SILENCE LIKE ANOTHER NAME

John Levy
SILENCE
LIKE
ANOTHER
NAME
Books by John Levy

Among the Consonants

Travels

Cards (with David Miller)

We Don’t Kill Snakes Where We Come From: Two Years in a Greek Village

Scribble & Expanse

Something Less Balanced

Oblivion, Tyrants, Crumbs

The Nightest

A Mind’s Cargo Shifting: fictions

In the Pit of the Empty

float among what sails & spirals (with Don Cole’s artwork)

Two Masters: Visits with Robert Lax in Greece (1984 & 1985) plus David Miller’s Cid Corman and ORIGIN: A Personal Account

On Its Edge, Tilted
SILENCE LIKE ANOTHER NAME

John Levy

otata's bookshelf
2019
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Moonlit Night

The trees' shadows lie in black pools on the lawns.

Charles Reznikoff
Driftwood

If it is moved it will never be the same and if it is not moved it will change more slowly. Knobs, bends, truncated branches, fragrance, grains of sand; dents, smooth passages. It is like a distant tree’s voice, though only a few words, in one of those musical languages more vowels than consonants, peculiar accents and some letters that seem elongated to show what happens when letters dream. It is like the answer when a plank of wood is asked, “If you could choose, how would you shape a body to lounge in?” Sometimes it has nightmares of being a new pencil—in a box of pencils opened by a boy who also has a new pencil sharpener. Sometimes it dreams of floating again. It waves to me. Come closer, it says, let’s loiter before we start the next journey.
Happiness

A Russian man on NPR yesterday spoke almost perfect English, though his *full* sounded like *fool*

twice, once in *fulfilled* and once by itself. I thought of him saying to someone *You are fool of shit*

and that made me happy. I’m often easy to please.

I’m generally happy to be alive. Fool of life.

Five-fingered thief, those three words come to me for no particular reason, as if they rhymed with *

Fool of life.* As a child I imagined finding a green bottle on the beach with a message in it from someone alone on an island and then I’d tell everyone and he’d be saved. It was always a man and always a green bottle.
How Diane Arbus Would’ve Photographed Me

Say she happens to be in Tampa when my family is staying at a hotel there. Summer of ‘58, which makes me six or seven. She’s out by the pool.

She likes pools, just as she likes beaches and nudist camps, and positions herself near the steps at the shallow end as I begin to climb out. Surprised by the fully-clothed woman with a big black camera around her neck I stop, one foot on a higher step, water dripping down my face, thin arms drooping at my sides. I have my mouth open for that first photo, the one she exhibits, as I look into her camera with no thought in my head that I should do anything with the face I forget all about.
Kyoto, 1975

Forty-four years ago, on a Sunday (I know it must’ve been a Sunday, it was my only day off) in downtown Kyoto I walked down a narrow residential side street after a drizzle. I worked in a nearby coffeeshop owned by an American poet and his Japanese wife. The street was empty, shining, the sun in and out of clouds. Someone on a second story began practicing piano and I imagined a girl, in her teens, as the chords came from the open window, stopped, repeated, stopped, repeated. I stood there, across from the house, unreasonably happy. Maybe it was only two minutes.
**Balneal**

I look up this adjective: of, or relating to, a bath, bathing or a bathroom. And I think of Pierre Bonnard and how often he painted his wife stretched out in a bath-tub (underwater). *Balneary*, an alternate adjective, perhaps works better, Bonnard’s nearness to her with water between them, the water she’s under, which he paints as if it were her attire. Colors surround her and she, too, is composed of many hues. She is at rest as he works be-holding her.
April 3rd, 2019

for Leslie

We’ve lived in the desert
on this piece of land for
33 years and this
morning

you show me
the first poppies
that
have
ever
grown here.
Not many, and they’re yellow, but

we’re
not many
either. For many, you point out

the aphids

on a green stalk
near the poppies, busy
little
sap suckers.
Letter to Ken Bolton, 4/25/19

Dear Ken,

You’d know the exact shade of our brittlebush blossoms,

so yellow and bright. Leslie would too, but not me. I have to Google for shades of yellow.

In the shadow of our wall the petals

may be almost pineapple yellow, though I doubt you or Leslie would agree and pineapple on the chart isn’t as radiant. Maybe lemon, but deeper. I did find a shade called mellow yellow,

which I thought was only a rhyme Donovan used for his song. It reached Number Two in the Billboard Hot 100 in 1966, when I was 15 in the U.S. and you were a few years older in Australia.

Yesterday I took a photo of said blossoms, on my phone, the same ones in the shadow today, and emailed it to you
using a phone that back in 1966 would’ve seemed
to me to be a device in a Ray Bradbury story.

I wonder if you read his *The Martian Chronicles*
or *The Illustrated Man*, books I read all

the way through back
at around the same time Donovan

was also “big,” as we say. Neither
names would be recognized now, here

in the U.S., by more than a 50th
of the followings they had back then, but

that doesn’t make either “little.” The
blossoms are not

little

by any, as they say, “stretch”

of the imagination. What else do I have to re-

port? “Mellow Yellow” is in the back-
ground of my mind now, accompanying

this letter to you, which is not what I in-
tended. It’s as if I’m back

in my bedroom, alone, singing it, though
I didn’t know all the verses. Reminds me of

your poem, “Some Days,” and your lines

*humming a line*

*from an advertisement,*

*watching a lizard in the grass*
which brings me to the weather report: 
we’re seeing more and more lizards atop our rocks 

and dashing across the dirt. Our grass here 
in the desert is more weedlike and tall 

than I’d guess the grass the lizard in your 
poem is in. 

