



MEL WEISBURD

Collected Poems

BOOKS, PERIODICAL POEMS, AND ARCHIVAL RECORD

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers | Los Angeles, 2026

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Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

*Edited by Brian Kim Stefans
The Text-Tech Papers*

EDITORIAL EDITION

This edition gathers Mel Weisburd's two books of poetry with independently published poems located in *The California Quarterly*, *Coastlines*, *Poetry Los Angeles*, and *Quill & Parchment*. The book texts serve as copy-texts for poems Weisburd later revised. Stanza structure, lineation, italics, and meaningful indentation have been checked against the original scans; narrow-page hanging wraps have been rejoined. Obvious OCR corruption has been corrected without silently modernizing the author's wording.

Melvin Irving Weisburd

28 November 1927, St. Paul, Minnesota – April 2015, Los Angeles, California

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers

Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry

Research and edition prepared 2026. Historical texts are reproduced for scholarly and educational use.

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ARCHIVAL IMAGES

Mel Weisburd, Coastlines, and the Los Angeles circle



Mel Weisburd, editor in chief of Coastlines, at a benefit concert, 12 February 1956. Photographer unknown; reproduced from Estelle Gershgoren Novak, ed., Poets of the Non-Existent City.



The Coastlines staff and families in the 1950s: Bard Dahl, Mel Weisburd, Gloria Weisburd with Stefi, Lachlan MacDonald, Gene Frumkin, and Sandra Garrett. Photographer unknown; reproduced from The Gloria Poems.



Clockwise from upper left: Keith Gunderson, Mel Weisburd, Gene Frumkin, and Stanley Kiesel, 1969. Photographer unknown; reproduced from Poets of the Non-Existent City.

INTRODUCTION

Poetry, pollution, and a divided Los Angeles life

Mel Weisburd lived two careers that rarely occupied the same room: he was a poet and little-magazine editor formed by Thomas McGrath's Los Angeles circle, and a pioneering air-pollution inspector whose manuals helped establish modern environmental enforcement. Born in St. Paul to an immigrant Jewish family and raised amid separation, silence, and antisemitism, he arrived in Los Angeles as a teenager, served in the Army, and graduated from UCLA before joining the new Los Angeles County Air Pollution Control District. At Los Angeles State College he edited *Statement*, then co-founded *Coastlines* with Gene Frumkin in 1955. His poetry moves between the body and the instrument panel, private memory and public catastrophe, while his late books return movingly to his fifty-year marriage to the artist Gloria Applebaum Weisburd. This edition gathers the two complete books with the independently published poems located in *The California Quarterly*, *Coastlines*, *Poetry Los Angeles*, and *Quill & Parchment*.

Stage I | St. Paul, war service, and UCLA, 1927-1950

Melvin Irving Weisburd was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on 28 November 1927. In a 2013 UCLA oral-history interview he described both sides of his family as immigrants: his father's family came from Zhytomyr, in the region of Kyiv then associated with Russia and now in Ukraine, and his mother's family from Będzin, Poland. His parents separated when he was about two and a half. After a period as a ward of the state and his mother's hospitalization, he was raised on St. Paul's West Side by his Orthodox Jewish paternal grandparents. They cared for his material needs, but Yiddish and Russian surrounded a boy who was largely addressed in English only by his grandfather and an aunt. He remembered the household as a 'silent movie.' Solitary walks, private fantasy, and the habit of making short written notations became early ways of keeping himself company. Antisemitism also marked his childhood: he recalled being chased and beaten and later understood the employment barriers that had narrowed his father's working life.

At thirteen Weisburd went to live with his father, stepmother, and two stepsisters. His father had contracted silicosis while working at the American Hoist and Derrick Company, and the family moved to Southern California in 1942 so he could find wartime aircraft work. Weisburd finished high school in 1945 and entered the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program at Stanford, where he took mathematics and physics. When the program sent him to active duty after the war, he served at Aberdeen Proving Ground and then as an enlisted clerk at West Point. Honorably discharged, he enrolled at UCLA on the G.I. Bill. He began with scientific and mathematical ambitions but changed to English under the influence of a German Jewish refugee with whom he fell in love and through whom he discovered Goethe, Heine, Mahler, Beethoven, and the wider culture of European modernism. He received his undergraduate degree in English in 1950 and won UCLA's Shirley Robbins poetry prize that year.

Stage II | Smog inspection, Thomas McGrath, and *Coastlines*, 1951-1962

For nearly a year after graduation Weisburd survived on veterans' benefits and temporary work while taking civil-service examinations. Around 1951 he joined the recently created Los Angeles County Air Pollution Control District. The new inspectors were trained in combustion, industrial processes, and control equipment, issued badges and county cars, and sent through a landscape of smoking refineries, incinerators, factories, dumps, and backyard fires. Weisburd called them 'smog cops.' He was sometimes chased from industrial properties, but advanced to senior engineering inspector, spoke publicly for the district, worked with photochemists, and helped edit technical research. The notes he kept in the field grew into *Air Pollution Control Field Operations Manual: A Guide for Inspection and Enforcement* (1962), a pioneering handbook reissued nationally by the U.S. Public Health Service. The fifteen-part 'Report from an Early L.A. Smog Inspector, 1956,' printed in *A Life of Windows & Mirrors*, turns that work back into poetry.

In the evenings Weisburd studied at Los Angeles State College with Thomas McGrath, the radical poet and teacher whose dismissal during the McCarthy period helped politicize his students. Weisburd became editor of the college literary magazine *Statement* in 1954 and was part of the informal 'Marsh Street Irregulars' who gathered at McGrath's house: Gene Frumkin, Henri Coulette, Bert Meyers, Naomi Replansky, Stanley Kiesel, and others. McGrath's insistence that poetry belonged to communal life rather than aristocratic or academic isolation shaped Weisburd's editorial and poetic ideals. With Frumkin he founded *Coastlines* in 1955 and served as its first editor in chief. The magazine published local and national writers, sponsored readings and jazz benefits, recorded literary events, and provided an alternative to both university verse culture and the publicity surrounding Venice West. Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Charles Bukowski, Lawrence Lipton, Ann Stanford, Peter Yates, and many others crossed its pages or its social orbit.

Weisburd's literary experiment was inseparable from domestic life. He met Gloria Applebaum, an artist and sculptor from the Bronx, at a small Los Angeles gathering and recognized in her the warmth and cultural companionship his childhood had lacked. They married in the mid-1950s, had a daughter, Stefi, and made their Beachwood Drive house a gathering place for

writers and artists. Gloria helped host *Coastlines* fundraisers, welcomed contributors, and supported both the magazine and Weisburd's scientific career. Under the supervision of psychiatrist Oscar Janiger, Weisburd took LSD once in the late 1950s as part of an experiment involving creative people. His account, 'Lysergic Acid and the Creative Experience,' appeared in *Coastlines* in 1958 and was soon reprinted in *Best Articles and Stories*. He later credited the experience with strengthening his confidence that artistic, scientific, and organizational thought could cross disciplinary borders.

Stage III | Chicago and environmental leadership, 1962-1990s

In 1962 Weisburd left the county agency and Los Angeles when the American Medical Association recruited him to help establish its Department of Environmental Health in Chicago. Living in Evanston with Gloria and Stefi, he organized conferences, answered physicians' environmental-health questions, and published in *JAMA*, including 'Analysis of Carcinogenic Air Pollutants' and 'Physician's Guide to Air Pollution' in 1963. He remained connected to poets, taught an adult poetry seminar, and wrote 'Report from Evanston' for the final issue of *Coastlines*. The family returned to Los Angeles in 1966. Weisburd subsequently worked at System Development Corporation and, in the 1970s, founded Pacific Environmental Services in Santa Monica. As president for seventeen years, he directed multidisciplinary environmental work and prepared the three-volume *Field Operations and Enforcement Manual for Air Pollution Control* for the Environmental Protection Agency in 1972.

Stage IV | The late books, mourning, and the archive, 2000S-2015

The business career limited the time Weisburd gave to poetry, but it also furnished its conceptual vocabulary. His poems repeatedly join perception to instrumentation: windows and mirrors, radar, neural scans, refineries, spectral analysis, memory, and the body's own signals. The early magazine verse is argumentative and public, wary of technological violence and what he regarded as self-enclosed poetic expression. His work appeared across *The California Quarterly*, *Midwest*, *Poet Lore*, *Epos*, *The Transatlantic Review*, *San Marcos Review*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Grasslimb*, *Lummox*, and other magazines, and Walter Lowenfels included him in *Poets of Today* (1964). The later poems became more autobiographical without abandoning science. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* appeared from Conflux Press in 2005 with an introduction by Gene Frumkin. It brought together work spanning six decades, a tribute to McGrath, and the smog-inspector sequence. The book restored to view a writer who had helped organize Los Angeles literary culture before the city's Beat mythology hardened around a narrower cast of names.

Gloria Weisburd died on 24 June 2006 after four years of dementia and related illness during which Mel was her principal caregiver. His closest literary friend and *Coastlines* co-founder, Gene Frumkin, died the following year. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (2009) answered those losses with a chronological sequence that includes courtship, parenthood, Gloria's art, her mastectomy, the strains and comic resilience of marriage, caregiving, death, and Weisburd's tentative return to life. He continued to read publicly, took part in projects recovering Los Angeles literary history, and recorded an extensive oral history for UCLA in 2013. After his death in Los Angeles in April 2015, English professor Andrew L. Knighton donated the Mel Weisburd Papers to Cal State LA in 2016. The 8.92-linear-foot collection spans 1952-2002 and includes manuscripts, poetry journals, correspondence, and forty-two reel-to-reel recordings; selected tapes have been digitized by the California Audiovisual Preservation Project. His surviving work reveals not two disconnected careers but one sustained inquiry into how human beings perceive, damage, repair, and remember the worlds they inhabit.

CONTEMPORARY INTRODUCTION

Gene Frumkin on A Life of Windows & Mirrors (2005)

Gene Frumkin opens the 2005 collection as a friend of more than fifty years and as a poet whose own life in poetry was changed when Weisburd encouraged him to join Thomas McGrath's Los Angeles workshop. That personal history gives the introduction unusual authority: Frumkin reads the book as the late gathering of experiences he had watched unfold across most of Weisburd's adult life.

Frumkin places the parents at the emotional center of the poems. He distinguishes Weisburd's return to a frightening, disordered childhood from conventional confessional poetry, describing it instead as a lifelong attempt to recover sequence and meaning from what could scarcely be remembered or proved. He sets that difficult family history beside the sustaining presences of Gloria Weisburd and their daughter Stefi, and singles out 'My Father' for the force of its portrait of industrial labor.

The introduction also insists that the book's personal world cannot be separated from public work. Weisburd's years as an early Los Angeles County smog inspector and his later environmental business stand behind the poems' mixture of scientific language, political disappointment, and sorrow. Frumkin finds humor within that history as well, especially in the workplace poems 'Lyle' and 'Escape from Zenda.'

Frumkin's final judgment is affectionate and exact: the book remains lively because its author remained intellectually and personally alive. His essay supplies a contemporary witness to Weisburd's place in the McGrath workshop, the UCLA generation, and the Los Angeles poetry circle. This summary is included rather than a complete reprint of the copyrighted 2005 introduction; the full text remains in the archived source scan.

Gene Frumkin
Albuquerque, New Mexico
July 12, 2005

PERIODICAL POEMS, 1954-2007

Poems not collected in Weisburd's two books

The Elephant

1954

If this beast love is nothing like an elephant
It is certainly as ungainly, and if this figure astonishes
It is because what is inside of us is no less distressed
At losing one's head, than any titubated pachyderm
Harassed at the point of being eaten whole.
Love, too, shrieks its nasal terror at being four-footed.
But what else can it be with its thick hide
If it must hold our violent stomach
And keep our heart from piercing our shallow breast?

I really don't mean to unsize the voluptuous beast—
Although we can see through its magnificent eyes
The microscopic emptiness of ourselves
Rioting through the heavens; or to pirate his
Poor fancy when we, unrequited, seek a solitary
Death, just as he does amongst his ivory.
But since the elephant dies more calmly,
Why bother to make love a figure for the poor
Animal's own corpulent, but tidy sex?

It is simply that my love is downtrodden
Enough for me to look no farther than the traces
Of its struggle, and to follow a kind of elephant
To its stupidity. You have to see these things for yourself,
Or, if you are still smitten with the humbugs
Rapt on the arteries of our sentiment
And still pursue the enamored trail,
Dramatizing everything in sight, make sure you are a true
Hunter, for elephants can kill, or, inconstant,
Steal away as silently as a fox.

No, I think love is as serene as an elephant
Fated to dignify any circus.

See for yourself the physique of this fool:
Come, take a look into its past:
Here you see these folds of conundra,
These compresses of apathy about the eyes,
This naive assertion of its snout
Honking like Jumbo in jungle bucolics.

Publication. *The California Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (1954), pp. 20-21.

Descendant Robot

1955

The trumpet of his voice
Bleeds in its rusted organ.
His cogs are gnawing at their motion,
The needles of his dials limp—
His hand grows cold, petrified
In the silent climax of its precision.
And his eyes, webbed in satin
Dimensions, conceive immaculate
Instruments of reason
Isolating grave meniscuses
Of error, reflected
In the dark convex of his mind.

Publication. *Coastlines* 1, no. 1 (spring 1955), p. 26.

The Game

1955

In the living room, they face each other
and circle;
Full face, half face, quarter face—no face
Disappearing around the edge of a question,
out of
Each possibility as it is suggested, full
Circle in their own silences, back out into time
With fresh faces, and another cigarette,
retiring
Now to the rug and the ash tray, and the
restoration
Of damaged senses.

Each loses or wins, and shapes whatever smiling
Or frowning victory lumps his face from
The certain defeat within. But each is a stellar
Sport, shining coolly at her mutual distance,
Polishing with her mouth the elegant lies
And stinging truths passing hotly in the excuses
For her desire.

One wins, crosslegged on a stubborn center
Of the rug, bristling all her muscles of
disguise;
Winning all power to decide, all freedom
of reason,
Plays treason to the other's memory, breaks off
His exposed desire, and cackles in a laughter
grown
Indigenous on what she dies, on the still
twisted rug,
While the world steals around on the sly.

