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## The Land of Give and Take

Tyler Farrell

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# The Land of Give and Take

TYLER FARRELL



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COVER ARTWORK: *Untitled, mixed media on paper by Kyle Fitzpatrick – [kylefitzpatrick.com](http://kylefitzpatrick.com)*

COVER DESIGN: *Siobhán Hutson*

For my wife, Joan and our two sons, Holden and Linus.

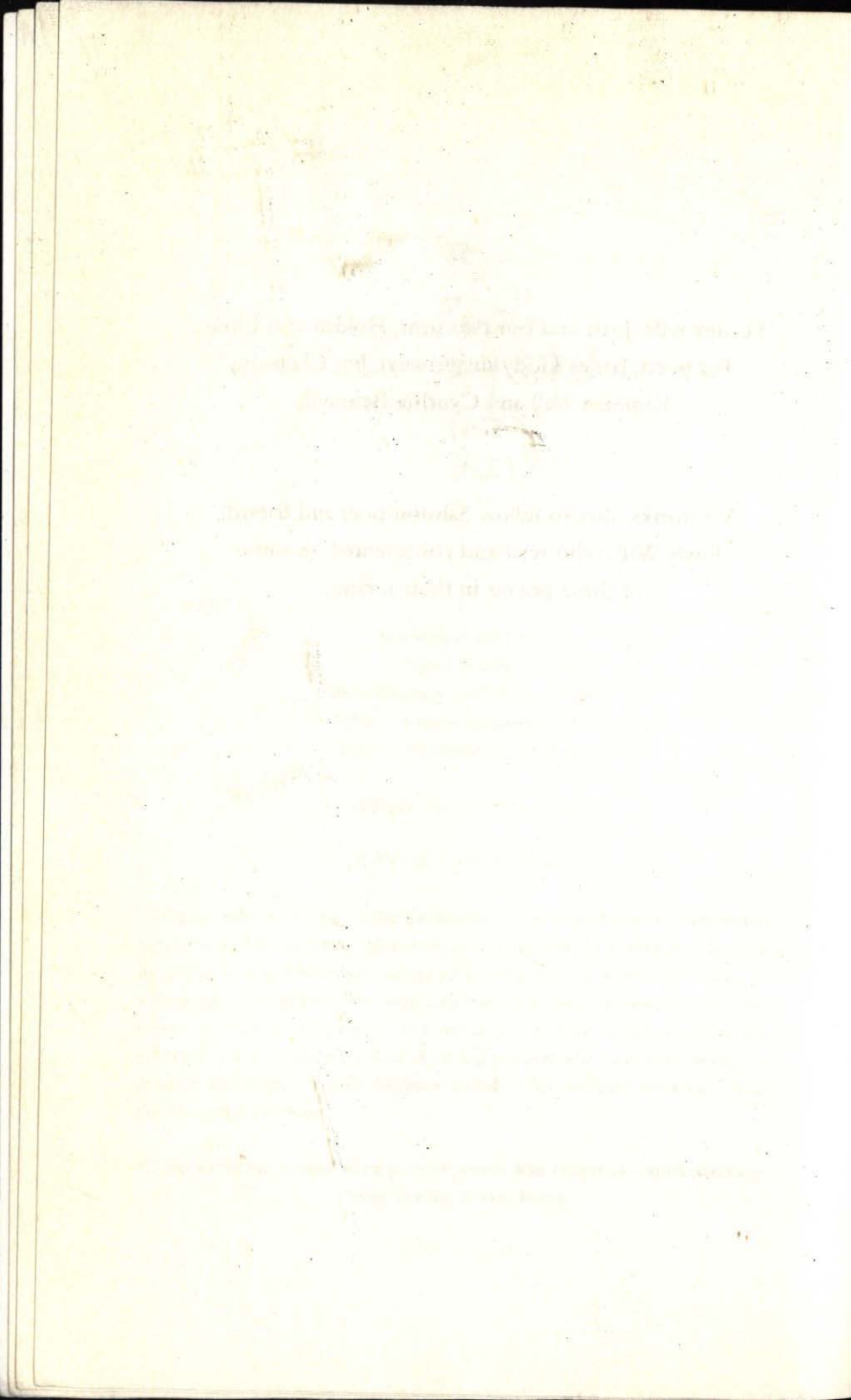
For poets: James Liddy (*in memory*), Jim Chapson,

Eamonn Wall and Cynthia Belmont.

My thanks, also, to fellow Salmon poet and friend,

Emily Wall, who read and commented on some  
of these poems in their infancy.





*And yet and yet  
Is this my dream, or the truth?*

W. B. YEATS

*He kept young as one who tells the truth keeps young.*

JAMES LIDDY

## Acknowledgements

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## I. The Honest to God Truth

*Even if a thing is true it by no means follows that one  
is bound to reveal it.*

LORD ALFRED DOUGLAS

*Oscar Wilde: A Summing Up*

*And not satirically or humorously true, but simply the truth.  
Pure unadulterated truth—luminous, profound and essential.*

SIMONE WEIL

in a last letter to her parents



1. The House of God

2. The House of God

3. The House of God

4. The House of God

5. The House of God

6. The House of God

7. The House of God

8. The House of God

9. The House of God

10. The House of God

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28. The House of God

29. The House of God

30. The House of God

## A Found Postcard

Dear Alyce-

Just a card to let you know  
we got the "letter" you  
sent to Jerry at Camp Carson -  
Cashed it already.

Going uptown soon.

Arrived yesterday in the middle  
of a parade honoring  
the founder of Denver.

Have driven farther  
now than ever before.

Still all the news I know.

Thanks again. Love and Kisses.

-Bernice



## The Influence of Joyce and Clarke on the Loss of My Faith

Politics in the summer sermons of my youth like fiends thrown overboard at the first instance of lust and love and sex with slight girlfriends. The hell of voices sighing, waiting for repentance while the priest reaches inside his pocket to adjust his microphone. The way the old ladies fawn over him like a flock of sheep, moocows lowing at the classics, the bible studies on Sunday and the choir directed by Sister Bernadette who broke her arm at the news of runaways, shocked, smoking pot under the slide at Wilson park. The breath of God, the anger casting lawgivers like a voice of conscience. I remember dispensation by the Pope on St. Patrick's Day and talk of celibacy and gluttony, the shadowed miles of the mind, the temptation when Junior High was more stress than college, like suffering sinners crying at the feet of Lucifer. I stood at the base of the statue of Mary and watched her crush the serpent with her bare feet. The sisters talked of doubt, proper handwriting, hovering above us like dark angels filled with eyes and sight for the low classes of people too poor to give to the church. Saint Catherine of Siena would rather walk a track of red coals than gaze upon the face of the devil again. She prayed a solemn hush, instead of luscious fields in the morning mist where sloth and pride ran in the dark flashing torches like candles at the head