Not that I had much to say 
when I wanted to write you, except 

to bask 
in the thought of writing with you 

“in” mind, though not watching you 
from above as you observed the lizard (and I 

observe ours) but 
bringing you into this spring day here to 

have this one- 
sided chat 

I could open up within.
On a Herely Basis

for Nat Levy

I hope to be alert, even more than alert, attentive, on a herely basis. A Finnish man, who was our tour guide, used that phrase on the tour bus. I knew he meant to say “on an hourly basis,” and I also knew he didn’t know he’d said “herely” and I loved “herely” and hope I can use and honor his error. I hope that right here, in this sentence and in the vicinity of this sentence, I can convey a little something of how hearing “herely” as we drove through a forest made me feel as the trees surrounded us on our left and our right, as we rolled toward a place we’d never seen, as the daylight was vertical between the vertical trunks of tall trees.
Greek Hearses (1983-1985)

I saw them enough, those two years
I lived in a small village and taught English

in Kalamata. I almost never saw
the hearses in the village. They would be

moving
in Kalamata

or sometimes one would be
parked. I remember one at the curb

a little downhill
from the Kalamata hospital, no

one
in it. No one

else
on the sidewalk. I have a terrible

memory, but it continues
to send me this, like a postcard

with no writing
on the blank side.

(2019)
Welcome, John Levy

I was in my early 20s. My parents lived in Minneapolis until I was eight, then we moved and never returned. I had come back to Minneapolis for a family reunion on my mother’s side, a reunion which turned out to be the single reunion (while on my father’s side we’ve had reunions for decades now).

I found the house where I spent my first eight years. Then I walked for over a mile to get to the candy store I used to visit, alone. I remembered the glass display case, the strips of white paper with small round drops of candy, all the other treats to consider with my pennies. It was still there, but was now a small restaurant as well, with a middle-aged man behind the counter who was perhaps old enough to have worked there when I was a child. But I didn’t introduce myself, didn’t do anything other than order a lemonade and sit at a table. I was the only customer. It was the middle of the afternoon.

Then the door opened and a boy, maybe 17, stepped in and the man behind the counter said, “Welcome, John Levy.” He even pronounced Levy the way my family does, Lee-vee. The boy smiled at the man. I don’t know if that was the biggest coincidence in my life so far (I am 67 now), but I imagine it will always be in the top three and I haven’t given much thought to which other ones are up there. It is strange enough to greet a customer/friend with a first and last name, but for that name to be the same name of the only customer in the space...I didn’t say anything. I suppose I could have introduced myself to both of them, told them a little of my own story. The boy had an innocence to him, a freshness. It was easy to imagine him being greeted with enthusiasm wherever he showed up. He must also be in his sixties now, I hope.
My Mother, Zoe Weiss Levy (1923 - 2009)

Her first son died at birth. Her second son did not. I was either her second or third son depending on how she counted (if she did consider me her third she never told me, but she kept secrets). One more son and then she stopped having children, most likely sure she’d have another son if she tried again. She didn’t, as some mothers do who wished for daughters, dress any of us up like girls when we were small. Nor did she complain or seem disappointed. It was simply a fact. She didn’t get what she wanted. In many ways I believe, now, about ten years after her death, much of her life was about not getting what she wanted. Is that very different from most people? I’m not someone who would even attempt to answer that. I was born and immediately a disappointment. We were close, especially as we got older. At the moment I feel like I have her face somehow, though we never resembled each other much. Or maybe not so much her face, but somehow I feel like her right now, and I don’t recall ever feeling like her before. She wouldn't have
written this, but it is as if she is standing in my body as I write. When she wrote songs for loved ones, to perform at birthdays, she’d use her rhyming dictionary. And this doesn’t rhyme, except I feel I’m rhyming with her.
Visiting My Late Parents

I haven’t lived nearly as long
with my late parents

as I did with them when they were alive.
They were generous when alive

and loving. In my dreams

when they return, as they do
often, they are generous again, soft-

spoken, kind. They are middle-
aged in my dreams, almost never

as old as they became. Last night
my father knocked on the door

to the bedroom I used to have
as a child, though in the dream

I was probably in my 40s. He
was wearing a brown suit jacket, much

like one he owned, and simply wanted
to tell me to come see our guests. I was

almost ready

I told him. His posture was the same
as when alive, good but not

too tense. His face was relaxed.
There was nothing about him

“out of the ordinary.” The doorway, a frame
around him.
Walkie Talkie

When I was a child I loved the idea of having a walkie talkie like people (usually men) had in TV shows. They were big and they worked and the people who had them did things that were secret and important. When I was a child I never thought of a poem as a walkie talkie. If I could go back and tell my child self that a poem is sort of like a walkie talkie, but one in which you say something and often it seems like it goes out to no one, but you like talking into it anyhow, would it confuse a boy who talked to himself enough anyway without needing, yet, the idea of poetry?
Another Letter to Paul Matthews

Dear Paul,

Yesterday morning I was raking a path in our yard when a Cooper’s Hawk landed on a branch about 10 feet away and level with my eyes. We were both in the shade. Hawk profile: its one yellow eye with black pupil met my eyes. Radiant yellow claws gripped the branch, the yellow going straight up the legs. Noise seemed to cease. I stopped moving. It was still. And then I was me again, holding the rake, outside doing a chore when I wanted to also be inside, trying to write. So, 30 seconds of motionless what? Wonder, on my part? Amazement? Magic?

