

To sit beside a bird is infinite enough: poems.

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To Sit Beside A Bird
Is Infinite Enough

POEMS BY DAVID HAYMAN

A PARALLEL PRESS CHAPBOOK

To Sit Beside
A Bird
Is Infinite
Enough

POEMS BY DAVID HAYMAN



Parallel Press 2008

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I would like to acknowledge the editors of the *Eggemoggin Reach Review*, vol. 2, in which the following poems first appeared:
“Equestrian,” “The Peasants’ Feast, Ibiza,” “Supposing Death,” and
“Driving Home Last Night.”

FIRST EDITION

For Loni and the girls, who have contributed so much

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Firsts That Last

Why does one recall
So vividly the instant
Of introduction,
The splash of awareness

Seeing or hearing or tasting
Whatever scars the senses

Pink tang of the grapefruit
Handed us, two hitching sailors,
By that lady with the gun
In her glove compartment;

Right after Paris, at MOMA,
A splash of black: Motherwell's
Spanish Elegy in the gallery to my left;

Loni, pinup outfit, lips a garish red,
Twinned with bumptious Kitty,
But she unchallenging, appealing;

Fresh salt thrill of sea urchin
Pried from craggy Brittany,
Harsh crunch that opened it;

Violet splash of Bougainvillea
On Ibiza's whitewashed walls
From the sea and in the sun;

The squares of newsprint
In the WC, first night in Paris,
Unwelcome rasp on my behind.

Details, printed, superimposed,
Catalogued, ineradicable. Samples.

The well is deep and wide.
The bucket leaks.
Its water whets my thirst.

Summer Night

To bed early in the damp heat
Too early and too warm

Track mysterious light
That plays across my walls

Feel the bass drone
Of father's voice rise
Through vibrating boards

Move my feet along
The outer edges of the sheets
Milking coolness hiding there
Test with wriggling toes
The seams of mother-mended sheets

And then erotic bliss as
Stitching cedes to pressure
Rrrrrrip

And then to sleep

Porching

Little,
I used to lie
On our red-tinted porch
On cloud-freckled days,
Deciphering the blots,
Watching the world revolve,
Seeing no transcendence there.
Naive beginnings of my disbelief.

The skies were splendid.
The sun, mediated by occasional clouds,
Warmed my meditations.
Naive intimations of absence,

As I, terrified of death,
Unable to sit still
In class, in synagogue,
At the table, rejected
Immortality, sin and its rewards,
Instinctively, revolting.

Life lesson never unlearned,
Secret of my meager success,
My unfulfillable urge
To project my brand
On a brightly bland
Ineffable indifference.

Supposing Death

I'd lie there in the dark
Thinking
I will die
Some day
Shivering with dread

How could I end
That I
My little self
Inhabited
What could nothingness be

Deep physical dread
Tightened the skin
Around my flesh
It never failed

No escape
No immortality
Never
Only never
In the bones

Unremitting
Though intermittent
Death imposed itself
Age did not abate it
Nor the illusions of belief

Until
In old age
I found my mirror map
Watched with fascination
The slow accumulation of signs
Wrinkle here
Brown spot there

Soon
The shape of my face
Would find
Its ultimate
Likeness
And acquiesce

Honeymoon

You were so young
Too slight for that rucksack
Of course you never complained
Except when the smoke
Nearly blinded you
Even then you kept stirring
Tasty semolina for my diet
It was on-the-job training

In Andorra, by the mill
You climbed trees for cherries
To liven up our pudding
At the *vendange* you outpicked me
Outlasted me and bore
The flea-infested straw
Of our special, private space

You were offended, angry, mad
When I gave the finger to those kids
Behavior unbecoming a scholar
Even a gypsy scholar
Who had no idea
Where he was going

But then neither of us did
We were free, hitching
To undetermined destinations
Putting ourselves each morning
In the hands of surprisingly
Accommodating drivers
Spending nights in hostels
Not always clean and nice
Once a rat ran over your face
Or camping in our surplus tent
Sleeping? in my flea market sack
The one you'd adapted for two
Using a navy blanket painfully thin

Oh yes, you did complain
Mornings after I'd rolled
Onto the soft part leaving you
To feel the stones come through
Air mattress? What's that?
Sex was something special, but
We were tough or toughened

