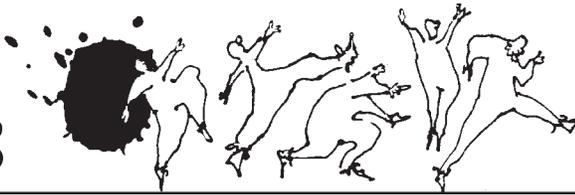


Deanotations



Issue 100

December 2001

Dear Reader,

I have a new book out -- titled (for Xmas gift giving) *Kill the Children*. (Perhaps it will attract parents in the post-holiday season.) You can order autographed copies from me, here, \$11.30 (\$11.75 in VA). If you enjoy my short, witty stuff, you may not care for this one. It's long poems, some a bit grim (often satirical) -- one is in this issue ("Lest We Forget"). It's good for you -- spinach poetry.

Issue 100 -- whodathunkit? 2001 -- that's supposed to be the future. Unfair to science fiction when shiny future dates become years in which one has doctor's appointments and (in my case) poetry readings to go to. A reading is expected to be less dull than a poem on a page, but duller than the end of the world as we know it, if we do. You get to the address (in an area famous for car-parking opportunities -- or rather, car-ticketing), at the correct time, correct year, universe, etc., you walk into a room and sit down, then listen to people you've never heard of saying things more or less at you as if it were vital for you to hear these things, and...that's it.

It might be more fun to hunt for tics on your dog's belly or collect bottles, aluminum cans, and newspaper in separate marked bags, but keeping our writers happy by pretending to listen to them is a cultural trust, something we take turns doing, like jury duty, so if just a few of you would volunteer to sit in on one and give our writers the illusion that they are reaching SOMEONE with their magic words (which are very similar to your words, but...well, they ARE your words), why we'd excuse you from the next 263 readings that come up, GOOD DEAL, EH!

But, no, readings are attended always by the same tiny crew, who can't skip a reading lest no one show up. So do your bit to keep these poor writers from turning from lives of quiet desperation to lives of noisy desperation, addiction, terrorism, teaching freshman English, and all that. (And to give the usual clique of polite listeners a break.) Go to some poetry readings, SOMEBODY, PLEASE!...I mean, O never mind, what do we care if anyone comes or not? We don't write our stuff for YOU, you know. Maybe if no one comes, we'll just eat all the refreshments, then hang each other -- what painters call a group hanging. Anyway, what's the use, you aren't coming, are you, you pearl-scarfing swine, you HATE us! Just stay AWAY! Who NEEDS you!

Who needs you?
Dean Sleight
(abducted by Sam Bebert,
9-11-01)

Terrorists strike at large crowds.
To be safe, I go to poetry readings.



September 11 catastrophe, and once again the World's Greatest Poet (whom -- HEY! -- it's not about!) wonders if he has anything to give the world. How could this happen on his beat? The Lone Stranger writhes again!

We respond to terrorism with outragism, griefism, angerism, self-righteousism, humanitarianism, blameism, self-reproachism, worryism, enthusiasmism, propitiationism, painism, victimism, patriotism, militantism, pacifism, religionism, aestheticism, Americanism, anti-Americanism, internationalism, globalism, isolationism, apathyism -- what hope has lonely terrorism, awash in such a sea of isms?

Boredom, like terror, can infiltrate and immobilize a nation. Join the War on Boredomism and those who harbor boredomists (the Harboredomists), for example, universities, government agencies, the writers of daytime TV shows, most poets...

That joke in which terrorist bombers, expecting to awaken in Paradise, find themselves in Hell -- it's worse: They can't tell the difference.

Daddy, tell us the one about the bearded millionaire who lived in a cave with his TV camera.

Passing an Unmarked cop car pulling someone over, a kind of terrorism?

The Proper Tool

To a man with a hammer, all problems are nails.
And to someone who wants to pound nails,
every object is evaluated as a possible hammer.

No, child, that's not a toy, it's a puppy. See,
he yips when you tug his ears. That means
it hurts him.

Yes, that heavy crystal ashtray can pound your pegs,
but you may shatter it.

We must consider efficiency, the greatest good,
elegance, manners, the feelings of others.
A careful workman selects the correct tool
for the job. If you cut metal with a wood saw,
you'll ruin the blade. If you crack walnuts with
a Mack truck, you'll find the meat disintegrated,
inedible. If you clean your nose with your finger,
you will not be asked out in polite company.

And yes, child, you COULD make a lampshade
from the skin of a woman, but that is not
what a woman is for. And, no, child, that is not
the proper use of a plane full of live people.



The most powerful nation on earth --
what could we possibly fear?
Only the sky ("Look, Sweetie! There's
a big airplane! Can you say airplane?")
The air we breathe.
The water we drink.
The daily mail.
Some of our neighbors.
Things we may read or hear or see on TV.
The future.