I moved my rake knowing the hawk would leave. And it did. Flew to a higher branch, a little further off and then I started raking again and it flew into our neighbor’s yard. Should I have stood there with it? Although that "with"
only applies to me because I can't imagine
what preposition the hawk would use if it spoke English
and wanted to get picky about prepositions, but I doubt
it would choose "with" and also I wonder what sort of accent it would have.

Should I add (in my defense?) that I had been out in the heat and
humidity for about 30 minutes at that point, whereas I'd told myself
I'd rake the path for 15 minutes tops before returning to my TO DO list, which, probably unlike anyone else's
in my neighborhood (let's call my neighborhood a five mile radius
in any direction) had Poems
at the top of the list. And I do like writing first thing, so to speak, after breakfast.

Had the hawk already eaten? If the hawk could both speak and write English
and also wrote a TO DO list each morning, what are the chances
it would have at the top of the list
LAND NEAR A HUMAN?

Anyhow, Paul, here it is, the next day.
You and I

often write each other about seeing
birds. You with your occasional eagles.

I don’t know if you’d have

stayed longer with the hawk. I suspect
you would have. Maybe you’d have

gone home and started a painting
and finished it then photographed it

and sent it to me. I don’t imagine
you would’ve joked

about what preposition the hawk
would’ve fussily

settled upon to describe its
proximity to your eyes. I do imagine

you would’ve done justice to its
yellows

and everything else it brought
to that branch. Your painting

would’ve said silence
too.
In a dream as I looked at a friend's large abstract paintings

on big pieces of paper another friend, sitting back in the shadows, said, "The squirrel looks for the tomato." He said this as a pronouncement and at first I thought it was a commentary on the paintings. The paintings were fabulous and I couldn't tell if the remark was meant as a negative critique or something akin to praise. Or was he saying that some people don't understand how to look at an abstract painting? I thought I recalled him saying this once before, but couldn't remember when that was or what he meant then either. I woke up. It was a little after 2:00 a.m., and it seemed important to me to remember the comment. I knew I'd forget it if I didn't write it down. If only I could also have been able to reproduce, even sketchily, the magnificence of the abstract paintings (which were mostly blues and blacks in harmonious clouds all the way out to the edges of the paper). After I wrote a few notes to myself about the dream I added, "I am seeing the red tomato while not knowing the meaning of the comment." Only later does it occur to me that I am the squirrel, looking for and seeing the tomato. The tomato is tomato red.
from time to time

at night in-between lightning I can't see the crow
Letter to Robert Lax

Dear Bob,

I like addressing you, though you no longer live on Patmos or in New York, or anywhere on Earth. The last time I visited, taking the ferry to Patmos and arriving on December 31st, 1991, I found you in the coffeeshop after I stood outside for a few minutes watching the islanders dance (divided into squares of window pane) and heard the loud music. We walked the short way uphill to your small home, and then dynamite began to explode, Happy New Year! I hadn’t known they’d set off dynamite and you either forgot to mention it or wanted me to be surprised. I was. I remember that it was on that visit you described Richard Avedon coming to Patmos to photograph you. You thought his small entourage of adoring assistants and hangers-on was a bit objectionable. You, who objected to almost nothing or no one, but they were a little too much for you and then Avedon wanted you to pose in a way
you thought silly. But you did it
and he took the photo of you
in a fashionable black leather jacket (did he
supply it? I don't remember you ever
dressing like that) leaning back on
a small grey shrub and looking solemn,

wise (which you are), compliant
rather than with the sparkle that
you radiated day and night. You were

a quiet sort of sparkler, but Avedon
(whose photos I often love)
dimmed you and literally put a dark cloud

behind your head. Yes, dramatic. And
a fine photo. But you told me you were
disappointed by it and also that you couldn't
give me a copy of it because Avedon
had only given you one. Or was it two?
As I recall you said it was the only time the islanders
didn't like people who had come to visit you.
And here I am, visiting you again, longing

for your warmth and acceptance. And joy.
I can find it, find you, in your poems and journals
and in the letters you sent me, often

with drawings, but while it isn't second-hand
it also isn't the same. I am tempted to
write something the way you might, say, such as

a list of colors
in which all the repetition
deepens
and brightens
the colors and the words
themselves and the silence

between the names of colors, a silence
like another name
for color. I won't, not here. I'll reread

one of yours. Each line a single
color and in this poem you alternate
between black and white, unpredictably

repeating sometimes
and constructing four columns.
You built so much with what you wrote

and these color poems
are a fraction of your body
of work. I can't recall speaking of anyone else's

body of work, but with you it seems right. I wish
more people owned all
your journals, plus

your other books. I wish
I were walking with you in Patmos
or were on the boat with Damianos and Leslie

and you, on our way
to that other island's
beach, where we swam

and had lunch
in 1985. I wish I could receive
an answer from you.
Everyone

one day
says something
that glitters

full of feeling

the words leave the bodies

and slowly undress

without showing off
Listening to a Recording of Paul Blackburn Reading in 1968

I listen to him read about
40 years ago. There are many
people who cough
in the audience and a barking
dog (where? leashed
right outside where he reads?)

