



# First Exit

POEMS BY

BRYAN MERCK



# Triggerfish

[triggerfishcriticalreview.com](http://triggerfishcriticalreview.com)

Copyright © 2015 by Bryan Merck

All rights reserved

For permission to reproduce text in whole or part, except for individual downloads, please contact:

Bryan Merck at [bryanme1956@gmail.com](mailto:bryanme1956@gmail.com)

or David Mehler at [triggerfishcriticalreview@gmail.com](mailto:triggerfishcriticalreview@gmail.com)

First Exit

Book Designed and Formatted by Dave Mehler

# **Penny University Press**

A Downloadable Electronic Chapbook Series

to Janice *thanks for what is real*

to Joe and Donna *thanks for the computer*

## *Acknowledgments*

the following poems were published in the following magazines:

Washing Clothes at Jimmy's Trailer - *Blast Furnace*

Technique of Ecstasy - *Literary Juice*

Prairie Song on the Eve of Father's Day - *Pleiades*

Winter's Deconstruction - *Hiram Poetry Review*

Minstrel Show - *Eunoia Review*

Material Juju - *Danse Macabre*

The Colors of Revelry - *Eunoia Review*

Volition Trumps DNA - *Triggerfish Critical Review*

[bryanme1956@gmail.com](mailto:bryanme1956@gmail.com)

# Table of Contents

Washing Clothes at Jimmy's Trailer	7
Technique of Ecstasy	8
The Greatest Kleagle in the World	10
Prairie Song on the Eve of Father's Day	12
Winter's Deconstruction	14
Wolf Man	16
Amazing Janice	18
Minstrel Show	19
Material JuJu	21
Poet 2, too	23
Stations of the YMCA	25
The Colors of Revelry	26
Rooster	29
1,000 Shocks	31
Tree Top Walker	33
Volition Trumps DNA	35
A Profound Meditation	40
Cave Man	42
To Bless With Words	44

## Washing Clothes at Jimmy's Trailer

*The generative forces of the world are wholesome.*

*--Sirach*

On the other side of the woods  
lies the ordered green of a cotton field,  
a very real Canaan  
beyond the wood's disorder.

My wife and I sit in rocking chairs.  
A huge live oak shelters us.  
I am very good at some things.

Last week, I knocked down a wasp's nest  
in the shed. The wasps have now tunneled into a roof beam.  
The nest was the greater miracle.

One night we walked into the cotton field.  
The plants had delicate flowers  
closed with the sun's leaving.

I fold up at night, too.  
I am in this land of farmers seeking recovery.  
For many years I cancelled my emotions with alcohol and drugs.  
My childhood is a bad neighborhood.  
It's not safe to go there.

Today, the living green sap of Summer sustains everywhere.  
Dragonflies shepherd the tall grass nearby.  
A white feral cat eyes us from the edge of the woods.  
Crows call from a nearby pine tree.

Every atom vibrates in something I can understand.  
I am no longer outside of this.  
The parallel scars on my wrist fade.  
I am more powerful, now.

Winter may still be some ways off.  
Nature endures without apparent effort.  
I have survived the passing mystery,  
the metaphor of Spring.

## Technique of Ecstasy

When Wanda enters a room, conversation stops and everyone looks.

Otzi, the 5,000 year old ice man, found in a glacier in the Alps, died as a result of a stone arrowhead in his back that struck an artery, and his brain shows he was then bludgeoned.

Wanda has never had an even cursory conscious thought about death. She is 28. All of her family is long-lived. She has never attended a funeral. On a deeper level, Wanda sees her own demise as many many years off, comfortably.

Otzi's stomach contains wheat grains and ibex meat, with flakes of charcoal. The meat is cooked.

At the edge of her consciousness, Wanda seeks an accidental enlightenment such that life continues to make sense. She believes this will give her a continuing way to live.

Otzi is clothed. He wears shoes.

He was a high altitude shepherd subject, as are all of us, to 3 minds: conscious, subconscious, and God mind. His subconscious was his connection to God mind which was always all around him.

Wanda fears imminent anarchy and lawlessness, doomsday, the breakdown of society. She hoards food and water.

Did Otzi die in fear? Were humans then afraid of death? Surely he was. Was there a presiding myth, a system of gods and goddesses and semi-divine beings with one foot in a heaven and the other foot in this world? Favored ones?

Anthropologists say that religion is a universal given found in all societies. Wanda's religion is the world of fashion, runways, magazine covers. Her temple is New York City's Garment District. Her father's religion was college football. His temple was the Superdome in New Orleans.

Otzi participated in a cult of the dead, stylized burials, communion with them and with their afterlife. The graves of his parents and kin were holy places. At certain times of the year he visited these graves.



He was tattooed with talismans of the next world.

Wanda has a nascent addict's genome.

Her use of alcohol and club drugs will soon disrupt her life.

She will be arrested and charged with misdemeanor possession of marijuana.

Otzi and his kindred brewed a type of fermented mead  
from honey and water. His body shows no signs of alcohol abuse.

Wanda's immune system functions remarkably.

She has never caught anything more serious than a mild cold.

Otzi has gallstones and wear on his knee joints and a gene for heart disease.

His untimely death freed him from further attrition.

In each of their days, Wanda and Otzi have instinctual methods for mood regulation.

They both stay in the positive range of feelings most of the time.

This is effortless for them. As is their vibrant affect.

There is an innate technique of ecstasy for the day by day.

Most people have an inborn tendency for happiness.

They see evidence of a benevolent Creator everywhere.

They feel connected and settled in God.

Their subconscious minds are rooted in God.

Otzi could have articulated this nascent blessedness.

It is deeper in Wanda. It is just a feeling.

Two years from today, Wanda will seek recovery in a 12 step program.

She will begin to open up more fully to spirituality.