The good old days, when all we had to fear
was our drugged and armed children.

AMERICA CONTROLS THE SKIES
said the headline after we'd bombed
Afghanistan for two nights.
What a relief! Let's go live
in the skies where it's safe
(unless you fear America).

Or shall we stay right here,
feet planted on terror firma.

Someone suggested it was kindness
that moved the networks to show over and over
for days the film of a tiny plane
moving (so slowly it seemed) into a distant tower,
which bursts into flame. They were helping us,
with repetition, to take it all in
and free ourselves of the horror.

I don't think so: The film was an unreality,
Muffled, flat. In the background, one tower --
just a black, unhuman stick in the gray air,
smoke-smudged, and then, as a small
female voice, oddly uninflected, says "Oh
my God oh my God my God (like one long word:
ohmygodomy...), a tiny silvery thing (a bird?)
seems to drift in from the right and move behind
the other brighter stick in the sky (we see
no impact), and then smoke and flame
surround the tower like a cloud
around a mountain summit. We hear no bang,
feel no heat, we are alive, and
(as if it could all be undone),

here comes that plane again and again
as, in the foreground, earnest anchors
explain how much and how many
that plane destroyed, how much anguish
(anguish, we are assured, we will never
be able to get over) it caused and
is causing, attaching to that repeating picture
more and more hatred and pain and speculation and
whatever other significance they can dredge up,
not making it more real, but making it sticky
with their glue so that we can't unstick it.



"What a world! What a world!"
screeches the ragged black cloud
until nothing is left of it but a tattered gown,
puddled on the ground.

"Is it true," we asked Herr Doktor,
"that the first concentration camps
in Nazi Germany (like Dachau) were established
for the Reich by psychiatrists, who also
pioneered the killing techniques (like gas)
used in the death camps?" "Well...
we never promised you a rose garden."

It's not that we Americans aren't doing our best. It's just that we don't know what we're doing, we don't know that we are doing what we're doing and we don't know who is doing even the few things we think (if we can believe the News) we're doing. But within those limitations, we are doing our best.

Those who attacked us, on the other hand, know precisely what they are doing and who they are. The only thing they don't know at all is that they're doing what they're doing on some other planet in some other long-ago millennium to some hideous enemy long dead. Unfortunately, as they roam their ghost planet (which mimics our own, as the landscape of a nightmare coincides with one's bedroom and the wrinkles on one's sheets), their bombs explode only in THIS world, blowing up our uncertainties, urging us to become the monsters for which, so vividly, they've mistaken us.



Prozacolantern

To extract your sadness,
I will scoop out your innards,
replacing them with a dime-store candle
that will glow behind the smile I will carve
in your face to greet ghosts and goblins.

Some religious people want the sky
or a bush or stone to talk to them.
They are prepared to heed such voices.
Why? Even I can talk, and I'm just
a piece of paper.

There Ought to be Allah

Some magnify God out of pride: See how great
must be that to which I submit!

People who talk incessantly about God and
God's Will think of God as the Mafia thinks
of the FBI -- CAREFUL! This conversation
may be bugged.

"God is in each of us." Those who fear God
fear each of us and themselves.

When Smart Bombs Go Bad

[Written during bombing of Serbia, not to oppose the bombing, but to suggest what it can't solve.]

Dear Editor,

I understand and share the outrage of those who condemn the tragic bombings of buses, apartment complexes, the Chinese embassy and other inappropriate targets in recent raids, but I think it important that we try to understand these bombs, not dismiss them as dumb or monstrous devices.

After all, for every smart bomb that goes astray and wipes out women, children and old men, 100 bombs correctly wipe out the uniformed husbands, sons and parents of those women, children and old men.

And bombs that go bad are not BAD bombs. They are bombs that got in with a bad crowd; bombs, typically, that didn't fit in, so that all the other smarties picked on them; bombs that had no other way to attract the attention they so desperately needed; bombs that looked to US for guidance in all that turmoil of gust and fog, but found themselves lost, alone, aimless; bombs brought up on TV shows and movies full of random STUPID violence, where ANY explosion is cheered as long as it's big and loud.

Remember, no matter what monstrous things these bombs have done, they are not monsters...or if they are, they are OUR monsters. We need to communicate with our bombs, understand their needs and how rough it is for them in today's heavy weather and high-speed, impersonal warfare. We must TALK to our bombs. We must TEST our bombs early and often to detect those with the potential for unsmart violence; get them counseling BEFORE they go out of control.

But first we must learn to LOVE our bombs. If we want well-educated bombs of which we can be proud, we must make the world a secure and caring place for our bombs. Our bombs are our future, and our future is the WORLD's future.

