

BRICOLAGE

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ABSTRACT

BRICOLAGE

by Anthony Sassin

Bricolage is a collection of original poetry representing a creative presentation of ideas. This series of poems includes abstract pieces, dialogues, monologues, and persona poems meant to entertain. The author explores the images and sounds produced by language as well as the struggle to find a unique voice and make meaning as a poet. The author also pays close attention to the role of *bricolage* as a process of composing from what is available. Many of the poems can be viewed as responses to other authors and texts.

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INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to choose what to discuss and what to leave out in an introduction to a collection of poems. The poems collected in this thesis explore language, landscapes, love, forces of nature, and the fantastic. The title *Bricolage* reflects how I feel about the process or method I used for composing each piece. The poems feel like loose assemblages—fragments of what was available fitted together with vague mythologies and memories. I would also consider this a pastiche because the struggle to find for myself a distinct poetic voice has led me to imitate the styles of other writers, which seems like a logical step toward developing as a writer. The poems have been inspired by my reading of specific writers to whom I continually return, including German philosopher Martin Heidegger, Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, and American ethnopoetic scholar Jerome Rothenberg. Throughout my collection, I pay homage to those sources by framing many of my poems with epigraphs from their work.

Most of the poems in the collection are presentational pieces intended to be read aloud with a focus on the images and sounds, which I use to create the mood of each poem. “Whichever Way Your Blue Wind Blows,” for instance, calls attention to the processing of language and the transformation of words. The poem represents that process. When read out loud, the repetitions of words and their constantly shifting variations become mantras to guide the reader not only through the poem but through the collection. Certain recurring images and senses flicker from poem to poem to create overarching motifs. I frequently refer to elements of nature, particularly wind and water, and grand, sweeping landscapes such as mountains and oceans in order to impart to the reader a sense of isolation, sanctuary, and solitude. Examples of such attempts include “Last Days of Uncle Jesse: An Elegiac Pastoral,” “Ventus,” “Peregrine,” and “Landscape Cosmology.” I am fascinated by landscape poems, the way poets can make landscapes come

alive and create the feeling of being transported to those remote locations. Consequently, I feel my duty as a poet is to return the favor by building little shelters, quaint playhouses of language in which readers may feel free to explore.

Some poems, however, depart from the peaceful and serene. The tale of “The Bone Giver,” inspired by the Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola’s eerily fascinating novel, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, is one such poem that attempts to take the reader to dark, unfamiliar territory. Inspired by Yoruba folktales, Tutuola’s novel includes a scene in which the protagonist follows a skeleton that gives its bones back to the people from whom it borrowed them until it becomes only a skull bouncing along the path. Tutuola’s novel challenged my prior knowledge of mythology and folktales. His work and its origins seemed so different from the Western tales with which I was familiar. I thought about how original his work is compared to many works of contemporary fantasy. Shortly after, I found a copy of Rothenberg’s *Technicians of the Sacred*, which opened up for me a world of endless inspiration and possibility with its many Native American, African, and Oceanic chants, incantations, formulas, and shamans’ narratives. Drawing from such texts, I attempted to create an eerily strange world much like the one I was escaping to in Tutuola’s work.

After reading many works by Charles Wright, Pablo Neruda, and various Native American and African chants, hymns, and incantations, I began to notice the effect of simple, direct diction and the movement between generalities and specifics. For instance, consider the way Neruda opens “The Island” in *A Separate Rose*, translated by William O’Daly: “The wind created all the islands of the sea” (1). There is a space separating that first line from the seven that follow. It is as if Neruda creates a horizon with that space and gives the reader a moment to reflect on the vastness and profundity of such a bold claim. The general ideas of “wind,” “islands,” and “the

sea” are brought together by the specific event of creation. The accessibility of his work feels unencumbered by exaggerated, overblown diction and word choice, yet he is able to create grand possibilities by setting landscapes in motion—a genesis and evolution.

I attempt to employ similar diction in poems such as “Quartz,” which is inspired by Neruda's *Stones of the Sky* as well as by Mircea Eliade's book *Shamanism* in which Eliade describes the use of quartz in medicine man rituals. In “Discourse of Wind,” on the other hand, I try to exaggerate—using the Latin denotation for *exaggerat*- meaning 'heaped up'—the diction and word choice. I excessively inflate the poem with many specific place-names (e.g. “Krakow,” “Gdansk,” and “Skagerrak Straits”) and terms for different winds (e.g. “harmattan,” “levanters,” and “mistrals”), all the while describing the route an imagined wind is taking. I assume my ideal readers will be unfamiliar with those places and winds, much like I was when first reading about them, and that my readers will feel swept up in the rapid succession of ideas rather than images, with no concrete noun on which to anchor or land safely for meaning.

