

Looking at Tree Bark

by

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Forward

Though I'm a playwright and not specifically a poet, I have on occasion spent time and energy with a focus upon writing long poetry (long poetry being anything longer than a haiku). There too have been times when poems have wanted to emerge from seeming nowhere, which I've done my best to honor. Therefore there is no particular focus to this collection beyond it being a memoir of my poetry writing at both focused and more scattered points on my still evolving writing journey. Experience tells me most poems are written with a small audience in mind and at times even for an audience of one. Poetry, in its various stages, isn't always about the finished product. There too can be different ways to interpret what a "finished product" in poetry or the arts might be.

You may be pleased to learn many of my earlier poems have been reworked for this collection as they were written when I was lacking an understanding of myself as a writer, a creative person or a thinking person (and I may still be lacking in these understandings to some degree). Though I'd add every reworked poem is still driven by the earlier version, though on a couple of occasions the focus of the older poem has given way to a more interesting thread that previously eluded me. I too have left a few early poems where changes have been minimal to offer some flavor of the writer I once was. At times I've been surprised I found a way (or a means) to reinvigorate some of these poems. It has been enjoyable and somewhat mysterious to tap into these older creative impulses and still find energy that's active, alive and invigorating and I recommend others consider doing this.

I have broken these poems into five groups. Three of the five groups came out of a particular focus or inspiration I had on those poems for a period of time. The other two groups (which are split chronologically) are a catchall for those occasional poems that presented themselves of their own accord. The poems I've reworked have required various degrees of editing, rewriting, rethinking and reorganizing, but I've been able to track down and reconnect to an impulse which originally helped bring the poem into existence. It was the poems where I was able to find and make this connection which determined which of my poems would become reclamation projects.

S.G. (March 2022)

Note:

As a writer I do not agree with the grammatical (and somewhat vague) distinctions between using "quotation marks" for titles of shorter works and *italics* for titles of longer works. As I find this pedantic and trite (and even a bit disrespectful and degrading) in my prose I italicize all titles.

S.G.

College Poems

Workshop 1

Packed	(1991)
The Time to Wait	(1991/2022)
Almost Alive	(1991/2022)
Who You Are	(1991)

College Poems

Workshop 1

I am a late bloomer. It took me a long time to get to college and when I got there everything in my life was new. In high school English was my least favorite subject, so naturally by the time I became a degree seeking college student (I was in my thirties) many things I'd avoided or disliked I was now drawn to, so I became an English major. However this brought with it a curiosity about creative writing so in the spring semester of 1991 I took my first exploratory steps into the world of creative writing and as luck would have it—in poetry! When I recently came upon the poems and assignments from this class I was surprised at both the variety and the inconsistency of my writing.

Not all of the poems I wrote are here. This was an introductory writing class so some of the poems were assigned to get us thinking about and playing with different ways and styles of writing poems and not all of them interest me today. The shortcomings of some of the poems were simply not having had much to say or forcing things I wouldn't normally write about. What I am pleased with and surprised at is there are actually four poems I wrote in this very first creative writing class that did have something to say and still have the ability to speak to me (and hopefully to you) today.

Packed was a reaction to a poem we looked at in class about a sardine can, but Operation Desert Storm was also on my mind. This poem hasn't changed in structure or focus, though with a more experienced and discerning eye and ear I've cut about 20% of it away. I don't remember where *The Time to Wait* came from. I seem to be projecting myself into a situation I'd not experienced (at least I don't remember the experience). The final two poems, *Almost Alive* and *Who You Are*, both reflect my interest in seeking to understand myself better as there is much of "me" in them. *Almost Alive* is the poem that required the most work and editing to help make it accessible and give it a clearer focus. *Who You Are* delights me to no end (as does *Packed*). There is one two-line section where I altered the focus a bit, but otherwise the overall structure and the sequence of thoughts is much as it was written in 1991 with only the removal of some redundant grammar.

Packed

An aluminum canister with a key on the cover. Then comes the cat as my eyes walk the geometrical pattern of neatly woven overlapping tales. Each one stares back at me with a bloodless drop-of-blood eye, their silver body bags bathe in golden oil, but they do not hear war's lies or fear the propagators.

