



A GREAT DEAL OF OTHER EMPTINESSES

Poetry Chapbook



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Return Visit

Dry grass crunches under feet.
Thorns cleave to shoelaces.
The sun shines and legs ache.
Jeans rub against themselves like a guiro,
Keeping time to the song of memories
In a wind that is slowly sweeping them away.
Hands hide themselves in pockets on hips
That remember past pain-free days.
The belly, covered by a flannel shirt,
Speaks of an old hunger,
The same craving the heart longs for,
Days when could have been's were still could be's.
Lumps come to throats,
Eyes see, the old farm house still standing.
Hair gets blown out of place,
A mirror image of us.

Nothing is Sacred

Those cheap fake
flowers--
received from similar friends
at our wedding--are dying.
Their plastic drops of water
Seem to saturate
the bleeding colors
fade, faded, fading.
And we will throw them away
some day.
For
nothing is sacred anymore.

They push out

I have been there
among the dead who speak hopefully
of dreams for their children.
Oh, the weight they put on and
put on and put on them,
poor banished children of Eve,
Burdened ones wishing to leave
their parents' hopes behind.
They push up, they push up, they push out
against the tyranny of the dead guardians
until--
realizing the futility--
They die themselves
and bear their own.

A New Color!

A black man with a white smile
and white hair
gives me the index finger.
"We are one!"
He shouts in Portuguese.

A Spanish Francisco
gives me the index finger
"We are one!"
He shouts in Spanish.

A Chinese man
gives me the index finger.
Wo Man Shi Yi!

I am happy to be there and one with them.
Pure joy
gushing forth from the spirit
and a thousand colors
blended with the languages
of as many countries--
For we all are one--
Creates a new color
And a new tongue.

We are never at an age we would like to be

They won't let my grandfather
have his teeth
Or his glasses either.
Seems they always wind up
over the fence.
The nurses laugh and poke fun
with needles
as is necessary in
their occupation.
But he is not a child
I ask them not to treat him as one.
He raised me
Bouncing on his knee
Until I was too old.
He helped me see
We are a never at an age we would like to be.

Flashback

I peep around a corner
from the kitchen into the
built-on-in-the-1960s living room
where my grandparents sit watching Hee Haw.
PaPa
Takes me on his lap.
I smell his aftershave.
A makeshift pony
made from thighs and knee caps
serves to draw me to the
peace that comes only at that age
and stays till suppertime
or maybe shorter.
After all
Peace is one, and we are billions.

Paintings

As I look at the paintings on my wall
There are none by Michelangelo at all.
A bird, a clock, a bakery, a beach...
When I want any, they're within my reach.
You have grown, and they have stayed.
I've come to realize,
This is how a father gets paid.

Returning

Would you rob me
of the mystery of life?
Blame my defiance on
the inadequacy of science.
For today
Walking under a blue sky
I was followed by a butterfly.
Bopping around here and there
Like a wind-blown flower
Or a falling leaf
marking there the hour
Of my return to belief.

No one on base

Old,
he sat
walking up to the batter's plate.
Cupping his head
No one on base - ninth inning.
Down by three
Two outs.
One run won't win this game.

Disturbance

On my way to work
through quiet
countrysides,
My indolent car purrs
and I'm taken
with the world.
"We haven't ruined it."

On the right-hand side
from not too far
I am shaken by a little fawn,
bleeding from head to foot.

Voice

A voice
 above
a thousand
spectators inside
rises
unafraid
making others nervous
I have kept him silent
Amassing an army
of conservatives
to preserve my dignity.
Walking always like a cat
Not wanting to admit my desires
for the scraps in the mouths of dogs.
I raise my nose as if knowing something
that the eating ones don't,
all the while starving
and in search of impetus.

The voice that would be strong
Has been silent far too long.
But it cannot speak,
For I have made it weak.
And I have my doubt
whether I will ever let it out.

Curse

I met a cat
Lying flat
on a paved driveway,
who looked so carefree
that I got a little jealous.
He had--well, not enough troubles.
So I gave him mine
And walked away.
He has nine
lives anyway.

