

WILL JAMES



The Woman in Dark Clothes

Poems

The Woman in Dark Clothes

Will James

Copyright © 2014 Will James
ISBN #: 978-1-312-06008-1

Contents

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| With Our Eyes Closed..... | 6 |
| The Woman in Dark Clothes..... | 7 |
| The TV..... | 8 |
| The Hills of Judea (The Woman in Blue)..... | 9 |
| The Hereafter..... | 10 |
| The Planet of the Blind..... | 11 |
| Death of a Televangelist..... | 11 |
| Here in the Shade of Blue Televisions..... | 12 |
| We Open Our Mouths But No One Knows How to Sing..... | 13 |
| Did You Hear the Story of the Boy who Forgot His Name?..... | 15 |
| A Fable..... | 16 |
| We See the Flash of Headlines in the Sky..... | 17 |
| Denial Is Like a Cloud That Blots Out The Sun..... | 18 |
| The Death of JFK..... | 19 |
| Death Rides in on a White Horse..... | 20 |
| I Once Saw Hank Williams Follow a Flock of Blackbirds into a Dark Field..... | 21 |
| The King in a Country of Rain..... | 22 |
| Anna Nicole Smith in TV Heaven..... | 23 |
| A Lonesome Dwarf in a House of Whores..... | 24 |
| Confession of a TV Addict..... | 25 |
| The Sound of War..... | 26 |
| Terror Blooms in the Ghettos of Palestine..... | 27 |
| Aurora..... | 28 |
| That Invisible Country..... | 29 |
| A Girl Called Heaven..... | 30 |
| The Eye of Winter..... | 31 |
| Carry Me Across the Water..... | 32 |
| Song for John Berryman..... | 33 |
| An Awakening..... | 34 |
| Advent 2012 (Newtown Connecticut)..... | 35 |
| The Waves at Midnight..... | 36 |
| In This House of Clouds..... | 37 |
| Warhol at the Factory..... | 38 |
| Above Dam Square..... | 39 |
| Nuit Blanche..... | 40 |
| The Ghost of a Girl..... | 41 |
| We Have No Hymns to Give Him..... | 42 |
| Back to the Beginning..... | 43 |
| The Goddess..... | 44 |
| They are like Visitors from Another Country..... | 45 |
| For Vincent Van Gogh & Edgar Allan Poe..... | 46 |
| True Story of an Incident at Chateau de Vincennes with the Daughter of a Chinese Opera Star..... | 47 |
| 9/11..... | 48 |
| The Missing..... | 49 |
| Back Here Again..... | 50 |
| Quay Winston Churchill..... | 51 |
| Ghosts in Winter..... | 52 |

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| She Once Believed in Happy Endings..... | 53 |
| From Black to Blue..... | 54 |
| Long After Dark..... | 55 |
| I Saw Socrates on the Road Today..... | 56 |
| Not as They Once Were..... | 57 |
| He Took The Head Shot that Killed JFK..... | 58 |
| The Bigfoot Hoax (The Man Who Killed Kennedy)..... | 59 |
| No More Games, No More Toys..... | 60 |
| For Agnes at the Cafe..... | 61 |
| Rumors of War..... | 62 |
| March 2003..... | 63 |
| High Condition (Red)..... | 64 |
| Of Winter & Wars..... | 65 |
| There are No Heroes Here..... | 66 |
| Walter Cronkite Dead at 92..... | 67 |
| TelePrompTer..... | 68 |
| Oceans & Technology..... | 69 |
| With a Wave of Our Hands..... | 70 |
| A Masked Man..... | 71 |
| They're Holding Jesus in Guantanamo Bay..... | 72 |
| The Burial of Osama Bin Laden at Sea..... | 73 |
| Transformation..... | 74 |
| White Orchids & Death..... | 75 |
| Her Vanishing God..... | 76 |
| The Sleepwalker..... | 77 |
| On Our Way Back To Paris..... | 78 |
| I Cannot Take It From Them..... | 79 |
| The Drag Queen..... | 80 |
| Basilique du Sacré-Cœur | 81 |
| Chatelet (Pont au Change)..... | 82 |
| The Poet..... | 83 |
| The Riders of the Night..... | 84 |
| Too Long in the Wind..... | 85 |
| Eros..... | 86 |
| I Could Fly a Plane..... | 87 |
| The Troubadour..... | 88 |
| Neverland..... | 89 |
| Hiroshima..... | 90 |
| The Facebook Song..... | 91 |
| Black Coat & Tails (If Looks Could Kill)..... | 92 |
| The Eighth of December..... | 93 |
| That Imaginary Boat..... | 94 |
| Long Into the Night..... | 95 |
| The Man on the Blue Horse..... | 96 |
| The Moon Followed Me Home..... | 97 |
| The Horses..... | 98 |

"There is another heaven & earth beyond the world of men"
Li Po

With Our Eyes Closed

Darkness descends without a sound on the wings of an invisible horse.
No one knows his name, this stranger in love with his own shadow.

We are walking backwards now with our eyes closed.
We have nowhere else to go.

The Woman in Dark Clothes

(for Edith Stein)

She adored Husserl, the depths of his thought.
But philosophy was not enough for her.
She became a student of love.
We breathe in the ashes of those burned
in the ovens of Auschwitz.
Flowers bloom out of the dust.
She walks with us in the darkness.
She is familiar with it.
She knows the way out.

They were not aliens from another planet.
They put their human faces on just like us
before they dropped Zyklon B in a hole
in the roof and waited for the bodies to fall.
That they shared in our common humanity
somehow made monsters of us all.
But why should we feel responsible
for their crimes,
when we barely recognize our own?

But the stain remains just the same.
It will take all of human history to recover
from that loss.
We breathe in the ashes of those burned
in the ovens of Auschwitz.
Flowers bloom out of the dust.
She walks with us in the darkness.
She is familiar with it.
She knows the way out.

The TV

They left the TV on for years. No one ever
seemed to watch it.
Often, I could see it through the open drapes
illuminating the room at night.
Eventually the TV caught fire.
Flames shot out from the walls
and the roof.
Someone called the police.