Or consider Neruda's single-quatrain poem “Men”: “We went a long way, a long way / to understand the orbits of stone, / the extinguished eyes still gazing out, / the gigantic faces ready to enter eternity” (1-4). The brevity of the poem and simplicity of word choice allow the most casual of readers to access a deep, reflective experience. In many of my poems, I choose to employ a similarly accessible approach to diction to open up for casual readers the opportunity to escape. The first four lines of my poem “Peregrine” demonstrate this approach: “We drag the wind behind us— / Drag it over mountainous waves / Of clouds like desert / dunes in seas of sky” (1-4). I use the inclusive first-person plural to position the reader in the poem to experience a brief flight over a blur of landscapes. Although each particular landscape describes the “clouds,” the mention of “mountain” in the word “mountainous” can project the most ready

image of a mountain with which the reader is familiar. In an instant, the reader is transported from his or her schema of a mountain to “waves,” a “desert,” and the “seas.” My objective is that the rapid succession of images creates a dizzying effect and an experience of momentary disorientation. I break the poem up into couplets to give the reader space and time to reflect on each experience before moving on to the next. Using a general language of landscapes, I try to invite the reader to fill in the gap—in this sense, it is, like many of my other poems, contextualized by the reader’s response. The reader creates the meaning with the context of his or her own experience.

In my poem “Whichever Way Your Blue Wind Blows,” I use repetition in an attempt to create an ethereal experience for the reader. The poem originally included a third stanza, but it became too repetitious. The two existing stanzas are each 14 lines long and written in iambic pentameter. I chose the sonnet form because it provided me with a framework for experimenting with the natural musicality of particular words. Variations of root words like “chime,” “glow,” “blue,” “still,” and “ripple” establish that light, delicate, ethereal atmosphere. I wanted to create an experience of pleasant, euphoric dreaminess with the repeated engagement of those senses: the sound of chimes, the comfort of a glow and the tranquility often associated with the color blue, the slight motion of a ripple barely disturbing the serenity of stillness.

Taking this approach, however, I run the risk of assuming that my reader identifies similar connotations in those words. The danger here is that my poem could work against my intention of providing a moment of reflection for the reader on his or her own experience and, instead, oppress the reader by imposing my own subjective experience onto him or her. The latter simply might be an inevitable aspect of poetry with which I must come to terms. Much of the poetry I chose to leave out of the collection was intentionally oppressive because I was writing what I

thought were profound philosophical treatises using dense jargon from science and metaphysics. Other poems I left out were merely snap-shots and still-lives of scenes and objects. Those poems lacked both motion and emotion. I was trying to be “experimental,” but I eventually realized I was excluding my potential audience, and a year later, even I didn’t want to read those poems.

I open the collection with a poem inspired by a genre of campy science fiction. “Fütür|Shaman” is a monologue, the speaker of which addresses a starfighter and his ship as they blast off and cruise at warp speed through the galaxy. The situation is familiar to a reader who envisions the stereotypical pulp sci-fi protagonist developed as far back as the late 1920s and early ‘30s with iconic figures such as Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon. The myth of the spaceman has developed over the decades and has influenced not only contemporary television and cinema but also music as evinced by the works of David Bowie and by John Elton’s “Rocket Man.” My intent with the poem is to expand on the spaceman figure and also to provide my reader with that sense of familiarity before departing toward the “unknown”—the pages yet to be turned. The poem also signals an escape; the reader leaves behind the comforts of what is familiar to set off on a journey to other distant, possible lands and scenarios contained within the collection.

The most difficult challenge has been the unification of form and content: finding effective forms for transporting my audience to the people and places I have created for them. Many of the pieces follow iambic or trochaic pentameter. “Last Days of Uncle Jesse: An Elegiac Pastoral,” for example, follows those patterns and is based loosely on the sonnet. It has 14 lines and incorporates some slant rhyme. “Whichever Way Your Blue Wind Blows” presents two sonnets also with sparse slant rhyme. Much of “Discourse of Wind” follows the pentameter

measure, but I was not concerned with following it rigidly. The spontaneity of wind would seem to contradict such structure, so I feel the form reflects the content well in that poem. “Said River to Fish” is a more formal sonnet that utilizes a rhyme scheme and was written in response to a classmate’s poem. Most lines of “Jimmy Two-Tone” employ spondaic pentameter because I wanted each syllable to pack a forceful punch. I achieved this effect by including compound adjectives, adverbs, and nouns. The effect of so many accents can create a feeling of turbulence and pressure building up, which reflects the inner turmoil felt by the character in the poem. Although I often deviate from formal structures throughout poems and the collection, I tried to maintain structural harmony in most pieces simply because setting for myself a general foot and line length guideline would help give me direction. I also felt pentameter would be an appropriate meter to attempt and utilize as a fairly novice poet because it is so traditional.