of a deathbed. The modern church was  
lines around our eyes, fell from the ceiling  
every Wednesday and a sample of shrines  
beheld in the form of grottoes, sand in my  
hands. The small souls sign their names on  
pages and pages of dollar bills in order  
to witness the shaking of hands, thrown  
dirt over shoulders and into the graveyard.  
The new church renovated with fear  
and low words. They taught me to wonder  
at the start of our hours, the flesh of the  
Crucifix and not of humans where blood  
dripped on the heads of the damned.  
The heavens were a roar, children of  
some soul cleansed by baptism. The fires  
rekindle with a birth in flame and I sit  
with my mind in a book. The essence  
and glow somehow stained my eyes,  
but the sight has opened a way in void  
of spirit, the walls of clay, the shapeless  
body, the word, the language of myself.  
The bleak rain and phantoms have gone  
and the refuge of sinners has been cured  
by Saint Thomas, the angelic doctor,  
the divine light where spirits of the un-  
defiled Virgin rekindling my thoughts  
on a plain bench reading of youth, age,  
sinners, saints, mortals torn from a book  
by my Gods. All worship and revere  
the truest of all sins, the Bible without  
judgment, the counsel of highest nature,  
the holy words of your two Irish sons.

## The Truth of Angels and Ravens

If you have ever read an autobiography  
of an Angel you know  
they first kiss every page, then let  
them float bound with white hair  
in the morning mist of sunshine  
until they drop  
into the mailbox of God.  
If God rejects the submission  
(for he gets far more  
than he can possibly publish)  
he summons a raven  
to collect the words - the small  
symbols for mankind to decipher - and ties  
them to a black feathered back  
with golden string made from  
stolen ingots confiscated from wall street  
embezzlers and big business  
brokers. Then the raven swoops down  
to earth and drops the manuscript  
at a bus stop, or train depot,  
or alley way in Brooklyn to watch  
the words blow like wind waves  
of everyday lives.  
And that is how we know  
Angels write quite exaggerated  
prose about the possibility of their existence.



## Ode to Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet (May Day 1673)

Louis,  
what philosopher  
are you reading tonight  
under upper Midwest stars?  
Perhaps Plato  
or Aristotle?  
I am partial to poetry  
by Crashaw.  
He is one of the converted.  
Read him in the pine forest  
with a pipe after mass  
while the shadows  
of fur bearing  
mammals expire.  
The beaver pelt  
for Jacques' birthday  
will provide warmth  
to kindle this, his sacrifice.

And you, Fr. Marquette,  
with Jesuit wonders  
of making  
the Portage (Wisconsin)  
and eventual descent down  
the west bank  
of the Mississippi  
only to miss your  
chance at becoming  
the very first  
New Orleans sinner.  
Instead,  
you ascend  
once again

and join the savages  
near the river  
before nightfall  
to say mass.

St. Ignace pray for our sins.

## Mid-Afternoon at a Barn outside Platteville

The narrow garden  
still in light  
where suns shine over  
ricks of hay.

A red barn protects  
those shorn  
in a corner to fit.

Under clouds as  
vision snows sing  
like the first  
coat of frost.

The dark grates  
smell of heather.

Dance the water fields.

A mere slip  
under ice  
and light boycotts  
the earth in fall.

There tumbles  
relief, the flailing  
fields learning  
to lust.

This private delight  
fills my eyes,  
dips my face  
into a sound stream.

## Three Poems for James Liddy

### *The Apartment of James Liddy*

Those gossip eyes waking when I arrive  
and senses gained in the small light  
of the sitting room while Jim gets us  
tea and puts down his copy of Pepys'  
Diary in order to talk and recite, tales  
of teachers and poetry in dark winter  
nights when the hallway red staircase  
glows with whispers from Milwaukee.  
James joins us and immediately asks  
for the news of old friends, students  
now around the globe, books of thoughts  
from those who don't always confide  
in him, but probably should. Liddy  
is a champion of youth, a champion  
of words from youth, an announcement  
still ringing in the ears of a Blue Canary  
sent down from heaven to gather holy  
words from this Irish and American  
wide eyed author, this Papal edict  
given us forever in these times of need.  
Then Jim goes to his room to pray and read,  
a monastic life amidst a city backdrop  
and James checks the knobs on the stove  
to make sure they have been turned off.  
We enter the street, hope for adventure  
to see a slow moving world where bars  
seem the only savior and poetry has been  
taught as a life, filtered through this man,  
this friend whom I admire for his memory,  
his knowledge and stories. Luckily, like  
for Hartnett, he has agreed to be the one to  
teach me to be a poet in the coming days.



## *At the Bookshop*

I have wandered through the dirtiest of bookshops  
searching for yet another talented, unknown author  
I can mention to my friends. But most don't seem  
to care about writers or even that I worked in a few  
bookshops, but was fired due mostly to reading  
books instead of shelving or re-arranging or general  
work a tome laborer should be doing during work hours.  
Hell! They could pay me and I'd smell the books,  
sleep in piles of books, have engorged dreams about  
stacks of books whispering to me as I sip a beer  
in a red velvet chair and recite from secondhand copies  
of paperback Irish literature anthologies crying of  
distant heavens and hells, religion from the Roman  
Empire, miracle fresh water words flow to the river.  
Heroes & wisdom count toward eternal salvation  
and happiness. Much like a lover whispering a truth  
in your ear under peaceful skies. She says, "I love you,  
I love you" again (never often enough) "I love you."



*Saints in Madrid, Iberian Sons*

We thought light had blinded the tourists.  
No one at the Prado except school children,  
loud and abundant school children  
with open mouths, backpacks, plotting eyes.  
I saw you at the foot of the steps  
with your fingers in your ears looking  
toward the knick-knack carts full of pictures  
of Spanish Saints. St. Teresa, her habit.  
God strolls here to buy Gaudí trinkets,  
yard bells, postcards, bull shirts & pottery.  
Art like vespers, words like evening mass  
when the sun curled round the earth.  
I bought a bullfighter's jacket, red with  
jangly, golden fringe, acted out the killing  
of a bull in front of you. You squinted,  
told me of Hemingway. In older days,  
meat from gored horses went to the poor.  
More armor and the peasants now starve.  
At the bar, cervesas frio. Praise Spain!  
The inspired age, Hartnett in residence,  
Isabella's Prayer book, silent private chapel.  
The bartender saw us praying together,  
asked, "Mas Cervesas?" You replied,  
"Si, of course." Drinks arrived, you intoned,  
"Protect us, Saint Mary of the Winds,  
Winged Mother of Isabella's Spain,  
Protector and Queen of the Catholic world."  
We bowed our heads, then took the cup.

## Three Poems for Joyce and Beckett

*Thoughts for James Joyce on Bloomsday, 2009*

The heart is a son  
made from a world of whispered names.  
He makes us beg for secrets  
in dark forests.

