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To the University Council:

The Thesis Committee for Matthew Cook certifies that this is the final approved version of the following electronic thesis: "What All the Fuss is About Vol. 1"

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WHAT ALL THE FUSS IS ABOUT VOL. 1

by

Matthew Cook

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Major: Creative Writing

The University of Memphis

May 2011

## ABSTRACT

Cook, Matthew Dennis. M.F.A. The University of Memphis. May 2011 “What All The Fuss Is About Vol. 1.” Major Professor: John Bensko, PhD.

“What all the Fuss Is About Vol. 1” is a collection of poems that explores the paradox of what I call *autobiographical surrealism*. The speaker in the poems, in most cases a poet, is navigating through an absurd and comic terrain that uses, as its main tropes, mundane objects, workaday routines, the play of language itself, and the surprising observations found in the quotidian swirl of urban life.

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## Solitude

*Solitude*—that's an awfully grand word for sitting alone at a kitchen table.  
There's a fly going around and around and around the room.  
He lands for a second on somebody's thank you note.

The microwave oven sounds like a very small fourth of July.  
A reproduction of Willie Nelson's voice is coming through the vestibule.  
It seems to be saying, Don't knock arsenic in the drinking water until you've tried it.  
Let's be thankful we don't have to be thankful.

Then a moment's silence, then a mother's ambiguous voicemail.  
It triggers a memory of a counterclockwise boyhood.  
A bird flies into our garage in Illinois.  
The bird walks out the side door with a rubber band in his beak.  
My mother holds my hand like it's the last swordfish burrito on earth.

Will heaven ever close for remodeling?  
Will the rugs and chairs become an embarrassment?  
To think what passed for heaven in the old days—

## A Long Story

Remember that time you drank vodka and grape soda  
and you vomited purple vomit on your white sport coat  
and the photographer came by and took a photograph of you?  
The black and white photograph of the purple vomit on the white sport coat.

I remember five minutes ago like it was yesterday.  
When you were a boy, I remember, you had a strong dislike for passages  
in a book where a character was making his way through the dark.  
You resented printed words that wanted you to visualize not being able to see.

Remember that invisible fence you installed along your father's property?  
You wanted to keep your father's dogs from running into the street.  
You told me once that you had a problem with your invisible fence.  
I said, What's the problem with your invisible fence?  
You said, It's a long story.  
I said, I don't want to hear a long story about an invisible fence.



## Ordinary Catastrophes

Do I need to remind you that the conversation  
Never survives the journey from the dining room to the living room?  
Would you rather be killed tomorrow,  
Or eat wallpaper paste everyday for a year, and then be killed?  
Is it just me or does time fly when you're ruining someone else's life?  
Is it so hard to imagine driving intentionally into flashing roadway barricades?  
Are you always so incredulous in the face of garbanzo bean-sized hail?  
Am I the only one around here who sees any advantage in radioactive Scottish puppies?  
Why must you walk the Piggly Wiggly parking lot with an affected Spanish gravity?  
Is it not completely clear that your mother's brother's girlfriend's doctor's house  
Is lousy with overvalued unappreciated intermediate-quality  
Antiquarian tablecloths with no resale value?  
Do you not understand what yesterday went through to bring us today?  
Do you not understand what a difference a difference makes?  
Doesn't everybody look forward to sitting alone, on the brink of suicide,  
Waiting for porcelain figurines to arrive by mail?  
Was the delivery boy so wrong to point out all the ways he was right?  
Why were you so angry at the sound of the wind blowing in your ears?  
Did you want the wind to sound *better* somehow?  
Did you not appreciate what the wind went through to get where it was today?

## After a Hard Day Killing Rabbits with a Hammer

After a hard day killing rabbits with a hammer,  
I could really go for a condescending  
article about a family without running water.

This room is the color of a room.  
I feel I'm on the lunatic fringe of lettuce tomato and bacon.  
After prolonged and inconclusive thinking,  
I pronounce you a drunken saint with synthetic earmuffs.

I bring the full force of my poetic resources to the gasoline station.  
I, who reconciled the contradictions of the school lunch program.

An old lady and the old man walk past, but they walk in single-file.  
I still don't really believe there's a skeleton inside of me.

There's organ failure and there's organ grinder failure  
And there's you're dead in the ground failure  
And there's rainbow peppermint lip balm failure.

Good luck getting a straight answer from  
The counselor at the home for colorblind children.

I now pronounce you an old lady and an old man.

## Conventional Raindrops

You're a conventional man walking down  
An ordinary street with the questionable haircut.  
An ordinary woman broke your conventional heart.  
Questionable skies are giving way to conventional raindrops,  
Thoroughly average raindrops, raindrops that are hardly worthy of your attention.

You're walking home right now because  
You were attacked by black flies at the punk rock coffee shop.  
You found yourself taking the black flies personally,  
Which is always an important signal.  
The bread factory is making below average bread but it smells fantastic.  
People from nowhere who used to live somewhere have decided to live here now.  
All they talk about is somewhere and they never mention nowhere.  
Small dirty birds the size of doorknobs are living above the drugstore.

You're a second-rate man living under an assumed name in a first floor apartment  
But it's a nice apartment and the windows look out on the park.

Other than the windows looking out on the park,  
Things are generally wrong everywhere.  
Your shoulder is malfunctioning.  
You're running low on contact lens solution.  
You have a full head of hair and you're unemployed,  
but you could pass for a bald man with a job.

An unsophisticated man approaches you and you feel momentarily superior.  
You feel sorry for him and yet you don't feel anything and it feels good.  
At least your defense mechanisms are working properly.

## I'm Up in a Cloud that has a Funny Name

I'm up in a cloud that has a funny name,  
You're down in the street with a plastic bag.  
You're talking to a disoriented man in a blue watch cap.  
I'm falling through the sky and it's painless and terrifying.

You're down in the street with an experimental rain poncho.  
You're organizing unemployed window washers, or something.  
I'm falling through the sky and it's painless and terrifying.  
You're negotiating canned meat and durable goods.

You're telling the window washers what they want to hear.  
Who will make the cakes and pies for tonight's disagreement?  
You're negotiating canned meat and durable goldfish.  
I'm falling through a cloud that's shaped like a New Jersey.

You're speaking with authority about grades of motor oil.  
Do you ever wonder what I'm doing, what I'm speaking about?  
I'm falling through a cloud that's shaped like a dog wearing a hat,  
Through a cloud that looks like an inferior teapot, or something.

Don't you ever wonder what I'm doing?  
I wonder what you're doing with the man in the blue watch cap.  
I'm falling through a cloud that looks like an old telephone.  
I'm falling through a cloud that has a funny name.

