

PHILOSOPHICAL
POEMS
2nd Edition

Nicholas Gordon

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ADRIAN

Adrian knows well the unsaid rules
Demanding that one be what one is not.
Restraining the fierce appetites within,
Interning the insurgents bent on sin,
As he matures, he learns to love his lot,
No longer heeding the laments of fools.

ALL CREATURES LIVE
THEIR LIVES IN ECSTASY

All creatures live their lives in ecstasy,
Nor is one moment less than any other.
Gigantic redwoods tremble in their pleasure,
Each root agog in search of buried treasure,
Light the music singing through their sea,
A wound of joy from which none can recover.

BEES SWARM ALONG THE FRAGILE EDGE OF DARKNESS

Bees swarm along the fragile edge of darkness.
Open wounds attract blood-hungry flies.
Near my heart lie savage little souls
Neatly arrayed to feast upon my life.
In eight days God will be through with miracles.
Even so, life is a gift of love.

So how does one enjoy this gift of love,
Even as one moves from light to darkness?
There is no moment free of miracles,
However swift and deep one's passion flies.

Glory is the dancing quark of life,
Alight with love and lust in all our souls.
Born of the cataclysm, our burgeoning souls
Race towards infinity, love
Infinite, lust infinite, life
Eternal as light billowing into darkness.
Little do we see how far it flies
As we spin through Earth-bound miracles.
Nor can we comprehend these miracles.
Darkness is the center of our souls,
Like still black water in the moonlight. Love
Is of this emptiness; unburdened, it flies
Swiftly in widening circles, skimming the darkness,
A motion outward at the heart of life.

More cry than ocean, more wish than star, life
Is the lyric of an explosion of miracles.
Dream and dung, it is the gospel of darkness;
In a petrie dish, a canticle of souls.

Earth is the stage for a concert of passionate love:
Lettuces and roses, gulls and flies.
Let flies and fish and redwoods sing of life
Equally, of love and miracles;
Nor shall our souls deny their birth in darkness.

BEFORE EARTH, WATER, AND AIR IS FIRE

Before earth, water, and air is fire,
On which all subsists,
Not as flame on oil,
Nor candle on wax, but with-
In, as in us, each
Element in love.

So we are:
Each organ mad with lust, tingling,
The blood eager to cleanse the spleen, nerves
Hungering for connection.

Gifts are tongues of flame.
A blood cell delivers its gift of oxygen. Why?
Brain cells surrender memories.
Reasons are beside the point.
In love we do only what we cannot help,
Each pinpoint moved by frenzy,
Longing to give, to be accepted, consumed.

Most of us have ideological toes,
Or live brightly, with understandings
More reasonable than real.

Around us, within us, is fire,
Non-consuming,
Delivered from flame.
Do we see it?
Absolute, messageless.
Do we see this dark, unradiant fire?

BEVERLY

Beverly enjoys a conversation.
Even when alone, she chatters on
Vivaciously, convivial as a bird,
Eager in pursuit of some bright word.
Reality to her is a relation:
Language is the sculptor of sensation
Yielding to the wisdom of the stone.

BULLIES LIKE TO PULVERIZE THEIR PAIN

Bullies like to pulverize their pain,
Unleashing torrents of humiliation.
Love can little do but bide its time,
Letting go the currents of the crime,
In bitter knowledge finding consolation.
Eventually, all must turn again,
Stripped of all but fear and adoration.

BY THE TULIPS

By the tulips people stop to take
Pictures. One wonders which are more
Beautiful: the people or the tulips?
Lush, almost fluorescent, like cups,
Like vases, like wet crimson towels
Hanging loose about the naked style.
Or an Annamese girl in striped mini
Just below her drawers, on her forehead
A pale red moon. Or two Indian women
In brilliant prints and gold nose pellets,
Nipples pressing through silk. Or an old
Man with his mother, identical blue chips
Glinting through corrugated skin. Families
Like flower beds, varieties of love
And anguish, phenotype and genotype,
And Babel, magnificent garden!
Or the glory of laughter, that needs
No language, the glee of children racing
Away, the silence of tulips calling
Wildly, pouring out love in perfume.

CANDICE

Candice tries to say what's in her heart,
As scrupulous with words as with perceptions,
Not severing the whole to serve the part,
Drawing ever more refined reflections.
In her sincerity is like a gift
Created for a polity adrift,
Each well-considered word a work of art.

CHARITY SHOULD MAKE THE GIVER SING

Charity should make the giver sing,
Happy in the undertow of sharing.
A gift should not be given out of duty,
Remiss in both its pleasure and its beauty,
Intent on rectitude, bereft of caring.
The burdens of the world may be worth bearing,
Yet gifts should still a certain lightness bring.

CHEATING IS A CRIME AGAINST ONESELF

Cheating is a crime against oneself,
Hardening the insufficient heart.
Each finds in lies an easy path to pleasure,
Abandoning the way that leads to joy.
The choice is ever open, but the gulf
Increases as the actor plays his part.
No one who cheats can cherish long his treasure,
Given what of hope lies can destroy.

CYNICISM COMES FROM SELF-DISGUST

Cynicism comes from self-disgust,
Yearning for a world one has surrendered.
No vision is complete but in repose,
Implicit in the steady gaze within.
Come, then, to know that good and evil must
In everyone with due respect be rendered,
So delicate their dance, as much in those
Not cynical as in those steeped in sin.