Everything is as it has been planned.

Godlessness is not endemic to humanity.

Existential angst is not endemic to humanity.

The nonstop barrage of media, the hegemony of academic ideas,  
the titular power of the scientific method –

every human being is born knowing this truth:

"Love will follow me all the days of my life."

## The Greatest Kleagle in the World

There is no agenda behind a snowflake.

He believes, as do we all; a few core beliefs define everything else for him, all peoples.

It is 2 am or so.

It is 1924; he shovels coal into a boiler's gut and transcends space and time. On the shore of the great Chattahoochee. He goes below and primes an oil pump, again. He shovels. And he shovels. He carries 12.5 percent of my DNA.

He has an extremely developed sense of "other." Nothing of star gates and wormholes and travel through the universe. Much of the fractal logic of the scapegoat.

His people spent a few generations working on the pyramids in Bosnia. Eye 62 squared. "Shall we gather at the river?"

Next week, our Thomas Byron will go north, to Newfoundland, and photograph snowflakes.

There is a diamond spike in the moon or the iron mines under Red Mountain.

The steam travels through a big pipe to the engine room. The engineer drowns. His turbines make the juice. He will awake soon and shoot rubber bands at common house flies.

The life of things impinges, a glorious will to power, domination, triumph, green seed that must grow, mature, reproduce after its kind.

Green, very green, he went to a voodooienne and when a loa fell upon him, it wanted tobacco and rum and he went from there; he drinks a bit too much; he smokes. He will overcome this through force of will.

The Mayans built more pyramids than all the other pyramid-building peoples together.

DNA drives the cell and makes it reproduce after its kind.  
DNA is the culprit. The will. All the rest is just baggage.

The boys at Nuremburg  
were distressingly sane.

He stood on the night shore of the Chattahoochee.  
No thought would come to him bathed in sweat as he was.  
He carried an assumption not really conscious about  
an ordered world. There in the chaos. Something  
to be imposed.

## Prairie Song on the Eve of Father's Day

I regret my father even though  
he paid for my education and  
bought me food, clothes, and the time  
I rode a horse at some paltry carnival  
and he trotted along beside me  
with the reigns around the big circle. I  
was about 3 or so and I knew about cowboys and  
he made me one for a bit.

*"Where is my John Wayne?" Among  
the Prairie songs.*

My father would never try to beat up your father.  
If he be a ragged man he never knows up close  
amidst middle-class accoutrements with no end.

I became curious about the Army and wars.  
He once gave me a talk about the tires on a jeep,  
the tread patterns for various surfaces.

If I asked him "How many soldiers did you kill"?  
He would not engage that. He would grow quiet,  
lugubrious, reticent, clumsy.

*"Well, I looked over Jordan and what did I see?"*

A band of angels and eternal torment by a merciful God who  
is just, justifier, just this. An inexorable will and right to punish.

I had spent a restless night in a Warner Robbins jail.  
Very drunk. I was seamlessly just there, high-level switching  
of many selves, all vying to stay hidden from each other.  
Dr MaCrae said I was sick. He told my parents I was sick.  
He was filling me with tons of antipsychotic meds.  
And shocks. My mother and he were also  
telling me I was an alcoholic.

My dad paid my fine  
and we walked out and got in the car.  
He cried severely.

*"Where is my prairie son?"*

It's all about guts here trapped in the goulash.  
And there are few trees.

## Winter's Deconstruction

When I start the car,  
a belt sings and screeches and burns under the hood, and then snaps.  
Pete, near the huge magnolia in the back yard,  
Stands laughing.

My radiator is frozen.  
Yellow-green icicles dangle from a ruined hose;  
yellow-green slush clogs the overflow reservoir.

We clear out some trash and boxes and roll the car into the garage.  
Pete fills a bucket from a tap on the hot water heater.  
He thaws the frozen motor. He tapes the burst hose.

This is the way my poem will develop, I tell myself,  
sitting on a box of old magazines.  
I am reading the September 1964 issue of GOLF USA.  
Its cover proclaims "Arnie's Army." Inside,  
on slick and slightly yellowed pages, Arnold Palmer is  
in his prime again. He hitches his pants  
at the head of his troops. He lays siege to golf courses.  
Millions of reserves watch, via television,  
this martial Huck Finn just back from the territories.

I remember what it was like to believe  
a place and a way to live existed, somewhere.  
Arnie was a beacon of calm intensity, there, flashing  
a weird American zen of possibilities  
to my stultifying world.

I close the magazine and light a cigarette.  
Pete, leaning under the hood of my car,  
Squints, touches, mutters to himself, considers.  
He could be a surgeon puzzling over an open abdomen.  
He could be a composer rethinking an old familiar score.

I watch him make his repairs.  
A thousand other images, named and unnamed, flood my mind.  
None has a thing to do with what is at hand.

Most winter poems are hackneyed and trite, I tell myself,  
Suggesting old age,

death, demise, change  
in a universe ruled by entropy and despair.  
A stoic acceptance is required.

Pete slams the hood and grins.  
The block isn't cracked, I tell myself.

"It's alright, Big Bubba," he says. "It's almost perfect."

I lay the magazine down.  
Years ago, I saw Arnold Palmer win the Master's.  
He made it look easy, fresh from Olympus, in his prime.  
He plays the Senior Tour, now.  
Even the gods grow old.

Pete is restless, antsy.  
He lifts the garage door.  
He drums impatiently on its raised edge.  
I figure he needs a ride to somewhere, to something, some event,  
Pro wrestling, a tractor pull, happy hour at the VFW.  
Everything is go, go, go, with him. I am always amazed.  
I light a cigarette off the lit end of my last one.  
Pete is no sad guest on the dark earth, I tell myself.

