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LATE INTO THE NIGHT Poems by Joseph Awad

LATE INTO  
the  
**NIGHT**



PROSPERO'S WORLD PRESS, INC.  
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Preface *Late into the Night* by Joseph Awad

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once was reported to have observed that one should read at least one good poem every day. Joseph Awad echoes these sentiments in the collected poems presented in his work *Late into the Night*. He demonstrates his talents as a poet by drawing on his boyhood experiences in the coal mining town of Shenandoah, his fast-paced life as a public relations executive, and his intellectual fascination with history, culture, politics and even science fiction. In his poem "At the Poetry Workshop", he notes that "...the unlikeliest thing can kindle poetry." For example, the author speaks of the thoughts of Sir Walter Raleigh on the night of his execution.

Far from the Tower's gloom, where I was kept  
For twelve long years, years in which  
I might have courted greatness, far away  
From screams, the hangman and the axe, the axe  
That will undo me in a few short hours.  
I would be headed for Virginia now.

In another poem, he reflects on the plight of coal miners and their irrepressible spirit in his epic poem "At the Miner's Memorial".

Like living dead long buried in the dark  
Beneath the earth, they labored all their lives.  
When they had finished a back-breaking shift  
And were lifted shakily to the breathing surface,  
And stepped out into the dazzling light and life,  
It must have seemed like rising from the dead.

In still another poem, Awad brings out the primal urges for conquest and the satisfaction at winning at business in a four line poem entitled "Auguries of Experience".

To see the world on a hundred grand  
And heaven in the rise to power;  
Hold a foe in the palm of your hand,  
And a glass at the cocktail hour.

Other examples of his mastery of poetic form abound in his work, *Late into the Night*. The reader is invited to share in these experiences

Alfred Dorn/Bryen Lorenz.

## About Dr. Alfred Dorn

Alfred Dorn, poet and critic, founder of the Anita Dorn Memorial Award for Poetry, received his doctorate from New York University, where he studied as a Penfield Fellow for work in Renaissance and modern literature. A specialist in authors of the 16th and 17th centuries, he wrote graduate dissertations on Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Spenser, and John Donne. He taught at New York University, Rider College, and the City University of New York. Dr. Dorn directed writing workshops for the Poetry Society of America, The Brooklyn Poetry Circle, and literary organizations in Texas, Arkansas, and Indiana. He has been featured on New York radio. Twice vice president of the Poetry Society of America, Dr. Dorn is director of the World Order of Narrative and Formalist Poets, which has sponsored poetry competitions since 1980.

Dr. Dorn's work has appeared in poetry anthologies and some sixty periodicals, among them *Blue Unicorn*, *Dark Horse*, *The Edge City Review*, *The Formalist*, *Hellas*, *The Hudson Review*, *Iambs & Trochees*, *Light*, *The Lyric*, *The New Criterion*, *Orbis*, *Pivot*, and *Sparrow*. As literary critic and art historian, he has published essays in *Iambs & Trochees*, *Arts Magazine*, and other journals.

In recent years, he published three books of poetry: *From Cells to Mindspace*, *Voices from Rooms*, and *Claire and Christmas Village*. He started Prospero's World Press, Inc. in 2008 to publicize outstanding works of poetry, fiction, and essays.

## Forward

The poems in this collection were written over a period of some fifty years and reflect a diversity of feeling, experiences and influences. Art is the sharing of experience, either real or imaginative. And so it is with poetry: not raw experience, as in prose, but experience condensed and transmuted into a work of art by the creative orchestration of form, imagery, rhythm and figurative language.

The book is organized in three sections. In the first, *Auguries of Experience*, most of the poems deal with worldly involvement, ambition, business and politics, as many of the poems in my earlier books deal with childhood, youth and the family.

The second section is titled *Browsing*. It is a miscellany of poems that did not seem to fit into the first or third sections. The poem, "A Commonwealth of Art," resulted from a request by the Virginia Commission for the Arts when I was poet laureate of Virginia. They were seeking a poem to celebrate the presentation of the Governor's Awards for the Arts. It was read at the awards presentation by actress Patricia Neal and appeared in the awards program. "The Bells and Belles of Williamsburg," suggested by one of the most popular poems in colonial America, was written for an anthology of work by contemporary Williamsburg area poets, "Avenging Spirit" grew out of my fascination with the life of Hannibal, and a desire to try my hand at poetry in an epic style.

The final section, *Late into the Night*, includes an elegy and a dramatic monologue of Sir Walter Raleigh on the eve of his execution. It mainly contains poems concerned in one way or another with a death or aging and the approaching end of life. While I have written elegies in more classical forms, "Tony" needed to be done in a contemporary idiom. But the loose iambic metric helped to modulate an elegiac tone.

While I have written a number of poems in free verse, the challenge of metrical form or a rhyme scheme, or both, compels a resourcefulness of language and imagination, stimulates creativity, and almost always makes for a more affective poem.

Joseph Awad

To the memory of  
my mother and father

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*I. Auguries of Experience*

## THE COMPROMISER

Torn, he labors hard to realize  
Opposed ambitions. He would like to choose  
Flesh and spirit both, to improvise  
A way to nod yet gracefully refuse,  
A dialectic that might reconcile  
Saint and sybarite in one, combine  
Art and marketability in a style  
Where poetry and "sell" are intertwined.  
Will he fuse conflicting leanings in the fire  
That lights the stars? Pluck ambiguities  
Of song from taut strings of a truthful lyre?  
Bind himself to Love that sets him free?  
First he must make the money to permit  
Giving his all to art and the Infinite.

## AUGURIES OF EXPERIENCE

To see the world on a hundred grand  
And heaven in the rise to power;  
Hold a foe in the palm of your hand,  
And a glass at the cocktail hour.

## THE MANAGER'S PRAYER

*Executives are not paid for doing things they like to do.*

Peter F. Drucker

This callus terrifies me; cold as marble,  
It hardens about the membrane of the heart  
After it's rubbed against the rough as long  
As mine has, after you've said as many times  
No to those you love, Yes to 'The Brass'  
And customers and contacts; learning soon  
To rationalize (*No one's indispensable,  
I can't help anyone if I don't survive*),  
Or separate decision from compassion,  
Accounting from *caritas*; profits from good works.  
Numbed by the broken lives of those you fail,  
The wreckage of vows you counted on or made,  
Trying the doors and windows of the prison  
They call *accepting one's own limitations*.  
With each abradant it becomes less painful  
To shut the door on the imploring salesman,  
Shrug off a rival's bankruptcy,  
Fire a man or bid a love goodbye,  
Or turn back to your salad and your steak  
After the call reporting that he's dead,  
Who helped you once for simple pity's sake.  
  
Don't insulate me from decision's pangs.  
Number me not with the hard, the tough as steel.  
Make me tender to cutback's trauma, pleading's tears,  
The wrenching of the dream. Lord, let me feel!

## SPEED

To be hurtled from LaGuardia in a taxi  
Over the rush, upsoaring, Titan-strung,  
Of Triboro's hyperbola, blurring past  
The pomp and glitter of the starry skyline—  
Tympanis of towers lit ascending  
In dusk to lord it over other towers;  
Ricochet like a pinball down the ramp  
Into Franklin Delano Roosevelt Drive,  
Racing the East River, shedding tunnels,  
Into the neon din, the heavy metal  
(Booming with power, affluence and pleasure)  
Of Manhattan's cordite density, while night,  
Like a country boyhood's piercing katydid,  
Shrills over and over and over, *Go for it, kid!*

## THE SITTING

*(remembering Marilyn Monroe)*

Take off your clothes!  
Strike us a pose!  
A brash, a Bel Air,  
A delectable pose.

Anything goes!  
Stand on your toes,  
Hand to your hair  
That leaps and blows.

Droop in repose.  
Inhale a rose,  
Lids with care  
Fluttering closed.

Dream as you doze  
Of extravagant hose,  
Skirts that flare,  
With furbelows.

Lift your nose.  
Defy your foes.  
Dare the world  
The stones it throws.

Flattering beaux,  
Adoring *Joes*  
Deathward fare  
And decompose.

Squeeze your woes  
Into a pose  
*O's* declare  
And enclose.

## SONG OF THE MASS MAN

I produce and I consume.  
What motivates me when I buy?  
On me depends a bust or boom.  
Am I insured enough to die?