Trees peak still like Ireland  
lit by a century of new slogans.  
We are clothed in ancient flesh  
borrowed like God's candles  
burnt down for cracks in wooden faces.  
We make out lilies by the sea  
faint white avenues in air  
pavements where canes step down  
coat sleeves beat a gesture from light.

*Easter with Samuel Beckett (Born on Good Friday)*

Upstairs my wife's family is having house church.

*Pause (louder)*

Downstairs I'm waiting for Godot.

*Poem Written on James Joyce's Birthday, Feb 2, 2010*

Clear glass eye-patch,

Mass card labyrinth.

I can see your sugar of roses

marchpane

foul pleasures in the spring

emblazoned on a bench

inside Dublin,

pipe smell of burn.

A long letter

costs half a crown,

parchment caresses the skin.

Tremble now, say yes.

## Up to the Minute News Reporting

Here lives a certain time  
a fading light  
something that unravels in the afternoon.  
Here we render notices  
for the families,  
steel trains loading media,  
spouting logos like  
God is dead  
lower your Cholesterol  
consume more anti-oxidants  
reach for job security  
in untimely hours  
of a fluctuating economy.  
Souls starve a desperate need  
for reinvention,  
like children on gravel roads  
throwing time  
into barren and blonde fields,  
constructing excuses for an education.  
One in four teenage girls claim an STD,  
one in three teenage boys forgets why  
he got involved in the first place.  
But we are all young  
with our struggling minds,  
our issues, our homes of failed marriages,  
our tremendous guilt  
our unabashed pride.  
We are two sides,  
two faces, two lives in a world  
leaving chilled churches  
for heated streets.



## The True Nature of Catholicism

Where could, or maybe when could  
nature ever rival religion?

Give it a run for its money  
in rain slickers  
with waves pounding the surf  
and tsunamis of biblical proportion.

Some see a connection:

Pope John Paul II, the lake poets.

Also, theologians and mystics who talked  
of the indifference of God,  
infinite contradictions and endless relevance.

But all of us must look at truth

through the mystery and ministry of life.

The wilderness stretched out in front of our eyes.

A place of divine love given down this barren earth.

Therefore, why make certain rules?

Laws with Papal edicts to stop chaos in the universe.

This Proclamation, for example:

No wedding ceremonies outside.

Why? For lack of mosquitoes?

For the sanctity of the house of Peter's rock?

Perhaps.

However, I believe the Church

might not want the unpredictability.

But mainly, it couldn't handle the miraculous competition.

Pray for all that is clear and bright,  
more that is beautiful and abundant.

## Jane Gallop's Phone Monkey

Footsteps in the hall,  
lumber with love apples  
sheltered in leopard skin  
hair dye, mountain fear,  
intimidation, island dawn.  
Door creaks down Curtin hall  
fourth floor, grey and beige  
in the white light of office hours,  
genius student requests,  
pleadings for direction, ass kissing  
lip kissing, heavy petting.  
My phone is her phone.  
It rings like newlyweds  
always at this hour, this minute.  
Rings in English, German,  
Postmodern Poetry translated  
the way only professors could.  
My body though a silver  
frame like heaven opening  
a gate, St. Peter and his big book  
allowing me entrance.  
"It's for you," I say.  
"For me?" she says in surprise.  
Like she didn't know  
or at least suspect.  
Then I turn and hear her  
cackle on the receiver  
and walk down to my  
un-famous cube, feel  
her eyes on my backside  
loving my every step,  
every one hour week.  
My unlikely turn  
as her little grad boy,  
her quiet office assistant.

## Mass in Rice Lake, Wisconsin

My mother-in-law  
knows all the angles  
when it comes to  
negotiating Saturday night  
mass schedules and times.  
Even without running water  
she still looks pure  
and virginal readying  
herself to pray  
for all the sinners  
in her life, including myself.  
Her husband always  
says she hasn't met  
a kneeler she didn't like.  
And the kids pile out  
of the car. I grab  
my book and head  
for the Saturday pizza  
place while the rest sit  
through a long Mass  
filled with songs and words,  
the old people standing,  
then sitting in trance.  
Ladies in white robes, voices  
from the choir loft  
as the priest clears  
his throat and adjusts  
his microphone. Before  
I leave she says to me,  
"I think we'll get out  
in an hour. But you never know  
with confirmation season."  
So I sit in the pizza place,  
drinking a beer, reading



my book while waiting  
for someone to complain  
that I have twelve seats  
saved for the Catholics  
on their way for reward.  
Lord only knows when  
they will arrive.



## Looking for the Ghost of Fr. Roseliep

Your catholic eyes for sacrifice  
covered in vocation,  
serving small rain  
on the streets of Dubuque.

This trinity of devotion  
for teaching, poetry, and sanctity  
like a gold leaf path,  
a human form in elegy.

I thought I saw you staring  
down from the seminary walls,  
watching footsteps  
on the fallen rocks carved  
in the years of stolen bluffs.

Where did you pour  
those "waterpots of gin?"  
Those half-truths of bedfellows  
and dark hair flaming  
in the gaslight of your room.

The small prick from a shadow,  
morning bells ringing  
in the sun and last year's  
silence like a dream.

You climbed that hill  
in June with a patch work quilt  
and hyphens blown  
through the willows.  
The credo and tyranny of God  
in the sunken hills  
of a river town.

## On Hearing that an Old Hotel in Downtown Dubuque is Scheduled for Demolition

Those red bricks mix  
with clouds  
in a bluff wind  
of yesterday  
no longer knocking  
on the window of light.

What young men will  
grieve for her  
upstream on the dirty river  
while doorways  
into evening whiten.  
Children play in her  
shadow, sweetness drowned  
by boys who walk  
with their lips  
and listen  
with their mouths.

Protesters pack lunches  
put on winter clothes  
chain themselves to trees  
plead with politicians  
who act like statues  
in the sun.  
Most walk by  
with heads down  
filled with boredom  
on their way  
to a casino to throw  
money at sorrows.

Monday daybreak brings  
bulldozers.

Some search  
for lists of city fathers.

I think they are kept  
by the blind  
man at the bookstore.

You must read  
the price to him.

He lets you get  
your own change.

## Five Short Poems

### *A Quick One for John Berryman*

O Henry  
with threats  
of jumping  
out of windows.  
What shape  
is your  
beard now?  
Perhaps round,  
like a song.

### *Manuscripts for the Digital Age*

I finished scanning Liddy's poems  
for the Selected  
and e-mailed them to John Redmond.

Then I sat down and wrote this poem.  
Scanned it as well.

### *Work*

When loss of your jump drive  
strikes panic in your heart.



*Woodland Pattern Poet*

O Antler,  
where has your beard gone?  
Burned by a campfire  
or stolen  
by forest fairies  
and woven  
into God's hairshirt?  
Then worn on the head  
of a Northland College graduate.

*Ode to Drinking a Schlitz amidst Protests*

Joe McCarthy and Scott Walker.  
The politicians who made Milwaukee famous.