## Wolf man

We take the next exit for a rest stop and coffee.  
Tiger is 7. He has a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles blimp in the back seat.  
He has several action figures. I have listened to his commentary  
and sound effects for a couple of hours as the Turtles battle evil.

We pass a mega-church with a carnival in its parking lot. Once Tiger sees it,  
I have no choice about stopping. There is a haze of fog up here.

The colored lights and neon tubes limn a spectral presence.  
An incredible harvest moon abides in the east.  
The mist thickens toward ground level.  
This place would make a good setting for a wolf man movie.

The rides are generic versions of rockets and airplanes.  
This is a children's carnival. The place brims with kids  
who remember what it is like to take to the air.  
I give Tiger a role of tickets.

I move to the edge of the lot for a cigarette. The interstate is down there  
somewhere. I cannot hear the traffic. Each of these rides has a tinny soundtrack.

I am distracted. Images keep coming up about a pentagram on some victim or another.  
And some lines about a man "who is pure in heart and says his prayers at night"  
becoming a wolf  
"when the wolfbane blooms" and so on. The anguished face of Lon Chaney Jr presents  
itself.

I did not ask to be chemically dependent.  
I would rather have been a wolf man.  
There would be less mayhem and damage associated with my past.  
I would have been shot early on with a silver bullet and killed.  
Larry Talbot did not ask to be a wolf man; circumstances conspired against him.

Most chemically dependent people have childhood trauma issues,  
some fundamental insults in childhood.

Scientists can now cite a gene or two that predisposes to addiction.  
There is much teaching in detox wards about dopamine, a neurotransmitter.  
A high percentage of coincidence exists in identical twins separated at birth.  
I will be two years clean and sober next week.



Tiger has seen me drunk and high. In a blackout, I took him with me when I drove into Mexico to score legal pharmaceuticals at a drug store, last year. All of these thoughts have no bearing on this particular present moment. The darkness condenses. I am insular, strange. My mind suddenly becomes unmoored. A seamless current pulls me deeper into time and space, away from the tyranny of thought, away, down. I see the faces of people I have harmed. I do not know who I am, where I am, or why I am. I know this, and this knowledge is annihilating. Panic rises from my gut and moves into my heart. Fear begins to dissolve my boundaries. I am becoming permeable. I am changing.

I struggle and move and leave that physical space. I will not remain in the shrouded transmogrifying night. I walk back into the carnival. I have a sense of leaving something sinister behind me. My radar is on. I reflexively check for evidence of a blackout, damage. The thread of memory is continuous. The crowd takes me into itself. I see Tiger flying through the air on a biplane. I revel in my restored humanity, the reassurance of another carnage free evening.

## Amazing Janice

She rocks in her rocker beneath the hummingbirds levitating around their feeder.  
Pepe, the rooster next door, awakens the world when he sees her.  
Billy, the red cardinal, pecks at the sunflower seeds around her feet.  
They bask in her words of affirmation, her generative crooning  
in songs that arise in the moment

She is one with the wrens who eat millet.  
Roger, the brown garter snake, suns himself on a warm rock.  
Janice sings to him and the various frogs and lizards.  
She blesses the honey bees working the flowers.  
Monarch butterflies get directions on directions south for winter.  
They hover around her head; the fine turbulence of their wings  
will eventually calm typhoons off the China coast.

A garden spreads out from her into the yard and around the house.  
She is also a consort of the green and growing world; red roses, daylilies, petunias,  
foxglove,  
impatiens, marigolds, begonias receive her daily blessing and thrive.

Stanley, a Persian cat, runs his motor in Janice's lap.  
In this peaceable kingdom, Francis, a grey squirrel, pauses on her breast.  
Fred, a mockingbird, runs through some impersonations on her shoulder.  
Uncle Will, a graying beagle, relaxes on the cool concrete.

Janice-- full of grace, an island of peace in a world of wonder,  
a friend of animals, a vegetable queen, a fructifying presence--  
carries her kingdom of heaven into every present moment.

## Minstrel Show

In Cub Scouts in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade on a stage  
in a Methodist Church fellowship hall, (I swear  
this happened; it did), they dressed us in blackface  
and costumes and trotted us out. The assembled parents howled  
mightily. And so on.

There are hard lives, but the capacity for joy yet exists.

We had a white MC. I was Brother Tambo.  
A friend was Brother Bones. In between  
was our extended family.

Have you ever let someone call you by  
a different name and just tolerated it,  
never correcting them.

Mr Bones, a hyperdimensional being who  
exists on the other side of quarks and strings, first  
appeared to me that night. He danced  
on the head of our guffawing Scoutmaster.  
Only I could see him. Bones is a bleached  
skeleton in tophat and tails.

Badinage.

I see the effects of changes in my deep mind.  
Corrections along the narrow path.

I should not think that penury will not exist, again,  
or the auction block, or the concentration camp.

All the world's languages come from the One language.

Brother Bones is a memory dropped into the abyss  
of the unconscious non-integrated material, hitting  
a floor there and scattering like quicksilver.

You taught me that someone was "other, less than."

In the church kitchen getting donuts, I saw my image  
reflected on a big steel pot. I had used burnt cork.

I knew of the casual evil living in the heart, then,  
the white middle-class heart, supposed repository  
of the Holy Spirit

I must concentrate on joy.

I had a mental cancer.

Its tumors are in remission.

There is always the malignant possibility.

## Material Juju

1

An article in a tabloid:  
"Ossuary Holding The Bones Of Jesus Discovered."

This human traffic.  
I am only a pretender to esoteric knowledge  
about weeds, grasses, and two-by-fours.

Shepherd of crows and buzzards.  
Friend of mournful processions.  
Prince of the power of the air.

I suffered in the camp,  
and I stood guard outside the wire  
in the place of failed suicides.