Excuses

Always in the back of his mind
he thought he would write
a book
a poem
a song
that moved the world to changes.
But always in the front of his mind
there were things to be done:
a bill to be paid
a neighbor to be visited
dishes to be washed
a yard to be trimmed
tires to be rotated
oil to be changed
and a job to make money
for the endless
relentless
trickle of the to do-s
that come after the I do-s.
And the children grew
older and as they did,
he grew wiser
finding that
no book
no poem
no song
could hold a candle
to bringing up family
washing the dishes
and tucking the kids into bed at night.

Loss

I am Aesop's dog
Show me a pond and I'll lose my bone for
Mere reflections of what I already own.

Beautiful Song

It must have been a beautiful song you sang
For the earth to take shape,
and the moon to hang around.
The earth tuned her ears,
The water began to shake
and form waves to clap the beat,
The land rose up and tapped its foot,
The trees flipped their leaves seductively,
The critters sang their mimics of what they heard--
All glad to be alive to hear your song.

I too try to hear it.
With ears wide open
and try tuning my heart to the beat.

Worship

On the way to church,
as the car filled with perfumed bodies
covered in fine clothing
turns toward the holy place,
A man pedals by
sweating.

Reprieve

Give me a quiet place
When the chores are done,
Work is finished,
And sleep for others has come.
Give me a quiet place where children's lips rest
For tomorrows talk and play.
I'll take night, they
day.
Give me this quiet place
Where I can hear you clear.
I'll be still. You will fill my heart with joy and peace.
To face the chores that never cease.

Distracted

Dear parent,	
It	Girls
seems	Puberty
your	Computers
child	Bullying
has	Texting
been	Coke machines
distracted	Food filled artificially
lately	with sweeteners
in	preservatives and
class.	chemicals I can't name
I've	Channel one
noticed	Late nights in front of an
it's	Xbox
hard	Wii
for	<u>Playstation</u>
him	Streaming video
to	MP3 players
concentrate	Cold cereal
on	100% DNV of sugar
algebra.	The Internet
As you know,	Pornography
algebra	Drugs
is	Alcohol
important.	Sex

Spring

What is spring, Grandma?
What is spring?
When you sing dear,
When you sing.
But I'm singing now, ma.
I'm singing now.
Yes -- and it's snowing spring, dear.
It's snowing spring.

Momentarily

(on the bombing of the Murrow building in OKC and the day before)

Someone, some song said

Find peace.

I replied,

"Is there?"

And yes--for I found some
momentarily.

Driving toward the city I had long longed to escape from.

The sun

In all its warmness,

Nestled near my heart,

Brought golden security,

And I became emboldened
momentarily

And coming back, a sign said,

"Don't do what you want. Do what you ought."

At the same time

Others were working on a plot
to kill those who are dead today.

The children.

Life truncated by a

Senseless explosion.

Fifteen miles from its center

I felt the magnitude

Of it explode in my face

And once again my impotence
rushed on me.

I could do nothing but watch

And at times not even that.

As the victims

casualties, fatalities, realities

Were brought out. I sat

Helpless as usual.

With no info for perusal,

I fumbled around for that peace I had earlier.

Not knowing if family lived or died.

And I heard again that song,

It's not that there is no peace

It just doesn't stay for long.

Love?

It's time
for those
of us
who really really
believe
to get rid of the queers
And praise God, he hears.
These years
will be triumphant
And when we hear the trumpet
We'll run to meet Jesus
and kiss
And I know this
There'll be hell to pay
When we show them what love
really, really
is.

An angelic kind of mother

Eddie went and spent
her money on no honey for the baby,
no soothing milk for the boo hoos,
or syrup for the achoos.
Instead she got a line of angel tattoos
that floated up and down her arm.
Those tattoos she used to
show this one and another
she's an angelic kind of mother.

Confidence

It's the net below
the artist's trapeze;
it's the tissue awaiting the blow
of your sneeze;
it's the cushion for your fall,
the "Ah, never-mind," the "not big at all."
It's the go-ahead run,
the long awaited sun,
The dawn at the break of day,
the thought that will all be okay.
The honey in your comb,
the cover of the dome,
the "Get out of jail free" card,
the inspiration of the bard.
It's the thing that comes to your defense,
it's your own confidence.