Neighbors gathered in the street.
They opened their mouths in wonder
but no one spoke. They watched it all
like some kind of ancient sacrifice
as they witnessed clouds of smoke
floating up into the heavens,
sending signals to those
no longer left on the ground.

The Hills of Judea (The Woman in Blue)

She walked in from the hills
wearing blue jeans with frills.
She sang a song in a broken voice.
It was the only one she had,
she had no choice.
Some say she took pills
to kill the pain.

She was a stranger here,
no one knew her name.
There was beauty in her eyes.
There was a wound she could not hide.
Her hair had a touch of gray.
There were lines in her face.
She sang a song in a broken voice.

It was the only one she had,
she had no choice.
She walked in from the hills
wearing blue jeans with frills.
She sang a song in a broken voice.
It was the only one she had,
she had no choice.

The Hereafter

How many clowns would fit into a toy car in the hereafter?
Imagine them piling in. Imagine the laughter.

We search for poltergeists in a darkened room.
Will there be space enough for them to bloom?

We wake in a world of make believe, as we hover between
what is seen and unseen.

We scan the brain
and enter into that mysterious terrain.

Human consciousness is a mystical thing,
seemingly held together with two tin cans and one lone string.

We look out at the heavens from a darkened room.
Will there be space enough for us to bloom?

How many clowns would fit into a toy car in the hereafter?
Imagine them piling in. Imagine the laughter.

The Planet of the Blind

Light shone all around them but they did not see it.
They had eyes but they remained closed.

No one analyzed their dreams.
No one even knew if he they had any.

Like Oedipus they walked in a world of darkness.
They existed in a land of unknowing.

They built war machines.
In air conditioned rooms, they piloted drones

by touch and dropped bombs
on innocent women and children.

Whirlwinds of dust blew all around them.
Radioactive clouds darkened the sky.

Ultimately, they considered themselves blessed
by their blindness.

When the end came, no one cried,
no one was left to tell their story.

Light shone all around them but they did not see it.
They had eyes but they remained closed.

Death of a Televangelist

They claimed children would be blessed and would impart wonders
to others by touching the TV screen,
that the dead would be raised by being placed in a room
with a TV tuned to their programming, coming from signals
high in the sky. (Surely the moon
witnessed their conspiracy to defraud viewers of their savings.)
Even as the pope abandoned his papal palace,

they continued to broadcast their gospel of prosperity
on satellites worldwide.

They flew not on the wings of angels
but on the wings of private jets.

In a platinum pink bouffant wig (like a drag queen in a John Waters film),
the one sat beside the other.

They lived in mansions paid for with promises

they could never keep. The fault was not in the Gospel.
The fault was with them.

(God is not a genii in a bottle to be bought and sold.)

Paul Crouch is dead. But his body will not be resurrected
in front of a TV screen tuned to TBN.

He is caught in the eye of a needle.

There is no need to send any cash.

Here in the Shade of Blue Televisions

Here in the shade of blue televisions,
we winter in the outer dark
and cast our nets
into an ocean of stars.

We wait for a signal.
We long for a sign to guide us,
a word, a beam of light that will render us
sanctified and whole.

We cling to scraps of paper in skyscrapers.
(The world is ruled by admen
and conjurers,
lobbyists and salesmen.)

The dead live among us.
There they stand,
those that we once turned away,
long hidden in the folds of time,

now transformed,
made new again,
born out of invisible waves,
crashing on an invisible shore.

Here in the shade of blue televisions,
we winter in the outer dark
and cast our nets
into an ocean of stars.

We Open Our Mouths But No One Knows How to Sing

While a dictator is deposed, monsters wait in the wings,
their eyes shining in the darkness.
From the top of the world everything seems so small.
From the top of the world is a long way to fall.

When the student of a poet guns down thirty two people,
her books suddenly fill the library shelves,
she is interviewed on TV, her books begin to sell.

After over one thousand are gassed outside of Damascus,
the president asks congress for authorization to drop
American bombs to rid Bashar al-Assad of his ghosts.

We open our mouths but no one knows how to sing,
even the stars have lost their meaning.
From the top of the world everything seems so small.
From the top of the world is a long way to fall.

Did You Hear the Story of the Boy who Forgot His Name?

Did you hear the story
about the boy who forgot his name?
Did you hear the story
about the girl who did the same?
Here we are again.
Take my hand.
I'll show you something grand.
Don't be shy.
We can fly.
Take my hand.
I'll show you something grand.
I'm not a ghost.
I'm not a shadow.
Don't turn away.
Did you hear the story
about the boy who forgot his name?

Did you hear the story
about the girl who did the same?
I'm not a ghost.
I'm not a shadow.
Don't turn away.
Take my hand.
I'll show you something grand.
I know you've been told all this before.
Don't be shy.
Open up the door.
I know you've been hurt before.
Open up the door.
Take my hand.
I'll show you something grand.
Take my hand.
I'll show you something grand.

A Fable

He heard the cry of love.
It burned white hot.
He saw trumpets, trombones and harps
floating high in the sky.
He heard symphonies echoing in a blue wind.
He transcribed all that he heard.
He sought out a queen,
a star,

to perform
in his kingdom of sound.
He held auditions.
He had affairs.
He practiced the black arts of the heart.
The women vanished.
He sunk into a bog of mediocrity
and despaired.

Then a maiden appeared
with long blond hair
and gray eyes,
and drifted into a zone of his own making.
When she opened her mouth,
bells rang and choirs sang.
She was able
to hold the high note

of his dreams.
He thought she would save him.
They went viral worldwide.
He bought mansions
on both coasts.
He was the conductor.
She was his instrument.
He pulled the strings.

His ego bloomed in the dark.
(Barrymore once played the part.)
But there was no love
between them, only his vanity
and her cries for help,
in perfect pitch,
ringing in his head,
filling the void.

We See the Flash of Headlines in the Sky

We sailed on an ocean of regret,
until we found a land where we could forget.

We see the flash of headlines in the sky.
There are no more bargains left to buy.

We hear a siren song that fills the air.
We hear a whistling in our heads.

We are done sleeping in our beds.
If you woke us we would fall.

We once were the children of the future.
We are now the children of the past.

