft of
all your sorrow, and they'll do it
while your mind's on other
things—scrolling for the
age of woods,
the lift of coloured
balloons, for the pack rats
making you chuckle.

Your bones will be the
last to finally attest that
you were here, reminiscing
with the hickory
never chosen, in a layer of
smothering stone,
archiving *all* that it has
heard but not betrayed.

The Wino

My every chug of wine
is utterly *medicinal*.

I accept you won't
believe me. I wouldn't buy it either.
What I *will* buy
comes swathed in a paper bag—
sheltered by the progeny
of the *woodland*.
If trees confer their blessing,
who am I to differ?

I'll be completely candid—
it doesn't cure what ails me. I will
still be limping to
the door when FedEx
beckons. Mourn my mother's
rot. Kvetch when I am
worming out of bed.
Oy vey is just a cultural
annexation—too good to
leave absconded.

I will caterwaul its merits
as I belt some Caballé,
from Pinot to Chianti;
share the sagacity of
the vine—how it's wiser
as it ages, like a monk
on a mountain-
top; the interconnected-
ness of stems—a model of the
brain amid the branches.
Green & purple pearls
are simply protons.
Worlds of a higher whole.
Every blinding star
submits to shadow. An
eclipse is but their kiss.

If it were not so then
Christ would not have
waved His heavenly hand,
morphing Evian to Merlot.
Welch's wouldn't cut it.

And if *He* were lacking
insight, I doubt you'd sing
cantatas every Sunday,
witness miracles of trans-
mutation.

The fact you're
Episcopalian
says it all. Forgiveness from the
grape in lieu of flesh. But blood can
be resplendent.

Heed my altar call.
Sip it again for
the very first time. Then quaff
it on your knees. Gulp it to
the marrow, till you succumb
to its vintage spell. Even mystery
spills its guts when it is drunk.

Endurance

*Where you die, I will die,
and there I will be buried.*

—Ruth 1:17

There are not enough words for
love. Maybe in other languages
but certainly not in English—
which is obviously the case
since we've co-opted every
variant of *amour*.

Fervour and *enchantment*?
Riffed from Latin class.
Eros from the
god of Acropolis.

A thesaurus isn't needed
when you mean it. Hear it in
the patience of another
diaper change. I wipe although
we've *never* had a baby.

Jacob waited 14 years
for Rachel. A pair of perfect
cycles while he toiled—

his vineyard gone to raisin
in the wind.

Wine is best when aged in
casks of oak. Not because the
grapes have been matured,
but the tree which gave its wood
before the seeding.

On the day of my final call
to Willow Acres, I'll read
you the story of Ruth.
A quilt will shroud your
shoulders while I espouse
her enduring voice.

I'll croon in acapella, lyrics
that I've conjured off the cuff.
The tap of my
Sorrentos on the tiles
a timpani; my mother's
cherished napkin used to
swab your drooling mouth—

folded like the
origami heart I tried to
forge, mutating to a

hat she chose to bear
when all her tresses
became a carpet for the floor.

Sorry I Can't Join You for Shinny

They say that it's so cold here
folks will gorge on ice cream
to warm themselves up.

It's the kind of day
a puck will feel relief —
freed from being thwacked
because it's adhering to a
glassy pond's veneer, like a sucker
that is stuck upon a seat —
engulfed in someone's slobber.

No one's drilling holes
upon the lake, juddering with their
poles like masochists.
Trout are forced to
bore beneath the silt,
assent to muddy quilts
of hibernation.
And no one can bait with worms,
since they're stiff like Mr. Noodles
before the kettle froths in fog.

The wings of every junco?
Squeak like rusty hinges
when they part.
Lubricants have been clogged
inside their cans, hardened like
the top of crème brûlée.

Everything is grounded,
for each micron
above the drifting
drops the air a half-degree.
The wind chill's
minus a million, sporting a
balaclava like a crook.

No one's pumping gas —
lava couldn't flow if
it were here.

You'd fly on up to
Pluto if you could. Its dark-
side feels like Tucson
compared to this. But fire
has gone on furlough,
laws of physics don't
apply.

Glaciers creep
ahead, as though it's the
Pleistocene.

Even the snowmen shiver.
Frozen in their
frowns. Buttons that are limp
as though they cling by a single
strand. Carrots like the
stab of icicles.
They've lost their
arms to frostbite; fingers having fused
as if a club. There isn't a parka
on the planet
that could possibly keep them comfy;
down that's cornflake-crisp,
snap at the slightest touch.
Every flimsy top hat
pinned with rime.
A sound like grating velcro
if you try to peel one off.
You and they
too impotent to move.