*(Mr Bones was commandant.  
He liked not having to wear a uniform.  
He dazzled us with a tie and tails softshoe,  
one evening.)*

This river lives. This water is alive.

I inhabit the green kingdom  
of the lizard and the snake.

2

An article in a tabloid:  
"Urn Containing Ashes Of Elvis Stolen."

A streetwalker plunges  
a flaming spear into my heart.  
In an ecstasy sense leaves me.

Postmodern madonna.  
Twentyfirst-century transhumanist dream.  
No piety for you. You  
carry the seeds  
of several terrible diseases

Incontinent heart,  
dragging your trauma about  
like a ball and chain.  
Victim identity.

Brass tits.  
Spiked womb.  
Blinding embrace.  
"Love," it calls me.

3

An article in a tabloid:  
"Artesian Well Drillers Pierce The Roof Of Hell."

The unfortunate scapegoat, so necessary  
for all of us.

Cathexis.  
Like God and Adam touching  
fingers on a chapel ceiling.

Incarnation.  
I am more at home  
with carnival.

I fly through many births and deaths,  
with and without ego.

Grace.

4

An unshaven and unbathed, mentally ill man  
standing in front of the fountain at Five Points  
gives this shabby sermon:  
"Agnostics, Atheists, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews,  
Latter Day Saints, Moslems, Taoists, Witnesses of Jehovah,  
and all the various and sundry other friends and enemies of God will be  
disappointed to have such vast company in heaven.  
God thinks favorably of me  
and you, too."

## Poet 2, too

Waiting in the waiting room,  
a running sound receding, a woman's voice:  
"We'll get a pair of pliers and do it that way."

Buzzards come to town each winter. They  
gather on the struts and spars of the water tower,  
scores of humped and brooding figures portending.

The men in the addiction treatment outpatient program  
congregate and smoke around picnic tables. They play cards.  
A few Rhode Island Red chickens often cross the street  
and make their tentative and purposeful way among the men  
who toss them scraps and such.

(One day the vultures will attack a  
chicken;  
the men will rally.)

Three buzzards circle the thermals high above  
the men's program. The men joke about this.  
Hear them:

"They must think we are tasty," says Doc.  
"Pickled," adds Jeb.

Today finds John Galen Holliday, MD at a picnic table  
and in recovery. His liver is enraged, his bladder  
is streaked with scar tissue. The lining of his stomach bleeds.  
His guts are raw and inflamed and doing only  
intermittent peristalsis. His BP is 159 over 99.

(He is more dead than alive.)

This is his first day in a treatment program.  
This is his first treatment program.  
He plays spades.

When you're in recovery, and something throws a wrench  
into the machine — fate, bad luck, satan — and you  
think "Is all this shit happening again? Already?"

(The stuff out here comes from me, a separate poet. It will work along a different metaphor.)

John Galen was boorish during detox.  
He wanted acupuncture and nutritional supplements  
and a cure. He is given addiction as disease,  
and 12 steps, and a lot of work.

(Doc is not a victim of disease.  
It is a moral weakness.)

Doc's brain is yet beginning to heal.  
As are the other men's brains. In med school  
he was taught that this was not possible.  
The tyranny of the insulted neuron.

(The vultures mass on the  
supports of the water tower like  
Cossacks with poor posture.)

Poet number 2 is not a real poet; he has no  
abiding angst, no overweening ego. He loves  
cheeseburgers.

(Poet 1 had unfortunate childhood  
experiences.)

Hear John G:  
"It all comes down to the ability of God  
to forget our sins. He does, you know.  
Or she does. Or it does. Orrrr....I am  
confused. Yet I will to be confused, yet I  
will to carry on."



## Stations of the YMCA

Brother Justin was my best-friend's father.  
He was the Director of the City Y.  
I never heard him use the n-word.  
Or my parents.

The Lee Circle YMCA still has rooms for rent.  
You have to leave during Mardi Gras, though.

The statue of Robert E Lee stands resolutely  
in the upper air, free of automobile exhaust  
but not pigeons.

Today, I notice the wooden Y on the wall  
across from the elevator. There is a small bronze plaque  
on the upper stretch of one arm. The Y is about the size  
of a good Catholic crucifix.

Or a Station of the Cross. I enjoy working out, here.  
It is not odious or a slow torturous business. How resolute  
was General Lee?

On the small bronze plaque is an open Bible and John 17:21.

He did not stop Sherman. He was no help  
during Reconstruction. Every southerner  
of my generation has been taught of Lee  
in hushed and serene tones. The War  
of Secession.

Rather than obey the Civil Rights Act of 1964,  
the YMCA of my youth became the City Health Club.  
I still went there after school with other children  
of my age. Or on some Saturdays with my father.

Under the weight of his cross, bleeding  
from his scourging, Jesus falls for the first time.

An alabaster Robert E Lee has his hand on his heart.

In the singularity, when machines become autonomous,  
operating with purpose, who will I trust? What I just told you  
may be true. Who will not know what they are doing?  
Who will willingly hurt me?

## The Colors of Revelry

At a cheap carnival in a strip mall's parking lot,  
I am compelled to revelry. I revel for a costly reprieve.  
I have pink cotton candy. Several children travel  
with me. They are dressed like turnips.

Aunts Wilhemena and Helene steer the schooner  
of elementary ed in Prattsville, Georgia, in that, the middle part  
of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among the sons and daughters  
of millworkers and one-eyed subsistence farmers, there.

Pill nation. Pills. Pills. I dream of round white tablets  
with the imprint of pharmaceutical concerns and lozenges  
of earthy hues and capsules done up in primary colors  
and faceless yellow pills.

The schooner sails through Pharmacology.

Pastel painted elephants goaded among  
cheap neon tubes burning, always shining.  
Among spinning rides with music and  
more light, moving.