Publication. *Coastlines* 1, no. 1 (spring 1955), p. 27.

The American

1955

Illuminated by many moons of destiny,
Born in the very fever of necessity, a citizen
Of natural law, with all rights, fibre of the surplus
Wheat and the iron clay, a muscle of the sun,

He might have bored a copper mine into some hill
Or built a babylon of oil, or built or shot up
Some town, barnstormed, bootlegged, embezzled, speculated,
He might have been a patriot or a popular president.

In the endless west of the vast regenerate virgin
The traumatic empire reeled between the coasts
On whose impulsive earth the manhood of his nation burst
'Till the frontiers warped and the cities thundered.

And the soil locked. American and landless now,
He sat with the misery of Job in the agrarian mind,
Bored the rifle of his bitterness, published
His agony of the lonely, fenced, windbroken frontier.

Then lost to a sullen, poetic generation;
To Europe, to Stein, to Lenin, where now
Like a black nun abstract against the white slopes
Of the future, pressed purple lips to acrid stone.

Then back to the brink of the eagle eye, peering
At the star crossed nations, to the wars, to the Death
And the ruined vision, to the classrooms where in
The nausea of students and teachers, he spat out the
world.

Then one day arrested in his vagrant dream, while
A thousand-eyed facelessness gaveled for order
In the electric darkness of its justice,
Scanning the withered truths scarred along his body,

And patrolled deep into his heart, zoned wisdom,
Followed reason, confiscated the history of his flesh,
Dropped dead beliefs and false images of this thorough

Enemy now into a thousand sudden networks.

Though exhausted from a lifetime of being born,
His love riots in its prisoned heart, and seeds
The endless west, the endless world now, delegating
His conscience to the parliaments of future dawns.

Publication. *Coastlines* 1, no. 2 (summer 1955), pp. 12-13.

The Integration of Failure

1958

I.

I am Lawrence, and by that name,
A Lawrencian system.
Somewhere in the stars I am known by
The center of my power in all its shapes,
And all the handsome characters of my ego.
See how the world gives in to me,
Inch by inch. It is lovely to be so free
Even in lapsing from my own principles.
Men have surrendered to me, or resigned
Themselves to oblivion. They are insipid
Scarecrows with all their fears.
Bankrupt and exhausted by my wit, surrendering
Their laughter and their admiration.
The truth is my lyricism,
But I can forge the truth
From each lie as well.
I am one of those undetermined
Infinite individuals.

2.

There is an excess of time to corrupt;
There are any number of conspiracies,
I am Lawrence and the name is bacteria.
I am the raw infected will; even the
Sun conspires to my putrefaction;
But man, but man is guilt,
And from that guilt men will make a man;
Not an image as Lawrence is;
But something real and unconscious as a fool
Something helpless and corrupt
Someone tame who bays at the moon.

3.

Now the stars are out, but I will not look.
I have not seen them in ten years.

It is dishonest to see them again,
Like a lover one has once rejected,
The stars are dangerous at my age.

There are vessels bound for troubled seas;
I have not bothered, though my courage aches to be born.
Who has filled my vacancy? Is he braver
Than I might have been? Am I Lawrence
To dream of what I might have been?

There are beautiful women, each a life
Of desire. Ten or so in each city;
There is even a nation of my children
To be born. There is my absolute
Immortality. But I am anchored deep
In my shallow sea. I will never travel.

And there are causes, but these are split and confounded;
Thank God, I cannot take the blame for these,
They were lost before my time. And there were
Enterprises whose imagination died with greed.
My dreams are sold for profit.

And there are the names of flowers,
Now dead in my weeds in my garden
That I have never learned. In all
This rubbish, I have the taste of greatness.
I am Lawrence of the feeble dream.

4.

And at that deep dark corner, at the
Very end of my rope, in that absolute
Rejection, Lawrence leaves me
And my name goes out. There is upheaval
And indigestion. Each contraction expels
Me further from that cozy world
As I am born again in a world I never claimed,
I am awakened by the landscape of my birth;
Goodbye Lawrence, do not worry,
I'm not dead.

Awakened by the murmuring landscape,

The paths relax in an afternoon spring.
The wind stirs the leaves of my pine,
And my neighbor's Eucalyptus.
There is a sense of being here
The conscious landscape of my birth.
And time is here where I've been busy,
And the brunette claim of my wife's smile,
Like the trellis filling with the growth
Of our marriage, is wordless, but full
Of my real name. Here, on this property,
Are the victories of my sinewy reach,
And here in my arms, my daughter asleep,
All this time, in my garden, on my knee.

Publication. *Poetry Los Angeles* (London: Villiers Publications, 1958), pp. 54-56.

Later Than There Is No Never No

1958

Later,
When you no longer wanted it;
Later, they said, save it
For later.
Soon,
But it could never be too soon.
Nor too early, only
Too late.

Too,
They said,
Too easy is too early for two; later
Will be soon enough.
Later
Is for non-profit ideas but now
Is for now,
Now is for things you
Need to need. Later is non-realistic
Now; later
Is for later, they said.

Publication. *Poetry Los Angeles* (London: Villiers Publications, 1958), p. 57.

The Sixth and the Seventh Sense of Men

1960

I'd like to stop time at just about the Flying Jenny
To hear it squeal and cough to plow the sky
With its wooden prop and singing struts,
Then stretch its wings out upon a gale,
Tethered by the craft of equilibrium,
And mount all three dimensions all at once,
Treading aloft in the sunset or the squall.
First, you rent a little harmless anger
At the planet you could never hurt,
Throttle wide open and exhaust flaring,
Smashing the air and stinging window panes;
Then to stunt your signature in the sky,
Lording it over those sepia melancholies
That disguise mankind in the earth.
It was the reflex of the human reach, I guess,
Whose art and muscle were but one remove
From the scoop of the crawl-stroking arm
Emblazoned in the coverts of the wind,
Meant only to balance motion against the air,
Windmill in the metaphor's weather.

But time cannot be stopped, except by death
Of the simultaneous and universal kind;
Nor can this crude flying machine
Be diverted to other sport, nor can this stick
And glue reminiscence be junked:
The sixth sense was born for the seventh
To elude the means of the first five:
Seething supersonic gazelle sucked into air,
Invention without inventor; abstract and
Programmed perception without perceptor:
Creature of the extrapolated magnitude
Of the Seventh Sense: radar and radio astronomy:
Sentient angels plunge into inverted depths
Of unsought and undreamed futures:
Objects in the scope, but retina dead
While the symbols of theoretical reality,

Pound like rivets in the practical mind,
Expounding the eighth and the infinite sense.

In the time of the Jenny you could preach
The instinct of the sixth sense by parable:
‘The stone flies and kills or rests forever
On a cloven road. That is the issue...’
And the mind would come to fix on that stone
As if it were a missile of clairvoyance
At rest in a garden of rapport,
And it would contemplate in the green naked shade
The eighth and the ninth sense illumined
By the incandescence of the wish:
Precognitions, fantastic realities, Brotherhoods,
Universals, Justice, Life and Power
Hereafter; Laughter, Joy and Love—
Complete concretion of the mystic realm.
Unless—unless, there are five senses after all,
And not even that in interstellar vessels,
Which succumb to the ennui of space,
Or not even that, if there is no sense at all
In all of nature but that gross stupidity,
Blundering mushrooms rising from the missile slopes,
In the mass acres of universal death.

Publication. *Coastlines* 4, nos. 2-3 (spring 1960), pp. 46-47.

Leave Taking

1960

For Gloria

At last we leave the charred harbor
To be made real again by uncanny love,
Plying upon the sealed waters
Into the purpose of the sunrise and the night,
In this ocean whose stars are kelp.
Even I am buoyant in the swells to tell you
I love you by the silver keel of the moon,
'Till it burns blue with my selfishness,
And the ocean is strummed to the summer shores,
Though I cough on the lustre of those summers.

I confess now that land madness of cursing
Stifled objects: the tousled moon
For his good humor or the generosity of the sun.
(The smiles of people burned me dark)
Would that all their love had been in my heart!
A crab like I will neither swim nor fly
Forced to see through the wreckage of his eyes
The sky is a vast well-kept park
With no trespass on the buttoned grass,
And I am scuttled to the ocean floor.

Thank heavens we are healed by sea's amends,
That ambient and undulating justice,
The running resumé and gross statistic
That horizons our course on the world.
And bound to the cleavage of our way and wake,
We face each other in the circumference of this craft,
And count vestigial dreams and soul's conclusions,
Listing the proper names of old ports
Where we may lie at anchor to hear the pounding surf,
While man worms now that solid oak of sky.

Publication. *Coastlines* 4, nos. 2-3 (spring 1960), pp. 47-48.

A Crow Black With Purpose

1962

A crow,
Black with purpose, shifts from one to the other
Of the holly boughs
On my disheveled lawn. Suddenly a hundred-thousand pig-weed
Moths rise
From the Hollywood Hills. The blackbird darts about to do his work.
These thoughts come to me:
Did many poet-moths die propagating that will? Did one give the signal
To rise? Perhaps
That is unimportant. Like a snapping sheet on Monday's wash they
Rise and flow down
Beachwood Drive across fifty miles of L.A. asphalt.

The black crow forages
Among necessities. I sit here thickening with abstractions
Darting among the limbs
Of confusion. I think: it is refreshing to my eyes
To cavil with distance,
Instead of illusion. I should exercise the seat of my vision
More often, I mean
Actual physical exercise, instead of propounding myself
To a tasteless oblivion.
I dream here in the green shade of how poetry should
Retaliate from my pen,
Like white ski-soldiers camouflaged on a white field of snow—
Except by the tracks,
I see how poetry wanders afield and loses the argument.

The black crow has what
He wants and flies half way up the variegated ivy of these hills.
With little thought
He manipulates the precise equations of his will, and leaves aliquots
Of air to forgetfulness.
Poets—whether they admit it or not—articulate by trial
And comparison, with little
Statistical significance. Their art, they confess, is an artificial
Physics, a Heisenberg

Insouciance of we-measure-what-we-measure. Or else, they drink
Poetry
Like the dark wine of unconsciousness, and
Never get drunk.
Such self-expression seals the fate of poetry.

My neighbors,
Whose names I forget, are full of immense empirical secrets.
The way they vote
Often comes as a shock to me. They do not see me here excavating
In a public quarry.
They think I vote like them. Actually, I am playing on
The stops of reality,
A querulous old flute. If it is not poetry then let it be oratory.
The opinion of
Imagination, consuming what is publicly unsaid.

I do not have
An inkling of what my fellows are writing
At the moment,
Or when they shall rise to the light like these moths.
They are just as
Preposterous as myself, sitting and thinking and writing.
A time will come though
When my neighbors must think. It will be either too late,
Or just a little
Before it is too late—in time, when thought will
Set the thinking
Mass ablaze, and we will break our appetite with our will.

Publication. *Coastlines* 5, no. 2 (1962), pp. 44-45; reprinted in Estelle Gershgoren Novak, ed., *Poets of the Non-Existent City* (2002).

Report From Evanston

1964

Somehow under the stagnant air,
By the polluted lake,
Ambushed by people on three sides,
It got trapped between Chicago
And old money and old grass.

You'd think it would be overrun
The way continents of students and air
And many an alcoholic from N.U.
Despite W.C.T.U. roll through.
Yet local rule and a civil tongue
Hold the line across
A corridor of liquor stores.

Or you'd think it would collapse
The way it accumulates, but commutes away.
Even as the old guard makes its stand
The schools integrate the children away.

Cities are rarely made from joy
And nothing lasts.
Yet in the winter, when you come home,
Ten thousand men scrape their walks at once.
And in the Spring, the elms open like parachutes.
On quite an ordinary day
The Mayor lights a candle for peace
And nobody resists.

Publication. *Coastlines* 6, nos. 1-2 (1964), p. 13; reprinted in Estelle Gershgoren Novak, ed., *Poets of the Non-Existent City* (2002).

Burial

2007

Though I often visited the graveyard, this time the first order magnitude of its finality startles me. Gardeners spin edge cutters around the stone mats. Roses are stuffed in 4:00 P.M. cracks. Red blossoms of the coral trees bulge with astigmatic clarity in the tearful squint of unshaded eyes. Blackbirds lift in squads and drop like handkerchiefs thrown by careless children among the headstones.

Black figures mourning the father, husband, brother make it clear that life seen through the squeeze of lenses is borrowed. I visited him at his open coffin, the features of his face sealed as if molded in plastic. That was not my father, neither in life or death.

Few feel close, driven apart by envy, guilt. The sociogram of family can't make eye contact, or easily say "hello," "goodbye." The guilt of not having gotten rich as Howard Hughes chokes in their throats while the Rabbi slips his name into blanks of boilerplate. There isn't much to say, except that he obeyed the law. He does not ask who will soon be left to remember him.

I move into position as pall bearer and I feel the weight of his body within. Yes, he was my father, I think to myself. I am no better or worse than he. My admission is too late. Workmen lower the casket with a winch that winds slowly in low gear, as the rabbi murmurs him down. He passes from our eyes through the fresh grass. I seem to hear his last words:

*I lie with the dead on the Eager grass.
The bison of Poland pass through the trees.
Dear Son, my dreams are still in the clouds
over the old neighborhood.*

Publication. *Quill & Parchment* 7, no. 9 (September 2007).

Torrey Pines

2007

Sitting beside my daughter
in her quantum mechanics class,
the professor threw equations
on four different blackboards
as fast as he could speak:
'series converge/terminate...
case where if and only if K equals not equals o...
where K is very large...where K goes to infinity...
($K + 1$)! factorial'
leaving me behind, breathless.

Later we strolled atop the cliffs overlooking
the ocean. We could hear the boulders rock
in the undertow for miles below. The sea looked
as if it were crawling uphill to wallow in the dusk.
Three gulls shot out from behind a cliff
and seemed to skin the light from the water,
alarming something that was leaving us.

Stefi and I broke into each other's eyes
as if what we had been to each other
flared and then extinguished
all in a moment. Then she jogged on ahead
for her exercise while I dropped back
to philosophize about the scene
and to smoke my pipe.