The Time to Wait

Your steps
exceeding mine
walk
after walk

I would
slow you down
time after time
unable

Now
you're steps are gone
so I share
our silence

Almost Alive

At a now deserted bus stop a child fresh
from school stomps his way in the snow
where the trails lead him back only to him
the significance of this insignificant design

Buried in the bottom bunk, this cage where
the lining of the upper bunk holds his thoughts
torn, it rips and rips again, reducing as it grows
the significance of his insignificant thoughts

Trapped on the bench along side his mother
a hot child entirely suitless this summer's day
as other children play and swim he sits quietly
the significance of his insignificant pain

Who You Are

Do you know who you are, day after day
yourself or a clone in society's way.
When you look in the mirror, whom do you see
it's your nose, your lips, but whose mind can it be.
School teaches to read and obey
behavioral patterns in a dysfunctional way.
Do what you're told or what they expect
it makes your mind dull, calm and correct.
Social control goes often unseen
'til conformity's shadow comes in between.
Insecure fears pushed to insanity's brink
no wonder some people seek comfort in drink.
 Do you live as you like or do you only pretend
 do you know who you are when you get to the end.

College Poems

Workshop 2

Toothbrush	(1991)
First Kiss	(1991/2022)
Pissing Dogs	(1991/2022)
Filament	(1991/2022)
The Salesmen	(1991/2022)
Art – Class – Lesson	(1991/2022)
Campus Bowling Alley	(1991/2022)
Stop Bus, Stop	(1991/2022)

College Poems

Workshop 2

Technically at this point, I should've been in an "intermediate" workshop; however, this wasn't offered so my second poetry workshop was an "advanced" writing class. There were no assignments in this class other than to write poems: the topic and style was up to us. This was the fall semester of 1991. In the first workshop I didn't feel out of place, but in this workshop three writers were head and shoulders above the rest of us. These three writers were not inexperienced and the quality and maturity of their work, their understanding of the craft and their individual voices as writers clearly exceeded the rest of us. I enjoyed and was astounded at what they wrote, how they wrote (structure, style, topics) and what they understood and expressed in their comments on the other poems. I probably learned more about poetry in general in this workshop and from those three than I did in all of my lit classes. If I was out of place with those three writers, I held my own well enough among "the rest of us" a few of whom were clearly more experienced writers than was I.

One of the things I noticed as I reworked this set of poems was a clearer and more consistent voice coming from my pen. If I was outgunned at times, I'd also grown and learned much in my first workshop. There were a couple of poems I don't have much use for today, but overall I'm pleased with the poems I wrote and the chances I took to push myself to grow further. There are eight poems I'm willing to claim from this class, which is a large number considering my inexperience.

One thing I was impressed with (and see consistently) within this group was how "small things" in daily life were drawing my attention (tossed cigarette butts, a Bus Stop sign or a light bulb going out) and were then fleshed out into a poem. I was becoming more observant and paying closer attention to details that surrounded me every day and maybe offered themselves to me. I don't feel the need to discuss where these poems came from, as they largely explain themselves. *Toothbrush* is the only poem in this section I didn't rework at all, as it was as good as it was ever going to get when I first wrote it! *First Kiss*, *Filament*, *Art – Class – Lesson* and *Campus Bowling Alley* are all experiential based poems, but with some "creative detachment" developing this time around (and a couple of those "small things" added in). The remaining three poems (these are not in order), *Pissing Dogs*, *The Salesmen*, and *Stop Bus, Stop*, all emerged from those "small things".

Toothbrush

THEJOB OF MY

TOOTHBRUSH

It keeps me, my dentist and Masters and Johnson smiling

First Kiss

There is no reason to touch
this makes you different

Fear is the usual, without it
my indifference is forlorn

I see your frustrated eyes
reflect me, so fear exists

This is a conscious effort
for you and you desire it

I sense destiny's tumble
yet my lips do not crave

As I remain unable, so
you remain a stranger

Pissing Dogs

We both smoked everyday
as we awaited the 5:12 bus

He was underneath the oak
I sat on the aluminum bench

For over a year we never
once spoke to one another

When the bus came we
both dropped our butts

Filament

You wanted me to see
the two-bulb
lamp
you made from my old
bicycle frame

When the door opened
the lamp fell
headlong
into the gray carpet and put
one bulb out