Insults and Injuries

I said,

"Remember how I cared for you
When you came to me as infants?
Some of you had barely a breath,
But I held hope and helped you age.
Had I not resuscitated you,
Had I not coaxed you and nursed you and held you in my arms...
breathed in you the very life...

You would not be here.

As you grew, I gave you gall.
Gave you clothes and a chance.
Resisted swinging love, that axe of death.
As you fattened I found a cage
And fed you on my anger.

MORE

You wanted.

And soon you were biting at the hand
as it reached inside with food.
Had I not resuscitated you...

Now I see you for what you were.
Insignificant slights.
Unintentional jests.
Slightly joking affronts.
Yet a few lies and one real injury.

Give me the key. Unlock my cage. And let's not bicker"

But all I heard was a snicker.

Getting up there

Though young by certain measures,
I am getting up there.
I look up—
The tailgate is high
Yet you ask me to jump.
My back legs shake.
I plot, back down, whine.
Mustering my strength I lunge
Grabbing the bed with my front claws only.
They scratch the paint and I fall back to earth.
You're patient.
You talk to me kindly,
lead me back a few steps,
pat the bed encouragingly.
I promise
next time
I'm in the bed
to sit closer to the front
so I don't fall out.
I'm determined.
I'm getting up there.

He said so

I asked my God for this
and he said no
I asked why
and he said, "Because I said so."

I asked my God for that
and he said no
I asked why
and he said he said so.

I asked my God why the bird sings
why the earth spins
why life begins and ends.
He said, "Because I said so."

Now I'm good to go
next time my God says no
just because he said so.

Harlem Revisited

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it die and decay
And then turn to dirt?
Flowers grow in it.
Or does it brighten a day
And heal old hurt?
Peace grows in it.
In letting it go
does the soul so grow
That it shoots to the stars?
—I bet
It's wasted regret.
For haven't you heard?
It's not dead yet,
Simply deferred.

Counterargument and Rebuttal

“But Lord
When did we see you naked
–and in need of clothes?
or hungry
–and in need of food?
or thirsty
–and in need of drink?
Please make this point clearer.”
“You didn’t.
Your eyes were always in the mirror.”

People and poems

don’t always come with exposition,
don’t tell you the whys, the wherefores,
of their disposition.
They change as you get to know them,
strike you as odd at first
but inside they’re waiting to burst,
belch, begin, bereave...
Give them time away from your abuse
They’ll make sense.
“The opposite of love is not hate. It’s use.”

Parallels

Now I see that all on earth
Does not have its heavenly parallels.
For all my sins
There aren't a thousand hells.
I no longer ask the meaning
Of a chance meeting
Or why the car stopped
when it did and should
Or why the hook on my seat belt
stayed put.
I've changed my mind
and thank God for it all the time.

My arms long not

My arms long not for her to hold
on lonely nights as these,
for in my mind I hold her tight
and put my arms at ease.
In my mind we smile and laugh
in love and share as friends,
all this time without a word
--that when said--
would make us make amends.
On a cloud up in the sky,
we zoom and zip and soar and fly
till the mornings call to me
and we must say goodbye.

Question

So you want a good job
to earn good money
and respect.
And you want a nice house
to keep your family safe
in honey
and you expect
your neighbors to look up
look up to you,
high and mighty — And
you
need good health to make good things possible
And you'll work hard at
it.
And you'll be a good man,
a good deed for a good deed.
Does this mean you don't want
me?

Open

To get a cigarette
butt out of a bottle
without touching the bottle
without sticking sticks in the bottle
or a vacuum to suck it out--
That old enemy
got you out of me.
Filled me up and you
floated right out--
you need water.
Living water reverse the tide.
Fill me up and wash him out.
Fill me up.
I'm open.

Presents for my boys

I could have given you a deerskin drum
and a rod made of bone with leather at the tip.
I could have given you a dance
near a fire,
faces painted the colors of dissection,
a way of being in life.
I could have given you stories that made your mind long to know the Great Spirit
that secured in you a purpose
and gave you a sense that you belonged.
No such thing as teen. Rite of passage.
You could have sucked in the night air
under a panoply of diamonds.
You could have run barefoot
through a camp
with aunts, uncles, cousins, neighbors shouting at you,
Stop!