A three-dimensional gauge popped into view
to mark the exact point of our separation.
A huge yellow ruler set on a north-south
line with the Institute of Oceanography
with scales and numbers large enough
for my nearsighted eyes.

In her world, everything is measured
with that gauge! The levels of the cliffs,
the curvature of the blue-green sea
the division between depth and height,

prehistory and history, science and art
her forward motion and my fallback.

From those heights the world is no larger
than a house. I must lower my head
to pass through it, and reentering
from the intense sunlight and darkness
of outer space, the eyes must adjust
to the light that had been subdued
by the lower atmosphere. I see
a lone student below in the bottom-most
percentile of the cliff walking the baseline
of the beach and my daughter—out of sight now,
beyond the last bend.

Publication. *Quill & Parchment* 7, no. 9 (September 2007).

A LIFE OF WINDOWS & MIRRORS

The complete poetry of the 2005 collection

Prologue: Three Koans on Human Perception

1.

A Kandinsky retrospective spirals up
the promenade of the Guggenheim
each painting is displayed in the sequence of its progress:
Decayed Action, Mutual Agreement,
Unanimity, Sky Blue, Gratuitous Ascent,
each signifying a synesthetic nuance:
The unseen made visible in acts of painting
without copying anything.

A doctor viewing Klammm and Moscow II
insists the artist suffered profound projections
of partial retinal images; whether by artist
or madman, creation of free forms out of thin air,
he says, copies only, however imperfectly,
the workings of a brain blind to itself.
Or does it see the unseen because it is blind?

2.

To sortie between soft art and hard science
depart the Dreaming Spires of Oxford.
Walk down the tow road beside the Thames
past the green verges. Cross the Radcot Bridge,
the oldest since Cromwell. Drive Botley Road,
100 miles Northeast across the Oxbridge rivalry.
Along the way notice how at first your thoughts
logically follow one another along the road,
but as you approach Cambridge, the realm of the
hardest science of all, your thoughts occur all
at once like cities and towns on a map.

3.

When at last you step back to view the tall building
made of glass, you cannot see a thing inside.
The sun fills it to the top with black from the noon
of the day. Patches of light leap in reflections
like porpoises of black lacquer. But at dusk the windows light up

from within like a reef laid up against the sun.
You can see the black silhouettes of white-shirted men
all scheduled in one mass, like Yahweh
revealed, His Authority thus decreed. You let
it snap you in and once trapped in there.
you all wrap yourselves into a bureaucracy of one.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 11.

When I Go Down to That Sleep

1956

When I go down to that sleep
it is to the marrowed villages I go
where the tail-bone sinks in the bush
and the marsh is shallow with fish.

I hang like a possum from a limb
and nothing will harm me now
the hunters are flat on the meadow
when they go down to their sleep.

My wife has moved a face-length
and falls into her sleep.
Our baby drops deeper than us all
to the bed of nutrient visions

where sleep just begins.
Outside of houses like ours
the guards are playing cards,
somewhere as the sun breaks

above Alaskan and Siberian skies
pilots rub the sleep from their eyes,
fly above the darkened earth
and drop the bombs of nightmare

while we are sound asleep
drifting on the earth like wreckage
our parts all laid on tables

like books with open pages.

Let the powers read through the night,

before they turn their lights out.

Let them read our sleep

then turn down into their own.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 13.

Variant. An earlier version in *Poetry Los Angeles* (1958), pp. 53-54, contains a different third stanza, adds a stanza beginning 'Power is wide awake,' and ends with a four-line waking coda. The 2005 book text is printed here as the poet's later revision.

Between Chicago and St. Paul

1948

This familiar almost forgotten country
sours with the headlines of the day's news:
The neutron bomb. Another incident...

Like a smooth war-machine, the torque
of the earth turns the dark over
my clattering, yellow-streaked passage. From
the train, the peace is glaring and inconsolable.

Trees are gangrene with throttled sun.
Farms are galvanized for war.
The moon, melancholy and out of its mind
hurls a charge down the missile slopes.

Past the hostages, whose yellow lights
cling like willows to the darkness,
and past the metric of the Mississippi
I return to make peace with my father,

To settle with my mother, mother of fact,
in whose county the leaves drop, dispossessed,
who complains from the crippled distance to her Poland,
how America stings in crabby rooms.

Because she is certified psychotic
I must make a compensation; I have learned,
alone, to make my way in the unknown, to accept
how God chokes Minnesota into beauty.
Still, I configure my malaise on the window glass.
My breath stains the world as it passes.
In the dark, the human is a catastrophe,

the minute an unexploded moment.

It is not that I am afraid to die
with distance and escaping time,
but that we should all die at once
sends me slowly home.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 14-15. Reprinted in Walter Lowenfels, ed., *Poets of Today* (1964).

The Wad

1985

From these high-rise windows
we watch the wide bodies rise slowly
across the treeline and the ocean.

Objects nearby occur by accident;
those farther out by grand design.
I crush this paper in my hand
to obliterate these distinctions
wherein all divisions join
into one ball,
all intermittent time drossed
into one clump, compiled into something—
maybe, one Love, or failing that
a cloud of loose ends.

It is as if I had wadded up my life—
and yours, too, just as you appeared
by my side—to throw away. Instead
I unravel it slowly to reveal:
passes and overpasses, lookout
and foothill drives, innumerable
telegraph wires and the axiomatic
sounds of railroad tracks:

axo-dendritic
axo-somatic
axo-axonic
axo-synaptic

past junctions and watering towers,
a single café in a ghost town
with strange street names:
substantia in-nominata
zone incerta
nucleus ambiguous
bouton termineau—
Ammon's horn

We reach Telegraph Road, Berkeley,

crammed with used book stores, coffee shops
posters of Nicaragua, Cambodia and
Jesse Helms stapled
to telephone poles.

And flattening it back to Mercator
what do we find?
The tortured borders of Poland
and, yes, you on a balcony there
hanging over it all waving
to me from very far away.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 16-17.

Crystal City

at Alexandria, Virginia, 1972

The jets pound
at National
fire into the brackish sky
like missile launchers
in the future war
the weight of glass
trembles in the hand

I lick my reflection
in a crystal bowl
go in and out by taxicab
visit rooms
stuffed with government
turned into cash
in the ledgers
of Marriott

Cities of light
bleed through the ceiling
I can't sleep
in the noisy rooms
sealed by windows
that can't open

I walk under the blackened stars
followed by wild creatures
omitted from the
urban plan
jets claw and tear
at the sky

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 18.

Anomaly

1988

On a dark night we sit around a beach fire
when by chance I look back and see the moon,
huge and bold, slyly sneaking from the left across
the wrong side of the sky.

In fact, she's not in the sky at all,
but floats on a slick of oil.
Close-up, she's brilliant chalk-white,
studded with dry maria.
Consumed by her own reflected light,
she appears a ruling cursor of the norm,
not meant to be seen at all.

When I look again she's
no more than a mile offshore,
sailing slowly to port.
She's not as large as reputed,
just big enough to make me feel small,
to flagrantly disregard the proper scale of things,
leaving me adrift in dire relativism.

Only I catch that moon where she is not supposed to be,
roaming beyond the black borders of the beach,
to become the brightest secret of
the darkest side of me.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 19.

The Owl

1964

Under the siege of the Integer
the fluffed owl
a speckled calico number
primped of ruffled Wholeness
uncompromising as a mother-in-law's morality
or the Communist Manifesto.

Unerring marksman
inclusive and precise
of the ratio of the Known to the Unknown
of the Seen to the Unforeseen.
Only its confidence
assures the Future of the World.

Present without presence,
note without chord; never in-a-sense,
devoid of Seeming.
Without peer it judges
all Final Judgement.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 20.

Delaware

1963

Racing through the New Jersey industrial district
along the railroad right of way
I travel faster than verbs through the warps,
the lodes of every one's homesickness passing
 dismal nouns:
Grey skies, backsides of houses, bare trees
"Merck", "Rahway Station," "Purolator,"
boys down by the river bank, a swath
of open wound beside an old road bed,
watermarks of ungovernable swamp,
of cumulative voting, stolen from the past
borrowing from the future, tangled in clutches
of dogwood, neglected graveyard stones.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 21.

Philadelphia

1981

O how to escape!
Alone, driving in a dream of Market Street.
Steered the wrong way into one way traffic
 around the railroad station
through a pond of water on a downtown
 street of poor drainage
 that drowns the brakes
around and through the parking lots
 crazy California driver
 in PA
lost
down E 76; Where is the small sign that points
to the Airport; big truck in the way
somehow on....what? I 95?.... tollway
 to Walt Whitman Bridge.
To the right, to the right to the last toll booth.
"How do I get to the airport?" I cry.
"Take the access road straight ahead,"
the attendant yells and soon I'm back again on track
again to my plane-but to where?

I regret not having driven over
that Whitman Bridge instead and followed its road
to wherever it might take me.
Only Walt could lead me to where
I might find myself again.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 22.

Nostalgia

1956

There is a beating heart in the steeple,
a stream of stars through the pass,
domes of breathing lungs
and in my hands, stones of light.

I've been here before,
but never beyond, wading
knee deep in the seed, in that
first great well-being.

There is a man by a bridge.
"Is She still here?" I ask.
His smile comes down from the trees,
and spring blooms in the field.

Some children are blown on swings
in the field before a castle.
A child nearby laughs and marks
the first place of memory.

I cry for joy as I recognize the spot.
"These are orphans of lost dreams.
They will tell you where she is,"
he says. And then wanders

towards the sun through
green curtains of grass
and drops softly out of sight.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 23.

Home Site

1981

Tall grass and cottonwood
are all that's left between the curbs.
The old airport, the mounds of Indian ancestors,
in short, the entire surround,
much closer in.

Birds drop, stretch, flutter today
just as they have always done.
I can take any pattern of their random imaging
for a natural history,
trace my smoking habit
or tendency to break promises
to an unbearable affection cut off,
or my chronic cough to a pillow
smothering me, or to her
simple disappearance
from the tip of my tongue.

What mother have I the power to prove?
I have no sentence she ever said.
Here, my very questioning is a fact.
Whatever comes freely to mind
flies with the birds
among the trees.
If all I can remember is myself
sitting in a blue stroller
legs folded under me like linen
what proof can be offered if I now deduce
they took her away because
she tried to kill me.
I remain nonetheless
evolved from parturition
and nurtured somehow by attachment
to the bodies of others
and to a long, troublesome journey
to capacity.

Why be concerned?
This is a graveyard of a neighborhood
—a site wiped out in the U.S
by freedom and prosperity.
There's not a child about.
Only fresh earth and trees and birds.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 24-25.

Amtrak

1967

The white doors
the redbrick row houses
uniformly double-bolted
above the cracked sidewalks
angled streets / strip parks
where empty benches
face the railroad tracks

A man climbs a freshly painted dome
to repair a weather vane
church steeples flare like flowers
above vast stretches of rooftops
billboards in black and yellow
cry RIZZO CARES

I travel superficially
but every now and then feel
the ache of redbrick in my bones
of idle people among fallen leaves
of long green corridors
where in my astonishingly long life
I have appeared many times before.

Although this is not my hometown
I mourn the emptiness of the foreground
memories trapped in little grassless rooms
below forgotten clock dials.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 26.

The Swimming Pool

1980

The pool is filled with the debris of my long absence.
The garden had tiered in shoots and fronds.
Whenever my pole gets caught in the upper bramble
fresh leaves drop into the water.

I swing the pole and net about like a glassblower
before a tempering vat. Leaves dart waterborne
in moments of centrifugal force and enter the net
like butterflies. At night raccoons come down
from the dry hills to drink to my handiwork.

Bees ignorant of the optics can't find the surface.
The shadows of their struggle beat for hours until they assemble
dead in the skimmer box, their stingers fully cocked.

A rush of heavy air treads like a caterpillar breaking
the surface of the pool into panes of antique glass.
Amidst the reflections of oleander and the clouds above
a seething jet arrives from the darkness of Eastern cities
to remind me much of my life left there.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 27.

Windows on the Distant and Near Past

198[final digit obscured]

You enter a museum,
tired and bored
and find yourself staring
at the staring eyes
of the Man from Sumer
and fall into a spell
of mutual fascination.

You move on to the amphora
and running figurines,
the jade masks and glyphs,
photographs of modern Mayan descendants
who know no more of their ancestry
than you of your destiny.

Tired and footsore
you wonder how strange it is
that man exhibits himself to himself.

Why does a person who loves Beethoven
become trapped in a small argument
of his life, and then in the end tries to
exterminate a race of others.

Our deepest passions cannot be concealed
we are naked in all of our intentions
though proud to believe we can understand
our own understandings.

Over there on the TV
a most terrible secret is exposed
to people all over the world,
humanity is tricked into watching
its own villainy:
An ordinary man
is secretly photographed
demonstrating with a pointer
on a floor plan the processing
stages, the waiting rooms, the chambers,

the storage areas; the schedule of trains,
without a single doubt
or lapse of memory.

There is no longer any news in that.
What's not told is how
that man felt when at last
he saw himself on TV.
But you don't get over
how you have no idea what the ground
under this man feels like.

He sees everything, including himself,
in some objective manner
He sees the underpinnings of what he
is beneath his dreamy soul.
But you can't and that is what
belongs in a museum.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 28-29.

Gregory

1986

At a grove at the lowest point in the road,
you'd think you were in the deepest wood
but the only forests around are among
the rich living side-by-side with the gifted.

Parabolic mirrors on an electrified gate
reflect the traffic through the glade.
Peek through the bush, a Red-bricked mansion,
row of garages, many cars all busy like
a submarine base preparing for a mission.

A man sits in the window reading a script,
staring into the scene of his absent-mindedness.
Why, he's Forester of The Purple Plain
unable to decide whether to buy a ruby,
a white sapphire or a golden amethyst for his love.
He is a hero of bad reputation who in the end
must save the life of another man
to redeem himself

Yes, he's played the nervous systems
of tall men, suffered all kinds of stress,
made life-and-death decisions without losing
his integrity,
tested characters on horseback and poopdeck,
and tall in the saddle as a reluctant gunfighter
he looked down on the weak and wicked alike
with flinching embarrassment.