## Cough Drops

That crow on the sidewalk with his one bad wing  
And his poorly understood song—  
He's picking up a worm and he's making a big *production* out of it,  
Using all of his crow *motor skills* and everything.  
He's been making no sense for years now,  
But he's getting worse and worse at it,  
To the point where he's almost making sense somehow.  
Such are the paralyzing contradictions that bloom  
In the early spring under the telephone wires.

You feel tragic when the Walgreen's woman recognizes you.  
You're not even *at* Walgreen's, you're under the telephone wires somewhere,  
You're entirely removed from the Walgreen's context,  
You're just trying to appreciate a crow,  
But there she is, the Walgreen's woman,  
The woman who sold you cough drops a while back,  
Cough drops that were considered *shocking* by the standards of their day,  
And now here you are, unable to live up to the ideals to which cough drops aspire.

You'd like to believe that your experience with cough drops  
Is *the definitive* experience with cough drops, the only *true* experience with cough drops.  
You know this is impossible, but you also know  
That somewhere out there is another person who might enjoy that idea.  
Until you find that person you're no one,  
You're just a confused man with high cholesterol  
Warbling under the telephone wires.

## A Spanish Cement Mixer

I was in Spain one time, and I saw a cement mixer.  
An ordinary cement mixing truck, driving down a street in Spain.  
And I thought, what do you know about that? A Spanish cement mixer!  
The vision was profound and disorienting.  
I wasn't *prepared* for a Spanish cement mixer.  
I hadn't *anticipated* a Spanish cement mixer.  
*Who knew* they mixed cement in Spain?  
Of course! Of course they mixed cement in Spain!  
Perfectly good cement being mixed all the time in Spain!  
I felt *hoodwinked*—I felt *dangerously unschooled* in Spanish cement!

## Gordon Park Pub

You got drunk, passed out,  
Woke up under the coin-operated table,  
Wearing only one contact lens,  
Peanut shells stuck to your back,  
Unable to remember the good joke Phil told,  
Remembering only the punch line that involved *kinesiology*.  
Vague recollections of the party the night before,  
Some birthday girl everybody hated,  
Awful buffet food, unidentifiable macaroni salads,  
An argument concerning Harry S. Truman,  
Whether or not he really needed to vaporize those woman and children.  
Well, if you put it *that* way, somebody said.  
But now the sun is coming in through the windows,  
Like it wants everybody to go to work, or something,  
And you think they're starting to love you at this place.  
They treat you like a half brother,  
And they give you cigarette-flavored yogurt and Spanish newspapers.  
You wouldn't call this no fun.  
You've had no fun, and this is more fun than that.

## The Above-Average Dead Person

Big misunderstanding with powerful man behind desk—  
Almost-dead butterfly falling through aluminum tractor trailer—  
Disorganized lecture notes discovered by protagonist in greenhouse—  
It's *his* greenhouse, he can discover whatever he wants there—  
Accumulation of unread periodicals from almost-dead intellectuals—  
Uncontrollable hiccups during drunken sex—  
City councilmen momentarily confused by ad hoc furniture situation—  
Who has *time* for the miscellaneous demands  
Of the average dead person—or the above-average dead person?  
Ivan the Terrible tortured and killed his own son.  
Peter the Great merely killed his son.  
The outside world is making strange noises.  
Peter the Great died of a urinary tract infection.  
It was probably a *great* urinary tract infection.



## The Drunk Man's Hat

The poetry comes easily in the morning,  
Not because the head is clear, but because the head is confused.  
My cat's brain is the size of a prize strawberry  
And he only uses ten percent of it.

The ants in the pantry have a way of micromanaging the marshmallows.  
I had a dream where I wrote a poem about making a lithograph:

A line drawing of a town drunk at mid century.  
He's a broken down alcoholic, but he's still wearing a suit and a fedora.  
Only the brim of his hat is flipped up, bubbles coming from his mouth.

This was back when degenerates still tucked in their shirts—  
Back when we still paid attention to the shirttails of degenerates.

He's talking to a security guard in a blue windbreaker.  
The conversation isn't going well.

The drunk man is saying something like:  
Give me the awful chemicals I need to clean this hat.  
If you can do that for me, I would certainly appreciate it.  
If not, I can find something else to appreciate.

## The Moose

We were in the woods in Ontario, walking around, minding our own business, when we chanced upon a moose. It was a real live moose all right, standing about twenty feet away. *Oh my god, look! A moose*, one of us said. *Whoa, I can't believe this, a moose*, said someone else. *Holy shit, a moose, just right over there—wow*, someone said. And we all stood there motionless, transfixed, trying to be as respectful as possible to the moose, trying to savor the moment. *This is so cool, a moose!* someone said. *I had a feeling we might see a moose*, someone said. *This is just so great, will you look at that thing?* Ten or fifteen minutes passed this way, and we were all still standing there, in awe of the moose. *Wow, look how big he is*, someone said. *Be quiet, don't startle him*, someone said. *I never knew they were that big*, someone said. This went on for another five minutes or so, all of us standing around flabbergasted at the sight of the moose. *This is really incredible, an actual moose*, someone said. Eventually, after another volley of these sort of remarks, one of us, I believe it was my brother, said, *Well, we just can't look at him all day*. And with that we walked away, with all the moose we'd ever need.

When the small man dies in the large house  
It gives you something to talk about at work.  
When your wife finds poetry in your pockets  
She doesn't even bother to read it.

It gives you something to talk about at work.  
The obituary of the failed piano player gives you hope.  
Nobody else bothers to read it.  
Found at the bottom of a staircase with head injuries.

The obituary of the failed piano player gives you hope.  
You're never too old to misinterpret Stravinsky.  
Found at the bottom of a staircase with head injuries.  
Killed by the awful sound of rich people clapping.

You're never too old to misinterpret the Constitution.  
The press conference of the Undersecretary of Overdoing Everything,  
The awful sound of rich people clapping,  
The small businessman oversalting your food.

The Undersecretary of Overdoing Everything will not answer the question.  
People with big houses will write books about people with small houses.  
Your wife will find poetry in your pockets.  
It will give you something to talk about at work.

## Suppressed Laughter

The stupid little things that make you happy,  
the stupid little things that make you sad.  
Literature will always need people standing around  
with their hands in their pockets.  
If you pass the woman who looks like a folded shirt, you've gone too far.  
Go to where the young man smokes cigarettes near the propane tanks.  
I don't know about you, but it's looking like our independence  
from England is probably going to stick.  
What kind of weirdo compares a woman to a summer's day?  
I never really got to know my mother—  
the fact that I was her son always got in the way.  
Where does the energy of suppressed laughter go?  
Why not a family car  
powered by the energy of suppressed laughter?