## ORIGINAL SIN

When they conspired, whispering on the phone  
With racing hearts, to meet for drinks that day  
At a dark, romantic, Byzantine café  
In a neighborhood where they would not be known,  
They could not know its gravity, or the sighs,  
The tears, the degradations now to come—  
The neon mean motels; becoming numb  
To conscience, bold at telling teeny lies  
That smolder in the gut; the grim mutations  
In relations til a look, like a pebble loosed,  
Will start an avalanche, or a spark produced  
By a casual word ignite a conflagration.  
A cosmos can be undone by acts as small  
As eating an apple, or observing one fall.

## LINES WRITTEN ON A JET

Insubstantial as the shadows cast by clouds  
That seem to float like islands of regret  
On surfaces of sunlit lakes below  
Seen from the high window of a jet,  
The protestations of her love (too much)  
Cast a darkness on his spirit that will stay  
(Unlike the fleeting shadows on the lakes)  
After fickle time has puffed away  
The empty words, the endless love avowed,  
The way that winds disperse the passing clouds.

## ON THE RESILIENCE OF RICHARD NIXON

Most people, if the truth were known,  
Thought of you as the kid next door  
Who tried to beat the machine at its own game.  
You were one of our own.

Whoever has lied, cornered by hate,  
To save career, family, face,  
Believing his motives at least were true,  
Shares in the guilt of Watergate.

No rich man's son, by ambition driven,  
You made it on brains and guts and sweat,  
And a knack for absorbing punishment.  
For this you cannot be forgiven.

You were down for the count. They said you were "through."  
You came bobbing back like a bloodied boxer  
Looking punchy from too many clobberings,  
Your famous jaw intact and blue.

## DAYS AT THE RACES

The call to the colors chilled his spine.  
He cheered as they galloped out of the gate.  
'Til they thundered across the finish line.  
But *also ran* was his usual fate.

He lost their all on an odds-on horse,  
Then begged and borrowed and bet right back.  
With turned-out pockets, (and now divorced),  
He shot himself at the Belmont track.

"Win or lose," he used to say,  
"It's the risk, the dream that gives the zing.  
Life's a gamble, a tough parlay.  
There's only one *sure thing*."

## YOU CAN'T GET THERE FROM HERE

Somewhere to the North it lies,  
Beyond geometries of snow,  
Where zero fixes frozen eyes  
And boreal remorse blows.

Southward now the path must plunge,  
Beyond the steaming jungle urges,  
Drizzling flies and moods of sponge,  
Where passion, on all fours, emerges.

Set sail for the mystic East,  
Beyond the pondering of gongs,  
Temples, prayer and barefoot priests,  
Deserts of monotonous wrong.

Push West, beyond philosophies,  
Style and the crumbling arch between  
Hellas and Los Angeles,  
The neon dreams, the wider screen.

*I have journeyed long, journeyed far.  
They draw me maps and diagrams.  
But the directions always are  
To somewhere far from where I am.*

## NEAR MISS

The laughing desperadoes of her eyes  
Nicked him, but not fatally.  
An eyelash closer to the heart—and *poof!*  
He might have kissed the dust, like me.

## THE MAN IN THE BLUE SERGE SUIT

He lugs his briefcase, weighty as a cross,  
Down empty office corridors,  
Through elevator doors and guarded lobbies,  
Down escalators to a metro station.  
You may spy him dozing on a late commuter,  
Slumped like the corpus in a *Pieta*.  
In Caracas, Brussels, Hong Kong, Montreal,  
He moves through customs with a nervous bow,  
Secrets of his briefcase violated  
By Pilate eyes that probe as if to ask,  
“What is truth?” In fashionable restaurants  
He sups alone in a corner, breaking bread,  
Sipping wine, in lonely ritual,  
Briefcase sitting on the facing chair.  
He paces by the phone in his hotel room,  
Anxious for a call that never comes,  
Briefcase lying open on the bed;  
Leafy twistings on the papered walls  
His garden of Gethsemane. He dreads  
The empty lobby of the great hotel  
Late at night. Stranded for a weekend  
In an alien town, he plays the hapless tourist,  
Trailing awkward lovers, families gawking  
Through Sunday afternoon museum rooms  
And echoing cathedrals. At a loss  
Before a marble crucifix, he fishes  
In a pocket for his guide book.  
It is Good Friday in his heart.

## FLAMMABLE

The first warm day of Spring is like a kiss  
On cheek or forehead, ladylike and dry  
As an *ibid* in parenthesis  
Or powdery wingbrush of a butterfly;  
An innocent endearment that ignites  
Fantasies of sizzling summer weather—  
Hot, moist, naked August nights,  
Insects rubbing itching parts together.

## SOUNDBITE

Step up to the microphone, Mr. McQue!  
If you were president of our nation,  
What would be your biggest innovation?

“O, I don’t know. An American *Poo*?  
An improved shampoo? A nickel cigar?  
I like things pretty much as they are.”

But Mr. McQue, you said last year  
When you protested the prohibition  
Of hats, “We’re headed for perdition!”

“Did I say that? Must have been  
The day Delila dented the car.  
I like things pretty much as they are.”

Is it fair to say then, Mr. McQue,  
That for you the *status quo* is par?  
“No. I like things pretty much as they are.”

## JANUS

Anticipated kisses taste  
Sweeter to lips than kisses true.  
Embraces remembered kindle bliss  
Real embracing never knew.

This being so, this kiss  
Cannot pleasure me  
As the memory when it is past  
Or dreams of loving yet to be.

## COFFEE AFTER DINNER

Suddenly and with as much alarm  
As when the strident jangling of the phone  
Jolts us from a deep sleep's arms  
And we imagine, sure our world is blown,  
A loved one's loss in frightful fantasies  
Of sirens, highway flares and sudden death,  
Over dessert and coffee she says, "Please  
Try to understand. . . (You hold your breath!)  
Something's come up at home. I'll have to go  
On the morning flight. . . I really hope that we  
Can keep in touch. . . I honestly don't know  
When I'll be coming back. We'll have to see."  
You stare at your clenched fist as at the phone,  
After the fatal click and the dial tone.

## DETAIL

Those rare and precious hours  
We want to treasure like pressed flowers,  
We forget.

That trivial event,  
Unfelt, unnoticed as it went,  
We remember yet. We remember yet.

## ON BEING ASKED FOR A POEM AGAINST THE WAR

I think it better that in times like these  
A poet's mouth is silent, for in truth  
We have no gift to set a statesman right;  
He has had enough of meddling who can please  
A young girl in the indolence of her youth,  
Or an old man upon a winter's night.

*On Being Asked for a War Poem*  
William Butler Yeats

Yeats was right. But poets by the droves  
Have sought to dramatize prosaic lives  
By penning rounds against the war that might,  
If not as art, as history, survive.

Poets should be independent thinkers,  
Free and wildly non-conformist; yet,  
Many, when cued, will rush to loudly voice  
A strident sameness, as if in a set.

In writing against the war, perhaps some think  
To show their moral courage, plaudits win,  
Who'd never dare to venture out of line  
To write against abortion, pot or sin.

To some the stance may even seem romantic:  
"Poet of Protest"—They resist submission  
To any discipline or rule, believing  
To be creative is to trash tradition.

I can't say if this war is right or not.  
But damned if I will try to force the Muse,  
Like a college student pressured by his peers,  
Misled by radicals and biased news.

I'd rather sing my praise for this good land  
And heroes who defend her. I am for  
Patriotic poems, and prayers for peace,  
More than I am for poems against the war.

I doubt if poems have ever stopped a war;  
Though poems, I'm sure, may help to stir dissent  
Against oppression, comfort weeping grief  
And help to heal the spirits war has rent.

## DÉJÀ VU

After the sunshine, the drizzle.  
After the apple, the core.  
I listen to the irrevocable  
*Goodbye*, the slam of the door.  
Why do I have the feeling  
This has happened to me before?