There's a method to his career,
plucking here and there virtues from
ambivalences of good and bad.

With the passions of King David and the vengeance
of Ahab he orders a war in the name of MacArthur.
To keep up with the times as he ages he becomes
more villain. By the end of the world he stares
wistfully at the stars from the conning tower

of a submarine.

There's a chill in the forest.

I walk up the hill to the traffic light,
changing the camera angle.

The mansion vanishes.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 30-31.

To Gloria, My Wife

1974

So free and easy making love
on the couch above the treeline
in the attic under the moon.

We gather ourselves like driftwood
find all of our aches to heal.
Our forearms twist
over deep gorges of groin
to find our hands clasped there.

Now our bodies have no borders
ankles on backs of heels
fingers across arm creases
wrists buried in hips
breast falling into hand
penis dreaming in its glove
the endless shrubs of our ribs.

I lay in a paddy of her stomach
steeping in her
and fall into deep sleep
while she is stretched over the gravity
that held us together, the universe
suddenly reorganized.

How can it be, through what great miracle
in the middle of an orange afternoon
after a quiet conversation
and a fresh sea breeze to boot
the timing perfect
love for an exact reason
on labor day and the house
set up and finished.
We were right on the mark
from the taste of milk in my mouth
its primordial sweetness and genetic templates,
percolating in my throat
all my seed spawned

that pulled me inside out
rinsed me through and through
enough to make a nation,
or a sunlit daughter born to handle
the division in art and science
better than I.

Soon we were all together longer
than the combined years of our childhoods
and grew in ways we never would
without each other.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 32-33.

The Blow

1981

The news at the office was bad.
It came like the percussion of metal against
metal over cushions of air
of cars colliding down the street.
Outside the sky was pale beyond navigation.

Perhaps it was only an innuendo
inside a passing remark,
or I reached a limit of capacity.
The mere whisper of its convoluted
circumstance is too complex for sympathy
and I'm too busy to suffer it.

I don't permit my voice to quiver
or my feet one misstep.
I send the news on a train instead,
along a straight edge to Philadelphia
to be passenger of its slow-working, undercutting
aftermath, to view the mountains collapsing
along the way.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 34.

The Case of Windows vs. Mirrors

1984

The window is chalked with smog in that contentious
real-time reality that rudely interrupts speech
and disconnects my thoughts.

The sun breaks through and reddens the sky
like an old woman rouging her face. The gloom at dusk
is a Power Sink, the ebb tide in the weakest moment
of day. Downwind blows the deceived consensus.
The air's acidity is proportionate to high-level corruption.

Somewhere through the malaise beyond the window, presidents
lie, ideas lose their value, facts their veracity,
scales their calibration, perspectives their horizons.
The sky is an erased blackboard.

While inside, in the mirror-lined wall of my Louis XIV deposition
I see myself reversed from left to right, stunned by my creatureness,
facing an attorney whose actual face hangs beside my reflected image,
about to collapse from his allegations. I see my soul beneath the foliage
of my image drowning in the mirror. Between his questions I remember
I was beautiful once.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 35.

Lyle

1982

His head, a grey cloud of expertise above a short stem
of dapper pinstripe, a ball of leaves
divorced from the black action of limbs
in the mists of their branching.

He stops me on the way to the john
and suddenly I'm swept into the newsprint of his head.
I look out over the waves of sentences
waiting for the period, the final silence
only to be followed by a calvary of "ands" and "buts."
I doze near the sleepy lagoons of his pauses
in the landscapes of Cromagnon.

I let him spin his thesis on any point
while doodling inside his thematic structures
on sheets of wasted time,
clouds and blackbirds, women in white dresses,
lines of poems, tables of food, seams of gold
and whatever I'm going to do next
should I ever return to my desk,
until the unforgiving imperative
of the human bladder reprieves.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 36.

Reunion

1964

On the verandah overlooking the Miracle Mile
Alvaro emerges from the house stripped to the waist.
He turns his back on the view and leans
against a flimsy railing in danger, I fear,
of falling down the canyon.
He had been listening to Mozart inside the house;
his eyes had not adjusted to the sun,
a multi-focus in them that would not change in his head.

It seems the desert is filled by some lavish hand
of contraption. The smog layer strings out under the sun,
the city scrambles like a bureaucrat's puzzle.
When I ask him to look at the scene, he replies:
"The city doesn't exist. First acid trips like yours are only visual.
After many, only music and people matter."

Gene, also on acid, sits nearby, massive as a Rodin,
sucking on his pipe, his face solemnly fixed on a trajectory
arching over and beyond the view.
The stucco, gingerbread roofs, signs, highways
are left only to me.

With each hour the city slumps.
The sun shears behind a tract-broken hill.
Alvaro dips his fingers into the clear shade,
his shadow falling first down the canyon,
then lengthening across Hollywood below.

Walking down the hill, the two men mutter gibberish
like Rabbis murmuring a black box of magic down

with puns while I alone with the physical world,
watch quicksilver trail their heels.

We drive away in separate cars
down into the splits of black avenues,
cracking everywhere as if under lava

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 37.

Mentor

1965

For the late Thomas McGrath

The train kicks up a linear storm
across winter's indifference.
In the Vistadome, I struggle to maintain
body heat over land barely made for men.
At Valley City the sky is cropped and fallen.
Fargo glows ahead.

As always he lives near a marsh
or a river. No matter the place or the weather,
the booze, jazz, ache of rented rooms
as before. Even in the dead of winter
chickadees and nuthatches fly to his
bread and suet, and students carouse
turtle-necked as in California years before.

Here he drinks and smokes between sieges
of six-beat lines. "We're about to enter the Fifth world,
Saquashohuh," he says in vocabularies of ten
dimensions, "and enter a world of peaceful revolution.
This time the compelling star will be seen
by all without guile or agitprop."

I leave him drifting off well beyond Marx
in Platonic forms as elaborate as the
Divine Comedy, towards the double gods,
the Tetragrammaton, the Blue Star Kachina.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 38.

Against All Odds

1974

I enter a building of sky-facing windows,
rise in an elevator to a panorama of parameters,
cross a bridge over the sensory darkness
enter a room filled with sun without shadow
sit in a red chair as of flesh, behind
fountain joints of oak that impart to me
even more existence,

on a pinnacle of a work force
that fluctuates under me, beyond bankruptcy,
perhaps even beyond death.
Here I pick from the fruits of my imagination.
The rest of my life is mine!

It wasn't difficult: Once the work flow is set,
it becomes reproductive. Product, heat and fume
rise from the template, information and money exchange,
and soon I can afford men better than myself

The company has a life of its own.
It's a crab that bounces over the tops of everything,
a juggernaut in iron-vested suit with sponge inside.
If it falters you snap up the slack
or coach its joints back to action
with a few well chosen words.

Still, I must remain alert to error
that might quickly blow to a storm
roll over us all like an army of tanks,
or appear in the sky like a heavy planet
that no one can keep in place.

But, today, the pluses and minuses
are in check,

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 39.

Generations Up from the Jenny

1950

I'd like to stop time at the Flying Jenny
to hear it squeal and cough to plow the sky
with wooden prop and singing struts.
Then feel its wings stretch upon a gale
to mount all four dimensions at once
tethered only by the craft of equilibrium.
throttle wide open, exhaust flaring
breaking "the surly bonds of earth."

You could vent a little anger
at a planet you couldn't hurt,
then stunt your signature in the sky
lording it over the sepia melancholies
of mankind on the earth below.
I guess it was the reflex of the human reach
whose art and muscle were but one remove
from the scoop of the crawl-stroking arm,
meant only to balance motion against air,
little more than a windmill in the weather.

But time cannot be stopped nor can this crude
flying machine defend its nation or conquer others.
Its successors became supersonic gazelles smashing air
and stinging window panes; abstract and programmed creatures
of great magnitudes: supersonic speeds, fire power,
bomb payload, deadly accurate at great distance.

In the time of the Jenny you could preach
homely parables. "A stone can be thrown to kill
or rest for eons on a cloven road." And the mind
thinking at the speed of imagination could dwell
on that stone as if it were only a toy at rest

in a peaceful garden in the shade of slow
growing things—or inter-planetary craft speeding
through the ennui of space in a motionless relativity equal to
the stone in the garden. Or, if in that ever renewing world, man
stupefied by speed and accuracy, need no longer think or act:
Blundering mushrooms rising from the missile slopes.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 40-41.

Escape from Zenda

1985

The agreement called for a closing date.
I signed this and certified that until only my resignation
was left. Imagine, I had never been fired in my life,
but in my last act I fired myself

All those years I played the imposter King until
forced to fight my way out of the trap laid by my
pretending. Oh, I was clever in thwarting the bluffs
and threats of lawyers and in warding off
the piercing of my veil just in the nick of time.

Who had I really been? John Doe, one of my alter egos?
"Whoever you were," I complained sitting on the bathroom
stool, "you used my body up as if you didn't give
a shit and left it worn, with impacted bowels, no zip,
robbed of years, damaged, old."

I slipped down the back stairs as an honest steward still
playing false King, leaving behind a multitude of pretenders
for the new era, the battle to break-out greater
than my break-in in the first place.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 42.

King Lear on the Palisades

1988

He sits on a bench in the shade watching the weather-dried faces of the homeless deep in the pluperfect-subjunctive conundrum of their luckless lives, for wrongs done them, and those they've wronged.

Most of his life people told him he was special
... gifted... maybe anointed. Where did that feeling
come from? A middle-aged dyed-blond woman
sitting opposite shouts: "...agree with me once in a while,

God damn it, agree!" Looking heavenward she curses:
"Why don't you shave the hairs off your asshole!" As if reminded
of something, a man nearby mumbles: "I already covered that!"
"You don't pay attention," she answers. Such aimless speech

flows from person to person down the paths of the park.
Their remembered /imagined conversations interrupt
his monologue. Were they all thinking the same thing
unburdening themselves in one grand chorus at land's end?

These thoughts compel him to silence and the park
to a shadowy gloom. With no one to talk to face-to-face
you reach the end of thought and the body eats itself up. Suddenly,
a robust old black man, wearing a cap on his grey head,

marches diagonally through their midst scolding everybody
at the top of his voice. They all turn to listen
as if it were about time someone broke the compliant silence.
"Now, gods, stand up for bastards!" he cries

as Edmund in *King Lear*! "If you have no heritage, go take it
from someone; borrow, steal, rebel! Go emboss yourself into space.
At least Edmund was an anti-royalist revolutionary."
Though everyone's listening, they look away as he marches by.

Painted on the back of his T-Shirt are thick white letters
I AM NOBODY, but his words continue to fill the park.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 43.

Talk Radio

2004

I go to bed listening to a walkman.
I can only muster amusement at the criminal
lies and illogic boring deep into my brain
as I'm rendered helpless with sleep.

I dream I am discussing current events with a
dear friend who abruptly turns on me with words
from the radio in his own voice while the President
of the USA is being interviewed in my living room.

My wife complains that all the words in our library
have lost their meanings while crowds outside
applaud the president in roaring approval.
In the early morning a neighbor warns that the police

are looking for me. I try to yell in capital letters
to push my voice into the waking life, but can speak only
in whispers. The voices at my door rehearse what
I shall dream tonight, without my permission.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 44.

Short Lines

1990

You must wonder why
these lines are like my knees
brought up hard and dense
against a cold white margin.

In that manner, they rise like doves
in the pointillist daubs of a Seurat.
You can catch them in one glance
like a snap dragon,
lick them in with stabs of tongue
like an anteater,
or let them glide with outstretched wings
so they can be shot down.

They are thoughts, feelings, peaking
on the run, under pressure -
specimens of instant experience
in res, in situ, in vitro
like ballet, each stanza ends in a pose,
in the lingering of an aria that almost,
but not quite, stops the action.

Not poems, but cullings of bottom lines,
suspended between poem and prose

. (
taper to their ultimate
conciseness in their great conservation
of sound and silence.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 45.

Kol Nidre

2002

(*"All our vows"*)

After a dreamless night I discover
my fingerprints eroded from toxic print,
my eyes and ears bruised by the media.
When was the world stolen while I was busy?

I will no longer tolerate such
hectoring and campaigning
the guilt from appeals everywhere
and all that is non-interactive and read only.
I shall leap across "on" and "off."
How pale then will digital messages become
to the merest tremor in a woman's voice
heard first hand.

I won't eat, drink, speak or think your
or anyone else's arguments.
Don't knock on my door or ring my phone!
Don't dare convert me!
I'm paid up and will pay only cash.
From now on I will purchase less and less
of what I was fooled to need.
I dissolve my debts and owe nothing to
inquirers, inquisitors and informers.
I cancel my subscriptions to all cultural usurpation.
I shall remain in the diaspora, free of all compromise
and corruption of language and have faith only
in independent witness and relativity.
I am a lost soul. A lost soul is what I wish to be.

I shall pay attention only to news that rises from the depths
of oceans, space, soul, far from cable and wireless.
And all that pounding music that misses a beat
and hisses like a cat. I shall ignore anyone
who speaks for God and flag.

Is human nature nothing more than

language mis-spoken and misread?

What shall I believe in the absence
of all that failed? I shall turn them all off,
pluck the weeds out network by network
synapse by synapse,
then I shall begin again.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 46-47; revised in *Quill & Parchment* 7, no. 9 (September 2007).

Variant. The later *Quill & Parchment* text is printed here. It restores the question at the end of the opening stanza, makes several small verbal and punctuation changes, and reverses the order of 'network by network' and 'synapse by synapse' in the final stanza.

Mallarmé Decoded

2004

*... if those girls whom you explain
be but an itching in your fabulous brain!
Faun, the illusion escapes from the blue eyes ...*

—Afternoon of the Faun

Nijinsky, just born, yawns and stretches under the sun.

He can't tell lower thoughts from higher,
animal states from human. He could be seeing
through the eyes of a chimpanzee or a wasp.
So merciful are his limitations,
he's at home no matter what species he is.

Amid the hormonal vapors of Agnucasta and myrtle
girls in a grove nearby exude the odor of a dress
just beginning to burn. He dances Debussy's larghetto to the
music of woodwinds and saxophone. There in the jungle of that
fabulous brain, his author's illusions, seen in their
first-impression clarity, break his tender heart.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 48.