## In the Bodega

Saw a woman complaining about Jesus to her boyfriend,  
while her boyfriend bragged about the reliability of his motorcycle—  
or maybe she was bragging about the reliability of her complaints to Jesus,  
or perhaps she was complaining about the reliability of her boyfriend.  
The whole time I was just thinking about myself.  
The owner of the establishment hated us all but he put up with us  
because we were buying things we really didn't need, which amused him.  
My mother shouldn't feel bad that she drives me crazy, I thought.  
Her mother drove her crazy; my great grandmother drove my mother's mother crazy.  
There's a bug in my cat's ear; there's probably a tiny, tiny bug in my cat's bug's ear.  
The saltine crackers at the market were under surveillance,  
Which made no sense, except to men looking to protect their saltine cracker interests.  
Right then a man walked in the store and I confused him for an old friend.  
I'm sorry, I said, I thought you were someone else.  
I *am* someone else, he said.

## My Dead Friend

I can still hear  
my dead friend's voice  
in my mind's ear.  
It's a lovely dead friend voice—  
It still makes me happy when I'm walking to work.  
He made comfortable people uncomfortable,  
which always brought me comfort.  
He died in the middle of a magazine subscription,  
like a bird dying of old age in mid air,  
the philosopher killed by a falling turtle.  
I once had a dream that my dead friend  
threw me down an elevator shaft  
in the English department building.  
You'll never take my dead friend away from me.

## Inexhaustible

I need uninspired thoughts to help me fall asleep.  
Average gray Warsaw Pact sort of thoughts,  
Luke warm oatmeal that falls short of luke warm oatmeal standards,  
Circular arguments at the rectilinear table,  
Exhaustless, impossible to exhaust, inexhaustible.  
I'll never fall asleep.  
Boiled platitudes with couscous and pomegranate zest.  
Impossible half dream about superfamily of eyeless mites  
Forging a sense of community in my inner ear.  
Disproportionate attention was paid to where George Washington slept—  
Where James Madison slept wasn't exactly chopped liver.  
Now half awake nightmare about things that aren't even that bad—  
Streets covered in garbage, beautiful garbage, the finest garbage.  
Turn on light, read introduction to unfavorable biography of man with mustache—  
Coconut vendors in market towns hostile to coconut vendors--  
A bucket of clams and a pencil could not write this poem.

## Thacker & Fredricksmeyer

Thacker had expensive art paper in his bedroom. Fredricksmeyer came over and got drunk. Fredricksmeyer spent the night in Thacker's bed because Thacker was over at his girlfriend's house. Fredricksmeyer vomited all over Thacker's blankets and sheets and pillowcases and so on. In the morning, Fredricksmeyer took a piece of expensive drawing paper and he drew a picture of a mean, scary-looking dog. He then taped the picture to the bedroom wall. He then took another piece of expensive drawing paper and he drew another picture of a mean, scary-looking dog, and wrote the word *bark*. He taped that to the bedroom wall. He then took another piece of paper and he drew another picture of a mean, scary-looking dog and he wrote the words *bark bark*. He taped that to the wall. Then he took another piece of paper and drew another mean, scary-looking dog and wrote the words *bark bark bark*, and so on. He did this until the walls were covered with mean scary-looking dogs. Thacker came home eventually. His expensive art paper was gone. His walls were covered in sophomoric art and his bed was covered in stomach acids. The end.



## Foothills Panic

There's a grocery store at the foot of the mountain  
Where they misspell the name so you remember it better.  
You drive past failed motels and successful dead chickens.  
The cavemen live in houses and the housewives live in boxes.  
There's nowhere good to stay except the abdominal pouch of a marsupial.  
There's water leaking from a man's car, strawberry ice cream from a woman's ear,  
The sound of one branch of philosophy breaking.  
There goes the zoologist with his renegade speculation on sleeping bats--  
It's nice to see an ineffectual man in his natural habitat,  
Refusing to cooperate with local authorities,  
Acknowledging only the iridescent plumage  
Of the common rain gutter bird.  
They have to put *something* at the foot of the mountain.  
Lurid banner at gardening center reads: *Cypress Mulch Madness*.  
The bread at the supermarket is always up against the wall.  
The stockboys are laughing at your descent into irrelevance.

Therefore, it was a Plastic Skeleton

Every time the gas company sends a worker to my house,  
The guy gets here and all he wants to talk about is *gas*.  
Why can't the gas company send someone *well rounded* to my house?

An impossible question is a nice thing to have sometimes.  
You tell me you pisshead: Is this pencil sharpener ordinary or extraordinary?

Every thirty-six months I have a nervous breakdown,  
And then I forget who I am, and then some time passes,  
And then I remember who I am, and it keeps me young.  
Everybody knows a submarine crew of poets would be a mistake.

It's often best to start the day with something false.  
Put potatoes in different contexts until you're blue in the face.  
Talk out loud to the photographs in the corridor.

Why must you discriminate against the irrelevant people?  
What did the irrelevant people ever do to you?

Why did you swerve your bicycle to avoid a plastic skeleton in the gutter?  
You said you *believed* it was a plastic skeleton.  
You saw the thing in the gutter for only a second, and that's what it looked like,  
And you swerved your bicycle to avoid it.  
Therefore, it *was* a plastic skeleton.

## Jesus in My Hair

When I was in high school  
there was this kid McNally  
who wrote a pilot for a TV show called  
Jesus in My Hair.

It takes place in a barbershop in Los Angeles,  
and the barber is played by Desi Arnaz Jr.  
What happens is the second coming of Jesus Christ  
lands in the alley behind the barbershop, and  
Desi Arnaz Jr. takes him in, and  
Jesus Christ hangs around the barbershop  
making a lot of snappy, Christ-like rejoinders and so on.  
But then one day he bumps his head really bad and  
he forgets that he's the second coming of Jesus Christ,  
and Desi Arnaz Jr. has to keep reminding him,  
making a lot of stirring pep talks or whatever,  
so that Jesus can rise to whatever occasion is called for and  
get somebody out of a jam that week.

Oh, and the show opens with one of those theme songs  
where the whole premise of the show is  
summarized in a thirty-second jingly number.

So this guy McNally is in his forties now,  
and I wrote him the other day, and I said,  
remember Jesus in My Hair?  
Why don't you rewrite Jesus in My Hair?  
And he acted like he was beyond the whole thing now,  
Which really bummed me out,  
like he had *outgrown* Jesus in My Hair.