We sailed on an ocean of regret,
until we found a land where we could forget.

Denial Is Like a Cloud That Blots Out The Sun

Denial is like a cloud that blots out the sun
and darkens the world. It is a voice
that tells only lies.

It turns the heart on itself.

It turns a mother against a daughter.

It turns a father against a son.

It is the maker of excuses and fabrications.

It says humanity is not poisoning the earth and the sky.

It says nuclear weapons are necessary
to protect the homeland.

It is at the starting point of all wars.

It leaves a mark. It leaves a scar.

The Death of JFK

Even before I learned
to stand or walk without some help,
I was already able to decipher the paradoxical truth
of the televised image—that the images
were an illusion.

Ghosts. Snowy pictures that talked.
Faces and pictures I eventually could control
and manipulate with the turn of a dial,
a surrogate memory where whole generations
were consigned to a cathode ray tube;
a world where images were transposed
into myth, and I could become a companion
to the likes of Lois Lane, Clark Kent,
Hercules and the Lone Ranger.

There wasn't a cloud in the sky,
so the bubble top was removed.
The president beamed and waved to the crowds.
The first lady was dressed in a pink suit
and matching pink pill box hat.
Together they floated down Elm Street
in a midnight blue Lincoln Continental,
a carriage for a handsome prince
and his bride.
Mountain climbers call the top of a mountain,
the death zone.
Unknown to anyone in the crowd,
the presidential limousine invisibly
passed into that zone.

Jackie tried to turn back but it was too late.
Soon after, the rumors began.
There was talk of Castro, the CIA and the mob.
Vietnam was engulfed in flames.
RFK and Martin Luther King were shot down.
Images of the dead were broadcast nightly.
The TV was full of ghosts,
but it wasn't a fantasy, it wasn't a myth.
It began with the death of a prince
and his widow in a blood stained, pink suit.
They are still with us.
It is going on now.
We see her, we see him, transfigured,
ascending into the clouds.

Death Rides in on a White Horse

An electric eye opens. It watches us while we sleep.
It opens doors and windows and lets the others in.

We hear them, their voices echoing throughout the house.
We can't quite understand what it is they are saying.

A one eyed fat man reads from a book of tarot cards
and a crystal ball.

He looks into the meaning of things.
He sees the towers fall.

He sees flashes of a burning world.
The fool remains but no one is laughing.

Death rides in on a white horse.
The talking heads have all gone home.

Satellites bounce signals into outer space.
Who can hear us? Who will save us from ourselves?

I Once Saw Hank Williams Follow a Flock of Blackbirds into a Dark Field

I once saw Hank Williams follow a flock of blackbirds
into a dark field. Later that night I saw Bob Dylan perform
in an old barn with candles for footlights.

He wore a white Stetson.
The stage was dim. It was an impromptu appearance.
He wasn't on the bill.

He seemed to enjoy his anonymity.
His voice was blue and hoarse.
It cast a spell.

As long as we are in this world,
the past is near to us; we can return to it anytime.
The shape and shadow of things may have changed

but the essence is the same.
In our dreams, we can visit countries we have never seen,
we can speak with strangers as if they were our friends.

Who wants grand possessions that fade away?
Why buy more rooms than we can ever use?
Why long for homes we will never own?

We hold the sky in our eyes, the clouds in our hands.
There is no end to what we can see,
there is no end to what we can do.

The King in a Country of Rain

When the rains came, who would have guessed that he kept a secret?
That he knew his kingdom would fall, castles and all.

He was no prophet. He was just a king lost in dreams
that no one could not quite recall.

When the rains came, who would have guessed that he kept a secret?
That he knew his kingdom would fall, castles and all.

Anna Nicole Smith in TV Heaven

The flashbulbs are so much brighter here.
After all, this is the land of laugh tracks,
big screen TVs and Cadillacs,
where games shows are broadcast twenty-four hours
a day and everyone is a winner. The thousand pound man
and the five hundred pound mom, can Doctor Phil save them?

Her bodyguard said her eyes were fixed and dilated.
The coroner ruled that a combination of pills
and chloral hydrate killed her.
Rumor has it that Andy Warhol
has already commissioned her portrait.
But Einstein wants nothing to do with it.

We open ourselves up to darkness but not to love.
Our heads are getting bigger everyday
while our legs are shrinking from disuse.
Did OJ commit armed robbery in Las Vegas?
Do flying saucers really exist? Can America be saved?
Stay tuned.

A Lonesome Dwarf in a House of Whores

He lived in a mythic kingdom.
His house stood in the shadow of a mythic mountain.
He was a small man but one of great vision.
In his dreams, he saw drones in the sky
and robots on horseback.
He saw men fighting wars by remote control.

He saw a hooded figure holding a sword.
He took this as a sign;
he took this as a warning.
He imagined the end of the world
as he lay beneath the shade of a blue tree.
He imagined it all broadcast on TV.

Confession of a TV Addict

After we saw Lee Harvey Oswald shot on live TV,
there was no turning back.
Our old world had faded. Our old world had gone black.
Blue and pink lights flash across the screen.
Reporters pontificate at the scene.
The TV drones on,
we watch as if in a hypnotic trance.
(We do the zombie shuffle and dance.)

Our memories have been digitized, our brains blown away.
What story are we buying today?
The Boston Marathon bomber is on the loose.
Another eighty five dead in Syria, there will be no truce.
There are no umpires dressed in black.
There is no turning back.
Blue and pink lights flash across the screen.
Reporters pontificate at the scene.

The Sound of War

Lightning flashes in the clouds.
I hear the boom and echo
of detonations in the distance.
I hear the sound of war.
Bashar al-Assad uses white phosphorus
on women and children.
It blisters and burns.
Fire devours their lungs.
Their footprints are soon
effaced in the dust.

I hear the roar of the mob, democracy in the raw.
Intelligence is flattened, nuance is lost.
A diplomat in denial doesn't point with a finger,
he points with a gun.
Russia votes down a no-fly zone.
The killing goes on.
Lightning flashes in the clouds.
I hear the boom and echo
of detonations in the distance.
I hear the sound of war.