I give my children tickets and they disperse.

"Behold he comes/riding on the clouds/shining  
like the sun."

Carried away in the mouth of a fox yet  
escaping said working-out by trickery.

Blue, green, purple surrounded  
by plain white bulbs strobing  
the sad and tawny background  
of our celebrations.

Janice sports a crow's mask.  
She has become my power animal.

The schooner sails through Anthropology.

“Talk to that fox, brother;  
tell on your disease, Chanticleer.”  
This floor resembles a chess board.  
A white paper mache horse’s head is tilted back  
on Uncle Ernie’s head who resembles  
a Franciscan monk.

I dressed as a pirate on Walpurgis Eve.  
The black eye patch. With only one eye.  
I was raised in a world of revelry, debauch.  
I can only make hand signs about which I have to also  
try to explain the meaning.

The schooner sails through Dissipation.

Festive midget clowns and tom toms and women  
who are not white. Anodyne.

I am come from a land with no sunset  
seeking carnival. I’ve come for a room  
with a view,

of Canal Street,  
of the most gimcrack celebration.  
(I read all of Vonnegut’s extant work  
in the late 70’s. “Gimcrack” is one of the words  
I learned.)

Like a chainsaw cutting butter.  
Fundamental annihilation in process  
at the base of personality.  
Growing.

The schooner sails around Ethics.

As a lad at the Grant Park Zoo, I watched  
a baboon gather up its stuff and throw it  
at the patrons.

A young girl child weeps beside the horses.  
She is overcome with joy. It is obvious.

The eye on the top level  
of the pyramid winks for me. Or  
it never winks for me.

Prattsville is an austere place. The schooner carries clouds of butterflies.

## Rooster

Smiley struts amongst his gabble of hens  
like a drum major at half-time. In the parking lot  
of the men's drug/alcohol rehab, the men gather  
and smoke and drink coffee and play cards around picnic tables.  
The chickens are working the area of the in-ground trash cans.

Smiley can yodel.

Just now, he tries to mount a hen who shrugs him off. He  
tries again. The drug addicts/alcoholics turn  
from their tobacco, coffee, spades  
and cheer and hoot our rooster on.  
Still the hen prevails.

The recovering boys are bound to celibacy  
for one year. Not Smiley. No.

"Err alay hi, err alay hi, err alay hi hoooh."

Smiley is Mose's seeing-eye chicken.  
Mose is an elderly Catholic deacon and mentor  
of John Galen Holliday, M.D.--

I want to go to the tree world  
of the Hundred Acre Woods--

Doc is more clean and sober than he has ever been--  
There are pathways in and among those treetops--

Doc as a newborn: "I am a baby in diapers. I am  
without beginning and without end"--

I walked the green pathways. I travelled in safety--

Smiley is fat. He is a service chicken. Mose harnesses  
the rooster and puts on dark sunglasses and pretends  
to be led around by him at the fountain. Various fountain  
-goers throw down fast food for Smiley. Mose favors  
a 72 year old Stevie Wonder at these times.

Doc has always had sex every day, mostly with a partner.  
These days he is experiencing a rigorous celibacy. It is  
just one more too-much thing. A bit. A little bit.

At the fountain, Mose sometimes pretends to be deaf.  
Millie signs for him. She knows he can hear.

On the planet, Doc, and the recovering recalcitrant  
addicts/drunks are beginning to feel, again, life  
unmitigated.

All of these are not doing time, are not just hanging on. They  
have only forgotten a common level of rejoicing that is coming back to them.  
They are beginning to feel, once again, the bone-level joy in the marrow.  
And Smiley can yodel.

## 1,000 Shocks

The Edge of Rhino:

What do I do?  
Why am I made like this?  
How does it serve to have  
a Creator?

My horn is in a Chinaman's stomach.  
My horn is in a Chinaman's schlong.

Close, startled brute moving.  
Animal essence. I remember  
my previous life as a human.  
And so on.

I am going to remain true to myself,  
this time. That's all it takes. Any life  
is good.

Pelican Zone:

I have lived among the pelicans for months  
at a time. I am like a missionary. Once a year,  
they terrorize the boys all night and  
remove their foreskins with a shard of glass.  
And the boys are men.

The Sin Eater:

On the bayou, at the Tarpon Rodeo,  
4 dozen raw oysters, 12 soft-shell crabs,  
5 seafood platters, 4 pitchers of draft beer.  
At his own picnic table, Pauly will be unable to move  
much for a few hours. His first tentative ambulation  
will be to the latrine to pee. He has a phenomenal  
bladder.

Backwards Shopping:

This day begins at 11 pm before I fall asleep.  
And runs it all in reverse. Every stolen breath.

The Signifying Cash Machine:

“Yo. Where was mama last night?  
I bet I know.” There is no good way  
to kick back at him. Slim and Todd  
drove their car through the storefront  
and snatched our machine. They  
took him to the state fair and installed him  
in the dunking booth. “Inbred hillbilly freaks.”  
Terrence never curses. He generates revenue.  
Now his cash is wet. “Hello sweet thing.  
Chippee chippee?”



## Tree Top Walker

Husbandman of pines, big tall southern trees —  
he shods his feet with spikes and climbs and attaches ropes.  
“Take a load off Annie,” he croons. “Take a load for free.”  
He swings to the other trees without touching the ground;  
he prunes with a pruning saw. He is at home in the tree tops.

(And the fellow calling the dance says “Promenade.”)

I was 17 when I realized I had no capacity for happiness  
apart from beer and pills and pot.

Today, some of my pine limbs are shading my neighbor’s house.  
I like him and his wife for many good reasons. His dogs do not bark  
at unfortunate times. The machines in his shop are not loud.  
He looks just like one of my favorite uncles.

(The dance caller announces a Virginia reel,  
and all the dancers fall into it easily.)