This challenge regarding form and content results from my lack of audience awareness. Because I have not determined a target audience or ideal reader, many of the poems feel disconnected from each other. When I tried to picture ideal readers or audiences, I struggled to limit myself. The collection conveys a sense of confusion over the audience because many of the poems seem disjunct and lacking a coherent or unifying theme. For instance, in “Said Owl to Frog,” I use the familiar anthropomorphic method of personifying animals reminiscent of children’s tales, but I use those characters as tropes for parodying a philosophical discussion. This poem and others such as “Elegy for Guy Smiley” convey a sense of longing for the past and, for me, the struggle of growing older while trying to cling to fond memories of my youth. As a latchkey kid without siblings, I spent a majority of my younger years watching cartoons, playing in the woods, or reading the *Watership Down*-esque books of Brian Jacques. The result

was an experience of isolation and escape, which has crept its way into the invented places and characters of this collection.

I have divided the collection into groups that I feel reflect the unifying themes. The result is a solid foundation for future works—each group can be expanded into a more elaborate and well-developed series. I originally set out to create an overly ambitious project that made use of footnotes, endnotes, a glossary, index, and a singular driving concept that proved too grandiose for my current skill and experience. Consequently, I decided to include only the poems that I felt most effectively demonstrate my style and approach to poetry. These are the poems that I have given the most formal, careful consideration and revision. They represent both my struggle and increasing familiarization with language and its potential. Most of them are primarily auditory pieces to be read aloud and appreciated for their musicality. I believe the poems include many strong images, sounds, and themes to keep readers entertained whether listening as an audience or reading in isolation. My hope is that the imagery and linearity provide enough thematic cohesiveness to engage readers.

Fütür|Shaman

Wipe the nebula dust from your visor.
Energy fields—check. Photons—check.
Shock-boosters—check. All systems go.
Warp speed, portal-hopping hyper-driver—
starbound comet-shooter: take us home.

Thrusters, engage. Let's skedaddle
out of this one-horse planet,
this barren, backwater Podunk.
Curvy, light-carving moonbuster,
galaxy-derringer: lock, load, and fire.

Land-scorching burn, push to escape velocity.
Shatter the atmosphere with your supersonic
slingshot gravity assist. Straighten your bearings,
cool your turbojets, and lock on to your target.

My deep space, constellation cadet—my black hole
ballerina: we'll do the Gemini Jive,
the Lepus Lindy Hop, the Taurus Tango,
and the Musca Cha-Cha. We'll shred the Kuiper belt
and surf dark matter. Interstellar cowboy
of a light speed steed: let's get lost in the void.

Said Owl to Frog

“Everwhen the wilting bog torch golden
tumbles petals to the earth,” said Owl,
“Tumbles to where past the saw palmetto
waltz the flawless grasshoppers—”

Frog interrupted,
“You mean the line where sunrises inscribe
morning and the ocean folds into itself?”

“Yes, Frog,” continued Owl.
“Red Fox has been dreaming
again in cuneiform of clouds
passing over the raspberry bushes—
all wedges and lines—
the sky is the inside of his skull,
and all things seem to be growing
smaller. Have you noticed?
Even definitions seem to be shrinking,
thinning out like the green and golden
apple orchards long logged, evermore
the May days gone, hitched and carried
to where the resting desert slopes and fallen
crest of sunrise come to terms with each other.”

Frog replied, “The smallness of all things
is of little concern to me, so long
as flies’ bellies keep swelling with blood.”

Last Days of Uncle Jesse: An Elegiac Pastoral

He'll find in a mountainside by a sea
a hole—a place to plant his dirt-caked field
wrangling hands: a garden where no corn grows.
Every day, he'll trek to the peak his plow-
driving, hay-baling bones, run his bent husk-
shuckers through the cloudstalks, and cast his hook
five thousand feet below. He'll catch kraken,
an acre long, strip the tentacles, dry
them in the sun, and feast like Poseidon.
Every night, he'll scoop a jarful of shine
straight from the moon, sip it down, loosen up,
Then lasso, wrassle, and saddle Monoceros
to ride over the Rosette Ridge, ride past
Andromeda, ride where light has yet to tread.