Terror Blooms in the Ghettos of Palestine

I hear skeletons calling out
from the other side of a darkened room.
I will not sleep tonight.
There is another kind of war,
the war inside a man, where all wars begin.

Terror blooms in the ghettos of Palestine.
Children sleep with dust in their beds.
Their cries like the seeds of fish
are taken up into the clouds.
Rockets flare out of the Gaza strip.

The law has hooks for hands, it is not delicate,
it does not have a surgeon's touch.
It cuts and rips into the bone.
The dead fly over Israeli checkpoints,
out of the occupied territories.

The candles have been snuffed out
but the sorrow remains.
Children sleep with dust in their beds.
Their cries like the seeds of fish
are taken up into the clouds.

Aurora

Is that the humming of a god or a fallen angel that he hears?
There is so much white noise that it is deafening.
It comes in waves.
As he sits in the courtroom,
his hair dyed red and orange, his mind wanders.
He is not dreaming. He is wide awake.

He sees things no one else sees.
He heard sirens
wailing months before the killing.
He saw pools of blood at his feet.
He saw birds trapped in a cave with no way out.
(Schizophrenia is a diagnosis but not an explanation.)

A woman holds a white rose and prays for the dead,
others join her,
their heads bowed in sorrow.
A newborn baby is placed on his father's belly.
He does not know his child is there.
He is in a coma.

There is a bandage over his eye where the bullet
entered his brain.
A ventilator helps him breathe.
He does not know that twelve died
in the back of theater nine.
He does not know how the movie ended.

Is that the humming of a god or a fallen angel that we hear?
There is so much white noise that it is deafening.
It comes in waves.
Our minds wander. We are not dreaming.
We are wide awake.
We see things that no one should ever see.

That Invisible Country

This is not the end of the old world,
disfigured and gray and lost in the clouds.
Rather this is something entirely different.

This is not like the world at all with its scorecard
of wins and losses,
its long list of words and wars.

So come and float with me and breathe this cool air.
There is no need to hurry.
There is no one waiting for us anymore.

A Girl Called Heaven

She spoke to me from out of the darkness,
a prompter whispering from off stage.

She cued me to my longing.
I confessed I was trapped in a kind of cage.

She said her name was Heaven.
There was magic in what she said.

She spoke to me from out of the darkness
as I walked beneath the shadows of the dead.

The Eye of Winter

The eye of winter dilates and then contracts.
The fog descends.
Ghosts climb up the mountain.

It is dusk now and the world has turned a pale blue.
I can see my breath in the cold air.
I fumble with a key that does not turn.

It is for another door in another life.
I'm locked out; there's nothing left to do.
I will not find myself at home tonight.

Carry Me Across the Water

'Gather up the horses and let's ride.
Carry me across the river to the other side.
Carry me across the river to my bride.
'I remember the day when the world turned gray.

Teach me how to fly before I die.
Carry me across the water to the other side.'
'Carry me across the river to the other side.
Carry me across the river and let me be your bride.

I remember the day when the world turned gray.'
'Gather up the horses and let's ride.
Carry me across the river to the other side.
Carry me across the river to my bride.'

Song for John Berryman

Snow enshrouds the Mississippi.
January in Minnesota,
the world is silent and white.
He dreams of Florida.
He dreams deep into the night.
The ocean beckons like a mistress,

he longs for a kiss.
He once had a plan
but he failed as a pilot
and fell as a man.
The world is silent and white.
He dreams deep into the night.

January in Minnesota,
the ocean beckons like a mistress,
he longs for a kiss.
He once had a plan
but he failed as a pilot
and fell as a man.

An Awakening

"You have to believe in your stuff every day has to be the new day on which the new poem may be it." —John Berryman

The worst lies, they say, are the ones
we tell ourselves
when no one else is listening.
A man can lose his way on a dark road,
his headlights can grow dim,
his car crossing a white line
that he no longer sees.

A poem he once believed in, falls apart.
A heart stops beating.
Then comes sleep,
followed by an awakening,
and a new kind of feeling forms,
unfolding,
even before he can name it.

Advent 2012 (Newtown Connecticut)

The silhouette of a paper angel is projected on the wall.
The world is full of tinsel and sorrow.
We walk with wands of light in our hands, candles for the dead.

When I was six years old I heard the news that the president
had been shot, that JFK was dead
but I didn't have to face the death of my twin.

We teach our children to say their prayers
before they go to sleep
but how can we prepare them for this?

The Westboro Baptist Church threatens to picket the funerals.
They are not followers of Christ.
They do not mourn.

The silhouette of a paper angel is projected on the wall.
The world is full of tinsel and sorrow.
We walk with wands of light in our hands, candles for the dead.

The Waves at Midnight

I sleep with books of poetry in my bed.
There's an ocean at my door.
I hear the hum of voices in my head.

The waves at midnight are dark and blue.
I can't remember anything anymore.
I've swum out so far, I've lost sight of the shore.

In This House of Clouds

Here in this house of clouds, I'm awakened by the flapping of wings.
I hear the call of birds.
I fly over mountains.

Like the shadow of an airplane that passes over open water,
I vanish with the wind.
The other side of somewhere is not always nowhere.

Warhol at the Factory

He walks on water; he floats across the room.
On the wall, his paint by number flowers bloom.

He's one part pornographer, two parts whore.
(Billy Name hands out masks at the door.)

Over there is a portrait of Chairman Mao
hung next to a silkscreen of a floating cow.

To the left are studies of Marilyn Monroe
and several images of Jackie O.

A doctor makes his rounds.
Brando and Elvis have lost a few pounds.

Batman has somehow misplaced his cape.
Ultra Violet accuses him of rape.

They walk on water; they float across the room.
On the wall, the paint by number flowers bloom.

Above Dam Square

Above the heroin and the whores, the sex shops
and the Van Goghs,
we float high atop a Ferris wheel

on brilliant waves of pink, blue and neon orange;
and breathless we hover there, rising,
but longing to descend.

Nuit Blanche

The portrait of a man in electric blue,
a torso actually,

hangs there on the wall.
and further down

the depiction of an electric chair
done in pink, red and violet pastels.

Oh how the shadows cry,
the voices of the dead.

