

*To Catch A Wave*  
*New and Selected Poems*  
*by Emmett Jarrett*



*Edited by Anne Scheibner and James Coleman*  
*Foreword by Dick Lourie*

*To Catch a Wave*  
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**Other writing by Emmett Jarrett**

**POETRY**

***The Days***

***4-Telling:*** Marge Piercy, Dick Lourie,  
Robert Hershon, Emmett Jarrett

***Greek Feet***

***God's Body***

***Wild Geese Flying South***

**EDITOR**

***Looking to the City: The Brooklyn  
Urban Hearings*** with Anne Scheibner

***For the Living of These Days***

***To Heal the Sin-Sick Soul: Toward a  
Spirituality of Anti-Racist Ministry***

***Broad Street Blues: A Reader in Radical  
Discipleship - Reflections and Articles  
from St. Francis House, Troubadour 1999-2010***  
with Sarah Jarrett

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**Cover photograph:** The Parade, Downtown New London, CT: Whale's Tail sculpture in front of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. The Parade is where the community of St. Francis House has been involved in organizing regular Peace Witnesses and special events such as the Fear Free Zone during the 2005 Mock Terror Attack, the *Black Lives Matter* Candlelight Vigil on November 25, 2014 and the reading of Dr. Martin Luther King's Riverside Church *Declaration of Independence from the War in Viet Nam* on April 4, 2015.

## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated in loving memory  
of Emmett Jarrett  
and to the members of the communities he served –  
past, present and yet to come.



Photograph: The board of Saint Francis House joins resident Cal Robertson in witnessing for peace.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the editors and publishers of the following books and journals, in which some poems in this collection first appeared:

- Portions of "Design: A Vision" were published in *31 New American Poets*, (Hill & Wang, 1969), Ron Schreiber, editor.
- "Design: A Vision" appeared in its entirety in *New Directions 21* (1969), James Laughlin, editor.
- *Greek Feet* (The Crossing Press, Trumansburg, NY, 1972) also includes "Design: A Vision" under the title "Design for the City of Man."

Other poems in this collection previously appeared in the following publications:

- *God's Body* (Hanging Loose, Brooklyn, NY, 1975).
- *Wild Geese Flying South* (Jubilee Publications, New London, CT, 2005).
- *Troubadour*, Newsletter of St. Francis House, New London, CT, "Beginner's Mind" (June, 2000), "Mark" (Summer, 2009), "Earth and Sea and Sky" (Christmas, 2010).

We particularly want to recognize Emmett's friends and colleagues at Hanging Loose Press: Bob Hershon, Dick Lourie, and Mark Pawlak, who in 2016 will be celebrating HL's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

The editors wish to thank Dick Lourie, for his careful reading and proofing of the manuscript and his many helpful suggestions.

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## FOREWORD

An alternate title for this collection might be “Sojourner.” I say that as someone who was a friend of Emmett’s for more than forty years. Here’s what I mean: the sojourner lives here, or someplace, but is always conscious of moving on to some other deeply important place—a type of resident, but self-acknowledged as temporary. In Emmett’s case, he sojourned here, then there, and there, but kept always with him some important part of what he had left. In his amazing poem “Design,” happily to be found again in this collection after many years, he goes to seek the “sojourners” who have inspired him—they are both poets and spiritual mentors: William Blake, Walt Whitman, and William Carlos Williams.

In 1964 Emmett and I were young poets who met as students in the workshop of the great poet Denise Levertov; she became a friend and mentor for us both. In those times—when a day or so of part-time work would earn you a month’s rent—he lived on Avenue D in New York’s East Village, and my bathtub-in-kitchen apartment was around the corner on Avenue C. We hung out, we talked, we wrote, we read each other’s work, sometimes we sang old songs.

Before long, Emmett introduced me to Ron Schreiber; the two had met at Columbia and started up a literary magazine that was about to undergo a death and resurrection. The three of us soon encountered Brooklyn poet Bob Hershon, and the new poetry journal, *Hanging Loose*, was born. Later we also began publishing books, among them Emmett’s *God’s Body*. Emmett sojourned with us at *Hanging Loose*—editing poems, writing his own, more hanging out and singing old songs—for many years, playing a key role in what it has become (it is still going).

When Emmett made the decision to enter the priesthood, he stayed with *Hanging Loose* for some years as contributing editor: he moved on but in some way remained with us. And as I visited and continued to hang out with him over many years, he welcomed me as perhaps a “casual” sojourner at St. Francis House, and sometimes we talked about politics. No one admired Emmett more than I did for his sojourn in peace activism as an essential part of his spiritual life. And as a true sojourner, Emmett never stopped

being a poet: he kept writing poems, and they were infused with the faith and spirituality of his life in the priesthood and the community of Saint Francis.

In short, you see why I thought of the other possible title for this collection. Emmett was the sojourner I was fortunate to encounter when we shared a world, and who remained my friend even as he traveled on elsewhere.

I miss Emmett Jarrett. I don't expect I will ever again have for a friend quite such a sojourner, who inspired me and showed me so much during his sojourns here. I miss Emmett Jarrett.

Dick Lourie  
Hanging Loose Press

## PREFACE

The last decade of Emmett's life (1999-2010) was spent at St. Francis House in New London, Connecticut. He was born in 1939 and raised as a white male in the segregated South's city of Alexandria in central Louisiana. Before our marriage in Boston in 1983, he had lived in many cities and cultures including Okinawa, Japan while in the U.S. Army, Herakleion, Crete, and London, England with other "sojourns" in Chicago, Manhattan and Brooklyn. But during our time together while he served as rector of Episcopal churches in Boston, Washington, D.C. and Stone Mountain, he talked about someday wanting to do a "Catholic Worker house."

His experience as a member of the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis beginning in the late 1990s undergirded his readiness to leave parish ministry and to name our new community in honor of St. Francis. We had spent time every summer since our marriage in Stonington, Connecticut where I grew up and where I brought our two children, Nathaniel and Sarah, for both spring and summer vacations no matter where we lived. Southeastern Connecticut was home base for me and for our children, and Emmett embraced this as the place for our new "experiment with the truth." The story of this experiment is available in *Broad Street Blues* with sections devoted to The Vision, Franciscan Spirit, Homelessness and Hospitality, Resistance and Peace.

These years in New London were for him a joyful and fulfilling time. In the previous twenty years he had grown as pastor, preacher and spiritual director. But he used to joke that before St. Francis House his autobiography as a parish priest would be subtitled "Boilers I Have Known." Finally he was free to engage in getting to know our neighbors and have his time and energy be fully engaged with them and the issues thus encountered instead of with the physical and fiscal responsibilities of parish life. This engagement led to work with our homeless neighbors and the crisis precipitated by the elimination of New London's Social Services Department. It also led to a series of Peace Pilgrimages and to being arrested at the Supreme Court in Washington as part of the Witness against Torture. Throughout this

time he continued to pray the Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer and to rise around 5 a.m. for his daily practice of meditation and journaling. And writing poetry. His sense of vocation as a poet was a strong part of the balance of his life. Through a local poets' group, it is part of how the community here in New London knew him as well. Since his death the annual St. Francis House fiesta in the park next to our two houses has included poetry readings organized by Jim Coleman who has served with me as editor of this collection.

Emmett died on October 9, 2010. The month before his death following two years of life with biliary duct cancer, he passed through a period of intense activity. He and our daughter Sarah had worked together for the preceding six months on *Broad Street Blues*, a book of selected articles from 10 years of the *Troubadour*, our St. Francis House newsletter. Thanks to the efforts of his old friend Bob Hershon and the Print Center in New York that book would arrive the week before his death. Emmett also stated that he wanted his poetry published and especially to re-publish poems from his early days as a poet in Greece – but not all of them! I wanted to honor that request in this the fifth year since his death so I started looking through his files and discovered a manuscript of poems entitled *To Catch a Wave* (2005-2009).

Emmett's poetry takes off from specific experiences or details of his life. Those details include – as is necessarily the case – details about other people's lives as well. Good art holds up images and lets the light – in this case through language – refract to others. There were several possible books in his files and indeed in that manuscript – some issuing from his boyhood experiences in Alexandria, Louisiana, his life in Greece and New York, his wife Carol's cancer, his life as an Episcopal priest and as the father of our two children. So how did we choose the poems for this collection?

The principle of selection for this book has been to make available the poems born of Emmett's engagement in the life of urban ministry and peace witness here at St. Francis House and to re-publish the poems from earlier periods which anticipate and anchor the possibilities of that engagement. After a period of time in the army and finishing his undergraduate degree at Columbia University in New York City, he spent a year teaching English in

Crete and writing poetry. His joy in our two children took various forms including taking each of them to visit Greece when each of them turned ten. His pleasure in their lives and gifts is exemplified in the fact that in a folder of his own poetry he had the original handwritten poem that Sarah wrote at the age of 8 and eight copies of that poem which he carefully transcribed into typed format the way that he typed up his own. Her reflection on how many poems are too many and how to choose from a myriad of possibilities is a fitting way to conclude this preface:

### **Too Many Poems**

Too many poems are just fine.  
You will find poems in a book.  
But first find a poem in your head.  
Then ask yourself why and which  
Poem you should choose? Then  
When you went outside the wind  
Blew you away to a far place  
Beyond the shore. Then you go  
To the beach. After that you feel  
Just weak. And you want to go  
Home and write a poem.  
And have a good look.

*Sarah Jarrett*

*29 December 1997*

Enjoy having a good look!

Anne Scheibner  
St. Francis House  
New London, Connecticut  
July 19, 2015

## INTRODUCTION: NOTES ON READING THESE POEMS

by James A. Coleman, Professor Emeritus  
Three Rivers Community College

### Part One

Emmett Jarrett brings together in his poems the forces of Modernist poetry and contextual theology. The pronouncement of poet William Carlos Williams “no ideas but in things,” and the contextual theologian’s belief that “God is active in each local context” may not immediately seem to point in the same direction, but in Emmett Jarrett’s poetry, they do.

Williams’s belief in particulars is evidenced in his long poem “Paterson” (about the city of Paterson, New Jersey); his method certainly influenced Emmett’s New London poems. To understand an urban situation is vital to urban ministry. The poetic method of investigation of particulars leads to the capability for effective social action as well as making for lively reading.

The “porch ministry” of St. Francis House, situated as it is in downtown New London, is an active site for the practice of contextual theology, and also the place where the human contact occurred that inspires many of the poems e.g. “Not Yet 6 A.M.” and “Mental Fight.” Sitting on the porch and engaging with neighbors has been part of the life of the St. Francis House community since its inception. The front room chapel looks out on Broad Street itself. An urban ministry in touch with the homeless, the addicted, the fearful and confused is a living practice of contextual theology.

In his academic career, which preceded his call to the priesthood, Emmett wrote a thesis about William Carlos Williams. After teaching English for several years and following his time in seminary, he went to England to pursue a doctorate on the theology of the poet and artist William Blake. Blake’s poem “The Tiger” asks if the hand that made the lamb could make the tiger as well. My favorite Blake poem concerns the plight of the small boys in London who were used as chimney sweeps. Blake delved deeply into the urban context. Blake’s poem “London” is emblazoned on the basement door of St. Francis House as part of the butterfly Meditation Garden next to Sarah Jarrett’s three Blake murals.

This sketch is meant to frame and assist the reading of the poems in this collection. My own regard for the work of Emmett Jarrett veers between the fascinating theology of an urban ministry, the active commitment to social justice, and the technique, particularity, and expressiveness of the poems. William Blake's focus on the plight of young chimney sweeps in 18th century London who climbed down soot-filled chimneys, human soot brushes, exemplifies the callous disregard for children in early industrial London. Blake heard the "chimney sweepers cry", saw the marks of "weakness" and "woe" in every face and behind the cries, Blake perceived "the mind-forg'd manacles." Emmett embodied the willingness to hear and to try to find expression for unheeded cries. He sought to break the "mind-forg'd manacles." Little surprise then that he participated in the Witness Against Torture at the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. focused on the plight of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. He became the spokesperson for the group that was arrested at that witness, and defended their action at the subsequent trial.

