

# Turn the Wheel

Poems by

**David Cope**



**Turn the Wheel**

## **Vox Humana**

**Turn the Wheel**

*By David Cope*

**Silences for Love**

*By David Cope*

**Coming Home**

*By David Cope*

**Fragments from the Stars**

*By David Cope*

**In the Inmost Hour of the Soul**

*Selected poems of Marina Tsvetayeva*

*Translated by Nina Kossman*

**On the Bridge**

*By David Cope*

**The Promise Is**

*By Kip Zegers*

**Quiet Lives**

*By David Cope*

**A Song Out of Harlem**

*By Antar S. K. Mberi*

# Turn the Wheel

Poems

1997–2002

by

David Cope

The Humana Press



Totowa, New Jersey

## Dedication

For Suzy and for Jim Cohn, who have sustained me thru these years.  
Thanks, too, to my dear friend Sharon Wynkoop  
for her challenges and encouragement,  
to my father for his help with “Fran” and for the Hopi Point sunrise,  
to Graham and Jean Thompson for their gracious welcome  
to the English Midlands,  
to old friends Gary and Lin Schmidt for being there,  
and to the Breidenfeld family, for years of quiet courage  
in the face of despair.

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“After Du Bellay” is adapted from Joachim du Bellay’s “Songe” (section IV) of *Les Antiquités de Rome*.

“After Ronsard” is adapted from Pierre de Ronsard’s Sonnet 26 from the second book of *Sonnets Pour Helene*.

Cover glyphs:

བྱིད་རང་ག་པར་ཕེབས་གས།

Tibetan: Khe-rahng kah-bah phe-geh

English: Where are you going?

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## Owashtanong Sunrise



## millennial blues

megalomaniac messiahs, end-of-world blues,  
missiles, comets & scientific speculations

spin like asteroids thru airwaves & newsprint:  
but where are the sunflower monkeys of venus?

where the rucksack singers & the lost sheep  
sleeping over the next new range, icy peaks

diamonds in dawn sun? where the naked boy  
posing atop the devil's butte, Adonis in his

Adam rose? I say, trumpet this lean dawn,  
its whirlwinds & quiet dreams alike a rune:

what Walts & Emilies & Wills will sing above  
the din of politicians & media spinners,

what cantors raise the homeless cry & name  
the lie as it will lie, what prophets recall

the lush breathing of one vast sigh & find  
the lost spinner weaving tiger worm & lamb

to swaddle the infant in its rocking cradle  
that a singer awaken to find the dawn?

you, singer, crying thru sparks & bones—  
where are the sunflower monkeys of venus?

## Lost Loves

old man slim boy  
    & boy-to-be,  
        I wake in the cold  
moon where even  
the crickets lie silent & the leaves

    hang in the flooding mist,  
        black streets silent—  
even the midnight  
screamers gone to bed at last—

& hear you though lost  
forever  
    singing in my ear, feel your  
tender touch as you  
    stroke my forehead—

so many gone down  
    the lost river, so many waiting  
now for you & me to  
    join them, singing

in some night apart,  
    shadow faces alight with  
secret fires,  
love that floods

even this room if only we  
    turn to it, & make it ours.

## **the white-bristled sallow face in the photo**

has clear blue eyes & no family. the preacher who'd begged him each week—"come to the mission where we can help you"—brought him a flannel shirt & chicken soup & found only the rumpled sleeping bag, scraps, the cold corpse strangled & heaved among pylon stones—for what? under this overpass, the traffic roar of thousands soars through this hour of pearl sky & red-lined clouds; the lights of downtown offices already wink & shine, reflected in the waves below—in the Amway Hotel, hotshot conventioners & stock splitters fork their eggs & lift their glasses, pause & muse at the passing water: a swan has landed in the eddies not far from the leafless red kinnickinnic & poplars whose buds already swell with spring, near the graffiti'd wall & landing where the old blind trumpeter blows each morning's blues like a funeral hymn, welcoming hikers with his bright eyes.

## Owashtanong Sunrise

light breaks in the racing waves,  
    hissing currents roaring around  
        pylons, across shoals—  
            hidden rocks  
    send up plumes & roostertails  
& swirling flowereyes of spray—

(here a thought of you who'll stand where I now  
    stand, & you who waded along  
    this stream & sang for fish,  
pronged stick pointed for striking,  
    & you, who watched aghast as logjams  
    upstream cascaded in *debacle*, crashing  
thru bridge after  
    bridge—lumber barons uptown splitting  
dividends grown from their grasping hands)—

    now one greybeard bends,  
        mutters & sighs aloud in the stream,  
limpsy jaw & chicken-flesh neck  
        working the air with syllables,  
    machine-like,  
as he plies the currents,  
        casting again & again, no luck—  
    *no luck*—  
eyes turned up to you in brief greeting—

then a strike, & both you & his chatter are forgotten—  
    his bandy arms now wholly turned  
        to his task, playing the fish back &  
forth thru currents—  
        wild rolling silver streak  
    flashing in the green spray—  
the old man's legs braced against a rock cutting the stream,  
    the fish now cresting the waves,  
  
leaping & plunging beneath again,  
    then gone . . .  
    he pulls the slack line in,  
        opens his bait bag  
fishing around for a big one, turning the hook to take  
    a wildly wriggling worm—  
& casts again & again,  
    flowers of spray & lights like eyes  
        still flashing about him.



## to you who dream

you live in no one's shadow:  
what shadows  
shadow your desire, the long line

of fathers & mothers who sang  
that you might  
sing & hear their voices dissolved in dust

still caroling your blood & eyes to be?  
what lost father,  
football coach, first love & panting hope,

what prophet howling in your home town,  
singer shouting  
from phonograph, what lines once spun

thru living breath breathed anew  
in yours when  
you were alone in your bedroom,

with your shadow stalking you along  
the wall & under  
the full moon outside among bare trees

in the midnight breeze? what lovers  
gave you tender  
dreams that linger still upon your breath?

who'll be shadowed by your shadow  
    & hear your voice  
calling, waking him in his most silent moment,

long after you are dust & light?  
    what worlds will spin  
in loves so spun, alive yet unforeseen?