DOROTHY

Dorothy's a gift to all who know her.
Open her, and you will find a song.
Reason, guilt, or love brings us to duty,
Of which only the last brings us to beauty,
The real beneath the real for which we long.
How difficult to be so sane and strong!
Yet Dorothy knows well the winds that move her.

EACH MOMENT IS A WORD OF GLASS

Each moment is a word of glass;
Each life, within a bubble sealed.
No pleasure save what one has said,
No love save self in glass concealed.

How shall we gaze like fiery stars
Upon this gallery of breath?
One says only what one is;
There is no rostrum beyond death.

Speak, then, of dancing particles
Within the curvature of eyes,
And with equations sow the seeds
Upon which data crystallize;

While in the forests lovers gleam
Like whispers on a moonlit stream.

EVEN A MOLE-RAT
RELISHES THE SWEETNESS

Even a mole-rat relishes the sweetness
Inside its mole-skinned eyes. And a roach,
Groping through a stove-pipe's greasy dust,
Has spots on its soul specialized for joy.
There are salt songs for anemones, and lust
Yet unsavored for a starfish to broach.

Sorrowing butterflies grieve for life's fleetness;
Ecstasy floods them at autumn's approach.
Vines feel the Earth's turning, heavy with must;
Each brief, tilted round their tongues will destroy.
No creature not surfeit with terror and trust.

EVEN TREES AWAKE TO A BREAKFAST OF LIGHT

Even trees awake to a breakfast of light.
In hungry excitement they elevate their leaves,
Great green choirs with ten thousand open mouths,
Hosanna-ing the sun from silent boughs.
Trees know glory with neither sound nor sight,
Yet spread their limbs with phototropic ease.

No one knows the inwardness of trees;
Imagination, though, rapport allows:
Nor sickness, fire, drought, nor age, nor blight
Erodes their silent worship of delight.

EVEN WHEN THE SKY IS STONE

Even when the sky is stone
The earth is free to sing;
The best potatoes know the songs
That season every spring.

Even when the wall is dry
The paint is not asleep;
Some foul-mouthed cuckoo keeps it up
With jokes that make us weep.

Even when a frog is free
It may not know the dance;
What good is it to have the right
And leave the choice to chance?

Even when the water's clear
Things aren't what they seem;
To understand the simplest words
There is a need to dream.

EVENTUALLY, MEMORIES SETTLE DOWN

Eventually, memories settle down;
Later still, perhaps, go back to sleep.
Life cannot hold so much of life for long,
Yet now I hold it dancing in my hands.

Though everything is now, now is not;
Each moment dances in a sea of light.
People were and will be, never are;
Present is a glass through which we wonder.
Everywhere are ghosts that dance in dreams
Rounded by the curvature of time.

EVERYDAY SUNS ARE RARELY WONDERS

Everyday suns are rarely wonders.
In sight the secret is humility.
Gifts tend to lose connection with their sources;
Having lived can generate divorces
That isolate our selves from what we see.
Yet nothing is more native than what sunders

The action from the act. Or plunders
What is for what is not. Or forces
Our eyes to solve what remains a mystery.

EVIDENCE IS RARELY EVIDENT

Evidence is rarely evident.
Very little meets the wandering eye.
Each meaning means far more than what is meant,
Leading one to sense some large intent,
Yet beyond the realm of what or why,
Not knowable but known, though gingerly.

EVIL HAS NO EASY EXPLANATION

Evil has no easy explanation.
Everyone is evil and is good.
Sometimes we watch ourselves do something evil
Frozen in a scream that's never heard.

We cannot stop ourselves, so we go on,
Knowing somewhere else the horror plays
And plays and plays until we are forgiven,
Healed by someone's gift of unearned love.

When someone has been tortured as a child,
Evil, like a mad dog, crouches near.
One buries it deep in a vaulted, lead-lined chamber,
But zombie-like it stalks the world within.

It's strange that darkened children need forgiveness
For evil that they suffer, innocent.
But guilt's the trademark of humiliation,
Burned into the flesh of memory.

Love washes over evil like an ocean,
Sweeping over seething, fisted anger,
Drowning it in cold, unquiet depths,
Leaving you weak and weeping on the strand.

You wouldn't be yourself without the pain
That twists inside like penitential dancers,
Making you the stage of some strange beauty,
Like no one else, the host of our redemption.

FASHION FOR YOURSELF A PERFECT MIRROR

Fashion for yourself a perfect mirror
On which to gaze when you are quite alone.
Undertake to view yourself completely,
Resisting being more than passive eyes.
There is serenity in merely seeing,
Even when the object is your own,
Even when you notice pride or loathing,
Not avoiding anything but lies.

FEARING FOR MY SANITY

Fearing for my sanity,
I shed my shirt and tie,
Walked out on my rectitude
And waved myself goodbye.

I did precisely as I pleased,
Said only what was true;
Cared not a whit whom I might hurt
Or what debts might be due;

Chose my orbit on my own
And lived by my own light,
Hurling through the gravities
That rule the lidless night;

Unknowing in my innocence
The iron laws that be,
And that the more I worked my will,
The less I would be free.