## SUMMER HEAT

*(N.E. Washington, D.C., the Forties)*

Days hot as ovens; muggy nights  
In the inner city of our puberty,  
Burning, tossing, sticky with our sweat  
(Dreaming of Mrs. Thurston down the street).  
August Sunday afternoons were lazy.  
Drab apartment buildings filled the view  
From our kitchen; open windows bared,  
In his undershirt, a neighbor gulping beer,  
His wife, in her slip, perspiring, puffing smoke.  
*Pepsi* jingles on the radio  
(*Twice as much for a nickel too!*) were blaring,  
Or a ukelele's hula phantasies  
Wafted us on waves to *Blue Hawaii*.  
We read the Sunday funnies or we watched  
(Picturing Mrs. Thurston in her slip)  
Slow oscillations of the electric fan.  
The heat weighed heavier as evening came.  
Bugs buffeted the screens at open windows.  
In muggy dusk we rocked on the front porch.  
Streetcars wailed like far off ecstasies.  
The itching roundsong of the insects rose.  
We followed the burning eyes of passing cars  
(Troubled by thoughts of Mrs. Thurston's thighs).  
We tuned around the static to Jack Benny  
And poured our lemonade from sweating pitchers.  
Down the block, above the trees and rooftops,  
Flashes of heat lightning came and went  
(Like thoughts of Mrs. Thurston in the dark).  
We looked in vain for stirrings in the leaves  
Of sycamores and oaks that lined our street,  
Talking hopefully of showers, of relief.

## UNFINISHED SCENARIO

Their lips kiss, draw back reluctantly.  
Dutiful, they go their separate ways,  
Convinced the stars will have them meet again  
Inevitably some afternoon or evening  
In a busy airport or a street café.  
  
They believe in love's improbabilities.  
They see themselves defeating all the odds—  
Met again forever, strolling grandly  
Hand in hand through happenings of light  
Down an endless tree-lined promenade.  
  
Destiny, diffident, skims the printouts  
Of their daily rounds, their divigations.  
Always arriving too soon or too late,  
At times they miss each other by just seconds  
In a cafeteria or a metro station.  
  
Some nights he tries to conjure up her face  
Amid the stars, like poetry's romancers.  
She primps and putters in her drab apartment,  
Dreading, any time the doorbell rings,  
That he will be there grinning when she answers.

## HONEYSUCKLE

Tenaciously it clings, it coils  
Around the trunks, entwines the limbs of trees  
As evil does some families,  
Choking the sapling's promise in its toils,  
  
Dooming beauty in its embrace.  
It hugs its juicy victims, Judas kisses  
Tender shoots, almost hisses  
As it twists and writhes to infiltrate where grace  
  
Has grown green innocence.  
It tightens like a noose around the throat  
As its winding strands garrote  
Young roses. With seducer-like pretense  
  
Its leaves seem tender, then they lean  
And lunge like licking tongues as if to taste  
Sweets with which they are interlaced  
In illicit tangles. Dangling, half obscene,  
  
Its pale, prickly blossoms reek  
With cloying fragrance. They appear  
In the sultriest time of year,  
Perfuming rotted branches. As the sleek  
  
Serpent, glamorously curled  
Around the tree, undid Eve with his lies,  
And Adam and budding paradise,  
It wheedles death into a garden world.

## *II. Browsing*

## HYPOSTASIS

I am one with all the wonder of creation.  
This pulsing flesh, this whirling earth, the stars  
Are of a piece, a continuity  
Of quanta and conjecture, so much so  
I scarcely can discern where Awad ends  
And all else takes its own identity.  
All things are interwoven in a weft  
Of plus or minus moments that combine  
And recombine in ripe complexity  
To make me visible, give heft  
To my emergent person, shape these lips  
So that, by grace's leave, my sounding rhymes  
Give utterance to inarticulate time,  
To worlds, to light years that converge in me,  
Making all that is a rush of song.

## THE YOUNG POET VOICES HIS LOVE FOR THE CITY

What favors can you fashion for her?  
What loot or lore, what precious splendor  
Pour out at her feet? How outdo  
The largess of those others, those other lovers?

Beguile her with bejeweled virelays,  
Glittering rhymes, opulent images  
Of April's golden ambiguities.  
Crush the *grappa* of a summer dusk  
Into a bootleg burgundy of language  
Purpling her proud lips and make her tipsy.  
Borne on starry metaphors, dip down,  
Softly downward, like a deft caress  
Across the silken kirtle of her lights.  
Nuzzle the perfumed secrets of her nights.

And when she throws you over, when  
You must lose her to those after comers,  
Flash the switchblade of a street smart art;  
Cut across her heart a singing scar.

## MOSAIC

Give me a night of nightingales and stars,  
Romance in my imagined Araby:  
Oleander gardens, hot bazaars,  
Olive women clad in mystery.  
Caliphs, fakirs, beggars, all the din  
And jangle of the dancers' timbrels. O  
For a *Sesame*, Alladin's lamp, a Jinn,  
A magic carpet on siroccos blown  
Toward sultan's palaces and minarets,  
Where the sun, obeisant to the muezzin's wail,  
A brazen gong, salaams in the west,  
And night falls softly, like a houri's veil.

## ON A BRIDGE

This bridge is like a metaphor  
Merging divergent river views,  
A comparison implied between  
Skylines otherwise askew.

I like to stand here in the middle,  
Listening to the river's voices,  
Equidistant from differing vistas,  
Straddling the riparian choices,

And lean on the rail and contemplate  
Leafage, sky and birds that soar,  
Passing boats and the flow of time,  
Far from the noise of either shore.

## OLYMPIC GAMES

They come from every land to light the flame,  
A glory the whole world shares by satellite—  
Each with a dream of winning gold and fame.

How we cheer the flags, the favored names,  
The faces—brown and yellow, black, white!  
From every land they come to light the flame.

We love their grace, their grit, their god-like frames!  
They test their best, striving with all their might,  
Each with a dream of winning gold and fame.

We applaud that striving, we who dream the same  
Dreams but never reach Olympic heights.  
From every land they come to light the flame.

The stadium rocks and thunders with acclaim.  
As they parade, radiant with youth's light,  
Each with a dream of winning gold and fame.

The champions, and all who made the games,  
Smile and wave and pass into the night.  
From every land they came to light the flame,  
Each with a dream of winning gold and fame.

## NOTEBOOK ENTRY, FEB.

Thought I spied Spring as I passed  
A city park the other day,  
Lolling on a patch of grass,  
A girl with sunlight in her hair.  
Looked for her again today.  
The park was bare:  
A travel poster across the way.  
An icy shiver in the air.

## HIGH HURDLES

My heart already racing. . .There's the crack  
Of the starter's pistol! Down the cinder track  
With thousands yelling "Go!". . .I go! I fly!  
My legs must lift me. . .*Now!*. . .*Now!*. . .*High!*. . .  
Opening like scissors, like bird's wings  
To clear the first hurdle, grimacing  
At row on row, as far as the eye can see,  
Like years of trials that lie in wait for me.  
Or those that I survived to make this race—  
Even when life slapped me in the face;  
But never giving up, like the tough kid  
At the detention home who ran and hid,  
Hungry, beaten, scared. . .or when my head  
Ballooned on nights I never got to bed,  
Struggling with the books for a retake,  
Fighting my lids next day to stay awake,  
Imploring my struggling, orphaned soul to ease  
The bitterness, the hurt that bias breeds.  
Legs, heart, breath, you're all I need!  
If only I could keep it up,—this speed—  
Forever. . .Legs are leaden. . .*Lift them! Now!*  
That pain! My side! I soar! O how  
I drag this massive, staggering self across  
The finish line. Fighting for breath, I toss  
My head back, gasping, clutch my sides,  
My eyes shut tight, opening them wide  
To thousands standing, cheering, as in old  
Newsreels. Did I win? Was it the gold?

## SATURDAY NIGHT DREAM

On floors of Venetian marble, echoing,  
We tip-toed, hand in hand, through secret rooms,  
Vaults that smelled of candle wax and incense,  
Past antique tapestries and statuary,  
And shadowy stone gargoyles like the sets  
In black and white old horror movies.  
Priests in vermilion vestments sat on thrones  
Hearing the crimes of kneeling penitents  
Who stared at us like guilty things surprised.

Then you were gone. I cried out your name,  
Racing back from room to room. I wept  
In a vestibule with grille-work, potted palms,  
The flowery perfume of a funeral parlor.  
I shook the handles of the great bronze doors  
With their figures, in relief, of mitred sages.  
They opened to a fearful sound of gongs  
On a rain-drenched dirt street in a slum.

From tenements across the mud-filled street  
Starved dogs came charging after me,  
Yelping, snarling, biting at my heels.  
Toward the glow of a new shopping mall  
And a familiar Sears & Roebuck sign  
I ran, calling, calling your name. And once,  
I thought I heard you cry out. It was just  
The far, faint evening cry,  
Strident as dying, of a distant siren.