## Fran

I see my parents still  
    wailing in the living room Argentina Street,  
a grey day, no wind  
& out the window traffic flashing past—Aunt Fran's  
    husband & son Dutch, my older cousin who'd  
filled his room with electronics, a genius at 13, killed,  
accident in the Rockies,  
& she in a hospital, her arm broken—my first  
    memory of lives, faces swept away from my life—  
later, when the sun broke thru,  
wondering where we go—I was six—

& after that, Dutch's oak furniture arrived,  
    his bed to be my bed, his mirror where my face  
would stare back, sigh & dream of love—  
& Fran, recovered, circled the world alone, sent me  
coins from England, Austria, Egypt, Japan,  
    mysterious envelopes that arrived in the mail  
worlds beyond my suburban sidewalks  
& mystery gardens where I'd pause  
    before an open rose & lose a day in dreams—

later, her house burned & she escaped  
    miraculously, settled & worked in Maryland  
as my parents' marriage cracked up,  
grandpa died, I raged at fallen love & lost my heart  
    until, lost child, I found myself in Sue  
& found my father again & heard  
    my long-lost grandma's sighs,

Fran the oldest child who'd seen more  
    & kept herself apart, learned to be alone—  
yet after the loss & the fire & the years apart,  
    she met her Hale & danced in her 70s like  
        a teenager, a few years without pain—  
a few years blooming in the fullness of her womanhood—

who guesses how much we can know even of those  
nearest us, how others cope & sing above their suffering?  
she'd refuse a funeral, would  
    go home to lie with her Hale—  
        these last months  
awaiting an end that now comes swiftly—& I, learning of it,  
    sit with my sisters & my family, my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday  
stilled in this quiet moment filled with her life,  
flocks of birds wheeling in slow motion, hovering around  
    the feeder in winter snow—

## the reception

as the wedding guests swallowed their wine & beer, crunched hors d'oeuvres & exchanged small talk, one who'd had a few too many found out another was the son of the man who'd fired his brother at the factory—"son of a bitch! your father's a son of a bitch!" he shouted, his florid face leaning forward, finger pumping the air like a fat sausage. how could the boy explain he hadn't grown up in his father's house, how take this old man's rage, how know what his dad had done? he retreated to the garden, where three girls were singing along to an old song as they & their boyfriends danced, hips swinging around to rolling thunder, their wild eyes & laughter an interlude for overworked sighs. inside the house, he could hear the old man's wife & sons—"shut up, Ralph! Jesus, what're you trying to prove? you'll embarrass us all!"

.

## Empire of Sorrows

Sing now the tears of the innocents at Red Rocks,  
*Ave Marias* wailed for bullet-riddled shadows—  
yet still missiles shriek thru never-ending night

as Jesse frees boys from the serbian prison  
where tongues are silent, choked with screams—  
& still streams of women weep for lost lovers,

hobbling thru checkpoints, shaking hands clutching wild-  
eyed kids, grandpas & grandmas cringing nearby—  
& still missiles shriek thru never-ending night

as generals point at flow-charts, recite stats & sortie  
counts & show films of bomb factories exploding—  
still streams of women weep for lost lovers

as the shadows of columbines sway in the breeze,  
gunfire's Moses defies Denver's red sundown  
& still missiles shriek thru never-ending night—

armored histories spout the reasoning of blood,  
careful communiques word us with corpses,  
& still missiles shriek thru never-ending night—  
& still streams of women weep for lost lovers.

## Solihull to Marylebone

fast train past a fox & her kits in bright morning sun,  
a child's basketball stuck  
between tracks at Leamington Spa station—

row houses fenced in & crumbling—  
what eyes peer through these begrimed windows,  
survey their lives in these cramped yards?

onward, to London: scotch broom & queen anne's lace  
doilies to the tablelands along the way,  
farmwife waving from her backyard to kids

running through Albion's long fields, legs stretching  
beneath faroff hills & gigantic clouds,  
hundreds of sheep & lambs gamboling beyond—

now singing gangs of football fans,  
Manchester United red & Newcastle stripes, pile aboard,  
charged up for their collision at Wembley today—

how many sorties over Kosovo today?  
I dream back through an evening in Coventry, Alan's  
talk of firestorms during the blitz

& the revenge bombings in Dresden, always  
the little people *getting it*—  
roasted alive, broiled in their shelters—

Churchill's on Millenium Contest signs  
in the supermarkets where Englishmen wheel carts  
in silent pleasure picking out their next week's fare—

what'll I see when I finally come to London?  
*Julius Caesar*, enacted again 400 years after  
Thomas Platter saw it, with concluding dance—

the blood of centuries spilled again  
for the blind seer's sighs & the blinking wise.



## The Fourth

she came off the plane from  
Macedonia in tears, unable to speak except with  
hands & eyes

the anguish of two lost sisters,  
their children, their families,  
how would she find them *here*?

and her husband worried  
their luggage wouldn't make it,  
talking, talking, his hands wringing—  
the last remains of a life forever lost.

within a week  
he'd have a garden in, turned with a simple spade,  
his cabbages & peppers & shallots  
growing in this new American soil—

yet she alone,  
dreams shattered  
beyond internet Red Cross listings & English lessons,  
would stay at home,  
inconsolable—

## **Turn the Wheel**



## planting salvia & marigolds in rain,

the face of that blue boy dragged from the Thornapple River—  
foot pierced by three-pronged drag hook, cop pulling the line  
looking up aghast as news photographers shot their footage—

rises again as my fingers work earth around plant after plant—  
I see his last-gasp contortions rising thru calm water where  
I'd daily dive or paddle out in voyageur fantasies—a boy

I'd never met, who'd come from Ohio with children's choir  
to sing in my mother's church, she graciously offering them  
a swim, to cool off after long bus ride on a hot July day—

I never heard his voice or song, met friends, parents, knew  
his mind or guessed what he might've thought, boarding bus or  
seeing this, his last river, yet here he is again, a brother

yoked to me in my childhood heart, his blue face a light  
in dark water gone out in the interstices of fugitive moments—  
stepping back from this riot of red & yellow petals, I pass

this gesture thru evening fog hovering above to that long-  
lost face who touches me still on the river of my childhood  
dreams, enigmas & lost sighs floating up in long silence.

## Ghazal of The High Plateau

mesmerized on the trip to this high plateau—the barren promontories,  
windswept spruce giving way to high scrub & thence to rock outcrops

where marmosets chattered your names to the wind as you sang, half  
in your sleep, tales of desert sun & wild waves on faraway November seas—

recalling the fallen hiker, his bandaged legs straddling his giant companion,  
weary eyes haggard in stubbled cheeks whose lips whispered only blues—

time passed so quickly you hardly realized you'd arrived, & now, with  
news of loved ones dead beyond your grasp & hopes, you turn to vanished

loves, vanished paths, & find no way, even the path behind you vanished  
in clouds & mist, only glimpses of far peaks & guessed-at valleys ahead,

even the cairns indistinguishable in rock scree. here, there is only one  
tiny yellow flower, an unearthly flower, nameless, a crooked flower once

signed to you by a long-dead sage. this is the sign you were to wait for:  
consider your frail bones, aging in the meat of your boyhood leaping,

those aches in loins that once propelled loves & led to singing heights,  
that song which brought you here, that you might sit. the mists are

the myth of this season; the next path can't be seen with living eyes;  
the heart's blind cupid can't fathom the love to come; sit. even the light

will spill in strange showers over your tired limbs & into your eyes which,  
blind until now, will open to the shadows of meadows & peaks still

unknown. in the dream, deer paths now blazoning broadway,  
towers stacked high with grumbling dreams & cell-phoned illusions

melt away, as does the day you were stopped still before prairie-wild  
grass, the sun blazing lights & shadows thru waves rolling to the horizon.

old friends return like wild leaves in moonlit valleys, sit & sing in your ear.  
the mountain is not the mountain. inside the vanished waves, beyond

mists & lost paths, songs become pathless riddles in your white hair  
& aging eyes, your child-corpse moving on with naked winged feet,

the unearthly flower now a sprig at your ear, as you sing silence at last,  
a breath, an ayre floating beyond this air as surely as you yourself were sung.