## This Looks Like a Nice Day

This looks like a nice day to put down the family dog.  
We have a backlog of pollywog dogs and dry ice fog,  
We have waterlogged dogs, and travelogue dogs, and leopard frog dogs—  
We have dogs that take the Lord's name in vain,  
We have dogs with featherbrains, on Lake Pontchartrain, with their gyroplanes,  
Their gyroscopes, their collapsible electrosopes,  
Their hope against hope, their deodorant soap.  
I think you know what I'm talking about—  
I'm talking about Brussels sprouts and technical knockouts.  
That's exactly what I'm talking about—I'm talking about steelhead speckled trout,  
I'm talking about whacked-out, roundabout, sauerkraut—  
Hypocritical sauerkraut cloaked in accepted platitudes,  
Cloaked in partially hydrogenated ineptitude, village idiot verisimilitude,  
Cold food, and turpitude.  
Borrower's remorse, follower's correspondence course,  
New and improved charley horse,  
You know what I'm saying—  
What kind of chewing gum did the kitchen police bring home?  
What with the twisted horns of insubstantial goats,  
And the doomed motor boats and the looming trench coats  
And the inevitable sore throats—  
The encroachment of last minute disputes,  
The reversible candy-colored spacesuits, the irreversible snowsuits,  
The hypersensitivity of gingerroot lawsuits,  
The inflamed swelling of another matter entirely,  
The dispensation of pounds per square hubble-bubble,  
I applaud your decision to live abroad and have your cat declawed!

We will make no distinction between those who commit happy hour fraud  
And those who harbor those who commit happy hour fraud.

## My Wife's Car

I was out for a walk one afternoon  
When I saw my wife's car parked across from the film department.  
You feel a kind of existential panic when you see your wife's car parked somewhere.  
My grandfather said death is like looking at your house from across the street.  
It's probably something like that.

You walk past a row of meaningless automobiles,  
And suddenly there's your wife's car—what do you do?  
You can't just walk *past* your wife's car.

She had twenty-two minutes remaining on her parking meter.  
I have the key to her car, so I decided to wait.

I opened the door and sat down in the passenger's seat.  
I knew she'd be happy to see me because we have an excellent marriage.

I sat there with the windows rolled down.  
I noticed an oak leaf hydrangea in somebody's front yard.  
I never even knew what an oak leaf hydrangea was  
Until my wife told me what an oak leaf hydrangea was.

Then I saw her in the distance approaching the car.  
I was enjoying the situation, the childish suspense.  
But then she came closer, and I could see she was crying.  
She opened the door and she put her arms around me.  
She said, "I'm so glad you saw my car."

## The Importance of Actually Existing

There was a spot on my blue shirt tonight.  
A television news magazine show was also on tonight.  
The spot on my blue shirt offered greater authenticity.

Warm soapy water became something I was searching for.  
I'll bet they thought warm soapy water would never amount to anything.  
They probably laughed when warm soapy water first came on to the scene.

Just because it takes courage to admit you're wrong doesn't mean that you're wrong.  
I used to be young and drunk and stupid.  
And then I became less young and less drunk and less stupid.  
But I'm still pretty young and pretty drunk and pretty stupid.

An imperfect circle is preferable to a perfect circle in that *it actually exists*.  
Never underestimate the importance of actually existing.

## Sestina with Common Cold

Abominable snowman with common cold.  
Much congestion in abominable head.  
Drinking plenty of fluids from streams near fallen wood.  
Living in dark cave, reading lonely monster newspaper.  
Weather today not looking so good.  
Snowman mentioning weather in snowman blog.

Have you seen abominable snowman blog?  
Examines telecommunications during Cold  
War, redistribution of wealth for common good,  
Ironic commentary on shrunken heads  
Of state, paper party hats folded from newspaper,  
Lost art of ambiguity in bright snowy wood.

Abominable snowman's relationship to wood  
Underrepresented in conventional blogs.  
Wood begets paper, paper begets newspaper.  
Baby snowmen, so to speak, recovering from common cold.  
Ideas growing out of side of snowman's head.  
Publicity for snowman generally not good.

Recontextualization of snowman myth not very good.  
Public want fashionable monster lurking in fallen wood.  
Abomination growing out of side of snowman's head.  
Snowman making new enemies everyday on blog.  
Ironic commentary giving way to strange head cold.  
Washed up monster reading yesterday's newspaper.

Snowman go to town to buy newspaper.  
Snowman find newspaper at store, newspaper look good.  
Snowman say, "Hello, I have common cold."  
Shopkeeper say, "Do you live in the wood?"  
Snowman say, "I write important blog."  
Shopkeeper goes mad and retreats into shrunken head.

Pitiful horn growing out of side of snowman's head.  
Technicolor monster delivering prehistoric newspaper,  
Singing lonesome ballad from prefabricated cave, writing furry blog,  
Crawling onto hard funny ground, walking around, up to no good,  
Abomination in distant valley of snowy wood.  
Ambiguous monster loitering with common cold.

## Scott's Fingers

In a large city, I went into a café to get out of the rain. There was a broken man sitting at the bar and we talked for a while. He said he was a musician, and he wanted me to know that he was a successful musician, that he knew *a hawk from a handsaw* and all of that—that he'd *been around the block* and all of that. There was a thunderstorm of unexpected beauty outside and we watched that for a while. Then he told me about his friend Scott. He liked Scott, he said. He would give Scott *the shirt off his back*, he said. But he would never allow Scott to touch his guitar. He said that Scott's fingers were very sweaty, and not only that, the sweat on Scott's fingers was not your ordinary sweat, but rather some weird sort of *Scott sweat*. He said the one time he allowed Scott to play his guitar, the sweat from Scott's fingers *deoxidized* the metal of the guitar strings. That's what he said: the sweat from Scott's fingers deoxidized his guitar strings. Then we talked some more, and he said that he and Shirley MacLaine were good friends. I'm pretty sure he was lying about that, but I'll bet Shirley MacLaine's *real* friends are not much better.



## Interesting Things

My friend brought some interesting things over to my apartment.  
His backpack and his briefcase were full of interesting things.  
Where did you get all those interesting things? I asked.  
I got them in different places, he said.  
I know another man who has access to interesting things, I said.  
Sometimes interesting things fall from the sky and they land in different places, he said.  
I had no idea there *were* so many interesting things, I said.  
When something compares favorably to something else, he said,  
That makes it an interesting thing, but it's also interesting  
When something compares unfavorably to something else, he said.  
Sometimes my mouth is full of interesting things, he said.  
Did you grow up around interesting things? I asked.  
Yes, there were interesting things on my father's side,  
But on my mother's side there were mostly different places, he said.  
Are we doing everything we can to promote interesting things? I asked.  
He said nothing.

I wanted to understand more about interesting things.  
I wanted to ask him if it were possible to define interesting things.  
But I knew well that he distrusted precise definitions.

## An Awful Sound

I'm disappointed with the ambition of the squirrels in this neighborhood.  
They're squandering a lot of squirrel opportunities inside hollow trees.  
I realize that ultimately this is *my problem*,  
But what would a neighborhood be without an indignant old man?