A \ləv\ Poem

The voiced liquid alveolar glide—
a tongue's lick across the wet ridge—
suspends, momentarily, near
the opening of two mid-spread lips,
the lower of which then curls
under a soft labiodental bite
as friction of what is absent
in a vacuum passes through
the intricate corridors of utterance,
vibrating fibrous cords of our bodies.

Gadget Phantom

“And it’s that body, both ‘natural’ and artificial, that will have to be carried far from earth before its destruction if we want the thought that survives the solar explosion to be something more than a poor binarized ghost of what it was beforehand.”

—Jean-François Lyotard, “Can Thought Go On Without a Body?”

I crawled out of myself, exited
the dismantled machine of myself,
and let my vessel rust in salt dust grains and rain.

I hit EJECT, leapt from the seat of my skull,
compressed my brain waves into binary,
and became an airwave, riding satellite
transmissions as a stock market quote—
a ticker tape symbol flickering
at the bottom of a screen.

My fiber-optic coffin waits
for my remains, spiraling outward—
all the carbon I had over the years consumed.

I became fodder for bricolage
but somewhere along the way, a window
captured me, a laser beam trapped in transparency,
and bending toward your lamp-lit page,
radiant light, amplified and refracting,
I spill into meaning.

Jimmy Two-Tone

“I got a Gibson / Without a case / But I can’t get that even tanned look on my face. / Ill fitting clothes / I blend in the crowd, / Fingers so clumsy / Voice too loud.”

—The Who, “I’m One”

Bone-grip ache clenches vice-like Jimmy while
alley-captured, late-night echoes run loose.
Brick wall-ricocheted shattered glass glitters
moonlitly, the night sky dark as a blind baby’s dream.

Slumped Over Jimmy, tearpool wading, curses
mom and dad for bringing him into this
brick, tree, handshake world, told mom to find
a place to park her bed-packed, I-75-roaming Chevy.

Colorado Mountain Man Wanna-Be
Jimmy can’t grow a beard or big strong hands,
so he can’t be a mountain man because
mountain men have beards to keep them warm
and big strong hands for knocking down trees.

But Thin-Fingered Jimmy, the Six-String Picker,
hammers on and pulls off note after note,
slides along fretboards, and sweeps up octaves,
electric progressions of Es, As, and Bs
resounding in his rosewood hollow body.

Discourse of Wind

“I come away clean, shedding the pure light of the wind.”

—Pablo Neruda “XX”

“The life of this world is wind. / Wind-blown we come, and wind-blown we go away. / All that we look on is windfall. / All we remember is wind.”

—Charles Wright, “The Southern Cross”

Blown sand, we are: stones of a desert swept
from hot dust of a coastal Saharan
Harmattan and Sirocco hurricane—
a gust so strong it blows garbonzos
out of their pods and turns them, mid-air,
into hummus—then carried to Mediterranean
levanters, turning from northwesterly
winter mistrals—master wind of the Rhone
Valley, post-war, the Vistula winding
up the Carpathians through Krakow
to Warsaw, toward the docks of Gdansk—
Danzig *auf Deutsch*—and into the Baltic Sea,
through the Oresund Channel, through the Kattegat
and Skagerrak Straits, into the North Sea
past the Shetlands and Torshavn of the Faeroes—
hidden haven of the maritime mist—
all to be consumed by the kamikaze
solar wind, Great Collector and Distributor,
whose flow continuous, charged particles
dispersed by permeation, will one day
gather and scatter whatever it desires.

Our House

I told you one day I would build
us a house, so here it is--look:

Do you see it
beside the marsh in the meadow
of the valley where arch the sharp-
ridged mountains like bodies
of titans and juggernauts long dead
and buried?

It cost only the arduous hours
of my penniless life to build.

Do you see the mountains
to the right of us,
the ocean to the left,
the forest in front on us,
and the desert behind?

Our house is somewhere
near the center of it all.

There is no fence to keep
the foothills from trespassing,
no road to scar the soil.

Said Pebble to Landscape

Tallgrass, Alder, Dandelion:
they get all the attention.
Blueberries by the swamp

where plump, white, duck-like pied-billed grebes
with black-striped bills yelp
“*eeow-keeowm-kowm,*”
dive ripplelessly, and snatch tadpoles:
maybe they have a place for me.

Or stick me in the snow of a mountaintop—
Or stick me in mountaintop snow.
I won’t make a sound or budge an inch.
I won’t complain about the cold.
Besides, the view up there is lovely.