## Frankie's Blues

Frankie squirmed, eyes brimming,  
    hands shaking—unfolded the letter  
& struggled to say how he'd turned

    from his own son, who wouldn't confess  
to killing the girl even when the judge & jury  
    gave him Jackson. Frankie raised his eyes:

his long struggle to hold down jobs, his  
    sweet smile, his war with the crack dealers—  
& now this, he torn & turned against his family,

    the boy's mother, who'd used their son  
as a drug runner when he was five:  
    "I couldn't get to him, they wouldn't. . ."

shoving the letter on my desk—his offer  
    to raise money, penance for  
the crime his son wouldn't admit—hands

    trembling—hoping they'd forgive,  
the night-after-night struggle to find some  
    way to redeem his blood—& what

help could I give, generations torn &  
    shaking apart before my eyes, what help  
but to share the silence & the moments

with him in his solitude & tears,  
lost brother safe in memory's lacuna,  
our breath exhaled & gone forever—

what life find light in jiving nightmare  
tunnel of red-rimmed eyes, what calm  
sighs sing amid the shaking sobs?



## **dried leaves flashing before full moon**

drove all night thru naked November  
    wilderness lit by moon & milky way  
to bring the last divorce papers to his ex,

    & found his father dead by morning,  
the long coma over, & now he sat  
    stunned with the finality, the stillness

of his own thoughts, the tenderness  
    of an old friend's arms around his  
shaking frame, no hope beyond

    quaking sunset. later, composed  
at the evening service, he showed  
    the photos of his dad on Okinawa

with the guys, the tower of beer cans,  
    the camaraderie of post-war smiles,  
photos too of his dad's courting dance,

    the early years of love, the years  
raising the kids, the first grandkids,  
    the walker, the soft smile of the old

man. the funeral home's video  
    remembrance bleeped out. no,  
she would not be coming.

tomorrow would be a new story.  
he took a breath, thanked friends  
for coming, & walked them

to the door, where the doorman  
swung the doors open, ushering  
them into the cool & windless night.

**Yeah, an' here he was,**

leaning down on me with his one eye still  
full of tears, the other now gone blind,  
singing an old yiddish ballad in my ear

like some long-gone yenta come back to  
find me a boyfriend—I'd been dreaming in this  
mile-wide field of headstones, the glassed pillars

in haze beyond, & distant rush hour thunder,  
wealthy slaves still quoting stocks & haggling  
in their hopped-up SUVs whistling while they

race to work—and above them, the raging torrent  
of dead souls screaming upward like roman candles  
into the mild sky toward the emptiness beyond

pole star & lost sailor alike. singers of my generation  
disappeared like evening rain when he left, burrowed  
into silent meditation in moonlit mountain cabins,

working on dreams deferred, hands rough now  
building invisible stone towers & tearing them down,  
learning the meaning of silence. a new breed

now runs the show, drives the planet ever closer  
to mammon's nightmare circus, buying, buying  
to save themselves from themselves, never

looking back, racing like mad horses for some  
lost nowhere horizon. once we'd thought to howl  
them back, yet there they go, ears ringing with

cash registers & cellphones. the heart's no longer  
heavy with the grief of loss; there are light moments  
when one may sing with long-dead friends,

watch dreams walk lightly from the living tomb.

## “La Goulue” Considers His Lines

O, I could wow ‘em  
    when I had the stage—  
        I had those boys  
singing in the aisles  
    calling out my name with *roses*—

    O those hip shakes, O let go!  
    & wild, wild eyes every night  
under the lights—

so when you called, I o’erlooked  
    my torso, once without a stitch  
(oho!)  
    of fat, & saw I’d not be what I was yet  
O the hap of it, to be

in my chartreuse gown & my  
    feathers again, to sing &  
        leap again—if only once—&  
feel my legs carry me up  
    in my fishnet stockings & slippers, to  
turn again & sing again—

    so I dream, alone on my bed, & peer  
into that mirror & see  
        that sweet-faced boy now  
    valiantly—is it age? hoping  
to live out some fantasy?—  
    or art, the love, the *feel* of it—

moving out into those lights &  
just letting go, letting be, the rush of  
breathing in a wild turn,  
sighing, again

& again, beyond the *image*  
we make for ourselves.

O to come again for you,  
come once more  
to that dazzling light!

## the passing shapes

beyond the great waves of dunes blown landward,  
fogbanks stretch north to the blind horizon, obscuring  
the swimmers in their last ecstasy, the islands where  
farms decay & crash into their crumbling foundations,  
currents where bones lie lightly among scattered wrecks  
on the shifting bottom—there, in a mother's sigh—  
where the submariners die in a blinding flash, dreams  
trapped in the cold pressing dark, there, childhood, tears,  
running in the mottled sun of forest shade, among mountains  
in spring, & a girl's hair flashing wild lights—he, high blood,  
now gone, holds her laughing together in summer rain, her  
kiss under an august moon—here, the watchers stare blindly  
into the engulfing fog, unable to touch what lies within  
the blinding white, yet certain of the shadow'd shapes passing,  
windy sighs like quick silences between an infant's cries &  
an old woman's cracked lips whispering ancient prayer.

## when they were younger

Jimmy Ray had once dressed up in drag & brought her  
bouquets, had danced her through seven bars  
& sat up with her, yakking 'til dawn, when they raced out  
to swim naked in the churning surf, sleeping the day away  
in the mottled shade of the wooded morraines. now,  
her small boy struggles with the insults of his classmates,  
her old Jimmy's doing the seven day shuffle & she wonders  
how she got here, if he'll ever excite her again, why she can't  
get this fat off her body, these crowfeet from her eyes,  
whether to be amused or offended when a slender young  
stranger eyes her up & down on the elevator. & today,  
her mother is 81, beyond her own mind in the rest home:  
what will she say to this voice of love become a shell  
of sighs when she steps through the rest home door?