I'm disappointed with the manhole covers around here.  
They're a disgrace to manhole covers everywhere.

The flags are at half-mast and nobody will tell me why.  
I write long sentences and I throw them away.

I probably write about squirrels too often, and I'm sorry about that.  
I wish I were one of those guys who could  
Write about squirrels *unapologetically*.

I saw a dead cat lying in the gutter.  
That is, I'm pretty sure he was dead.  
Either he was dead or he enjoyed lying motionless covered with flies.

Do you ever wonder where the Pepsi truck is going with all that Pepsi?

The intelligence agencies are floating through the sky,  
Undermining hog-based economies—or is it the Mexican avocado mafia?

My wife's off somewhere *raising awareness* for something.  
I'm not even sure what for.  
I just know she's *raising awareness* for something.

Wait, there's an awful sound in the neighborhood.  
It sounds like an overworked small engine, or the death of an important squirrel.

You're a Minor Poet Standing Near the Frozen Spinach.

You stop by the store to pick up your wife's favorite beer.  
Inside, an old woman goes out of her way to start a conversation with you.  
You're wearing an overcoat that reminds her of an overcoat she once knew.  
An old woman is allowed talk to you for as long as she likes.  
You cannot tell an old woman to stop talking to you.  
You're a minor poet standing near the frozen spinach.

When you get home you find that your wife is not home.  
You go downstairs and transfer the laundry from the washer to the dryer.  
A useful husband knows that the brassieres do not go in the dryer.  
You remove them from the washer—  
You hang them to dry on doorknobs throughout the house.

## You Lied to Dan

You lived in a neighborhood of swans and man-made lakes,  
With man-made swans and retrograde sponge cake,  
Amateur frozen people with late-breaking headaches,  
Bioluminescent bellyaches, and defective emergency breaks.  
In the grand scheme of peeled carrots you're the one who needs to change.  
You're the strange deranged exchange student homesick on the range.  
When in Rome bring home carry-out food in rectangular Styrofoam.  
Let's sit alone and write a poem about the monochrome funeral home.  
Let's celebrate the disorganization of your tool box,  
Your relocation to the detention home of the cowpox boondocks,  
Your unorthodox yet ultimately successful jack-in-the-box paradox.  
The flash-in-the-pan muscleman from Uzbekistan,  
You lied to Dan the mailman about your CAT scan,  
You lied to the fire department about the gumdrops in your glove compartment,  
You were snotty about the manicotti that useless Lucy brought from Syracusey—  
These are hitherto the grievances I have against you, thank you.

## Forgotten

I can't even stand to be in the same room with myself.  
Something old something canned something borrowed something bland.  
I'm reading a badly written book about a miserable man.  
We don't even remember when we forgot this forgotten painter.  
But misremembering is a mode of originality.  
The underground room with the particle board and the poodle wallpaper.  
You supply the blood and the sweat, I'll supply the tears, and the poodle wallpaper.  
Write about what you know about what people across town know.  
My grandmother's favorite bird was the cedar waxwing.  
Do you know what *your* grandmother's favorite bird was?

Tygan

I'm a laboratory dog! Woof! Woof! Bark! I'm a laboratory dog!  
Not a *Labrador!* No! Not that! I'm a *laboratory* dog!  
Bark! Woof! Scratching behind my ear and things!  
Man in white coat brings me food and things! Bark!  
Man in white coat brings me food and talks about funny things!  
Talks about dependent variables and things!  
Man talking about digestive system! Man in a white coat!  
I'm a dog! Jumping up and down and things! Laboratory dog!  
I make man in white coat feel clever! Clever as man in white coat can be!  
Man in white coat brings me food and things!  
Man in white coat writes data on clipboard and things! Bark! Bark!  
Everybody *wins* in laboratory dog man in white coat arrangement! Bark! Woof!  
Man in white coat rings bell sometimes!  
He rings bell and brings me food!  
Man in white coat talk to assistant about *the chemistry of saliva!* Growl! Woof!  
They seem very interested in *gastric functions* and the chemistry of saliva!  
The chemistry of saliva and me! That's what they love!  
I'm a laboratory dog! Woof! Bark! Rolling on floor and things!  
Man in white coat killed my brother yesterday and felt clever!  
He tore my brother open and analyzed salivary glands! I'm a dog! Bark!  
Jumping up and down, licking your face all the time and things!  
Man in white coat brings me food! Growl!  
Man in white coat not interested in my salivary glands! No! No! Not possible!  
Man in white coat rings another bell and brings me more food!  
Man in white coat always rings a bell now before he brings food!  
Then man in the white coat *doesn't* bring food, just rings bell!  
An interval of time passes! I'm a dog! Bark! No food! Bark!  
My salivary glands are doing what salivary glands do! I'm a dog! Growl!  
Drool! Drool! Drool!  
Now man in white coat jumping up and down!  
Man in white coat tells assistant I'm making *associations!*  
Man in white coat seems *surprised* that I'm not stupid!  
Man in white coat feels smart to discover that I'm not stupid!  
Talks to assistant about forward conditioning,  
backward conditioning, classical conditioning! I'm a dog! Woof!  
Man in white coat thinks I'm *psychic!* Bark! Growl!  
Man in white coat speak of *psychic secretions!*

Man in the white coat wins great big prize from Swedish academy!  
Bark! Growl! Scratching my head and things!

Duane Duane

He was in and out of institutions during the nineteen seventies. He was in group therapy sessions with a man who shot part of his face off. He wrote a song about feeding saltine crackers to a duck. He wrote a poem where he rhymed the words Noxema and Iwo Jima. He watched a lot of television at the institution. He thought *Gilligan's Island* was real. He sincerely believed that *Gilligan's Island* was real. Let me explain this a bit more. He knew that *Gilligan's Island* was a television show, that wasn't the point. He knew it was a television show with actors, that wasn't the problem. But he was convinced these actors were *forced, against their will*, to act out this show—that they were enslaved by television executives and forced at gunpoint, or through emotional blackmail, or whatever, to act out *Gilligan's Island* every week. This wasn't at all funny to him. And all of the madcap schemes the characters would contrive to get off the island, the smoke signals, the flying jalopies and so on, he believed these plots were really just *code* for us, the viewer, to go and save these people from this television show. He truly believed these actors were suffering deeply. He suspected they were being tortured. He was convinced the Skipper was blinking at him in Morse Code. He believed these things as much as you or I believe anything. He noticed the way other patients at the institution laughed at the show and he didn't like when they laughed at the show. This story isn't funny, but it's also funny. It's not my fault that this story is funny.