And turning now we realize too late
that we have passed through

an opened door
into a forgotten room

where no one ever sleeps
and no one ever leaves.

The Ghost of a Girl

Imagine the shadow of a sail moving over rough waters,
the waves like turbines
turning over and over again, tumbling endlessly.
There are no monuments where the car crashed
to honor the dead girl.
There is just a stump marking where the tree stood that stopped time.
Like a limb that has been surgically removed, her mother

and father can sense her presence. Sometimes
they can hear her voice coming from her bedroom
up the stairs, murmuring in a language
that they can't quite make out,
and even all these years later they believe she is with them,
reaching out, just beyond their grasp,
just out of sight.

We Have No Hymns to Give Him

He feeds on straw in the dark
chambers of his heart.
There are no nail holes in his hands.
He leaves no bread
crumbs for us follow. He is no Savior.
We have no hymns to give him.

Still, he is genuine. He wears no mask.
He doesn't put on airs
though sometimes he is selfish, stupid even,
and makes mistakes. He knows how to fail.
He is an ordinary man.
He is one of us.

Back to the Beginning

Once again I've come back to the hills
of a half forgotten country, back to the beginning

of stones and hope, and back to where I once stood
transfixed before the figure of a woman

even as the particles of her breath
hovered and then vanished into the cold, winter air.

The Goddess

Her skin was bone white
and had a kind of aura.
She stood in the doorway
but wouldn't come all the way in.
She said she was on her way
to the Mississippi Delta.
She had heard the call of the river
and the wail

of archangels
as they crossed the Great Plains.
I saw her once before long ago,
and even then there was a light
around her head and face,
shining like a rising moon,
a kind of beacon,
over open water.

They are like Visitors from Another Country

Somehow they are different
from us now.

It is as if they traveled
back from the dark side
of the moon and left a part
of themselves behind.

They seem baffled
by the things we say.

They are like visitors
from another country.

They smile and laugh,
but it is not the same smile
and laugh

as they had before.

They are our neighbors,
but when we knock
on their doors,

they are never at home.

The friends we once knew
have moved away.

For Vincent Van Gogh & Edgar Allan Poe

Always the blade hovered over his head,
ominous and foreboding,
a shadow that changed the shape of things.
He saw apparitions in the corners of his mind.
In his sleep, he saw the faces of the dead.
There is money in nightmares and pornography
but not in poetry.

The oldest woman in the world said
she once met Vincent van Gogh
and that he was disagreeable and drunk.
But why talk of that?
His work will not be forgotten.
We walk in a room and there he is, looking back
at us, more like a ghost than a man.

True Story of an Incident at Chateau de Vincennes with the Daughter of a Chinese Opera Star

She hovered around me for hours in the rain
talking about heaven and God

and apparitions and signs; and after that, she took off
her wet, black stockings in the bathroom of a cafe,

and then reappeared without them
as if no one would ever notice.

9/11

and now, a second and improbable plane,
a blip on FAA radar, United Flight 175,

approaches and then plunges into the south tower
of the World Trade Center, igniting into orange and red flames

while bodies fall and then tumble like stunt doubles
into the empty but televised air.

The Missing

An egret whirls into the wind,
and then turns and folds in upon itself and lands
beneath a cloud of water;
while in the distance,
airplanes at the edge of thunder
murmur and echo

like the thin mirrors of the ego,
glittering and lost, and I shudder
in the dark blue and consider
the dead (and all of their voices),
an unwavering remembrance,
a delicate descent.

Back Here Again

I am back here again looking for something
that I lost a long time ago,
something that I left in a box
for safekeeping and then forgot about until now.
Come with me and look.
Don't be afraid.

The rooftops are still blue here at night
and the stars are so white.
Hold my hand.
There's an ocean in the wind.
Can't you hear it?
It's so close it could almost blow us away.

Quay Winston Churchill

A fish hovers
near the surface of the river
and then turns and waves its tail
while I try to focus on the depths.
But the Marne is dark and green.

Late each night,
I warn my brother
to look out for knives
and volatile lovers.
But the Marne is dark and green.

And like a ghost
on a departing train,
you wave and walk away
while I try to say goodbye.
But the Marne is dark and green.

Ghosts in Winter

What do I care about Prozac and depression, price controls
and the unemployment rate (blue voices in a dark room),

while a lost girl wades through drifts and drifts of Minnesota snow
and apparitions huddle high above the frozen river?

She Once Believed in Happy Endings

Once a stone has been dropped
into the depths of a green and living pond,
it cannot be recalled, the action cannot be undone;
it has become a part of that green continuum.
Reality has been changed,
altered, rearranged.

I met him in the eighth grade.
He took LSD on the weekends and was already
a guitar virtuoso.
He loved the early Yardbirds, jazz and blues.
He taught me how to jam.
He once fired me from a junior high band

but he was always kind.
Years later a storm blew in.
Voices roared in his head.
He wanted to banish them to the darkness.
But how could he win
against such a big wind?

Where could he begin?
Wishes changed nothing.
So he taped his ID
to his wrist and put a gun
to his head
and squeezed the trigger until he was dead.

Each night his mother longs to dream of her only son,
before the voices and the gun.
She once believed in happy endings
but no more,
not without her son,
not in a world undone.

From Black to Blue

In my mind, I hear your voice
telling me that you had no choice.
That there was nothing left to do.
That your world had gone from black to blue.

Do you have nothing left to hide,
there on the other side?
No more secrets, no more lies,
no more need for alibis?

Was there nothing I could say
to make you want to stay?
Did you really have to go?
That's what I want to know.

Long After Dark

A train carrying
contraband cargo
passes by farms
and hills
on its way to a depot
hidden
far underground

while men in masks
and biohazard suits
prepare for a disaster
and plot a course
for the stars

but oh the wind blows
hard here
and will not dissipate
until long after dark.

I Saw Socrates on the Road Today

I saw Socrates on the road today.
He had stardust in his hair.
His beard was long and gray.
His eyes glittered and flashed.

I saw pilgrims on their way to Bethlehem.
I saw poets and singers, too.
I saw moms and their kids.
I saw men without masks.

I saw Socrates on the road today.
He had stardust in his hair.
His eyes glittered and flashed.
His beard was long and gray.