## Part Two

The contemporary European theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar writes about the encounter with "the beautiful":

Before the beautiful—no, not really before but within the beautiful—the whole person quivers. He not only finds the beautiful moving; rather he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it.

(Wikipedia, *Als Ob*)

In "Waking and Watching," Emmett describes sitting in a café in Crete in 1966:

...It starts to snow.

Through the smoky windowpane of the café

I watch the fine white powder settle on oranges  
growing in pots in front of houses in the village.

I scribble long-lined poems in my notebook, breathless  
because nothing I have ever seen has been so beautiful.

The beautiful is presented here not only to let us as readers find it, but to go ourselves within the encounter, something that is characteristic of many of Emmett's poems. Feel the quiver.

### **Part Three**

"To Catch a Wave," the title poem of the collection, illustrates a different capacity in these poems. A picture of surfers riding a wave into shore becomes the vehicle for a leap in the poem in which Emmett imagines that he might "catch a wave" accompanied by those "crushed" by the "systems of success," and "bring them home."

Such a possibility, such a leap onto the surfboard of possibility is for "fools for Christ" who have the metaphorical imagination and the yearning, as indeed Emmett did, as he does in this poem of ministry. As the poems in this collection will reveal to the reader, Emmett was the most pleasant company imaginable, playful, witty, learned, and articulate. The intentional community which he and Anne initiated has entered deeply into the fabric of the city of New London. These poems encourage engagement and reflection both on the power of poetic expression and on building the loving community.

The words of the poems dance across the page,  
the birds in the air dance above the clouds,  
the fish in the water dance among the waves,

love's dance.

from *Design: A Vision*  
Emmett Jarrett  
1967

**Written at  
St. Francis House  
New London  
(2005-2009)**

## The Walking Poem

1

Come, Spirit who broods  
on the waters of creation,  
who yearns to gather her children  
as a mother hen gathers her chicks  
under her wings. Come  
and teach me, Spirit,  
present in every place  
that pilgrims visit, make the beauty  
of your presence known  
to walkers and welcomers.  
Turn stony hearts into hearts  
of flesh, pulsing with blood,  
beating out the rhythm  
of your peace.

2

The Spirit said to me: "See,  
I have made you a watcher.  
Go down to Union Square  
at the heart of the city  
where State St. and Bank St.  
and Water St. converge. Look out  
at the ocean where whalers went  
in the past. Look up the river  
to the factories where workers  
toiled in the past. Look  
at the farmland where produce  
grew to feed the people. Whatever  
you see, acknowledge;  
whatever you hear, proclaim,  
that people may sense my presence  
in creation, my love

in their enemies, my justice  
in my peace.”  
So I began to write.

### 3

“Our Order walks,”  
the saffron-robed sister said  
to me in Boston in 1998.  
They walked from the Peace Pagoda  
in Leverett, Mass.,  
to Washington, DC, Atlanta,  
New Orleans, then took ship  
for the west coast of Africa,  
the “slave coast,” walking  
as they sailed  
to reverse the “middle passage,”  
walking out of slavery.

### 4

Eric said, “The leaders  
of the Nicaraguan revolution  
walked when they didn’t know  
what to do. They walked  
into the countryside to consult  
the people. They got clear  
about the correct course of action.”  
Having learned that,  
Eric spent the next 25 years  
walking around New England  
to consult with people  
in United Methodist churches  
about the correct course of action  
for our country.

## 5

Henry David Thoreau,  
who went to prison for war tax  
refusal in 1847—remember  
the Mexican War?—wrote about  
walking. He liked the word  
*saunter*. There are two possible  
derivations for the word:  
first, the people who walked  
around Europe in the Middle Ages  
were landless folk *sans terre*.  
Children called out when they  
saw them, “Look, here come  
the *sans terrors!*” Or else  
they were pilgrims walking  
to the Holy Land, the *Sainte Terre*.  
Pilgrims are walkers, saunterers,  
One does not rush a pilgrimage.

## 6

Thich Nhat Hanh tells  
this story twice. When the Buddha  
was asked, “Sir, what do you  
and your monks practice?” he replied,  
“We sit, we walk, and we eat.”  
The questioner continued, “But sir,  
everyone sits, walks, and eats,”  
and the Buddha told him, “When we sit,  
we know we are sitting. When we walk,  
we know we are walking. When we eat,  
we know we are eating.” On the Peace  
Pilgrimage, we know we are walking,  
yes, we know we are walking.

## 7

Woke up this morning in a strange  
 bed provided by Sisters of Providence  
 in Westfield, Mass., to pilgrims. Woke up  
 this morning and remembered  
 that my name is graven on the palms of  
 your hands. My 99-year-old mother  
 may forget me. A young mother  
 nursing her infant at full breasts, even she  
 may forget but you will not forget.  
 So I woke up this morning with my mind  
 stayed on freedom.

## 8

Woke up this morning  
 in my own room at St. Francis House!  
 Stonington is a good place to  
 recuperate from surgery and endure  
 chemotherapy, but this 1890  
 former crack house on Broad Street  
 is home. I woke up this morning,  
 made coffee, and prayed  
 before the Rublev Ikon  
 of the hospitable Trinity,  
 welcoming God of the foreigner,  
 the stranger. The Crucifix  
 of San Damiano that spoke  
 to Francis spoke today to me:  
 "Rebuild my city. Walk  
 around its streets among the homeless  
 and the harried while the pilgrims walk  
 over New England byways.  
 Tell the people of New London,  
 'Another way is possible.'  
 You can share the fruit  
 of the earth – not an 'environment'

for you to manipulate for profit  
but Creation, belonging to God,  
for you to cultivate and share  
for the common good.”  
So I whispered, “Yes,”  
because today my mind is  
stayed on freedom.

## Sunrise at Eastern Point

Why does the sun rise in the east?  
Why does the compass needle point north?  
Are the deep orange clouds that I see  
On the horizon, dripping pink on the waves  
That roll into the shore, the same “rosy fingers”  
Odysseus saw when he woke on the shores  
of Kalypso’s island?

The second boat  
Goes out from Gloucester Harbor, forty-five minutes  
After the first one’s light sank under horizon’s  
Thin line.

My bare feet, ten toes wriggling, propped  
On the cold radiator grate beneath the window –  
Are the only naked feet among the sneakers  
On five prayerful nuns’ ten feet. Two more boats  
Race to catch their mates. Sun’s up.

I don’t see Earth-Encircling Poseidon with his briny  
Locks, but a brown Palestinian Jew gets out of  
The fishing boat and walks across the waves  
To the shore. He comes close enough  
For me to see the wrinkles around the eyes  
And the salt spray sprinkling his beard.  
My old friend, Eric Solibakhe,  
Gestures to me to follow as he turns  
And walks back to the boat.

Not  
“Walking on the water” in a Sunday School  
Bathrobe, but Eric surfing the waves on a board  
Balancing neatly as he comes in to the shore  
Wearing a black body suit.

Odysseus  
Wandered for ten years before reaching home.  
This man has been calling at ports all over the world  
For a long time, recruiting a crew

the rays of the sun  
shining like that I think  
of the child's Bible story  
and how the world was  
born.

... get angry and shout  
What I ask him the third time  
"What's the matter?"  
"I don't know, I would love to  
I don't know what's the matter."

The way I got mad  
at the doctor in the Athens  
charity hospital in 1966  
who asked me "What's-a-matter  
now?"

That's what  
I wanted to tell him a while  
ago, and now honey,  
I'm sorry, but I can't  
help to even a word to  
you about my mind.

And I'm not  
mad at anyone else, I just  
want to get on the sidewalk,  
and I'm sorry, but I can't  
do anything.

That Tupper says  
"Get some Ensure,  
but that's what I want to do  
for you, right?"  
"Strawberry,"  
"I like strawberry. And vanilla."

(Cavalier Light)  
In the picture of the  
showed in the picture of  
and I'm surprised by  
because I'm not a  
plans I was hung with  
bright colored birds -  
all illuminated by rays of  
sunlight so that they seemed  
to be as they radiated from  
blue clouds on the scene.

In reality, I just  
saw this light  
in Detroit in 1966  
pouring down from the  
bright sky into the Palace  
Valley & reflected back  
by the blue cliffs of  
the Pincushion. I think  
call this place  
the novel of the world.

But last Sunday after the  
poetry reading at Jean &  
I said Cafe, as we drove  
west on Interstate 95  
I saw it again  
beyond the Connecticut  
River behind Old Saybrook  
rays of sunlight spread  
across the sky, like  
stars in Vancouver  
blinds turned upside down  
in the window. When I see

## Sunrise at Eastern Point

Why does the sun rise in the east?  
Why does the compass needle point north?  
Are the deep orange clouds that I see  
On the horizon, dripping pink on the waves  
That roll into the shore, the same “rosy fingers”  
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of Kalypso’s island?

The second boat

Goes out from Gloucester Harbor, forty-five minutes  
After the first one’s light sank under horizon’s  
Thin line.

My bare feet, ten toes wriggling, propped  
On the cold radiator grate beneath the window –  
Are the only naked feet among the sneakers  
On five prayerful nuns’ ten feet. Two more boats  
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Gestures to me to follow as he turns  
And walks back to the boat.

Not

“Walking on the water” in a Sunday School  
Bathrobe, but Eric surfing the waves on a board  
Balancing neatly as he comes in to the shore  
Wearing a black body suit.

Odysseus

Wandered for ten years before reaching home.  
This man has been calling at ports all over the world  
For a long time, recruiting a crew

For his fishing boat to help him catch men.  
Dawn's rosy fingers disappear in the bright  
Light of the day I've been waiting for.

## **One-Eyed Rick is Dead**

One-Eyed Rick is dead  
who used to play

cards around a table  
at the homeless shelter,

his body found in the parking  
lot behind the courthouse.

Rick suffered a seizure  
about the time I rode

the night train to DC  
for trial on charges of

“unlawful free speech”  
on the steps of the United

States Supreme Court.  
Rick was homeless seventeen

years on the streets  
of my city. No “cause of

death” is listed. Two by two  
we walked from the site of

our crime to the place  
where justice was meted

out to us but not  
the prisoners in Delta block

at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.  
Tortured because

they were found by bounty  
hunters in Afghanistan

or the border regions  
of Pakistan; captured & sold

to U. S. forces for “extreme  
interrogation” in the war

on terror, they are  
speechless now, like Rick

on his slab in the morgue.  
Our little community

of Catholic Workers prayed  
every day with poems written

in *qasida* verse forms –  
rhymed couplets based on ninth century

Persian love poems – & our love  
for one another grew

like the bitterness they suffered  
in their cages. Rick

was remembered on Friday night  
at the shelter while I rode

the train home to New London.  
His family and friends

gathered to remember him  
— some of them meeting each other

for the first time — & eat  
a memorial meal prepared

by Alison from the soup kitchen.  
*From another world*

*my high school sweetheart  
wracked now with delusion*

*sent an email message  
to explain:*

*"I'm planning to come  
to see you if I can.*

*I live in the forest.  
My Grandfather & I live*

*in the forest here. I want  
to talk to you about what*

*will happen if it becomes  
larger. Our grandparents*

*are also concerned, but  
perhaps none of us*

*is really enough. Love  
is not enough."*

Not enough for her or her  
cousin the Queen of Italy.