This sought after romance
would be
experimental
but your youthful soul is too
inconstant

The Salesmen

A cold-call knock drew defenses tight
as she instantly knew I was a salesman

The TV had already been turned down
as she listened to my packaged speech

Her I-know-all-about-salesman-smile
offered a polite, simple “no, thank you”

Proudly repelling the shark, she returned
to her easy chair and turned up the TV

Art – Class – Lesson

“Sketch softly”
the TA said
“it’s easier to erase”
today we
draw draperies

“Darken the crease line
before you shade”
but I’m still ‘sketching softly’
erase, erase

My drapery
looks like a mountain
erase, erase
too many crevices
do I need more
detail

“Take a break and see
what others are doing”
that’s good
how does she draw so fast
that drapery doesn’t have many folds
I must be slow—
look at that shading
oh, now I feel better ...

Mrs Benson
i don’t like drawing flowers
if i could draw a horse
i could draw faster
‘cause horses run

“Relax,” the TA said
“you’re doing fine
you can use your pastel chalks
see
and blend it with
your finger
remember to ‘make it yours’
it may begin as a drapery study
but in the end
it’s
an abstraction”

Campus Bowling Alley

It is an oddity of the afternoon when
students evaporate so Hamlet can be
heard speaking with his father's ghost

about filial duty. A man in his thirties
and a male child alight upon the alley
nearest my table to disturb Hamlet's

eternal struggle. The child lacked the
striking strength of the man frame
upon frame as frustration overtook

me as I held my breath with each
attempt he made to control the too
heavy weight. He knocked over

four pins once and I cheered almost
but his spare attempt again floundered
into the gutter as I hid my empathy

behind *Hamlet*. "Do you want to
leave?" the man asked. "No" said
the boy "I want to do it like you."

Stop Bus, Stop

Once again with eyes rubbed red
within the silence the child sits

The parent sits secure and uneasy
fresh from release once again

An offer from a bribery filled bag
as they wait for the bus—to stop

Turning back and forth and back
the small and agitated feet dangle

Anchored legs offer no support
but cross back and forth and back

A condemning eye upon a snuffle
as they wait for the bus—to stop

Nothing is said by anyone else
and no one dares look at them

Cigarettes push out from the bag
four eyes spot a bus to free them

But the number is wrong so they
will wait for the right bus—to stop

Bellywash

Monday Morning, 3:12 AM	(1999/2022)
Poems #3	(2000/2022)
Tele-Vision	(2000)
Friday at The Metropolitan Museum of Art	(2000/2022)
Reflections	(2000/2022)
Double Reflection	(2000/2022)

Bellywash

Bellywash is not a poem but a title for a group of poems. I had moved to the east coast hoping to find a theatre to work with. I was a half-hour's train ride from Manhattan and was in a playwriting workshop. I moved there in October 1999. I was in the fall workshop and after the first of the year another workshop began in January. I was writing and experimenting and eager. A year earlier I'd become interested in the vast differences between the early scripts of Shakespeare, so I was looking for a way to bring some part of this topic to the stage. During the fall workshop I played with many ideas. These attempts were received well enough, but it wasn't what I was looking for. By the time the second workshop began I'd found my play topic and had begun my research.

However, something strange was also going on, back in December—a poem had popped out! Now something more problematic began: in January and February my playwriting energy dried up, so in the workshop I was empty handed week after week. Knowing there was a problem, I decided to move back to the Midwest—but then something else happened: more poems! I actually wrote ten poems during this time, even if they don't all hold up. Back in the Midwest my playwriting energy effortlessly returned and I'd write the first draft of my play, *Shakespeare Restored*, in the coming months. What does all of this mean? This is simply the background behind these six poems.