## CHICAGO

I get a rush, (a Rush Street rush!)  
When the drawbridge on Michigan Boulevard,  
Staggers groggily up from lying down,  
Blown from dozing by the piercing hoot  
Of a frantic freighter steaming for the lake.  
Now vertical, the drawbridge is a peer  
Of the Wrigley Building and the Tribune Tower.  
Bells clang and jangle like a prison break.  
Red lights race like Frolics in a raid.  
Slim arms in zebra stripes do a slow faint,  
Backing traffic North to the Water Tower,  
And South past unamused museum lions.  
The cars, the C.T.A.'s, the cabs, the trucks  
Truculent, idle fuming, beep and honk.  
A spectacled commuter sits erect,  
File-folder fingers tapping on the wheel  
Of his palpitating Chevy, gazing fondly,  
Filled with Walter Mitty fantasies,  
At bandana red, banana yellow funnels,  
Flirtatious flags that flap like panties, waving,  
Decking the well-stacked tramp, now brazenly  
Tooting her horn and breasting Gypsy-like  
The gawking skyline. Now our driver dreams  
Of tropic seas and nights of tangy stars,  
Far ports where tattooed sailors take their ease  
With ukuleles, dark-eyed lovelies, leis,  
And guzzle rum and spin outrageous yarns  
Of a jazzy town where ships cause traffic jams,  
A windy city where antipodes  
Build temples in the clouds to chewing gum.

## RONDEAU

Deprived of love the chirping Spring  
Would be a throne without a king,  
A coat of mail without a knight,  
A robin with a broken wing!

Like love, like Spring! The likening—  
A happy, glad and passing thing!  
The Spring's a sunless satellite  
Deprived of love.

Love and Spring like spouses cling;  
A rainbow is the wedding ring.  
Together quickly they take flight  
And fade upon a summer night.  
O may I never hear the Spring birds sing,  
Deprived of love!

## THE BOOK

The early chapters were full of expectation.  
After the songs, the marches, the *coup* that failed,  
We wondered if Charles would ever find salvation.  
The theme was love and war: sirens wailed  
As they fled the burning city. Edward fell  
When the bullet bit, remembering boyhood snows  
And Bel by dawn light in the small hotel,  
As he left her, tearful, putting on her hose.  
We closed the book as if we'd lived it, sighing  
For lost times, grandfather's sudden illness,  
The forgiveness as they gathered at his dying,  
Then Spring, the empty house, the lonesome stillness.  
I wish I were back in youth's high paradigm,  
Reading it again for the first time.

## RAIN

Washing the windowed landscape willfully,  
It floods gully and gutter, weighs down  
Leaves in the garden, squashes the roses, soaks  
All the secret places of the night.

I sit in darkness listening to the downpour  
Drum, like worried fingers, on the roof,  
The rainspout's trickling, the forbidding drip,  
Drip, drip of overflowing eaves.

I had not been forewarned as Noah had.  
I think of rainbows. But the rain falls faster  
Like booted storm troopers on the march  
Suddenly breaking into a run.

## THE COLORS OF POETRY

Baudelaire on midnight's flower  
(Orchid blooming in a pavement crack?)  
Punished nature's insolence.  
He bared his heart. Night was his rack.  
Color him black.

Mallarme of a pale flower  
(Pendant blue the dryads knew?)  
Chanted, exploring the *azure*  
Between the symbols of his rue.  
Color him blue.

Rimbaud saw hell in beauty's flower.  
(Drunk on youth, from home soon fled),  
He scattered words like rosebuds, blood,  
Where aftercomers dare not tread.  
Color him red.

Claud el sang the gracefull flower  
(His verses rose like *Ave's* told)  
Of faith. *God loves us* was his theme,  
Like petal by petal, poem-polled.  
Color him gold!

## CABARET

Stars nudged each other, slyly winked.  
The moon wore a tired smile.  
The raffish wind had one more drink  
And hung around awhile.

The mumbling, gray and senile sea  
Rolled his own from time to time.  
You whispered a burning vow to me  
And sealed it with a rhyme:

“The ocean deeps may disappear.  
The hand of time may bring  
Mountains to dust. The stars may veer  
And shatter, showering  
The loveless earth with firelight  
But we shall love as we love tonight.”

Stars argue now how long it's been.  
The moon is getting on.  
The ocean mumbles. The wind drops in.  
The two we loved are gone.

## REMEMBERING WASHINGTON

Summer dusk in Washington; half-light,  
Perfervid as a Shenandoah rose  
In leafy shadow, laden with the musk  
Of swarming summer evening memories.  
Glittering bridges bracelet the Potomac.  
Early lights make stars about the skylines.  
On the Virginia side, the Pentagon,  
Hard-edged Crystal City, Arlington—  
*Taps* pining the silent, buried brave.  
Westerly, Roslyn's rise; across Key Bridge,  
Georgetown's parapets and steeple; then the sweep,  
The patriotic postcard panorama  
Of the capital city, city of my first love,  
Resplendent as remembrance in the roselight.  
The Monument's upraised finger lifts the eye,  
Like the hushing gesture of an orator,  
To starry evening's banner slowly lowered  
Over Columbia's rooftops, Federal buildings,  
Vistas of bronze and marble architecture.  
Behold the famous dome, lit up as if  
Aglow with very freedom's shining dream;  
And there, the pillared shrine where Lincoln sits  
Keeping watch over the vast republic,  
Remembering barefoot summers in Kentucky;  
And there, by the Tidal Basin, the chaste temple,  
Clustered by dogwood, cherry branch and pine,  
Where Jefferson stands, restive, listening  
To the rising hum of millions of free spirits  
From Louisiana to the Northwest Passage,  
And crickets sing of nights at Monticello.  
Rose deepens into purple, then warm darkness  
Filling all the twinkling distances,  
Distances I walked lost summer nights,  
And walk and walk tonight in memory.

## THE BELLES AND BELLS OF WILLIAMSBURG

*Wilt thou, adventurous pen, describe  
The gay, delightful, silken tribe  
That maddens all our city. . .*

James McClurg, The Belles of Williamsburg 1777

To the lad from the hills of Albemarle  
The capital was wondrous: nights  
Of laughter on Duke of Gloucester Street,  
Windows aglow with candle light,  
The songs of the belles of Williamsburg.

He studied Latin and Greek and Law.  
The governor's dinners were 'in' and witty.  
Saturday nights he loved to dance  
To Palace fiddles or tavern ditties,  
With the glamorous belles of Williamsburg.

The summer of Seventy-Six brought news  
He had penned the glorious Declaration  
Proclaiming us free, proclaiming us one—  
A new, an independent nation.  
How they rang the bells of Williamsburg!

He passed away on the Fourth of July.  
While flags were drooping at half-mast,  
Mourning the Virginian's passing  
Who loved his country to the last,  
They tolled, the bells of Williamsburg.

Three hundred years of history!  
But for me these streets will always be  
Where he was first bedazzled by  
Worldly grace and civility,  
And the blossoming belles of Williamsburg.

## BROWSING

Like rows of crooked tombstones  
Or teeth in a Yorick laugh,  
Forgotten volumes fill the shelves,  
Each title an epitaph.

Take one down at random.  
Brush the shuddery mould  
Off the antique binding; blow  
Dust from the lettered gold.

Pause. Ponder the summer light,  
The breath a book survives,  
Perhaps a rhythm, an image, a rhyme,  
Will fire the light alive.

Imagine the passion, the fervid vows  
A verse may reaffirm.  
Open the book at random. . .Slam!  
Waylay the browsing worm!

## A COMMONWEALTH OF ART

When Elizabeth was queen a poet sang  
Virginia's future: "Laurel Everywhere"  
Foretold how all the arts would flower here  
To accolades from governors who care.

From landscapes of four hundred years,  
From flying change, from Pocahontas' pain,  
From memory's wick; from airports, crystal cities,  
The Barter, Wolf Trap, paintings by Nell Blaine;

From the glories of Virginia's April gardens,  
Autumnal mountain leafage, dogwood dells,  
Old battlefields and sun-blessed ocean beaches;  
From faith and farms and factories, from the swell

Of gospel rhythms, Bluegrass, Ella, Patsy,  
Symphonies, folk art, noble columns, domes,  
Bo Jangles and ballet; from avenues  
Where Arthur Ashe and Lee are both at home;

From Shenandoah, daughter of the stars,  
The Rappahannock, Mt. San Angelo,  
The Charlottesville backyard where a bard kindles  
Lyric zodiacs; from Anne Spencer, Poe,

Jamestown, echoes of grandiloquence  
In St. John's Church; from lovers' hearts,  
From a commonwealth of freedom, spirit, life,  
Come the colors, forms and sounds, the happy starts,  
The breadth and wonder of Virginia's arts.