Sincerely Yours,
Laser Guidance Counselor and Editor of Detonations

I Don't Know What To Say...But Since You Ask...

How I'd love to be asked for advice;
It would give me a chance to be nice,
To share all my knowledge
(Not taught in some college),
And be humble and wise and (as I'll now explicate in
detail with several brilliant examples) concise.



Out the window, a yellow leaf, more lovely than any of our plates, detaches, sails across the yard...out of view. I will not need to replace it. It won't cost me a cent. Carefully I shake a few drops off the plate and stand it in the drying rack.

Some leaves glide, some plop straight down. Some whirl, some somersault, others slip and slide, others wobble. They are like kids showing off their different moves: Hey! Watch this belly flop!



Myrrhy Christmas to All

'Twas a cold winter's night, drizzly -- BRRR! --
And the dog in the manger said, "GRRR!"
But a cow and some sheep
Rose from wet shiv'ry sleep,
Tottered near, sniffing frankincense, mrrr.

Putting things off is an inefficient way of deciding not to do them. The future fills up with phantom deeds. One can be haunted by the future as well as the past.

We think the old are wise because they grow far-sighted.

Old age has advantages: You kids can wiggle your ears, but can you wiggle your teeth?

"She is losing bone density," says the doctor -- perhaps becoming a bird?

Man, born free, is everywhere in chains: Starbucks, MacDonalds, Barnes & Noble, Staples...

If there were no humans, cancer would have to invent us.

"Dismantle the ship!" he cried, de-rivet-ively.

There were two kinds of kids: Those who avoided stepping on the sidewalk cracks, and those who stepped on them only when there was no other way to smash an anthill.

Why I Do Not Reform

Having once done something wrong,
I do it again and again, getting so good at it that I can do it without thinking,
so that soon I'll be able to continue to do it while leaving most of my attention free to do other things, maybe even something good.

To seek to become one with God without first putting oneself in order -- it is as if a cracked, out-of-tune violin sought to become the violinist: succeeding, he would find himself convulsed in an infinite wince.

Bach's Credo

My faith is more abstract than church or fashion:
I play with time and form: O Math, you passion!

Birds, butterflies, lizards, insects camouflaged to match their settings, at first invisible, are often, seen on their own, beautiful, and yet were invisible in a setting whose beauty we didn't notice, a striped and stippled rainbow of caterpillar lost in mottled mishmash. Or perhaps these creatures are beauty's emissaries, designed to detach from chaos of leaf, pebble, weed, twig and dirt to reveal in a fragment the pattern of the whole.



Amputated Limerick

A young lady who strolled through the high grass
Found herself tête a tête with a tigress --
Well, perhaps "tête a bête" --
Meat to met? Bait to pet?...--
Best foreshadows her fate -- but I digress...

Roots

Testicles are little testes, says my dictionary, and testes are witnesses (as in testimony, testify); thus a testicle is a little (and bare) witness to my virility. Protest, contest and most of the other “- test” words also derive from witness, but not “test” and “testa”.

Testa is a hard shell around a seed, from the Latin for an earthenware pot or brick. (In this world full of detestation, I wish my witnesses were derived from a hard shell, a brick overcoat.) That earthenware pot is also the root of “test” -- from an Old French word for the pot used to assay ore for metallic content. Many other “test” words (testy, tester, teston) derive from French or Latin words meaning “head” (e.g., a teston is a coin with a head on either side), which also goes back to testa; thus, “crackpot” (for our tops are pots) and what school tests do to our têtes – our hard ceramic skulls held over the fire to test the mettle of our brains when we (to mix the metaphor) have our heads stuck up our assay questions.

But nowhere in my dictionaries do these derivations diverge from a single source. Pot is pot and witness is witness. Surely, like testae, testes are shells around seeds. Surely a test bears witness to my skills, and witnesses are examined, put to the test. Just coincidence? My dictionary shrugs.

Well, without testiness (not a testosterone-addled state, but merely a “head” state, usually describing a state of head, but often applying as well to a head of state), I will make do with my little witnesses (not little heads, pots or seedpods) -- timid, easily threatened witnesses, for they shrink from the virility to which they attest. And after each spurt of virility, they become ex-spurt witnesses. When they are not on the “stand,” they enter my witness protection program. Can they take the fifth? They could when I was young, but now the second is often too much for them.

“Witness”, by the way, is from Old English for wit or knowledge. Witnesses know something. You’d think, of body parts, the brain or heart or eyes would be called witnesses -- they are thought to see or know. Or the mouth, lips, tongue -- they testify. Long ago, perhaps, men were routinely unmanned; hence, parents of the bride would insist on examining the prospective groom -- interrogating his witnesses. More likely this usage derives from commerce in cattle, horses, dogs -- would they breed?