On the road for three full months
A dollar a day, *tout compris*,
Fifty cents in Andorra
So I could buy those spiffy
Shoes, so stiff and heavy
I never walked in them

Yes, you served me well
Even after numbering my failings
And did you let me know

Oh yes, we were happy then
In love, ensconced for a while
In our permanent present

Ibiza 1953–2007

A summer morning
Light sifting through
Slatted shutters
On generous space

My wife
On a wooden chair
On a red tiled floor
By a whitewashed wall

Assertively still
Defying space and time
My young wife
In vibrant memory

Susanne Sewing

Did he sleep with her?
Probably. One could and did.
She reminds me of my Gretta,
Compliant, motherly, industrious.

Gauguin's French maid
In her *chambre de bonne*
Narrow, spare, not well lit,
Probably as bare as ours
That student year in Paris,
On Avenue Daumesnil,
Seven flights up,
Cold water,
Dim corridor,
Squat-toilet,
Cramped low-ceilinged room
Looking out on Sacré Coeur,
Montmartre's wedding cake.
Was her's that good?

She sat and sits, plainly plump,
Unsparinglly portrayed,
A fleshy flesh-toned nude
Mending something, intent,
Bathsheba, perhaps unwashed.

His Danish wife kept it
After their separation, bitter,
Did she know, value, show it?
Did she know, suspect?
Did she sigh when she sold it
To the Danish brewer
Who hung it one flight
Above a mob of plaster Greeks

Unheralded,
A vigorous masterpiece
By a youngish neophyte.

For me she was a shock, delight,
Better than Rembrandt, or as good.
But I too was young, and ignorant.
An amateur.

I know more now, not better, no,
Still, she sits and sews or mends
My worn imagination.

She will speak,
Tell me what I've done.
Contrition.
She will smile.
Life will resume.

Until again.

Again

A child again,
Traumatized by Mother's silence,
Now by hers.

Yes, I did it.
What?
Existed.
In her space.

Said something.
Still don't know what.
Must have been bad.

She's avoiding me.
Curtly tells me things to do.
Leaves the room
When I approach.

Is it over?
Has this occurred before?
No and Yes.

What's next?
I will wait.
Until it breaks.

Cowboy

Taos, Christmas 1960

She stands there
Powder can in hand
Chipmunk cheeks
Blanched seriously

Facing the camera
In a shirt that says
HAVE GUN WILL TRAVEL

Ask her name
She'll tell you frankly
"My name is Cowboy"

The straw hat proves it.

Ecology

Sunny morning on the trail
Abruptly, ahead as usual,
She stopped, stooped, pointed,
Shouted, "Look, Daddy!
It's a fly's nest!"
Indeed, and a fresh one too.
No need to disabuse her.
Bright eyes, a nature lover,
She turned and held my hand.
Then, softly, I told her.

Equestrian

She says she always loved horses
Kept a stable of plastic beasts in her room
Called herself cowboy, yes, I remember that
We have a photo of her kneeling over a cat
Watching it dispatch a sparrow hawk
On the back of her head a little straw thing.

Didn't stop her producing and loving
Two boys who don't much like horses

Now in finance she has a 'farm,' a barn
Paddocks and stalls, six horses that she rides
Curries, mucks out for, feeds, nurses, to relax
Her Rolodex she says makes her valuable
Important people will answer when she calls

Still young, youthful, athletic, charming
She rides, an Amazon, controlling with
Amplly muscled thighs reluctant horses
Erect, girlish, giving as she takes
My daughter with whom I quarrel
Amiably as in her youth, the girl
We never needed to control because
She knew better than we the risks she ran
Even when she told us she was sharing
Her dorm bed with a pigtailed Chinese boy
Or when she found her "blond Adonis"
Left sculpture for publishing for Wall Street

She's always risked and always won
Raised herself in our image without our help.

We weren't always friends
My first baby, she rejected me for my wife
Then I rejected her
We competed for food and affection
Once I left her at a friend's house
Just drove off, knew her absence
Only when I turned to show her a horse
Grazing in the northern California field
Not deliberate, no, but not good either
Then she won me, charmed me with her quirks
Taught me to worry about, to respect, to love
The freedom of her spirit

And now she rides

Goodbye

Oh, Yes,
She was very old
A centenarian
The first in our family.
On my last visit to the home
I wheeled her down the halls
Pointing to Dad's paintings hanging there.
She nodded but seemed uninterested.
Still, she greeted everyone with a smile,
And then, suddenly,
Pointing back toward me,
She said, "Look!
Here's my twin, he's come to visit me
After all these years.
I don't know how he found me.
What a nice surprise!"