## LOVERS OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

No, their hearts are not at all deceived  
By wafted stardust, tapestry-like tales  
Of dragon slayers, Guineveres aggrieved,  
Enchanted forests, love enduring, sails  
Tilted over waltzing emerald waves  
Headed for golden dawn in El Dorado,  
Imagined treks through starry architraves  
Light years from earth. They surely know  
Reality can tear a man to pieces.  
Choosing to ignore quotidian gloom,  
The hurt and desolation when love ceases,  
They avert their eyes from desuetude and doom.  
Conjuring worlds of light and legerdemain,  
Of trips in time to a lost love again.

## LA PRIMAVERA

In Botticelli's "Primavera," Spring,  
Reborn, delights both eye and heart, aswarm  
With life renewed. Here line and color sing  
Of youth, the glory of the human form,  
Of breathless love, its time, its blossoming.

Venus, in prim habiliments, presides  
As goddess of marriage (looking almost sainted).  
She regards us kindly, tilting to one side  
Her covered head, she whom he also painted  
Ascending naked from creation's tide.

Above her flutters Cupid, said to be  
Her child by that free spirit on the left  
(Fondling fruit) and known as Mercury.  
Cupid shoots an arrow, quick and deft  
At a dancing Grace, the loveliest of three.

The Graces, in white gowns that modestly  
Reach to the ankles, elegant as nuns,  
Are three distinctive personalities;  
Fingers interlinked, as finely done  
As his madonnas and epiphanies.

Zephyr wafts warm breezes, half in flight,  
Panting after Chloris. Flora strews  
Pinks and periwinkles, roses, white  
Hyacinths, anemones and slews  
Of daisies—all, all for our delight.

Faces, figures, flowers symbolize  
The beautiful, the human, fecund earth  
Redeemed, the antique pagan myths revised  
In quattrocento vesture, the rebirth  
Of Venus, but with catechumen eyes.

## FOR THE POET'S WIFE

*Sleepily, the muse to me: "Let us be friends,  
Good friends, but only friends. You understand."  
And yawned. And kissed for the last time, my ear.*

Donald Justice, *The Telephone Number of the Muse*

Let him fritter nights and holidays,  
Tramping Parnassus with his wayward muse—  
Those wild excursions for the fabled phrase!  
She shuns liaisons, plays it fast and loose  
And never makes the tabloids. No cinquains,  
Or jeweled villanelles or lyric gems  
Can elicit her commitment. She disdains  
Designs to 'bridal' her and dry *ahems*  
Of bards preparing to propose, eludes  
Ploys to lure her to an 'altar'd' state.  
With him content to take her in her moods  
She'll risk a brief flirtation, a late date,  
A night's roving, a quick kiss, a dare—  
But rarely an apartment off the square.

## AVENGING SPIRIT

*Then, O my Tyrians, besiege with hate  
His progeny and all his race to come;  
Make this your offering to my dust, No love,  
No pact must be between our peoples; No,  
But rise up from my bones, avenging spirit!*  
Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trs., Robert Fitzgerald

By light of a full moon they crossed the square  
In Carthage, Barca grasping by the hand  
The boy half-running to keep pace  
With his father's lordly strides. They paused  
Where wide stone steps ascended, steep,  
To a hilltop temple arched against the stars.  
The boy could see the torches, the dark forms  
Of priests at the high altar. His child's heart  
Galloped with fear remembering the wrath  
Of the god that dwelt in this dread place;  
Remembering being present here one day  
When thousands thronged the plaza, lined the steps  
Cheering the immolation of a girl  
To appease the anger of the giant idol.  
Slowly son and father climbed the steps  
To the pillared sanctuary. On the altar,  
Surrounded by solemn priests in ritual robes,  
A bull was tethered. Barca drew his sword  
And slashed the bestial gullet. Gushing blood  
Bespattered him and priests and gaping boy.  
Igniting altar kindling, the high priest  
Beheld a fleeting vision in the flames—  
*The boy exhorting horsemen, elephants  
And infantry from many tribes and nations—  
Blood everywhere; a hundred thousand slain!*  
Barca sipped from a golden cup, then poured

Libations on the smoking flesh. The boy  
Jumped as it sizzled, hissed and spat. His father  
Gripped his hand again and said to him:  
"Tonight may be our last in Carthage, son.  
We sail at dawn to join our troops in Spain.  
There your apprenticeship in soldiering  
And war begins. You are my heart's hope  
For shattering Rome's arrogant aggression—  
A Rome I hate with all my soul, a Rome  
Begot by that Dardanian pig who spurned  
And broke the heart of Dido, noble queen,  
Founder of Carthage, she whose royal blood  
Beats, vengeance-seeking, in our Barca veins;  
A Rome that feeds, insatiate, on our lands,  
Devouring Malta, Sicily, Sardinia—  
A Rome that covets Carthage's vast commerce,  
Wealth and glory, and, if not destroyed,  
Will pillage all we love and make us slaves.  
More than my brief years may be required  
To vanquish Rome. That's why I bring you here."  
He placed the boy's hand on the steaming altar.  
The lad, fearful, tried to pull away.  
But his father's grip was iron-like as he spoke.  
"Say after me: 'I swear by you, great god,  
Brought from Tyre by Dido to be adored,  
That I shall never be a friend to Rome;  
That I will fight her with undying hate  
Until she is no more.'" Word for word,  
The wide-eyed boy repeated the dread vow  
That rode the night wind past the Afric shore  
Over the foaming sea to sleeping Rome,  
Where, it is told, the statues in the Forum  
Of gods and heroes sweated blood that night.

## AT THE MINERS' MEMORIAL

Shenandoah, Pa.

I remember black hills all around  
In my Shenandoah boyhood long ago.  
Now the coal mines are abandoned and the sound  
Of colliery horns and roaring breakers muted.  
Now the hills around are leafy green.  
And looking from the Shenandoah Heights,  
For miles beyond the steepled town below  
To the far horizon, all is green that once  
Was the color of a dying miner's lungs.

Banks and stores and shops familiar once  
On Main Street are long gone; the window glass  
Of abandoned storefronts dim with dust  
Or boarded up. The theaters where we thrilled  
To movies in the thirties and the forties—  
The Capitol, The Lyric and The Strand—  
With their brightly lit marquees, are gone.  
Landmarks like Schutawie's soda fountain,  
Maher's Restaurant and Mandour's Hotel—  
All, all are gone.

But now there is something new uptown.  
At the corner of East Washington and Main,  
Where Girard Park begins. Its solemn bronze  
With monumental bas-reliefs agleam  
In sunlight from above the wooded heights,  
The Miner's Memorial rises like a prayer  
In timeless tribute to heroic men  
Who toiled in endless darkness all their lives,  
Men who daily braved the dire threats  
Of lung disease, of cave-ins, deadly gas,  
Of cold and floods and fires, dread explosions,  
To feed their families and to better life  
For luckier others. These were the men who built

This town and others in the region,  
Towns with wondrous names that sang on signs  
We passed on old roads on our Sunday drives—  
Mauch Chunk, Girardville, Frackville and St. Clair,  
Shamokin, Pottsville, Tamaqua, Mahanoy City,  
Mount Carmel and Centralia and Shickshinny,  
Minersville, Lost Creek and Gilberton,  
Wilkes-Barre, Hazelton and many more,  
Built on the backs of brave men mining  
Anthracite that fueled the vast growth  
Of America's great industries and cities.

*With all their strength and breath, as breakers roared,  
They toiled in endless darkness mining coal  
That lit and energized a nation. Lord,  
Into your endless light lift up their souls.*

Many miners began when they were children,  
Working as breaker boys with their good *butties*.  
Far from the play of warm and sunlit skies  
That spangled morning woods on Locust Mountain.  
When they were old enough to work as miners,  
Day after dismal day they made the dread  
Descent into the darkness and the danger,  
Deep down where dampness chills, down  
Where it's difficult to breathe. O endless night!  
Like living dead long buried in the dark  
Beneath the earth, they labored all their lives.  
When they had finished a backbreaking shift  
And were lifted shakily to the breathing surface,  
And stepped out into dazzling light and life,  
It must have seemed like rising from the dead.  
No wonder that, on their days off,  
Miners would spend hours out of doors.