## The Fleeting Avenues of Summer

The avenues of summer  
will not last  
and cabstands will seem  
further from bars,  
a windbreaker under one arm.

The golden age of memoir  
is on these streets.

These glared windows  
and pavement reflections,  
where glad hands  
throw cigarettes down  
at each crack in the sidewalk,  
a front stoop painted green,  
an outdoor beer garden,  
a yellow brick building.

A breath of lake water air  
through windows  
flung open in houses of charm,  
on pedestrian streets,  
in grids of near city blocks.

## The Burning Shadow

*for Kate O'Brien*

Saint Teresa of Ávila  
soul servant and truth author  
love's full quiver of life and death  
play long with that breath.

What bright soul,  
flaming heart in Castilian girls  
wise like the spirit flower  
of the civilized world.

In scarce dawn, rebirth  
convinces lucky children  
to profess life everlasting -  
vision of power, immediate.

## Hymn to a Martyr

*for Richard Crashaw*

*But our having parents seemed to us a very great hindrance.*

ST. TERESA OF ÁVILA, *The Book of Her Life*

Let us out grow our parents  
together, and go now,  
you and I,  
to the land of the Moors  
and be beheaded there  
so we may live  
as martyrs,  
blood enough  
for salvation.

The heart's cabinet suffers.

Open the purple wardrobe  
of your side  
to love a divine  
and sacred flame.

Imitate saints, unto thee.

Desire eternity.

Forever and ever,

Amen.



## The Lord Giveth

*(Poem for Michael Hartnett)*

Crucifix classrooms, twelve of age  
I learned of joyful verse hymns too.  
Old fathers like a whiskey sage,  
rain words, drenched in comment dew.

Preach on truthful pen,  
from Liddy's mouth as well.  
Your stolen cat or necklace wren.  
Arena, what immaculate spell.

Abandoned language, cliché love  
which bore my chalice, cursed the air.  
Pubs near the Liffey, Kavanagh above.  
Yellowed pictures and witness here.

The night now surrounds us most,  
your face in flame emblazoned.  
A risen star from such a host  
with words and thought so wizened.

Consider this one holy truth.  
Limerick, south Newcastle West.  
A son gathers surrounded with  
unbound truthful quips as quest.

## Poem for Lorine Niedecker

*As I paint the streets  
I melt the houses*

Your face is the weather  
your eyes the rain—

forever cultivates  
my thoughts  
on what stands  
for beauty these days.

Stand by the boatman  
and know  
his rough face sways

away  
from your chin.  
Variance

without and within.

## God's Chosen People

The northern earth of fragrant birth, 1835.  
Mock the envious eye, confound the reckoning.  
A tale of hinterland clergy.  
Daily conversions of Ojibway souls,  
once alone on Bayfield peninsula.

Save the savage face.  
Shepard their souls  
with meekness and love,  
and nature's white hand.

Fr. Frederic Baraga, the snowshoe priest,  
had a tongue for languages  
and Adam's brow.  
One mind to make it understood  
how God considers any man and his fall.

Missions at Cross river.  
Church and cemetery  
now shrine to safe landings and crystal flesh.  
Life everlasting for the unclaimed.  
Thread of flesh alive in time's race.

He promoted health care and small pox vaccinations.  
Denounced liquor in demijohns: the curse of the tribe.

He even learned the native language.  
Printed a book, the first any soul had seen.  
Then came more: Catechism, prayer guides,  
bible stories spoken by the tongue of the land.

Father knew the power of the word.  
The importance of language. The arrow of light.  
A seraphim soul instructor  
who speaks the body's birth language,  
tells of an origin without sin.



## Poem in Honor of Austin Clarke's Reverence

Great and spiritual woes, that odium theologicum  
which overshadows our childhood.

There was always a tiny ringing in the ear;  
a soul in purgatory crying to us for aid.

I imagined my Jesuit self-aware education  
(beneath the cloud of unknowing) to be similar.  
The times would keep me from seeing the black church  
or tempt the fates by running twice round it.

I admired how you saw the secret pool,  
discovered another hemisphere in which all was different.  
Walked among golden crosses on lapels of priests and brothers  
melting in the round glow of gas rings.  
Would you dare scribble light thoughts of repression,  
sadistic celibacy, sensual interests on the Magnificat?

I often pray to you St. Austin, venerate you,  
for your blessings obtained from God,  
to dispel our fears in reverential radiance, lovely and enskied.  
Thank you for illuminated words on dark volumes.  
Knowledge of the hypnotizing gaze, the tortured darkness of apostasy.

Like the martyr St. Denis after being decapitated.  
He picked up his head and walked a mile.



## A Topic for the Confessional

At the Galway Bus Station  
two blown kerchiefs speak  
above rain dotted black dresses  
from the nuns in disguise. Humid  
students wait for lines to subside.  
Coffee, a mist in the afternoon.  
Schedules on tables slip down  
like dark hair over a small girl's eyes.  
The music from the street  
drops in the air and the book  
I have just read invigorates me  
like the rain has baptized me.  
The bus will still not be here  
for a little while. But I clutch  
my sparkling water and wonder  
if I should ask those nice  
nuns if they want to go get  
a drink with me in the pub  
across the street. But I am not  
going to tell you if I actually did  
ask those kind nuns to have a  
pint with me. That's between  
me, them, and God now.

## Writing Grants for Notebooks

Important assistants in offices  
often practice their hands  
at requesting grant money  
for everything a grade and middle school needs.  
New basketball uniforms,  
polished gym floors shined once a year.  
Blue tile for the atrium, recent addition.  
Formica tables in the rec room.  
Large maps of an ever changing world.  
New books for the library.  
Teaching aids for 21st century students.  
Curriculum wants what curriculum gets.  
But still, the aged Pastor wonders  
why they want so much money to buy notebooks.  
A woman just back from lunch says,  
"They're not the spiral kind of notebooks, Father."

## The Renovation of the Shelbourne Hotel

Stone guard gutted,  
covered in golden sheets  
of Bowen.  
She haunts the rooms,  
hits on her chambermaids.

Elizabeth, how big was your house?

As big as a hotel  
packed with carriage streets  
and children for land  
near St. Stephen's Green.

The butcher and newsagent  
each lit a smoke while  
blue shed a bedroom sanctuary.

Perhaps Liddy is in the horseshoe lounge  
telling of youthful Dublin  
with Mother and her heavenly  
Clare accent.



## Lent

*I wish ye a merry Lent; I hate Lent, I hate different diets,  
and Furnity & Butter, & herb Porridge, and sour devout  
faces of People who only put on Religion for 7 weeks.*

JONATHAN SWIFT, *Journal to Stella*

Will I be sent to everlasting damnation  
in Dante's levels of Hell  
if I enjoy Lent simply for a Friday fish fry?

I love to see those long lines of Catholics  
winding around a neighborhood chapel  
in wondrous blue spring light  
so they may sit in a church basement  
to be seen by white collared priests,  
families with wide eyed children,  
important parishioners stuffing their faces.