Instead, I give you an Ipod.
I give you bottled water,
new shoes,
an education.
I give you books to read and learn from
so that you may know the world but—I fear—never
your self,
your own holy self.

Dead bees

“Dead bees can be expected in the world. The shadow is a part of life.”

The sermonizer said,
"God's love is enough"
After the sermon,
I sweep the dead bees
from the back room
near the baptistery.
The vacuum stinks of their demise.
Trapped and with bulging eyes.
Death in a panic. Some crawl
None flies, like time.
A shadow overtakes me
And I don't feel loved.

Creation in a handbag

You may not understand
my slipping away
my going out
my leaving my mind.

But there's a place--
Light enough to carry with me in a handbag,
Light enough to be unburdened--
where I go.
Sun a bright high in the sky
Noonday heat
beach
Pina colada,
and girls—oh their beauty.
We do not make love.
We smile,
Greedily sniff the sea sprayed
Air, and enjoy creation
in a handbag.

Lib

So much to do before we rest,
so much to do.
Baby in the closet,
baby at the breast.
We will suffer for this great career
shoved upon us
heaved upon us.
Pressed by a legacy of good intention,
we shall work and bare children
(or kill them if we wish
for they would rape our bodies
and take our rights)
who in turn will oppress us,
like the hideous intent of men
who've kept us
for centuries hidden away in abbeys, like nuns.
We'll have none of it.
We'll have our freedom
with or without baby in the closet,
or baby at the breast.
So much to be done before we rest.

Nature's paint

Tell me bird,
flying in her house and
doing things I ain't,
Tell me if you can
where nature gets her paint.
I like the pinkish purple hue
through which your wings are chopping.
And to your left a gallant blue,
I simply must go shopping!
Cause
My heart flutters in colors
drear and drab
the freedom it desires
hides in darker shades of gray
In which my wings
get lost
as you must in wind on a strong day.

Sing freely

Oh, you're right.
You're bloody right.
You sing freely of the dances,
Sing freely of the home.
Light-hearted as the day that passes
singing freely of the dances
freely of the bone.

You're bloody right. You take your chances,
Enjoy your fist and your
amber brew.
Might I share a cup, or two?
And sing freely of the dances
Before my time too passes?
You're right. You're bloody well right.

It's a good thing for the daytime,
--But not so good for night--
To sing freely of the dances,
Sing freely of the bone.

Remuneration of the help

She is the hired help
whom I pay with
acceptance of indignations
with sacrifices of my dreams
with swallowed pride
coughed up fur-ball-like as an offering of peace.

But at least the wash is done,
the clothes are folded
the sink is empty
the kids are fed and content.
When Jesus said, "Share in my sufferings"
This is probably what he meant.

Asriv Eciv

He was an uncertain fellow,
Unsure of what he was
Sure of.
Eyes on a million things
Hands on none.
The Mitty in him was
A heart that desired more than the mind
could give.
Or vice versa
Or versa vice
Asrev Eciv
from the Slavic Northwest
Where girls are bought
and sold in sex trades
Saw the rising of a new world
and wished to rise with it,
at least to be a helium balloon.
(In China they're called air balls)
And isn't that silly that no one
thought of putting balloons on the Titanic?
So this uncertain fellow,
Asrev Eciv--
Who smelled of late afternoon fish
and
who wore long whiskers
and
who carried himself with an
air of dignity
despite the scandals of a younger Asrev
when money was
charming to women
and women charming for money
as liquid as
freshly melted snow,
though perhaps more yellow
--wanted!
Wanted words to be less impotent
Fewer words for greater gain.
But words will never make
up for one's not knowing what
he would like to say.
Not even the greatest bard
spoke greatness through a disheveled mind.
So he sought clarity.

Hum...Hum...Hum...
Vegetables
Hum...Hum...Hum...
Shu Tsai and Ami Tofu
Hum...Hum...Ho...Hum

The mind is not the barrel of
a cannon in some ways.
It should not be cleaned as such
or purged
for purging gets rid (often) of what
should not be got rid of.