FELICE

Felice, of course, is very, very happy.
Each night is but a harbinger of day.
Life's pain must disappear, upon reflection,
In the transcendental glory of perception,
Casting doubt on all that stoics say.
Evenings, though, she can get very snappy.

FIFTY-FOUR

Fifty-four sings softly to herself
In harmony with what she cannot hear,
Filling an unfathomable gulf
That those who turn from silence wrongly fear.
Years pass like songs too beautiful to bear.

Fortunate are those who find life fair,
Open to the winds that stir that sea!
Underneath each word precise and clear,
Reason reaches out to mystery.

FLY UPON IMAGINARY WINGS

Fly upon imaginary wings
Over every dark and windswept storm.
Rise above all turbulence and harm
To where the white-robed angels praises sing,
Yearning for eternal peace and joy.

Even as the winds your worlds destroy,
In you there is an alien voice, and calm,
Giving forth the word that rapture brings:
Holy, holy is all life and death!
There is a paradise within each breath.

FOR ANCIENT TREES WEEPING ONCE A YEAR

For ancient trees weeping once a year
Old, dried-out tears that congregate in dreams,
Roots cracking stones, branches thick as tropes,
Threatening roofs and power lines and bones;
Yet these remain our spirits' dearest homes,

Their silence irrefutable as popes,
Wild serenities, hushing all our schemes:
One's life must be more than pride and lust and fear.

FOREVER IS A METAPHOR FOR NOW

Forever is a metaphor for now,
Imagining the moment shorn of motion,
Finding its analogy in how
The sense of self is separate from the notion.
Years erode us more than we allow.

Fear not, for in poetry is truth.
Our place among the gods remains assured.
Upon the rock of beauty lies the proof
Regarding what of wonder has endured.

FOREVER IS THE STRANGEST THING

Forever is the strangest thing:
It's shorter than you think.
It starts at any time you like
And ends in just a wink.

You can forever be: right now
Is just as good as then.
The moment is quite all there is,
No matter where or when.

The moment is eternity,
And now is just a dream.
We see our lives in futures past,
But that's just how things seem.

Beyond the motion of the mind
Is something that is true:
As awesome as the universe,
As small as me and you.

GISELA

Gisela would all essences rescind,
Inviting entities to go their way.
So would we all decide what we would be,
Each moment giving way to mystery,
Leaves becoming leopards for the day
As worms are stripped of wombats by the wind.

HOW BEAUTIFULLY THE RUSHING GLASS

How beautifully the rushing glass,
All molten gold across the stones,
Pours into pools of cloud and sky,
Paints a scrim across the deep.

Yesterday the milky grass
Made a blanket for the bones
Of all the birds who questioned why,
Trilling wonder in their cheep.

How magically the morning brass
Eases our phantasmic moans,
Ripples salmon in the eye
'Ere the gauzy end of sleep.

So, too, the syllables that pass
Directly over silent thrones,
And thoughts that, graceful, slide right by
Yon mysteries that dragons keep.

HUBBLE-SCOPES ALOFT WILL SEE ANEW

Hubble-scopes aloft will see anew;
Again, the centers of our souls will change.
Perhaps the things we most believe are true,
Ptolemy-like, will strike our sons as strange.
Years of light, long hidden by the air,
Millennia of thought will burst and scatter;
Overhead, the stars will still be there,
Though shifted from the poles that really matter.
How wonderful to know that what we know
Each mystery unravels from below,
Reveling in nights beyond the stars!
So let it be with every day:
Discoveries themselves always betray;
A fresh idea files older thoughts away,
Yet spins the ancient tales of life on Mars.

I AM A LONELY WANDERER

I am a lonely wanderer
On my way towards death.
I love the clarity of air
Each time I take a breath.

I love the friends who walk with me
And then must go their way.
I love the rose at dawn and dusk
That celebrates each day.

I love to laugh at all the things
That do not know they're fun,
And weep at all the things that wound
And shrivel up the sun.

I never saw my father's face
And will not have a child,
But even so, I share with you
My joy, wind-whipped and wild.

IDEAS ARE QUITE CONTENT TO BE A PATCHWORK

Ideas are quite content to be a patchwork,
Decently avoiding confrontation,
Enjoying well the wealth of stimulation,
Open to some opening in the bulwark.
Less willing to live lightly is the will,
On unity depending for its sway,
Given to harangue to get its way,
Yearning for power to shape, or break, or kill.

JOY LEAVES A BIT OF WONDER IN ITS WAKE

Joy leaves a bit of wonder in its wake,
A sliver of silence, celibate and bright.
Some would sell their souls to get it right;
Others such ambition would forsake,
Not willing to pursue so chaste a light.

LANGUAGE CANNOT BE BUT IN THE HEART

Language cannot be but in the heart,
A sense beyond all sense both loud and clear.
None may master it but by the art,
Grasped through mime, of holding being dear.
Underneath all words, then, must be love,
Articulate and frank, though rarely spoken,
Gift of those who through our maelstroms move,
Each a mirror in a line unbroken.

LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL, MY CHILD

Life is beautiful, my child,
Though many things go wrong,
And you may hear much sadness in
Its strange and lovely song.