As I was still rather inexperienced as a writer in 1999 and 2000, these poems have needed to undergo various degrees of editing, rearranging and the cleaning out of many (too many) superfluous elements. The first poem to pop out, *Monday Morning, 3:12 AM*, did so literally as it was written from a dream; I awoke from the dream—at 3:12 AM—went to my word processor and typed it out. The hard copy I have is in a not too useful free form style, which is probably as I wrote it that early morning. The remainder of these poems didn't show up until after I knew I was moving back to the Midwest. The older (and longer) version of *Poems #3* felt as if I was grasping to try to write anything I could come up with, almost as if it was written as a freewriting exercise. Fortunately, there were a few places in *Poems #3* that still had some resonance which is what remains. *Tele-Vision* is one of my favorites from back then and one of the few poems I still had some (albeit a bit cloudy) memory of before I went looking for these poems. *Friday at The Metropolitan Museum of Art* is another experiential based poem. The last two poems, *Reflections* and *Double Reflection*, are about my struggles to try and write workable dialogue which in the end I suspect is what all of the poems in this section are about and what they were trying to tell me.

Monday Morning, 3:12 AM

I just awoke from a dream—
the dash is your favorite
mark in your poems—

You were climbing a ladder on a
mountain without a handrail
then you disappeared—

Now I write, sleep still in my eyes
but with a poem calling me—
as letters do with you and I

You snuck me into your house and
said you could not love me
though you wanted to—

A cotton shawl covered your shoulders
tiny as your frame—
big as your heart—

The TV dinner spoke, when I told you
a part of me, did not
want to love you either—

You took the last bite from
both TV dinners—
but still I write

Poems #3

To write a poem

Call it what you may before
it grows beyond from within
the ring of life to call home

To call a poem a poem

Yes you said but you didn't say
to let it go calling forth what
still and always needs to be said

That's what they call it

Unknown to us and me
you don't say what is or was
outside the reason within
my head unless home called
you and then called again

But I don't really know

The calling horizon left before
I let it happen for the rest of
my living days towards this
which as you know is to not
know the real from the wrong

Don't let this away

What is this forward calling that
for the sureness of life we never
get said or express with the care
of being who or what we are but
who cares anyway unless we get
less and less more caring for that
other thing beyond our reach

Tele-Vision

If I had a TV
 would I eat at my desk?
If I had a TV
 would I floss everyday?
If I had a TV
 would my bathroom be clean?
If I had a TV
 would I be watching right now?

If I had a TV
 would I walk into town?
If I had a TV
 would I read just for fun?
If I had a TV
 would I dream while I sleep?
If I had a TV
 would I have time for myself?

If I had a TV
 would I write every night?
If I had a TV
 would I see what is real?
If I had a TV
 would I know my own heart?
If I had a TV
 would it change my life at all?

Friday at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

It is the place to stare
if you like to stare

You watch while they hang
waiting for you to watch

A gallery of unsigned Cezannes
or an exquisite Vermeer

Nothing is said, except “please, don’t
touch” when a hand gets too close

You are not expected to touch
you are never expected to touch

Extended evening hours on
Fridays, the bookstore teems

A European art book and the
delicate underside of a breast

Living flesh
I want to stare

Living flesh
I don’t want to be seen

The soft and supple curve
you are not expected to touch

Living flesh unbuttoned
a full button below the breast

So I look for a book
and hide behind Van Gogh

Reflections

This is the poem I intended to write
yesterday I think but I don't really know

For now I slow down and let it settle
as it understands itself better than do I

Within my mind I know I can not write
dialogue here and this is why I came

A quagmire of inadequate words try
once again to fill, but fail once again

These images flood, float and fabricate
still all is empty, vacant and vacuous

So why does this call grow stronger
when there is no dialogue to release me

A slow and deliberate voice arises and
falls once again into a clear uncertainty

Might this be the cream rising to the top
or the sediment settling on the bottom

Double Reflection

Not another day, but another writing
attempt to find the poem I thought I had
found amongst the quiet of "Bryant Park"

Behind the New York Public Library this
is where I became aware of that changed
voice I didn't expect but there it was and is

So write I do and today the need pulls me
along no matter what I use to distract the
images that have not found the paper yet

Knowing how they call to be released the
voice calls out one line and then another
weighing and moving on word after word

I stop at a bookstore and the voice stops
distracted by others' words yet these words
come back again when back on the street

The voice looks for the paper, where is
the paper, I need the paper yet the voice
in my head moves on word after word

Not wanting the voice I move quickly but
to no avail as it hounds and haunts my soul
yet it is my friend and my very breath