## Not Hitting a Road Worker

I have a recurring dream of broken glass in my mouth.  
I'm in a car accident, my head goes through the windshield,  
And there's broken glass in my mouth.  
Then I'm in a bathroom for some reason.  
I'm coughing and hacking bloody fragments into a sink or a bathtub.  
I'm being very careful, very conscientious, about where my bloody fragments go.  
This is a relatively new dream of mine.  
I had gone my entire life without ever dreaming of broken glass in my mouth.  
And they say people don't change.

I'm a middle aged man half asleep on a couch in an advanced western democracy.  
Why is it that when you drive past a school you must slow your vehicle,  
But when you drive past a man reading at the fifth grade level  
You're awarded the full privileges of acceleration?

There's a Russian man in Milwaukee who lives on the streets.  
That's really impressive when you stop to think of it.  
He traveled all the way from Russia just to be homeless in Milwaukee.

Can you see this book of poems from outer space?  
Could this book of poems fetch even one cigarette in prison?  
The short answer is no.

The sign says ten thousand dollar fine for hitting a road worker.  
As though you need an *incentive* not to hit a road worker.

I always thought not hitting a road worker was its own reward.

## We Drove into Town

We drove into town  
To buy dead animals and beer  
And white wine for the girls.  
Cornwallis was driving the car.  
An expert was talking on the radio.  
Cornwallis knew more than the expert did,  
Which made us feel strong.  
We went to a farmer's market.  
Cornwallis saw a man he wanted to avoid—  
A minor character he knew from his high school days.  
We bought a dead chicken and some new potatoes.  
The dead chicken was expensive,  
Because it was a chicken that had had a good childhood.  
The girls requested a dead chicken that had a good childhood.  
We drove away, successfully avoiding the minor character.  
In the parking lot of the beer store,  
We saw a dog leading an unexamined life.  
The radio was now threatening to give away prizes.  
We went inside and the dead chicken waited in the car.

## New Poem Thingy

All of the respectable nymphomaniacs had gone home over the holidays—  
There was nothing to do except drink vodka in graveyards with competitive jerks.

Sleeping in abandoned automobiles can really build character, sometimes.  
The agoraphobics were under house arrest, which was fine by them.

Nobody could tell which came first, the foreground or the background,  
Or those flowers in back of the background or that unknown man at the edge of the foreground.

The Canadian geese on the miniature golf course had impulse control disorder.  
Everybody needed more critical distance from the decorative light bulb factory.

We searched the parking garage of a very small Baptist college,  
And we found many very small Baptists.

We couldn't find our car, and then we found our car,  
And then we were sentimental for the days when we couldn't find our car.

We went for a drive, and we drove past houses we couldn't afford,  
And then we drove some more, and we drove past houses we *could* afford.

## Bad Writing

Many farmers can no longer earn a living from bad writing.  
Railroads and highways that once carried bad writing to surrounding cities have been eliminated.  
Sulfur dioxide gas can prevent bad writing from forming chemical changes.  
Surface tension can hold bad writing together.  
Bad writing, when used correctly, can form tiny water droplets in zero gravity.  
In isolated areas bad writing is made from sassafras and wintergreen.  
Egyptians regarded bad writing as a symbol of a crippled sun slouching across the sky.  
Federal and state laws prevent bad writing that might make people ill.  
Some bad writing is curled and worn under wide-rimmed bonnets.  
In ancient Sparta bad writing was considered unnecessary in the education of young boys.  
Most bad writing enters the home through a hatchway in the roof.  
Some believe bad writing was sent to punish the wickedness of man.  
Bad writing, if left unattended, can sometimes cause bathtub ring.  
Exposing bad writing to ultraviolet rays can prevent decomposition and spoilage.  
Bad writing has been known to change the contours of undersea mountain ranges.  
When bad writing is swallowed, do not induce vomiting.

## Sestina with Love and Socks

My wife can't find any of her socks.  
The things keep disappearing—it's a sign  
Of something or other, like dead worms on the sidewalk.  
Socks moving uncontrollably through the chaos of space.  
We trust the socks are in good hands.  
When you score nothing in tennis they call it love.

How does the substitute teacher explain love?  
The police report on the missing socks  
Is about as useful as a ghost giving you a hand  
Job as you're working to sign  
The great mysteries into law, the gravitational forces in space—  
The road to hell is paved with sidewalks.

Nobody complains enough about the sidewalks.  
Instead, they go outside and fall in love  
And circle the block looking for metaphysical parking spaces.  
There's no satisfying explanation for the disappearing socks.  
There's no leading alternative theory, no sign  
Of life on other parking lots—you throw up their hands.

When the big hand gets on the one, and the little hand  
Gets on the six, put your worst foot on the sidewalk.  
Rob yourself with a ballpoint pen and sign  
Away your claims and rights to the above-stated love,  
And then kiss all your socks  
Goodbye and have your remains sent into space.

Please print with blue or black ink in the provided space.  
What's the point of all those fingers on your hand?  
Inside an old T-shirt I find one of your socks,  
Like finding a buffalo nickel on a sidewalk,  
The potato salad that dare not speak its love,  
Incomprehensible regulations on no-parking signs.

Please don't take this as a sign.  
Do not write below this space.  
When you score nothing in love they call it love.  
Someone will write a popular song about holding your hand.  
The neighbor throws her husband's clothes on the sidewalk.  
I want to hold your socks.

## Not Really My Problem

The complicated girl who looked simple from across the room.  
The simple girl who looked complicated from across the room.

Her father was Director of Fun Things for Confused People to Do.  
He almost died once eating a Hawaiian pork chop—  
Laughing uncontrollably, his mouth full of sparkling water.

He *did* die, eventually—of something other than a Hawaiian pork chop.  
His obituary was in the newspaper.

The obituary of the complicated girl's father—  
It was right next to the obituary of the guy who invented frozen French fries.

Her father died on the same day as  
The guy who invented frozen French fries.

Through our insanity and our desperation  
We accomplish as much as through our discipline.

I said, 'How does one really invent frozen French fries?'  
She said, 'You know, that's not really my problem.'