Though friends and loved ones die, my child,
They're never really gone.
Nor more nor less than yesterday,
In you they will live on.

They will live on in you, my child,
As everything you see,
Though it must vanish, will remain
Alive in memory.

Alive in what you think and feel
And dream and say and do,
For all who ever were still are
Upon this earth in you.

LONGING IS THE TRUE ETERNAL LIGHT

Longing is the true eternal light,
Instigating life throughout the darkness.
No one loves but longs throughout the night,
Delighting in sweet dreams of lost delight,
As dawn brings back the gifts of happiness.

METAPHYSICAL PROVERBS

1. Things are or not in relation to the motion of consciousness through time.
2. Imagination constructs experience from the spindrift of a vast and violent sea.
3. This process evolved through natural selection.
4. Therefore the only possible definition of truth is pragmatic.
5. Whatever is, is as it is in relation to an observer. To a different kind of observer, with different senses and imaginative processes, it would be an entirely different sort of thing.
6. To no observer, in itself, an object is potentially as many different kinds of things as there are different kinds of possible observers; that is, both infinite and nothing.
7. Most of what lies outside our consciousness is to us unimaginable.
8. The further we wander from the realms we evolved to experience, the more dumbfounded we become.

9. Since we continue to wander further and further, we continue to be dumbfounded in increasingly sophisticated ways.

10. Death is our experience of the end of individual consciousness.

NAMES ARE LITTLE LABELS

Names are little labels that
We paste upon a sea.
Are Jack and Jill and Pat and Bill
Really you and me?

You may be Ruth or Jennifer
Or Ghali or Ahmed,
But you are more, much more than any
Word that might be said.

You are the moon and stars, the Earth,
The Universe, and more.
You dance across eternities
And sail beyond all shores.

You have within you all that is
And that shall ever be.
And yet you also are, of course,
Reiko, Ralph, and Bree.

NO BETTER TIME THAN NOW CAN BE IMAGINED

No better time than now can be imagined.
In fact, there is no time that is not now.
Nothing was or will be, only is,
Each memory or dream no more than this:
The thought of bloom upon a winter bough.
Yet all of life is full of such phantasms.

For you the moment's much too good to miss.
Open it as far as thoughts allow.
Unhinge its doors, and hear its sunlit passion
Reverberate across the fields of bliss.

NUMBERS

Numbers are the link between
The knowledge and the eye.
Our self-contained equations map
The banks through which things flow.

Words never say just what they mean,
While numbers never lie,
Enabling our minds to wrap
The world in what we know.

ON THINGS OF LEAST SIGNIFICANCE

On things of least significance
A universe depends:
The destinies of galaxies
Must wait upon a quark.

The cause fits not the consequence;
The more on less depends:
The phrasing of philosophies;
The sputter of a spark.

Unfathomable! What follows from
The twitch of one sperm's tail.
The depth of what we are and dream
Results from such a race!

Impassable! The chaos come
Twixt wind and wind-blown sail!
A wisp of wedged-in fat can mean
The end of time and space.

PROVERBS OF BEAUTY AND GOODNESS

1. Beauty in people is called goodness; goodness in things is called beauty.
2. An essential quality of both is wonder. In beauty wonder is expressed as radiance; in goodness, as love.
3. Another essential quality of both is harmony. In beauty harmony is expressed as balance; in goodness, as justice.
4. Dissonance and asymmetry increase radiance by suggesting powerfully what is not there; injustice and evil similarly increase love.
5. Thus harmony and wonder are in permanent tension. In any object or person justice and love, or balance and radiance, are locked in a continuous dance.
6. The desire for harmony and capacity for wonder are inborn, having evolved to enhance an individual's relish for life and ability to live peacefully in society.

7. Beauty and goodness objectively are a single quality of being itself, present in all beings insofar as they exist. The more beauty and goodness, the more being; the less beauty and goodness, the less being.

8. Beauty and goodness as we know them are subjective judgments based on one's experience of an objective quality. Thus the broader one's experience of beautiful things and good people, the more developed one's taste and finer one's judgment.

9. The aesthetic experience is no more divorced from the moral than the moral from the aesthetic. For a beautiful person may be more beautiful in soul than in person, while a good book may well find its radiant relish for life in love.

PROVERBS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

1. Consciousness is the product of natural selection, like enlarged canines or binocular vision.
2. Matter and spirit, time and eternity, subject and object are dualities of perspective, as one can look from various angles at a single scene.
3. Brain activity causes thought as the movement of a bow across a string causes music; thought causes brain activity as music causes the movement of a bow across a string.
4. Thought and music exist both within and outside of time.
5. Now is a point without dimension; the future is imagination; the past is memory.
6. The self is the subject of infinite regress.
7. The separation of consciousness from the whole of being is an illusion that can be overcome only by an act of imagination.
8. Death is the permanent loss of consciousness, which does not by any means end one's existence, only one's consciousness.