at Bard College, Blackburn
the bard. Monsieur
Blackburn, as he greets
himself near the end of a poem
arriving

after a train trip. He reads
his poems
and speeds
then slows, pauses,
we hear

him turn the page (the microphone
must be closer to the pages
than to his mouth). Now I listen
to “Fog,” sorry
I never met him. He died

when I was 20. My older brother
went to a poetry workshop with him
in Aspen and the only thing he told me
(back then) was that Blackburn told him
that having typos in a poem

was like talking to someone and later
looking in the mirror and seeing a big
piece of spinach between your teeth.
Nothing for Cid Corman

It's tempting to say I have nothing to say as I begin writing a poem. I understand why Cid
often wrote variants on this theme, poems he starts by declaring something like
I have nothing to say
and then says something more. I practically lived with Cid. I moved into his coffeeshop in Kyoto,
to work for room and board when I was 23. He never had nothing to say in person. He'd show up
in mid- or late afternoon, having stayed home to write and frequently tell me he'd written two dozen letters
as well as many poems. Sometimes an essay, too, or translations. He'd make marvelous ice cream then,
as the saying goes, hold court. Speaking of court, much later, when I was in law school, he wrote me suggesting I become
a Supreme Court Justice and adding he'd written one and had received an answer. He also
wrote Presidents, but they didn't reply. I thought I had nothing to say and then thought of Cid. When I took a book
out of his shelves the book would be full of Cid's marginalia, often argumentative, though there'd usually be
passages he'd praise. He had careful penmanship. He had nothing to say in a number of poems
when he started them
knowing nothing

never stayed nothing
if he just held on.
My Third and Last Homicide

I hadn't been a public defender for many years when I was assigned the case. My client told me she was drunk, and someone else was driving, when they passed a woman sitting at a bus bench. My client told the driver to pull over.

The other woman was a former lover of my client's boyfriend and my client knocked her over and kicked her in the nose. The coroner dissected the deceased's head, placed pieces of the head on a clean patch of light blue carpet and photographed each piece, some gleamed under the light.

My supervisor respected my request I be assigned no more homicides. Only one of those photos lodged in my memory for about 20 years now. A small photo, each tuft of carpet in perfect focus surrounding a skinned piece of face.
Germs!

A moth flew near my face as I was eating oatmeal with soy milk, then landed in it. After spooning it out I had a choice: throw it all away, since whatever the moth spread from its wings and body as it soaked a few seconds was strewn invisibly in all directions far beyond the spoonful lifted out, or finish my breakfast.

I kept eating, not noticing the added texture or taste of one moth's powders and scales. I remember my mother warning me that if I drank soda pop from someone else's bottle (even my brother's) the germs would kill me. Years later, I was shocked at my younger brother Andy's birthday party when Ed, my older brother, dropped a slice of pizza face down, looked at me defiantly, picked it up and ate it.

The first time Mom told me germs would kill me we were on a beach, no one else there except her, Dad, my two brothers, me. Dozens of dead horseshoe crabs covered the sand, it was overcast, the waves roared in. There were big pieces of driftwood. I held a bottle of orange soda pop, the orange wonderfully and unearthly bright. Andy's was grape. Did I want a sip of his?
Roadrunner, Feb. 5th

Moving dead cactus in my yard
to create a path, I unearth an earth

worm

and watch it change shape from
崩, to I, and then C quickly
against dark brown moist dirt.
I wonder if Leslie would like me to
catch it and take it to her garden, but

I don't. (Later she tells me she
has enough.) A few minutes later the roadrunner
who I think is the same one who
comes to our yard frequently now
and lost its fear of us, walks down the driveway
and picks up a worm, sucks it down

and finds another. I wave my shovel
at it, in greeting. It glances at me and back down.
It looks almost fat this morning.
I think of David Miller because

he likes roadrunners and sometimes I
send him a photo of one. But I'm out here
with a shovel, not a camera. I'll put words
in the roadrunner's beak, just two: "Hi David!"