Could have been my beard
That made her acknowledge
Me as her unacknowledged,
Long-dead, weak-minded, twin,
The one for whom they'd bought the farm
Hoping he could at least manage that,
The stunt man for the Jersey studio.
Age loosens the 'talktapes.'

When I was little, I was often bad.
Often punished, sometimes brutally.
Of course, I was much loved,
The only boy,
The curly-headed little blond.
But I was slow to learn,
And mischievous.
She spent deadly hours drilling me
With hand made cards.
I learned to add, to multiply, to spell.

Still, there was that day
When, adolescent, I spotted her
Across the street
In the 'ratty' Persian lamb,
So small so insignificant
I turned away,
Pretending not to see.

And now we'd driven down from Maine
Through a hurricane
Followed by Denise and the boys
To see her buried next to Dad,
Ahead of her by twenty years.

She'd outlived all those friends
She'd spent countless hours
Cultivating,
Schmoozing on the telephone,
By the window by the stairs.

Eighteen years ago
We'd packed away and carted off
A lifetime's accumulated stuff,
Stuffed a few of Dad's paintings
Into the Goodwill receptacle down the street.
She left the old neighborhood.
We insisted, after the fuss,
After anxious neighbors and village cops
Had helped her cope
With the phantom intruder,
The one whose back she'd seen,
Repeatedly,
Descending the stairs,
Whose presence made her call,
Repeatedly,
Who'd left her strangely unconcerned.
No, she never lost her sunny disposition.

Gathered at the funeral home,
There were only seven,
My wife and I,
My Pennsylvania sister,
Our New Jersey daughter
With her two sons,
And a lone stranger,
The son of a forgotten friend.
Yes, that quiet boy,
Who was so good at chess.
My California sister 'couldn't' come.
My other daughter would resent
Not being told, 'It was so rushed.'

The rabbi on call knew none of us.
But he managed well enough
With what we told him.
He made Mom's life
Approximately real.

It had been so long, so slow, her trip
Through stages of decrepitude.
I felt anesthetized.
(This was all so pro-forma.)
Until that tear escaped unbidden
And that stifled sob.
Cheap sentiment.
Cheaply bought.

Because her death had been easy,
Just a final sigh,
No malady but age,
The coffin could be open.
She'd never caused much fuss.
I went alone to view the body,
That dolly in its case,
To see that tiny head
Lace bonnet bagged.
I had to force my lips
To meet that forehead,
To feel beneath that cold wax
Simulacrum
A pang of warmth.

It was raining at the grave.
The diggers were out of sorts.
But I asked permission to shovel clods
Onto the plain pine box.

It was the thing to do.
Was it only for display?
For whom?

Lately, I've seen her
In my dreams.

Re-entry

We've been away
Fall now and we're back
To our other home
Confused by the familiar
Intrigued by the smallest differences
Afloat in delights and disappointments

I'd forgotten that unread book
Those duties still undone
The heft of that ugly dish
The efficiency of that knife
Those overprotective oak leaves
The inefficient heat and complex thermostat
How to get comfortable under the quilt
In our handsome new snow white bedroom
Efficient space, yes, for our unshared shelter

This time I won't be overtaken by my age
Won't collapse in self pitying angst
The recollection of my father's death
Need no longer unnerve me
Now that I've staggered
Past his four score into my final decade
It's my wife's turn to flip
She's earned it

Voyance

I'm not sure by whom to whom it was
Half seen across the crowded table
A box perhaps, shyly passed,
Reluctantly received
With a smile, a gesture, and a sigh

And then the faintest whisper of skin on skin,
The shrug, the sound of chair,
The fall of something indistinct.

I saw and heard and felt
A murmur from the past
A tremor of desire
With a shiver of regret.

Viewing

Museums instill tranquility
Routinely I engaged myself
Focused each framed or mounted space
For objects that caught and fixed my gaze
Shocked my senses with their demands
That Paolo or Pierro or Jan, Goya's blacks and greys
A glance brought lightness, fullness, warmth and joy

Or painters long ignored from prejudice
The unscanned surface of Chardin still lifes,
Never liked them till I finally looked,
Saw how earthen vase and odd-slung hare
Could touch the senses
Awaken slumbering awe.