Drinking in the sweet delicious air,  
Refreshing heavy coal congested lungs,  
Delighting in the brightness of the snow,  
Sparkling in its bounty on the coal banks,  
The collieries and bleak, surrounding hills,  
Or reveling in sunlight's golden warmth  
On long walks with the kids on summer days.

*With all their strength and breath, while breakers roared,  
They labored in endless darkness mining coal,  
Dreaming of open skies and sunlight. Lord,  
Into your endless light lift up their souls.*

The miners were men of courage and of faith.  
They or their forebears all had made their way  
From far off countries to America,  
Dreaming of freedom, work and better lives.  
From Ireland and Lebanon they came,  
From Italy and Poland, the Ukraine  
And Lithuania, Germany and Wales  
They came to work the mines from diverse lands.  
My grandfather (his father was from Ireland),  
A fourth-grader when he began to work  
As a breaker boy, labored in the mines  
All his life until grandmother's death.  
His children all were grown and on their own.  
He fled the mines and family and friends,  
To roam (they called them 'bums' or 'hoboes' then)  
The lonesome vastness of America,  
Living in the open air and hopping  
Freight trains, and bargaining for drinks  
In unknown bars by singing Irish songs  
In his angelic voice, and bedding down  
In lonely fields beneath the boundless stars

And waking to the blessed light of dawn  
Far from the nightmare darkness of the mines.

*With all their strength and breath, while breakers roared,  
They labored in endless darkness mining coal,  
Dreaming of fresh air and sunlight. Lord,  
Into your endless light lift up their souls.*

My Aunt Mary had a humble house.  
It sat forlornly at the edge of town.  
From her front yard the view was coal hills,  
And in the distance the black silhouette  
Of a foreboding mining structure. When  
My Uncle Frank Sincavage came from work  
I would watch him as he slowly climbed the steps  
To the back stoop of that gray frame house  
And sank, exhausted, on a wooden bench.  
There he would sit a while, a heap of blackness,  
Gazing at nothing but the light of day  
And breathing in the fresh, the precious air.

His face would look as if he'd blackened it  
To take part in a minstrel show. And after  
He laboriously removed his miner's gear,  
He would sigh and get up wearily and enter  
The door into the kitchen where Aunt Mary  
Had been heating pots of water on the stove  
And bathe in a steel tub on the kitchen floor  
Close to the iron coal stove's warmth.  
He died of the black lung disease. O how  
He loved the sunlight and the out of doors!

*With all their strength and breath, while breakers roared,  
They labored in endless darkness mining coal,  
And loved their wives and children. Lord,  
Into your endless light lift up their souls.*

I think of generations now long gone  
In Shenandoah, those courageous men  
Who labored lifetimes in the endless dark,  
Or died before their time in mine disasters—  
Striving to give their loved ones better lives.  
They built the schools and churches and defied  
Mine-owners, brutal union breakers  
And corrupted power, pioneering  
The labor movement that in time would lift  
The dignity of working men and women.  
And America's economy to greatness.  
This memorial honors each of them,  
And brother miners all across the earth,  
In England, Europe, Africa and Asia  
And the Americas. For centuries  
They've labored daily in an endless night,  
Enriching us with energy and light.

*With all their strength and breath, while breakers roar,  
They labor in endless darkness mining coal,  
That warms and lights our lives. O Lord,  
Into your endless light lift up their souls.*

### *III. Late into the Night*

## LOOKING AT THE LEAVES

Leaves that drank the sun, the April droplets,  
When barren branches burst into green song,  
Spangling summer's children, letting light  
Splay through the darkling woods they played among;  
Leaves the night wind riffled, sifting stars,  
Whispering *ifs* and frivolous clichés  
To shadowy lovers on their evening walks—  
Dazzle our eyes! Delight our vintage days!  
Identify at last with that high splendor  
Toward which all creatures living grope and grow.  
And in that shining—gold aglow with gold—  
Glory a season. Then let go. . .let go. . .  
Dry leavings spirited by the bitter wind  
Into the winter dark, the year's accrual,  
The natural sacrament of how all dying  
Nurtures earth to April and renewal.

## NIGHT LIGHTS

Three times the clock on the mantel chimes.  
Yawning, I close my book and rub my eyes.  
I check to see if the front door is locked,  
And pause, in the darkness of the living room,  
To look out the front window at the night.  
In the house across the street the lights are on.

Ever since her death some months ago,  
He keeps the lights on all night long.  
Does it tell how dark his world is now  
That she has left him, old and all alone?  
Or was he always fearful of the dark,  
Hiding his fears as long as she was there?

Time for bed. I peer out one last time  
Into the soundless, empty dark of night.  
The glowing lights in the house across the street,  
Left on as if for someone still expected  
To be coming home tonight, burn on.  
They make the surrounding darkness even darker.

## AT THE POETRY WORKSHOP

*In memory of Ellie Braumiller*

Seated around the table, we took turns  
Displaying keepsakes that we dearly prize,  
Telling their stories, learning to discern  
The feelings simple things can symbolize.  
When her turn came she lifted from its bed  
Of velvet a glass crystal. We could see  
Its facets flash and glitter as she said,  
“The unlikeliest things can kindle poetry.  
As a child I’d gaze up at our chandelier,  
Entranced by the lovely rainbow gleams encased  
By light’s diffusion in each crystal tear,  
The way God’s grace lights up a face.”  
With all eyes on her countenance, she displayed  
The glass from which her girlhood’s glory rayed.

## AT THE HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

*(the shoe exhibit)*

Stiff-tongued elegies! Laments  
In leather! Lives' lorn remnants! Shoes,  
Drab and out of fashion! Sad reminders  
Of all that might have been, that a world rues!

O soles that should have trod life to the full:  
To school, to work, to synagogue, to home;  
On night walks with first love or summer strolls  
With the new baby, bidding friends "Shalom!"

Their names He knows who shaped each foot  
With love and set it free to walk the ways  
Of light, to leap, to dance the wedding dance,  
To mount the temple steps to give Him praise.

Heaped in hallowed clutter here, they pose  
A mystery to which they are the clues:  
These dead will stomp with joy, as children do  
When a loving father treats them to new shoes.

## HANNAH

*(March 22 – April 22, 1995)*

Your beauty, rosebud, will not bloom in May!  
Though brave, your tiny heart was past repair.  
We gave you our hearts, but you could not stay.

They had warned your mother, "Tests all say,  
We should terminate now! Survival is rare."  
Your beauty, rosebud, will not bloom in May!

"If she lives but a day," she said, "she can sashay  
straight to heaven, sainted, named; and prayer  
*Might* win a new heart, *might* let her stay."

Splayed and pierced as on a cross, you lay,  
Wired up to machines in intensive care.  
Your beauty, rosebud, will not bloom in May.

Once you opened your eyes as we all prayed  
Aloud. (O loving peek, as if to share  
In that living light!) But you could not stay.

The day you were buried was cold, wet, gray;  
Rosebuds and baby's breath shivered there.  
Your beauty, rosebud, will not bloom in May.  
We gave you our hearts, but you could not stay.

## SUNDAY VISITS TO GRANDPARENTS

I remember summer Sunday afternoons.  
Oppressive hot monotonous afternoons  
When nothing, nothing whatever ever happened,  
When nothing in the mahogany parlor stirred,  
Not even the curtains at the open windows.  
I would listen, sitting straight-backed on a chair,  
(During lulls in the grownups' conversation)  
To the calls and yells of children outside playing;  
As I stared at squares of sunlight on the carpet,  
Locked in the timeless ticking of the clock  
That presided on the mantel with its rows  
Of photos—all their children and grandchildren. . .  
First communions, graduations, weddings. . .

It is hot this summer Sunday afternoon.  
I watch my granddaughter. She is listening,  
Sitting straight-backed in a parlor chair,  
To voices of children playing games outside  
As she stares at squares of sunlight on the carpet.  
I picture her maybe fifty years from now,  
Her grandchild sitting in her living room,  
Remembering summer Sunday afternoons  
When she sat with us in this old house,  
Locked in the timeless ticking of the clock  
On our mantel with its row on row of photos  
Of children, grandchildren, even great grandchildren;  
First communions, graduations, weddings. . .

## DAYS OF JOY

We almost burst with *Glorias* unsung,  
Breathing in the bracing ocean breezes,  
Eyes on the far horizon's curvature,  
Sunshine bright across the heavens flung.