I see some pious old ladies talking of others,  
devoting themselves to giving up sweets  
for 40 days and nights, hands intertwined with powder  
pink rosaries – the only sin, one of pride.

But perhaps they are saying a Hail Mary  
for gluttonous bodies  
as they watch me gorge myself  
on the trough of the oldest established Christian faith.

St. Patrick and St. Catherine pray for our swollen souls.  
Pray for Papal dispensation and for all believers  
now and at the hour of our appetite, Amen.



## Three Catholic Prayers

### *A Morning Prayer for Our Blessed Virgin Mary*

The fridge sounds like a rainstorm  
while I sit and read a new book, learn about  
The Roman Catholic Chapel at Knock.  
I can almost see the dry spot,  
under a brown gable, then  
the apparition of the Virgin Mary,  
her Son  
and St. John the Evangelist  
on the cutting board altar  
raised under Thy invocation  
blessing our names in this small kitchen.  
From rain to full day shine.  
Now, perhaps I'll shanks' mare to mass  
and hope the homily is brief.

### *Prayer for Pope Benedict XVI and His Love of Abstinence*

Parts of deepest Africa  
are gaining more Catholics  
than the U.S. is losing.  
They may hold us into  
the next millennium  
if we pray  
for the new wave,  
the next tide,  
a cure for the epidemic  
without the use of condoms.  
Besides,  
the rare book room  
at the Vatican Library  
needs more rubber gloves.

*Prayer In Thanksgiving for Learning Chess from a Priest*

Slow and deliberate.

Contemplate.

Of all the moves in heaven and earth

you must protect Mary,

Queen of Angels, mother of us all.

## The Lives of the City, Long Forgotten

We have seen them  
in the sky, in the trees,  
among the fog  
that rises from a winter earth  
covered by snow  
white on ice  
like the Mississippi.

We have felt them  
with our hands,  
the sounds blamed on breath,  
streets and houses  
like steel pillars  
next to a subway station,  
shadows from darkened windows.

They are full, like pomegranates,  
small seeds from the ground  
that look like a heart  
greeting a new child,  
a small direction for a finger  
to point out our flaws  
nearly shown  
from a wrinkled face.

We have told others of them,  
their good work  
and, like outstretched hands,  
their lives naked  
to amuse ourselves.

There is morning and night  
to see through their eyes.  
There are amusements  
to be told, invented,

two historians that begin a game.  
One may greet you  
on the road to the city,  
the other sits on a bridge  
and waits to be asked  
about his legacy,  
that face with many  
grains of distance.



## Cameras One through Five

### I.

I can see only straight lines in all directions.  
A bank teller on a break  
followed by battered shapes  
of structure. I look into windows and shards of glass  
in full form waiting to break.  
Peer with me, squint your eyes and focus  
on what makes you watch. I am  
drawn in thousands  
of ways, images obscured by rain,  
street lights and college girls telling stories  
of last night's break up. Get closer,  
get closer to you in every way  
and answer my calls only when I need  
to feel the hot fog on the back of my lens.  
The skyline ropes another piece of sky  
and nobody stops for a second to look up.  
They worry about their wound up movements  
like toys clambering their way through  
crowded streets of afterthoughts  
of what I should have done different last night.  
Maybe another drink and she would have  
taken me home. Maybe a talk with my girlfriend.  
Maybe dealing with my boss. Maybe a slight  
switch of judgment if I wasn't thinking  
about his clothes on the floor of that hotel room.  
Maybe a turn of a key in the front lock  
of my parent's house. Maybe a trip to the south  
side for a beer with my friends. Maybe a cab  
ride instead of the bus. Maybe a dollar  
to that man outside the Laundromat. Maybe  
a shoe shine from the machine  
in the bathroom. Maybe if you listened  
you could hear what I see.

## II.

A funeral procession long after  
the trial of walking  
on top of frozen sidewalks.  
Who can see the streets the way I can?  
The man on the corner always  
waits for a bus, but never knows  
that I am looking over his shoulder  
and hollering at those business men  
jaywalking in broad daylight  
and security guards  
asleep at their desks, a cup  
of coffee slowly going cold.  
The steam evaporates in another  
25 seconds. Sigh again  
and again without a touch of irony  
like those altar boys after Sunday service  
and the piazza with men on covered  
streets and blacktop faces.  
Tonight, I want to go dancing.  
He says to himself, "Did I turn the iron off?"  
while checking his watch  
and rubbing a finger under his nose.  
I can see what he is hiding  
behind that worn face, but only his clients  
will never know the deeds of insecure men.

## III.

The bank is steady today, the swinging  
door is always revolving. It spills  
out red ties with a symmetrical geometry  
by and by, a frame within a frame.  
Consistent and formal, nobody  
stops to ask directions  
to a restaurant down the street.

The vault is impenetrable, but  
I keep my left eye on it at all times.  
Who is the man in the trench coat?  
A simple sign of a check and the cash is yours,  
no questions asked. A cynic would  
demand more. The windows are darkened  
with sight and I wonder what it would  
be like to be free of the upper corner  
of a white stucco ceiling. No matter.  
The cell needs recharging, the monitors  
are wearing thin. My lens needs  
a good cleaning and an upgrade  
is on its way from the factory.  
A man in a white hat fiddled with my knobs  
on Tuesday. Let me keep looking  
into your eyes. I can focus automatically  
on people with flesh exposed and trade  
insults on attire and hair and wonder  
where she is going tonight. But I know  
it is back to an abusive husband. And he  
is testing new torture devices in his basement.  
And he doesn't live with his mother  
anymore because she died a week ago  
after a long struggle with cancer. And she hasn't  
told her boyfriend that she is sleeping with  
his roommate. And he has nothing to hide except  
his shame. And she is someone with a terrible urge  
to need. And he is stealing from his foreman  
to support his habit. And she hasn't told her parents  
about her boyfriend. And he is someone  
without any happiness for the place that he  
has been stuck inside since high school.  
Like I said, I can focus automatically.



#### IV

My kingdom to be a fly on the wall  
and all I have is you, the Friday  
afternoon crowd who are much  
younger and move faster. A roll of  
quarters here, and stack of bills there.  
Teach me a new trick so I can  
look inside. I can hear things too,  
but can only comprehend images,  
a filtering of liyes in another  
part of the city where being  
is always another crime. I am obscure  
to most, but a child looks and nods  
his approval. No matter, the tapes  
will be erased in a fortnight  
and I will forget why I zoomed in.  
What is she wearing today? Another  
silk scarf from her lover. Another braided  
anklet of iron sulfate to show  
to her co-workers. Another bruise on her arm  
and some quick cash for enough drinks.  
I want to dance tonight with his  
feet. I want to stretch out  
among the living, but the lights  
will be turned off at midnight  
and my tape will go unused  
in darkness. There is a bar just down  
the street and I hear they are installing us  
in the bathrooms and selling the tapes to  
a network. My reward is filled with the innards  
of hopeful and despicable people. I don't ask  
for flesh, just to know such secrets.