## Tender Petals for Calm Crossing

along this silent path among cliffs thru terraced green you'll  
sing beneath your breath where the poet once dreamed

of his escape thru the clouds, where whole populations fled  
to rebuild shattered dreams, hands in the moist earth—

stone masons who shaped the rock attentively, that it might  
interlock & honor earth that gave both seed & harvest

in the sweep of seasons—ghosts today, they wander with you,  
picking your pockets, to know what dreams you bring

to this place, what breath you leave among these rocks,  
what song you gather in your backpack & basket of silence:

here, the lost mother weeping for her child borne to minutes  
of love before its last breath, the father pouring a lifetime's

devotion thru his hands, his face red with defeated love yet  
shining in all the brilliance of that loss—here, the lovers moving

together, their short gasps echoing in a great sigh thru which  
another child comes—here, the lost father who could not face

the wreck of his love in his own child's eyes, his sorrow like  
a hermit lost in the passes of his own valleys, his heart bursting

with roses he could not bring to his own table—here, warriors  
cut down like corn on a day as crisp as this, eyes turning skyward

one last time, up to the light as their blood gushes out on fertile  
ground, shining path where arms & legs of the dead clutch

& kick at heaven, vanishing dreams of hungry ghosts. so  
you come, bringing blessings & eyes to flush the tears that

still pool in the world's grief thru all the rages of lost centuries,  
all the weeping sisters crying for lovers who never appeared,

all the lost brothers marched thru barbed wire to death's  
final anonymity in the last bursts they'd ever hear, minds

turned inward to their mother's cries on the day they forced  
their way into this light, compassion now for them all:

that your dream be clear when you come to this pass, I send you  
this wish where tender petals turn, open in both darkness and light.

## Lear by lanternlight

white moon now  
thru the tent where  
Poor Tom brings  
his old father up to th' extreme verge—

my companions asleep  
far across the clearing, their  
logsawing complement to roaring  
winds above the highest firs—

this a.m., their kayaks were  
*taken* in raging cross-currents, yet one  
dipped & feathered merely  
with a paddle tip, & found the center—

to float where the heart  
slows, the ear tuned to  
the humming of that silence  
none hears in the smug city

where blindness comes not from  
cruelty, but the stealth of routine—  
even such an eye-  
less man may need to see

his life's a miracle, O moon  
thru my tentflap now—

## **The Abyss**



## Reading the Signs

far from the main track  
we push on  
thru old loggers' trails  
crossing & turning upon themselves,  
across the stream  
below the roar of the distant falls,  
into the dark,  
leaping from boulder to  
boulder, over  
the shoals onto  
the moraine's high bank, clutching  
roots & gasping, crawling upward,  
no sign of the watchers  
tho their eyes were on us—  
thru the abandoned  
ruins, crumbling brickwork  
still standing—  
deep in the valley, harvest moon  
over the last hill behind us,  
crickets  
crickets trapped in the last desperate  
song of their lives, & still no sign  
of the promised path—crashing  
thru twilight, heavy brush, to look up  
at last & see  
the stars beyond the moonlit hill,  
& now the faint trace  
of a trail, where we see, at last,  
into each other's eyes.

## My Bike

          leaned against the bridge as  
dawn sunshafts burst  
                  thru hills beyond,  
burned off mists  
          retreating upriver—  
how much must one shog off  
to come at last  
          to the moment  
beyond the thinking sigh,  
          crossing the bridge, waves below  
swirling into churning silence?

ashore, the lovers're  
          locked together asleep  
in their car's backseat,  
          gnarled fishermen  
ogling them as they trundle beachward,  
          arranging bait boxes & gear,  
lunches & coffee before  
casting quick lines  
          into the wild currents—

                  across the bridge,  
          Anishnabe sacred  
groves teem  
          with dragonflies, butterflies,  
bees gone wild  
          in the acres of petals,  
wild flights, birdcries  
          breaking the deep silence—

I could cry out—yet turn  
    & swiftly coast past ruined trestles,  
swampshack foundations near  
        rails where rolling stock  
    once showered sparks & smoke  
beyond mounds  
where a thousand years of dreams  
    cradle in skulls, lie  
        among turning roots—

        swiftly I pass  
through beds of wild indigo,  
    white pastiche of anemones  
coneflower & goldenrod,  
thru a maze of thoughts back  
    downstream to the shining river,  
        the silent beach,  
a day so clear I'd swear  
    it'll last forever—

upstream, the lovers  
    now wake together & rub  
        their eyes, stretch & sigh—

        the rodman pulls in his dream's  
    great fish, struggling  
with his own excitement,

    a single bee works  
        the late summer anemones  
            in the quickening breeze.



## Waking Ophelia

so you leave the shouting politicians, the hole blown in the Cole,  
even the cries of survivors, the eyeless days of rage on Gaza rooftops,

leave the tongue talkers & spin sellers—go out back & hear the three  
corbies croaking like mad Molls beyond the flames, & dream yr way

down the hidden path beyond the last playground fence, thru trees  
of heaven, beyond the teenaged round pounders in their ritual dance,

beyond the one-eyed gimpy preacher & aging mourners bent over  
an open grave tossing roses, go—to where the stream meanders

at the bottom of the sunken gulch, hidden beneath the low-growing  
willow branches—follow the current until it widens into a deep pool

flowing green with long strands of seaweed, where the striped bass  
lies deep in the brown pool, alone, fins beating still in still time.

beneath the mirror of the surface, in the reflection of the leaning Eve  
lost in her own face—only there will you find the shattered wall,

the silent cortege, the lover rocketing thru northern lights in blueblack  
skies—there you may witness the child reborn, Ophelia's opened eyes.

## The Gift

where nurses scuttled years & machines clicked & whirred,  
pushing air to lungs that they not collapse about his heart,

the room now is silent: no more parties with eyelids taped open,  
no Indy 500s surrounded by old friends who in later years could

only squeeze his hand or massage swollen feet until circulation  
returned, briefly, the soles grown warm—no glances back to

the boulevard of broken dreams, his days as a James Dean  
in waiting. nor will rockers blare Clash songs from the roof,

bring roaring sirens up the drive on the 4th of July—no more  
mannequins'll be blown up with dynamite, nor will wild boys

ride off lost trails drunk with visions. the ordeal of years  
put the clocks on hold tho lovers & family held up, somehow.

now he's only for the faint stars, finally out from this last  
station, this prelude to silence. today brings the gift—

that he was *here* so long, that he endured, silent, & kept us  
strangely clear through his silence, now at last set free.