Please, my diminutive witnesses, tell the world all you know, all you’ve learned, nestling in the dark all day or hanging around showers -- come, show us your



wit! No doubt it is with mirth you’ve grown so wrinkled. No hearsay now, just what you know. Your Honor, they grow reluctant -- may I treat them as hostile? If they know something, I’ll squeeze it out of them!

No more questions, Your Honor. Your witnesses, my love. I give them over to your hands.



Lest We Forget

[Note: Written after reading an article about Reagan’s birthday years ago: He wasn’t up to attending the party, but did play golf with Bob Hope that day. If you think this poem is an attack on Reagan, please have another look. It’s about us.]

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. An elephant never forgets, but this is personal, not political. We must make that distinction or all our politicians would be institutionalized for forgetting their promises.

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. In his day he was called “Teflon” because nothing stuck to him; now even memory turns slippery.

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. Nancy went to his birthday party without him. Was he missed? Probably not – so many people know how to “do” Ronald Reagan...

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. What was it he said about the dead storm troopers? That they, like those they killed, were victims? Was that a remembering or a forgetting?

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. He said Americans should be proud of being American. Was that a remembering or a forgetting?

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. He used to know a great many things by rote – that is, by heart, such as movie scripts, the speech he took on tour – who knows how much else he was or seemed to be was memorized, is now forgotten or comes back only in random bits?

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. He’s forgotten about sending arms to Iran for hostages - if he ever knew. If he ever knew, he’s forgotten he knew. He does not at this time recall. He may have been an honest man. If not, he is becoming one.

[continued]

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. Nancy is taking good care of him. If he were still President, probably we wouldn't be told. Would we notice?

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. He used to be a spokesman for General Electric: "Progress is our most important product!" – can you still say that? Come on...Progress...? Progress...?

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. He is - has always been – such an easy target. Now he's a sitting duck. It's not sporting to say these things. He suffers from a disease. It could happen to anyone. It could start at the top of our nation and trickle down to the rest of us.

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. It's not so bad: He can still play golf with Hope. And now even his own children speak well of him.

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. He is loved and hated for wanting to shrink government, for failing to shrink government, for forgetting the poor, for remembering the rich, etc. He is loathed and adored for saying it is not evil for a person or nation to prosper and be strong. Now here's the odd thing: Nearly everyone hates or loves Ronald Reagan for something he said or is said to have said, and everyone is certain that somehow events have justified this love or hatred, but hardly anyone remembers (or ever knew) just what Reagan did or what came of it or how much of what has happened since came of it. Today's newspapers are already a gray blur. Tell me, who are these candidates really? Even our pain becomes unreal the moment our President feels it. What is the difference between such knowing and forgetting?

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. He proved that an actor playing the role of a political leader is impossible to distinguish from a political leader. Is this something we should remember or forget?

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. His baiting the Evil Empire and his "Star Wars" plan were so stupid that maybe they ended the Cold War. Lebanon, Libya, Grenada... His idiotic economics



brought us huge economic expansion - or was it ruin? Or was that because of the liberal congress? O listen, I can't think with such stuff. I remember only "Doonesbury" and that full forelock awaft on helicopter wash that drowns out his smiling voice.



Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. Does he still have a full head of hair? Does Nancy tint it? Does he stammer more now, quaver, jowls shaking? Can he still grin that grin? Is there anything he must forget to be able to grin that grin? Is he cheerful about forgetting? Can he joke about it? Isn't Ronald Reagan a pretty good guy? Nicer than Nixon, anyway?

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. Even as we speak Ronald Reagan is forgetting things. There is so MUCH to forget! He has just this moment forgotten "Where's the rest of me?" and now he's forgotten preferring to be in Philadelphia...and there goes "There you go again!" But there is more – so much more to forget.

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. We, too, are alive but forgetting things. "Surveys show that 60% of those under 18 don't know..." – that we fought in Vietnam, that we didn't win in Vietnam, who Roosevelt was or Truman or Ike (Does anyone remember Gerald Ford?) – and one-year-olds have forgotten almost everything, though some have remembered how to grin that grin.

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. And us? With each new miracle drug, we forget all the earlier miracle drugs that are now called evil drugs. We all know that things have always been the way things are and so must always be so.

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. If we can forget fast enough, we will, at last, be able to live in the eternal present, having no past nor future – 100% guilt-free, without plans, budgets, debts or regrets. Someone will take care of us – maybe the Government, for hasn't the Government always taken care of the People? Ronald Reagan, of course, preached

[continued]

self-reliance, but Ronald Reagan probably isn't allowed to go for a walk alone now lest he get confused – all those Pacific Palisades mansions look pretty much alike.