If I took a photo and used an app
I could make the roadrunner
say that over and over.
Still Life, Apple and Pear, 1956, Oil on Canvas, Euan Uglow

A red apple without a stem against which a yellow pear with a brown stem leans. They meet our eyes on a white tablecloth with a blue sky or wall behind them. Uglow painted this when I was four or five and he was 24 or 25. He said his aim (in general) was to make "a structured painting full of controlled, and therefore potent, emotion." A curious "therefore," I believe. A photo of him in 1986 (black-and-white) shows a bearded balding man sitting in front of a loaf of bread on a table, one thumb to his mouth, apparently contemplating what he would paint. The ceiling low, the studio humble, difficult to tell if he is posing or simply caught in the act as the bread is, as the apple and pear are, before vanishing into the past. Now I Google the photographer, Jorge Lewinski, find he was famous for his photos of artists and therefore conclude Uglow is posing. It's a fine pose in front of the bread. A marvelous photo including
the bread. Lewinski and Uglow
dead now, the bread and apple and pear
long gone except to those of us who appear
and eye them.
Self-Portrait with Parents

A starry-eyed large man
will never look at me when I look
into the mirror. I appear

a small rational man
standing there, full of bedtime

stories and the memorized birthdays
of his late parents. Growing up
I never heard them deride others or
each other. We didn't live
near anyone with a rooster, we

were city. I loved to stand
next to my father when he
looked into the mirror, shaving,
while I looked up into the mirror at him.

I remember my mother playing the piano
and, once, someone else's

xylophone. Right now I'm alone and
as I think I realize my mouth is a little open
and that reminds me of my father when he
was listening to his thoughts. He had bigger lips

than mine. Someone once nick-named him "Lips Levy"
or maybe it was only "Lips;" it must've been
my late mother who told me that.
I don't look that much like her, but

more than I look like him.
I think more like her too I imagine.
Occasionally

when I am reading a book and have
my hand on the page I notice my hand
as if it belonged somewhere
else, or to some other

being. Knuckles, veins, fingers,
skin, color, all peculiar and
as if also
by an author I'll never meet.
Cemetery

There is nothing
between the three gravestones
except air, grass, insects, odor, the
sound waves of cicadas,
sometimes human

words, and the body
at regular intervals
of the groundskeeper
who hasn't reread the
chiseled names. A moth

lands in the corner of a T,
folds itself, and I'd be wrong
to guess it thinks of nothing.
It thinks, but thoughts
as distant from me as

the lives of these three strangers.
All I know about them is their
names and the years
they opened and closed their
mouths. I close my mouth

and chew a fig
my wife gave me from
her tree. A small part of it
lodges
between two of my back teeth.
Paris, 1976

A friend persuaded me to visit
with him one night a street lined
on both sides with prostitutes. Women
in many different clothes
and costumes, who ranged from their
late teens to their 60s. I found it difficult
to look, occasionally
politely said
no as some
asked. I was young
and felt sorry for them. A week or two

later on a different street
during the morning I saw a woman emerge
from the ruins of a building, stepping
over a broken wall unexpectedly
in a sexy dress. She saw my face the moment

I saw hers, then an older man appeared
behind her. He was well-dressed. They left
the rubble nonchalantly
as if stepping out of a taxi.
The Random Serbian

I met one in Las Vegas a few years ago. He drove me to the airport in his taxi. When I learned where he was from I told him I love Serbian poets, and named several. He loved them too. It turned out he collected books. I wrote a poem about being a passenger in his taxi. Then last week, visiting Kyoto, I was riding the two-hundred-and-four bus and the only other foreigner (who had got on a few stops after I did) sat next to me. A black-haired middle-aged man in a black jacket. He, too, was Serbian, had been living in China teaching English. He was just as delighted as the taxi driver had been to find out that I know about and love Serbian poetry. He'd never met someone not from Serbia who did. We discussed them excitedly. I found the PDF for my last book on my phone and showed him my poem about talking to the Serbian taxi driver. He read it slowly, smiled, said something positive and then spoke of other Serbians he knew, or knew of, who'd gone to the U.S. and driven taxis, even if in Serbia they were architects or musicians.
An Army of Books

It's a cold war between me
and the unnamed waiting out there.

Cold wars inspire fear if anyone
can say fear is ever inspired.

I have gathered my troops of the
definitely inspired, with their

spines and names, with their
words and presence. They

await my decision about which
of them will speak to me next

and for how long. I have promoted
most of them repeatedly and awarded

them the highest honors and privileges.
They wait for me when I sleep, when I

eat meals, leave home without them,
take showers, find time away from them for

my family and friends and the strangers
I also love to treat—when I'm capable—with

kind attentiveness. When I die they'll be
scattered, some sold, some dumped, some

donated, very few kept by my family.
They won't know I'm gone. I believe

I won't either.
Lincoln

My taxi driver in Brighton
is from Zimbabwe and
his parents named him Lincoln,
a name he says Abraham
Lincoln "put on the map." One
of his brothers is Phineas
and one of his sisters Primrose.

He's 65, one year younger
than me. He flew back to
Zimbabwe for his mother's
funeral, just got back four
days ago. I tell him my
mother died nine years ago.
How old was she? he asks.

Eighty-six. Mine too, he
says, cancer. Mine died
of a heart attack, I say.
I'm next, he says. I know
what you mean, I reply.
My mother had terrible
headaches, he says, and we
spent all this money on
doctors who said it was
migraines. When they found
the tumor it was too late.