## Her memory comes

in flashes now—

blinking

in a new room,

her life

shrunk down to this—

shadows

passing,

darkening the light

beneath the door—

her sister

suggests they walk:

exercise

is good, gliding

like ghosts thru scented

halls where

within rooms others

shift

and groan. there are (still)

memories,

as girls

crossing the straits

aboard the old ferries—

and her sister nearly

drowning in

the river, their father

plunging in,

suit and all,

to save her—

"I thought I was a goner"—

even their father's  
home from college,  
wide eyes when  
they sang  
*Little Red Light*  
("I'd sleep all day and work all night")—

bright morning  
now passing quickly—  
and she grown so thin,  
so quickly—

## that she can

no longer  
speak to him, with him,  
  
is difficult—  
she would,  
if she could, pull him in—a great fish,  
  
gnarled, petulant,  
  
a great beast—  
  
but he resists,  
taut against the line, unwilling  
  
or unable  
  
to leave that rocky bottom, that  
  
blue dream,  
its broken  
pearls,  
fallen anchors & snapped chains,  
rotted  
keels &  
dead men's bones  
  
(singing,  
he would imagine)—

so that this, after  
years of  
tugging, is where  
he lies, waiting  
alone, uncowed,  
persuaded despite  
his ridiculous rages that  
love, being loved,  
is more than dreamed ephemera,  
a muddy bottom swallowing  
lives whole,  
a hope, horizonless—  
(one imagines  
a further stage,  
beyond this,  
an awakening—  
yes)

## After the snowstorm

where mourners  
tossed roses into an open  
grave on a hot  
July day,  
shovelling dank earth  
atop the new coffin, now  
the blown snow drifts like a wild  
wave up to the road  
where the ploughman  
leans against  
his truck's great blade  
& breathes  
his smoke, stopped  
at last  
after hours of heavy  
ploughing.  
in the next meadow, a backhoe raises its last load  
from a newly dug grave—  
two men jump into the hole  
to finish  
& tamp the soil, to make it "right"—  
& far down the long drive,  
the hearse's lights appear,  
the procession trailing behind.

## Shattered,

eyes  
flushing

tears, she  
kneels before

the coffin  
& strokes her

great grandson's  
hair, kisses

him one  
last time—

shattered—  
the roaring

truck,  
another boy

at the wheel  
flooring it,

angry at his  
mother—



## The dharma at last

longdead in his dream the boys leap  
    one by one over the cliff into the wild splash  
        & the singing current—the tow pulling them

    down into green dark & silt where the sunken  
trees fell & were pinned as well, great black  
    branches looming up in the murk, fish tearing

        the guts of whitened & bloated corpses as  
    their eyes stared, marbled spheres like moons  
glowing in the dark. by night, the water clears, the

    shadow moon reflects off the pale carcasses—  
        & he is awake, panting, the moon shining  
thru his midnight window. he hears the voices of

thousands singing & weeping as police line up  
    & SWAT batons SWAT batons SWAT batons & march  
        march march into the now-screaming singers,

    their ranks breaking—the one-eyed bard chanting  
for calm—the ranks all fled, he left alone to sweat on  
    a factory floor, in a madhouse swabbing urinals. now

        the dreams are all moonlit, no destination  
    & yet this weary traveler sings in his passing  
steps, careless in the theatre of stars where the dead

walk with him daily, nightly, old companions  
urging him to rest as even days grow darker,  
the news ever more ominous. he must consider

the sleek craft of his final voyages, the turns in his  
last river, the song he will compose to take him  
beyond his last lay to sing in dreams where

his companions fled, to learn to walk among  
the living like a shadow in the daylight of  
their certainties, waiting for them to leap at last.

## Cross-eyed farewell

bored, out the door from  
yr life as it has been—

“it’s over”—yet your  
bloodsong’ll surge

like an old blind singer  
when you least expect her

to come back & beg you  
for a line & a sigh & it’ll

come out refined & gracious  
& wiser for the passage—so

wave before you disappear,  
& when you find yourself

anywhere near a wild river  
full of madhouse uproar, spring

& all, wait for me to appear  
naked wild with crossed eyes

to shoot the rapids together  
to nowhere campgrounds pow-

wow with spirits (& even if  
you don't show, the dream's

a sure bet here): so onward,  
to Nepal, India, Tierra del Fuego

to Marrakesh, to Timbuctu &  
the forgotten spice routes

where the ghosts wander  
forever in their shrouds,

bearing tea & sunflowers  
to longdead sultans whose

eyes have turned to pure light  
like the dew on desert blooms.

## The Disappearing Sages

as Voltaire would disappear through poppy & hellebore,  
through primrose & the endless sighs filtering from  
the half-opened windows of tenements & prairie palaces,

out the door forever into the meadows of waves surging  
toward some vast rocky plain where barks & liners lie  
broken, their treasures of bone & pearl & shattered steel lining

the stream like broken teeth, so these last voyageurs  
push off & disappear in the pearl mists each dawn,  
leaving the world to scowl & threaten, as it will. so

missiles careen into Palestine, sunflowers of blood,  
the hotshot pilot shaves a spyplane's wing & ejects  
at last into the wide wide sea, into a woman's tears & memory;

the pimple-pocked grads paste mortarboards to their heads  
& march away from their bulleted dead, aching  
with scars in their eyes. the magus himself must

break his staff at last & pass even his third thought  
as vain: courtier & statesman machiavel it to the end, where  
the last standing man is Caliban: thus the journey out,

the relief & laughter beyond the perilous voyage,  
the farewell to the alchemy of the word, the silence  
that illumines & heals the brainsick heart at last.

## **The People Themselves**



## as the dryers rolled

the radio blared “Louie, Louie,”  
kids spinning in corners  
to the beat, lost among strangers,

their teenaged mothers  
furiously folded towels & underpants.  
an aged toothless woman

leaned against the wall,  
muttering, swatting flies,  
her eyes clouded, cheeks swollen;

at the window, young  
fathers stared out, disconnected,  
watching others spin brodies

in the parking lot—no relief  
from the heat this day,  
clinging kids pushed away,

a nuisance—hands in back pockets,  
waiting for  
the women to finish.



## The Michigan Dead at Sharpsburg

each stone: a name, the state, a number  
(5000 here in all, laid out state-by-state),  
smaller numbered stones for the unidentified:

these slaughtered where dunkers prayed,  
early in the morning. farther across the circle,  
Sue wanders among the New Yorkers,

looking for Meagher's Irishmen, cut down  
in the sunken lane shortly after absolution.  
a sunny afternoon, stillness after two days

on the road—here the lakeboys, voyageurs  
& new immigrants, the hopeful ones,  
all Whitman's boys beyond all lilacs now.

## Traffic Backup, Chesapeake Bay Bridge Road

the firemen mull about, scratching their heads,  
adjusting their gear in the hot sun as others pry  
at jammed car doors or bend above a stretcher,

waiting to rush a broken body to the waiting  
helicopter, now landed on the road itself.  
another stretcher's laid nearby, lump

under the sheet—apparently a child—  
no one stands by or attends to it, & when  
a sirenless ambulance arrives, the firemen

load it slowly into the dark bay, & slowly  
the driver pulls away. finally, the workers break  
thru the door, tenderly lift a body to stretcher

& whisk it away to the helicopter, which rises  
above the corn, beyond the lines of cars, where  
anxious commuters race back to their own cardoors.

## The People Themselves

lightning streaks above the red eyes of the Washington Monument, beyond the White House, where sharpshooters store their rifles after their stand atop the roofs, zeroing in on citizens & gawkers alike as the presidential motorcade passed thru to the inner sanctum. but here, in the darkness & thunder of summer rain, a vast crowd stands silently under umbrellas all across the famous mall, even beyond the lines of outhouses jammed with defecating voters, beyond the monument itself—all hunkered down waiting for fireworks. On their one evening off, with their families or long-lost friends: in the frenzied rain, when the hacky-sack champs've retired to their puptent, one wild boy dances for tomorrow, swinging like a madcap Gene Kelly wheeling with his umbrella. & now the rain stops over the land, the vast crowd howls in a clearing twilight, shaking out umbrellas, Adams's boom-boom-boom big gas & fizzling fire below the still-revolving wheels of night.