In my dreams,  
I lay my burdens down and vanish  
into the heart of the American night. I pay the tree man in cash.  
He is a keeper of esoteric tree knowledge.

One year, I came into fleeting contact with my feelings, or  
maybe only a rumor of my feelings. Through my life  
up until then I could not see or feel my loss.  
I was not blind to it; I just could not see it  
or touch it or hear it or smell it or taste it.

(The dance man calls for a waltz, and all the guys  
and gals in western wear grumble and sit it out.)

I am 56, now, and I am constantly told my life  
will inexorably change for the better in many many ways  
if I will only drive a certain car or use a certain auto insurance carrier  
or drink a different brand of cola or use a better denture adhesive  
or dental floss or mouthwash or deodorant,  
and so on.

Another neighbor, Kameeka, teaches kindergarten and is a survivor  
of female genital mutilation. She grows eggplants and tomatoes in her back yard.  
Her dog, Binky, is a Jack Russell.

As a child, I had an intricate tree ecosphere in which I lived and travelled.  
They were massive hardwood trees. Winter never touched them.  
My world was their foliage. I walked in peace along huge limbs on well-worn paths.  
I lived in this arboreal neighborhood with Winnie the Pooh and Owl and Eeyore.  
We sang together. And every created thing with breath sang with us.  
No one could see me from the ground. This was a real place.  
I left it as a teen; I carry it yet in my heart.

(The dance caller dismisses the dancers.  
"You all come on back now, you here.")

There are undercover musicians in the French Quarter.  
Once I was walking on Royal Street. I came upon an empty chair.  
A guitar was propped against it. A crowd had gathered.  
Just then a young man walked out and took up the guitar  
and sat on the worn chair. He looked and sang like James Taylor;  
he had a great gift. I dropped a 5 into his hat and requested "Fire and Rain."  
He asked me to sing with him. We sang the song. When he relinquished the guitar  
he said to me "Thank you for lending your voice, brother."

I really needed to sing that song, then.  
If I desire them, special moments can happen.  
This is pain's surcease. Life is also good on the ground.

Jake is the man who picks up my garbage every Tuesday and Friday.  
He tells me that two yet abide: joy and love.  
He says I must feel the joy; I must spread the love.  
"And the Word was Joy," he says. "And the Word was Love."

Accidental being. It does not frighten me.  
Life is rich with blessings. Life can be lived above the fray.  
I know of the possibility. Blessed is anyone who will travel in the heights  
and sing there.

## Volition Trumps DNA

*Even our genes are subject to our beliefs.*

**--Vin Prihamanda MD**

Animals play.  
Sea lions play. Otters play. Lions play.

Humans need scapegoats.

Humans also gambol. Red and yellow and black and white  
*(not a compound subject in standard English,  
adjectives modifying the noun and simple subject)*  
humans *(and an intransitive verb)* gambol.

I'm talking to me.  
*(Frolic is a synonym.)*

Mose is pretending to be blind. He comes around with his seeing-eye chicken,  
an overweight rooster named Smiley, in harness on a leash. They  
join Thomas Byron at the Storyteller fountain.  
"You forgot your Hoover cane," says Thomas.

Mose sits on Thomas's bench.  
He resembles Stevie Wonder the elder.  
"This is surely a beautiful day," says Mose.  
"Glorious," adds Thomas.

Smiley is very happy guiding the faux-blind Mose around.  
Thomas gives the bird a small mound of shelled sunflower seeds.  
Mose is a former AME pastor and now Catholic deacon.  
"Errhhh a errhh a durrr," crows Smiley.

Last week Thomas had a vision.  
In his heart he stood on the levee.  
The river water became souls, billions of souls flowing into God,  
flowing inexorably a few miles away into boundless sea.

The fountain's jets arc water up and it settles like rain  
on a man with a goat's head reading from a book ( I  
actually met the analogue of this creature when I was 6),  
reading to dogs and sheep and an alligator and several frogs. Actually,  
the water comes from the mouths of 5 frogs at the points  
of a pentagram.

"Ready to take more pictures of snowflakes?" asks Mose.  
"I'm going north next week," says Thomas.

From 1883 to 1968, 1,297 whites and 3,446 blacks were lynched in the US of A.

The rooster pauses for air.  
A girl teen on rollerskates sets down a piece of sausage for Smiley.  
The rooster loses interest in the seeds and begins to rub his head on her silky smooth and firm legs.  
"Errhhh a errhhh a durrr," he crows.

Thomas asks "How are you now, hon, not even 2 decades into your job on the planet?" She considers this an inane question from an older person and not worthy of any reply. She skates away.  
"You scare people," says Mose.

The Hebrew priest placed his hand on the goat's head and confessed the sins of his people and then drove the goat away, into the wastelands.

Delbert Whiggins is the name of the white slaveholder who raped Mose's great great grandmother and contributed a sixteenth of Mose's genome. "His guile follows me," says Mose.  
"I picked that up in the early 1800's."

Mose has lately been witnessing to Thomas about Jesus Christ.  
*(This is a compound noun; it is only a name, as John Smith is a name.)*  
Thomas has known about the redoubtable Galilean for a little over 300 years.  
For Thomas, Jesus is a salutary influence, like Henry David Thoreau or Mahatma Gandhi.

Thomas is over 300 years old. His body floods each day with vigor; he naturally produces great quantities of antioxidants; his mitochondria produce very few oxygen free radicals; he ages slowly, very slowly.

He saw firsthand the human slavery as practiced in the American South. He detested it, chattel, people as chattel with not even the slightest chance to take the helm of any personal vehicle of will, slaves belonging to Christian owners who justified the system with Biblical teachings. On a not quite conscious level, then, Thomas stopped considering a God of love.