Not as They Once Were

(for Levon Helm)

The hills are blue on the horizon and the clouds are gray.
The moon rises round and white.

I'm happy to be going home, but I'm so tired and the hour is so late.
Far behind me, my friends are out there in the dark

on other roads with other friends.
I hope to see them again.

But not as they once were but as they are
(and I won't be in a hurry, and they won't be too late).

He Took The Head Shot that Killed JFK

He wasn't like the other boys;
he played with ICBMs instead of tinker toys.
But no one made too much of a fuss.
No, no one made too much of a fuss.
After all, he was one of us.

When he peddled an unwinnable war
amongst the Joint Chiefs and the Marine Corps,
no one made too much of a fuss.
No, no one made too much of a fuss.
After all, he was one of us.

When some were heard to say
that he took the head shot that killed JFK,
no one made too much of a fuss.
No, no one made too much of a fuss.
After all, he was one of us.

The Bigfoot Hoax (The Man Who Killed Kennedy)

They're looking for Bigfoot on TV.
They're looking in places where he might be.
They're searching the woods in the dark,
looking for a sign, looking for a mark.
They say he's a master of invisibility,
hiding over there just behind a tree.
They're looking for Bigfoot on TV.
They've taken it to the point of absurdity.

They're looking for the man who killed Kennedy.
They say there's been some kind of conspiracy.
They're looking for the assassin on TV.
They say he's a master of invisibility,
.hiding over there just behind a tree.
They're looking for the man who killed Kennedy.
They've taken it to a point of absurdity.

They're looking for flying saucers in the dark.
They're looking for a sign, some kind of spark.
They're looking apparitions in the dark.
looking for a sign, looking for a mark.
They're looking for Bigfoot on TV.
They say he's a master of invisibility.

No More Games, No More Toys

A mother had a premonition.
A mother had the chills,
three drowned boys
in the Robin Hood Hills.
No more games, no more toys
for the boys
from the Robin Hood Hills.

A mother had a premonition.
A mother had the chills.
One had a fractured skull, three drowned boys
in the Robin Hood Hills.

The police targeted a teen.
A false confession
placed him at the scene.
They said he wore black.
They said his life was off track.
They said his art was obscene.
No evidence, no DNA, but a jury
found him guilty
for the killing
in the Robin Hood Hills.

He wishes he could sleep.
He wishes he could go.
But he's in too deep
there on Death Row.

A mother had a premonition.
A mother had the chills.
Three drowned boys
in the Robin Hood Hills.
No more games, no more toys
for the boys
from the Robin Hood Hills.

For Agnes at the Cafe

She didn't like them was all she could say.
She didn't like poetry
in general and didn't like my poems in particular.
But why had she been so honest?
That was what I wanted to know.
I tried to tell her that I was reaching
for something unknown,
that I wanted to float up
out of my body

and out of the room and touch the heavens;
and then I remembered a moment in a café,
weeks before, so clear to me now,
when she looked away,
a crease appearing on her forehead
as she frowned,
as if I were speaking in tongues
or skywriting
with just a finger while flying in the dark.

Rumors of War

He sang a tune or two in a one man band
then hopped a train to a distant and nameless land.
And in a boxcar he heard someone say,
'You can't take back what you never gave away'.

There are rumors of war; there are holes in the sky.
The dead line the roads but no one hears them cry.
The living are throwing stones into an empty well.
Their houses are bare; they have nothing left to sell.

I hum along to a song that I know and understand
as I trudge toward that distant and nameless land.
And in the darkness I hear someone say,
'You can't take back what you never gave away'.

March 2003

Gusts of wind blow across the beach and with just one
final turn, the surf crashes against the shore.
They are crossing over now, breaking through the green waves
and white foam like flying fish glittering in the sun.
Death carries a long knife, there are shadows behind his eyes.

The Pentagon insists that once Iraq is disarmed,
the sanctions will come to an end.
But the dead will not be paroled from their prison cells
and their severed limbs will not grow back.
Death carries a long knife, there are shadows behind his eyes.

High Condition (Red)

Air raid sirens sound as clouds of smoke billow over Baghdad;
and so it has begun, so that even now as flowers bloom
in pink, white and violet clusters, F/A 18 Hornets take off

from dark blue strips in the Mediterranean, their engines
emitting vapor trails that drift and then vanish into the desert sky;
and even now as women in white march in Jakarta

and protesters stand outside the Houses of Parliament in London,
a mother discovers the torso of her missing child
and blue on blue fire kills another marine.

Of Winter & Wars

This is a country of winter,
of old men and wars
and ghosts defaced in a white mist,
of trees with long black limbs
and snow banks
piled up high against the back of the house.

Here the sky is a kind of blanket
or shroud
for the dead
and daylight is like a secret
hidden
in a book that no one has yet to open.

There are No Heroes Here

(for Cindy Sheehan)

We are going nowhere now
in a house that has no doors or windows.

It is just a place to sleep.
There are no heroes here only mothers

and fathers calling out to children
who will never come home again.

But why try to speak of this?
It is like throwing ashes into the wind.

We are going nowhere now
in a house that has no doors or windows.

Walter Cronkite Dead at 92

His hair turned a shade of gray
even before the assassination of JFK.
He told us the president was dead

between ads for Nescafe and Wonder bread.
Some say he was the original talking head
but he was so much more.

We hear the chorus and are about to sing:
'Stop the killing, put an end to war.'
But we haven't learned a goddamn thing.

We hear the chorus and are about to sing:
'Stop the killing, put an end to war.'
But we haven't learned a goddamn thing.

TelePrompTer

HOLD US IN A HUMAN TELECAST

TOP STARS AND BLANK EXITS
WITH TELEVANGELISTS ON SATELLITES

AND UNREMEMBERED HEROES ON BLONDES

THE WATER COMES IN
WE UNDERSTAND

IT HAS COME THROUGH THE WIND AND THE CLOUDS

HOOKERS BY BLEACH
WHITE WIGS AND U.S. WARHEADS

BILLOWING ON BYLINES WORLDWIDE

BLANKET US UNMASKED

X TELEPATHS ON TOPLESS HOUSEBOATS

THIS IS OUR ULTIMATE BUYER

PARACHUTES BY ULTRA LIGHTS
HOLOGRAMS BY FOAM

Oceans & Technology

Out here in this country of unending sleep,
I inherit horses in winter
and blowing hands;

above the clouds, and the televisions of L. A.
(where once a blue whore danced on a powdered mask),
a woman is broadcast on air,

a former debutante manipulated by plastic surgeons
and ultimately disposed of by parapsychologists
in the Pentagon.