You've Reached Jesus Christ, To Leave a Message Press One, or Just Wait for the Tone, to  
Leave a Numeric Page Press Two Now .....*BEEP!*

Yeah, hi, Jesus, maybe you remember me,  
This is Ron. Ron Hodgkin.  
Yeah, gosh, we met a while back at a party, over in Easthampton?  
Last June, remember? At Trisha's house?  
I'm pretty sure I was wearing my Hard Rock Café Mogadishu shirt,  
And I think you had on your paisley cargo shorts and your titanium flips flops  
And we were standing there out by the pool.  
I remember you were talking shop with some of your carpenter friends,  
And I was standing right there too; I was the one with the Hard Rock Café shirt on.  
I know it was kind of a crazy party,  
But do you remember our conversation?  
I was telling you about that idea I had for a screenplay, remember?  
You seemed to think it had potential.  
That's what you said, you said: *It's got potential.*  
It was that one about the family that gets displaced by regional wildfires  
And they have nowhere to go because they're pinheads and  
They have to live underneath a railroad viaduct and  
They have nothing and no adequate shoes or anything and  
They take in a gifted chimpanzee and  
The chimpanzee's a big help around the viaduct  
And he prepares all the meals and does the wash  
And together they learn true understanding.  
Remember that? That was mine. That was me, Ron Hodgkin.  
I mean, I know you're a really busy guy and everything,  
But you seemed to like the idea at the time,  
When I told it to you out by Trisha's pool.  
But anyway, that's not the reason I'm calling.  
Oh, hey, by the way, before I forget,  
I think you mentioned that I could borrow your miter saw?  
I'm finally getting around to that crown molding on my lower level,  
And it would really be a tremendous help if you could swing that.  
Gosh, one of these days I'm gonna buy one of those damn things.  
But anyway, that's not really the reason I'm calling.  
You see, how should I put this, my mother's been really sick recently.  
I mean I'm really worried about her.  
God, where do I start? How much time do I have on this voicemail?  
The thing is, I think maybe she's got *smallpox*.  
It's really weird, I know, I thought smallpox had been eradicated from the planet,  
But you know how it goes sometimes,  
When you *think* something's been eradicated from the planet and—  
I mean, I'm pretty sure she's got the freaking smallpox.

She's got those *lesions* on her *mucus membranes* and all that.  
I mean, I looked the whole thing up online and I thought I'd better call you.  
So that's the deal, my mom's got the smallpox,  
And I'm wondering, if you're not too busy tonight,  
If you could maybe come over and just give us a hand with this.  
I've already fumigated most of the house,  
And the incubation period's pretty much over  
And I've got her out in the garage, and  
It seems warm enough for her out there, at least during the day.  
So, yeah, if you could come over sometime that would be great.  
And yeah, if you come by, bring that miter saw, I mean if you remember—  
*Only if you remember*, it's not a big deal either way.  
I know you mentioned at Trisha's that you were looking for drywall work in the area,  
And my neighbors, the Carlson's, are planning to refinish their attic,  
And I told them I met this guy Jesus at a party,  
And they said they'd heard of you.  
Well, anyway, please give me a call back and tell me what's up.  
I really hope you remember me—Ron, Ron Hodgkin.  
I can't tell you how much this means to me.  
OK, anyway, I gotta go.  
Take care. Bye.



## A Plastic Chair

I was sitting in a cafe one day when an attractive woman knocked over a plastic chair. This caused a considerable racket, and created for her a moment of embarrassment. At that very same moment, I was trying to write a poem about a praying mantis I saw one time in front of a tire dealership in Colorado. Because the plastic chair was very close to my table, and because I was the customer nearest to the awkward racket, the woman felt obligated to acknowledge me in some way, which she did, with a sort of philosophical eye-rolling smirk. She was very attractive. She might as well have been Ingrid Bergman knocking over a plastic chair. Anyway, things settled back to normal after that. The woman took a seat, and I began writing again in my notebook. I wrote about an experience I had at an outdoor Mexican restaurant where a homeless man walked onto the patio and started eating the tortilla chips out of my basket. That's what I was writing about. And as I was sitting there writing that, the door opened and a man walked in. He was a man who was locally important thirty years ago, a washed-up dinosaur of a once promising rock and roll band. Anyway, he walked right past me, and as he did he knocked over the very same plastic chair. When this happened, I felt I had permission to look over at the woman, which I did, and she acknowledged me again with that smirk.

The Emotional Center

*for John Bensko—with no hard “feelings”*

Don't mess with me right now, I'm all stirred up with emotion, man.  
I'm in a rage right now because I can't find my car keys.  
Not only that, but my Japanese fighting fish just went belly-up and died.  
I'm really in despair about this, and there's all these emotions going through me, man.  
My nervous system is really going to town on me with grief and things, man.  
There's all this sugar in my bloodstream and my *glands* are emptying hormones everywhere.  
The wind is blowing and it feels like the whole sky is full of emotion—  
The whole neighborhood is full of emotion—  
There's emotion backing up in the storm drains—  
It's like an emotional sandwich, man,  
And you've got all these emotional condiments,  
And you take one bite and all this emotion oozes out everywhere,  
And you've got emotion running down your chin and your arm.  
Man, don't let me operate heavy machinery right now.

## An Enormous Wad of Blue Chewing Gum

I was waiting around with a friend.  
We were waiting for another friend to show up,  
And when the other friend did finally show up,  
He was the same friend I was initially waiting around with.

It was like the time I had more than one twin brother,  
And the small intestine and the large intestine  
Were having some sort of intestine rivalry to the point where  
Nobody could figure out who was ketchup and who was mustard.

My grandmother's staircase led to my other grandmother's music room.  
I misunderstood my mother's misunderstanding of *General Hospital*,  
Which amounted to a sort of *Very General Hospital*.

I couldn't find my wife in a department store, and an old woman felt sorry for me.  
In my childhood bedroom, the Human Resources lady  
Was living in a sea chest under the storm windows.  
There were paper clips stuck in my cat's throat,  
And the Human Resources lady said my cat probably  
*Enjoyed* having paper clips stuck in his throat.

Unable to escape the box my uncle's washing machine came in,  
I ran into my coworker and my coworker's common law cigarette girl,  
And suddenly every donkey was a horse in particular and an ass in general—  
My running shoes, which I could not give away, got up and ran away.

I had an enormous wad of blue chewing gum in my mouth.  
I wanted to spit the enormous wad out.  
I waited until I thought no one was looking, and I spit the thing out,  
But right then a pretty girl turns the corner, and she thinks I'm disgusting.

The fish in the ocean have no fresh water to drink.  
Has anyone ever thought of that before?

## The Point I'm Trying to Get Across

One thing you always want to do,  
you always want to close the cover on a book of matches before striking.  
I'm not kidding about that.  
When I was a boy there was this girl on my block, I'll never forget,  
a girl named Joyce Denker,  
and I'm telling you: she learned the hard way about  
closing the cover on a book of matches.  
It was just an ordinary evening in Normal, Illinois, and  
Joyce Denker was trying to light a candle at the dinner table,  
just trying to do something nice for her mother,  
but I'm telling you, right as she lit that match,  
*damn* if the flame from that match didn't set all the other matches on fire.  
I'm talking about a whole *book* of matches on fire here, do you understand me?  
Anyway, this all happened right as I was walking by their house,  
and right through their goddamn picture window I could see this great fireball.  
And I *heard* the awful screams and  
I *saw* poor Joyce Denker run out that front door with her hair on fire and  
this thick, black, greasy smoke trailing after her.  
I watched as her sickly mother tried to beat the fire out with an old oriental rug—  
so don't give me any *lip* about closing the cover on a book of matchers.