Not enough for anonymous  
dead men or Guantanamo

prisoners, their captors  
& the judges

& all the homeless men  
in New London. There is

not enough love  
to keep us all alive

to write *qasida* couplets.  
But for the poets of

Guantanamo, the old friend  
& her imaginary grandfather in

the demented forest, the scruffy  
Catholic Workers in Washington

and One-Eyed Rick  
& me maybe "Love is

enough." We haven't got  
anything else so love must be enough.

## Mark

I can't get over expecting  
To hear your voice on the answering  
Machine when I pick up the phone  
In the morning to record the day's  
Message. The painted wooden  
Robin still hovers over your place  
In the chapel. Any minute now  
I will hear your raucous cough  
Or the "*kich, kich, kich*" snicker  
Of your laugh. Now Russ has only  
One of us to tease him about being  
Baptist in an Anglo-Catholic company  
Or the token liberal among the orthodox.

You took up a lot of room.  
Your tiny apartment has expanded  
to include four years worth  
Of memory. Military decorations  
Compete with seminary honors  
For first place. Your own children  
Have come back for your burial  
And my children have mourned your loss.  
Your "advice to the young marrieds"  
Given to Nate and Zuli on the last night  
Of your life was simply, "Be kind."  
You and Sarah shared the dark  
knowledge of a preacher's kid.  
I don't know what we'll do  
With your father's purple cassock.  
Nobody I know is likely to become  
A bishop. Nobody you know either.

Anne cleaned the apartment yesterday,  
Giving away books to would-be Bible  
Scholars and clothes to homeless men.  
You wore the same sizes as her father did,

Who never threw anything away.  
She wiped up a fine layer of dead skin  
From four years of suffering from psoriasis  
In the apartment. We celebrated Mass  
For you on July 19, with incense  
From St. James Episcopal Church  
And holy water bucket borrowed  
From St. Mary Star of the Sea,  
And many more hymns than you  
Would have liked but you weren't

In charge of the service. It's over now,  
All the alcohol and violence, your father's  
Disappointment in you and yours in  
Yourself and your own children's in you  
Your mother who abandoned you and Amy  
When you were small, is reunited now  
With you, and all the disapproval  
That was wasted on both sides is given up.  
Perhaps you are fishing in heaven.  
You don't need "scooter races" now,  
Because you have what Aquinas called  
"The resurrection body" – eighteen years old  
Physically, but wise as all eternity.  
Good-bye, old friend. I hear you calling.

## Not Yet 6 A.M.

and already Broad Street is busy  
with commercial, automotive, and pedestrian  
traffic. Slightly crazed Vassily stops to  
ask if my seersucker bathrobe is a  
hospital garment. Already people come to  
Labor-Ready looking for workers, the Guida's  
Dairy truck pulls into the parking lot.  
Across the street the dentist's tenant  
walks his dog, a teenager barrels down  
on his bike ("No hands!") and homeless men  
begin their pilgrimage from shelter to soup  
kitchen to daytime hospitality looking  
for cans, spare change, a cigarette, a drink.  
Harry's red and white taxi, blue Port City  
cab, Peg Curtin's livery service slide by.  
Beneath the street I hear a heavy heartbeat.  
Angelus bells in my head ring the hour:  
"Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee."

## Mental Fight

Guarded by Otis the beautiful Beagle  
I wait on the porch for the UPS pickup  
reading Ken's new book *Doing Theology*  
*in Altab Ali Park*. I notice the phrase  
"mental fight" from Blake's poem,  
a reference to spiritual warfare.

One of the homeless guys asks for money  
for food, a mother walking with her child  
wants to exchange a twenty dollar bill  
for two tens. The superintendent  
of schools parks across the street  
and goes into the dentist's office.

A couple of lawyers park in front  
of the house and take their two big dogs  
to pee in Williams Park. Otis barks  
fiercely as they drive away smiling at us.  
Amy & Jesse stop to ask about Jesus,  
they want to get their life together.

The steps of the empty house  
across the street are vacant now.  
Larry Love was there this morning  
reading *The Day* paper  
keeping an eye out for my safety.  
"Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand."

## Poem Beginning with a Line by Clarence Jordan

*Not that we shall die and go home with him  
but that he is risen and comes home with us,  
bringing all his hungry, naked, thirsty, sick,  
prisoner brothers with him.*

Thus he shows up and like him his friends are dirty, hungry, smelling of drink, wanting a place to stay, a handout, maybe a job. We had expected better, a better looking, better dressed, better spoken person, with respectable friends, a plan of action to solve the problem and get them off our doorsteps. We thought he would speak with a better accent in language appropriate to the courts of law or at least "the courts of the Lord's House." What we got was this homeless guy who talked about foxes having holes and birds and flowers being better dressed than respectable people. He didn't support a stable social order but was subversive of the American way of life. He was more an anarchist than the monarch of all. He was a good talker, we liked what he said as long as it was only poetry. When it became clear to us that he meant to change us we fixed his wagon, spread his arms wide to welcome the multitude, but nailed in place to the fence posts. We left him there to suffocate or freeze to death. Heaven and earth combined on that cross to stamp out any possibility that he would rise again or say those words again that caused so much trouble for good people. The police put a sign above his head that said, "Goodbye and good riddance to bad rubbish."

## Healing Power

*for Tupper Morehead*

Ronnie gets angry and shouts  
When I ask him the third time  
“What’s the matter?”  
“I don’t know, I told you,  
I don’t know what’s the matter.”

The way I got mad  
at the doctor in the Athens  
charity hospital in 1966  
who asked *me*, “What’s a-matter  
*you?*”

Then Bob Lax,  
after a breakfast of *loukoumi*  
and warm honey,  
sent me to the *Anti-Aphrodisiakon*  
to cure a dose of clap  
I got in Paris on Bastille Day

Ronnie can’t eat  
but he’s hungry. He points to a bag  
of food on the sidewalk,  
“I’m starving, but I can’t eat  
anything.”

Then Tupper says,  
“Get him some Ensure,  
he can *drink* that.” “What kind  
do you like?”  
Ronnie says, “Strawberry.  
I like strawberry. And vanilla.”

## Creation (Light)

In Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible*  
the picture of creation  
showed modest Adam  
and Eve surrounded by  
peaceable animals, lush green  
plants & trees hung with  
bright colored fruits –  
all illumined by rays of  
sunlight so thick they seemed  
solid as they radiated from pale  
blue clouds onto the scene.

In reality, I first  
saw this light  
in Delphi in 1966  
pouring down from the  
bright sky into the Pleistos  
Valley & reflected back  
by the sheer cliffs of  
the Phaedriades. Greeks  
call this place  
the navel of the world.

But last Sunday, after the  
poetry reading at Bean &  
Leaf Café, as we drove  
west on Interstate 95  
I saw it again.  
Beyond the Connecticut  
River behind Old Saybrook  
rays of sunshine spread  
across the sky, like  
slats in Venetian  
blinds turned upside down  
in the window. When I see

the rays of the sun  
shining like that I think  
of the child's Bible story  
and how the world was  
born.

## **Focus**

I suck my life  
from the wounds  
of the dying  
Christ.

## To Catch a Wave

Three surfers in black wetsuits  
ride the crashing waves  
in from the Atlantic  
to Brace Cove and “the old  
eternal rocks.” What courage  
they have, matching their slender  
bodies against the ocean’s violence.  
What grace, as they stand upright  
and sail past rocks to sandy beaches.  
Where will I find  
such grace and courage in  
the universe I live in?  
Where but among the fools  
for Christ who match their wit and  
weakness against the systems  
of success that crush  
the children and the poor  
into black holes of torture and despair?  
What can I do, dear Christ,  
but wash their bruised and bleeding bodies,  
give them soup and shelter?  
Or can I catch a wave to ride  
and bring them home?

## A Supermarket in New London

California Fruit has closed its doors.  
Charlie Facas, owner of the building which housed  
not only California Fruit  
but Tony D's Italian steakhouse and restaurant,  
where in the old days  
City Council members went to drink after meetings  
and make the real decisions,  
as well as Labor Ready ("Work Today, Paid Today"),  
the wedding gown shop, and pizza parlor –  
Charlie the proprietor of the last market  
within New London city limits,  
has rented out the space to Fiddleheads  
Organic Foods Cooperative.  
*Just the facts, ma'am*  
No prejudice in my song!

I wander down the aisles of California Fruit,  
supermarket of my dreams,  
and find yellow onions big as baseballs,  
*Medaglia d'Oro* coffee as well as *Café Bustelo*,  
Goya products, dried beans and *sazons*  
for Latino families to cook with,  
mousetraps, cigarettes, beer and Colt 45  
Malt Liquor, as well as fresh cut meat  
– *What color do you think dead meat is?* –  
boxes of book matches, wet mops,  
all the things we had on the Lower East Side  
when I first moved to New York  
and read about Allen Ginsberg's  
supermarket in California.

They bought it for the parking lot –  
plenty of room for the Volvos and Beemers  
from Mystic and Stonington Borough to park in  
where before the winos passed out  
and hookers plied their trade undistracted

by accountants, dentists, and community police –  
but the supermarket was part of the deal  
so now they're cleaning out and finding  
dead rats in the corners,  
*tut-tut*, “besides the locals only came  
for cigarettes and beer and redemption money  
from the cans and bottles  
they picked up on the street.”  
They know what's best for us,  
and they'll give us what we need  
if we can afford the membership.

Charlie has opened a new  
smaller store on Huntington Street,  
in another part of the building, in case  
the Fiddleheads committee can't meet  
the expectations of their neighbors.  
Unredeemed neighbors.  
Nobody wants poor people,  
old people, handicapped people –  
especially people with drug and  
alcohol handicaps,  
tenant organizers from the Bronx or  
mothers from Puerto Rico, whose sons  
think reenlisting in the Army  
is the best option they'll ever have.  
Such people never want organic, can't afford  
“the best,” and don't know when  
they're finished, not redeemed.  
The situation calls for epic measures.

What thoughts I have of you today,  
Allen Ginsberg, Jewish pinko fag of 1950s  
Amerika, respectable glasses,  
Zen practices and all!  
You knew when a neighborhood  
was and enjoyed sneaking looks at  
people enjoying themselves in ways  
they never heard of in the Borough.

Like you, I like to look at people,  
strange people with hairdo's and humpbacks,  
hopeless loves and unhealthy habits—  
*judge not lest ye be judged!*—  
who were here before I was, and are still coming.

## Saturday Night Special

### Homage to Allen Ginsberg

We go out late on Saturday night to buy the *Sunday Times*.  
Peter goes into the store and I stop to talk with David.  
Nearby a crowd begins to gather around a woman drunk or crazy  
On bad drugs lying on the sidewalk, trying to pet a dog  
Who is snarling at her, as his master tries to restrain him.  
Her boyfriend pulls at her arm,  
swearing, "Come on, you goddamn bitch.  
Get the fuck up!" The dog's owner, tugging at the leash, cries  
"Keep your hand away, he'll bite!" but the woman  
Warbles her invitation, "Here doggie, here doggie, doggie."  
The man is about to punch the woman,  
The dog is about to break away  
And bite the woman, the crowd begins  
edging away from the violence  
About to explode in a Lower East Side Saturday night special.  
I walk over, hold out my bag of cookies, and say,  
"Would you like a Fig Newton?"  
The dog owner yanks his beast away  
And walks off down the street. The woman is bewildered.  
I say, "Oh, I haven't introduced myself. My name is Allen  
And this is my friend David." The woman's boyfriend  
Drags her to her feet and leads her away muttering about  
One more lunatic on the street with a bag of cookies.  
"Oh well," I say, turning to David,  
"Would *you* like a Fig Newton?"