## After Du Bellay

ivory columns raised on high,  
bases of the richest metal—  
alabaster capitals, crystal friezes—  
the double front of an arch put up for Mercury—

each face, a portrait of Winged Victory  
dressed as a nymph—  
& seated high on a triumphal car  
Roman emperors in their antique glory:

the work's so fine you'd swear  
it was made by hands forging  
& sharpening lightning.

above, clear blue, the end of this dream:  
such fine work, this arch—suddenly shattered—  
before my eyes, a landscape of dust.

## Clearing the Gazebo Roof

first one chips the lichens  
    off the cedar shakes, chops back  
        the wisteria poised to descend  
    from above, as another scrapes  
the new-made loam & pressure-  
    washes it all down, sitting  
        in the lush light of a Maryland  
    sunset, exhausted yet  
lifting a glass together  
    as the first fireflies linger,  
        lighting the meadow beyond  
silent as we grow still.

## Out thru the eye beyond the stars

upriver in full moonlight, past the forested bank  
where the old hunters' lodge once rotted away, even  
the bars on the windows fallen in, beyond  
the flatland where I once camped, a boy, & dreamed  
of Anishnabes & voyageurs in the deep night—  
dreaming back to that night when, drunk, we plowed  
upriver on a pontoon in deep fog, Charlie falling  
overboard again & again & having to be fished out,  
Todd & I like lookouts for stumps in the swirling  
current. now we approach the darkened banks & turn,  
& I think of you, far away in the firelands, grieving  
with your mother as her lifemate begins his journey  
beyond this void: I'd cup my hands & catch this moon  
& send it to you the way sages once drank this light in  
& sang their lovelong death songs as journeys out  
thru the eye beyond the stars, opening in tears.

## the years in a wink

white hair wildly strung  
out at all angles  
from her head, her eyes

bulging, winking  
among the sauntering crowd,  
she shat on her

wheelchair seat,  
laughing, he saw, & turned,  
covered his eyes,

bending toward  
their room.  
he would not talk of it,

seeking only darkness,  
solitude of the bathroom,  
the locked door.

## on the moonlit road

the old man  
    wandered alone,  
        his distended belly,

        sagging manbreasts  
    & phallus hanging out  
for the flashing headlights

passing, the drunks  
    making their way  
        home after a long

        night of sweat &  
    laughter—startled  
now at this vision,

    the pale wanderer  
        grinning in red socks  
            in the gathering fog.



## the distorted mirror

dodging rocks & gutting it out up-  
stream, finally one turns & floats down

sideways where mists rise & twist into  
spinning devils as the pearl light reveals  
the moraine beyond—here one floats,

at last, downstream beyond thought,  
beyond the manacles of routine & sharkbite  
news & corrupt polls & rumors of coming

terror—one floats at last to the smooth  
mirror reflecting autumn oaks & clouds  
above before the paddle breaks

this illusion, where the ripples turn  
branch and leaf to rolling shadows,  
the clouds to roiling white. one breathes

in such moments, even as a plane roars  
from the airport beyond, flashing  
in the sun, turning away for O'Hare,

bright dawn now cresting the ridges,  
shadows now burst in a flash of light—

**Gone (as you are)**



## ground zero

high in the tower  
rush hour headlights stoplights  
metal traffic

below, office workers  
streaming thru doors in a hundred buildings—

two sit on the stairs holding hands,  
one stroking the other's hair—she  
in tears looks up as

a dark stranger's shadow passes down  
into the stairwell below—

she waits until he is gone,  
turns & folds her head  
into her sister's arms.

## Blue Notes for New York

a winter of dust & paper  
fills mouths & eyes—  
faces forever racing away, in terror—

even in the rising sun, the bright  
day over battery, harbor, Liberty herself,  
ships speeding away toward Jersey shore—

so many gone down the dark way  
for nothing, amid flame bursts  
& bodies falling thru spreading smoke—

in dreams, millions tramp thru centuries  
down Broadway's ancient native path,  
golden door with its open promise, rush

hour crowds, saxophon'd canyons' bleak light:  
here a blue note for your long night of wails,  
a paeon for your fallen dancers' hearts.

# In Silence

*for Anne Barber*

hour after hour

they waited in the ER,  
expecting the onrush

of wounded & maimed—

yet there were only  
firefighters with

smoke inhalation,

cuts & bruises, hour after  
hour, the minutes

ticking away, the dust not  
even settled, filling  
the winter garden, the palm

court, where no

wounded walked nor  
rescuers bore the maimed,

only the silence &  
the realization at last  
that none would come

thru the open door,

beyond the shrieks & sighs  
& the endless roar.

## **L'amor che move il sole e l' altre stelle**

again, the towers fall again—crowds emerge from the great cloud  
where last cries float skyward in the endless roar—& days on end  
turban'd men run, gunmuzzles flashing, cars in flames, yet I recall  
l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle, & sing thru a silence of tears.

talk shows rake thru the bin Ladin bio, the chopped-off fingers  
of Saudis, caged young radicals in Cairo now loos'd on the world.  
tabloid covers put the demon in crosshairs, yet we do not forget  
l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle, & sing thru a silence of tears.

in spite of the ultimata of Bush & Blair, the Taliban's defiant cry,  
the endless string of caves like hole-in-the-wall hideouts for a demon  
bandit, in spite of survivors' curses & hoarse cries for killing, I recall  
l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle, & sing thru a silence of tears.

harvest moon hangs low in black sky which turns thru another night:  
we rest, work, laugh, weep, dream how a tender touch or quiet word  
might sigh a breath to awaken a world enraged, & hope they hear  
l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle, & sing thru a silence of tears.

## Anthrax'd

& booby trapped,  
compassion's key

dangling in  
bombsights, under media

blitzes & briefing  
room pronouncements—

“we’re dealing with sick,  
twisted people”—

who’d learn  
the art of terror

& give his life  
to rage, to overcome

terror?  
awareness, the prophet said,

is the key, hum  
to the bomb,

to the bomb,  
hum to the bomb

going off again  
& again in our own minds—



## Bomb Fragments, Body Parts,

where Taliban fighters once  
camped & awaited their day  
of glory, their welcome from

seventy virgins in their  
imagin'd paradise, the piles  
of rubble're all that's left,

two men picking thru  
looking for unspent bullets—  
blue sky above, line of brown

ridges valleys snowy peaks  
beyond, telescoped goatpaths  
where generations once must've

hiked in silence & heard their  
hearts, singing to bell'd herds,  
dreaming under a blue moon.

now, far above, B 52 trails  
mark the horizon where others  
drop bombs or die for

the same oily glory, blasting  
away for their big holy chunk  
of the gasping planet.