His father died of a heart attack
and he says he hopes he'll go
like that—quick, no pain.
I've never met another Lincoln, he says. But there's a Lincolnshire around here, he adds then looks out the window as if he can see it.
Postcards, After a Death

Thumb-tacked up next to a window, loose in wooden drawers, blank ones bought in museums, and those with writing. The survivors tasked with figuring out what to do with clothes, books, papers, shoes, leave these cards for the end. Here's one with nothing on its back, a Matisse papercut. And now a still life, Nature Morte, by Henri Fantin-Latour (1836-1904); those dates bring to mind how long the card's temporary owner lived. Flowers, fruit, a knife blade extending out over the creased white tablecloth.
Letter to Ken Bolton

Dear Ken,

There's a crow in your poem "Italian Chronicles—Birds of Rome" (actually more than one) and here are your lines I recalled in Copenhagen:

"A handsome kind of crow they have around here—two-toned, black & a lighter chocolate-charcoal colour."

The two crows I happened upon near The Little Mermaid, at a dock, were also two-toned, but black and silver. They walked upon rounded rocks, dipped beaks into water and pecked at squares the size of half a postcard made of what looked to be asphalt that then they'd pick up by their beaks as I snapped photos. My son, kind and at a distance, sat at a picnic table on the otherwise deserted dock since it was early and no one was there to
climb down into
boats. A swan
and cygnets
dipped heads into the
water through long green
thin ribbons (seaweed?) and
earlier I’d taken better
photos of them, which
was easy (that
is, getting "better"
photos) since
they floated inside or
near
the dark reflected and e-
longated
triangle of a boat's
hull
so visually there's more
going on
and off
and in. I kept
thinking of your two-toned
crow, wanting to show you these
two as they
leapt and flew
inches
above water-
smoothed
rocks
and I
crouched
and focused
while they held
trash
aloft
in silvery-
black beaks.
On the Day I Die

Or night. Both my parents
died on odd days (the first, the
29th). I usually prefer

odd numbers to even

so I’d prefer an odd day or night
to pass away, as the saying

goes. "Away." César Vallejo
wrote the most famous poem (I think)

about dying on a particular day. He chose
Thursday, in part

because he wrote his poem on a Thursday, a rainy
Thursday in the fall. He died

in the middle of April, on the 15th, 1938.
It was a Friday. As for me, I just read

a poem by John Bradley about Tomaž Šalamun,
"Bring Me the Tongue of Tomaž Šalamun,"

a variation on the Vallejo poem, a humorous
excellent variation. But it reminds me

of the day
when I learned Tomaž had died. He died

on December 27, 2014. I was astonished
he was gone. He was only 73. I’d thought

I could look forward to many more
of his poems. I felt such loss.
I'd sent him a book of mine with a poem in it about misreading one of his poems

and he'd sent me a postcard saying nice things. I never followed up, he sounded busy and the card was enough. I have 10 of his books. The jokey Bradley poem was written either in 2006 or earlier as the book it is in was published in 2006. Bradley's poem begins

Tomaž Šalamun will write the last poem on a rainy day in Ljubljana, a Friday in April when lilacs fumble toward the light and a hand lingers over a light switch.

The poem is in Bradley's book War on Words: The John Bradley/Tomaž Šalamun "Confusement"

which I ordered recently. It arrived on a Tuesday. I am writing this on the following day, a rainy Wednesday in Tucson. I began this thinking I would never want anyone else to write a poem, joking or not, about when I'm going to die unless I wrote it myself. But then again, I'm anyone, writing this poem. . .

I won't be a suicide, won't choose the day and date, so it will be "up"
to "chance," as so much of my life has been. I'm 67 at the moment. For some reason

the "at the moment" reminds me of an arrow touching a bullseye, at the moment

of piercing. Not a dart. Don't ask me "Why not a dart?" I won't have a rational answer.

My father died on New Year's Day, 2013. He was born on an 11th. My mother

was born on a 14th. I appeared on a 28th. Twice 14, obviously.

If I have to go on an even number I wouldn't mind a 14th or a 28th.

I have about a 3% chance of dying on a 28th. I've always loved making up stories.

As a child that was my main entertainment, so much time alone
during which I often existed with so many others, including Gulliver,

Noah, Medusa, Pinocchio, Captain Blackbeard,

Jonah. I never thought of any of them dying. And they never did.
She is

listening to Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-Sharp Minor. Again. In daylight now. Her mother stops outside

er her closed door. She is in there, lifting her arms to the ceiling, alone near her bed, in

with the music. Her mother remembers telling her daughter the Moonlight Sonata never made her think of, or see, moonlight. Her daughter said something about how some notes sounded moonlit.

Doesn't it depend on who is performing? Yes, the daughter answered, very much. Today it is Evgeny Kissin on YouTube.

The mother steps back, afraid her girl will see her shadow under the door. Although maybe her daughter's eyes are closed.

The mother's breathing slows and she feels light-headed. After six or seven minutes her daughter returns to the beginning, her favorite part.

The mother feels herself swallow and stands still, aware of her throat and then the soles of her feet through her shoes, on a floor.
Last Night Here for Now

I hear noises from the street below. I am in Edinburgh for one more night. A man's voice. Another man's voice. Can't tell if the two are talking to each other. Are they at a distance from each other or do they just speak loudly though they're close together? I could look down. But why? Cars pass below too and something is idling, probably a bus.