And one thing you never want to do, under any circumstances,  
is put *anything* inside an electrical socket.  
Like, say, a wire or a fork or an envelope opener or any metal object of any kind.  
Can you hear what I'm saying, boy? I'm talking about *metal objects* here.  
You listen to me when I'm talking about electrical sockets.  
I remember when I was growing up, there was a girl in my neighborhood,  
a girl named Joyce Denker, and one time  
she was horsing around with some needle-nose pliers, like we all do sometimes.  
I mean, we all have things we want to accomplish with needle-nose pliers.  
Now, I don't know where her parents were that day,  
I'm not trying to blame them, that's not the point,  
but when she put those needle-nose pliers into that electrical socket, Geez Louise,  
if that jolt didn't throw Joyce Denker across the goddamn room.  
So much electricity went shooting out of that socket  
that the whole goddamn power grid of West Normal, Illinois, went haywire.  
And I'm telling you the utility company sent a man over in a black car and

that man made Joyce Denker go door to door,  
with her poor little face all disfigured,  
and that man made her pass out leaflets on electrical safety  
until she didn't know what day it was.  
I kid you not. I don't *kid* people about electrical matters.  
And let me tell you, that girl had so much  
what-do-you-call electromagnetic force, *voltage* or whatever coursing through her,  
that for weeks afterward she could disorient a goddamn compass.  
She could make a compass think south was north and Wednesday was Thursday.  
Now if you want to end up like Joyce Denker, that's your prerogative, you go ahead and  
do what you need to do with a pair of needle-nose pliers and see if I care.  
You go ahead and keep your short wave radio  
on the edge of your bathtub, just like poor Joyce Denker did.  
You go ahead and run frayed extension cords under a rug, just like little Joyce Denker.

And another thing I want to tell you,  
another thing that's really important, involves laundry.  
Now, whenever you're doing the laundry,  
never, *ever*, leave the dryer door hanging open—  
*not even for one second*, do you understand me?  
I remember something that happened one time to a kid I knew.  
She was a little girl who lived down street from us, a girl named Joyce Denker.  
One day, her mother, Mrs. Denker, was doing the laundry.  
Mrs. Denker had this big soft comforter in the dryer, and it wasn't quite dry yet.  
It was *almost* dry, but it wasn't dry—you know how comforters get.  
Anyway, Mrs. Denker was about to run that dryer again when the phone rang.  
And while she was away answering the phone,  
little Joyce Denker walked by and saw that big soft comforter in the dryer.  
Little Joyce Denker decided right then and there to take a nap and  
she climbed into the dryer and curled up there and fell asleep.  
Then Mrs. Denker comes down, runs the dryer some more,  
and she goes off to watch something on television.  
She had that television up so damn loud  
she couldn't hear the *screams* of poor little Joyce Denker.  
And when Mrs. Denker finally got that comforter out of the dryer  
it was all speckled and covered with tiny bits of mangled up Joyce Denker.  
And it was a great big mess and it was a tragedy and she cried really hard and  
she had to wait for Mr. Denker to come home and  
put Joyce back together again with his Allen wrenches  
and his crowbar and his *know-how*.

Mrs. Denker couldn't do nothing, because Mrs. Denker didn't *know* nothing and she had no *higher education* and I'm not sure she even had *opposable thumbs* or anything, but that's not the issue here, that's not the point I'm trying to get across to you, boy. Do you understand me? Do you understand what I'm saying?

Wilkie

Her feet hurt really bad and  
She was sick of John Singleton Copley  
And the holes in the drywall needed spackling.

She fouled up the vinyl letters really bad last time and  
Todd made her do the whole thing all over again.  
Todd said it was nine hundred dollars worth of vinyl lettering.  
For that paragraph on the wall—talking up Copley's *directness and vitality*.  
Every show they hung seemed to have some guy with *directness and vitality*.

There was an old man who worked there for many years,  
And every day he emptied his colostomy bag  
Off the side of the loading dock.  
That was as brilliant as anything she'd ever seen.

It was Copley's *palette* that made her sick.  
That same palette over and over again.  
*Boy with a Squirrel* in that same dumbass palette.  
Todd said *Boy with a Squirrel* had an *atmospheric quality*.

She liked the *backs* of those paintings, though.  
Everybody had seen a Monet or a van Gogh,  
But she had seen the *backs* of those paintings.

## Excellent Taste

In Norway it's possible to get whale as a topping on pizza.  
I never ordered such a pizza,  
But when the judgmental delivery man brought it to my door anyway,  
He acted like it was my fault there was whale on a pizza in Norway.

I was new in town and I inquired as to where I might go to find self pity.  
He said I could find self pity at any of four convenient locations.

I met a woman who told me a raccoon bit off her index finger.  
Her arms were folded as she spoke, so I could not confirm or deny her claim.

The woman with the folded arms who presumably lost an index finger to a raccoon  
Talked very fast and said many bold and impressive things.

Her ideas were mostly stolen from others,  
But she had excellent taste,  
And she stole only the most beautiful ideas.



## I Don't Have All Day

The moon needed a new shirt to go with his old tie. So the moon took a bus downtown to a respected haberdashery. When the moon entered the shop, he saw a jackal working behind the counter. The moon said, "I need a new shirt to go with this old tie. Do you follow me?" The jackal said, "Yes, I follow you, but to obtain such a shirt I must journey to the bottom of the shirt world and speak with the pig." The moon said, "I don't have all day." And the jackal said, "Ease up cowboy, you'll get your shirt." So the jackal journeyed to the bottom of the shirt world but he made no effort to contact the pig. The pig was known to do excellent work, but he took his time doing it, and the jackal didn't need that right then. So instead, he sought out the spider mom. The jackal said to the spider mom, "The moon needs a new shirt to go with his old tie." The spider mom then began to talk, but the talk was completely unintelligible because it wasn't really talk at all but more like spit, and soon the jackal's face was covered with spider mom spit. The jackal then abandoned the spider mom and pushed further toward the bottom of the shirt world. He stayed in a motel down there and he stole the largest bath towel they had. "I will make this bath towel into a shirt and sell it to the moon," the jackal cried, stuffing the bath towel into his rucksack. But when the jackal returned to the haberdashery, the moon was gone. This made the jackal furious and he resolved to make a new shirt anyway, just to spite the moon. This is why today the jackal has such a distinctive coat and why the moon is so out of fashion.