

An aerial photograph of a coastal landscape. A winding road or path cuts through a green, vegetated area. In the background, there are large bodies of water, possibly a bay or estuary, with various islands and peninsulas. The water has a textured, shimmering appearance. The overall color palette is dominated by greens, blues, and greys.

S I L E N C E
L I K E
A N O T H E R
N A M E

John Levy

**SILENCE
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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

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otata's bookshelf
2019

Acknowledgements

The poets Ken Bolton, John Phillips, Dave Read, Boyer Rickel, and Peter Yovu helped and encouraged me during the time the poems in this book were written, and also assisted me in deciding which poems to include. I am grateful for their advice and friendship. My daughter Allyson Levy chose the photo that is on the front and back cover. My wife, the painter Leslie Buchanan, has consistently inspired me.

“On a Herely Basis” and “To See” are from a collaboration with John Phillips in which we respond to each other’s poems.

Many thanks to the editors of the following magazines, in which many of these poems (sometimes in earlier versions) have been published: *NOON: journal of the short poem*, *otata*, *otoliths*, *Rasputin: A Poetry Thread*, and *Shearsman*.

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ISBN: 978-0-359-96193-1

Cover & Interior Design: Sarah Gzemski // sgzemski.com
Cover Photo: John Levy

Published by Otata’s Bookshelf // <https://otatablog.wordpress.com/>

A print edition is available.

for Leslie

Contents

Driftwood	3
Happiness	4
How Diane Arbus Would've Photographed Me	5
Kyoto, 1975	6
Balneal	7
April 3rd, 2019	8
Letter to Ken Bolton, 4/25/19	9
On a Herely Basis	12
Greek Hearses	13
Welcome, John Levy	14
My Mother, Zoe Weiss Levy	15
Visiting My Late Parents	17
Walkie Talkie	18
Another Letter to Paul Matthews	19
In a dream as I looked at a friend's large abstract paintings	22
from time to time	23
Letter to Robert Lax	24
Everyone	27
Listening to a Recording of Paul Blackburn Reading in 1968	28
Nothing for Cid Corman	29
My Third and Last Homicide	31
Germs!	32
Roadrunner, Feb. 5th	33
Still Life, Apple and Pear, 1956, Oil on Canvas, Euan Uglow	34
Self-Portrait with Parents	36
Occasionally	37
Cemetery	38
Paris, 1976	39
The Random Serbian	40
An Army of Books	41
Lincoln	42

Postcards, After a Death	44
Letter to Ken Bolton	45
On the Day I Die	48
She is	51
Last Night Here for Now	52
Levy's Accordion Straps	54
Dear Mind	56
After Guillevic	57
To See	58
Some of Us	59
"Death frequents the poems. . ."	60
My late father's comment on a photo I sent him	62
Letter to Ken Bolton, 4/25/19	63
An I Do This, I Do That Poem	66
His Light Brown Hair Neatly Combed	68

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
U, to l, 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 other-
wise 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 Tomáš Šalamun,
"Bring Me the Tongue of Tomáš Šalamun,"

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

of the day
when I learned Tomáš 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 enter-
tainment, 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

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

a 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 "accordian" and wondered if that's a variant. Googling it (and not finding "accordian," 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 dis-
coloration. 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.

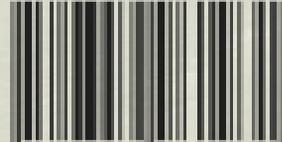
"I don't know why strangers
always call me Champ." He said it modestly,

though it also seemed
he knew.



ISBN 978-0-359-96193-1

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0 780359 961931