Outside once
during a meditation on the Tao
He heard a screaming
And a dog's barking seeming
to dance unrelated together.
"A lot," he said, "Like a pinball
being shot back and forth in the machine
while listening to a creaking door."
(Don't ask me--He said it.)
And he realized
That eating meat had no
relationship to not eating meat
Romans 14:20
or to the feeling of euphoria
one gets while engaged in
intimacy or to
farmers who see no help from a swarm of locusts
or perhaps even to spiritual enlightenment!

So our Solomon
threw off the solemn self
And engaged in
wild sex parties
drunken sprees
a few bank robberies
a kidnapping
and a partridge in
a pear tree.
Having sunken so low
and living in a pig sty
he went back to his father
who just happen to have killed
a fat cow by accident

and asked for more money.
Originally, the father had been
happy to see him, but when
he asked for more money--
Well, I digress.
The end,

he found,
of worldly pleasures
was a hell in itself.
empty minds
empty hearts
empty pockets
empty mouths
empty stomachs
empty kisses

And a great deal of other emptiness-es.

A father's love is non-condemning
(unless you're a complete loser)
All accepting
(unless you do something he can't accept)
and all forgiving
(until you do something he can't forgive)

Thus, with a new loan from a generous dad
Asrev started anew
Accepted as acceptable by a church
in Bellevue
in which he became involved
as sort of repayment for
all his problems they had solved.
And the love he felt was grand
As they all walked hand in hand.
He felt he was truly a part
of love in the Lord's heart.
But soon
doubts arose
As to whether he should breath through his mouth
or just his nose
when leading congregational singing.
And he became unsure if Jesus really meant
you ought to sell all you got and just rent,
or if it was hyperbole.
And whether one cup or many

was best.
And whether he should wear
the brown or green vest.
And whether works could
save him
Or on grace he should depend.
So many questions plagued his mind
That Asrev had to leave the church
in time.
Nobody really seemed to
miss him.
So he found a lady who would
kiss him
In ways he hadn't been kissed before.
Assuming such was love
He entered a union with the one just mentioned
above.

And the two shall become
one flesh--
It seems they did a few times
until she told him "I love someone else."
With the closing door behind her
Asrev was alone again.

When the sun shines in May
one cannot complain.
Unless the world that once was rising
falls back
in one's lap.
It must be much harder for a wine skin to be empty
than a bottle.
Asrev was a wine skin of course,
virtually a Shar Pei now.

It had all lasted a little while.
But the pinball slowed down
And the door stopped creaking
And the dog stopped barking
And the helium was leaking
And he went back home to be with his father.
Who knew best.
That was the life of Asrev Eciv,
from the Slavic Northwest.

Pearly Gates

When I'm dead and bald,
And my name is called,
I'll ask my God if I passed.
He'll probably say "Yes,
but only half-assed."

Up and Down

Father in garden
We with him
We see him
We talk him
Then—
We hide
God look down
God feel down
Try talk us
but need wait
till Holy Spirit down
On Mary
Then a baby
up He grow
till He die
down He go
secret like
Surprise satan in kingdom.
Then up up up he go
Stop midway-like on eart'
Tell 'postles bye
Up more he go
Then Holy Spirit down
down us all,
soon us all go up
all go up up up
soon we up
and no more down
be back with father
in garden

Be with Him
Be see Him
Be talk Him

Punch

Punch a hole in the darkness
down in the depths of the night.
Sing as the angels harken
My soul rise
Eyes set right
Spirit cries
A resounding amen song.

Marriage Rights

Maranda to her husband

You have the right to remain
silent.
Anything you say (or do)
can be used against you in the course of time.
You have the right to an opinion.
If yours makes no sense,
One will be provided for you.
If you decide to answer my questions now,
in a manner unacceptable,
you have the right to stop answering at any time.
Just make sure you don't exercise that right.
Knowing and understanding your rights as I have explained them to you,
are you willing to give us a kiss?

L'orange

Larry was a mime
and orange had no rhyme,
Until Larry thought to marry
him an orange.