I'd stop, then muse, then concentrate
Etch in memory this or that.
Objects for recall, those tints, that surface
Became much more than retinal remains.

Permanence not guaranteed.
The first shock of detail could fade.
Though cumulative effect may last,
Contributing details are lost, a blur
Of impact, moment and environment.

But now that travel is a sometime thing
What do I strain to fix and hold,
Like treasure that could be mislaid?
Dust encumbers the brightest hues,
And icons vanish under years
Of incense, smoke and praise.

So see, my eyes, and help me see.
My memory help me recollect
What I may once have truly seen.

Cervetera

Rome in June
Head-under-fountain weather
We escaped for the day
North to the Etruscan cemetery

Not the dreamed of graves
No ladders for descent
No murals to admire
No painted celebrations
A village of bee hives
Empty sepulchers
Containing bare raised slabs
Absent the gaudy furniture

For ornament one had reliefs
Loaves jugs joints plates of figs
Of color only muddy traces left
Those were sterile spaces
Spoils of the spade not houses of repose
Vacated by the rats the thieves
The archeologists

Standing in the dusky cool
We envied all of them
But were content
To profit from ancient providence
Ducking in and out of monuments
Making a random census of the dead
Filling each void with thoughts
Of prosperous burgesses
Couched conjointly
Offering on outstretched plates
Ovoid tokens of regeneration

Sated at last
With celebrated death
Now seated on our sacks
Backs against the gate
Beneath a huge pine tree
Surrounded by outsized cones

We ate olives bread and cheese
Yearning for wine while
Inspecting with surprise
Abundant nourishment
Bedded between heat-loosened petals

Shielded from the worst
But baking slowly and still parched
We watched as men
One old one young
Parked their van across the road

They didn't acknowledge us
When entering the orchard
So we sat young pilgrims
Disinterested until we
Watched them lug and stack
Twelve heavy cases in the back
Watched them sort their wares

Then finally, the old man turned
Exhibiting on outstretched hands
With just a word just a smile
An offering of surplus fruit

Plump ripe huge pink yellow
A dream of peaches like none
We'd ever thought to see
Succulent
There were four in all
Each a living feast
We smiled quick words of gratitude
As he turned again and they drove off

Peaches and fresh nuts for desert
Sweet nuts cracked between our teeth
Peaches too ripe to market
Juice running between young fingers

We first gorged then slowed to savor
Perfection in taste and texture
Nectar like nothing we then knew
Nor since have known in fifty years

Young lives to celebrate abundance
Clumsily staunching with paper and cloth
The lively flow of generous sweetness
Crossing quickly and forever
Into memory

Pentecost

Athos

The Grand Lavra intact
Grandfather of monasteries
Withstanding ten centuries
Unburned on its northward cliff

I hadn't expected
And hadn't understood
Pentecost
When they told me

Up from our cots
At the sound of two monks
On the stand wielding their mallets
Rhythmically beating wooden slabs

Intrigued
I obeyed that summons to
Midnight mass under that great lead dome
Past the thousand year old tree
Planted by the founding saint

Awe
As we entered darkened space
Groping toward the central vault
Illumined meagerly by a single lamp
To settle standing in our stations by the wall

Silence
Copious black drapes floating past
Cowled monks each drifting to his saint
A quick buss then a bow to the stand
A reverent kiss and a retreat to station

Silently an officiant moves to the left
Four others too old to hold the scores
Two young their candles framing iconostatic gates
In antiphon they sing about the day

Their pace inspirited progressively
By the monk igniting candles on the crown
Stark beauty grim dignity mitigated only
By the decrepitude of those bearded faces

Those survivors might not last the night
One by one the candle flames encircle
Illuminate gradually partially the images
On dome and huddled on the altar screen

And then with the crown complete
The candles one by one extinguished
The screen folds outward to reveal the altar
A monk behind it waving smoky incense
Emerging to cense with system each of us

The crown extinguished, the mass concluded
We all, the monks with a swish, returned
Through the dark into the night of reality

Not a word or gesture had I understood
But this I felt that in that vault
Time had been suspended and reversed
The ancient mysteries had survived
Christianity

I wasn't then and am still not sure
How good or bad that is but back
On my lumpy bed my sleep erased
Efficiently the remnants of the night

The Peasants' Feast, Ibiza

On the other side of the island
The peasant feasters sat
Beneath extended eaves,
At a long table under the
Brilliant carbide lamp
That etched their faces
Lined or startled in their youth,

A long table for the great communal dish.
Only we *foresteros* had spoons and plates,
A courtesy, a sign of gratitude and mark of distance.