Random Acts of Poetry 1

Sailor's Song	(1997)
Paragraph	(1999/2022)
Romulus Has It	(2000/2022)
Dog Cat Fish	(2000)
The Wheel	(2001)

Random Acts of Poetry 1

There is no rhyme or reason to this grouping. These poems are all strays of various sorts and their order is strictly chronological. *Sailor's Song* grew out of a play I worked on. There was a lost and lonely romantic scene aboard a ship and the director wanted sailors singing in the background. I wrote the lyrics and another member of the crew wrote the music. *Paragraph* is a poem that emerged from a letter I wrote to a poet friend. I had commented on how poetic her letters were, when I saw this poem hiding within a letter I wrote to her. The 2022 rewrite is largely to rein in a sprawling free form structure which didn't serve the poem very well. *Romulus Has It* is one of those poems you write when there is simply nothing else to do and this really happened; this poem was reworked in 2022 as the early version—written a few weeks after the incident—was surprisingly lackluster. *Dog Cat Fish* emerged from a drawing on a post card I received back from a theatre acknowledging my play submission had arrived (which was how things were done before e-mail was ubiquitous). *The Wheel* is another poem that emerged when you can't do anything about something that has happened, so being a writer I did what writers do—I wrote about it.

Sailor's Song

Far away across the sea—my family
Far away upon the sea—just me

But the sea is a home for sailing men
Its lonely here for me

One long lost day this boat came
And took me—to the sea

Left from the shore of my family

Why do I sigh, why do I cry
I'm far away upon the sea—just me

Paragraph

It has been so long and so much has happened
since I saw you last
it was great to see to sit and to talk
with you ... too long

I loved watching you dance
to see you free and alive after the darkness
but there is a
restlessness in you and I know you feel it too

I will be curious to see how and when and what
will happen because it will happen
I don't know much
but I know that much

Dancing satisfies you but does it
feed you
it satisfies the appetite but not
the hunger

When you get hungry enough it will happen again
because you are an elemental artist
and you need to create
from scratch

Romulus Has It

It was my fault, I suppose, as I was the one who called her this time. Her answering machine message—a month earlier, said she wanted to

meet with me: I was to “leave Wednesday open” and she’d “call back Monday” to set up the time for Wednesday. That month later—I received

the form-letter rejection I expected. However, we had spoken once—maybe ten days before the rejection letter came. She told me “Romulus has it”

referring to my MFA application she claimed he was reviewing “more deeply.” That Monday I awaited her call to set up the interview—for

which I was to “leave Wednesday open” but my phone never rang, so on Tuesday I called her office. I had only wanted the twit in her office

to remind her to call me, but I knew by his voice he wouldn’t forward the message. MFA interviews are crucial for playwrights as I’d need to be deemed

capable of becoming an industry professional. But I knew it was already too late, as the MFA interviews were said and done—two weeks had

passed—she’d come to Chicago and left without interviewing me, but I still hadn’t heard one word. There was no apology for the forgotten phone call

and there was no apology for no interview, there wasn’t even a ‘can you make a quick trip here to New York’ or a ‘we can do a phone interview.’

All she said to me was—“Romulus has it,” so there is no doubt whatsoever, it was entirely my fault, as I was the one who called her this time.

Dog Cat Fish

Some days the
scratching can be so
strong. Pulling

apart what seems
inside, what seems
whole, what seems

buried and lost.
They all
pull

today. They did as well
yesterday, but then
the scratching

wasn't as it is
today. Dog Cat Fish.
I smile—curious, indifferent,

puzzling—at that bit of
scribble. The unknown
ball-point artist in

black ink. A call to
patience. But the
scratching

digs deep—crisp nails
carve inside “WHY? WHY?”
“Dog Cat Fish” I say.

I saw them. I
smiled. Need there be
more. “WHY? WHY?” it

continues. I fend with
“Dog Cat Fish.” Nothing else
makes sense.