Scan

1997

The Detector can capture a signal from a
single neuron and image galaxies of memories
the way astronomers rank the luminosities of stars.
It sees through the skull to the crown of the new cortex
cocked forward on the old like the laurel on an Emperor
and into a brain which, like poor Hamlet's poor Yorick,
makes jests from paradoxes of mind-body, space-time,
particle-wave, yes-no, on-off.

Unraveled, the terrain of the brain reveals an atlas of Europe
marking sites of secret treasure and ancestral whereabouts
buried beneath alpine amnesia: Cotton grass, blue Gentian
and dense clumps of moist, snaky Sphagnum like those
of the les hautes fagnes.

The cobble stones of an old Roman road run through it.

Here mind is time and brain is space and
each organ a sculpture. Protected from the world
they experience no feelings, leaving the superfluous cortex
idle to conceive endless nostrums like resurrection,
afterlife and the cetus polymerase chain to copycat
the Father, sanitas ex natura.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 49.

Delirium

1997

"Please count down by seven from a hundred," the doctor requests.
I respond "100, 93, 86..." but distracted by the concept
of number itself I think:
Seven seas, planets, heavens, colors; seven imams beginning with Ali
and lost my count.

Even I could see my wandering was taking me afield.
Only the great mathematician Euler who solved the problem of
traversing a non-repeating path between two islands
across seven bridges without backtracking anywhere
could get me out of this mess.

The first bridge hangs over a deep gorge where balance
becomes precarious. On the second I find no connection
between machine and work, organ and function.
On the third I get too far ahead of myself and am left behind.
On the fourth, the bridge collapses trapping me on both sides.

The doctor repeats: "Relax, try again. Think of
subtracting seven each time, arithmetically."
"100, 93, 86..." I begin again, but on the fifth bridge
I count seven steps to UCLA's Royce Hall from the
quadrangle; I pass the Seven Corners of St. Paul on the way home
from the airport; I see the 7-Up bottling plant through my first
girlfriend's window. I arrive at Apartment #7 on Sycamore Drive
of the woman I marry; I drive seven miles from my daughter's
home to Tyson Corners.

From the sixth bridge, the seventh is no longer in sight
and losing my balance, I fall...

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 50.

Image Hill

1956

I was a working engineer in his class, not a nature lover.
McGrath taught about the Marxist engineer Christopher Caudwell
who demonstrated in system diagrams how science and art form
a complete universe, not as fitted together, but as they 'interpenetrate
man's struggle with Nature.' That is, because reality by itself
often collapses into illusion both art and science are necessary
to perceive it. McGrath saw the Blue Star of the Hopi Kachina
as this point of view incarnate.

He took us on a search through Griffith Park to find images
for our poems. We made our way on dusty trails
hair-pinning up past Eucalyptus on fickle slopes peppered
with seed pods that looked like printing types. He pointed
out Castor bean, Solae with little tinkler bells, porcupine
bush, Manzanita and high bush huckleberry. They
did not interest me nearly as much as the view of Los
Angeles hazed over below. Noticing me he swore
the revolution would come in five years. But I knew
the city was much too spread out for that.

As we separated I returned to the grids of commerce
and the city of data scatter, probability distributions
of the market place, the Infimum of the suburbs,
the exponential smog—all monsters of quantifiability
grazing on barren landscapes.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 51. Reprinted in John Bradley, ed., *Eating the Pure Light: Homage to Thomas McGrath* (Backwaters Press, 2009).

Her Hands

1966

...yes, her hands
I could close my eyes and let them
arrive from far away.

They came from the sky and sprung up
from within me
in a spell of somnolent warmth.

It is late morning now and she interrupts
herself "Do you remember," she says,
"I used to pet you with both hands,
and sometimes with my feet
at the same time.

You moaned with delight,
you couldn't get enough.
I could feel the cold and hungry places
under your skin.
I gave you as much as I possibly could."

Then with a pat,
thinking I had enough, which I never did
she says "I've been out to the garden
while you were sleeping.
You should see the orange blossoms
on the tree. Come out with me now."

The Solari bell rings in the breeze. Seeing her
prolific garden I see the great power of her hands.
"Look!" she says, "the corn and tomatoes
are coming up. The corn stalks will serve
as stakes for the tomatoes... "
She has grown and healed everything around us.
I can't move still feeling her hands on me.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 52.

Janns Steps

1950

In the late 40's
the view from the steps at UCLA
looked exactly like El Greco's Toledo.
What little smog there was
seemed to linger only from the longings
of the German exiles that turned the dusk
turquoise over Beverly Hills.

Brahms was flesh and Beethoven
defied nothingness. Toscanini
began to radiate in space, sending
The Song of the Earth,
the D and F Major of the high contralto,
the B flat of *She Feeds Her Flock*
and the piercing sweetness
of the *Shepherd on the Rock*
to the stars...

Through the brush of the hills
house lights blinked whose inhabitants
we never saw but whose names were on
our lips: Huxley, Brecht, Viertel,
Mann, Isherwood, Stravinsky, Schoenberg.
They kept our spirits high and helped
us to believe in ourselves.

Most of all, my first girlfriend
translated for me the tender variables
of German subtlety into idiomatic English,
taught me music in two lines,
from Telemann through Haydn to Beethoven,
from C.P.E. Bach through Mozart and Schubert...
and for a year or two, she, not UCLA
became the *alma mater* of my mind.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 53.

My Father

1949

My father, a laborer, forty-eight, divorced three times, timid
and always tired, comes home with the furnace blast in his ears
and speaks in an egoless voice. His grey stubble is dry
and electric, his eyes reverberatories of fire. Thin
and hollow, he burns the core out of himself until his marrow
flows, flips his cigarettes away, half-smoked, lifts castings
above purple fumes, almost above his head from a strength
of not believing in doctors. His passion is fire and his love
is his death. Now against the remaining womanless days
he walks abroad the earth in robes of heat waves,
diaphanous excrements of hell and this world.

Alone in the corner of his kitchen
until the cool shadows form in the summer, at 7:30.
He finishes his coffee and papers, and
cool, clean and in pain, rises and sends
 Two clocks, two clocks,
 ahead of him
 into the night.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 54.

Variant. First published in *The California Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (1954), p. 19. The earlier text uses past tense through the opening passage and differs in punctuation and line setting; the 2005 revision is printed here.

The Infant in the White Room

1987

At the point where the rays of the sun
strike the earth's atmosphere
the entire universe turns into the
consciousness of the infant
growing towards its first memory.

A voice was there from the start
It did not say, exactly:
“*You are,*” or “*I am*” but rather
“*There it is,*” as if the world
had been searched for and sighted
after a long voyage.

There the earth was in the meniscus
of its vision, plain for all to see.
Just slipped into existence. Thank God!
It was good enough for him.

A life begun
ingesting light in sheaves and loaves,
the exfoliates buzzing in its ear:
the growth of crystal
the silvering of mirrors
the tarnishing of silver
the sawing of softwood
the hosing of sidewalks
coal sliding down basement chutes
the explosions of cylinders
the shouts of children in the afternoon

and in the distance
the whine of God.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 55.

REPORT FROM AN EARLY L.A. SMOG INSPECTOR, 1956

*The fifteen-part sequence from *A Life of Windows & Mirrors**

Black Thursday

Today the smog is more ominous than at any time
before (or since.) Contrasts between afternoon shadows
and sunlight vanish. Lipsticks lose all color.
Bright pastels of houses fade grey. Through burning eyes,
the sky looks like the atmosphere of Venus.
A County Supervisor shouts over our two-way radios:
"For God sakes! What is that stuff? What's going on!?"

The meteorologist reports the next day. "The smog that morning
stalled between San Nicholas and San Clemente Islands
where it cooked, and now is headed 50 miles out to sea then
both north to Ventura and south to San Diego."

The Mayor complains the City of Ventura is to blame
while a newsman's rotary camera catches
L.A. in the act of never ending settlement.

The Mayor of Riverside sends a note
along with his annual greeting to L.A.
complaining that a swath of smog
with the consistency of cotton candy
arrives on time each day
exactly at 4:10 PM.

And as it happens passengers on a transcontinental flight
view a mysterious, diaphanous shape
rising gracefully like Isadora's scarf
on a cold morning
over Trenton, New Jersey.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 65.

Patrol

Every state of matter enters the air—
some here and there, some gone forever
like puffs released from cannons on light-off,
hazing valleys like battlefields and choking canyons.
We scramble in grey Fords, Thoreau's "inspectors of snow" surveying
the skies driving over passes, under passes, along
the first freeways, across the straight arrow Telegraph Roads
and Lookout Drives, past doomed orange groves,
along the foothill plots of alfalfa and romaine,
the Boulevards, Routes, Roads of the *Thomas Guide*
past cities that change unrecognizably when we next
get around to see them.

The rhythm of the tires over seams of concrete
take on their own prosody. The Pasadena freeway—*iambic*;
Imperial Highway—*dactylic*, Olympic Boulevard—*anapestic*.
In chorus, I belt out lines of poetry from my fading
English education to keep from going mad.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 66.

A Metallurgical Plant

With safety helmet and glasses I plunge into a foundry
alarmed by high temperature, heat-cycle horns. The faces of
slag-stoking men are eaten by the alkaline air
from the taps of bright orange, yellow pin point, burning rims
needle flows, while casting molds are laid out
in nurseries of man-made things?

What should I address: the rush of images that rise in the fumes
before my eyes, or the image-less relations of
time, quantity, emissions. Appearance and sound
seem so real the furnaces look like giant locomotives
harnessed to power the illusions of the mountains
or the turmoil of the earth below the mantel.

Concentrates are charged into the furnaces cars
and poured into ladles upended snug to throats
of converters. In the fireboxes streaks of red orange
from the black matte and the still-glowing
slag lurk behind the willow shields of duck blinds
in marshes of miniature sunsets while extruders squeeze
out miles and miles of copper wire to fleck with lights
the misty nights of Los Angeles.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 67.

Power Plant

The tall smoke stack with its red and white epaulets
200 feet above the plant, just below its plume rise
commands the Valley like a General
who hovers over nothing specific
and about which we can only speak in jargon

(It is for the General to order only once
and his engineers to sweat their existence)
as his grey plume fans out into quiescent air
lolling in the residential streets downwind
like a Chinese snake.

Can you imagine, should I write a ticket and order
this giant to cease violating our paradise, even though
he hooks us all to grids of lighting, heating,
cooling and life support with more than enough zip
left over to energize cinema and sign, the bizarre
and make-believe and fill our brains to the brim
with image and acronym.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 68.

Oil Refinery

Approaching it I feel awe and revulsion
at its metallic entrails, an unpredictable
dragon in the sudden eruptions of its emergency flares.
It is as close to a living digestion system
as anything in the man-made world.

At first, we rely only on our senses.
Listen for gases hissing from high pressure valves,
look for mirages of vapors from low pressure systems,
frosts at points of pressure drop and track sources
of the smells of skunk, garlic, onions and cabbage.
Compounds of differing composition can have odors analogous
to eating, living, making love and dying, all proportionate
in the carbon/hydrocarbon mix of the air we breathe.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 69.

Backyard Incinerators

Think of red hot lava
flowing onto a plain from a line of volcanoes
and the red Christmas glow in the night
from horizon to horizon
We tried to ban them back then.
(*You probably never saw one.*)
They were made from concrete slabs with cast iron doors,
grates, spark arrester and ash pit
and were found behind every residence,
hospital, factory, warehouse.
They remained sacred for many years.
Getting rid of them during the time of Joseph McCarthy
was exercising dangerous power.

Someone has a great idea. The county narrows all trash burning
to the late afternoon when the smoke crawls across the
lengthened beams of the sun inflaming each carbonaceous particle.
You could see them swarm like pink salmon in the onshore breeze.
People eating dinner suffered the smells of burning garbage.

So convincing was this stunt they were shortly banned.
(Years later James Watt, Reagan's
Secretary of the Interior, claimed this kind of environmental
ploy to be a communist plot. Who knew?)

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 70.

Even a Crematorium

Entering, I find it spotless and the lone operator solemn.

He gives information with utmost indifference.

“There’s some unavoidable smoke on light-off. But this morning

I accidentally set the fuel rate too low.” Out of habit, I look into

the firebox and am shocked to see a corpse

on a pallet with his arms neatly arranged to his sides, serenely

burning away with a fatty, yellow flame while black smoke like

a rubber tire wavered around in dances of satin

and chiffon like an aurora borealis.

—I jerked my head back to reject the unexpected shock.

“It’s 1,400 degrees Fahrenheit in there now,” he says.

“Like any living thing, complex proteins are rare in the universe, and unstable.

Fat has a viscosity lower than a rubber tire,” he says too knowingly.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 71.

The Old Red Pacific Electric Cars

Many of these from the largest area-wide transit system in the country
are stacked broken and buckled into a pyramid neatly facing the sunset,
then lit with acetylene torches. Bright flames and smoke curl upwards to form
a black tornado until the column bends at right angles into the temperature
inversion. This act executes our childhoods,
the rails of escape from our fractious lives past the Myrna Loy statue
at Venice High and on the way to the amusement piers where Harry James
and Woody Herman play, also to be short-lived. Nobody left until the last
remnants of the cars burned to the ground.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 71.

Leaving Patrol

Then driving home into the gloom of dusk,
the power sink, the ebb tide
in the weakest moment of the day,
the sun vanquished in the darkening east
split from the embers of the machine-gun succession
of head- and tail lights fleeing west.

While the north and the south balance
on the thin strip of that light cleavage
the sky breaks in half, its huge cantilever
strip and twist like pieces of celery.
The two flanks of murk join and take on a reddish
cast from the illumination of downtown
which bares the grey streets of purgatory
suffered by the homeless and humiliated.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 72.

Downtown

Men cluster in spindles of summer Khaki
in the winter.
their bullhorn voices tangle in surly conversations
The babble fills the railroad station dome.
Outside a deadline falls upon the city.
With heavy heart Christmas Eve has come.

The skid row tightens the brows of the old men;
some lumber like bears from the bars
and lump the perspectives of the long avenues.
Some eyes are glazed, like fish swept along
with the tides of the city.