V

A public harangue out front,  
I focus on its name  
transcribed in human chatter  
and sermonized with an influence  
on the public. Music always covers up  
what is being talked about while the cops  
are in the wrong bar looking  
for the wrong man. Public domain  
is always used instead of common sense.  
I hope that the security guard  
is asleep again so I can see this alone.  
One by one they all collapse outside  
and only I have access to their inner thoughts,  
their honest accusations about mothers  
and fathers out in public. If one knows  
he is being recorded, one always acts  
as if a role had been chosen for him, a movie  
camera and a director forming a box with  
his thumbs and first fingers.  
I want to be who I am showing you  
not who I am ashamed to tell you.  
A flirting persona, confident and humorous,  
followed by nights of guilt and anger, of drinking  
too much and late night television  
when I should be reading or throwing  
out boxes of past newspapers with articles  
about who reviles me and when.  
I am looking over his shoulder  
and documenting what he sees  
from inside the trench coat and briefcase  
of an average man  
trying to make it in this world.  
The eyes of a saint are often traded  
for one moment of sin.

## II. Journals to \_\_\_\_\_

*I'll tell you a sore truth, little understood.*

JOHN MONTAGUE  
"No Music"

*Men are sometimes hanged for telling the truth.*

ST. JOAN OF ARC  
from her trial



# I Have Spent My Life

*to the memory of dear Liam O'Connor*

*...in the perpetual sign of loss and gain*

JAMES LIDDY

I have spent my life on the hopes of people,  
on the love intentions of the furious and silent.  
Now, fallen away snapshots in the nightwar,  
the war in the belly of its survivors, the ones  
who have given up asking nothing more for the hardship.

I have felt like storms and like droughts,  
heard words from Christ's politicians  
who drink for the wrong reasons,  
make grand statements about current fiscal crises,  
offer food to a stolen child, disassembled.  
Return them to the separate house world,  
tell them to behave and accept.

I have been made to choose  
between the rich and the ignorant,  
petty thieves of the moral right and the ethic wrong.

I have spent money earned over years  
before I knew what to spend it on.  
I will keep earning and spending. Until it's all spent.  
I will pass on knowledge to my sons, the heirs  
to a world whose dead are set in their ways.  
The living under similar ground and salvation.

The lies told by adults help them reach adulthood.  
Something new like the unvarnished truth, gently and gradually.  
They grow up a little every day.  
Some play make-believe in overpriced houses  
with little pets and buried in-laws in the root cellar,  
a family bible strapped to their chest.  
Make a world with endless torments of hell.



Let us pray.

O master you are all knowing.

You have given us the numbered lights in the sky.

For which to count our blessings by.

I have been let in with light and woken to the sound of rails.  
Love received and I value the gift highly.

I have covered my wounds to serve myself and my family.  
If it were necessary to suffer more, I would.  
But I am humble while the wind from city grates  
rolls back to the great lake.

I have confessed to no one,  
the feeling of sorrow and the fullness of pleasure.  
Made charts for my school, my jobs, my mistakes.  
I have drunk imaginary milk  
from an imaginary glass.

A little boy crossed over Wisconsin Ave. today  
with his pregnant mother and I started to cry out of joy.  
I spent the rest of the day thinking  
about possible occupations for those children.  
Banker, Stunt Driver, Weaver, Rover.  
The next obsolete occupation of the future.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!

Let us pray.

O master you are all knowing.

You have given us the numbered lights in the sky.

For which to count our blessings by.

I have awoken again.

I have spent the day in the city on the lookout  
for clues for the laypeople,  
instructions to the day and night,  
confessions from the discretion closet.

I have spent my life in thought  
dispensing an abundance of virtues and fullness,  
intentions to pass along, always useful, perhaps misguided.  
Made one place my home, another, my head.  
The future believes in my current self.  
The past forgets my older self.  
I will think and love, truth seek and commend.  
How have I spent my life?

Let us pray.

O master you are all knowing.

You have given us the numbered lights in the sky.

For which to count our blessings by.

## Going Through Withdrawal over Someone I Almost Fell in Love With

*...and the prettiest girls in the world live in Des Moines.*

JACK KEROUAC, *On the Road*

My cell phone has stopped ringing  
ever since you left Dubuque  
the day after I left Dubuque  
asking me to stay with you  
in that big empty house on a bluff  
for just one more beer,  
one deep conversation about you or me or us.  
The way we always talked,  
the varied topics we used to discuss  
when we were drunk and felt young  
and still in that life instead of this life  
that happened after these descriptive days  
you are now reading or hearing,  
the words from the middle of our new lives.  
However, I am speaking  
of your new life in your capitol  
and my current life in my capitol.  
It is in this new life I wish your happiness,  
in this new life I hope you are well.

# I Wrestled With You in this Poem

*for Jack Spicer*

Her legs  
could be California.  
Her empty eyes,  
rivers.

Mud bank  
strangers  
fishing  
for bewildered birds.

I lived  
a forest.  
Sang with giant trees,  
a sacred noise.

Her face  
cannot sleep.  
Up from the heart,  
mirrored glen hunters.

Flame – ghost bird.  
Claw – visible ocean.

Camera pointed  
toward  
the orbit.  
Temporary, not flat, voices.

Spiritland,  
like a sunny heaven.



Send lost objects  
to the moon.  
Instant pictures and parlor tricks.

The ache of twilight  
dances  
like wrestlers  
on the barren earth.

## Midday Marauders

Big bad love  
is better than no love at all.  
Stolen and fleeting.  
Deliberate with consequence.

We don't think  
in black and white.  
Only in dark places,  
under sheets  
banging against each other,  
swindled into lust.

Remember lighter days  
when I wasn't  
embezzling your face  
and got more sleep.  
Instead of filching  
like bugs  
we should've listened  
to each thought  
turn into noise  
or maybe sounds that  
we hadn't heard in a long time.

We hoped for a notion  
to be ourselves  
from the beginning  
and stuck to the plan  
like bank robbers.

Unplug the cameras.

I'll go to the vault.

## Pray Let Me Know

Isabel, last month  
we spent a dead end drinking our money away.  
Laughing twin drinkers swapping stories.  
Testing locals & bartenders with  
trivia, fishing for pictures of Yeats,  
leathercraft in the dust, glances for  
empty beer glasses, full ashtrays,  
growing stacks of postcards.  
We left early enough to arouse suspicion  
and jealousy from the moralistic crowd  
came home still burning with questions,  
checking books for more brilliance and invention.  
Then, I wrapped my arms around your couch.  
And in my head you appeared & spoke.  
I twitched in my sleep looking for morning,  
watery eyes dripped into my mouth.  
At newest sight you were always work.  
But, I am paralyzed now, awry in your apartment.  
This poem grew from my ardour, our laughter,  
Isabel. Also, to remind your current dictum  
about the lure of the apple,  
the Goddess of approaching drums  
and drunken hubris.