9. Since consciousness is a function of the brain, it cannot outlive the brain, any more than sight can outlive the eye.

10. All being is one, single and indivisible, both within and outside of time.

PROVERBS OF GOOD AND EVIL

1. Good and evil are like unstable elements that bond immediately to form a single molecule. A jolt of electricity, however, can temporarily separate them again.
2. The innocent are guilty of not knowing they are guilty, whereas the guilty are innocent of not knowing they are guilty.
3. The most common justification for evil is cynicism. The second most common justification for evil is idealism. However, idealism tends to justify the greater evil.
4. One often perceives someone as evil because one perceives oneself as good. This error is the cause of a great deal of confusion and suffering.
5. The reward for goodness is self-satisfaction, wherein also lies great danger.
6. How, then, is one to know good from evil? That which springs from love is good. That which springs from greed, lust, or hatred is evil. That which is beautiful is good. That which is ugly is evil. That which you yourself would want from another is good.

That which you yourself would not want from another is evil.

7. There are those who cast aside all restraints and are willingly evil. There are those who live perpetually restrained and become self-righteous. There are those who are aware of the evil in their hearts, words, and acts, yet are able to love themselves and others.

8. Evil must sometimes be met with violence, but the only antidote is love.

9. Thus to be good one must love those who are evil, among whom one must include oneself. That is, to be good one must be evil, both at war and at peace with oneself.

10. In the war between good and evil, the major battleground is in the hearts of children, and the weapons are the lives of adults.

PROVERBS OF HAPPINESS

1. Happiness is another term for inner peace.
2. One achieves inner peace through harmony between what one does and what one believes.
3. Thus while outer events might make one happy or sad, happiness itself is entirely internal, and at all times completely within one's power.
4. This does not mean, however, that happiness is easy. It requires wisdom, discipline, and love.
5. Wisdom comes slowly, through the scrupulous pursuit of truth over time. Thus what one believes is never certain, but can always be sincere.
6. Discipline enables one to acquire habits in tune with one's beliefs. Behavior flows from character, which, like a mansion, is built of thousands of details, or acts, each judged not only for itself but for its contribution to the whole.
7. Love is the choice to open one's arms to life, enabling one to embrace imperfection. From it flow empathy, compassion, generosity, and acceptance. The opposite of love is fear.

8. To be happy, one must love oneself as well as others.

9. Because inner peace or harmony is never perfect, happiness is never achieved, and is always a question of more or less.

10. The inner and outer worlds are mirrors. How one shapes one's inner world through will shapes one's perception of the outer world. Thus an unhappy person is likely to perceive a world of lust, greed, and lies, whereas a happy one is likely to perceive a world of people struggling in the grip of love.

PROVERBS OF JUSTICE AND LOVE

1. Every person, no matter how horrible, is a child of God and is therefore loved.
2. The causes of evil are pain, lust, and fear.
3. Since evil is both caused by pain and causes pain, it is self-perpetuating.
4. Thus one way to diminish evil is to answer pain with love and understanding.
5. Violence may be necessary in self-defense or in pursuit of justice, but violence in pursuit of vengeance is evil.
6. People have an innate sense of justice, just as they have of symmetry or balance. Even infants know when a punishment is just. Parents can tell from the sound of the cry.
7. Without justice there can be no rules. Without just rules there is anarchy, in which everyone's survival is threatened. Thus just rules and equitable enforcement are the primary responsibilities of the State.
8. Without justice the weak are defenseless. Without mercy justice is a robot that knows not what it does.

9. Justice diminishes evil by diminishing fear. Love diminishes evil by diminishing pain and lust.

10. Failure to discipline a child who does wrong teaches weakness. Discipline in anger teaches evil. Discipline out of justice teaches order. Discipline with love teaches goodness.

PROVERBS OF THE SOUL

1. The sun sings.
The heart answers.
The soul listens.
2. The heart sings.
The sun answers.
The soul listens.
3. Although some say the word "soul" is obsolete, there is no substitute.
4. The soul is the foundation of nothingness upon which the person is built.
5. There is no dualism of body and soul. They are two views of one person.
6. In time the person dies, body and soul, except as a bell reverberates long after it is struck.
7. Outside of time, however, the soul is that part of a person that is eternal and unchanging, the same in every being that ever was and ever will be.

8. We experience the soul in the same way that we experience our thoughts and feelings. But unlike these other experiences, our experience of the soul is our window onto eternity, through which we see the essential truth, beauty, goodness, and oneness of all things.

9. Nothingness is the soul of Being.

10. That is why when we look for the soul we cannot find it. But when we eliminate all else, we find ourselves immersed in its sea.

PROVERBS OF TRUST

1. Trust is a decision.
2. The bestowal of trust is a gift; its maintenance, a reward.
3. Trust engenders trust; distrust engenders distrust.
4. It is far better to trust and be disappointed in a person than to distrust and be disappointed in life.
5. Trust differs from blindness as love differs from obsession.
6. The proper limit of trust is prudence, not fear.
7. Trust permits risk, which permits change, which permits growth.
8. Trust in the future is called hope.
9. Hope, like all forms of trust, is based on a combination of desire, experience, and will.
10. Without hope, life is not possible.

RARE IS THE THING
THAT MAKES A POINT

Rare is the thing that makes a point
Of its integrity.
Most lie swaddled in our words,
Indifferent to ideas.

But every once in a while one
Insists on our surprise,
Penetrates our cinema,
Reveals to us its silence.

SINGING AT THE CENTER OF YOUR SOUL

Singing at the center of your soul,
Long may you dance across your inner stage,
Regarding neither rectitude nor rage,
Pursuing neither destiny nor goal.