Bartolomeo and Maria our guarantors
Among impoverished fisher farmers
On the other side of the known, on the rocky shore
Across from Vedra, that island pyramid,
Great rock pasture for the summer flocks
Where that year we'd joined the chase.

Bartolomeo, blond accident in this dark country,
Leader with no authority, had caught that great fish,
Cooked and served it now, veteran and survivor.

We ate the light that evening savoring community,
Joining without belonging, tossing fish bones
Over shoulders for lean dogs to gobble,
Dogs starved to sharpen their taste for rabbits
Vestiges of ancient times, the same portrayed
In Roman sculpture, and on Egyptian tombs.

This is History's island after all,
Home to Carthaginians, Romans, Moors,
Perhaps that's why these hard bitten,
Independent, feuding folk
Are also warm and loyal friends, allies.

Under the Republic, they were Loyalists.
Anticlerical, they'd burned their priest in his church.
Now in thrall to the Fascisti,
Reluctantly they licked the whip,
Paid taxes to support police and clergy.

Bartolomeo, wild spoor of passing Normans,
Let Maria tell Marie Helena, who told us
Of those times.

How Loyalists settled scores the island way.
How, when Fascisti came, there was retribution.
Spread out on their ungenerous lands,
These people were close in blood and they remembered.
Aiding "the enemy," no matter whose, endangered.

Surely it was the wrong moment
To have errands in that village,
And not the best time to help Jose,
The simpleton who'd mopped the barracks.
But it was the code. It was his nature.
He promised shelter, took that risk.

Their trail, the one we followed, was narrow, devious.
Someone betrayed them, some neighbor with a grudge.

The soldiers stopped them, bound them, led them back—
Part way. "Just to that dry river bed, near that bush,"
Marie Helena told us as we neared the farm,
"Then they told them, 'Stop! Now say your prayers.
You're going to die.' So he said, 'You're on your own!'
Hit that gully, running into country he knew best."
Maria didn't say how he survived,
With neighbors' help no doubt,
No doubt by stealth.

Between mouthfuls of fish and rice and sips of rough red wine,
I thought of this, watching faces glowing in that light
And wondering what those feasters did those years,
Who among them aided him, as he now aided them,
And how, through centuries of forgetting,
They and their hungry hounds survived.

Autumnal Actions

Just a few days earlier
We'd put them out for Halloween
One on each side of the stoop
Then I saw it, the first white nibble
Squirrel or chipmunk

There was progress on the right
I checked each time I left the house
Bemused as the nibble became a gap
The gap to my amusement a yawning hole
Accompanied by off-scourings of seeds and skin

Then the left-hand one bore signs
Moved, even fell over the edge
Now there were two holes and
An abscess in the one still standing
Eviscerated, grotesque, gluttony in progress
But no rot. We've had no frost

I replaced the fallen pumpkin
Observed the nibblers' progress
As the leaves turned and fell
Exhibiting arboreal skeletons
Prelude to seasonal stir and
Celebrations of diminution
Prayers for rejuvenation, spells

Now grey squirrels are puffing out
Prosperous as bankers worrying
Yesterday, I heard the rush
The chattering as I left the house
Spotted three squirrelings skittering
Squirrel tag around our deformed oak
The one that sends leaves out trunk-wise
Topless, declaring and defying mortality

They chase each other round and round
The door slams and they freeze
One spread-eagled on the front
One peek-a-booing round the side
The other just a flickering tail
All fat with promise and waiting
To explode.

Their depredations deck my stoop.