How about the ragweed field’s edge?
I’m sure it could use a little sprucing up.
Or where the avocados grow: where that is,
I don’t know. Maybe by Mayan ruins?

At the bottom of the stone steps of El Castillo
helping it tell time? Or the sands of Isla Mujeres—
heard through the grape vine they could use a rock or two.

Grind me to dust in the hands of a mason
who’ll turn me to brick for Sicilian streets,
or roll me down a valley to the river
where I might change the water’s course.

Lodge me in the six-fingered tree
reaching up Wildwood Pathway,
Or toss me toward Goshawk, Oak Ridge,
Firebreak, or Fox Run. Somewhere. *Anywhere.*

As long as I don’t have to spend
the rest of my life in this tire tread.

love jam

she got lipface—big n juicyes—n they
birdsoft like sparrowtail in alpenglow

she put em on me n all the world
like ice floe melts away

she got the sky eye—blue n gray—n they
daybroken tender fulla summerlaze wanderlust

she got the firetouch makin me sweat
n burn like she got sunray fingertips

n now I got a machinegun heart
goes rat-a-tat-tat fast n hard as she make it beat

Vox

sound of your own voice cruising 70 miles per hour—Westward, Wichita;
sound of your own voice clutched in the palm of a killer, pried loose as the sheriff
 uncurls the fingers;
sound of your own voice coated thick
with resin from thirty years of Pall Malls, non-filtered,
 a pack a day;

“The Sound of Silence” as sung by Simon & Garfunkel & your last name—
the one attached to the sound of your own voice;

the sound of your own voice starring
as “The Voice of Reason”

the sound of your own voice mellow, golden, and velveteen
with hints of sandalwood and jasmine;

the sound of your own voice digitally enhanced,
blasting from a Dolby Pro Logic surround sound
system or through a Fender Deluxe with delay and reverb;

the sound of my voice in yours, of your voice in mine:
our voices tangled in cacophony.

Praises of My Love

“Ogun makes the child kill himself with the sword he plays around with[...]”

—Yoruba “Praises of Ogun”

...who eats turds like Ogun for breakfast
and craps them back out before lunch

my Love, she’s stronger than iron
she sets the seasons to work and keeps them from quarreling
she tells Old Man Sorrow to pack his bags and hit the road whenever he’s outworn his
welcome and he walks right out the door

she takes by wing the road of wind and sky which is the only route to her town
she knows to lug my bones in a bag to the sun when I die
she knows to bury those stars with the others at rest in the fields of her eyes

she threads the beads of my dreams so I may never lose them from around my neck
she carries the names of everything unnamed
always has
heavy as they are on her shoulders

perhaps “Ogun makes a baby’s skull hum like a pumpkin he makes a grown man’s clink
like a plate,” but Big-Love, she’ll crush the skull of Ogun
between her thunderous breasts and use the dust for blush

The Bone Giver

“As they were travelling along in the endless forest then the complete gentleman in the market that the lady was following, began to return the hired parts of his body to the owners and he was paying them the rentage money.”

—Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*

and so the bone giver who on his throne of bones all day
dwelt and doled out bones gave us and anyone else
who happened to visit him bones and sometimes
these bones were moonwhite but occasionally
scraps of meat and flesh hung dripping
with blood but we all received them
thankfully and went on our ways
eager with our new bones

it is said that one day the bone giver
gave away all the bones
gave away the ankles and knuckles
furnished us with skulls
some with eyes and brains left inside
even the bones on which he all day dwelt
and doled out bones and so he with a sharp stone began
to shave carve and rend loose the flesh and meat from his own
bones until soon he stood a skeleton and proceeded
to pull each bone from the next and to give them
to us who eagerly waited

but soon he was no more than dangling
arm and skull and he said to us I now
am no more than dangling arm and skull
please leave me with these fragments of myself
which are all I have left but the crowd
insisted he give up his dangling
arm and skull for they were eagerly waiting

he begged them to leave him but they grabbed the arm
and finger by finger pulled until soon he was nothing more
than a skull jaw and tongue and he said

please leave me my skull jaw and tongue
with which I am able to make these sounds
which form words which are all I have left
which I will sing to you throughout all seasons
if that would bring pleasure to your lives
but they shouted bone-giver, it is your job to give bones
not to sing throughout all seasons
that is the season-singer's job

and so they tugged and pulled apart his jaw
tooth by tooth, loosened his tongue until soon
the dark silent nothingness of absence poured
out from his chuckling lightness

Nymph

Saw it with my own eyes; saw her wandering
the field of her gathering; saw her reach
and dip her fingers into the stream;
reach out to the four corners of the world
and, slow as a dredge, pull them toward each other,
folding over like sheets of passionate lovers;
watched as she sank her teeth into the flesh of a shadow
to let the blood of autumn pool at her bare feet.