Out here in the shadow of a paradox,
I huddle in wonder, decomposed but undiminished
while a hundred warplanes

fly over toxic foam (oceans and technology),
breast implants found hidden hospital gown
of a surrogate mother.

With a Wave of Our Hands

My friends have all taken off their gas masks
as we welcome the dead with a wave of our hands.

While far above us, the vapor trail of a jet
dissipates across a blue sky, and it occurs to me

that we can send letters anywhere now, without stamps
or a postmark, our thoughts transmitted on air.

A Masked Man

On top a white stallion the Lone Ranger
descends;
a masked man debilitated and unrehearsed.

What is it that I want to say but ultimately cannot say?
I have become nothing,
a ghost deprogrammed and on parole.

I walk out into the shadows of televised snow,
televised desolation, blue trauma
by a descending sky, man of blankness, man of sighs.

They're Holding Jesus in Guantanamo Bay

Snow White performs miracles most every night.
She counts the cash, then begins to pray.
What would the founding fathers say?

They're holding Jesus in Guantanamo Bay.
There will be no trial. The CIA lost the file.
They're holding Jesus in Guantanamo Bay.
What would the founding fathers say?

George Washington had wooden teeth.
He was our first Commander in Chief.
Snow White pedals porn on channel five.
She takes the cash, before the ratings dive.

They're holding Jesus in Guantanamo Bay.
There will be no trial. The CIA lost his file.
They're holding Jesus in Guantanamo Bay.
What would the founding fathers say?

Snow White performs miracles most every night.
She counts the cash, then begins to pray.
They're holding Jesus in Guantanamo Bay.
There will be no trial. The CIA lost the file.

They're holding Jesus in Guantanamo Bay.
What would the founding fathers have to say?
What would the founding fathers say?

The Burial of Osama Bin Laden at Sea

Wrapped in a shroud, his eyes blotted out,
he can no longer read from the book of war.

His mouth opens to an ocean of darkness
but makes no sound. His hands are empty.

They hold no stars. The heavens have been effaced.
There is no way to chart a course.

There is no moon to push in the tides.
No wind to carry him home.

Transformation

We drift out into a world of clouds and blank waters,
of ghosts that hover and then descend,

and with each breath enter into us
until there is nothing left to name or to remember,

until there are no more spells
left to be broken.

White Orchids & Death

After watching a movie
about a woman
in a sanitarium
obsessed with white orchids
and death,
I think about the girl
at the pool and all that she said.

She spoke about her father
lost in the mountains of Wyoming,
wandering beneath
white peaks of heavenly snow;
and she spoke of her two sisters,
and her mother
and all of her love.

Her Vanishing God

She laughs at the thought of a movie about us
while toy birds flap and then crash

between the legs of the Eiffel Tower;
and turning away, she looks to her blue

and vanishing god for the flash
of an illicit love, but gets no response;

and to me, she gives what she can
and can give no more.

The Sleepwalker

On the boulevards of Paris, she dreams of orange
and red detonations,
of thrusting hips

and imbeciles in motion,
of apricots and whipped cream.
But I am exhausted by her pontifications

and pronouncements,
her fantasies and fabrications,
and her apricots and whipped cream.

On Our Way Back To Paris

Across from me she sleeps while our train
flies like a jet into the wind;

and where there should be a blanket,
there is just this empty space between us.

We are falling now. We are like postcards
sent from the other side of the world.

I Cannot Take It From Them

Outside children are laughing in the dark.
While amongst them a woman is dancing

(almost floating), so beautiful, dressed in white.
Still I wish they would go, so I could get some sleep.

But they won't. This is their night.
I cannot take it from them.

It's too late for that now.
They won't be coming back anyhow.

The Drag Queen

He puts on a padded bra and then carefully applies pink lipstick,
rouge and powder blue eye shadow to his face,

topping it all off with a platinum blonde wig
and a white bridal gown.

Veiled and ready now, he makes his way to the stage
and takes his final vows.

Basilique du Sacré-Cœur

A woman on top of a surf green horse
floats out over Paris and considers the margins of her world

and wants nothing more than to fly higher
above the lavender and the gray.

Chatelet (Pont au Change)

An African woman in a white garment,
a scarf wrapped around her head,

turns and then walks back up out of the station,
the outline of her gown billowing in the open wind.

The Poet

In many ways, he became like everyone else.
After all, a poet cannot eat his words.
Often, he hid behind the curtains in his room, shuttered in the dark.

One night he dreamt of a bird, a starling I suppose,
gliding on long black wings.
He longed to follow that bird.

So he stretched out his arms as he lay in his bed,
and drifted up into the sky.
At first he was afraid as he looked at the world below

until he realized there was no power left on earth
to pull him down, that there was no gravity in dreams.
That it would be impossible to fall.

The Riders of the Night

Envoys have been sent out into the night,
rider to rider, with no end in sight.

They turn one to the other,
brother to brother, the riders of the night.

They come from a land of war,
a land of poverty and blight.

With no instruments to guide them,
they fly by lunar light.

In a field of ghosts, they close their eyes.
But find no rest amid the cries.

And so they move on further into the night,
rider to rider, with no end in sight.

Too Long in the Wind

When I open the book of my failures,
I know that I have lived too long with my secrets,
with words that no one else ever hears,

and I'm left with a longing
and a kind of emptiness seemingly as big and blank
as the space between the stars.

Eros

Sleepless

I sit on the bank

of Lake Ray Hubbard

and look out

into the blank pornography
of the night

(the water rises to meet me).

I can see the blue-green

light of a boat in the distance

while a fish floats by

on undulating waves,

its white belly bathed

in a hallucinatory radiance.