Afterimaging

Having spent the day
Harvesting, I would lie
On my back, eyes closed
And see projected on my lids
Precisely

Persistent shimmerings
Of raspberries, say
Bleeding in clusters
Distinctly sheltered by and
Contrasting sharply with
Their small green leaves

I'd hold them there
In my image field
Their presence
Meaning more by far
Than that sharp flash
Of sweet followed by
The crackle of hard seeds
Clotting between my teeth
Setting my tongue point
Out to root them free

The shock of discovery
First one, then a cluster
Then more, then absolute
Perfection in a berry
Voluntarily slipping
From its vinous perch
Or the flash of a familiar
Delicacy in the shelter
Of a barren grove
The yellow-orange
Of the first chantarelle
Picked before the others
Yield their light
In multiples of eager joys
Soft stiff and savory

Strawberries, Blackberries
Lingonberries, in season
Demarcating my summer
Feeding acquisitive frenzies
Yes, we eat them all
But it's the chase I love
The sighting and collecting
The quest for perfection
The sensations and the feel
Accumulation, not only greed
But concentration
No, not only that

The total loss
Of self and temporality

And then of course
That ultimate reward
That retinal remainder
That afterglow.

Petals

A friend
Brought it
Dark pink
Sparsely petalled
It smells like
Yesterday

Dipping now
In its glass
Cornered
On a table
Shedding all
Its petals
Progressively

Two
Perch now
Primly
On the
Dark surface
Of the wood
Three are stranded
On the boards below

Together
With what remains
They pattern
My memories
Of the rose-rich
Garden of my youth
The too-muchness
Of tinted splendor
That peopled
Summertime
When I was small

Fungi

Rained last night
The air is moist
The grass is wet
As are my shoes
I scan the ground
For what I hope to find

And yes, almost
Beneath my feet
Not the first
But promising

A cluster of brightness
This morning's
Chanterelles
Close to where
They always are
Magic on my path

I harvest them
Hold them in my palm
Sniff them

They smell
Like apricots
And lunch.

Arborescence

They yield to the wind
Tremble vociferously

But trees don't move
Vulnerable they stand
Grow circles of bark
Magnificently distended
With calculable rings
Become splendid deformed
Accumulate imposing blisters
Pearls of eccentricity age

Immobile they can be moved
Riven by lightning's surprise
Infested with rot, ants, termites
Sawed or chopped by woodsmen
Or view hungry householders

They are monuments to change
Societies of one reaching
Competing elbowing for light
Probing earth
With labyrinthine roots

Once they colonized
Now they congregate
Thirsty giving what they must
Yielding reluctantly time

Impermanent survivors
Their pollen populates the wind

A Shadow

Today the sun spreads gold,
Infuses autumn greens and reds,
Inspiring ample joys of time and place,
Giving those I meet on road and trail
The itch to share, communicate.

I noticed as I spoke with Rich,
Of mushrooms, fish, and vegetables,
That Benjamin, his second son,
Bright, gregarious, with messages to spill,
Has shadowed every move we've made.

Now, walking on, with garden pelf,
I hear trainer wheels behind me grate and slide.
Not the first time. I've become his confidant.
Neither smiling nor quite grave, he quotes,
"Death comes very slow." Matter of fact, a statement.
"I'm four." We've talked age once before, but now,
"That's a very long time." His gaze finds my eyes.
In childhood I'd often felt, but never shared,
Morbidity. He trusts me. Now, how to reassure?

"Yes," I say, "Four is long, but some people
Live to be a hundred. How much is that?"
He puzzles, drops his eyes. "Can you count to it?"
He hesitates before the numbers come,
From one to ten to twenty, filled with pride, and on.
Numbers spilled with confidence, a child's broad smile.

He doesn't want to let me go, invents new topics.
Impatiently, I listen, say goodbye, and turn,
And turn again, to his insistence.
Say goodbye once more.
Then, altered, thoughtful,
Almost reluctantly,
I leave,
Sensing eyes that follow my retreat.
Happy?

Expectations

It's muggy today, but
The lawns are spangled with hopes
Thick webs dew-heavy and white
Each with its glory hole
To blacken with expectation
The untorn fabric

Little Benjie, now "five
Count them" fingers
Waves and runs, carrying
In his hands a double cone
Wire, with open ends
He's wearing a tee shirt
Blue, with stenciled prey
A gap-toothed smile
Babbling half-digested
Syllables of joy
Of the pond, of the sea
And of some stream where lurk
Digestibles with fins and scales

And mine?
Damp enough today for mushrooms
Plucked a few along the trail
Inedible talismans