## ER Saturday Night

she staggered out of mass after delivering  
scriptural readings, burning  
pains in her chest, face flushed—

now, he sat by her in the ER, silent years  
flashing by in a confusion of images, wedding  
bells & tenement years & groping thru babes

& miscarriages & shitty jobs, her eyes  
now questioning, she talking thru  
her pain as the interns wander thru with

questions & routines, the machines above—  
green readouts, peaks & valleys charting breath  
pulse, life itself—clock relentless as an admitting

nurse's keyboard, the drunk two sheets over  
howling at the attendants, "fuckin' bastards, you  
can't do that to me, try it, you fuckers, try it'—"

finally, she must stay the night—blood work,  
chemical readouts, studies to see whether it was  
*indeed* a heart attack—& he is out, in the

cold night among the stars, helpless, looking back  
at windows where she must be looking down, her heart,  
their lives, in the balance of relentless day & night.

## Whaddya get

a big pig cookie jar loaded with oatmeal cookies,  
dusty kids' books, *Paddle to the Sea* on the lower shelf,

two Skippy jars filling with dime & penny dreams,  
holes cut in tops so we kids could tithe our allowances,

a burgundy plastic radio playing Tennessee Ernie Ford's  
"sixteen tons and whaddya get" as my mother worried over

pot roast—dad late coming home again—always at work,  
where diecast machines & production schedules were epics

in his dream. arriving now, at last, he'd wipe his brow  
& drop his briefcase, piles of papers—exhausted, half-

asleep—too tired to look out picture windows he'd slaved for,  
too tired to take an anxious son canoeing, black spaniel

panting at the door—too tired to look up where the evening  
sun shone thru autumn oaks, glinting on the river beyond

where already the moon rose & october's flocks gathered.  
finally, with stars coming on above, he sat, said grace

as we bowed & held hands, I tickling my sister's palm  
to make her squirm, my mother's eye open beyond.

## Blinding snow freeway rush hour

makin' a buck—damn fool in black pickup giant flag hanging off  
his rear races thru like it's a sunny day in July an' there ain't  
no tomorrow—cars fishtailing in his wake,

semis bearing down, flying over bridge no time to check the river—  
surely the whitelined oaks gotta be something to see—  
strange time to be working, always been my

pass out on the couch or bop to the Duke flippin' burgers or singing  
in the shower—big slowdown now, lotta red lights ahead.  
a good time, home alone, 3 hours, dozing, waking

prep to come for readings, poetry impresario in a bowler hat,  
how gather young poets' manuscripts for xerox?  
lotta work there—wonder if Antler'll let me

take 3 stanzas from Skycraper Apocalypse, if I can afford Paria  
Canyon photo in color on cover? should I give these kids  
Kerouac, Ginsu now? off the freeway, skidding

thru lights to park—cellphones now going off in class,  
we sit & contemplate snowfall over the city, lights winking  
in towers beyond this window, even snakelike

traffic muted on choked roads beyond, thousands stopped dead  
with tired limbs, empty stomachs, loved ones visible only  
in memory, fingers rapping on wheel for home.

## Gone (as you are)

when the currents push you  
    straight into that hairpin turn where  
        slammed sideways around  
    the bend two fallen mammoth tree trunks, stripped  
        & bleached, lie along each bank,  
branches forcing rushing water into  
    a narrow channel—brake  
    & cut thru surging waves, avoid the crash  
        that'd toss you into the roar the  
frigid waters, your craft swamped or adrift in  
    wild plunging currents—  
somehow you're through,  
    the river widens out,  
    calm, & you can  
sit back as morning sun fills forest & swamp.  
    ahead, deer wake to your imagin'd silence,  
leap for their lives  
    through cedar budding kinnickinnic giant firs,  
breezes raising whitecaps racing  
    toward you, & you await the moment when  
the wave line hits & you lift your eyes  
    to the new sky where  
all the sleepers are finally pushing seaward skyward  
    in a mad rush  
where the cranes lift themselves & are gone,  
    as you are.

## **The Broken Note**



## In a Sentimental Mood

like Trane's mourning sax wailing deepnight streetlight sorrow  
he waits & watches her disappear beyond the illumined circle—

out his life forever gone to another dream—he, stood up among  
backlit waterfalls in wheeling traffic, before a statue “the gilded hero”

like headless Herakles stoptime gliding toward hopeless distant  
towers lit up forty stories of shadows groping in fluorescent lights—

the night shift, heads bent over desks hunkered down like deadheads  
groping for tomorrow, for bleak sunshine factory smoke steamvents

rising thru naked trees stretching like spikes skyward, vapor trails  
beyond, endless graveyards tombstones angel wings weatherbeaten

granite tears, ships beyond freighting grain fords computers to green  
breasts of land, wild ports' hubbub swarming sailors longshoremen

drunken deckhands, ears fulla other news—ships too at docks  
disgorging blinking immigrants eyes glazed dreams of starry nights

wading en masse to stare up at blinding lights traffic roar fumesighs,  
old worlds fading in memories clutching at a word an icon a shade—

he wrapped now in her retreating steps—those nights they once held  
each other for life, shared warmth final defense against the loneliness,

the roar, the nights of sighing down their separate screams, all gone, all  
gone down, song for a lost embrace, a kiss against the sighs of dawn.



## Madadeyo in dreams

deep moonlight, blue night Norway spruce ginkgo & apple branches  
shadows across fresh snow blue-white,  
even roaring trucks up on 28th muted in this stillness—am I awake?  
Sue asleep by my side, sighing, turning, & now

I'm floating, up into stars in murky dark where old Allen still grins  
& weeps in dreams, his basso profundo echoing beneath  
3 a.m. ayres & madrigals springtime pretty ringtime friends giggling  
thru parts chorus of madmen warbling in the dark—

& Chris, long dead now, heroin overdose hot summer night, blue-faced  
corpse once genius riverboy who couldn't run his demons down,  
parents' religious cramp desecrating his death, legal injunctions against  
publishing his gay poems—madboy Chris, coming back

to reassure me, "yes, it's as empty as I'd surmised"—young wino  
who'd strung himself out with me, raging thru poems late night  
in garage, smoking pack after pack of Camels, spodioidi shouting darkly—  
they now vanish, their white eyes & bones melding into starshine,

singers gone back thru dream—how float thru these middle years  
so many shadows clinging behind, still keep that simple riverboy  
dream intact? running crazed thru classes appointments meetings  
conferences medical pokings bank & billpaying—where'd the time

go how recover that stillness gone like my own half-forgotten child's cry  
when first I felt the pleasure racing naked in woods & diving  
deep in sunken pools only to find fish eyes staring back in murk?

Ah, Jimmy, you shoulda been there when we hung high in air  
before plummeting down the long waterfall into the abyss & rose  
like angelboys flashing up thru turbulence to stretch for the sun—

out, out, awake now, out of this dream to find the first purple lines  
of dawn, scratch my bum & flip the switch to a new day coffee  
& soft Satie before others stretch & fill my ears with songs—

wake to a third thought not my death, not yet, madadeyo.