Look — the Michelin
Man's not stepping out-of-doors,
despite his tired rolls of
roly-poly, 50 pairs of socks
inside his boots.

It's so frigid
Hell's congealed at last.
Demons & the damned
are seeing their breath for
the very first time. The Devil's
gone off skiing,
his red of nostrils
sting from appled air.

Saints will see him coming —
their every halo
buckling from its burden,
when the sun can seem a
macrocosm away.

My hockey stick has bonded
to the lamppost.
Like a tongue which took a
dare despite our pleas.

Sharing the Carapace

There are times that the snow
looks pristine enough to eat.
Or possibly *drink*. The meta-
morphosis of melt. Everything
will be clean that final day.

And then there are times
the buds will stay clasped
as a purse, unwilling to divvy the
touch of maquillage;
a huddled sort of
beauty, like scallops in their armor,

refusing the egression from a mouth—
till the buntings trill their
octaves to the stratus,
hoisted beyond what
auricles can hear—
the limit of our lobes—

before they plummet
in the form of freed ovation,
water that's been ransomed
from its freeze.

And then there are times
I can still pen something *pretty*.
For the wind has droned my name,
confided its furtive love
between our howls.

The Prognosis

There's a man so attuned
to the Earth, that whenever it
quakes so does he. The doctor
assumes it's Parkinson's. The priest?

Seismology stigmata.

Perhaps it's empathy gone
amok, juiced like
Barroid Bonds.

His mother thought it strange —
as a boy he keeled
to the carpet, as if a bullet
struck him through —
blubbered for dear Old Yeller
till the set was off for good.

He's much too sensitive.

*His father will straighten him out
just like an iron.*

It's obvious that he didn't —
concussed as concrete plummets
on another's skull —
half a world away;

short of breath
the moment a girl has drowned—
disgorging froths of water
as though his windpipe
had been channelling
Niagara Falls.

There's no way it could have
happened every time—
he would have been dead for decades,
and this poem would not exist.
Blame it on *survival*—
that discrepant, two-edged
scalpel.

The nun who bled from her palms
was only grieving for her Christ.
If a hundred-thousand others
bore the laurel of thrusting thorns,
it wouldn't mean half
as much. When we know the
name of suffering, it wounds us
more than 80 million numbers.

A bhikkhu shrivelled
to bone
after gorging on
all-you-can-eat.

The panzerotti, triple-
cheese. Raheem Hassan
had starved to death
that very afternoon.

As for the man, his face is
steadily healing from its burns.
They say it happened while he
scooped some Häagen-Dazs,
the instant that a toddler was
being strapped into a stroller —
maybe Gaza or Ukraine —

the mother struck by shrapnel
in her knee, which will give him
a wretched limp
he can't explain.

On My Decision to Retire as a Poet

You say I should hang up my quill.

Everyone's grandma

& her dog are posting poems.

It's not the grandmothers

I'm concerned about, their

odes to orioles—

it's these drooling

sons-of-bitches; their ghazals,

villanelles—to a flea-filled

water dish;

the couplets on their

human's forlorn crocs,

laced with bites & upchuck

since he passed; the plop of meat

from a can, its rings from tin

chiselled in its jelly,

like some avant piece

of shit at the Guggenheim.

Competition from the grandmas

I can handle. They're forever

out of sync, think Facebook's

still a thing,

talk about their emails
like it's 1996. Their use of LOL
that screams Hugh Grant on
Betamax. Even the Amish cringe.

But the mutts
are cutting edge, think of
Elon Musk as Obadiah, *unhinged*
upon his parchment, scrolled like
Gertrude's curls,
every psalm they bark
pushing bounds like San Andreas.

You tell me novelists have it
worse. Everyone's nephew
& chinchilla
looking to become the next
Fitzgerald. And nothing can gut
a reader more than
a Spanish-speaking
gerbil, locked in its sawdust-
brig — going nowhere on its wheel
for what feels like eternity;

Rover peering in
just for the fodder, scrawling madly
like some slobbering
Ezra Pound ahead of his time.

Haiku

Basho's *frog*
was just a toad.
Never had a wart
in all the years.
I mean Basho,
not the toad.

How can he write
of life
without the harbouring
of what's grotesque?
I will pen them in.

The splash was
from a stone,
tossed by boys of mischief,
who hoped that he would
swivel like an eddy, would spot the
gruesome boils on his face.

How can I convey it
in the fetters of
5/7/5? Half the syllables
squandered on the pond,

its pads and rippled breath;
the ones he claims are
lotus but they're not.

Tuesday Night Nachos

We both hate
billionaires. Say if we had
their kind of money we'd be
feeding every starveling
in the world. Christen clinics
in West Darfur; rebuilding
homes of Gaza in a jiffy.