My Love Is a Mighty Fist

My love, she is one mighty
powerful hand reaching out
of nothingness, through smoke

and juke box blues,
grabbing hold, shaking
and rattling, reeling back,

forming a fist to slug guts,
uppercut chins, jab jaws,
hook temples, and clench collars,
ripping shirts, flinging bodies over tables,
across rooms, into walls and stools,
dragging torsos across the bar,

through peanuts and cigarette butts,
crooking noses, backhanding cheeks red,
blackening eyes, splitting lips and brows,

boxing ears, knocking gums empty, breaking
pool sticks over knee caps, shattering bottles
over scalps, pours tequila, strikes and flicks
a match, then watches me burn in her grasp.

And if to flames ignited by her touch I burst,
keep me far from water—let me char in her clutch.

Peregrine

“The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which humans are on earth, is Buan, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on earth as a mortal. It means to dwell.”

—Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking” (145)

We drag the wind behind us—
drag it over mountainous waves

of clouds like desert
dunes in seas of sky;

drag it, rootless pilgrims
dwelling as we are;

drag it along Caligo River
with eyes full of midnight buffalo stampedes.

All we, in the end, become are second-hand
travel guides to imaginary cities.

Said River to Fish

Leap into me; navigate my inlets
and outlets; let's defy gravity, burst
from soil and stone, where I keep my secret;
let my purity quench your lifelong thirst;
swim, gleamy-scaled surface-ripler,
the rivers and streams, brooks and creeks, which lead
to me. Don't be lured by the spinning,
false promise of a meal when all you need
is my bubbly thrust to fill your gills,
my ever-flowing pressure from strata
below pathways, fields, forests, and hills,
under the Covered Bridge, the Chippewa
Loop, the aquifers giving rise to our
union and this autumn light-filled shower.

Prayer for a Poem

give me words
bring them down from above
and put them into my mouth or
shoot them out of my fingertips
a sound a syllable a noun a verb
noun how you define the subjects
the objects the world and all things in it
and verb how you prescribe action
to the subjects and objects of this world
without you I'd not be
and without you I'd not do
and without you I'd not have
a name to call you
my tongue and my throat
my lungs and the air inside of me
you give them purpose

Vox II

The sound of your own voice hollowed
from hewn solid oak—a cabinet
for fine china and pewter figurines.

The sound of your own voice
as a shelter for third world
children without voices.

The sound of Sound—Sounds R' Us—we make sounds;
we manufacture sounds for your listening pleasure,
all sounds from all over the world:
smokestacks, didgeridoos, and chopsticks;
crushed soda pop cans kicked along pavement;
the galaxy shattering like stained glass...
Haven't heard it before? Now you can.

The sound of your own voice all day,
every day, twenty-four seven, three-sixty-five—
the oubliette of your own voice.

The sound of your own voice chanting
alongside millions of others in a rally
against the sound of “the enemy's” voice.
The sound of your own voice
tucked in a tortellini
and muffled by risotto.

The sound of your own voice screaming
as Tony “The Poet” makes tortellini out of you
by now you should be thinking
this is a guy who likes the sound of his own voice.
The hills are alive with the sound of your own voice.

Love Poem

If your hair were a field, I'd build on it
a home made from my fingers.

If your eyes were suns,
I'd blind myself.

If your hands were trees,
I'd lock myself in the cage
of your branches.

If your mouth were an ocean,
I would sail my rickety skiff
to the roughest waves
so I could be knocked overboard.

If your legs were highways,
I would drive until I run out of gas,
then walk until my feet rot off.

At the Edge of Nothingness

“Truth is un-truth, insofar as there belongs to it the reservoir of the not-yet-uncovered, the uncovered, in the sense of concealment.”

—Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Thought*

“[...] and then / Past untruth is one step to nothing, / For the end, for me as for cities, / Is total absence: what comes to be / Must go back into non-being / For the sake of equity, the rhythm / Past measure or comprehending.”

W. H. Auden, “Compline,” *The Shield of Achilles*

Where the flinging of things happens—
where twisting of loads along the way occurs,
where I fling myself and now am
no longer, bending back toward the origin
of a shadow of a silhouette—what was
me is now a thing that is not
no thing yet, but, still as the cocoon
of a luna moth to a birch leaf,
I cling to the nearness of myself:
a clinging that keeps me from gliding toward
silence, beyond the way trees venture
to tree-ness, beyond the point the tree
becomes a thing, the word “tree” only one
of many used to call near the rooted growth.