The Wheel

Strength and durability.
Several miscellaneous parts
somehow formed to fit with

one another. Interwoven as
it were. But not of wood
or steel or even rubber. The

strength to climb and persevere
the most difficult conditions—
slickness of mud and snow, even

rocks and gaps of space and
time. This hub holds all
of these individual spokes

of various shapes, sizes and
personalities, together. One
day, the hub cracked and fell

away—don't worry, it's just his
mortal coil, the Spokes said,
continuing to roll along.

– Brad, in memoriam (1957-2001)

Free Market Frustrations

Big Box Store (2008/2022)

Broken Record (2008/2022)

Free Market Theory (2008/2022)

Smile (and Don't Worry) (2008/2022)

Soliloquy (2008/2022)

Free Market Frustrations

These poems all grew out of a single intuitive and artistic impulse in 2008 as our economy was imploding. The original impulse (there were three poems back then) was deep and intense. The first two poems (*The Merger* and *The Mortgage*) came spilling out with a direct and stern voice, therefore they came out in a conglomerate of words and ideas. This was likely because I was using the poems to attempt to better understand what was happening. Somehow out of *The Mortgage*, a third poem emerged. This third poem, *Soliloquy*, had a better sense of control as it was based upon Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy, but still reflecting our self-inflicted financial woes.

All five of these poems still have me scratching my head as it is beyond my comprehension how we could again cripple ourselves and our economy by repeating many of the same stupid, greedy and childish mistakes we made in 1929. I think history will continue to repeat itself as long as we have enough blind and ignorant people in our society who bother to not pay attention to anything but their own shortsighted impulses (as writers often do). I was first taught about the crash of 1929 in probably 7th or 8th grade and I *never* needed to be reminded of it again. I would like to think I was a capable enough writer in 2008 to have not needed to rework any of these poems, but if I was as a writer I wasn't close to understanding things well enough from a political or economic perspective. Politics and economics will forever be entwined and anyone looking to better understand one or the other will inevitably limit and cheat themselves if they try to understand only one of them.

These first three poems were all interwoven within *The Merger*. The first thing I did was to sort the three threads from one another, so I could begin piecing things together (I too apologize for a few redundancies in using a couple of lines and images more than once): *Big Box Store* has the least connection to the original poem as the thread it is expressing was not as fully fleshed out; *Broken Record* is about the severed thread (not from the poem, but through history) that was reattached to make our self-destruction of 1929 possible again in 2008; *Free Market Theory* is a poem I find obvious, but I suspect I'm in the minority. *The Mortgage* has become *Smile (and Don't Worry)* and largely pulls the other poems together. *Soliloquy* is my favorite in this group, if you don't read any of the other poems aloud—this one you should and with your best Shakespearean flair!

Big Box Store

If we had
a Cassandra to warn us would we
listen
that Sinon (a Greek) was not telling the truth
to the Trojans
about the big wooden horse
but
let's not forget about
what's forgotten

Still
we seem to love the multinational corporate mergers
where
little swallow up tiny, big swallow up little
and
giant swallow up big
so
let's open the gates and tear down the protective walls
we must
outsource every job in America if there is more
profit
to be had
for shareholders

Human cost be damned
we
individual citizens
are free to buy slave-made products
we are free to
sell
our freedom
of personal choice
we are free to
buy
from the spider
seemingly asleep in its web
as it awaits
we mindless, blind, ignorant bugs of
greed

Broken Record

It was inevitable I suppose
we had done it before in
1929
banks became too big
(and too reckless)
with too much debt taken on
then the bubble burst so the dominoes fell
and fell
and fell
and we helplessly fell into
The Depression

Because banks had gotten too big
(and were too reckless)
we lost our trust in banking
so FDR signed the Glass-Steagall Banking Act in
1933
which broke apart the high-rolling investment and securities banks
from the regular savings of regular people
in the commercial banks
that was until
1999
when Bill Clinton claimed
Glass-Steagall wasn't necessary
anymore

It was inevitable I suppose
we had done it before
so who would be surprised
nine years after Glass-Steagall was nullified
the financial industry would crumble
once again in
2008
with too much debt taken on
too many banks had once again grown to be too big
deemed "too big to fail"—yet risking and failing with their customers' money
(too reckless once again)
so the American tax payer was stuck with the bill
as Main Street
bailed out Wall Street
and their
greed of addiction
and their
addiction of greed