That morning on the seashore years ago  
We squinted in the sunlight, reveling  
In the blinding radiance of a jeweled summer  
That made the day and us a golden glow.

Holding hands, we listened to the hubbub—  
The tumult of the white waves tumbling in,  
The screeching of the seagulls, flocking, gawking,  
At the children laughing, fluttering like cherubs

And galloping across the sparkling beach  
Straight for the froth and foam of fuming surf;  
Our future lives unknown, like clouds forming  
Beyond the far horizon, out of reach.

I can't make up my mind which joy is greater—  
Remembrance of that day or being here,  
Your frail hand in mine, aglow again,  
Together still, so many summers later.

## THE AGING POET

He knows where beauty resides.  
He has passed by there many times,  
Catching her silhouetted at the window  
Out of the corner of his rhymes.

Chances are getting thin now  
That she'll invite him in, close the drapes,  
Shed the robe with the embroidered roses,  
Let him praise her perfect shape.

## WHAT MONTICELLO MEANS

Driving to Charlottesville, we see them first  
From afar, faintly, undulant as lovers  
Asprawl in summer's gold or, snow-immersed,  
Like bride and bridegroom under linen covers,  
Crowned by clouds at times, or heaven's rays.  
They hover all around us, edged with light,  
Dwarfing our hurried lives, stretching away  
Westward to where the day will yield to night.  
When Martha died, Jefferson, all alone  
And wild with grief, would ride his horse for hours  
Through these leafy heights their love had known,  
Where dogwoods, white as bridal dresses, flower.  
About him, mountains huge as duty loomed  
While bruising emblems of her beauty bloomed.

## TO LONELINESS

You walk with me down hotel corridors,  
Down neon strips, through quiet neighborhoods  
Of evening towns. You ride with me  
Down the night highway while the wipers tell,  
Retell regrets and the rain pours.

You jostle me on crowded city streets,  
Browse with me through galleries and shops,  
Sit with me in the darkening hush  
As the play begins. In line behind the lovers,  
We watch their hands, their gazes meet.

In noisy bars, at parties *de rigueur*,  
Where everyone knows everyone, I drift  
Amid the chatter, the couples dancing,  
The laughter and the song at the piano,  
You eyeing me everywhere.

When the house is still, the others long in bed,  
And "golden oldies" on the radio  
Conjure times, places, faces,  
And the parlor windows rattle in the wind,  
You whisper of my beloved dead.

When I feel joy you have to disagree,  
Murmuring that joyless days must come,  
Or, how perfect it could be  
If only someone (someone always absent)  
Were here to share it with me.

At times I want you by me, times I spend  
Idling by the ocean or in the woods  
Or solitary in the snowy dusk.  
Why is it that when I am most alone,  
Then you seem almost a friend?

Old spoiler, I know who you are.  
You are the grace assigned to guard the heart  
From earth's beguilements, reminding me  
Of home, of first love, as I tramp this world,  
A lost traveler from a distant star.

## MAINTENANCE

Saturday chores around the house remind us:  
Things need constant patching or replacement.  
Railings must be repaired, a loose brick fixed;  
There's caulking to do about a weathered casement.

Friendships, marriages, professions, states,  
Institutions, even civilizations,  
Decay, corrode or crumble, wear away,  
Defying the most expert restoration.

Unless there is someone around to care,  
All that we are falls into disrepair.

## SUBJUNCTIVE MOODS

It is no good brooding  
Over chances missed—  
The road not taken,  
The door not opened,  
Lips not kissed.  
What might have been,  
The romance our roles omit,  
Would haunt us still  
Even if we could re-begin.  
Heart's hunger is infinite.  
For every door  
We entered in,  
Regret would fancy  
Thousands more.

## THE ROMANTIC'S PRAYER

Help me to lay aside my glitzy schemes,  
My starry *ifs*, my svelte velleities;  
Write off the wasted seasons, the regrets,  
The fantasies of fame, the stubborn dreams  
Of lotteries won and weeks of sunlit ease  
On the Riviera, or a private jet,  
"Adventure and romance," those heady themes!  
Help me to treasure simple pieties,  
Resolves to which I've always said, "Not yet!"  
Let me retrieve the rich, rejected graces,  
The chances lost to be with children, wife,  
To find fulfillment in the homey places.  
Lord, reconcile me with my life.

## MAGNOLIA

I take the measure, from our front door,  
Of our heaven-intent magnolia tree.  
The day we moved in it was a seedling;  
Only three leaves, like a fleur-de-lis,  
And not even half way to my knee.

Its leaves outnumber the days since then.  
Branches have soared, have ramified  
Like our lives, our loves. Over the years  
Blossoms, like hopes, have bloomed and died.  
Still, its thrust is heavenward. We have tried.

## TONY

*(For my friend Tony DiGirolomo, who, at age 17, suffered a broken neck diving off the pier at North Beach, Md. Until his death some 40 years later, he was paralyzed from the chest down.)*

Tony, at seventeen, you might have modeled  
For Michelangelo (his *David*, maybe);  
Strong neck, firming shoulders, lush  
Black hair you parted like a movie star's!  
Dribbling, dodging, driving down the court,  
You faked your man. What moves! What style!  
And O the glory of your leaping high,  
Arms uplifted, hands like winged birds  
In flight, like a famous maestro's, as the ball  
Soared with our hearts, in an exquisite arc,  
And through the net made music.

At the teen dances you were cool, man,  
Togged to the bricks: new blue suit,  
Midnight blue, one-button roll,  
Soft white shirt, collar rolled,  
Maroon knit tie, Windsor knot,  
Pegged pants, Flagg Brothers shoes,  
Manfully shined. . .Cordovan! Cool!

You tried to show your buddies how to dance.  
"You've *got* to be cool," you stressed. We tried to ape  
Your insouciance, your easy step, your rhythm.  
Girls adored you, whether you held them close,  
Gliding slowly to "The Moonlight Serenade,"  
Or sent them spinning to the mounting beat  
Of "In the Mood."

Starstruck, dreaming happy endings,  
Jitterbugging to the jukebox, charmed

By the church hall's dancing lights and colors,  
We could never have imagined your neck broken,  
Your swinging legs, your strutting feet,  
Motionless and stiff as lifeless sticks;

Those quick, sure hands and fingers crimped,  
Limp as blighted blossoms; your tanned body  
Blanched, a deadweight burden to be lugged  
From bed to wheelchair every morning,  
Hefted back in bed each night,  
(O humiliations of the diaper changes!  
Ritual emptying of the urine bag!)  
Day after day for more than forty years;  
All the modalities of a lifetime altered,  
Rearranged like particles of water  
In a tragic splash!

That July night, how silently we climbed  
The steps of Sibley Hospital, to your room.  
Your mother and your sister rushed toward us,  
Knots of hopeless gestures, wet with tears,  
Pleading in mingled English and Italian,  
Hugging your healthy, walking, unhurt buddies  
As if hugging you. Your frantic mother  
Lifted her hands to heaven, crying out,  
"Madonna, Madonna mia!" She shut her eyes  
And shook her head, imploring, "Why? Why?"

In the private room a plaster body cast  
Gripped you from chin to stiff, protruding legs.  
Your head was shaven like a Buddhist monk's  
And yanked back flat against the mattress  
By a cable that ran taut around a pulley,  
One end anchored in your shaven skull,  
The other held in balance by steel weights.

We signed your cast, scribbling rude endearments,  
Wisecrack wishes for your quick recovery.  
That night we all grew up.

You prayed for a miracle at first. With time  
The miracle of calm acceptance came.  
We'd stop by your house to cheer you up.  
But it was you who always rallied us.  
Never a bitter word or a remonstrance;  
Always that generous smile and a quick jest  
Or a droll story that made us, in our laughter,  
Overlook your ghostly face, your flopping hands,

The enormous effort when you wheeled your chair.  
The guys would tumble in on Christmas Eve  
On the way to midnight Mass. Greeting us,  
You'd yell for the refreshments in Italian.  
Your mother and your sister, from the kitchen,  
Would hurry with the glasses and the trays.  
You were hospitality's high priest,  
Proffering, like sacraments, the shortbreads,  
The home-made wine. We kidded you,  
"Hey, Tony, you been stompin' grapes again  
With those bare feet?" How you would laugh!

Your buddies married. Some of us moved away.  
In a letter you wrote, "How good God's been to me!  
Others agonize in choosing their vocations.  
I know for sure that here, in this wheelchair,  
I'm right where He wants me to be, doing  
Just what He wants me to do."