Ronald Reagan is alive but forgetting things. Soon we will forget Ronald Reagan. It is said that what we forget we must repeat. We will forget Vietnam (he helped us) and have to do it again. We will forget the Holocaust and have to do it again. We will forget slavery and have to do it again. We will forget religious intolerance and racism and ignorance and greed and cruelty and have to do them again. We will forget ourselves and have to do them again. We will even forget forgetting and have to forget again. And so we will have to do Ronald Reagan again. He will die and be forgotten, but when we need him, once again Ronald Reagan will be alive for us, forgetting things.

A Fishy Election

Though nine tenths of the law is possession of the residency,
Some still insist Bush stole the presidency.
Others (who as vigorously sought it)
Say he bought it.
In a way, he inherited it.
Few say he merited it.
Anyway, he's stuck with it,
So why not wish him luck with it?
Otherwise there's no end of speculations,
As we chew over chads and peruse polling regulations.

There are, after all, explanations galore.
Perhaps Bush picked up the election where Al Gore
(That microphone hogging mugger
Whose name is an anagram of "galore" just as "George
W. Bush" is an anagram of "Whose bugger?") –
As I was saying, perhaps Bush picked it up one day
Where Gore had carelessly thrown it away,
Perhaps thinking it was just someone else's money.
Can't you hear Dubya saying, "Honey,
Look what I found!" "Oh George! Don't soil it!"



Or perhaps when Clinton flushed it down the toilet,
The presidency was swept into the Gulf of Mexico,
Where it was swallowed (as so much was swallowed,
both by Clinton's sexy co-
Worker [that is, if she didn't expectorate]

And of course, by the electorate,
Whom you'd expect to rate
Clinton's performance poor – both swallows,
that is –
But he gets high marks, say surveys; though Hillary
never looks satis-
fied...but is it perfume from a laundered dress
That makes me so digress?) –
Swallowed, as I was saying, by a giant fish,
Which, hooked by George, mouthed the words, "Spare
me, and I'll grant you one wish,"
But George, though compassionate, couldn't read lips,
So he slit that fish from head to where, had it not
been a fish, it might have had hips
(And thus, equipped with both hips and those pursy
fish lips, been qualified to serve
The previous administration with perverse verve,
But alas...) – slit that fish, I say, and then,
Imagine George's utter amazement when,
From out that fishy gut plopped, somewhat tarnished,
but looking less worse for wear than Monica
(whom, for a reason that will become obvious
in a moment, I wish were named Erica),
Yep, you've guessed it! Out plopped the Presidency
of the United States of America!

He Should Have Traveled by Yak, Kyuk Kyuk Kyuk!

A young sportsman embarking from Nyack
Tried to row round the world in a kayak.
When he made it to Borneo –
This is gory, I warneo –
He got hyacked by a head-hunting Dyak.



Tourist Attraction

A young Swede touring Kenya went biking
In the wild country most to his liking.
Word went out, beast to beast,
"Meals on Wheels! Let us feast!"
Soon they recycled one cycling Viking.

A smartly farted fart is an ass-toot. A prolonged fart
is a consti-toot. A food that produces immediate
farting causes insti-toots. Gas from moldy white bread
is desti-toots. A fart while you sleep is resti-toot,
and avoiding a farting sleeper is resti-toot-shun.
Immoral fast living emerges as prosti-toots. Horny
stallions greet mares with Hay, Toots!

Alas, Poor Atlas

Did Napoleon ever wonder, among his embattled hosts, “What am I doing? How did I get here?” I doubt it, not so he’d be aware of it; he’d gone too far. Questions like that became too expensive as the torn bodies heaped up around him. Had he asked such questions, he’d have imploded, leaving a large grease spot. Historians would say, “He had a seizure” or “went mad and apoplectic”. When you’re holding away from you with all your might the mass of all you’ve done (keeping the bloody heaps decorative accessories to your glory), you don’t have a hand to spare to scratch your ass (not without a Hercules to hold up the sky for you) nor a nano-second of attention available for looking inward. The tension of it – taut as a sail in a storm – may look like nobility.

It Only Hurts When We Laugh

Napoleon, in Russia, a short and portly man who could not last long in a world that permitted silliness. There he goes now, galloping ahead to beat the blizzard, a small man in a huge hat with one hand under his shirt to guard his ribs against anything ticklish.



Dictators, Edible and Inedible

Caesar is a salad, Bismarck a jelly doughnut (how sad for iron Otto) and Napoleon a pastry – appropriately puffy, but I’ve never seen Hitler on a menu. Hitler ala King? Hitler buns? Maybe one of those ice cream rolls where a slice shows layerings of flavors? The Hitler would have a dense block of double Dutch chocolate just below the center (mustache) and another at the top (that dip of hair he cultivated) and two fierce cherry eyes, all on a pistachio face. “Hans! Eat your peas or you’ll get no Hitler!”