Free Market Theory

Do we have a Cassandra among us
to warn us
though we would not
listen
any better than the Trojans did
when she warned them
about
the giant wooden horse
but
why can't we see this ourselves

It may be inevitable I suppose
so open the gates
tear down the protective walls
(if we have to)
to fit the giant wooden horse inside
we must welcome in
free market theory at any expense
“the market will find its own way, trust in it”
we are told

We
yes that is
we
American citizens are
free to sell
our freedom of personal choice
free to sell
our freedom to think for ourselves
free to sell
our freedom to protect ourselves and to protect our economy from deindustrialization
we are free
to not lose by force, but to sell by choice
for this our short term
greed
we are free
to give our economy over
by selling out
(no matter the human cost)
to any slave-made product to anyone
for the lowest
price

Smile (and Don't Worry)

It was inevitable I suppose when you see debt
as something other than debt
but don't worry
this is not a 30-year fixed-mortgage we will ever have to
payoff

Don't worry
(my parents did that)
children of The Depression they all did that but that is in the past it is not today
this is the 21st Century where we don't bother to question
people's motives or their integrity
or to ask what lies behind the friendly smiles
the corporations provide
as we purchase their outsourced
products

Don't worry
there is not a price to pay for this
just ask our politicians and our smiling economic experts
just ask our economic experts and our smiling politicians
we are not a debtor capitalist nation
this is simply the way things are done in this 21st Century
we don't need to produce anything here
we can buy it from someone else and employ their workers
(slaves really)
besides our workers don't need jobs
they can get credit

So don't worry
we can continue to go into debt
ad infinitum
just ask those smiling politicians we elect
this mortgage
will never
be due
we will put our capitalist souls under their totalitarian thumbs
as we continue to borrow more
and more
and more
and more
unless ...

Soliloquy

To build or not to build—that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
the slings and arrows of financial collapse
or to takes arms against free market delusions
and by supporting our own—end them.

To die, to sleep, no more and in our sleep
to say we end the heartache of the thousand
unnatural shocks Wall Street is prone to. 'Twas
a consumer-nation devoutly self-reliant.

But now, to die, to sleep, to sleep perchance
to dream of days of yore. Ay, there's the rub
for in this sleep of trade imbalance what
nightmares have come as we have shuffled
our factories off to slave-mongering shores
coiled for shareholder's profits—no pause for
humanity, a calamity for generations to come.

For who can bear the whips and scorns of
Wall Street recklessness, the oppressive
trade deficit, our willful ignorance, the insolence
of political party collusion and the spurns
of our impatient, unworthy, empty, outsourced
economy? Then we ourselves can not our
quietus make—due to a bare bank-vault!

Who would these fardels bear to grunt
and sweat under this collective madness
but that the dread of something worse
than death—the multinational company
whose shelves bring only debt—puzzles
the consumer and makes us bear cheap
items at big box stores rather than fly to
'American made' which we know not of?

Thus ignorance will make paupers of us all.
And thus the native hue of totalitarian
resolve has sicklied o'er with a pale cast
our thoughts on freedom and our lack of great
enterprise buries this moment of our stupidity
to regard their products—which are turned
against us, as we lose the name of consumer.

Random Acts of Poetry 2

For the 21 st Century	(2019)
Stone Bite	(2020)
Ode to a Self-Sustaining Economy, or The Stuck Boat	(2021)
Four Words (or Less)	(2021)
The Merger, or What Some Might Call It	(2022)

Random Acts of Poetry 2

As with Random Acts of Poetry 1 there is no rhyme or reason to this grouping, beyond it being chronological. I wrote *For the 21st Century* to honor the 200th anniversary of Walt Whitman's birth which was largely and shamefully ignored throughout much of our culture. However, I did not write this poem in a "long and sprawling" style most would consider reminiscent of Whitman. In 2003 I began writing haiku as part of my research for a play and my haiku sensibility is clearly the driving force behind this "long and sprawling" tribute to Walt Whitman. *Stone Bite* is a product of the covid pandemic. I walk much and along one street where I often walk someone was painting stones and leaving them along the sidewalk. *Ode to a Self-Sustaining Economy*, or *The Stuck Boat* is a playful reaction to the boat that was stuck in the Suez Canal in March 2021 (some topics are simply too ridiculous to resist). The last poem I wrote before I began to gather these poems together, *Four Words (or Less)*, again came to me as I was sleeping; this time I jotted the words down, went back to sleep and typed them out in the morning. The final poem in this collection, *The Merger*, or *What Some Might Call It*, was written as I was pulling this collection together. It emerged from various influences including reworking the Free Market Frustration poems and *Ode to a Self-Sustaining Economy*, or *The Stuck Boat* so it feels appropriate to end this collection with it.