Only later on the off chance
I scout the path by our lagoon
Where those wood chips have
Sprouted spotted brown signs
Pretty, fresh and of
Dubious quality

But wait, that bulbous surface
That muted tawny chestnut glow
What? Perhaps. Maybe. Yes
It never fails
To astonish
In my own back yard
Where I've stalked it endlessly
The first of the *edulis cèpes Steinpilzen*
Plucked clean with rests of soil
Pristine and perfectly marked
Cradled snugly now
In my webbed palm

On the cusp of August
Their season has begun

Predictably

With summer at its height

And Waning

Encounter

This morning on the cove
The tide worked its slow regress
As sunlight turned the muck to luster
Outlining mystery trails to the channel
Glistening with sluggish promise

Tempted by the potential of this day
I sought pleasure on our wooded shore
But soon paused to search for raspberries
Stumbling through the tangled canes
And then I thought I heard a rustle,
Faint enough but real, and slowly turned
To see that delicate pair still speckled, lustrous,
Frozen, furtive, wary, shy with leafed out ears

I stood there barely balanced on the slope
My hand full of fragile fruit and stared
Their four eyes met my two or so it seemed
In fact my glasses blocked their view
Innocent, new-licked and barely weaned
A motherless fraternity they stood alert
Before my transfixed eyes those fugitives

How long did it last
I didn't check my watch
Perhaps ten minutes just feet away
With their meager stippled loins
Long enough for me to note
The thin white stripes that longed their spines
The tufts of white fuzz at their knees
One stood frozen, ears alert
The other wandered, loose eared
Nibbling random weeds
Each tentatively approached inspecting
Drew back but did not flee

It was a dance of sorts before my eyes
As I stood stiff, my fist bleeding berries
And they puzzled questioned or ignored
Shifting sunlight lustering their hides

As imperceptibly water rose before me in the cove
I waited watched and held my breath
Prepared at last to move and moved
Their bounds were hesitant at first

And then I turned again to pick
Aware of captured transience
Of faun fragility
Of innocence youth and peace

Running

The mist has risen.
The tide is up along our shore.
Colours glow to painful hues.
Across the slope below my window
Slick flanks and thighs,
Lean neck and legs outstretched,
Eyes wild with fear, a yearling flashes redly by,
Then, down beyond the further slope
Vanishes (in the bay?) behind the spruce
(by what surprised?).

That one is safe, motherless, but safe.
The other I did not see,
The orphan she describes,
The one diverted as it breached the road,
The one that swerved to miss her car.

I see it, though, in my inner eye,
First feasting on the tender greens
Of lettuce leafing through the mulch.
Not sated, it looks in shy confusion
Toward the green beyond the blacktop.

And then, that sudden bulk before, beside and past,
The shriek of senses, the tightened haunch,
The brain a turmoil straining to adjust,
No time to dodge, the unseen other . . .

"Tore off the license plate," she said,
Of the speeder in the other lane,
The body jackknifed, the belly mush,
(What else?) a limp mass on the road . . .
Exasperated (shocked?) the driver leaves his car.

(And then what?) Does he drag
That pulsing leanness to the edge
And wipe his bloodied hands (on what?),
Or will he foot it to one side, beyond his wheels,
Adjust and straighten out the plate,
Get back in his car and drive?

What does one do with one's road kill?

Soaring

Up the graveled hill
By the cove across the way
Breezy overcast
Wind rustling oak leaves
Whistling through the spruce

I hear workmen hammering together
Three million dollars worth of house
For a man with generous appetites
Leaving enemies on another isle

If water is the future
The present is water frontage
So he will span his point of land
With a dwelling out of scale
To human need—lavish and conspicuous

High tide in a light wind
And another sound splits the sky
Raising a shiver of delight
The bifurcated shriek of the hawk

My step lightens as I search the sky
Stopping at the clearing
The builders have made
Following huge wings
Kiting in the breeze
Hearing joyous sounds

Of one of two of three and even four
Sporting individuals in quest of lifts
Insistently reformulating
The empty space and
Intersecting tree lines
That slice my view

Gratefully I resume my walk
My constitutional
Banking on the future
Of soaring ospreys
If not my own

Blowdown

In front of Charlie's house,
By Route 15,
The potter's sign has gone,
The frazzled stump
Of girthy tree,
The one
I'd hardly noticed
When it stood,
So very high and
Too close to the road.
"Venerable,"
The paper said.