He Has Buffaloeed Rome, So Let’s Give Him a Home

Brutus pleaded with Cassius and Casca, “Must we carry out this bloody task? Ah, We don’t need to stab him! Just seize Caesar – grab him And bundle him off to Nebraska!”



If I were a wealthy terrorist leader, I’d buy the manufacturers of bathroom scales and rig them all to show adults a few pounds heavier than they are. The morning weighing would become a terrifying experience, plus millions of Americans would begin to starve themselves (making thousands of tons of fattening food available to hungry nations). The scales could be preprogrammed to go gradually more awry, so that dieters would never lose as much as they expected. America’s middle class would become anorexic, enervated, helpless...

Diet diet diet! I’m becoming a salad citizen.

How fat am I? I won’t lie on my back on the beach lest I attract a terrorist suicide pilot.

Xmas morning headlines: SANTA’S SLED HIJACKED BY TERRORISTS. Do not – repeat: DO NOT touch those Christmas stockings until CDC and bomb-squad crews have cleared them. And please report any oddly-dressed, white-bearded, big-bellied males whose frequent laughter is a little creepy.

New sign campaign: THANK YOU FOR NOT EXPLODING.

Seriousness is a serious matter: “How can you joke at a time like this!” Catastrophes are serious because people die. Death is a serious matter because dead bodies are serious: Still, solid, unresponsive, stiff. Sit one in a chair and tell it jokes – they never laugh. Skulls may smile, but they don’t laugh. People get serious after catastrophes because death is contagious. The living become more dead. Dead bodies are serious because they are objects. Objects are very serious. Talk to a chair or an ashtray – no sense of humor. Seriousness is serious matter.

Cars pass. A mother screams, yanking her small son back to the sidewalk. Cars pass. She continues to scream at her safe son.

Between Times

A group of people: If all they can agree about is the weather, then for the ten minutes each a.m. while they wait for their bus, chatting, nothing else will exist for them, only the weather. What one feels or sees that no other feels or sees (whether rust's diamond glint on a sign or an ancient frozen grief) is unreal and slips between the beats of noticing the weather and saying what one is expected to say.

Is it the mind wandering when you notice between one awareness of the pattern on the rug and the next that you have been elsewhere, or have you been somewhere that comes between two flickers of the pattern on the rug, your absence a grace note decorating the one-note thudding of the physical?

If that beat is all you can hear, it becomes a wall of sensation, impenetrable, being all that is. If you can hear a quicker, finer beat, the physical becomes first a fast flicker, then, as you become subtler, a slow thing, chasms, universe-wide gulfs opening between each beat, time enough (or timelessness) to syncopate,



time to fill in the gaps with your own adornments, which, to those who know only the physical, appear as the indescribable grace of a dancer, the impossibility of a gun that appears lightning-quick in your hand, the endless hanging in air over a dunk shot, the wit whose flashes of connection dawn slowly on hearers over centuries, as if the physical were a slow-motion projection of an artist's instant universe.

Your world is not dream fragments of the physical. The physical is fragments of your world. What is agreed upon drives out of attention what is only one's own. The gaps between nanoseconds are unspeakably rich. If you plunge into them (or are plunged into them unseasonably by drug or torment – which makes the richness hellish), you find you can predict the physical, because your own universe makes sense – YOUR sense and only to you, so that the random details we all agree upon (including the notion that you belong to a brain in a head in a room in a place in a

century...) are seen to follow inevitably (a perfect music) from the pattern you create.

At first, you don't predict; you marvel: Somehow the physical keeps returning, bang upon the beat. Between rug pattern and rug pattern, no matter how elaborate a wealth of image and drama intervenes (wavy design surging to become upheaval of ocean, evolution of species, dimming of an old cold sun to the choring of immaculate angels whose voices interweave to become a wavy design...), always, just in time emerges the next instant of the physical and everything (rug, orange peels in the glass ashtray, her face questioning yours) fits.

Then you notice you know what will happen next, as any conductor knows the score. Next you can make things happen, for example, speak (in everyone's world) from your own, so that those who hear you cannot help but hear you from their own worlds and become just a tiny bit aware of the flicker, of the walls' getting thinner, of solidity itself as a bad pun, of agony as the hearer's moan. But if you were pushed into your own world, you will be in, but not of it, agog at your own creation as if it were being done to you by a self you cannot quite be. Drugs slip you into fissures between the seconds, where you cling to recurrences of the ordinary, but are swept away, the physical flashing briefly into view as the sky between green engulfments blinds one who, flailing, drowns.