## Early Morning at Eastern Point

Snug in my blanket  
in front of the window,  
coffee mug warming my hands,  
I look across Brace Cove  
to the dark Atlantic. Just now,  
the sun pops up and beams –  
bright orange brush strokes  
on canvas. Eyes of houses  
strewn along seashore  
stare out, wide to the light.  
I think of Marlowe,  
stabbed in a barroom brawl,  
and Faustus' last words:  
*See, see, Christ's blood  
streams in the firmament!*  
The blood dries up  
in the bright day's break.

## Planning Danny's Funeral

We send for a large quantity of boots to decorate the sanctuary, the kind Danny wore for landscape gardening on Fishers Island, before he died last month, half in, half outside his tent in Bates Woods. The priest asks me to preach but no one knows the Gospel of the day. A woman in a sharp business suit is haranguing homeless shelter volunteers: "You've got to show them who's boss!"

I try to tell her that our guests are not prisoners while other people search for a lectionary or Gospel book. the box I expected to be full of boots arrives loaded with glossy green copies of *The New Left Review*. Nervous Homeland Security in black uniforms move in: "Everybody sleeps in Bates Woods tonight."

## **Dancing in the Street**

People were dancing  
in the street last night  
(Anne called it “jumping”)  
as The Reducers played  
songs of revolutionary  
hope on a stage behind  
the Soldiers and Sailors  
Monument in Union  
Plaza. Music of the New London  
School of Poetical Politics.  
People younger than  
my daughter and older than  
me were dancing to songs  
of our city, shouting whispered  
messages into the loud and  
fireworks-spangled night.

## **Mr. Would-be Rides Again**

Saunters down Main Street in Gloucester town  
a paperback book of poems from *The Greek Anthology*  
shoved into his jeans hip-pocket, looking for a local  
girl to seduce or another envious poet to skewer  
with an epigram.

## Mr. Would-be Tries To Make Conversation

walks around Niles Pond  
on the Eastern Point of Cape Ann,  
intending to ask three questions.  
Loud Atlantic waves beat on the shore  
of the narrow strip of land  
between pond and ocean.  
He talks on the cell phone  
to his sister in Missouri.  
Crash of the waves makes it  
impossible to hear.  
He walks up Bemo Avenue  
to the main road – Eastern Point Boulevard  
with its wide fenced yards  
and big rich people's summer cottages  
– *too much of the scorn*  
*of the indolent rich*  
*and of the derision of the proud* –  
eating clementines and tossing peel  
under neat hedgerows.  
Hikers watch him from  
the other side of the road.  
These are the questions:  
*Why do I feel like a misfit?*  
*Does God think I'm a misfit*  
*Does it matter?*  
He turns onto Niles Pond Road  
and sees, at water's edge,  
a blue heron, standing still  
looking at him. *Are you the answer*  
*I'm looking for?* The heron stalks  
across the shallow water and does not  
dignify the question  
with a reply. *Are you a messenger*  
*from God? Are you God?*  
Hoisting himself noiselessly  
into the air the heron flies away.

## **Look at Me!**

I have  
at last  
stopped  
wanting  
to get  
your  
attention.

## A Woolen Rosary

### Homage to Gary Snyder

a simple woolen  
    circlet of  
        100 knots  
to count the breath  
    and say  
        Lord Jesus

I got my first one  
    on Mount Athos  
        in 1977  
took it back  
    to England where  
        it came apart  
in a washing machine

(the first one washed  
    in a thousand years  
        of practice!)

bought another  
    when Sarah and I  
        were in Crete  
lost that recently  
    and wrote to Roger  
        in Hydra for help

—A hundred knots  
    in groups of twenty-five  
        separated  
by decorative beads

at the end  
    a cross of knots  
        from which depends

a tassel – I carry it  
    in the pocket of my red  
        woolen vest  
every night  
    when I go to  
        the homeless shelter

in New London  
    a long way from  
        Greece

What is so special  
    about this scrap  
        of knotted wool?

*Letter from Roger Green, of Hydra, Greece, dated 12/12/04:*

*So you rang me on Tues. Dec. 7. On Wed. Dec. 8, I was passing the monastery I mentioned in Kolonaki. An old crone in black was sitting on the steps outside the gate. She had a cardboard box beside her. I could see that the box was full of the kind of short, knotted loops that can go around your wrist.*

*Self: "A friend of mine is looking for a knot-string with 100 knots."*

*Crone (rummaging): "Here you are. Here's one with a hundred knots."*

*Self: "That's splendid. Thank you."*

*Crone: "It comes from the Holy Mountain."*

*I paid her and that was that. But the punchline is that, although I subsequently passed the monastery many times, I never saw her again; and friends to whom I mentioned this phenomenon said that they had never seen a woman selling rosaries outside the monastery. Draw your own conclusions....*

Wednesday morning  
    December 22  
        I give Ben

a ride to work  
at the 99 Restaurant  
in Groton  
It's snowing  
busses won't start running  
until 8 o'clock  
we take the bridge  
across the Thames River  
he says  
"I believe in miracles.  
I really do.  
You taking me  
to work this morning  
is a miracle."  
"Don't mention it,"  
I say  
steering carefully  
in the snow  
heeding the signs  
("BRIDGES FREEZE  
BEFORE ROADWAYS")  
of the times.  
Ben makes \$17  
an hour  
as a line cook  
saving up  
to get an apartment  
then go back  
down South  
to see his family  
he says he's  
clean and sober  
fourteen months and counting.

## Little Boy Blue

the taste of light  
    is the taste of mango juice  
        sweet and smooth  
to the tongue  
    open eyes two  
        candles burning  
street lamps outside  
    fade with the  
        dawn  
the pilgrim asleep  
    in a haystack  
        dreams his *staretz*  
points to a page  
    in the book –  
        “the one in you  
is greater  
    than the one outside” –  
        the taste of light is  
smooth as the grain  
    of wood on the altar  
        sweeter than –  
wake up, pilgrim,  
    dreaming of light,  
        there is nothing  
to fear  
    nothing  
        that is not  
mango juice  
    to the taste  
        of light under  
the haystack  
fast asleep

## Like Lazarus

Look, you didn't  
do what you didn't  
do. Now you've  
spent forty years  
saying you didn't  
do it.

Bob Shapiro asked  
in the days of  
hope, "Do you  
believe in the  
*possibility*  
of social change?"

Marina on her way  
back to prison said,  
"Don't nothing  
belong to you –  
you don't even  
belong to yourself."

But Lazarus died  
waiting for his  
friends to get there.  
Martha baked cakes  
and Mary wept  
by the roadside.

## Sarah Stalks A Grasshopper

*for Sarah*

stops in the marsh grass  
    beside the shore  
        picks up  
periwinkles and puts them  
    down again  
        on wet stones,  
sends a flat rock  
    skimming  
        along the surface  
of the water  
    then leads me into  
        a thicket of wild  
raspberries  
    in the neighbors' yard

“This side belongs  
    to our neighbors.  
        They let me  
pick them.  
    The other side  
        belongs to Don's Dock  
and his wife.”  
    she tiptoes through  
        the tall grass  
stalking  
    the swift grasshopper.

## Blue Escape

Blue Port City taxi  
pulls up across Broad Street:  
lanky young man with black beard  
face hidden by hood of his black  
sweatshirt

(I can't make out  
the college but the fact that  
he's wearing it doesn't mean  
he went there)

and girlfriend  
in 1950s outfit (blue skirt, white blouse  
tucked neatly, hair ribbons bouncing)  
run down the steps from the dentist's  
apartments, load sheer blue  
fabric bag the size of a steamer trunk,  
2 backpacks & one electric  
guitar into the cab,  
jump into back seat and  
take off down the street.

## Breakfast

*The greatest tragedy is not to live in a physical world.*

Wallace Stevens

I spread the butter  
on the toast—  
it melts as it glides  
over the warm bread—  
then spoon the honey  
from the jar  
onto the bread,  
honey mixing with butter,  
bread like lungs  
inhaling sweetness.  
I think of Greece and  
breakfast on Poros Island.  
We sailed from Athens  
in the morning,  
then walked all day  
through the groves of olives,  
orange and lemon trees,  
plucking leaves  
from branches above  
our heads, crushing them  
between fingers, breathing  
deep the odor of  
citrus and summer.

On winter mornings  
like this, around the table  
in New London with Anne  
and Mark and Nora,  
and sometimes Nancy,  
I remember that time  
when the light fell  
over my life like a net,  
connecting sense and spirit,  
and I breathe again  
the odors of daylight

and night, the blue sea  
dark with knowledge,  
and air inhabited.

I have never been  
at ease in my own body.  
For me it was always  
sex or God,  
not simply touch and  
taste and smell.  
In search of ecstasy  
I missed the honey and  
lemon leaves.  
The spirit descends  
and remains on the simple  
who delight in skin, feel  
with feet, touch with hands.

Still I can ask,  
Who are you?  
and who am I?  
I can enjoy the sweetness  
of friendship – fiery and  
sweet as honey –  
mixed with butter on the  
bread at breakfast  
on the road from Poros Harbor  
or here today  
in winter sunlight.

## The Story of My Life

Homeland Security show up in their black uniforms like Nazis without swastikas and demand an explanation: "Show me your papers!" the glorious *gauleiter* from Texas insists. I say "I don't have any papers!" But I *do* have papers, I have a passport which I am required to carry on flights that go to Mexico or Canada, and a driver's license from the DMV of Connecticut to prove that I am a 67 year old white male, 5 feet 9 inches tall, with blue eyes, restricted to driving with corrective lenses and then only a non-commercial vehicle weighing less than 10,000 pounds gross weight with another vehicle in tow.

"Give an account of yourself!" the *gauleiter* growls. The New Testament says "Always be prepared to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence," sweating it out with the Homeland Security guy's weapon stuck in my ear. The Emperor may come and ask where I was in the last war – *which* last war? – and I will have to show my DD214 to prove I was "honorable." But still I can't give an account of myself. It's the story of my life.

I wasn't born, but "from my mother's womb untimely ripp'd" in Baptist Hospital, Alexandria, Louisiana, & my father put down his occupation as "planter," my mother was a "housewife." Race Caucasian, even though the envious neighbors along the Red River said everyone in my family had "nigger blood." Powerful stuff, that blood, one-eighth overwhelms the weak white corpuscles of the other seven-eighths. Oh octoroon! *O Clemens, O pia, O dolcis virgo Maria!*

My father "was a telephone man,  
who fell in love with long distance."  
Once he stopped at the house in Boyce  
where my mother's parents lived, driving an oil truck  
and donated enough fuel to run the heaters  
all winter long. When I met him  
again at age 16 he gave me this advice:  
"Always when I go to a new town or look for a job,  
have my shoes shined and a copy of the local  
newspaper under my arm. That always works,"  
he said. "It's the story of my life."

And now that I am old  
I still can't give an account of myself.  
"It's the story of my life."  
"The story of my life" is not to be able  
to tell you the story you want to hear.  
Just sitting here waiting  
for the next embarrassing  
episode or endless imagination of flowers  
promising healing to anyone who succeeds in telling the story of  
my life.

## **Awake!**

On August 6, 1985, my friend Ed Rodman proposed an answer to the question: "In the light of Hiroshima, who are you?" He said, "In the light of Hiroshima, I am a man who prays for peace, works for justice, and hopes for mercy."

On March 9, 2001, after a conversation at St. Francis House, I asked my friends and neighbors, "In the light of the Urban Caucus meeting in New London, what is the mission of St. Francis House?" I should have asked, "Who do people say that we are?"

This morning I woke up to the sound of rain on the roof. Downstairs I can hear the rain on the driveway between St. Francis House and Eric's house next door. Praying in the chapel, I hear the rain falling in the street. "In the light of bombs dropping, people meeting and talking, and rain falling, who am I?"