We see a *homeless*
& *hungry* sign
on the way to the pub,
eschew the *discomforting*
meeting of eyes with
every step,
feigning we spot a
swallow scoot
roof-to-roof,

knowing that we've planned
this affable evening
for a week,
have just enough change
for beer,
hope to harp & grumble—

about the likes of Galen
Weston / Elon Musk,

the Bezos / Rockefellers,

howling as our Coronas
hit the spot, paying with our
Visas as if our wallets
had been bled by a
sanguisuge; not wishing
to lance this moment
with our pangs of hypocrisy,
mislay that gleeful feeling
we're better than they.

Paradigms

Your sister Terra
loved the clouds.
Not the cliché of bestial shapes
we think we see.

Each one's there to shield.

Not to occlude the sun
and flare of stars.
But for those who
orbit the earth.

When she was 10, she vowed
she'd be a floating *Cosmonaut* —

Astronaut,
your mother promptly scolded.
But the *cosmos* denoted distance,
an escape to *foreverland* —
blast the Russo-Commies.
They haven't got a patent on
creation.

The crew on the ISS
post their panoramic
views. TikTok's good for
something. The Earth is not a
marble
it's the shift of
stain & speckle—the whiter
the better—
its malignant
hide-and-seek.

They'll boast our
planet's *picturesque*. Its plume &
tuft of cirrus, concealing
urbanity's squall.
Never the same sky twice.

And out-of-sight, pogroms of
never again.
Buckshot in the flesh.
A forest raped by flame.

And just beyond it all,
a cottage in the Alps;
the embodiment of calm.

What we call *peace*
is playing deaf.
The *still* before the
surge of tsunamic snow.
A daughter's gasp & shrill—
please papa don't—

bouncing off a panda
in the sky, its claw that
bears down slowly
on a fish—no guts,
no blood, just something you'd say
is minding its goddamn
business.

Chemo

You began to
shave your head—
before the diagnosis—
peering through the
smooth of crystal ball.

Cancer claimed them all:

mother, son, husband,

your aunt *Felicity*,

who, when you were only
just a *sprout* upon her lap,
laughed about the
merits of being bald:

it makes the morning easy,
no fussing with a brush
or coloured tresses,

the hat stays on—
even in the wind,

saying her locks of
Toni Red
would blind her in a storm,
sticking to her visage
like spaghetti in the rain,

racing to catch her Tilley
amid the gale,
the one that stripped
the leaves away from *even*
her favourite willow:

Don't say that I am weeping.

*The world is simply capsized;
my smile, overturned.*

Sinéad was never as
lovely as when her crown
had held no shadow,
the shine from lack of
stubble, looming
like newborn grass,

when you've goosebumps
on your scalp
in summer's balm,

from the snuggle
of an evening waft;
its benign
and solace kiss.

Mysteries

People have said
what's dreadful comes
in threes. For me
they come in twos—

the proverbial second
shoe, plopping from the
ceiling when I try the
sneakers on,
and the right is tighter
than left. Both will be
abandoned to their box.
Have you ever seen a
human leave Adidas
with a single cleat?

The time I lost a glove
I kept the other in a basket—
where it baited, suggesting
that my fingers
could take *turns*
at keeping snug, while I
saunter the downtown streets,

looking like an ass-clown
who's too cheap to buy a *pair*.

There's a reason that
our marriage is a struggle.
Forever stuck on *two*.
If we'd been instead a *trio*
I swear we'd get along.
I'm not talking *ménage à trois*—
but casseroles & dishes.
Another could have
scrubbed while we embraced.
We only quarrel
amid the bubbles—
the Sunlight squeezed
out twice instead of thrice.

Think of a traffic
signal—only bobbing red & green.
It's *yellow* with the power
to calm. Gleam like an
amber star, a warmth in
winter chill.

It's a riddle why my
eyes will blink together,
why both my hands will lift
in supplication, to some gracious
triune God, or when I cheer
a netted puck—in our son's
first game at centre,
two tongues to
say *I love you*
if I had them.





Andreas Gripp was born and raised in Treaty 6 Territory (London, Ontario) and in 2024 moved to Leamington with his wife, Carrie. He's the author of over 40 books of poetry, including *The Earth Is Painted War*, *Last of the Bons Vivants*, *Trigger Happy Warnings*, *Satanic Canticles*, and *Give Us This Day*. His writing has been lauded for its lyrical and literary merit, accessibility, and for its blend of comic and poignant storytelling.



Beliveau Books

ISBN 978-1-927734-70-4 \$15