Whether you are terrified or wowed by your drowning, you emerge to chairs, tables and walls more solid and oppressive than ever, for the solidity of things is a function of your fear of what you have created or might create. The drug overwhelms you with what you have made, so that you cling to the world with whose making you more than ever insist you have nothing to do.

It is a harder flatter world, a tired chaos in which you know all can be predicted, but can predict nothing, in which to be aware is to beware.

The drug becomes an escape from the trap it tightens, an elastic leash that snaps you back hard.

[continued]

Trying both to regain and lose the sense of the world as a flickering thing, you submerge yourself in anything with a hard, fast, hypnotic beat, grind against purple walls of sound and incense, strobe-stuttered, so that for you even the physical becomes too fine a beat to sense.

You live in a subset of time as limited as talk of the weather, whole minutes passing during which the world around you goes past as unnoticed as once your own universe slipped away between the seconds.

Between the heavy acid beats you notice vaguely, as if drifting into a daydream, that someone is beside you, speaks of love, is crying... and once more the strobe flashes and you are real and hip and nothing else matters.

But if you can accept our old agreement and re-enter it newly and willingly each instant, glad of a way for us to know we are with each other, if you can remember your own richness and goodness, can trust yourself to do nothing to destroy the game,

then you can move gently and easily among the microseconds, stretching out time as one who motionless studies rainbows in translucent wings of a fly at rest an instant on a forearm. Then you can play. Then you can catch a smile from a stranger on bus or elevator or printed page and know there are other players, no end of play.

The Language of Our English Ansters

The Duchess of Marlborough
Was bit by a Carlborough.
Her cousin, Dame Worcester,
Was pecked by a Rorcester.
The wife of poor Gloucester –
Poor fellow, he loucest her.



Stunning...that is, Studying Kant

The professor, pretending to lecture us,
Was indulging in daydreams most lecherous,
For the blonde in the front
Crossed her legs – cunning stunt!
Did this show help her grade? Oh, you betcheras!

Poet's Epitaph

They never made me Laureate.
(Is anybody sorry yet?)

Buying each other Christmas presents
as good soldiers bayonet each other:
to do what is expected of us.



CUT!

Sometimes dreams freeze, lose magic, like a car out of gas, suddenly unwieldy, unsteerable. Usually this occurs in the morning, just before I realize I'm waking up. There's someone beside me, I dream – someone unexpected (I know the face, can't place it) in bed with me, and suddenly it's just there, with me waiting to see what my dream is about, but nothing happens, just the face, and not even the face, but my idea of it, my memory of a dream just lost, trial thoughts about what should be happening (but nothing does, thoughts being just thoughts), and then I'm awake.

But at first it feels like something has frozen the action, a paralysis – not a nightmarish one, because already I'm outside the dream, trying to get back in, trying to jump-start it, trying to lie back and let the dream unfold, like a child getting Daddy to continue the story by saying "...and THEN?"

I'm waiting for the dream to tell me something (like who is she and why is she in my bed and do we get to make love? Is there a feeling I should be feeling?), and the dream is waiting for me to tell it what to do. It's as if the undercurrent of my slow turning toward wakefulness has overwhelmed the dream maker, who says, "You're so smart, YOU take over!" but I don't remember how,

and maybe, in deeper sleep, this is the stuff of nightmare paralysis – can't run, can't move – because the dream itself is frozen, waiting for me to dream it.

TILT!

It's time that you knew: Sometimes I have those waking-up dreams (though even in deepest sleep I'm afraid my dreams now have that quality) – the kind I meddle with. You should know about the ones where I'm screwing some woman (it's happened several times in the past 15 years – usually one of my ex-es or some composite thereof), and I keep remembering that I'm married to YOU, so this won't do (the screwing, not the dreaming) and dreaming "I'll have to tell her" (you) – Oh, it's a mare's nest, you, beside me, becoming an anachronism in my dream! And in any one of these dreams,



I'll remember the earlier similar dreams and try to recall whether it upset you to "find out." Once or twice, even awake (early morning, not quite in synch with the body), I've caught myself thinking about this, as if you and I lived in a world where it was well-known (and somehow excused) that I'd had a few lapses. So anyway, late this a.m. (probably because at some dream level I knew you knew I was sleeping too late), you were (in my waking dream) sitting across a table opening mail, and you looked up from the letter and said: "It's for you from Lynn Ravensbrook [some such name] – she says you screwed her." And here the dream proper (so to speak) must end, because after that I'm making a series of responses, like retakes (meddling again) that include "Huh – who's she?" "When?" and "I think we just lay together – we didn't actually do it" (I've got to stop reading those Clinton stories!) and "Are you OK?" – all these retakes, because suddenly you're frozen, and I think, wow, Pam is upset, stony, about to cry, about to yell – then I realize, no, it's just the dream camera is stuck, and I'm about to wake up and none of this happened; because you can only meddle with a dream so much before... TILT – the camera freezes and you wake up (& I did). So it was all a dream – happy ending, right? Except maybe a few centuries ago there was a lady named Ravensbrook, and if you'd asked me then (and you probably did in my dreams when SHE was the anachronism from reality and YOU were both past and future), I'd have said I'd never forget her.