It is 8:15 p.m. on a Sunday night, the last night of this September in this 2018. Once again September has a mere 30 days while some other months have 31. "Size doesn't matter," a friend of September whispers, to console September because September feels short-changed. But September is also fussy and corrects its friend by stating, "It's length more than size." The bus is moving now, louder than when it idled.

The men are further away. No, maybe they're finally lowering their voices, though now they've raised them again, perhaps afraid to be called monotone in a poem being written by a stranger they almost imagine four stories above. But their imaginations are otherwise
engaged. I could open my window and shout, "You're in a poem now!" Would they be pleased? That's a rhetorical question. The other

night when Leslie and I were in the kitchen eating she thought she heard music. She got up and

looked out and sure enough, she had. There was a bagpiper piping (it was dark already, maybe after 7 p.m.) and behind him

da dozen young men in kilts and white shirts. It was not part of a parade. We didn't know what it was part of, except

our night, and theirs. I keep thinking of the great Frank O'Hara lines that he begins "In Memory of My Feelings" with:

"My quietness has a man in it, he is transparent and he carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the streets. He has several likenesses, like stars and years, like numerals."

Now my poem has O'Hara in it and I'm going to say he walks four stories below carrying a bullhorn and reciting this beginning
to "In Memory of My Feelings." And the passersby, awestruck, speechless, will soon tell the first friend they see or phone or text that an American on the street had said the craziest shite and it was great! "What, exactly?" the first friend may ask. "I'm not sure, but it had a gondola and stars."
Levy's Accordion Straps

They cost $19.99 at Guitar Center. "These beautiful one inch leather accordion straps from Levy's exude style and security." I can imagine meeting an accordionist who asks "Are you related to the Levy who makes those great accordion straps?"

Before today, April 26th, 2018, I would've said "No," but known zero about what those straps "exude." I happened to discover them like most of my discoveries, by accident. In Gregory O'Brien's poem "A Genealogy" I saw the word spelled "accordion" and wondered if that's a variant. Googling it (and not finding "accordion," although O'Brien is from New Zealand and maybe that's how it gets spelled there?) I found the Guitar Center site and decided to educate myself on accordion prices, never dreaming I'd also see straps for sale, much less that my surname and the manufacturer's would match. What's next? YouTube. Angelo Di Pippo playing "La Vie En Rose" on a French accordion, viewed as of today 614, 267 times. I can tell his strap is definitely not a Levy's. One viewer remarked (in broken English) of Di Pippo "that old man
looks like my father. I am almost start crying." Whereas Tomas Pressel commented: "I am searching a known accordion song

i heard in the TV but dont know the name. Its a faster music with happy mood. . .Anyone Tips?"

One more related search and I find this regarding "Slav way of playing Accordion:

Tracksuit, Hat, Chain, Accordion. Thats all you need. A bit of vodka wont hurt."

After this detour I return to O'Brien's poem a changed man.
Dear Mind,

You are dear. Without you I'm nothing. Often with you I'm almost nothing

but you tell me that I can't really conceive of nothing, so you instruct me
to use "almost" up there. When I first learned your name, Mind, I was a child.

Your name was not one of those words that interested me. It seemed like other words

for things, like car, sidewalk, leaf. Except unlike those things I couldn't see you

or ride inside you (it never occurred to me I could) or walk on top of you or watch you

turn colors and fall. In many ways both of us miss those days, days that if there was no school

were sometimes fabulously unending. The nights were rarely as good, school or not, since

you made me so afraid of the dark. Yes, I'm blaming you. And whatever parts of me

are not you also deserve blame. So here we are, both

67, truly approaching the dark. You suggest I write "truly and falsely approaching the dark"

and there, have I satisfied you?
After Guillevic

for John Martone

Straight Line: Occasionally
the circle dreams
of how it would feel
if it could
stretch out
simply
in
two ways.

Dotted Line: It's true,
sure, no dotted line
appears to be a giant
(unless in a book, say, for
a child in which
the point is to connect them) and
this
modesty, acceptance
of limit, becomes
it.

Broken Line: Together we stood
in the Heard Museum
in front of the old barber
chair
in the long exhibit of how
Native American boys
and girls were forced to
have their hair cut, stop
wearing the clothes their
families
gave them, drop their own
language.
To See

To see the shooting star my mother saw when she was a girl in Minneapolis, out under stars, looking up, forgetting her mother sick with cancer and how she had to be the one taking care of her mother, cooking for her, cleaning up her green vomit, cleaning her body, taking care of her for that year, but on this night she's looking up.
Some of Us

In the woods, a man kneels,  
only because he is sure no one is looking.

A dying man, in a hospital bed, his hand  
held by a stranger.

The bearded man looks up from a book.

She wants you to read her mind.

He thinks about his father.

A sad man in a chair.

This man who wants you to see he regrets.

That disappointed man  
near the man who is secretly pleased and believes  
we can't tell.

The young man who knows how handsome he is.

Trees out the window.

Clouds, tree tops.

Down below, a child's hand  
raised to ward off something we can't know.
"Death frequents the poems..."