John Galen Holliday, MD, poet of storm and stress who uses an innocuous pen name, walks up and sets a half-eaten hamburger with all the toppings in front of Smiley.  
"Errhhh a errhhh a durrr," crows Smiley, forgetting the last bits of sausage.

"Alright men," says Doc.  
"Alright brother," says Mose.

Thomas considers poetry to be of more value than Western medicine.  
He eschews pleasantries: "You have the gift  
of naming. Never give it up. Never relinquish it."

Doc sits between Mose and Thomas.  
His attention is on Smiley. Animals fascinate him.  
He believes them to be free of the human scourge of concupiscence.  
He once wanted to be a veterinarian.

Doc has lately become a Catholic Christian. Mose is his Deacon.  
"You gave me a piece of the Host that Father consecrated at Mass, this a.m." he says.  
"God is in the details," says Mose. Doc goes to Mass every day.  
He is almost a year out of serious addiction,  
Valium- Dilauded- Fentanyl.

Last week Doc had a vision.  
In his heart he saw Jesus addressing hundreds of followers.  
Jesus said "You must eat my flesh and drink my blood."  
Most of the hearers were offended. Jesus watched them leave.

Chemical dependency runs in Doc's family.  
He has lately completed an exhaustive periodical search  
on addiction as disease.

In the late 1980's, he made a study of common birth defects.  
Spina bifida bothered him, cleft palates bothered him,  
but it was the anencephalic monsters that he could not shake,  
newborns with only a vegetative brain, no higher function, short-lived,  
unable to apprehend beauty, or humor, or themselves.  
This solidified his atheism.

Doc's chorus gambols in the fountain.  
Six grungy old men and two semi-hot women and Jeanette,  
a project-dwelling cynic – they leave off Doc's case just now.  
They hoot and whoop in the spray. They splash each other.  
They may also be scared of Smiley who is still working on his hamburger.

"There is evidence now that our genes do not necessarily determine  
our biology," says Doc. "We are actually not at the mercy of our DNA."

Doc segues into a reverie. As a child, he was taken to an alligator ranch  
near the Okefenokee Swamp. This was before alligator meat  
began to be regarded as a delicacy by anyone other than the Cajuns  
in Louisiana. A nearby man tossed a cigar into one of the gator's mouths.  
Another guy threw an empty Coke bottle at the same gator.  
This rankled Doc. He asked his father about it. His Dad called them  
a couple of "lowland plains hillbillies."

And so on.

Our John G. suddenly wonders why he is thinking these thoughts.  
In recovery, he has learned about triggering circumstance.  
At times, he is able to watch his mindstream in a dispassionate manner.  
He does this every morning when he meditates. Right now,  
he believes his chorus is just rattling the bars on his cage.

Last week, Smiley had a vision.  
In his heart, he found himself in a chicken coop with dozens of fine hens.  
The signals from all of them were "Go!" He went,  
and he went, and he went.

Jeanette takes an abandoned cup and throws water at Doc.  
One of his grungy old guys tells her to "desist." Doc once believed  
the chorus was him. He no longer thinks this way, however.

Smiley is the fortunate product of hundreds of years  
of selective breeding. He is randy and potent by design.

Thomas and Doc and Mose are the products of many many many thousands  
of years of breeding based on vital yet subtle definitions of beauty and desirability.

Everything gambols.  
Dogs gambol. Sheep gambol. Alligators gambol. Frogs gambol.  
Doc's chorus gambols. Gastrointestinal tracts gambol. Brains/minds/hearts gambol.  
Immune systems gambol. We all gambol on many levels. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
gambol.  
Smiley gambols. Thomas and Doc and Mose gambol on a bench beside the Storyteller  
Fountain.

Mind and imagination, will and emotion are synonymous to soul in these three men  
and a chicken. Any being – air, rock, water, wood, flesh, spirit-- carries existence.  
Thinking is only one form of being. Today, Thomas and Doc and Mose and Smiley  
and the entirety of the universes exist with ease. (*The infinitive "to be" implies  
a state of being; "I exist" is a complete sentence.*)

At the Storyteller Fountain, just now, Thomas and Doc and Mose and Smiley are not  
merely waiting for their various genes to turn on or turn off. For them, intelligence, love,  
joy,  
body-mind and heart-mind are subject to will, and even will proceeds from choice.  
They are not consciously aware of this.

Last week, Mose had a vision.  
In his heart, he stood on the bank of a river.  
A very Semitic Jesus stood waist deep in the swirling water.  
He bid Mose to come into the silted stream.

He cradled Mose's head and lay him back into the flood.  
He brought him up again and Mose was all alone.  
A white dove hit him squarely on the head. It was light;  
light; it was all light; nothing but light.

For Thomas and Mose and Doc and Smiley, each with good treasure  
in his heart, balanced on a fine point, volition trumps DNA. Nothing  
is determined apart from belief. Beliefs operate their bodies and their minds  
and manipulate the nearby quantum fields of reality.  
Each cooperates in the creation of this common world.  
They are not really consciously aware of this, either.

## A Profound Meditation

I am unstuck in myself, reflexive  
to a fault. Who am I?

One evening, on the golf course, about 30 deer  
crossed the fairway ahead of me.

“Who are you?” Dr Petz asked me  
as I sat by his 6<sup>th</sup> floor window, looking out  
at the Nashville Parthenon.

The deer yet seemed skittish and real.  
The question brought on a panic attack.

Once I sat by a window in a tall hotel in Atlanta.  
A beam of light found me and I floated out 60 stories  
above Peachtree Street and vanished  
into a brilliance.

Where do I go when I vanish like that?  
Or my vanishing was a brilliance. Or  
there were no casual cameras at that height.  
And nobody saw this amazing change of state.

I have one state. Or I have many states.  
What is all the stuff when I sleep. I have flown  
from great heights and off my humble back porch.