To Dream is the Opposite of to Dream

as "to watch TV" is the opposite of "to create a work of art." To ask the function of dreaming (even that minor portion of dreaming that occurs while we sleep) is as silly as asking the function, not functionS, of thought or love or art or being.

There are dreams that warn, dreams that promise, dreams that allow or force us to look at what we've refused to see, mostly chaotic fragments of memories and borrowed memories.

There are dreams where we simply see what we, having stepped outside our bodies, are looking at. (Body at rest in a Midwestern hotel, keyed up from a day of negotiating an icy highway, I am out over an ocean among billowing snowflakes, and it is no dream. Returning, I examine the scroll-work in the stone cornice of a red-brick building.)

There are dreams where the highway's yellow line that had leapt up at us all the preceding day continues to blip though us, filling the niche in vision where we resisted it; dreams where the just-filled tooth slowly releases its clutch on the drill; dreams where I am spectator, dreams where I am dream-master, tinkering, honing, getting my dreams just right; dreams where I argue with my dreams; dreams where I try to sate my craving for pain and grief (because of what I've done to others) or my need to be cruel (because of what others have done to me); dreams that justify my not waking up to pee by explaining the need as a subtle defect in flower-patterned wallpaper of a childhood bedroom, and besides, it requires first the triplicate filling out of an endless application form; or the dream shows me that, without rising, I have risen and am already standing over a dream toilet; dreams that say not to vomit because the nausea is merely a friend's face (how strange!); dreams where I orchestrate with sensual lips and eyes (as ornately intertwined as sculpted baroque fronds) my body's simple expulsion of seminal fluids; dreams where I compose a symphony and have it performed for me and create and hear each note of each instrument with the utter clarity of dewdrops on grass blades; dreams where I wake up and lie open-eyed in the dark, the dream continuing...



Global warming. Month after month goes in AND out
like a lamb. After a year of counting sheep,
I crave winter's sleep.

A black cat tiptoeing on her white stalkings.

You poor nagging cat (our neighbor's),
please don't put yourself out –
I'll do it.



Little black poodle. Big yellow butterfly
sails by. If I were running things,
it would alight on his curly head, like a
bright bow on a little girl dressed up
for church. But God missed that chance –
or maybe not, if you can see what I saw.

Every night, my love, I see you naked, and,
as if chanting a small prayer, I tell myself,
"I am 12 years old, and there's a naked girl –
wow!" Later we do it or we don't. Either way
I've had my fun.

No Room For Angels

Because they stand on issues pin-point thin,
Statesmen, to seem upright, must spin and spin.

Top Spin

Why do politicians spin like tops?
Why don't they show us their hearts?
Because, like breasts, the unsupported are flops;
The topless, whether DEM or GOP, 'll topple.
A public man, to stay on top'll
Hide his private parts.

Klink...Klink...Klink... –
must have left coins in the pants.
Money laundering.

Among whirling leaves droops a green pine –
guilty spectator?

On TV – action! Watching, full of motion,
a child sits still.

Running, head down – a world goes past unseen.
Breathe...Breathe...Breathe....

A long run – one sidewalk block, so many
landscapes.

A long long run. Just beyond a worm's horizon,
the next stride.

A long run. I slow to a walk.
The world of trees comes back.

Gray branches, brown earth, black crows –
a moving matrix to contain this volatile green
that drifts in the forest's cage, light as air,
only a brief condensation of blue and gold,
shepherded, cherished by darting birds and
fluttering shadows that coax it back within
bounds, calming, caressing, keeping greenness
for a while with us.



A bird song I've never heard before
from the wall of green out back – can't see him.
The same song over and over, a chromatic arpeggio
as green as the leaves, unanswered. What if there IS
no female near to answer his melody? What if there's
none anywhere? These days a species could vanish
while singing over and over the same song.

It took him a while, but he changed his tune,
so he's a mocking bird after all. I think
they wait for an answer in kind, than change songs
to see if the other changes too – Why fall
for some one-song hack.

Birds are feathered ex-reptiles. Mockingbird song
disagrees. It comes from a long long line of
nothing but feathers, flutter, hollow melodic bones,
shifting leaf shadows and cool, sweet nectar
from a fruit I've only dreamed of tasting.

In the vast machine of the physical, man is just
one tiny cognition.