## On His Birthday

I remember a time

*(when was that time?)*

when all the girls wanted

to live in a garret

with Emmett Jarrett

*(who were those girls?)*

now he is a sixty-year-old

smiling public man

and even his mother

can't remember the honey

*(remember what honey?)*

only the money

*(what money?)*

oh my!

### **Stonington Poem**

“Put away the sword,”  
techniques of meditation:  
useless instruments.

Notice patterns of light  
on the water  
as the sun rises;

the gull that soars,  
banks its flight and  
sails around

the green mimosa tree  
to land and stalk across  
the grass in

stately, solitary  
procession to the shore.





## Saint Francis House

Saint Francis House and Victory House  
in New London, Connecticut

A Blake mural on St. Francis  
House, by Sarah Jarrett

*Background:*  
Emmett's  
library of poetry  
and theology.

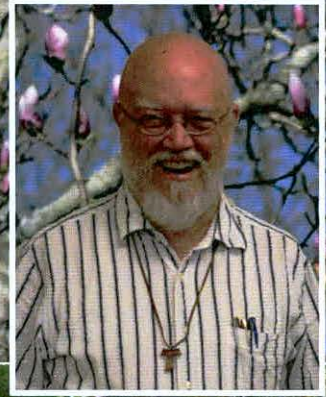


Smooth stones from  
the chapel of St.  
Francis House



The St. Francis House board joins residents  
in the chapel of Saint Francis House.

Counter clockwise from below left: Margaret Rose, Emmett's curate in Boston in the 1980's, now on the Saint Francis House Board, with his peace sign; Anne Scheibner and Danni Bellows, TSSF, a board member, seated on Emmett's memorial bench; its top inscribed with Matthew 5:6; Emmett walking for peace with Eric Swanfeldt, 2006; Emmett 2005; background: a magnolia tree at the cemetery.



BLESSED ARE THEY  
WHO HUNGER AND THIRST  
FOR JUSTICE  
FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED  
MATTHEW 5:6

**Written in  
Herakleion, Crete  
(1967)**

## **Design : A Vision**

*for Ron Schreiber*

Thus saith the Lord: I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth: and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts a holy mountain.

Thus saith the Lord of hosts: There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age.

And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.

### Overture

The city is in imminent danger of being destroyed:  
Certain sojourners rejoice at the news.

Once old men fished in the Seine,  
Boys swam naked in the Hudson and graceful girls  
Played in the green hills around Florence.  
Fine olives grew from a single tree  
On the akropolis of Athens, and even before  
Beautiful women played with the bulls at Knossos.

Then walls were built  
That could only be burned down  
On a day when the wind blew steady from the south:  
The olive withered, careless hands dropped statues  
And perfect poems were used to wrap garbage in.

A second chance was offered  
But within thirteen years it was bartered  
For commercial advantage, unrealized.

Now a catatonic rules over orderly chaos  
With weapons he lacks the wit to design:

The citizens are turned out of the gates  
To eat locusts and wild honey.

The city is in imminent danger of being destroyed:  
Certain sojourners rejoice at the news.

### The Quest

Here is the talisman:  
a silver thirty-drachma piece commemorating  
the Glücksburg dynasty, five kings  
on the obverse side

and on the reverse:

This magic Greece of the mind.  
It is a strangely shaped country, the balls  
of the Balkans, a hand reaching down from Russia  
to the Mediterranean, the point of contact  
between so many easts and wests.  
Two silver dolphins leap from the horns of Crete,  
a ship under full sail makes for the Aegean.  
The artist has enlarged the size of the islands  
with respect to the main  
to make them show up  
on the coin,  
which is not precisely to scale,  
not a rational map but

‘periplum, not as land looks on a map  
‘but as sea bord seen by men sailing.’

Walking by the sea on a warm spring night  
the thunder of waves gave incongruous comfort  
to my constricted heart.  
The air smelled warm and damp.  
The strange pink light congealed in front of me,  
I heard the voices as in a dream  
speaking out of that pillar of light.  
The sojourners said I might see their city



yet *here* is the city we long for.  
What master mind will give this body  
to be the design for the city?

\* \* \*

“On the organization of the social group, the remains from prehistoric times leave the field free for the imagination and do not furnish us with much information. It is not impossible, however, to imagine the vague outlines of what might have been the evolution of the Aegean societies. . . .”

### Two Mad Songs

I visited a madhouse in America and there I saw, besides the chief poet of the age, young women of pleasing appearance and young men slender of body, with fire in their eyes, and heard them sing songs of their own invention set to an exquisite music, sweet and sad but all the same joyous and strong. Throwing off their disheveled clothing they raced across smooth green lawns waving the wild white asphodel like a thyrsos as they sang:

#### *The Young Girl's Song*

I gave birth to the sun,  
Nursed him in a cavern  
Under the warm sea.

I raised him up as my son  
And brought him forth  
In the morning, shining.

He grew up in an hour,  
Shone on the round world,  
Then came back to me.

All in a single night  
I bore him, nursed him,  
Reared him to brightness

And buried him,  
All in the same warm sea.  
I am again with child.

*The Young Man's Song*

I am the cock of the world:  
I love my mother.

I was conceived by the moon  
On a starlit night,

Rocked in her slender arms.  
Then I loved her, and she

(Laughing and biting)  
Swelled up like a white balloon.

She set me down on the ground  
To play with my brothers.

We tug at the moon with her tides,  
Nibble at wild-goat figs.

I am the cock of the world:  
I love my mother.

The boys and girls danced together, leaping over brooks and stones, whirling across the smooth green lawns. But before they could sing me their chorus a doctor appeared in his starched white coat. He frowned and rebuked their revels. He brought a professor with him who sat the boys and girls down in front of a chalky blackboard and taught them to make sonnets on sixteenth century themes.

\* \* \*

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being which is relative rather than absolute and present when an individual is acceptable to himself and his social milieu as reflected in his personal relationships, his satisfaction in living, and his level of achievement.

On any one day in the year (1966), there are 28,352 children and young adults with serious mental disorders in our mental hospitals, of whom 4,949 are under fifteen, and 24,403 are between fifteen and twenty-four. Of the estimated half a million mentally ill or psychotic children in the United States, most suffer from schizophrenia: but only a very small percentage receive psychiatric treatment.

*A remnant! a remnant!*

\* \* \*

Was Hamlet mad? Polonius, who was the foremost psychiatrist of his day, thought so. But bloody Claudius, the power politician, knew better. Hamlet's tragic flaw was simply this: he knew too much.

Such was also the case of Rimbaud.

The new world is begun! It has been nurtured in secret for two hundred years to disguise its ancestry. Now fully matured it raises its head and shakes off the empty shells that concealed it. The ultimate alternatives hover between crossed hairs. A shaft of light shines out clearly from the city that is now at hand. False starts are forgotten, the sojourners rejoice. Even now, while you sleep, the issue is being decided. The old America was an abortive birth. The new city is alive, it breathes, and has body. *Time shall be no more!*

## The Sojourners

The sojourners visited me in Tompkins Square Park. It was the first night of spring, the air was warm and damp, and my heart was excited when I saw the pink light approaching. My guide was a woman of remarkable grace and beauty whose name was Beatrice. She wore no clothing. I was eager to ask her questions about the sojourners and the city but first she sang me the song of the sojourners, accompanying herself on an instrument I did not recognize but the melody was strangely familiar. This is the song she sang:

Before Abraham was, I am,  
a stranger and sojourner in a strange land

for whatever greatness may exhaust itself upon  
this much is sure:  
it loses its home.

We are the sojourners,  
we are the wanderers,

strangers and sojourners  
in a strange land:

Having no home  
we make the earth our home,  
having no kindred  
we love all men as kindred:

We seek to grasp the meaning of the time  
by keeping still  
and adhering to clarity.

*And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth  
bread and wine: and he was the priest of the  
most high God.*

*And he blessed him. . . .*

The temptation is  
to avoid the conflict  
because we know the futility of struggle.

The temptation is  
to hold fast that which is true  
and despise a world  
bent on its own  
destruction.

But it is not enough  
to compose  
the perfect song,  
set the notes in order  
and sing it well.

We seek to grasp the meaning of the time  
keeping the city  
always in mind:

for there is  
no perfection  
apart from  
our common world,  
our flesh,

And even the animals know  
how uneasy you feel  
*in der gedeuteten Welt,*  
interpreting your world

Because you have not  
as Whitman (a sojourner) told you  
turned to live  
with the animals,  
you more than we  
are strangers  
and sojourners  
in a strange land.

Under the flower  
That blooms this morning  
Traces of snow, traces

of snow—  
*Kallakhrinaki*  
A calla lily  
Smooth white mouth  
with pointed tongue—  
The tongue cocks upward  
Earth-colored, ochre  
The wide mouth opens  
perfectly white.

I tasted it—  
the sap is bitter  
that brings its growth—  
yet must we drink it

all

Before Homer was, I am,  
a stranger and sojourner in a strange land:

My name is Teucer: I am wandering  
toward sea-surrounded Kypris  
where the Pythia said  
I am to found a city  
and call it Salamis  
in memory of  
my island home.

And on the journey  
to see Helen  
in her very flesh,  
to see through the veil  
of illusion  
that fluttered upon the battlements  
of Troy.

Nothing but tears of joy,  
none but the tears that come  
    invited by sweetness,  
sufficiency of beauty,  
the scarcely tolerable strictness  
that when achieved delights  
    (in new birth)  
refreshes

    if we are  
    strong enough  
as the cold spring slakes the thirst  
    and refreshes the traveler  
    on his way to Dodona, Delphi,  
Paphos, Bethlehem,  
    America,

    new Jerusalem

    Before Dante, I am,  
    a stranger and sojourner in a strange land  
    Before Leonardo, Shakespeare,  
    strangers and sojourners in a strange land  
    Before Blake and Whitman,  
    strangers and sojourners in a strange land

I will not mention Jesus  
whose seed fell upon stones,  
dried up in a short summer  
and now stinks:  
nor the one man of your time  
(I speak of Kazantzakis)  
who showed you Jesus naked.  
You know what happened to him  
and to his country.  
His bones broken, like relics  
of painted saints whose eyes  
the Turks poked out,

afraid of their power:  
even his bones were not left  
to rot in the earth in peace  
but burned by your pitiful bombs.

Before all Gods, before all Goddesses,  
we are the wanderers,  
we are the sojourners,  
high priests forever  
after the order  
of Melchizedek:  
evermore strangers and sojourners in a strange land

\* \* \*

Here she ended her song. It was only with difficulty that she was able to rouse me from reverie, telling me I might see and converse with three of the sojourners, those who had cared most for my life. She hung a silver chain around my neck with the Greek coin for a pendant, and I set out to find my benefactors.

BLAKE IS NOT WHIRLING HIS ARMS like a windmill, he is leaning over the copper plates, acid in hand, etching his visions in corroding fires, the method of Hell, regarding himself with pleasure, reconstituting our bodies out of five rational senses. My face appears beside his on the glossy surface, our emanations mingle joyously and he invites me to improve my sensual enjoyment with a plate of his wife's green peas.

\* \* \*

I LOOK FOR WHITMAN IN A SUPERMARKET he has been known to frequent but he is not there. I find him instead sauntering along the open road, a visionary Broadway with sweet savage gardens stretching for miles away on either side. As we are comrades and countrymen he invites me to loaf with him on the grass, where we exchange catalogs and kiss one another's soul with penetrating tongue. Although there is fire, our tongues are

not Pentecostal flames but flowering buds, tasting, moist, singing a powerful song.