For the 21st Century

colonialism
exploiting foreign workers
outcry
outrage
outlaw

(repackage)

out of sight
out of mind
outsource
exploiting foreign workers
globalization

Stone Bite

Go slow

the rock said
not that the rock could talk but
a hand painted message
for any passerby to read
or to take with you if you wanted
it was for any
one who cared to read or to listen
to it

It was

along my new-normal
walking route
after the virus locked us in our homes
and away from one another

Go slow

it said again as my eyes
perused the other rocks
'Peace'
'Courage'
'We are in this together'
a zip code
and 'Fortitude'

The world I grew up in
did go slow at one point
but not any more
would we
could we
learn
to do this again
learn
to care again
learn
to simply be our
self

As I walked away

Go slow
the rock said
again

Ode to a Self-Sustaining Economy, or The Stuck Boat

Once upon a time there was a boat
The *Ever Given*—it was afloat

Full of free trade bargains, with consumers in mind
But alas it wound up in a terrible bind

Through the Suez Canal, the winds blowing sound
An unpleasant day for spinning around

With sand in their eyes they could not see
Turning then sideways and sideways they be

The boats behind grew angry no doubt
But she couldn't move for all of her clout

She struggled and struggled but wouldn't come free
With all of her free trade bargains for you and for me

The tug boats pulled and pulled but to no avail
In the sand she was stuck—stuck without a sail

You can holler or curse or even invent
But sideways in the sand was not the intent

They dug and they dug even more sand away
Hoping to release her in less than a-week-and-a-day

Upon the sixth day, she was finally set free
To again bring free trade bargains to you and to me

So beware all who follow this tricky thin path
It isn't always as simple or as plain as all that

There are some who will win and some who'll go swimmin'
But none will forget the poor *Ever Given*

Four Words (or Less)

colby
camembert
contempt
credence
long division
catastrophe
uncertainty
wonderment
discernment
destruction
puzzlement
pleasure
posture
pastime
parachute
to save
the life
unexamined

The Merger, or What Some Might Call It

It is inevitable I suppose as we want to think the best of them
But of course we don't want them to shut down the government
The first time it can be fun to watch their scripted performances
We cross our fingers and await the hoped for eleventh hour reprieve
By about the fifth time it is annoying to watch their performances
As we know the eleventh hour reprieve will miraculously appear

The media gives everyone a front row seat for Debt Ceiling Theater
Our politicians put on this show—to show how hard they work, for us
What do you think—is our spiraling out of control trade deficit a problem
The politicians scream bloody murder about raising the debt ceiling
But when it comes to the actual trade deficit—they never mention it
If they are not concerned why should any of us bother to be concerned

As long as we can get credit as a nation, our debt has no meaning
We can thank the Chinese for this, who have been carrying our debt
They have carried our debt since we normalized trade with them
We normalized trade with them—so they could join the WTO
They assure us they're not a totalitarian regime and they are our friends
They put us in debt and we pay interest, on our interest on that debt

Still at some point shouldn't we try to bring the trade deficit down
Though no Democrats and no Republicans ever talk about doing this
There are no concerns here whatsoever for the Republicans
There are no concerns here whatsoever for the Democrats
And this isn't a big business merger so we have nothing to fear—whatsoever
So this must be a good thing because these politicians work, for us

The Democrats genuinely oppose the Republicans (on many wedge issues)
And the Republicans genuinely oppose the Democrats (on many wedge issues)
We know we can trust our politicians, as this isn't a Presidential debate
And we know we can trust our politicians, as this isn't scripted theatre
Democracy has always been sacred here or it use to be or maybe it once was
But their two-party collusion—of silence on the trade deficit—is not what it is