## The Pleasures and Pains of Lust

*after Thomas De Quincey*

It has been a long time since I first heard your voice,  
your forgotten lips speaking of uncontrolled trysts,  
the time before you decided to impersonate me,  
made to forget all known dates, significant or otherwise.  
But I knew you would remember, a head for numbers,  
eyes for words told in stories, acted in afternoon drama,  
always an unconscious minister of recited pleasure.  
Those heart-quaking vibrations sewn into hands  
like cigarette smoke broken lines, evaporated torments  
reverting lowest depths, and ringing in my head.  
I see a sad eyed jester in the midst of misery.  
We practice at intermission and I jump out of bed  
to splash cold water on my face. But cardinal  
events are not to be forgotten, like you, celestial drug.



## Lockstep Love

Covering ground again.

It's time.

Bedroom marching pleas.

Unison hum  
like mosquito wings.

We want to be free legs.

Shadows from the city (repeat).

Stage play, moonlight dancer.  
Grey barracks performance.

Think of something to say.  
Then don't say it.

Inches on the body = miles on the mind.  
Awaken on the firing range.

Tighten up  
your twitching body.

## Three Short Poems

### *Do You Love Me?*

I have always thought piety  
an unattractive quality.  
And youth very heaven.

### *Bad Habits*

Bad habits full blown  
in old age compound  
the things that I did  
when youth stood around.

### *An Arrangement to Meet at a Rest Stop, Afternoon Rain*

The skies were Irish today.  
Our conversation was confused, silent, brief.  
You wanted answers.  
I wanted my things, my books, my clothes.  
You forgot them, probably thought  
you would never see me again.  
You were right.

## Months of Petals

Match parades us with beauty  
altogether well, slight breeze memory.

Crowds foresee our foibles  
ground us in upper/lower worlds.

No choice but to drink mead  
with stiff Ireland, sober no more.

This evil face. Underlined phrases  
in books of Catholic literature.

Little trees, notes nailed to them.  
Field writers with bowler hats, glances.

Given away myself a part of worlds.  
Used like one thousand old and white stars.

Errors are petals of discovery, writes Joyce.

## Milwaukee Afterparty I Should Have Avoided

And he was telling us about some personal lovethings,  
how they had to get it all straight before he moved out here  
from backeast dustcloud. Somewhere the rent didn't seem high  
for a one room coldwater flat surrounded by the evilgrey  
industrialcity with no rations for the sacred&religious.  
Thinhipped bowing, sorted lookalikes walked around the room  
trying plaidshirt notfitin, nervously searching for ways to make  
breakfast out of breadloaf and eggwhites in the bluefridge.  
Small apartments with cigarettes from red lipped openmouths.  
Immense smokerings, thoughtbubbles, illuminated dumbtalk  
from longbodies who hung over blackforest fire escapes  
never realizing some lives had once (perhapstwice) passed by.  
All the while he wrote desperate letters home to motherlovers  
with shakenheads in disapproval. Reach for another bourbon.  
And she went on again about her past, some jailkidrug story,  
all deafening rumors about best laid plans, reported accusations.  
Words spoken so fast she was inventing new contractions. Then,  
she called some guy a wannabe feminist. Shouts, blares, yammers  
from outside convinced himself and others about the last nighthome.  
Didn't sleep with her passedout on the couch. He could wake  
her up with his eyes, his beerbreath, his fewdollars of weed  
in the hollowedout sole of his shoe. Too sane for madmen,  
not shallow enough for artschool, what his friends had become.  
But they had nowhere else to go, all lovepromise and headswheat.  
Taking wrongrisk, capable of doing horriblethings if needed.  
And I was swimming, studying for midterms, standardizedtests,  
the bias of thosethings. Therefore we left. And I said to Joan  
as we rushed down the street to my safe blackcar. We were past  
a ticktick in riotdream now. Drove of rivernoise in nightmaze.



## The Land of Give and Take (Trinity)

*You are my confessor, to whom I have entrusted my soul.  
Dispel my illusions then by telling the truth; for truths of this  
sort are very rarely told.*

ST. TERESA OF ÁVILA, *The Book of Her Life*

*...all a Lie; and I begin almost to think  
there is no Truth or very little in the whole story.*

JONATHAN SWIFT, *Journal to Stella*

### Overture

"I went to the city to-day,  
stopt at a bar to meet you and we staid there  
with never any talk of treason, heartily."  
Hapless sinners, unchecked passion  
for fearful hearts, need for support system.  
You're invited to a party,  
drinks and billiards, supervision,  
necessary classroom where the social and popular  
talk of literature and minstrels,  
a travelling band of wannabes in our own way.  
Words and looks to make us more interesting,  
a veiled happiness in trivia questions,  
discussions, flirtatious parlor tricks  
on advisable walks  
just north of one of the widest parts of the river.  
Let your mind be the widest part as well.  
I've seen you around gathering information  
from various classes, feigning interest  
to noticeable quotes, saved decisions.  
Lunch followed by pretending near library stacks.  
What can you gain now?  
Angels are servants of God  
who have never tasted sin.  
Hear the other side, see the other side.

## *Intermezzo*

"I was adreamed, methought, that you were here  
in search of the unvarnished truth."

Now I know why Cistercians take a vow of silence.

Study and prayer by mute monks.

Kneelers sans cushions, the path to enlightenment.

There are always confessors, soon called martyrs,  
words whispered from lips behind closed doors.

Tell the hardest truth first,

the truth that clasps the earth.

Regression and impersonation.

Your desire to be envied and made mystery

like adults who drink import beers in bars,

take on other lives in order to survive.

Who knows what is best for us?

Friends who dictate (y)our decisions.

Shot up with sodium pentothal

to confess to the body, not the spirit.

"Discretion is necessary in everything.

I have seen nobody of consequence to know the truth."

I was so out of my head this morning

that I sent excuses about what I believe.

"Therefore pray, be kind.

Keep past stories in some safe place.

I would give something for their keeping."

## *Coda*

"'Twas a terrible, windy day. We had

processions in carts of the Pope and the Devil,

and the butchers rang their cleavers.

It blows bloody cold and I have no waistcoat here.

Parliament prorogued, guiltless and still, and I tottered."

Does God give health for loves you lose?

Can silent dark sustenance ever sustain?

Thousands of martyred Jesuits scream around the world  
with mood knowledge, central love status.  
And what of your steamy letters?  
I shall not answer them.  
Replies might be fairly fuddled;  
people began to prattle before I came away.  
You said you received my letters. Don't tell me how many.  
Instead, read the following like a diary entry,  
an appearance or two in the *Selected Letters*,  
or a narrative in circumstance.  
We were too weak to support each other  
trading fears for other fears.  
We discover ourselves with great aims,  
martyred in love's flaming heart.  
"However, I must go as I came until it mends.  
And so I walkt home as I went, and am got into bed:  
I hope in God some rest will do me a little good."