\* \* \*

THE DOCTOR IS DREAMING IN THE outer office but he looks up from his reverie and greets me, then pulls me out the door to show me the asphodel and speaks, his tongue thick, "of love, abiding love," the difficulty and risk of it, only to assure me it has all been worth the effort. Him I feel closest to, the diffident, assertive Williams. The others are sojourners but he tells the truth in the very words I would use if I were as old and wise and as feminine as he is.

Some days later I dined with Beatrice on a grassy hill encircled with flowers. We feasted on strawberries, succulent fruit, olives and grapes, oranges, peaches, mangoes and others so exotic I didn't know their names but she assured me the earth had grown every one of them. We finished the meal with various cheeses and bread, washed down with a goblet of spiced and fragrant wine.

She spoke of ISOMERS. An ISOMER of God is the sojourner, and we are all ISOMERS one of another. We have one birth, one life, one unquenchable energy: yet we are different substances of manifold but perfect expression, like crystals, all beautiful. Our whole activity is *play*: this is the rule of life.

Neither is the sojourners' city a place, nor any thing at all. The city also is an ISOMER, body of a man, body of a woman, body of both of us dancing together. And still I could not see the city, having for so long dulled my mind with ideas of soul and body, matter and spirit, confused dichotomies. Beatrice smiled and told me it would appear, my imagination would not fail me.

Many other things she also told me that I may not reveal, for they are written elsewhere. Then we were joined by the beautiful girls and boys from the madhouse. We danced on the hillside till late in the evening, when Beatrice took me aside and

we lay down upon the earth together and played God's game to the end. At last, full of pleasure, we slept.

\* \* \*

When I awoke she was gone. I looked at the grass and the curious animals around me. Then I raised my eyes from the earth. And I beheld the city.

### The City

*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away: and there was no more sea.*

*And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

### In the Messara

We saw wheat growing wild on the upper slopes  
and sucked the sweet stalks for their milk,  
wild dittany that gives special comfort  
to women in childbirth,  
almond trees in pink and white blossom  
since January,  
filling the air with flowers,  
olives on the lower slopes  
darkening the land with their green,  
shimmering leaves  
that rustle with light,  
vines growing deep in the valleys,  
*stafilia* for wine, for raisins.  
Later there will be pomegranates  
red and bursting with sweet seeds,  
red in the sunlight shining.  
Lemons and oranges, oranges all winter long,

the finest jewel in the earth's crown,  
barley and carobs, tiny early bananas,  
asparagus, artichokes growing wild,  
the very grass, called *khorta*, is good to eat.  
The earth brings forth in abundance,  
corn, wine, oil and honey in abundance:  
For they had built Jerusalem  
Upon this green & pleasant Land.

Set over against lust,

*Pleasure*

No red but the red of anemones,  
only the blood of Adonis  
whose flowers sprinkle the roadside.  
Bodies are softly united,  
touching is always caressing  
for love is dancing there  
*praised and exalted.*

Set over against money,

*Pleasure*

It can never be purchased:  
priceless, can only be given.  
No bodies are broken, flesh  
and limbs are laved  
in loving and dancing  
and we are knit together  
*praised and exalted.*

Set over against envy,

*Pleasure*

For the time is free  
and our bones are clothed  
in amorous new bodies.

We are isomers one of another  
and all are joined  
in our delightful dancing  
*Evermore praised and exalted.*

West of Mires  
a low mountain ridge breasts the Messara  
like the prow of a ship. Here, on a spur,  
some 250 feet above the plain,  
is Phaistos.  
From the large central court of the palace  
we saw Mount Dhikti to the east,  
to the south the plain and the sea,  
and towering over the north  
the snowy brow of Ida.  
All around spread the earth's wealth.

Minoan architecture is  
agglutinative : organic  
a man builds as much of a house,  
a king builds as much of a palace  
as he needs  
(and no more)—  
later additions are made  
as the need arises.  
And there are  
no walls.  
No walls.  
The city has no walls but air,  
No gates but love invite us there:  
It is set upon a hill,  
And establish'd by God's will:  
*For time shall be no more.*

The streets are grass,  
green and a soft cushion to our feet  
and to our bodies when love invites us.  
We wander like atoms in a molecule

or angels speeding on errands of revelation,  
we encounter each other in love  
renewing our energy  
and change direction without regard to direction.  
Everywhere is where we want to be  
and where we are:

For we have built Jerusalem  
Upon this green & pleasant Land.

In Homer's time  
there were a hundred cities  
in Crete  
my island home:

Today  
there are more than 1500 varieties of wildflowers,  
at least one hundred of which are indigenous.  
Quince, the sweet fruit, in shape of a fig,  
is native to the island,  
and the cultivated olive was introduced  
into the Peloponnesos by Herakles the Cretan.  
And Daidalos flew with wings  
of wax and feathers,  
wings of wax and feathers.

When we tire of ascending  
the mountain  
we look down from the height  
and refresh ourselves  
with the delicate colors  
of wildflowers,  
God's footprints,  
blood of Adonis,  
hyacinth, narcissus,  
even asphodel,  
the flower of  
incredible love  
with mystic crosses  
traced  
in red on the petals.



The angels are women  
and men  
    with gills and fins  
        to swim in the sea  
and wings on their shoulders  
    like Daidalos' wings  
of wax and feathers,  
    Chagall's angels  
        and Rilke's  
*aber nicht schrecklich,*  
    not terrible.

The words of the poems dance across the page,  
the birds in the air dance above the clouds,  
the fish in the water dance among the waves,  
  
    love's dance.

The city is set on a hill  
(Phaistos my model  
    from my island home)  
no poets live there  
    for all men are poets:  
their songs fall  
    palpable  
        as golden pears  
from the tree  
when the breeze blows over their ripeness,  
    as pears from the tree  
        all the year:

Morning and evening  
    spring and fall  
        youth and old age and  
  
                    new life

in the city I long for  
where the block is both carved

and whole,  
the vessels  
in order:  
moving at random like atoms,  
isomers one of another  
modeled upon God's body:

For we have built the city without walls.

**From**  
***Greek Feet***  
**(1972)**

## Ikon

In my mind I'm making an ikon of all that I love  
and all that I have loved  
and all I once hated or feared so much  
it was as if I loved them—  
for now there is nothing I fear or hate,  
there is nothing I'm not madly in love with—  
and all that once enslaved me  
even as recently as yesterday  
that I'm free of now.  
I'm putting my images into a deep-vaulted  
picture frame of fine wood, polished and shining.  
It hangs in a prominent place in the living room  
of my house, as Greek peasants hang their ikons  
in the living rooms of their houses.  
I burn a lamp in front of it day and night  
with sweet-smelling incense for a perpetual reminder.

## Snow in Archanes

It is a universal whiteness, everywhere the same,  
mere outline, blurs indistinct except in the mass,  
snow falling and snow on the ground,  
snow in the fields, on the mountain, in trees,  
on the roads, on roofs of houses, in windowsills,  
snow covering everything: beehives, mail boxes,  
the twisted grapevines are elegant igloos,  
summer shimmering olives are silver regattas,  
the low stone walls that divide the farmers' plots from each other  
are completely obliterated, a single commune of snow.

Yesterday it looked so much like spring I wrote letters  
to everyone I know shouting: "Spring in January!"  
Now it is snowing so hard the postman will never get through  
but I'm not disappointed. Today I saw  
the darkest green orange tree in all of Crete  
fully laden with Japanese New Year oranges, large as grapefruit,  
all of them powdered with a delicate dusting of snow.  
The heavy oranges glowed, and the massed snow crystals  
reflected  
the light back again and again till I thought  
the whole tree burned with a brilliant midwinter flame.

## At Kazantzakis' Grave

The six asymmetrical stones  
under the weight of which  
his bones lie  
must once have been one stone.  
His name does not appear  
on the tall wooden cross of  
weathered stripped branches  
tied together with baling wire.  
There is no way of knowing,  
on the face of it,  
whose bones rot in the ground  
beneath the irregularly broken slab.  
Atop the slab there is  
a limestone plaque on which  
these words, in Greek,  
can narrowly be made out:

*I hope nothing.*

*I fear nothing.*

*I am free.*

The word *tipota* in the inscription  
is the same word a Greek uses  
to say *It's nothing, you're welcome*,  
when you have thanked him for  
some common courtesy.  
It is also the word  
with which you reassure the waiter  
that you are not offended  
when he forgets to bring water  
to your table, or the customary  
salver of bread. What great thing  
did Kazantzakis hope for,  
the renunciation of which  
made him free? What great thing

did Kazantzakis fear,  
the overcoming of which  
made him free?

The simple and impressive monument  
lies on the grassy top  
of the Martinengo bastion  
in the Venetian wall of Herakleion.  
The wall itself is a monument:  
it has been surmounted  
by Turks, Greeks, Germans,  
every army that has ever assaulted  
the narrow provincial city  
it defends. The Cretan Zeus,  
whose monument is Mount Iouktas,  
where he is buried,  
lies in the distance, speechless.  
In the stillness I hear  
the echo of an explosion,  
still reverberating,  
years after freeing the six dark slabs of stone  
from the one stone they once were.

## Runes

I picked up six black stones on the beach today,  
put them still damp in my pocket & brought them home  
to play with,  
forgot them awhile, eating supper, then remembered  
& took them out, dry now, to look at.  
I laid them out one by one on the table under the lamp:  
a large one, a flat one, one round, one square,  
one with a trace of copper like a wire fence separating two fields,  
& one with a long nose down the middle of its face,  
both eyes on one side, one under the other—  
an ugly little fellow but likely to inspire fear & obtain worship.  
Dried out now, in the light, they are all pockmarked & gray:  
and six black stones I picked up walking on the beach this  
January day.

**From  
*God's Body*  
(1975)**

## What'll It Be?

I am the redheaded Puerto Rican midget  
who was passed out in front of your doorway  
when you went to get *The Times* this morning  
I am Henry the old wino  
who came into your hallway last winter to get warm  
& you wouldn't give me any cognac  
I am Fritz the Nazi who lives upstairs  
& throws empty beer bottles at your summer sublets  
when they try to broil steaks in your back yard  
I am your former friend on the top floor  
my wife doesn't like your wife  
& I don't speak to you anymore  
I am the crotchety old Arab lady from two flights up  
I knocked at your door the other day  
& asked you to open a bottle of pills for me  
I went away crying because I'm afraid to die  
Look at me:  
I am your last chance to do what you say you mean

## God's Body

Winter, 1966. Late at night, in a bar in Iraklion, I'm drinking raki with a bunch of Greeks — students and older men — as we sit around a pot-bellied stove keeping warm. My companion, a New Zealander, is very drunk. I am not truly sober. There are no women, of course, and after a year in Greece this is the first time I saw Greeks get really drunk.

I have a conversation, part argument, part playful dance of the mind, through an interpreter, about whether Shakespeare or Chaucer stands in relation to modern English as Homer does to modern Greek. The whole thing seems absurd, but there is a certain drunken formality to the discourse. A Greek student can't, or won't, believe I can read Chaucer without a pony. I don't believe he can read Homer without one either.

An old man speaks up.

Tell me, young men, young scholars, I don't know anything, so tell me: What is God's body?

God is pure spirit. He doesn't have a body.  
He probably doesn't even exist.

Everything has a body. Don't tell the priest I said so—oh, hell!—tell him if you want to, I don't care—everything has a body so God must have a body.

God can't have a body, he's God.

I can't believe in a God, the old man says slowly, who doesn't have a body. I've lived seventy years and never seen anything, from Iraklion to Ierapetra, and from there to Chania—and I went to Athens once—

and I've never seen anything that doesn't have a body.  
If God doesn't have a body, he can't be. So tell me,  
what is God's body?