Their huge heads on neglected bodies seem
swollen with paranoia, abandoned children
grown old in self-contempt.

Along 5th street near Santa Pedro
drunks lie in doorways or sit red-necked
on bar stools in open air saloons.

I pick a mayor from among them
appoint others to the City Council
to head all the big bureaus
and let them run the town.
That will sober them up and
maybe get some things done.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 73.

Movie Appearances

I go to the only place I can forget the day,
and enter any movie.
Ventilators spill soiled air into the balcony.
Smoke creeps like ghosts along the Egyptian decor
down into the tattered and colossal beam.
Faces secrete from the protoplasmic dark,
eyes suck at each luminescent lemon drop.
Images of actors jump from the beam to make love
on the beaded screen.

In this cave of hoax, the audience is one
grove of longing, its long search
for fulfillment just inside angel's gate,
the only collective passion they may know
when eyes and the reflection of eyes
and the snow on the silk ledges of breasts
and all of them are swallowed
by the dark, each alone.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 74.

The Infra-Red Spectrophotometer

Next they search for 'Compound X' in chambers
running samples of synthetic smogs through a long path
infra-red spectrophotometer which detects constituents by wave lengths
on scales of increasing strength and signal vs light
absorption in a spectrum from 20,000 angstroms to 2 micron wave lengths.

Hearing it snap and buzz, I could not help asking myself
who I am and why in such gradations of light?
We look for illuminations through long paths of dusk
to see what the light does to the sky in order to feel
we are truly alive in a natural world.

I see light on the surface of the snow
through the haze over a bluff
through a drinking glass
a dusty threshold underneath a door
slivers of light just behind the ear lobe.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 75.

Along the Coast

We drive the boundary between land and ocean.
waves rebound from coves and peninsulas,
revealing the earth's surface is mostly water
and unconscious, to be farmed only by poetry.

Farther, on ignition a missile sets off a ground cloud sucking
steam from the launch platform, taking swirls of sand and dust with it.
The hot gas cloud becomes buoyant miles high layering combustion
products down the sky. Booster trails look like creme de menthe in dusk,
tinged with pink strawberry soda.

Near the oil platforms divers install sub-sea trees
inside chambers over wellheads dropping 1200 feet below.
Valves shut automatically should loss of hydraulic pressure occur
as a precaution against blowout. (*All this is happening
in the Eko Fisk Field, North Sea, Zakum Field, Arabian Gulf,
Gulf of Gabes, Tunisia, the Gulf of Mexico, the Santa Barbara Channel
and in alluvial fan catchments and the great basins of prehistoric lakes,
landforms of organic sludge bound in their rocky matrix:
Uinta, Washakie, Piceance, Green River.*)

The tension of the world is in the surface of the sea.
Oil tankers and cargo containers sail as clods of continents,
jig saw pieces breaking apart and coming together in the puzzle
of the earth's resources. Oil is the protein of the world's economy.
The consolato del mare rules land and government,
surplus and deficit, haves and have-nots, war and peace
and the routes of tourism to historic scenes.
At night the sea puts fishermen to sleep
the platforms light like skyscrapers offshore
a huge tanker comes alongside a pier
and floats on the reflections of the harbor
to pump its crude to port and take on ballast.
Vapors rise through its ullage vents.

Faces of the crew peer over the side
despondent in the lights of the foreign shore.

There was an odd instability in the stagnant air.
The sea seemed to fill with tumors of scattered being,

the land patched from the crusts of dead planets.
Odd, glancing visions never seen before chance with the wind—
too imminent to be put into words.

A flame between the layer of the evening
and the lights of the harbor on the lapping water
wave and snag on the tip of the widely distributed shore
and then unwind from the darkness to barely
touch the tip of the tanker. A reactive scream
of matter is heard to the edge of the atmosphere
for miles and miles around.

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 76-77.

Lament: What We Learned Before It Became Too Late

In L.A. the emissions from a million and a quarter cars on grids
of increasing vehicle—
miles of declining miles-per-hour exceed the threshold of smog creation.
Volatiles and oxides of nitrogen fixed in the high heat of combustion
break down into ozone and free radicals. Certain particles accumulate
in the body
faster than excreted—the so-called *body burden*.
That emissions of carbon dioxide would cause global warming
was forecasted
even then. (And later it would be found that some smog contaminants
are homologous to the organic compounds in the brain, the angel
of both art and science, the cross of the world to bear.)

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 78.

What We Learned for the Wider World

Visibility is low in all appearances
we must see through the technical parts of our minds
as if through an infra-red scanner
the urban/rural heat sink,
the atmosphere silkened with the products
of distillation and oxidation of hydrocarbons.
And from below, urban dioxides drifting from the Mesoscale
to Synoptic Systems and because of methylate of mercury
dead fish are found in the creeks, and seared foliage
and withered trees in the downwind swaths
of factory towns

Today exhaust from oil consumption is pumped
into the air as the resource dwindles.
The water supply is falling as the glaciers retreat,
methane is freed from lake and tundra, carbon dioxide
locks in the heat of the sun, clouds of dust and acid rain
circulate the globe. In a million years who will drill
for the oil of our rendered remains? Quantity will far
exceed those of the dinosaurs, but for what use?
What quality will it be?

Publication. *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Marina del Rey, CA: Conflux Press, 2005), pp. 79.

THE GLORIA POEMS

The complete 2009 poetic memoir of a fifty-year marriage

Preface

Gloria (Applebaum) Weisburd, mother of Stefi Weisburd (poet and science writer) and my wife for 50 years, was the hostess to poets, writers and artists, and political and literary events surrounding the publication of *Coastlines Literary Magazine*. *Coastlines* was published in Los Angeles during the decade of the 50's. A radiant woman, she gave comfort and aid to poets and their families and great support to my business ventures. She was an artist and a sculptor in her own right. She was known by her smile, the warmth and the textures from her sculptor's hands. She passed away after four years of a painful and disturbing illness, June 24, 2006.

This source preface is followed in the 2009 volume by short memorial passages from Gene Frumkin, Alvaro Cardona-Hine, Mel Weisburd, and Stefi Weisburd. Their wording remains available in the archived source scan; the poems themselves begin on the following page.

The Problem Was...

(1955)

I was alone from morning to evening
through all my meals and out in the field
driving through the county like a phantom
over passes and under passes, along the first

freeways, the Pasadena and the Hollywood,
all the straight arrow telegraph roads
and lookout drives, past all the doomed
orange groves and alfalfa plots-

along the foothill drives, and the numbered
streets, boulevards, routes, roads
of the Thomas Guide, scanning the skyline
for smoke and fumes from factories,

a taste of corrosion and acid in my mouth.
At home, I listened to the incantations of my room:
the water dripping from the faucet,
the cooling of beams and joists

the abrasion of traffic, the creaking of the city.
I was in the one world where every act has its reaction,
every expansion its contraction, every thrust its drag,
every circulation its return, yearning for warmth,

even from gravity. I heard my arteries rage under
my skin, the shell of my body pulsing with breath,
a world in itself apart. In the morning rumpled sheets
turned black, the only evidence of my presence.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 8.

First Impression

The right nearness, far history of her
lies fresh on her face, which glows
against the dark beards of men
and the bushes behind them, startling me.
She shines like Manet's painting
Luncheon on the Grass.

Her first 'hello' invites me to their picnic
at the topmost mast of the sun
to a goodbye that lasts for hours
in the light-shafted calm of afternoon.

So easy is her face that I'm neither
humbled nor enslaved
by her beauty and so full
is the short time, familiar, that soon
we find ourselves lying
on the lawns of the rest of our lives.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 9.

Mechiah

So free making love
above the tree line
in the attic under the moon.

We gather loose ends of our lives,
like driftwood washed ashore,
find all of our aches to heal.
Our forearms twist
over deep gorges of groin
to find our hands clasped there.

Our bodies have no borders
ankles on backs of heels
fingers across arm creases
wrists buried in hips
breast falling into hand
the endless shrubs of our ribs.

I lie in a paddy of her stomach
steeping in her
and fall into deep sleep
while she is stretched over the gravity
that holds us together, the universe
suddenly reorganized.

* Yiddish for satisfying pleasure

Author's note. Yiddish for satisfying pleasure.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp.

10.

Marriage

Mirror, I've changed!

How certain the eyes, the chin,
some ambitions fulfilled.

I'm not critical of your science,
but weren't my eyes cast in slate,
my mouth turned outside in?

I must tell her what it feels like
to be known by her.

How unusual to be called
by my name
day after day.

Each call, each touch brings
out the sheen of marble
and sets our names in brass.

When we press our mouths to kiss
the dark cold flees our hollows.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp.
11.

Going Out With the Boys

Gloria says the Los Angeles River is overflowing.
I say, we'd become anything to sing: fish,
birds, creatures of the deep. Repairs are
needed on the house with this rain, she says.
I say I can't miss going with the boys.
So, McGrath, Frumkin, Kiesel and I drive off
to our jazzmen at Manhattan Beach,
the fenders of my car outriggered in the rain.

We drive through troughs, drains and rivers
until we reach the dangerous coast.
We are square and sober,
breaking out in hives of smuggled talk
but our talk is water-logged.
On the left, tons of darkness.
On the right, the epileptic fit of the sea.

Our vision smears with terrestrial ooze.
The viscous road fattens on our rudder.
We turn to find a dry northwest passage,
love for women was never as turbulent.
The poets laugh, trusting my divination
to find the road all resolute for them.
I am the avant garde of the highway,
the terrestrial wheel gripped in my hands.

Black spits out wads of light:
the lanterns of the massive Hyperion sewage,
look like luminous birds roosting on scaffolds.
Its smoke stack bursts gunfire into the night.
The coastland lists like a surfacing submarine,
the sea draining from its drowned deck.
But the road still heads towards that dirty horn
where we will rain down hard from our poems.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 12.

She Says "Let's Make a Baby!"

We buy a fixer-upper. She builds birch
cabinets in the kitchen and a new hallway.
She paints the rooms with cheerful colors.
When I return from work somehow it seems the
entire sky got painted turquoise over our house.

She surrounds the house with plants and fast
growing Eucalyptus that lift the gables up.
In the middle of an orange afternoon
and a fresh sea breeze to boot—
the house set up and finished
she says, 'Let's make a baby!'

From the taste of milk in my mouth
its primordial sweetness and genetic templates
percolating in my throat, I knew we were on the mark.
The gush of seed pulled me inside out, rinsed me through
and through, enough to make a nation,
better yet a beautiful daughter.

Stefi lies in her crib wrapped in new skin.
I don't quite see resemblance. There must have
been some distortion due to the speed
of her pop-through.

We start a babble duet.
I ask where she came from,
had she been here before?
Did ancestors send regards?
How did she find the exact
spot on earth to land?
It took years before she answered.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp.
13.

Chicago, 1962

I.

It's an entirely different matter
moving West to East against the homeward traffic.

On arrival, after thirty years in the West
we immediately come down with November,
a kind of agony in the middle ear.

All the sloppy weather dumps here
days shift about out of order
the foliage of the breast withers
into effigies of bronchial trees.

Rain ices over, branches break from
the weight and crash like chandeliers.

Into December and thereafter
Chicago (red-headed oxide plumes from
Gary, Calumet) cracks like Steubenware.

On the shores of Lake Michigan
waves freeze in motion
ice is held in crests
form troughs across fissures,
wrap around pier posts,
slabs of ice crack under newly
powdered snow.

Under the coal-noon sky
the body glows from the friction of the present
a vernal thirst for sun overcomes:
a strong shadow and the sounds of birds
swatting air.

2.

On the downslope of winter
summer and spring wrestle each other
one minute snow, another rain.

Something always falls from the sky.

Time through the seasons is tear-dropped
The speed of time makes the earth egg-shaped
feels like we climb the round-hill of winter
and fall into the lap of the elapsing spring.

To overcome her unhappiness
of our move to Chicago,
Gloria finishes her art degree
and makes us many friends.

Stefi is growing and is a happy
child; she likes the snow and friends
cares for a toy poodle called Misty
and keeps a Guinea Pig.

Only I, I fear, am given purpose.
I brought them to a place
they did not choose. But they
pass their love and strength
to me to pass on in my job
to help better the environment.

In time our lives fall into a fixed pattern
like a snowdrop. Gloria demands that
we travel to Europe and return to L.A.
which persists in her dreams
like a post-hypnotic trance.
It is drizzling when I come home
puddles of water soften the earth.
April. At last we take our time
making love again.
Again, the natural pun:
snow one minute, rain the next.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 14-16.

The Pot

The honeyluster pot
that now sits in the den
grew in her studio
while I was flying
into the glaze
of the western sun

It is perfect or imperfect
I am interested or indifferent
I approach its value
like a DC-10 that startles
a settlement of birds

The birds of her hands
ignore I was away
or that I returned
with observations
that have no form or place
and resettle again

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 17.

A Bell of Silk

She wove a loose fitting blouse
I could easily lift,
windmills of my hands and lips under it.

Under a nine-month overcast
she built a walnut cocktail table
over the bright red rug,
planted Geraniums on the window sills,
grew indoors the backyard we left
 in California,
painted the leafless black elms
barely seen through frosted windows
on white canvas.

I snuggled to her in the dark for warmth
held her breasts.
She looked at me in the light of the street lamp
dimmed through the window shade
as if I had planted bamboo in them
rolled on her side
sucking her tongue,
moistness in her turned away-eyes.

The doctor found a tumor in a milk gland.
The right breast,
the blouse, the garden, the lips, the tongue
 the hands
toppled from her chest
into the Michigan Avenue rush,
the avalanche crushed my hands
like beer cans.
!

The doctor read the pathology report
as if from The Chicago Tribune.

Unwrapped, the sweet remaining breast
startled under the light.
A seam ran down the sheer face
where the other had been,
the scar of Chicago
on her body.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 18-19.

Preparing for Bed

Undressing in the lamplight
she is briefly naked
a flap of flesh drawn tight over the armpit
like a suspender reveals the ribs
on a quarter of her chest.
The remaining breast turns shyly
to the side of the quartered man-side,
surprisingly fresh and coquettish.
The missing breast carves a crescent
from us both and drifts somewhere
like a moon of lost gravity.
The skin long healed is not unattractive.
I don't mind, never did.
I wish she would sleep naked
but always she quickly slips her gown
over her and sleeps on propped
pillows way, way above me.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 20.