John Wilson writes, in an Introduction to a book of essays on Robert Creeley, of Creeley's later poems. The entire sentence reads

"Death frequents the poems, but the intense loneliness of the earlier poetry has subsided." Of course those are my line breaks. The use of *frequents* as a verb isn't unusual, but somehow gets to me. Wilson continues and quotes part of a poem by Creeley about his late mother, "Mother's Voice." Creeley begins by saying it has only been a few years since she died and he can hear her say "I won't want any more of that." Paraphrase the poem. No.

Creeley has been dead more than a few years now (I'm writing in June 2018, so more than 13). I saw him
twice, once in Canada giving a reading and then 30 years later in Tucson giving another. Now he

frequents death, if it makes any sense to use that verb.
I bought every book of his and double copies of several, thinking I'd use one to mess up with notes and leave its double pristine. I always wanted more of what he offers, still do. Where he frequents, in his poems, doesn't subside. At 66 now I recall being about 21

in a small house in Seattle that someone made into a bookstore. Alone in a room I found a copy of For Love, a book I already owned, and opened it again, facing the corner, and while I can't remember the specific poems I chose to enter I see its cover, still hold it open.
My late father's comment on a photo I sent him

of myself and a friend, at Olympia, with a stadium behind us where the original Olympic races were run. I sent it to him in 1985, back when I was 34 and he was 62. He wrote back that he recognized me and my clothes. I didn't ask if he was suggesting I update my wardrobe. He loved clothes, as did his father, and had a walk-in closet with hundreds of shirts, some fabulously loud. I'm 68, he's no age I suppose, unless I want to consider him the age he was when he died. I don't, I prefer thinking of him as ageless, and, for the moment, have him in one of those wild shirts he sometimes wore on the weekends. In my mind he's outside, in daylight, in his yard, near his rose bushes and we're both enjoying silence.
Note to Ken Bolton

"I like time" you write in your poem 'Star Eyes'

and I think

as I listen to the garage door shut (Leslie

going out to meet a friend

for coffee while I'm

in the storeroom of the garage that

I altered to make my study, a long

narrow space crammed

with books, papers, magazines, photos,

clippings, etc.) that

Anthony Bourdain, the latest

famous suicide, must've
decided he stopped

liking it. Your poems

are no more the famous

stream of consciousness

than an architect's

plans, so yes and no all

over and in every corner.
You and I are both older
than Bourdain was a dozen
days ago when he hung himself with his
bathrobe belt in a small hotel.
I thought, still do, it must've been
an impulse, apparently
irresistible, to decide to
hang himself or one thinks
he would've found or bought
a rope. He had said
he'd had everything he dreamed of
and had said that quite a number
of years before
seemingly deciding that his dreams
weren't worth living for? Who
knows? There was no news of a
note left behind and his mother
said she was shocked, never
thought he would do that. Though
a few friends
said he had been down. Down.
The word, down, sounds
like one has had enough, done
enough, is
done. I didn't even watch a full
episode of his TV shows
so why do I care? Though I
listened to an interview with him
a year or so ago and am listening to another

now. He seems, in the
interview, to not like so much

who he was sometimes, especially
when he was an addict, but

is energetic, seems
happy to both talk about himself

and listen to the interviewer.
A bathrobe belt?

I, too, like time. Though I wouldn't
have ever thought to say it

like that
before reading your poem.

Your poems
flow, so in that way they are

streamlike, and I'd say
they're streamlined too, though long

usually, and wonderfully. What
you care about and see clearly fills

your poems, unpredictably,
and you laugh at

yourself much more than
at anyone else. I like Bolton poems.
An I Do This, I Do That Poem

Yes, a reference to Frank O’Hara. I did that, put that
title up there. I’m drinking coffee, a little soy milk in it, which
reminds me (remembering IS doing something, after all) of a dental
hygienist who cleaned my teeth about 13 years ago, the only
dental hygienist I’ve ever had who expressed disgust as she worked. She suggested
I put milk in my coffee to prevent more discoloration. I always put milk in, I
didn’t say. I didn’t really want to say much to her. I did
write a poem about her because she hated poetry, which
I found out when she asked me about the book on my lap I’d read
when she was out of the room. Up in another stanza is a "really,"
one of those words condemned (usefully) by Benjamin Dreyer, such as just, actually, quite,
very, rather, so, pretty (when not referring to beauty), and surely. I have that list
in bold black Sharpie up
on my bulletin board, the easier
to ignore it. Ignoring is doing something
right sometimes, wrong others. That's
my specialty, as I do this
and that, mostly behaving
pretty surely and letting doubt
wait really quite elsewhere.
His Light Brown Hair Neatly Combed

I couldn't tell you what he looked like back then

and haven't seen him since. At 27, I was employed by a small theater in Seattle

10 blocks away from my one-room apartment. At the concession stand

during a movie a boy (maybe 14?) came out and stood before the glass counter, inspecting our limited range of sweets. Though the movie was running, he leisurely studied the boring offerings. It was the first and only time I ever called a customer "Champ."

"What would you like, Champ?" I asked, after giving him two minutes of silence. He smiled.

"I don't know why strangers always call me Champ." He said it modestly, though it also seemed he knew.