**Written in  
Silver Spring, MD  
(1987-1994)**

## Berries

*for Anne*

Mulberries for the first taste of the day  
    when I walk outside in the morning cool  
and pick them like Adam from the branches  
    of the tree bending over in the  
backyard laden with heavy fruit they drop into my hands delicious.

Blueberries for breakfast later  
    with dry cereal and mixed dried grains wet with  
cold milk fresh from the refrigerator  
    floating dark in the white bowl delicious

Strawberries and raspberries growing wild  
    in the grass and along the backyard  
fence or cultivated large sweet ones  
    from the farmers' market or the roadside  
vendor with cream or plain  
    their large sweet seeded succulent selves delicious

How like the first man I am this morning  
    coming naked from the door into  
dew-drenched grass coming forth immaculate  
    from the mind of God into a world  
created for my care to nurture my wife & children my friends & me

Berries delicious berries  
    black blue purple red full-blooded berries like  
sacraments to nourish us  
    God's grain God's fruit God's body and blood our life  
delicious

## **“Here I Am”**

“Here I am, Dad, here I am!”  
cries four-year-old Nathaniel,  
leaping astride my shoulders  
like a cowboy, beating my head  
like a drum with his small hands.

Talking with Cyprian on the phone  
I note how perfectly male  
my son’s behavior is, like Bowser,  
Ernie’s dog, who marks a hundred trees  
in half an hour with urine  
to prove he’s been there.

“As time goes on,” says Cyprian,  
above the din of Nathaniel’s shouts,  
“we have to keep saying it louder  
because the world doesn’t care  
that we’re here.” I agree  
“we have to say it louder –  
each year we find new ways –”  
“Until it’s over. . . .” Cyprian gets heavy.

“It’s the last word, isn’t it?  
our final offering to the Father when we die.”

“Here I am, Dad, here I am!”

## Today

*O that today you would hearken to his voice!*

Psalm 95:7

Today my job  
is taking Buddy  
to DC General  
for evaluation and  
possible admission  
to St. E's. We're not  
impressive figures  
in this scene.  
I blend into the background  
of grey walls that absorb  
the faded black  
of my clergy-shirt.  
Buddy's eyes betray  
a hermeneutic of  
suspicion. He fits in  
here  
without a doubt.

Today humility is  
knowing precisely what  
I'm needed for:  
a ride downtown,  
cigarette money, a place  
to sleep safe from  
the drug dealers in Buddy's head  
who are trying to kill him.

Buddy listens  
to the different voices  
while I sit on a bench  
in the waiting room  
making notes  
for my sermon on Sunday  
about the soldier  
Jesus marveled at

“a man under authority”  
with faith greater  
than anyone’s  
in Israel.

The duty psychiatrist  
in the Emergency Psychiatric  
Response Unit today  
is Ido Adamo, MD,  
who decides that Buddy  
is indeed paranoid  
and depressed  
but doesn’t have enough insurance  
for admission  
and so isn’t “a danger  
to himself or others.”

So today  
I *don’t* drop Buddy  
at the CCNV Shelter  
but bring him home again  
to my wife and child  
in the Rectory  
and the open pack  
of Newport Menthol  
Filter Extra-Longs  
he left there  
when we started out  
this morning.

## Another Day of War

(February 23, 1991)

*NOTE. February 23 is the feast day of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who was martyred at Rome by burning in the year 155.*

another night of  
green lights flashing over Baghdad  
like video games of "smart bombs"  
bursting above white-washed housetops  
in acrid air  
while I watch mouse-like  
in swaying cobra eyes

another day of  
fasting throat dry  
empty of friends no satisfaction  
no end in sight another day of  
straining forward  
to what lies ahead  
pressing on toward the prize

another time  
another victory won  
as fire takes the shape  
of a room  
or the sail of a ship  
filled as the wind makes a sail  
around the old man's body

I can almost  
see the body in the middle  
of the flames not like burning  
flesh but bread baking  
I can smell the sweet  
and pungent odor of  
the incense

**Written in  
Stone Mountain, GA  
(1994-1998)**

## After the Accident

What a tough and fragile thing  
a man is! "meat, bread and wine,  
the raw materials from which the mind  
is made," a gently waving stem like a soft mushroom floating  
in liquid in the skull.

It's me!

I was *not* cracked open yesterday  
and spilled on the street.  
There's somebody home today  
able to say my timid "thank you."  
Somebody *there* to say  
my "thank you" to.

## Poem

the first  
cold day of  
the year  
I fumble  
for gloves  
in the pockets  
of my winter  
coat and  
find yellow  
pieces of  
paper wrinkled  
like faces  
of old people  
folded in  
chairs and  
hidden away  
in a corner

## **“But Oh, the Agitated Heart”**

It's like a pump that flushes water  
out of a flooded basement, empties bilge  
from ships' holds on a stormy sea.  
It's the stiff spine in the washer  
that beats the dirt from clothes in soapy water.

It flutters fast as the quivering body  
of a tiny bird, eyes darting in every  
direction, filling the air with fear.  
It's like monkeys, racing from limb to limb  
of the tree that is my brain, chattering

like teeth on cold December mornings,  
swinging from branch to branch by their tails.  
It's like atoms colliding in a Wilson cloud chamber,  
threatening the universe. But stop,  
like a phonograph, in a moment of time.

Recall, heart, in whose house  
you live, in what nest you are laid  
to rest, to what height climb. Into whose sky  
Be still. Feel the caress of the hand  
that holds, then swiftly spins and  
sets you free.

**Wednesday in Holy Week:  
Present Tense**

Early this morning  
Blake's tree full of angels  
turns out to be  
the dark magnolia  
in my front yard.

Tonight  
Comet Hyakutake  
made a brilliant  
final pass over Atlanta  
during a total eclipse  
of the moon.

Who would  
believe it?

**From**  
***Wild Geese Flying South***  
**(2005)**

## Waking and Watching

### 1.

Winter 1966, Iraklion.

I catch the bus in Morosini Square and ride past  
ruined cities up the mountain to Archanes.

The heavy diesel engine grinds its gears.

From the window of the bus I seem to see  
young women and men dancing with bulls  
in the cobbled streets of the palace at Knossos.

I teach the farmers' daughters of Archanes to conjugate  
the verb *to be*, then entertain them with stories  
of Sir Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa guide climbing  
Mount Everest.

After class the girls scatter

cheeping like chicks in pursuit of the mother hen.

I saunter down the main street of Archanes,  
insouciant *xenos daskolos* in search of a chair by the fire  
in a *kafeneion*. It starts to snow.

Through the smoky windowpane of the café

I watch the fine white powder settle on oranges  
growing in pots in front of houses in the village.

I scribble long-lined poems in my notebook, breathless  
because nothing I have ever seen has been so beautiful.

2.

Winter 1972, Brooklyn.

I leave early in the morning after Carol  
has gone to work and drive up the Taconic  
to Catskill. My task is to install  
a device on the telephone that will produce  
a busy signal if the temperature drops below 30 degrees.  
When we phone from Brooklyn and get the busy signal  
we'll have time to drive up  
and start a fire before the pipes freeze.  
Such is the ingenuity of the newly rich.

But you have other plans.

As I listen to music in my mind  
speeding up the Taconic State Parkway:  
*We interrupt this program to bring you the word  
from Jesus, who is recruiting a new class  
of Episcopal priests among out-of-work poets  
married to Jewish girls in New York.*

"Jesus!" I swear as the car swerves and almost  
runs off the road. "Are you here?" Out of breath, I park  
by the side of the road and hear you ask: *Why not?*

### 3.

Summer 1977, Mount Athos.

Roger and I have come to visit the Holy Mountain. We leave Carol with an old friend from Crete in scrawny Ouranoupolis, "the heavenly city," to entertain themselves. Roger is here to collect an icon painted for him by the monks from Arkansas who are teaching him *Athonite attitude* so he can survive his wife's betrayal. I'm here to find out what it means to be a priest the year Elvis died in a world where *holy* is a metaphor at best.

We sit, self-satisfied, on tree stumps and watch an old man labor up the hill with a load of firewood on his back. He gives us *raki*, Turkish delight, and a glass of water, his hospitality. "Do you know what this place is?" he asks. "This is not a touristic place. Here you can see God." He looks at me. "You will see God but only when you become completely transparent." We laugh as he moves off toward his *skete*, carrying God on his back with the firewood.

4.

Winter 2001, New London.

I take a deep breath and wish for the day to come soon  
when, like a pane of glass polished clear in the sunlight,  
you will see through me. The snow in Archanes,  
the voice on the Taconic, the monk on Mount Athos—  
none of them matter at all until the divorce from myself  
is complete. Then Carol (dead nearly 20 years)  
and Roger and I and the girls in Archanes (old now)  
and the bull-dancers of Knossos will be dancing together on the  
cobblestones  
of some holy city or other, inhaling the God in the air. You watch!

## **Beginner's Mind**

### 1. How It's Done

Out there in the fog,  
in here. Listen,  
the gulls call  
from the sky. The waves  
lap, lap on the shore.  
Any minute now  
the New York to Boston express  
will come shining  
through the fog,  
steel engine screaming  
along the tracks, unperturbed  
by being observed.

## 2. The Observer

1.

Four jagged rocks  
on the water's surface –  
a goose & three goslings –  
sail away to the north.

He was so busy  
watching the rocks  
that he didn't notice  
a thing.

2.

One, two, three  
flotillas of swans  
escorted by cygnets  
between the bridges  
of Lambert's Cove.

A solitary  
egret grooms himself  
rejoicing in the safety  
of the rocks.

### 3. Beginner's Mind

The mind empties itself, then begins:  
a single duck churns steadily  
across the Cove towards Quanaduck.  
A cormorant turns its sharp head  
right to left like a periscope,  
then dives to escape collision. Soon  
the water is still again. Like a mirror,  
it reflects the scudding clouds  
on the surface of the sky's  
blue screen. Beginner's sky.

## Nightlight

As the tortoise  
withdraws its limbs –  
first the right front  
foot, then the left,  
next the left rear  
foot, then the right –  
its unsupported shell  
rocking gently on the ground –  
looks all around  
beady eyes unclosing  
then goes inside

So the contemplative  
with open eyes embraces  
the desert she has always  
lived in  
turns on the light  
and sits inside  
the circle that it opens  
in the darkness.

## The Diamond Sutra Doesn't Mention Feet

*for Matthew Gibson*

I saw eighteen pairs  
of feet walk slowly  
around the meditation hall –  
mostly old, the feet  
of people who have  
lived a long time  
without paying attention:  
callused male feet  
hiding aggression,  
the painted toes  
of female feet attracting  
men, blistered athletic  
feet, long feet,  
narrow ones, wrinkled,  
priests' feet, nuns' feet,  
the prophet Isaiah's  
"beautiful on the mountain"  
feet – I watched them  
walking naked  
in the circle. The suspicious  
feet of contemplatives  
watched me –  
they said: "Try to develop  
a mind that does not  
cling to anything."

## Pain and Suffering

*for Jeanie Wylie Kellermann  
& in memory of Carol Baum (1944-1982)*

Pain simply hurts, as when you cut your finger  
or break your leg, or cancer eats your bones  
so thin they break while walking down the stairs.  
Suffering is the noble thing, if you're up for it,  
what Gandhi says you must put up with  
if you want to conquer un-truth by truth  
and change the world with nonviolence.

Pain is the penalty for living so long  
that nobody remembers to call and see if you want  
to go shopping or walk around the mall.  
*Pain* is the French word for bread.  
You can taste pain. Nobody has any  
doubt about being in pain or not;  
some part of the body simply hurts.