Unknowable,

I can have none of this.

I have no thoughts

(a faint echo of stars),

the descent

of an unidentified

but topless sky.

I Could Fly a Plane

She only spoke when we were alone;
and like a statue on a pedestal of stone,
she held a secret and wouldn't let go.

One night I dreamt I saw her cloaked in a purple hood,
her hands clutching a cross made of wood.
I heard her whimper.

I heard her sigh,
and then I heard her say goodbye.
I could sail the ocean. I could ride the waves and the foam

(head in hand and with my eyes wide open).
I could wander the planet. I could fly a plane.
But I will never find my way back to her again.

The Troubadour

(for Townes Van Zandt)

The hounds had the scent but no one said a word.
So he went on out into that wilderness alone
and found a herd
of wild horses and made a home.

Later he tumbled while riding in the dark.
But even as he fell, he hummed
to the chorus of a lullaby
that he once learned by heart.

Rumor has it that he's gone upriver (far away from here).
While others say he's orbiting
above Houston, preparing to parachute in.

I say he's the guy with the grin
on his face, hovering just there,
floating on nothing but air.

Neverland

He's got a boy in his bed.
He's got monsters in his head.
One more show, one more shot
is all he's got.

He's a fan
of Peter Pan.
He wants to fly
across the sky.
There he goes
a king with no clothes.

He's holding a baby above the crowd.
He's talking to himself out loud.
He's never coming down
from the edge of that jagged crown.

He's dancing on the head of a pin.
He's refusing to let anyone in.
Another pill, one last shot
is all he's got.

There he goes
a king with no clothes.
One last shot
was all he got.
There he goes,
no more shows.

Hiroshima

(for Miyoko Matsubara)

I heard the whirring engines of a B-29.
I glimpsed its wings and tail; a sign
of foreboding filled the earth and the sky
with the terrifying message that all must die.

I saw the shadow of the descending sword.
After the flash, the heavens roared.
I fell to the ground with my hands to my head.
I awoke in the darkness and the dust of the dead.

I ran toward my home, but I could never go back.
Everything had changed; the sky was black.
I went to the river to escape the flames.
I saw bodies sink into graves without names.

All around me were the broken pieces of mankind.
Had the whole world lost its mind?
Out of the chaos came a voice I knew.
Was this my friend? Could it be true?

Her face was swollen with slits for eyes.
From behind charred lips came her cries.
I was twelve years old when the A-Bomb hit.
Just a child when that fuse was lit.

I saw the shadow of the descending sword.
After the flash, the heavens roared.
I fell to the ground with my hands to my head.
I awoke in the darkness and the dust of the dead.

The Facebook Song

I saw your photo on facebook the other day.
I had to take a look what can I say?

Funny by now, I thought we would be flying in cars
with nothing left to do but follow the stars.

Yes I thought of you the other day.
If I saw you what would I say?

Funny by now, I thought we would be flying in cars
with nothing left to do but play our guitars.

I sent you a instant message the other day.
No response. I guess you were away.

Funny by now, I thought we would be flying in cars
with nothing left to do but follow the stars.

Funny, I thought we would be flying in cars
but our maps are out of date and we've lost the stars.

Black Coat & Tails (If Looks Could Kill)

Like a magician, he's up to his old tricks:
another show, another fix.
His heart's in a box
bound by a thousand and one locks.
His world is whirling and about to tilt.
The knives are in all the way to the hilt.
He'd let them go but he doesn't know how.
If looks could kill, he'd be a ghost by now.

From the shadows, he calls out your name.
Just one shot and you're back in the game.
Your heart's in a box
bound by a thousand and one locks.
Your world is whirling and about to tilt.
The knives are in all the way to the hilt.
You'd let them go but you don't know how.
If looks could kill, you'd be a ghost by now.

The Eighth of December

It was the eighth of December.
This is what I remember.
This is what they said:
John Lennon had been shot.
John Lennon was dead.

It could have been George C Scott.
It could have been anyone.
But a psycho with a gun
had snuffed out the sun.
Yoko took to her bed.
John Lennon was dead.

It was the eighth of December
That is what they said.
This is what I remember:
John Lennon had been shot.
John Lennon was dead.

That Imaginary Boat

He stood out in the rain.
He took a drink to kill the pain
and there he would hide
from all the hurt inside

He stood out in the rain.
Took a drink to kill the pain.
There he would float
on his imaginary boat
where he could hide
from all the hurt inside.

There's a hole in his heart.
Been there from the very start.
No one would claim
that he's winning any kind of game.
Could have been my grandfather
on my mother's side.
Could have been my grandfather
on my father's side.

I don't stand out in the rain.
I don't drink to kill the pain.
I no longer float
on that imaginary boat.
I no longer hide
from the hurt inside.
Now that I have all of you
to help me make it through.

I no longer hide
from all the hurt inside.
Now that I have all of you
to help me make it through.

Long Into the Night

Long into the night, I drift in and out
of a fog, with numbers
whirling around my head,
with clouds hovering in the darkness,
with zeroes
made up of nothing but air,
with stars floating on the edge
of an indigo ocean.

If I had a rocket ship,
I would search those stars out
and then make a map
and mark their exact location,
so others could then plot a course
and find me there,
an astronaut,
a kind of sailor, unmoored .

The Man on the Blue Horse

After a walk in the park,
we came to a place
of monuments and statues
and the tombstone
of a man on a blue horse;
and in the dark
she took me aside and asked me

to call her later.
But when I did she
pretended to be
someone else,
as if I ever knew
who she was
or what it was she wanted.

The Moon Followed Me Home

The moon followed me home,
its watchful eye
wide open, never blinking, never looking away.

There were no clouds, no obstacles between us,
no shadows standing in our way,
no barriers of any kind.

There was just an unconditional acceptance
of each other,
a connection, radiant and true.

The Horses

The horses are gathering together
out there in the dark
over on the other side of the field.

Once the fog comes in, they will float up
into the clouds and drift high above us
and look down on us as we lay in our beds.

They will listen to our prayers
and look in on our dreams.
Later they will guide us back from the land of our regrets.

And in the morning, the field where they
once grazed will be empty,
and any sign of them will be gone.