We now have a word to rhyme with orange.
Allow me to introduce their daughter,
L'orange.

Tell Fairy

Time up on a once
sat I there like a dunce
fating the chew
listening for the line punch.
Hair then grew and did it tickle
as if I had slept like Van Rip Winkle.
But whatever I was
confused was I not an inkle!

Eye Phil good,
Y two shoes make my feat Phil good
too. Comfortable, Healthy, Heart
Y like uh can of Tom Otto Soup
Can make one fill
--Oh, how shall I say?
wholey.
What else is there?
Eye fill Good.
Aye say'n the tu,
who sew ever
be leave 'n
me? shall half
E. Turnell life.

Pronouns Oust They

If I, we,
he she
it and you
understood that peace
on Earth depends
on what we do,
do you know what I
think we'd do?
We may all stand up and
say,
"There is no more
they."

Don't count me out

I'll be the first to admit
that I in darkness sit.
That I curse too much
and act like such
people without a compass do.
But I do good things, too.
I go to school and have two jobs.
Teach the poor and admonish slobs.
Clean my room and eat my peas....
Don't count me out of heaven, please?

The master equivocator

I'm happy here with yes and no.
And quite content with "I don't know."
I believe in God with no solution.
I have no qualms with UFOs or evolution.
I'm saved one day and damned the next.
Some days I read, and others, can't care less.
One minute I love, the next I hate.
Believe in choice as well as fate.
Love two girls as my only mate.
But when you start to suggest I've sinned.
Remember what we have my friend
In common: a beginning and an end.

Sometimes I smile

from the heart,
Then at times
by request.
And sometimes I get confused
Which is real and
Which is jest.

Middle

In the beginning was the word,
And that word was all I'd heard.
But the world grew
And I.
Until one word became a few, and then
more
I listened to them
They were not enough,
Much less just one.
Though they refused to work together
I would force them.
Like a million pieces of a
thousand puzzles
Grinning each time I--by my own effort--
brought about a union.
But now the beginning is over.
No more introductions.
No more words.
No more puzzle pieces to force.
I'm in the middle
and intend, at least I intend,
to stay here till the end.

Taiwan Streets

At a traffic light in Taiwan in the 90s
Yellow lights that mean go
Green tea eggs being eaten from a plastic bag
Red splotches of beetle nut splashed at my feet.
These are the traffic signs.
A man pulls up to me, masked and hard headed.
Dogs with cancer of the lungs
and broken legs.
A roar from behind getting louder,
A glimpse, a fading, (a broken law?)
And what is left but perfumed petroleum vapors?
Stinky tofu mixed with whiffs of bread baking.
More gather looking left--
vulture like--
To see the cross traffic's light turn yellow,
which means go.
And with them, I do so.

Turned around

Dear Lord,
Something's wrong with my head.
I'm sure no one has noticed,
though such a deformity is hard to miss.
Can we talk somewhere private, in your office?
It poses a problem, and I'd like it fixed.
I'm sure it's just a simple mistake.
And, don't get me wrong,
I don't like to complain,
It's just – my head's on backwards
along with my brain!
And while I can still function all right
in my day-to-day life, like
eating and talking and sleeping,
I don't know which way is forward,
and I keep looking back.
How can I get anywhere if I
keep doing that?

Give me the ball, please!

Gimmedaball
Gimmedaball
can'tyouseeIaintnuttinif nIdonhavadaball?
Dude!
Yougaimedaball!
Igotsadaball!
Hollyshit! Lookatemail.
utakeadaball
utakeadaball
Ijustsitshairnwachitall.

Summer

May's here!
May's here!
The days are long
--song--
and winter's mostly gone.
Soon,
How soon
It will be June.
Tomorrow,
Yes, tomorrow, a new tune.

The watched clock

A loud clock is ticking
slowly away the hours.
Lowly--
I'm feeling sickened
so low.
To know
That such a friend's so quick in good times
But in bad,
My!
So slow!

Students are poems

In class,
a nagging feeling told me to write a poem.
"I should be writing!"
I grabbed a pen and looked at my students.
Now, I'm not bragging,
But I realized then
More poetry was in that class,
Than all I'd written in the past.