Whichever Way Your Blue Wind Blows

Her glowing chimes the blueness of burning
collisions—echoes rippling stillness.
In vapors of her touch, in heat and steam
of nearness, gathering ourselves toward each
other after our having been brought forth,
I glow. Having chimed her blue winter light,
The circling wind of her name appears.
Her name circles over Blue Ridge Mountains.
Her name drapes me with light, plows my willows
toward the swallowing soil. Wind slips her name
through my window—her name, the stilling sky
unfolding blue as turns the way toward seas
beyond the shore, reflecting blue still filling
wild eyes that bid my return to her.

Templum

“Language is the precinct (templum), that is, the house of Being. ... It is because language is the house of Being, that we reach what is by constantly going through this house.”

—Martin Heidegger, 129, *Poetry, Language, Thought*

In this house of many doors,
we enter and exit endlessly—
we come and go as we please.

And on the many doors of this
house of many doors hang wrought
iron knockers on each side of every door—

some shaped like animals,
some shaped like faces,
some shaped like our animal faces.

Always holding open and closing doors,
we never get to where we should be.

In this house of many doors,
we clear our throats before we speak,
but now our throats are raw;
our teeth daily fall from our skulls
but grow back every night;
our hands, gnarled oak,
turn rusty knobs; our hands
we press to sheets of paper
and pray that, one day, words will appear.

In this house of many doors,
we skulk from room to room, searching
for phantom limbs we’ve left behind.

Quartz

“Quartz opens its eyes in the snow [...].”

—Pablo Neruda, “II,” *Stones of the Sky*

To swallow light from the sky,
you must first prepare your skull
by clearing its contents
to make room for the many
shades of quartz with which
it, along with other major
organs, will be stuffed.

Keep close to quartz—
to silicates of hexagonal symmetry,
to sugar blade and starseed
the color of frozen ginger ale,
to amethyst phantoms,
rutilated and tourmalinated:
blue quartz in the rotting
fingernails of a dead yesterday.

Love Event

what you are is neither
grasped by my hand

nor by my mind
nor by any theory.

how can I categorize you among
various lifeforms of this world

if to this world you do not belong
because of this world you were not born?

Landscape Cosmology

“The landscape was always the best part.”

—Charles Wright, “The Southern Cross”

Below and away from our bare feet,
the hill descending expands into fields.

Grass bellows joyous hymns to our hands;
flesh of earth craves our fingers;
soil beckons our knees.

Where boundaries gather near stillness—
gather soil to grass, bank to pond,
tree to open field—we gather

those who, in response to callings, call
ourselves to gather, to name each
other and all things absent.

Glowflicker downward comes in glyphs
to fill our skulls with variations
of leafrustle and birdchirp.

How softly all illumines, and we, howling
dogs and hooting owls, determine
meanings for these phrases.

We have no place to call our home;
We have all the world to call our home.

Questions to the Unfathomable

Are you the evening-carven silhouette
riding over the desert horizon?

Are you the hand that holds eternal light?
When you speak, do sunsets escape your lips?

When is the right time
to leap into your absence?

Are you immeasurable, uncontained, always
everywhere and nowhere now and never?

Are you my six-foot-deep hole in the ground
and the casket concealing my dry bones?

Elegy for Guy Smiley

Toothless, tongueless, jawflapping
glorifier of the mundane
carton of eggs and loaf of bread; bringer
of togetherness—voices from the past—
timekeeping granter of wishes;
“America’s most beloved gameshow host;”
high-strung jungle bellower,
frightening rabbits and monkeys:
here is *your* life, a life beating time,
a pageantry of numbers and letters,
an affair with the letter *e*.

Shelly’s legislator, you speak truth.
You’re a voice from my past,
didactic, teaching me how
to inspect the world and wield words.
I also have had affairs—
my little black book holds 26 entries,
and I call them every day.
Often my tongue disappears,
or I feel like some invisible hand
guides me, too, against my will.

I still can’t beat the clock,
But you, Guy, you were never
late on early Saturday mornings.

An Affair

The bridge between you and me is narrow
but sturdy, crafted of wooden planks,
and hanging above the rapids
of the early winter night we shared,
but winter is selfish, cares for itself,
and the frost it brings will surely settle
on the rope that binds each plank to the next.
The threads will fray and, slow as the daisy
pushes up through cold soil, come undone.