Her Work

She was hands-on bronze, aluminum, glass, clay.
A white-haired woman shoveling sand
on the casting floor of City College.
She poured molten metal into sprues,
sawed gates and risers, swung blow pipes.

She painted like Turner's fire-burnished
sea-skies, etched nuclear blast craters
of the next war into canvas. On her Grandson's
wall, her limned flanks of cellos, black notes & clefs
flutter like Brahms' butterflies in a tonal breeze.

She sculpted white pillars of porcelain bones
like testaments to the dead, fine figures that nestled
together, sanded smooth as puzzles, abstract
shapes soft as inner thighs.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 21.

Back in L.A.

Under Star Pine and Coral,
the lace of Eucalyptus tumbling down
the skyline,
the sun roof open
the decks of the Oldsmobile glow
midst arrays of crated parcels
of houses cast in stucco and tile
from one horizon to the other.

We're happy to be back
at the terminus of the aqueduct
near the tide pools of the ocean
and I'm free
driving through the gardens of set-backs
fresh in the minutes between home and work
after a sweet night's sleep with wife.
The shadows of the leaves of trees
flickering on the running face of me,
the hunter.

Pale grey of the roadway rotates like whetstone.
Automobiles gesture, feign, sidle, flirt.
Mascara of eyes in the rear view mirror
of the car ahead,
my eyes on the driver of the car
tailgating me.

The head rests of the Mercedes ahead
and to the side
flare like the head pieces of nuns.
I look up and through the trees and
float above my car like a lover
in a painting by Chagall

and approach other vehicles closer and closer
from farther and farther away.

Objects that look at themselves in motion
are dangerous.

It does not take much to slip from grace.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp.
22.

Regent's Lecture Fantasy

Reddened by the sun, dressed in blue blazer,
I approach the lectern
carrying a small volume, page markers
trailing, a picture of liberal modesty
to reluctant applause.

"The poet speaks what is publicly left unsaid,"
I quote from my poem 'The Crow Black with Purpose'
"Poetry is conversation, or a letter to an imaginary friend.
I won't lie to you with one eye on the market.
I speak to each of you in limited editions
of confidence."

That was one fantasy. In another
Gloria, not me, climbs to the podium
to admiring applause, shortly after I was
burned to ashes. Now she has purged
all my papers from their hiding places to
spring my legend forth.

Poor wife!—victim of my absent-mindedness—
stands before the crowd
a radiant figure in grey shock
With the hapless texts inside the thin volume
she must wing a kind of expertise,
while denied telling her side of the story.

One conclusion:
Manuscript and fame are very temporary.
Diskettes grow brittle; smog vaporizes
ASCII, software is incompatible
with new generation hardware. In reality
I'm locked in code and buried in
the silence of her throat.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 23.

Walking

After I retired, she shows me the flora and fauna
that I once sped past with only work on my mind.

If it weren't for roads and fences, all of the trees and
gardens would make one national park crated
by hedgerows of *Eugenia Syzygiums*: jambos,
S. paniculatum, rich green, tinted copper
nestled and tightly laced among the swimming pools
and tennis courts under the sea-air.

How remarkable to see such sumptuous mischief
while sub-zero winter settles far to the East
L.A. gardens and gardens but no one seems
excited by this perpetual surprise.

Pampered roses are metaphors and names:
King's Ransom, Mon Cherie, Mister Lincoln, Mikado,
-the red rose, the white Rose for the Madonna,
a golden rose for a majesty. Some betoken emblems
of sovereign states and engage for prizes like little houses
of York and Lancaster in war and reconciliation.

Passion fruit grows in reckless abandon
but their blossoms are not terribly sincere.
Giant Lilies of Paradise and Chrysanthemums
exaggerate the beauty of their madness.

She often rushes to the twinkling pageant at the ocean.
to watch the sun fall below the horizon, the clouds
simmer in the thickening reds of the rays until the sun
pausing for a moment swelled to the point of outburst,
then fell behind the horizon fanning outlier rays
as the ocean turned to molasses. The hues were all
she needed to know about the spectrum of color.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp.
24.

The Two of Us

As a male I am incomplete.
I live, but share my existence
with a woman a breath away.
We can't see each other entire,
the two of us in the house,
or walking down the street.

The woman and I
weave, leap frog, pull and intertwine
the faintest strands of our twin existence
 through each of us
in grasps of completion
against the storms of days.

At night I hold her hand,
the softness of her belly,
the hand of her, the other person, my wife,
and reaching the length of my arm,
I find the missing breast.
My other hand of my other arm
finds hers and becomes a single hand
 of a third,
the sometimes hidden depths of our love.

Rolled over she strokes the top and bottom
of my ear with the tips of her fingers.
A stingray lies flat and peaceful
on the side of my head.

Her face through the fog of my eyes
is clear against the grey mat of her hair
as I find the lush breast opposite
 the missing breast.
Thus it is, no matter argument or
estrangement, we are one.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 25.

Young Woman in the Atrium

Her hazel eyes with splashes of brown
are fixed in amazed wonder,
her laughter is soothingly subtle
and always ends with an "Oh...h?"
of "is that so?" or an "Oh...h..."
of the clearest understanding.

She sits in her office, pen in hand
before a snow white ledger like a judge
working a confidential assignment.
The shine from a sheet lights up
the bulb of her face.

She renders concise my lugubrious draft
with large precariously leaning letters
all B's capitalized wherever they arise
like tulips.

She is preparing a white paper
on the blackest use of my powers
with the greatest of gentleness
the smallest of hands.

When I summon her, she sits in a chair
sheathes her eyes and eyeless
smiles with slight politeness
but when we speak together
it is from the gentle hearts
of lost children.

I cannot stop summoning her
or conceal my true interest.
I act out tempestuous gruffness,
confide my stratagems,
ask her advice.
In the hallways, her eyes
interrupt all other matters
deep in the depths of my
tangled stomach,
this churning desire,

failing judgment.

I seem to awake a hero
in remission from a long illness
with the morning sky of April.

I allow myself to drift
into the stream of her gaze
and in my mind we accidentally kiss
through all levels of atrium
all layers of glass
down the well of thin air
right on the center lines
of her lips.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 26-27.

Life Force

With soft tissue, Gloria saved spiders that slid
in the bathtub. She adopted stray cats and shooed
birds away to keep them safe. Even rats were welcome
to her grapes. Her life force collected all plants
and animals into the arc of one species.

The grapevine she planted against the back of the house
thrived wild and fruitful and tangled with the Cup of Gold
which groped its way up the shingled roof to confront
—like an opposing army—the Bougainvillea that reached
the ridge from the front.

The grape leaves grew face-sized and the march of bamboo
stereoscoped the eye with double vision. The cypress
stretched 40 feet tall.

I took up long-handled shears and cut away at anything
that might drop into the pool or overrun a path. Thorns
stabbed me. The dead wood of the cutter handles pricked
slivers into my hands. Bushes thrashed at my cruel turn
of mind, shrank back in shock, vowed to re-generate.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 28.

Confession

I sat in the kitchen while Gloria made dinner.
Suddenly a hair trigger in my throat gave way and I
began to choke, then break into tears.

What's the matter, what's the matter?
she asked, on the ready to understand.
I cried years ago as I did in St. Paul
when my childhood sweetheart
refused my diamond ring.

Gloria, who always stands to help friends asked again
What's the matter?
What could I say, what must be said?
"Don't you see, I had an affair," I said
as if she would understand, as if in my
blind madness, she would be proud of me!
She backed off and turned pale. But then,
I thought, in desperate afterthought
what I confessed could not be real.

Lo, it wasn't real!
where? when? how was it possible?
yet, it was there, what I had to confess:
I had fallen in love
and felt too much the sensitivity, the tissue of it
to know what I was doing.
I was no longer dead!
But had to die again

In the madness, I forgot she was my wife,
this woman prepared to understand and assure
enduring love and disinterest to
exonerate me or even to set my love free.
She was silent, her form punched out
the interior gone
the thread and piping on her outline torn
the negative space of her shape remained
so that she was there and withdrawn
terrible and mute with the past.

She left gently closing the door
to run to her beach that she first splashed
her foot into, to watch the gulls soar, wandering
the edge of the ocean weeping. I had never
seen her cry or show a deep hurt I could
only imagine her tears hidden in the dark
space behind my grandmother's candelabra
on Friday night.

But where was the evidence?
Portia was the shadow of a memory
the fragment of a dream or a fantasy
played out for me like a movie

in which she is the actress only remotely
possible to know. I could see her in a movie
beside Gloria and not feel remorse.

Now I don't know if it ever happened
or if someone slipped something into my pocket
to dream on.

*

Love in secret is mere hallucination
that nonetheless burns flesh,
adds to experience, but is not possessed.
Inconsistencies will betray him.
The laws of lies can be sharp and punishing
as the laws of truth and just as unjust.

But if one loves, no matter how many,
are those loves truth enough?
Is truth only that which in act, in flesh,
exists only un-memorized in open air?

Still, had I lost interest? my physician asked,
looking for some unspeakable pathology,
as if sex by clandestine was the only means to health.

Now she cannot hear me through.
She listens to the snapping linen of my lines
set the wind to blowing outside
her anger whispering in my ear

'lies, all lies.'

She cannot tell the difference between
what I say and she thinks.

She suspects I have a woman somewhere.

Over and over again, I try to assure her
that for years now she's only been my muse.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 29-31.

Io

She rejected her first name because she hated
being named after a Vanderbilt. Instead, she
was 'Io' reduced by Zeus to a heifer
searching for a place to belong: she painted
the seismically seething moon orbiting
a cold and indifferent planet.

Going de Kooning wild, she painted her face large
in greens and greys, moist eyes undercut
by dark pouches. She made a stained glass
window from broken dishes and mirrors, dull knives
and band-aids and called it 'Marriage.' Another piece
an actual rock smashing through a window.

Whether for her father or me come-lately,
beneath her calm was love and hatred for Zeus.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp.
32.

Her Story

She began to tell the same story over and over:
At 16, the doctor pulled her aside, 'Your mother—
her heart is very sick. You must help her from
straining too much, but promise to tell no one,
not even her.' She carried the secret alone.
After Anna died, Gloria cooked for her
father, Ben and older sister, in her lap
on the subway, fresh-killed chickens still warm
from the kosher butcher.

'No lipstick!' said Ben who kept vigil in the living
room, behind a newspaper when a boyfriend
came to call. He eavesdropped on their good-byes
in the hallway, then opened and slammed the door.
Steadfast to the old world: 'No college!'

She took off in a crowded four-engine propeller-driven DC-6
into a thunderstorm, passengers threw up all around her.
A man said 'you must be a seasoned flyer.' 'No, this is
my first time. I'm not worried.' The flight took
eleven hours non-stop.

In L.A. she saw pink and pastel houses with gingerbread roofs,
exotic trees and flowers. No gum-pocked sidewalks, no
dirty alleys, no long shadows lumbering from tall buildings.
She took a bus to the beach (in January!), sank her feet
in the ocean and ran a long way down the tide line.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 33.

Today

Caught in this day of your dying
I can only speak about you
in the choke of my second person voice
that echoes on and on in the coliseum
of this moment. 'You: always 'you'
at the start and the end of each
thought I have.

A week ago, your eyes memorized the design
of each leaf, the composition of the garden,
the sunset shift from red to lavender
as the ocean slowly purpled.

Three days ago one eye opened wide
like the eye of a surfacing whale
and stared indifferently at the garden
the sunset and me, then half-shuttered
without complaint. Yesterday
both pupils rolled from side to side.
I leaned over to catch their focus
to steer them back to me.

This morning, a subtle smell of lilac
around your bed drifted through the
kitchen on its way to the open door.
Your mouth agape like a fish out
of water, I climbed into bed to kiss
you straight on the mouth. Your lower
lip rose to finish, then dropped,
then you relaxed into stillness.

The caretaker brushed your hair,
your daughter brought out a dress.
Oh, if you could have seen how you
grew younger and younger and more
and more beautiful as you lay in my arms.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp.

34.

The Sleep of Endymion

They come in the middle of the night, bump
the gurney against the door and shuffle her out.
I hide in bed dulling her removal to an ache that morning
will find incredible. I swing from dream to dream
like Tarzan, night-after-night in a rush to save
her from dying. Each morning I wash up
from the shipwrecks of failure. I see my days only
through a thin slit and speak in slips of tongue,
my subconscious belly-up. I fall head-over-heels in love
with fleeting resemblances of her then slip back
into the rip tide until I am washed up again.

By day, I catch her in the scents of footwear,
freesias, sandalwood. I open old bottles
of unguents left from her beautiful youth—
gardenia, passion flower, rose, musk, key lime—all lost
none of their pungency.

A technician tweaks the highs and lows of her hearing aid,
and twists a new mold in my ear. With my own in my right
and hers in my left I hear much better than before.
A little shrill, perhaps, but sweet strains of her voice
still trail in after tones. 'Now that you're alone,'
she says, 'go to a high desert plain where I can see you.
Be silent so I can hear you. Stand under the sun's searchlight,
and then under stars and there in your sleep feel the tip
of my tongue go round and round in your ear.'

If she is alive in me, where will she be when I die?
Who will dream the dream of me dreaming her?
The non-sequiturs of grief tear axons from neurons.
I need to escape the logic of all of the illogic.
I slip my cell phone in my jacket over my heart.
It beeps as if she's trying to reach me, but when I answer
I get only the infinity of the busy signal.
I enter her studio, peer into the web-ridden darkness, dig
through rubble as in a bombed building for a lone survivor who may
still be alive. Through the fissures and cracks of her canvas rise
odors of acrylic and oil, the dust of dried clay and sudden storms

of bright color: Red, like an open wound, green like a shoot
from a tuber through a crack in a wall, the blue of
mortification, whites and yellows
like blinkers from distant ships on open seas—
pigments to paint my nightmares.