Suffering has to do with passion.  
Not so much *la grande passion*, although  
it's closer to that than the passionate  
like to admit. But passion in the sense  
of something that buffets the mind's composure,  
the cold and powerful irrationality of  
a hurricane that tears off the roof or lifts  
a whole house up from its foundation  
and sets it down somewhere else, if at all.

“The Passion according to Saint John”  
is sung in churches every year on Good Friday  
and at no other time. The melody,  
an ancient tune that aches with the suffering  
of Jesus, isn’t something you want to hear  
more often than once a year. Of course,  
if you’re Jesus, or someone else  
whose pain has turned to suffering,  
you sing it every day.

**A Sermon Preached to Seagulls  
in Gloucester, Massachusetts, October 24, 2002**

Like Saint Francis, who preached to the birds,  
I preached a sermon to the gulls  
on the Dog Bar Breakwater at Eastern Point Lighthouse:  
brown, gray, blue and white gulls,  
protectors of the coast.

“O gulls, guardians of these shores,  
you are the early-warning birds of America.  
How honored you are to be always on the lookout  
for Iraqi missiles loaded with weapons of mass destruction,  
ready to fall from the sky onto Boston.  
Fly up in the air, like fighter planes,  
Seek out Scud missiles arriving from faraway Baghdad.  
Alert our homeland defenses to incoming terrorist bombs.”

One after another the gulls flop off the breakwater,  
fly across the harbor. Unlike the larks  
Saint Francis preached to, they do not form a cross  
or dip their wings in gratitude to their Creator.  
They cross the bay to Gloucester town  
leaving the blue sky empty.

## **The Rain Like Grace**

The rain comes down like grace  
in torrents drenching the thirsty soul.  
Steam rises with morning prayers  
from the asphalt parking lot.  
The chatterbox rain talks itself out  
as the sun comes up over Broad Street  
and trucks deliver groceries to  
California Fruit and elegant provisions  
for Tony D's Italian restaurant.  
Men huddle in the light  
from the windows of Labor Ready,  
waiting to open its jaws.  
At the end of the day  
the men return from their work  
cash their paychecks  
and quench their thirst  
with quarts of Colt 45 malt liquor.  
"It's outrageous," Mike says.  
"Some of these guys got GI benefits,  
they could live in houses if they had the chance."

## Art of Poetry

What are the parts? Where do they come from?  
what is the origin of this mysterious species?

The lines, long and dark as the waters of the East River,  
come from the Brooklyn side, slapping the shore at nightfall.

The fiery figures, blown up like dust in the path:  
imagine them seen through the London engraver's eye!

The details—water drops, the hospital, farm implements,  
asphodel—are kept in the doctor's office in Rutherford,  
New Jersey.

They are the rhythms of common speech, the wide-eyed  
ability to see what is there that no one else sees,

and the details, always the details—  
what Scotus calls the "quiddity" of things.

What is their origin? Do they come from the flesh,  
fierce with desire, of the Christ of the burnt men?

**Completed  
In New London  
(2009-2010)**

## New London Poems

Prologue in Alexandria, Louisiana, 23 July 2007

*Sitting now in a crepe myrtle grove outside the Alexandria Inn & Suites, alone but for the workmen a few hundred feet away who are preparing for construction work on the hotel's décor.*

More trucks than cars in the parking lot.

Where are you, Christ?

Where in this world are you?

Are you in the multiple trunks of the crepe myrtle trees growing like youthful limbs out of the earth?

Are you in the arms and legs of boys and girls reaching up for sexual power?

You are in Anne, fascinated by J. K. Rowling's final Harry Potter novel, reading contentedly.

You are in Nate's forthright declaration that he intends to ask Zuli to marry him.

You are in Sarah's claiming of her Southern woman's roots, in her friendship (and cigarette smoking) with Sarah and Aimee, and perhaps even Beverly, my sister.

How are you in me?

I don't know.

Unless it is to show me Christ in them.

The crickets in the bushes around the lawn where I am sitting are the *continuo* for the orchestra of earth that sings Christ's praise.

Let me add a small and simple melody. Let me be, like my ancestor Gervais Compton, in the window of the chapel at St. James' Church, a chorister in the choirs of heaven, to sing Christ's praise.

Thursday, 26 July

Presence with a capital "P".  
Small "p" practice.

I've lost the woolen rosary –  
the one Roger found for me  
in Athens under mysterious  
circumstances.

Already the fig tree  
I planted last summer  
comes up to my beard.  
It will be too big to bury  
this winter. I will wrap it  
in seaweed from Ocean Beach.

Someone described  
Russ Carmichael as "a poverty  
pimp." Can I write poems  
about New London homeless  
men and women without  
being the same thing?

Where are you, Christ,  
in that relationship?  
Russ claims you told him  
to put on a clerical collar  
and go down to the pier  
to help the homeless.  
Is that true?

I say you told me  
to start St. Francis House  
with me the only Franciscan,

a Catholic Worker house  
with no Catholics  
in residence. Is that  
true?

Now I've pulled a month's  
growth of weeds away  
from the soil around  
the fig tree. Its young  
trunk is an inch thick –  
not much less than the arms  
of the crepe myrtles  
in Alexandria. Its  
tallest branches lean  
toward the east, of course.  
Will we have figs  
this fall?

Where are you, Christ?  
Are you perched atop  
Sarah's basketball hoop  
in the backyard parking lot?

I sit in this sunken garden  
waiting for the sun to climb over  
the roof of St. Francis House  
and sing me a song  
of the creatures.

What I want now:  
to be a part of the choir  
that sings your song.

The homeless men and women  
on the streets of New London  
call me "Father Emmett," or  
some call me "Sir."  
Melvin told me years ago

about Holy Ghost music,  
the song of the one who really is  
“the father of the poor.”

Rise up, Brother,  
greet the new day.

Saturday, 28 July

*Sitting with Otis in the dew-damp garden, reading Luke's teaching  
on prayer, and asking God myself, “Lord, teach me to pray.”*

Overcast day,  
clouds keeping heat in,  
dew soaking the grass  
under my feet,  
dripping from trees  
above me.

I want to be saturated with God  
as the towel I used to dry the dew  
from plastic chairs is full of water.

Like Jonah, when the sailors saved themselves  
and tossed him overboard, the waters swirl  
about me, the abyss overwhelms me,  
seaweed wrapped around my head –  
it is a picture of depression. Even so,  
when you are the darkness, the swirling sea,  
when it is you who have cast me  
into the heart of this atmosphere of love  
and your breakers and billows pummel me,  
then I come again into your temple  
and with resounding praise I worship you.

## Christmas 2008

Eastwind blows  
    the snow off Long Island  
        Sound  
into my face  
    when I go to check  
        on Jim.  
in the Hermitage  
    not thinking  
        of his 3 aneurisms  
lung, heart & kidney  
    disease he  
        sleeps careless  
of his wife's concern

Gail (Jim's wife)  
    & Anne return  
        with replacement  
lights for the Christmas  
    tree the old  
        ones burn out  
after 20 years  
    so lacking colored bulbs  
        in darkness we  
witnessed the down-  
    leaping of the mighty  
        Word when all  
things were  
    in silence & night  
        in the midst  
of its swift course.

what do I need  
    with tinsel trees  
        and electric  
illumination?

in the darkness  
of the year  
I walk through days  
of candles burning  
burning burning

## Hello Darkness

Up at 2:30 a.m.  
    come downstairs to  
        listen  
in the darkness

if sleep is a  
    death the darkness  
        is what  
wakens me

    I go into  
        the old friend's  
space light a  
    candle warm  
        to the touch

thirty years ago  
    in a chapel in  
        London I sit and  
watch the candle  
    burn down  
        in the night & speak  
for a dying woman  
    "I shall not die but  
        live"  
the candle gutters  
    spits fire and  
        goes out

now I see the dark  
    image of the bull  
        rhyton a drinking  
cup shared  
    like an animal's  
        head with

holes in the bottom  
for the wine  
to flow

the outline of the  
bull's head is  
the metrical pattern  
of a 16th century  
lyric "Charm me  
asleep and melt  
me so" the  
pattern flickers like  
a shadow on the wall  
fading in  
and out

like the serpent  
form I saw later  
appearing and  
disappearing among  
the uneven  
stones asking

"Who is your treasure?"

**From the  
*Troubadour*  
(Christmas, 2010)**

## Earth and Sea and Sky

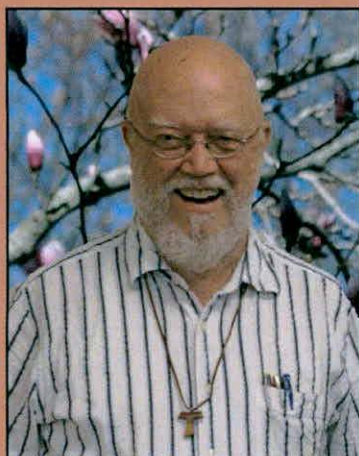
It is clearer in Gloucester  
    where the earth  
        drops off  
sharply, the steep rocks  
    plunge  
        into the water.

The sea stretches out  
    to the horizon  
        where it meets the sky.

On Patmos  
    I imagine  
        Bob Lax's long face  
as he lies  
    stretched out  
        on the beach  
and watches  
    the water,  
        hears the lap-lapping  
of the waves.  
    He doesn't need  
        to look up  
to see the sky,  
    color of wine  
        reflected  
from the Aegean.

From my window  
    in New London  
        I see streetlights  
shimmering in fog,  
    the occasional auto  
        driving down Jay Street  
or ambulance  
    flashing red lights on the way  
        to the hospital.

I know the water  
    is there,  
        Thames estuary  
emptying  
    into Long Island Sound,  
        the same Atlantic  
Ocean as at Gloucester.  
    I don't need  
        to see the sky  
full of promise  
    after the sun's bath.  
        Like a runner  
in the hills  
    I can feel the pleasure  
        of earth  
and sea  
    and sky  
        awaiting my arrival.



**Emmett Jarrett**

**What people are saying about *To Catch a Wave:*  
*New and Selected Poems by Emmett Jarrett***

Emmett Jarrett (1939-2010) was a poet, priest, and witness for peace and justice. He embraced the world as it is, present to everyone, especially the poor, homeless and powerless. This book includes poetry from every decade since the 1960s. It will make you want to witness the surge of peace and justice, to ride its wave into your own city.

—Rick Bellows, TSSF, Westfield, MA

Beautifully crafted, Emmett's poetry celebrates the sacredness of life in all its forms. Evocative and visionary—these poems inspire us to action.

—Janice Syedullah, TSSF, Hyde Park, NY

The best theology is poetry, and the best poetry is mystical. Emmett Jarrett's poems weave these together. His poems dance full of truth and warning and hope. I want to keep reading and I want to share these poems with everybody.

—Carl McColman, Lay Cistercian, Stone Mountain, GA, author of  
*Befriending Silence* and *Answering the Contemplative Call*

Emmett's keen observation permeates his poetry that we too might see. His solidarity with the poor and oppressed illuminates our path towards salvation.

—barbara baumgarten, tssf, mission partner/catholic worker in Brazil.

For me Emmett did not “catch” a wave but rather “created” a wave of compassion, confidence in God's power, love for neighbor, and celebration of life that carried many of us to places we never expected to go. May these poems carry us all closer to the kingdom of God that Emmett confidently anticipated.

—The Rev. Cathy Zall, Homeless Hospitality Center, New London, CT

Emmett Jarrett made an indelible spiritual imprint on my life. This selection of his poetry makes me feel as though I'm sitting down with him again; listening to him and feeling his energy, love, wisdom and strong joyful spirit.

—Ken Norian, TSSF, Hicksville, NY, Minister General,  
Third Order, Society of Saint Francis

(TSSF is used after the name of a member of the Third Order, Society of St. Francis.)

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