And in a later letter you confided,  
"The guys rarely come to visit anymore.  
Some days it's hard, so hard  
For me to say, Thy will be done."

Much later you wrote, "How God  
Must love me, giving me such great folks.  
My mom and dad are getting old now.  
They're worn out, I know, doing  
All that they've had to do for this ole hoss  
All these years. Please pray for them."

Laboriously typed, your letters ended  
Always, "Yours in Christ."

## LATE INTO THE NIGHT

I think tonight of men and women gone,  
Who shared my passing times, my fortune's places.  
Their beaming faces will not shine upon  
My vesper years. So many wasted graces!  
Too late, I come to see how good,  
How loveable each one was, despite  
The times that we disliked, misunderstood  
Each other's words or ways, or nursed some slight.  
I picture remembered faces with a pang—  
Schoolmates, neighbors, rivals, friends made  
At work or in my travels, lights who sang  
Or danced or argued, laughed or wept or prayed  
Or stayed up talking late into the night  
With me, who sit alone tonight and write.

## SIR WALTER RALEIGH, ON THE EVE OF HIS EXECUTION, TO DR. TOUNSON

Regrets? O course. What man, at death's approach  
Doesn't regret things done, or worse, not done?  
God blessed me with a glorious life. Just think!  
A farm boy knighted by the Queen he loved,  
And who loved him; yet gifted with a wife  
Most rare and true and beautiful and brave!  
I had the best of both worlds: the high life  
At court as the Queen's favorite, all the play  
Of politics and poetry and fame,  
Travel, adventure, talk with the best minds,  
All this on one hand, on the other life  
At Sherborne with my family and friends,  
Strolling the gardens, studying, writing verse,  
Riding in the woods or hunting deer.  
God gave me everything. The Queen did too,  
Until I hurt her, marrying in secret  
One of her own maids. And yet I loved  
Her still and always will. That she loved me  
She proved by pardoning me, defending me  
Even against the cuts of her loved Essex.  
God, the times we had! How she could dazzle!  
Enemies and rumor-mongers spread  
Salacious lies about us and our love;  
The same foul mouths that called me atheist  
Who always loved and tried to serve our Lord.  
Vulgar minds! Never could they imagine  
How intellect and wit and shared ideals  
Brought us closer than raw passion could.  
Not that we weren't tempted; but the gulf  
Between her sun-like majesty and me  
Kept me from presuming, from dishonor.  
Regrets, you ask? Oh I regret Guiana!  
I curse the day I ever heard that word

NOTEBOOK ENTRY, *OCTOBER*

And that lying Spaniard in whose evil spell  
I became obsessed with gold and El Dorado.  
My heart breaks when I think of the good men,  
My dear son Wat among them, who have died  
Because my stubborn greed for gold, deluded,  
Drove me to ruin, brought me to this night  
And place where I await the headsman's axe.  
If only I'd been as willful and as driven  
To reach Virginia. But the Queen forbade it.  
She gave me charge of that high enterprise,  
The ships and men, but would not let me go.  
And so I only know that great new world  
By reports from men I sent, like Hariot  
And White who brought Virginia back in art.  
My heart says to have gone there might have meant  
More than if I had found El Dorado.  
I had dreamed of building England in Virginia—  
Prosperous farms and towns and towering cities.  
With wisdom gleaned from all the years of study  
For my *History of the World*, I could have governed,  
With Bess and our dear children at my side,  
And leisure to write verses that might live,  
Far from the plotting of ambitious lords,  
The wiles of Cecil who I thought my friend,  
The endless power plays and James' ire,  
Far from the Tower's gloom, where I was kept  
For twelve long years, years in which  
I might have courted greatness, far away  
From screams, the hangman and the axe, the axe  
That will undo me in a few short hours.  
If I were headed anywhere but heaven,  
I would be headed for Virginia now.

I stand in a golden sunshine  
(I like its warmth on my neck and back)  
While a rush of wind flails the leaves  
Of the lush, red maple. I stay to watch  
Their shuffling shadows *do-si-do*,  
Dancing with sunlight on the grass.  
I make these lines lest a lovely moment  
Be lost forever when I pass.

#### *IV. Translations*

OUR LADY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS

*By Paul Claudel*

That scrawny kid! He knows there never can be  
Much love for him. He senses my pity. See,  
He blushes, braves a smile, and fights back tears.  
Orphans, losers, in a world of cruel sneers,  
The down-and-out, the illiterate, spirits crushed,  
As they lose out on everything, lose out on friends they can trust.  
So they rarely open their hearts. But their hearts can be won  
If you treat them with kindness, give them honest attention.  
O poor, take my pity, my hand, but trust me not.  
Soon I'll be back with my kind and won't give you a thought.  
The poor can only have friends who are poorer than they.  
O suffering sister, come look at Mary, I pray.  
Poor woman whose husband's a drunk, your children unfed,  
When you can't pay the rent and you wish you were dead,  
When your world falls to pieces and hope seems a fraud,  
Come to church and gaze on the Mother of God.  
Whatever injustice or misery lies in store,  
When her children are hurting, a mother hurts even more.  
Without hope or complaint, behold God's suffering Mother,  
A poor soul and a poorer, staring silently at each other.

## CORRESPONDENCES

*By Charles Baudelaire*

In nature's temple living columns rise,  
Sometimes murmuring words we can't make out.  
Man makes his way through forests filled with symbols.  
They watch his every move with knowing eyes.

As lingering echoes from afar converge  
And deepen into a dark harmony,  
Immense as night, immense as clarity,  
Perfumes, colors, melodies—all merge.

There are perfumes that are fresh as infant skin,  
Mellow as oboes, green as prairie grass;  
Others are rich, triumphant, steeped in sin,  
Diffuse as something infinitely vast,

Like amber, musk, the fragrance incense vents,  
Singing the transport of the soul and sense.

## HORACE, BOOK II, ODE VI

Septimius, my friend,  
Ready to trek with me to the world's end,  
To the wild Cantabrians, far from Rome's decrees,  
Where the waters of the rugged Syrtes wend  
And the Moorish tide roars everlastingly,

O that Argive-founded Tibur might provide  
A home for my old age, by peace possessed—  
For one weary of wars and roaming wide  
On life's tumultuous seas—a place of rest.

If unkind Fates should overturn this dream,  
Then through the fields Phalanthus ruled of old  
My heart will seek that sweet Galaesus stream  
Where sheep by skins protected have their fold.

More than any spot in all the land,  
That little corner smiles on me. There bees  
Make honey sweeter than Hymettus' and  
The olives rival green Venafrum's trees.

Ah, Jupiter has blessed that place with Springs  
That linger, Winters that are short and tame.  
There Aulon, loved by fruitful Bacchus, brings  
Grapes that put Falernian vines to shame.

That country, with its blessed hills,  
Beckons us both. And there, at my life's end,  
You'll pay a debt to memory and spill  
A tear on the ashes of your poet friend.

## About Joseph Awad

Joseph Awad was born in the coal-mining town of Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. When he was ten years old his family moved to Washington, D.C. He majored in English literature at Georgetown University, where he edited the college literary magazine. He also studied drawing and painting at the Corcoran School of Art and did graduate work in English at George Washington University. He enjoyed a career of more than forty years as a public relations professional, most of it with Reynolds Metals Company, a major aluminum producer, where he rose to vice-president of public relations. He also served as national president of the Public Relations Society of America and had a book, *The Power of Public Relations*, published by Praeger.

Awad wrote poetry since his teen-age years and his work appeared widely in journals and anthologies, most recently in Howard Bloom's *Anthology of American Religious Poems* published by The Library of America. *Late into the Night* is his fifth book of poetry. He was Poet Laureate of Virginia (1998-2000) and served as president of the Poetry Society of Virginia and The New Virginia Review. He was a recipient of the Virginia Writers Club's Lifetime Achievement Award in poetry and a member of Virginia's Communications Hall of Fame. Joseph Awad passed away on July 17, 2009. His wife Doris resides in Richmond, Virginia. They had ten children.

Other books of poetry by Joseph Awad

*The Neon Distances*

*Shenandoah Long Ago*

*Leaning to Hear the Music*

*The Big Bang*

Other poetry books (Winners of the 2007–2008 Anita Dorn Memorial Award for Poetry) published by Prospero's World Press, Inc:

*Elegy for Everyone* by Alfred Nicol

*The Accidental Cynic* by Gail White