Suffering is nothing but the road:
You, the traveler, are sheer delight,
A little wisp of lovely, lilting light
Torn from a joy that pain cannot corrode.

Be, then, whatever person time will tell.
Do what reason and the heart deem good.
Take whatever will or fortune would,
Always west of heaven, east of hell.

Within, you are more beautiful than you
Can ever comprehend, though you can feel
A wonder and a passion that are real,
Wandering like a wind through what you do.

SOME ARE PICKED FOR PLEASURE, SOME FOR PAIN

Some are picked for pleasure, some for pain;
Some for pity, others for perfection.
Some are unfortunate, and so remain,
While some seem chosen for the gods' affection.

Some lose limbs or sanity or joy,
Stranded on the road from birth to death;
Some find all the world in their employ,
Riding through rich fields, the lords of breath.

But all are souls, and therefore lost at sea,
Lost, lost, and drowning in eternal grace;
And all must suffer the same agony
And vanish into time without a trace.

And all are loved, and lavished well with love,
And live within a love serene and good.
Fate may cruel or expeditious prove,
Yet one may dwell in glory if one would.

SOME PEOPLE ARE A SHIP, AND SOME A HEARTH

Some people are a ship, and some a hearth;
Some are wind, and some are summer sun;
Some are many, some are only one;
Some seek the whole while others seek the part.

But those who travel also stay at home,
While those at home are also much abroad,
For all of life must be an open road
That leads us to the place from whence we roam.

There is no difference what we do or are
That makes a difference to the naked soul
That stands before the mirror of the whole
While sailing, sailing bright beyond the bar.

THE BEING OF BEING IS BEING

The being of being is Being;
The being of nothing is none.
And if you find this so much nonsense,
At least it will do you no harm.

Now nothing is nothing, for certain;
And something is something, for sure.
Since something cannot come from nothing,
It must be eternally there.

And though it is hard to imagine
Since time is our air and our sea,
No thing will ever be nothing,
Though we will not always be we.

THE CHILD WAS MERELY ACCIDENTAL

The child was merely accidental.
When she looked up, the sun turned towards her,
Each star found her face, space crawled up
Next to her, wrapped her in its many layers,
Touched each eye with a soft finger,
Yet her unease would not disappear.

Even in that radiance, it would not disappear,
In the sweet reluctance of a child's world,
Given the joy of strangeness, given
Her capacity for forgiveness, it remained
That she might not have been.

THE EARTH DOES NOT REGRET ITS TIMES OF MOURNING

The Earth does not regret its times of mourning,
However overwhelmed by waves of grief.
Inside each thing is an eternal fire
Redeeming all the sorrows of desire,
Transforming them to more than mere relief.
Yearning is the beauty of each dawning.

One is all: Then why are stars adorning
Night, ripped from their single, perfect sire
Even as they dance in disbelief?

THE FUTURE HAS NO INDIANS

The future has no Indians,
No Pacific coast.
Its mines are planets,
Its fire stars.
Huge colonies hover
Like worshippers,
Arms outstretched,
While galleons sail
On solar wind.
There are forty quintillion
Amazon jungles
Per single, sated termite,
And the only things
People tend to run out of
Are numbers.
But far out at the edges,
In ships that cube the speed of light,
A few daring scouts
Search desperately
For Indians.

THE LOS ANGELES OF 1958

The Los Angeles of 1958
Was obliterated in 1959.
Every house, movie star, palm tree, and freeway
No more. Gone. Nada. Nihil. We say
There are photos, memories—I have mine.
Yet holy presence we cannot recreate.

From desire and dream we make our memories,
Images of images, the stage
Vacant, the quartet long gone, our rage,
Ever, for lies, distortions, uncertainties.

THE OCEAN THAT WE LIVE ON HAS NO SHORE

The ocean that we live on has no shore.
However far we sail, we reach no end.
Infinity is simply what we see,
Restoring the first meaning of "to be,"
There being only ocean, nothing more.
Yet that is what we cannot comprehend.

None long can bear that god-like ecstasy,
Imagining oneself at Being's core,
Nor long remove the multiplicity
Each mind within itself must apprehend.

THE ONLY TRUE IDEA

The only true idea
Is a dead idea:
Living marble,
Like a Michelangelo mausoleum
Or Keats' Grecian urn.

Live ideas are like people:
They bustle and jostle in the marketplace,
Are vain, possessive,
Wear makeup,
Lie to get their way.

One could no more live without ideas
Than without people.
Yet, as with people,
One would be a fool
To believe them absolutely.

THE ROAD AHEAD IS LIKE THE ROAD BEHIND

The road ahead is like the road behind.
The dreams achieved revise the dreams to come.
Mind shapes world, and new-shaped world shapes
mind,
As what you are steps back from what you've done.

The deeper you resides in its own space,
Sheltered like a yolk from wind and tide,
Filled with unimaginable grace
To wander through the paradise inside.

Ambitious girl! Become what dream you will,
And sail across each dark, forbidding sea.
Within, the fawn will graze sweet meadows still,
Untouched by all the phantoms you will be.