Her best glasses I once searched the house for sit
on a pile of dusty books. I see what she saw through them:
The morning sun, weakened to the color of sandstone, reflecting from
sidings of the studio upon the house beyond and up into the golden
undersides of Magnolia leaves: Patches and lacings of burnt sienna
to the yellow end of raw umber. The harmony of the scene confirmed
by the auburn breast of a single bird on a high wire above.

I fill the walls of the house with her paintings, arrange them
to view the scope and breadth of her work. A self portrait,
her face blanched if she found no existence in her self,
One hurried pastel, strokes of fierce determination. This I hang
in the bedroom and title it 'Sleep well, my dear husband,
I'll be watching over you.'

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 35-36.

The View from Her Room

I grieve in the dark east of our house
hiding from her absence, comforted
by her still warm side of our bed.
Then I dare to move into the glare of her
empty west-facing room that framed
her point of view, to see what she saw:

Shadows of the leaves of Cup of Gold,
walls of Eugenia, stands of bamboo, grape
leaves spread out like sun bladders.
The butterfly searching for the salt on her finger.
Rays of angled sunlight scoop up the reflections
of the pool and invert them on the ceiling in
camera obscura. They flow into a cascade
of lucent tears down the window glass.

The shimmering of the light on the ceiling
warbles in some ionic phenomenon
like a beam from another world, maybe She, herself.
We never believed that way. Still I stand
within it, forgiven, rectified, re-loved
the gift of a bride and the legacy of a mother.
I let her fill herself up in me, just in time,
our selves in total eclipse.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 37.

Cheating on the Death of My Wife

The grape vine shaded the house,
but I hated it for its ecology: spiders,
squirrels, possums, raccoons and the mess
of fallen sweets not even the rats finished off.
I cut it down to the ground when she
no longer remembered it. After she died,
a searing heat wave hit and I sweated
to prostration in unshaded grieving.

Every time the day of her dying flashed in my mind,
the softest parts of my heart
nearly choked me to death. The cleavage
of reality and unreality split me. I had no choice
but to call her name, speak to her, to the walls
and ceilings of her house, to love and hate
myself as she did.

I wanted to die. Instead, I planned
to have my ashes mixed with hers to assure
thorough intimacy but cowardly leapt to life
for every hug from mourners and every flirt
from passers-by, greedy for any spark of life
trapped between loss and freedom, grief and new love
in the passion and pardon as of one song,
point and counterpoint of requiem.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 38.

Serotonin Blue

I.

Mourning pervades the neighborhood.
The swollen orange moon hangs
 low over San Vicente. Minute
sounds of insects lie futile beneath
the arc of atmosphere.

Late at night rats
in the foliage eviscerate
fruit on the trees, discard
strips of skin as if cut
 with a paring knife. They drink
 serenely from the swimming pool, brush
against leaves, growing careless
and creaky towards dawn
 until morning restores the
neighborhood back to humans.

2.

Sleeping and waking are on one parchment.
The ascendent morning and the afternoon of falling light
leak into the haze of conceiving poetry.

Dreams begin remembering dreams, dreams within dreams,
the same relentless themes. A new generation of dreams
hides in the solid state of hardwood.
Ship to shore, Houston to capsule—
go down and up and into across lagoons
to save a wife still in distress or la la la la la
my tongue twisting like the slippery red spot on Jupiter,
the poem lost before it's written.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 39.

Why?

Whenever I ask why I close my eyes because
there's nowhere else to know and see handwriting.
When I open them I see hieroglyphics left over
from an ancient Academy of Angels, the Vice-God
of natural selection and the Quantum General
of Conundrum commanding the fortress
of unspeakable answers.

I become the leading scientist of my brain
which, nonsensically throws only shadows
of its anatomy on Plato's cave. This kind
of thinking idles smoothly in schizophrenia
like a bird that can't escape the logic of its cage
that doctors call abnormal. They don't
believe a haiku can be drawn mathematically
by least squares regression or that leaden prose
can be transformed into golden poetry
(one can only afford minimal amounts)
or why Endymion, the dreamer, and Selene,
the moon goddess who watches over him
were last seen being trucked down PCH
to the Villa Getty.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp.
40.

"Phenomenal Woman"

Mythili Prakash prepares to dance the Ramayana epic
in the classic style of South India, a tale of
betrayal of a suffering woman told in a
deceptively gentle manner.

Musicians on rugs play tabla drums, tambura
and venu. She enters dressed in exotic garb and jewelry.
A man chants in staccato and sprung rhythms
to animate her dance. She crooks her neck,
left then right. Her snaking arms weave
and re-weave the linen of space-time,
strobic stop frames of her postures trail behind.

The coiled fingers in her fist unfold like a fan.
Then points her finger like the barrel of a pistol.
Her thumb swells erect in passion. Her toe equally potent,
barely touching the floor, imparts rotation to the earth. A leg
swings like a pendulum. Backlit, the waves of her arms
recapitulate all animal designs and refines them to
the perfection of human female form.
Tragic or gay she wears a Kabuki poker face;
in distress, the ironic smile of a limp rag doll,
her eyes blindfolded by her wide-open gaze.

The overwhelming applause reminds me of
the large crowd that attended Gloria's memorial
in the open air by the great circle on the Palisades.
Who were most of these people of all ages who
loved her so? And where was I in our marriage
of half of a century?

Outside the theater, a fresh breeze spoke to me

in Gloria's voice. "Don't feel guilt," she said.
"I was with you bone-to-bone wherever you were.
As you wrote we were so close, we couldn't see each other.
How else could we have lasted so long together?"

*Thanks to Maya Angelou.

Author's note. Thanks to Maya Angelou.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 41.

Dating Again

I.

I was steaming brown rice and thawing Orange Roughy as the sun dropped down the kitchen window and set behind the trees. I recalled how she lost taste for her favorite foods. I placed cafeteria options on the table and ground 12 pills into her vanilla ice cream. We watched action movies she used to avoid; only movement caught her attention. Then the struggle to get her on the toilet, undress her, put on her gown, lift her to the bed, positioning her for the least pain.

After three years of this I never felt closer or loved her so much. When I ate my fish and rice alone, wanting her back as she was, she finally spoke: "What did you do with my remains?" she asked. "They're in the house," I said. "My ashes will be mixed with yours." "You're welcome to join me," she said. "It won't be long as my time goes. In the meantime, it's not good for you to be alone. You've learned so much from our marriage, you ought not let it go to waste. I have a big stake because what's left of me is in you and our daughter. I want you both to grow as persons and writers.

"When we first met you were pining for dogs. You were not ready for marriage and had you married one then you would have cracked up. You took your shrink's advice to marry me, which was not very flattering. I married you while mine was against it.

"So that you don't foul up at your return to square one, I will accompany you on your dates and advise who is worthy. Because I'm within you, I can't let you destroy us."

2.

A friend who had lost his wife went online and lied about his age. He said don't worry women lie as well. The first woman arrived one hour late at the restaurant. She was pretty in her photo, but obese, hungry and talky. With drink, coffee and dessert the dinner added up to a tidy sum. Gloria balked at this. "At this rate you won't be able to afford many dates. Why don't you agree to split expenses from the start? Or do what we always did, share the meal. You don't need to stuff her fat ass."

I found no sweet young or old thing. Most seemed hardened by bad

marriages. A few widows were happy to be free again and thought their husbands were a joke. There's something ludicrous about two geezers thinking the other is much too old.

I met a striking Russian woman. She asked what I did with my time. I said I was retired and wrote poetry, but no Pushkin am I. She did not know who Pushkin was and had no interest in men with delusions of grandeur. As to whether she liked the U.S., she shrugged her shoulders. Climate nice, U.S. people not too smart. Yes, men abuse women in Russia, but several times she asked where she might find them in L.A. I asked if she'd like to see me again and she laughed in my face. Gloria gave her the finger.

I met an itinerant hospice nurse 15 years younger. She was pretty but her mouth was set too close to her nose and I couldn't get mine in edgewise. One day she confessed she was married. Gloria moaned, "See what I mean? Left to your devices you go for dogs." A woman who happened to be a real estate agent sent me a report on my property without being asked. Gloria was livid. "Don't you dare go there, idiot! You're an easy mark."

I ran into a streak of psychotherapists, as if they were suddenly freed to advertise. Of course, they get confused like everyone and have a right to a life, but still why do they all ask 'why' after everything I say, and 'why' again to my answers. This problem compounds because I like to talk—no silent cowboy am I. I'm ready made for cathexis, and can easily be pushed over into catharsis. There was no way I could hide the dog-eared misery of my childhood or duck labels like attachment disorder to explain why I'm still in the past running to catch up to the present.

Gloria liked one of them because she was a good artist, with warm and gracious qualities like hers. Gloria enjoyed going to exhibits, concerts and operas with us, but tried to protect me from the inevitable. "I'm sorry, Mel, but be prepared. She's attractive enough to find a younger man with more vigor and accomplishment on her level. You've lost much of the height you had when I met you. You're in your 80's, bald, overweight. Shall I go on...?"

3.

Lately, keeping company with myself has become more agreeable and writing keeps her alive. In the second year after she passed, I dressed

up in an old suit, white shirt and narrow tie, put a rose in my lapel,
lit her memorial candle and married myself. That was not so much a
reclusive act as a long overdue remarriage. After all, the wrist watch she
gave me for my 50th birthday keeps on running and we go on behaving
as if we are still a couple. When I come home from shopping I see her
through the front window sitting in her wheelchair waiting for me at the
kitchen table, a spray of Bougainvillea on her lap. The momentum in
the love of her smile is greater than ever.

Publication. *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009), pp. 42-44.

EDITORIAL NOTE

Copy-texts, variants, and source practice

The copy-texts for the two book sections are *A Life of Windows & Mirrors: Selected Poems 1948-2005* (Conflux Press, 2005) and *The Gloria Poems: A Short Memoir of a 50-Year Marriage* (Conflux Press, 2009). The dates follow the title and copyright pages, not later dates embedded in local filenames.

The periodical section contains only poems not absorbed into the books. Where a magazine poem was substantially revised for *A Life of Windows & Mirrors*, the later text is printed once and the earlier reading is described in a variant note. The edition therefore avoids duplicating 'My Father' and 'When I Go Down to That Sleep.'

Lines broken only by the narrow measure or gutter of a source page have been rejoined. Deliberate inset lines, numbered divisions, stanza spaces, and source italics are retained. The partially obscured terminal digit in the date attached to 'Windows on the Distant and Near Past' is reported rather than conjecturally supplied.

The prose tribute to Thomas McGrath and memorial quotations by other writers remain in the archived source scans but are not presented as Weisburd poems. The 2009 author's preface is represented before *The Gloria Poems* because it establishes the sequence's personal and editorial occasion.

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COLOPHON

Production record

This critical reader's edition was prepared for *Extremes and Moderations: Early Southern California Poetry*. It is set in EB Garamond at six by nine inches. The cover uses unlettered artwork supplied by Brian Kim Stefans with the standard series typography and palette.

The poems were reset from the original book and periodical scans and checked for OCR corruption, stanza integrity, meaningful indentation, italics, quotation spacing, and false hanging wraps. Archival images and the research record are stored with the edition.

HISTORICAL FRONT MATTER

Mel Weisburd - Collected Poems

Gene Frumkin's Introduction to A Life of Windows and Mirrors

Restored from the original source scans

INTRODUCTION

It was a pleasure reading "A Life of Windows and Mirrors", especially since I have loved a number of the early poems for some 50 years. Mel and I have known each other for more than that length of time, and I too, urged by Mel, began writing poetry in Thomas McGrath's workshop, as it is described briefly toward the end of this book.

The poems here cover a wide range of experience, personal and as it has developed from exterior events. At the core are Mel's relationships, or lack of them, with his father and mother. In one poem, he writes: "What mother have I the power to prove? / I have no sentence she ever said," "what proof can be offered if I now deduce / they took her away because / she tried to kill me." I don't categorize this as confessional poetry, but rather as an attempt to complete and find order in a horrifying childhood, which has of course endured almost a lifetime.

Also involved on the personal side (but isn't it all personal?) are his wife Gloria and daughter Stefi. "To Gloria, My Wife" is a tender evocation of their married life together. He pays tribute to Stefi's great ability in art and science. But Mel's poem "My Father" has stayed with me through the years, and I quote the first stanza for its sheer vividness:

*My father, a laborer, forty-eight, divorced three times, timid
and always tired, comes home with the furnace blast in his ears
and speaks in an egoless voice. His grey stubble is dry
and electric, his eyes reverberatories of fire. Thin
and hollow, he burns the core out of himself until his marrow
lows, flips his cigarettes away, half-smoked, lifts castings
above purple fumes, almost above his head from a strength
of not believing in doctors. His passion is fire and his love
is his death. Now against the remaining womanless days
he walks abroad the earth in robes of heat waves,
diaphanous excrements of hell and this world.*

"This world" is the overall matter of the book and this, I think, is best personified by his work as one of the earliest smog inspectors in Los Angeles County, from which he drew much of the material in the first book in the country (the world?) dealing solely with enforcement of new air pollution laws. Eventually in Santa Monica, CA, Mel formed his own company, which was doing well until Reagan came to office and strongly de-emphasized all pollution matters. These things are not dealt with in detail in these poems, but they are behind much of the sorrow in them. Even so, there is room for humor when he writes about "Lyle," presumably an employee of the company:

*His head, a grey cloud of expertise above a short stem of dapper
pinstripe, a ball of leaves
divorced from the black action of limbs in the mists of their branching
He stops me on the way to the john
and suddenly I'm swept into the newsprint of his head.
I look out over the waves of sentences
waiting for the period, the final silence
to be followed by a calvary of "ands" and "buts."*

In the intervening years between declining profits and the sale of the company there was much controversy and bad feelings, "Escape from Zenda" provides a very good composite of how things went, again with humor, "I slipped down the back stairs as an honest steward still/playing false King, leaving behind a multitude of pretenders/for the new era, the battle to break-out greater / than my break-in, in the first place."

This is a lively book of poems, as the writer is a lively man. Mel Weisburd was my classmate at UCLA although we didn't meet until afterwards. That was when he urged me into McGrath's workshop and a life in poetry. He remains, of the all the classmates I ever had, one whose work and person have stayed with me through an entire lifetime.

*Gene Frumkin, July 12, 2005
Albuquerque, N.M.*