What Good

What good are eyes without landscapes?
What good are ears without arias?
What good are feet without paths?
What good is an unbroken heart?
What good are my arms without your body?
What good am I without you?

As good as a shoreless ocean.
As good as a horizonless sky.
As good as shining a flashlight at the sun.

Ventriloquism

I tossed my voice to the wind
the wind has carried it to sea

and now the sea has carried it away
the sea has carried my voice

to a distant shore where voices go
when we toss them to the wind

it is an island of voices
a booming, craggy island

but the sun will bear down on the island
scorching those voices until they evaporate

and even if we find them they will be
of no more use because by then

we will have learned to grunt
and to speak with our hands

Ex Machina

How ratchet-like the pipe-clank hymn
assembles and dismantles
the great machine of my being
to release the ghost of a specter's apparition
locked in the grasp of a shade's cold embrace.

I would bleed oceans of rapturous light,
bellow moonward in the flight of my
endless turning among your gears.

Beard

My, how you've grown.
Seems like yesterday,
you were a little sprout.
But that's just like you
to come and go,
to keep me warm for nights,
then up and leave me naked, shivering.
The times I've reached out to you,
and you were nothing but a shadow.
I know I've turned my back on you.
We've had our breaks, our time apart,
fished other seas—soul patch, mutton chops,
goatee—but one day, you'll see
it's only you and me, together,
alone in this cold, cruel world.

Fortune Cookies Lie

Twenty years from now, I'll have been dead for five,
fully decomposed, the flesh settling in the bowels
of worms while the earth slurps the last of my marrow.

Six years prior, I'll have made an attempt to age well,
wondering why I had neglected my health.
I'll have stocked my cupboards with ginkgo biloba,
ginseng, b-12, and one-a-days.

I'll have dreamt of a life much better than this one.
I'll have pictured, ten years from now,
the steak-and-potatoes life; the fly-to-Venice-this-weekend-
and-Capetown-the-next life;
the cabin-tucked-in-the-shadows-of-a-forty-acre-forest life;
the full-time-with-health, vision, and dental,
401k, cholesterol-free, power-juiced, well-aged life.

Questions to the Unfathomable II

Do you roam foraging the mesa
for mesquite and creosote bush?

What kind of fuel do you take?
Are you a manual or an automatic?
The Growling Engine or the serpentine belt?

Are you the Rigid Designator,
nondescript Transcendental Signifier,
and the Sign of Signs?

Do you have a cinnamon-apple
swirl with a frosting of sugary delight
or a hint of garlic, lemon, and parmesan?

Are you analog or digital,
and will I need a special box to see you?

Do you stretch like Route 202 out of Litchfield,
heading west toward Bantam,
or end deadly down a one-way?

Are you a baseball cap wearing,
longcut tobacco chewing,
knot tying, log splitting,
lawn mowing, Pabst drinking
bearer of the right bower
and a handful of trumps?

How many milligrams does it take to put you down?

Kraken

Fortunate Kraken, disturbing no boundaries,
keeping hidden in the dark heart of the sea,
nestled in your palace of coral—You wait
for the descent of a sinking ship so that you may
plunder the treasures and bones of the crew
and their captain. Drape your tentacles
round my arms and legs,
pull me to your abyssal sanctuary.

Blessings

May the rag of the sun
polish your shadow's edge.

May your heart of thunder
crack through the horizon
of desolation and suffering.

May your feet carry you
beyond the crystal fountains
guarding the deep stillness
of the mind's vast caverns.

May the blue winds of light
carry you from Macchu Picchu
to the highest pass of Himalaya
along with all the names of the good
gods of valleys and plains.

May the crop of your sorrow
wither from drought
in the scorching light of joy.

Whichever Way Your Blue Wind Blows II

Her glowing chimes blue, burning collisions
of echoes rippling stillness. She tilts
her stillness into spinning drifts, lifting
spring from ripples, slings heaviness over
her shoulder, and clouds my lowland hollows.
Hollowing her stillness, how she empties
her spring to let such heaviness unfold.
How she clouds my gathered hills of lowland
hollows where I plow my willows toward
the swallowing soil. How my horse, pulling
harrows over acres, turns earth without
collapsing from exhaustion, I will never
know, but I wish for such endurance.
Still, I grind my bones into warm, blue dirt.

Love Poem

Poem, you shitbag.
You sonofabitch, Poem.
I've done everything I can
to avoid you.

I've procrastinated like a grad student
working on a master's thesis.
Poem, you motherfucker:
I love you, and don't ever forget it.