## Ancient of Days

pants rolled up among rocks along Lake Huron—  
a windy day, sun & clouds, his wild white hair blowing,  
old Scotsman still, even now turning a burr  
like a thistle in a heather field buffeted at sunset—

& he wanted me to go to him especially, I the shy one  
who turned away from his reaching hands, his hug rebuffed—  
tho his phrasings live in me now, yet I cannot quite touch  
the heart & repeat the song intact, myth or years clouding me:

the self-earned law degree, speeches in disparate farm towns  
to new graduates, daughter at his side “to keep him awake”  
on the ride home—he telling her later men are bound to wander—  
the holiday grin through reddened cheeks, the dishes stacked,

his tie turned perfectly beneath the apron, big hands a blur,  
suitcoat across the chairback nearby & he dancing in the kitchen  
retold now by aged aunts once girls flinging themselves too  
thru wild days & high flying nights chasing young men down—

he leapt once into the river to snatch my mother who'd clung  
to a log turning & rolling into white water beyond, long gone day,  
my own dream intact in that. A wizened dream now, he's mine,  
where I lift a glass in memory, on a windy Huron day going fast.

## Dreaming: Valley of the Sun

two helicopters  
    down'd in crossfire,  
unknown dead—

    & we roll south  
thru heavy snow,  
    headed for O'Hare,

Sun Valley,  
    if not to some ditch,  
sliding out of

    control—parents now  
pacing, wondering  
    where we might be,

a lent cellphone  
    our slender line out  
to them, even as

    rockets slam into  
Afghan hillsides  
    & suicide bombers

parade into Israeli  
    coffee shops, all  
loading up

    for the next round.

## Canyon Rim to Hopi Point by Moonlight

the fabled domes & vermilion spires, towers, ledges, pinnacles  
shine faintly in the distance, pale blue, ghostly by moonlight,

frigid wind slashing up the canyon—one picks one's way  
thru scrub pine twisted into spiraled grey struggling out of

the unyielding mesa thru centuries of weather, passing bands  
of hunters, warriors, tourists—here where Cardenas stood agape,

where Anasazi & Havasupai measured their days in tales spun  
in fire, I grope thru the dark to sit alone, silent under the fading

blue horizon, you lost to me as a bright dream once floating  
in a still sky—yet it is good to lie flat to fierce gusts,

on a stone ledge jutting into this deep emptiness, awaiting  
the first sun shafts white light flashing up thru the canyon,

& then to turn like a bright angel & make my way down  
onto pack trails, switchbacks where as the sun mounts higher

ravens circle above, their flapping wings like sails slapping  
in the breeze: thus one may greet a new day, beyond despair.

## Passover Blood Market

bombs bombs bombs bombs  
in market restaurants street corners

tanks checkpoints, shrieking  
women shot at trying to bury bloated

sons in parking lot—Arafat hisses  
by flashlight, Hussein's payoff

turns dividends for families who  
sacrifice their own—Sharon howls

as Bush & Cheney spin in silence,  
synagogue bombings in France—

& you, my son & daughters, I see  
in your eyes this my gift to you.

## After Ronsard

among wars rumors of wars faithless  
century faithless age angry politicians—  
among a thousand trials, ancient freedoms stripped away,  
surely it's madness to speak of Love—

chained madmen, fanatic terrorists're  
no less mad than I—I,  
grizzled and sickly, who've grown eyeless  
as Love itself, insane—

imagining lovers falling for each other  
among fallen towers, dreaming of love  
among threats flashing across airwaves—

adieu, weird sisters, spellweavers, politicians—  
Muses, I shoulder my own sack—I'd rather  
pass trials than go blind on your aery streams.

## Emile at the Crossroad

too many blue hours too many nights in the mirror,  
    hiding, running, his eyes now bulging in daily nightmare—  
        the helmeted gunner, machine gun spraying near-naked  
bodies, writhing, wrapped in blood mists jugular spray  
    as they fall, corpses bulldozed into ditches eyes wide  
        in death, & he, standing along a ditch—he, spared to  
finish the work—he, looking into the blue faces  
    open mouths disappearing beneath a wave of sand,  
        neighbors, lovers, one hand last to sink beneath—he—  
now at a downtown intersection alone with his  
    clutch of daisies & one red rose wrapped in green,  
        the anniversary of Heloise's disappearance, she who  
had sustained him, her red hair like a fire  
    in his brain, her impetuous smile & blue-eyed  
        laughter at his angst, his vain pronouncements—  
the candle she'd lit in the window time  
    & again to welcome him in during his darkest  
        hours—a brief repast, a tender touch, a moment  
shared where they could reach into silence  
    & hear the lost songs—now gone forty years,  
        now a dream he clings to, awaiting the signal  
to change & let him go, far from the maddened traffic at last.



## The Broken Note

I tender my heart to you, my love, even in this broken note.

in the shallows the first spring lily pads break the surface,  
arrowheads rise thru muck where coon prints trace the shore.

downstream, we float among submerged rocks broken  
trees in swift current, where dead faces gaze up thru gloom,

thru the flashing mirror—& we too wind thru time's illusion:

networks' wired hum primes us for the coming war, great  
minds bend to the cunning task of fire & blood, slogans & flags—

floating thus, may one sing a broken note to greet this dawn  
where herons turn from the jetliners' blast path & the roar

of the shaking train stuffed with its cargo of dead dreams?

(ever a broken note, yet my heart is full of love, my love  
is full of heart, full is my love, my heart is full, tho broken)

thus the kayak glides ashore where even phantoms laud  
their loves, as I my love tender this message for you.

# Turn the Wheel

## Poems by David Cope

### Praise for *Turn the Wheel*:

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### On David Cope's earlier collections...

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—**Carl Rakosi**

*"D.C.'s intensive clear details always a pleasure ...very solid clear human texts."*  
 —**Robert Creeley**

### Gone (as you are)

when the currents push you  
     straight into that hairpin turn where  
         slammed sideways around  
     the bend two fallen mammoth tree trunks, stripped  
         & bleached, lie along each bank,  
 branches forcing rushing water into  
     a narrow channel—brake  
     & cut thru surging waves, avoid the crash  
     that'd toss you into the roar the  
 frigid waters, your craft swamped or adrift in  
     wild plunging currents—  
 somehow you're through,  
     the river widens out,  
     calm, & you can  
 sit back as morning sun fills forest & swamp.  
     ahead, deer wake to your imagin'd silence,  
 leap for their lives  
     through cedar budding kinnickinnick giant firs,  
 breezes raising whitecaps racing  
     toward you, & you await the moment when  
 the wave line hits & you lift your eyes  
     to the new sky where  
 all the sleepers are finally pushing seaward skyward  
     in a mad rush  
 where the cranes lift themselves & are gone,  
     as you are.

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