Its trunk extends now,
Too huge to overlook,
A monumental
Victim of the wind
That cut a swath
Through Little Deer.
"Tornado,"
Someone said.

When his wife died,
Charlie grew morose,
Threw lugubrious pots,
Returned to the bottle.

Musician, book lover,
Master of the glaze,
Solitary man,
He's sold that house
And left his trade,
As emblem,
Left that stump.

Driving Home Last Night

This is the road I take,
The same hill I sweat up,
The same water viewed through foliage,
The same roadside vegetation,
Familiar byways, stones and weeds,
The causeway wriggling by in waterwise.

It is late enough and overcast.
My headlights, beamed on bright,
Enchant the roadside as we wind
Past the stones that mark my passage,
Turning huge clumps of intervening weeds
Into stage sets for a faerie pageant,
Faceting them, bejeweling them
Into brilliants various in green and gold,
A jungle set, a distant place
To light imagination's flares.

Passing now, into and through the trees,
Reshaping foliage, accenting trunks,
As we climb the slope I hardly know,
But know too well and know the turns
And know the slope and now,
With dangerous dark speed
We slide past neighbors' lights,
Estrangement dissipating into reassurance,
Mutating into disappointment like a sigh,
As we turn abruptly,
But with caution,
Up our drive.

Is home the place we want to be?
Of course, and tomorrow I'll forget,
See only road, wave my appreciation
At those cars that widen my walking way,
Breathe heavily up the hill and mop my brow
With sidelong glances at the passing scene,
Another day, another
Constitutional.

Watering

‘To sit beside a bird / Is infinite enough’ (for me at least). That was how they went, my first satisfactory lines of poetry, too many years ago. I never could finish that poem. Today it may have finished itself—as a feathered out experience.

I was watering lettuce plants wilting in the fresh tilled garden down the slope from our road when I heard the sound. A loud hum, it was, harsh to my ears, louder than a bee, right by my left arm. My eyes were on plants of course and on water flowing from my pot.

It took me a moment to focus on that shimmering green enamel, bright and clear against the darkening soil, there, on the edge of the falling water. A ruby-throated humming bird, half the size of my thumb, not in flight for once, stood quietly near my feet, edging closer, tentatively, to the spray. I stood, entranced. Such a fragile thing at such a fragile moment.

My lettuce plants were drenched and the water in my pot was running out. So, torn between duty and pleasure, I dared anticipate, moving the flow toward and even over that tiny body. But then it basked—luxuriated even, before scooting away with a furious hum.

Well, I thought, that’s that, elated by the wild proximity of that fugitive, but oddly solid splendor. Having refilled the pot, I returned to other thirsty plants, watered light-headed, silly almost, only to be surprised by that hum and the bird, edging once more, coyly, toward the spray and even bathing under it—briefly, as I watched.

This was my bird, my instant, on the brink.



David Hayman sailed to Paris in 1950, convinced that poetry was his destiny. He told friends of his calling and even submitted “poems” to a fledgling periodical. He wrote his wife-to-be promising a bohemian future as starvelings—she came anyway. Their first three months were spent on the road, thumbs extended, literally hitching their way around France. Through it all, imbued with a heady sense of “purpose,” he was reading Joyce and the Symbolists; talents he decided were too big for emulation. When he began working in earnest for his degree at the Sorbonne, his muse paled further, or rather dried up; so that, in the fifty years that followed, he felt free to sate his creative urges with scholarship, teaching, and publication. Oh, it was a good life, rewarding enough to feed his family and ego.

It was after he and his wife built their house on Deer Isle in Maine that he found what turned into the essential community. The atmosphere and encouragement there turned his winters into incubation periods and his summers into. . . Almost spontaneously, he rediscovered forgotten joys of a discovery, naturally occurring and sparse but welcome. In 1999, he gave up teaching but continued his scholarship and publication, on both Joyce and Samuel Beckett.

Most of the verse and prose in this volume dates from the pre- and post-retirement years. The four published items first appeared in the second number of *The Eggmoggin Reach Review*, a little magazine produced with care and love by the supportive members of the Deer Isle writers’ groups. They have his thanks. Thanks also to Ken Frazier and Elisabeth Owens at the University of Wisconsin–Madison Libraries, and to Nancy Brower and Earl Madden at University Communications.



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