Freddy was a beer man at the Braves’ games.  
“Get your cold beer here!” I was too young. I was.

Nothing happens to me that is not  
in my consciousness. Already. There  
must be consent. There must be. There.

I never told Dr Petz about the levitation thing.  
I never levitated out his 6th story window.  
Or about the funny little guys from Mars.

Once I went into a late night strip club.  
The stripper did a partial lap dance on me.  
I never asked nor did I pay her for it.  
It was late Saturday night or early Sunday.  
I wanted alcohol.



Where do I go during sleep?  
How does my body continue  
until I return? Things happen  
when I am awake. Marvellous  
dislocations

## Cave Man

It all comes down to being able to do it  
without thinking about doing it. Like smiling.

This cave is littered with rat stuff. I guess.  
Or maybe it's remnants of old charcoal fires.  
There is an obvious great room or living space  
which gradually tapers down to a tunnel of some sorts.

Rats could live here; vermin could flourish; years  
of lice in my hair, biting. The closeted smell of unbathed bodies.  
I could look anyone in the eye.  
I am salvation.

I have an electric torch. It is my resolve.  
I can linger in this anteroom or go further back, down  
into the base of the mountain, the foundation of it.  
I become different people. It is awkward.

I did well on city streets, lying among pedestrians.

I am told these caves were cut out by water, inexorable over time,  
great stretches of it, passing, a shroud I wear on my face and covering  
deep mind.

I become a man with a bison head.  
What do I do? Why do my horns give me power?  
Why is everything reducible to hunger, food and a driving onward  
urge to fructify, procreate, settle? I will myself forward, always  
forward as if something draws me there. What is time?

Even rock must yield to water.

"Have you been trained in the use of this gun?" I asked.  
"No," he replied "you just aim and pull the trigger."

Down the tunnel on its walls are figurative figures of what these people ate.  
And what ate these people. The paintings bring God into it, survival. Blessed  
hunting. The force who sent the animals they killed and ate. That assured  
them the animals would never leave, always be available, especially  
when it got cold.

The animals never seemed to suffer like we did.  
They never spoke. Apart from their noises. We  
would surround one, throw big rocks at its head,  
kill it with a spear.

Every year, worrying the sun would drop lower and  
lower, go away.

I am loosed, now. I enter the stream. In my hand,  
I have a sculpted figure of a woman. Small, stone.  
All hips and breasts. In the lull before dawn,  
I take on flesh, again, to become  
a tribe.

## To Bless With Words

*for Noam Chomsky*

As a child I always wanted a pet Cobra.  
Sister Mary Elizabeth Steelwrgin wanted to handle  
rattlesnakes, eastern diamond-backs.

The villagers are incensed.  
They gather at my gate, brandishing  
crude farm implements. Is it harvest time?  
They could only be scythes and rakes and forks  
amidst anger levitating loudly at my gate.

I am only a man with excellent hypertrophied upper-body  
skeletal musculature. (He looks too happy, untempered  
by the common woe.) Sr Steelwrgin considers  
bodybuilding to be an attempt towards disorder  
or perhaps order.

I missed out on the war.  
I need to hang my angst on that wall, there.  
To explain the pain, the goddamn freaking stuff of  
abiding pain.

Sister Mary Steelwrgin When  
is of the low water Whens. Sister knows about geologic time. She revels in it.  
She has a framed photograph of a fossilized lizard with wings. And another  
of a famous fishapod.

She knows about the dearth, however, of transitional species in the fossil record.  
She does not consciously deal with this. It causes her to dream,  
from time to time, about her goldfish flying out into her living room  
and her parakeet backstroking in the aquarium.

(He of the well-kept upper-body skeletal  
musculature. He of well-defined and swollen  
biceps, triceps, deltoids, anterior portion of  
the upper pectoral.)

Dr Ninnyhammer:  
"If you want to not encounter a snake in the woods,  
go with me." (He has seen 2 snakes, not in the woods.  
One was a minor green snake in his neighbor's garden.  
The other was a water snake when he waded into the lake  
looking for golf balls. He had used his unshod feet for  
initial contact.)

A metaphor of warfare, life as perilous, God often asleep,  
and so on. I always have everything I need; it just does not seem  
that way. A million heart-breaking centuries. This is one  
thing that would justify my discomfiture.

If I had shared in that nihilism, if my invisible wounds  
had arisen there.

“Slings and arrows” and “outrageous fortune.”

During the time of the Gang of 4, Tif wore glasses.  
He was seized and made to live and work in a sewage plant.  
He only had one set of clothes.

On the hill, in his pen, a Rhode Island Red rooster named “Smiley”  
crows vociferously. Down the block, another captive rooster  
takes it up. It spreads across the small town. This system  
is very much like the wall-taps used by the boys  
at the Hanoi Hilton.

There is some part of me that is not locally bound,  
that knows the future. What is intuition? It does not  
know any boundaries.

“Take arms against a sea of troubles.”

This is not the beginning of anything:

Crude common grunts and rills about food, a fire, a cave,  
and the overwhelming joining of all of this, and sleep, and others,  
someone to share in the progress, all fueled by an essential  
primal substance driving all of this one cell at a time  
into a future.

In high school and Happy, my bird dog who  
was only ever alone in his backyard, would point  
out covies of bluejays and armadillos  
when I threw his tennis ball.

This builds and multiplies and expands  
and discovers images deep in minds, and caves,  
and takes on distance and units of sound in  
a proto-speech. “Water” sounds like water.  
“Death” sounds like death and these feelings  
that accompany everything, Joy.

You have known it in night dreams. It all. You, and remember in your heart, this: "It is only if you just remember. Someone takes a sprig and traces something essential into wet clay. Someone deciphers it. And the thing explodes."