THE THOUGHT ELECTRIC WINGS ACROSS THE SHALLOWS

The thought electric wings across the shallows,
Wheeling like a cry from friend to friend.
Each virtual lover feels so well connected,
Neither needed, nor apt to be neglected,
That intimacies swiftly dart and blend,
Yet separate unerringly as swallows.

Soon will our dreams emerge from eaves and hollows,
Entering one dreamer without end:
Visions into messages, reflected
Each by instant each, as each thought follows
Nothing that we now can comprehend.

THE WIND THE RIVER ROILS WELL

The wind the river roils well
And rocks like shells the boats offshore.
Reeds and cattails thrash and turn
As willows loose their streaming hair.

Soon the storm shall strip them bare
And wash downstream the whiplike ferns.
The river past its banks shall pour
And misery reduce to hell.

So do we all await the power
That rises with the rising wind.
The air electric sings of woe,
And darkness like a dirge descends.

Well do we know our fate depends
On more than we will ever know.
Nor will nor prayer that fate rescinds
Though grace attends each anxious hour.

THERE ARE TIMES THE SEA IS SULLEN RAGE

There are times the sea is sullen rage,
And all the wind can carry is despair.
The morning barely brightens the dark air,
And life is what no comfort can assuage.
There is pain too pure for any sage,
When breath is what precisely is not fair,
And hope seems hopelessly beyond repair,
Unlikely to recover much with age.
Ah, then, sweet child, know that you are loved
Simply for the glory of your being,
Regardless what you think or say or do!
This is a gift that cannot be removed,
A passion for a passion beyond seeing
That waits within the darkness just for you.

THERE IS A GARDEN IN MY HEART

There is a garden in my heart
More beautiful than words,
Filled with subtle scents and shades
And the rhapsodies of birds.

I go there to refill my cup,
Or, when I am alone,
To find my favorite rock and trace
The smile upon the stone.

When the wind blows in my heart,
Stirring up the sea,
I turn my back upon the waves
And return to me.

I sit beside a quiet pool
And gaze down at the sky,
And feel a yearning so complete
I cannot help but cry.

THERE IS NO GARDEN GUARANTEED TO BLOOM

There is no garden guaranteed to bloom,
However closely sun and rain conspire;
In every hope there has to be some room
Reserved for cultivating fresh desire.
There is in every mind a supple chart;
Yet wildflowers grow within the heart.

Each hope is like a love before the wind,
Intended for some fury, while below
Great stillness opens, mute and many-limbed,
Haunting like a vagrant undertow
The thoughts of those who need to come and go.

THERE IS NO GREATER PARADISE

There is no greater paradise
Than simply being here.
The proof is in the agony
That willingly we bear.

A moment is beatitude;
A year, eternal grace;
A life, a window wide upon
The transcendental face.

Our gratitude's ubiquitous,
The stuff of every day,
The ground bass of an ecstasy
That never goes away.

And yet . . . and yet this wonder lies
Like grass beneath the snow:
Above we fear the brutal wind,
Eternal spring below.

THERE IS NO JAIL FOR THE SOUL

There is no jail for the soul,
Which everywhere is free.
One might as well secure the sky
Or chain the open sea.

The body may in bondage sit
Or on a golden throne.
It matters little to the soul,
Whose fate is all its own.

The soul is sovereign in the self,
And ever free to choose.
Without, one may be forced to crawl;
Within, one can refuse.

Without, one can be flayed alive,
But none can touch the soul,
Which, willing only what is good,
Emerges sane and whole.

THIRTY-FIVE

Thirty-five has all the joy he needs,
Having memorized the sacred score.
Infinite beauty rests within his hands,
Rising from a sea of music stands,
The sound mere presence to the silent core,
Yet far from the rendition that he reads.

For now, the faint allusion that he leads
Intensifies his avarice for more,
Visioning the glory he demands
Even though but life can lie in store.

TIME IS NOT A RIVER BUT A SEA

Time is not a river but a sea,
Holding all that was and is to be.
It is the mind that moves across the story,
Racing with the wind upon its glory,
Tracing through the will one's destiny.
Years shimmer in their drowned eternity.

The problem is, of course, identity,
Having the impression we are free.
Remember that the Earth does not seem round.
Each eve the sun sinks slowly towards the ground,
Even as we choose to take our tea.

TIME TENDS TO MAKE THE BIGGEST PROBLEMS SMALL

Time tends to make the biggest problems small.
It heals the bitterest and deepest wound.
There is no pain, no agony at all
That Time won't turn into some sweet, sad tune.

So let Time take you as a river flows
Beyond the violent rapids where you are.
There are things that every woman knows
Once she can see her tempests from afar.

When you are young, your choices wait on you,
Or if they disappear, there'll soon be more.
The things you love and lose, the words you rue,
Sometimes, when you look back, look like a door.

TO BE CONSUMED BY SOMETHING MORE THAN BEAUTY

To be consumed by something more than beauty,
Holding in one's hand the sense of all,
Innocent of self, of interest pure,
Reaching for a grace that will endure,
The fragments of a light beyond the wall
Yielding truth with neither rage nor pity;

Seized by inner craftsmen, skilled and sure,
In reverent abandon, ruthless awe,
X-ing out the fruits of one's own fancy . . .

TO BE SURE, THERE AREN'T MANY HAPPY SEAHORSES

To be sure, there aren't many happy seahorses
(Hummingbirds of the shallows, hovering);
Instead, they dart about, unspeakably lovely,
Reflecting curiously upon their lives,
Their diaphanous fins fluttering,
Yearning to be eternal, to understand.

Some, not many, emerge from their seahorse
Eyes (little question marks, hovering),
View themselves and cry: Oh! How lovely!
Emerge from their dark blue lives, fluttering,
Nodding—How could we have failed to understand?

TO DAYDREAM IS TO STIR THE POT OF HOPE

To daydream is to stir the pot of hope.
What we most want is up upon a stage,
Eliciting a self-vicarious pleasure.
Nor should we deprecate such homespun treasure,
The source of much delight at any age.
Years pass, yet dreams with dreamers still elope.

Fear not to dream, for dreams are not mere leisure:
Imagination gives one room to cope,
Vivid in its scenes of love and rage
Even as it makes one's world to measure.

TODAY'S AN OCEAN WHICH YOU SAIL FOREVER

Today's an ocean which you sail forever;
Winds forever carry you away.
Eden always lies somewhere behind,
Nor can you turn your vessel to the wind,
Though memory must memories betray.
Years break like waves across the bow of ever.

Fortune's the horizon, giving way,
Open endlessly to your endeavor,
Unreachable as it, nor cruel nor kind,
Retreats before the vastness of the day.

TRUTH IS A PASSION UNCONTROLLED BY SENSE

Truth is a passion uncontrolled by sense.
What we know is seldom more than what we think.
Each touch of the world seems a revelation,
Neither shaped by words nor sifted through sensation,
The thing itself, untamed, the longed-for link:
Yet the bride forever keeps her innocence.

Nestled in each word is a relation
Imprecise, misleading, and intense,
Near plunging into speechless radiance,
Even as it rests upon the brink.

TRUTH IS JUST THE OPPOSITE OF SENSE

Truth is just the opposite of sense:
What we know will lift, eventually, like fog.
Each paradox is like a shining face
Nodding vacantly across a room.
The only source of thought is innocence,
Yet we must wear the colors of the wog.

The signature of arrogance is grace:
How can we know, except that we presume?
Reason robs the soul of nutrients:
Each heart constructs its own bright carapace;
Each mystery divides within its womb.

TRUTH IS WHEN ONE SAYS
WHAT ONE BELIEVES

Truth is when one says what one believes,
Restoring harmony within the heart.
Upon the chime of truth all discord leaves,
Turning but to tarry in the eaves,
Having heard the grace behind the art.

WHAT WE DREAM OF TURNS TO DUST

What we dream of turns to dust
While dust is more than we can dream.
Time tumbles towards the faceless sea
As we gaze at the waterfall.

We are the marionettes of lust,
As predetermined as we seem;
Yet we are in ourselves as free
As nothing on the brink of all.

As we breathe each bated breath,
And work our unabated will,
And do our evil and our good,
Not always clear on which is which;

And wait unspeakably for death,
With faith or not, for good or ill,
We conquer every land we would,
And rule a kingdom vast and rich.

WHY SHOULD WE CARE THAT WE MUST LOSE THE PAST

Why should we care that we must lose the past?
There are millennia we'll never know.
Nor can a truth in full regalia last
Longer than it takes the wind to blow.
Of course, there are the many things we learn,
Not to speak of curiosity;
But neither motivation makes us burn
With sacred lust at each discovery.
We feel there is a holiness in things
That witness bear to truth. For we, too, bear
Witness to the miracle that sings
Through every sense the wonder that it's there.
Sojourners all, we hold each moment dear,
Moved to honor all who have been here.

WORDS ARE GOOD FOR THINGS, LIKE CARS AND TREES

Words are good for things, like cars and trees,
But when it comes to feelings, they're like trying
To wrap a waterfall or sign a breeze,
Or tell someone a whole truth without lying.
I would tell you how I feel with signs:
Like how I look at you or how I touch,
Or how I fit my dreams to your designs,
Making one bright world—and then, how much.
The truth is not in words or even deeds:
It's far too subtle to be seen or heard.
It's in the garden that supplies one's needs,
Too various for any act or word.
Words are like the scent of rich perfume:
They indicate a presence in the room.

WORDS ARE SPOKEN
WITH THE HAND AND EYE

Words are spoken with the hand and eye.
One may know the meaning, but the sense
Remains within a matrix far more dense,
Defined less by the what than by the why,
Silent save to sensibility.

YOU HAD THE GIFT OF HAPPINESS

You had the gift of happiness,
The unrelenting grace
To see the radiance of life
Within the ruthless face.

Cancer, heart attacks, and strokes,
Paralysis and pain,
A flood that left you penniless . . .
And still you smiled again.

It wasn't pure naiveté
Or something just not there,
Or, even worse, an inner lie
That said you didn't care.

It was a certain blessedness
Attained by very few
That let you live within a love
Within the love in you.

ZACHARY

Zachary lets go a long-held longing
Amid his contemplation of the race.
Chastening a tide of heartfelt yearning,
He goes to some quite ordinary place.
As life unfolds, he dances through its shadow,
Redundant as a grain upon a meadow
Yielding to the wind across its face.