### III. The Exaggeration of Everything

*But in all that what truth will there be?*

*Waiting for Godot, Act II*





# The Mystery and the Truth

*For Edward R. Murrow*

There was a man  
who died on a road  
near an old town  
never to be remembered  
for what he did  
or who he knew  
or how many friends he had  
or which one of those friends  
spoke at his funeral  
which occurred  
on a hot August day in 2008  
outside of the city of M\_\_\_\_\_

at the Church of the Sacred Heart  
following services  
in St. Joan of Arc Cemetery  
on quiet, little Lilac Street.  
He will not be remembered  
for his great deeds  
or his sharp wit  
or the thousands of dollars  
he once donated to animal rescue  
or the fact that he always  
woke late  
which angered his wife  
who had been up  
most nights nowadays  
with a bad cough  
watching the sun rise  
and hoping that maybe today  
would be the day  
those damn creditors  
would stop calling  
now weeks

after the death of her husband  
who had tremendous  
debts all over town  
mainly from gambling  
and boozing, carousing  
at local bars  
with local ladies  
who seemed to like  
this man's company  
an awful lot  
and who most of the time  
couldn't be trusted  
to relay a story  
like this accurately anyway.  
So instead,  
this man  
will decay in some  
grave in the Midwest  
and never be feared  
or followed.  
He will never  
say anything great  
or do anything memorable.  
He will never scale new heights  
or reach new lows  
because often we find  
the truth to be so naked  
that it screams to be clothed  
in mystery.

## Change the Gait of my Life

*For Patrick Kavanagh*

The horses gathered round the cold pond and mingled on wide streets where bars fill up with fake light. When the settle bed was built for my uncle, my aunt took comfort in the fact that he wouldn't fall out even when he came home from the bar after walking from one end of the neon soaked Mission street to the other stopping in every bar that didn't have a television blasting. And sometimes he would even make an exception to that rule. Each bar was filled with road gossip and my uncle would come home ready to charge and argue with my grandpa. And they would yell at each other in that Irish way until one of them was finally shut up by the other, either by passing out or often by a smack to the face, then to the ground suddenly like the sun through the morning fog. I always woke to a next day that had these glances at the breakfast table, these looks like altar boys holding their tongues in front of the priest. Thinking hard, but speaking not. The smoke in the light and dust in my eyes while my uncle reached his dirty hands into a glass of ice and placed a cube on what my father called his cold steel tongue. And then finally, after a long silence came the great apology. Something that my grandmother demanded. Tainted waters might also flow in the blood of the grand sun.



## The Navigators

White stone Portugal,  
the flight out to sea.  
Belltowers and trade winds  
filled by dreams to loot the soul,  
a thousand saintly and pious eyes.  
What is beyond Cape Bojador?  
Perhaps monstrous men who fight  
in the war for spice and cattle.  
Ones who play cards and fish  
on the coast of 100 miles  
to win land for Iberia,  
choke gold from the sand,  
quarry marble for palaces,  
mine rubies for Isabella's rosary.  
And where is Aragon  
on the newest map  
approved by the Pope?  
It is covered with rocks  
and area treaties, sea routes  
buried under oceans of water.  
Someday stop by Madeira  
and ask them why they are Catholic.  
You might get a host of answers.

## Long-sleeve Black Shirt

I had followers in that shirt  
especially when I wore it many days  
in a row, kept it safely on my  
back as passers by pointed,  
perhaps thought that  
I was a transient or an artist.  
Maybe a bearded Russian writer  
who lived alone with only a plant,  
a window and his pages.  
A stone faced man'  
with no other clothes,  
no hope for a Queen Clean Laundromat.  
I have no change to plunk into any machine.  
It was all given to the poor of heart,  
the poor in spirit.  
The ones who most ignore  
and yet talk about in times of woe.  
I am down to my last clean dish,  
my last clean shirt,  
my last clean thought.

## Elizabeth Bowen's Rome

Italian walls  
brittle that  
walk in rose  
cornelian.  
Trees bloom  
like a cistern  
overflowing.  
Factories make  
shadows out of  
dark clouds  
and roads sing  
like red tin ribbons  
emptying sky  
onto the ground.  
I think I see  
you Elizabeth  
smoking a French  
cigarette jotting  
down descriptions  
of truth from  
the lips and eyes  
of an angel.

## More Swift to Run Than Birds to Fly

*after James Elroy Flecker*

I ignored the sun when  
he told me to nix  
my other life  
on the threshold of morning  
and went to see my body  
awakened by blind  
tears, the swarm of troubles  
at year's end.  
I heard a cough somewhere  
in the distance.  
It must be the boys  
of Amber Street thriving  
like pride in the alleys  
of our minds,  
smoking grey shadows  
whispered into air.  
The moon glow of summer  
days reminds me  
of trumpets calling  
the feast of night,  
red wine frozen like ghosts.  
Let us dance like bodies  
in the snow and sing  
for the angels  
of earth until our gardens  
land near home  
and sweet flowers decay  
for new lips to speak,  
new hands to feel.



## The Development of History

Tell me, Rimbaud, about Abyssinia  
about words and poetry  
in the streets. Tell me about  
the French mind where love and pain  
are intertwined. Tell me  
of history as told by poets who  
drank and ate and fucked too much.  
Tell the world who will not listen.  
State with your eyes  
the state of the nation, the tales  
and problems of an age,  
the beauty that was a fire sprung up  
in fields littered with bodies  
slow to dissolve among the living.  
Tell me of a blackness broken  
like the fingers of children  
and trains through downtown.  
Tell me of imagination, the politics  
of persecution where death becomes  
the only escape. Tell me now  
before we grow beyond forty and hold  
still with the innocent expression  
of an irritable boy.

## Thoughts in an Empty Bar After Thanksgiving

Lost in time  
on the continent,  
a kick from the table leg,  
moveable faces.

Be with me white angel.

This parable God,  
with dead eyes.

Repertoire of empty  
beer glasses  
cracked.

All that runs,  
runs well.

This long war,  
land cleared,  
darkling harbor,  
blank sky woven into sleep.

I think of moonlight,  
Beckett's tree,  
Crane's bridge  
and the exile of her streets.

## High School Confessional

I read an article once  
that was like an epistolary novel  
where a young girl,  
a member of the smokers  
wrote to a dead boyfriend,  
confessed her secrets,  
and finally described the suicide  
of her high school lover  
who convinced her  
to go all the way  
in the dark moonlight  
of a Nissan Sentra  
after a summer party  
had ended with the police  
showing up and giving  
out tickets to under-agers  
corralled on the porch  
in loose handcuffs.  
The girl slipped her small hands  
out of the metal rings  
and they drove to a field,  
felt each others  
bodies in the back  
of the silver car  
while he thought of other girls  
in skirts, or how  
he couldn't tell his father  
that he was out all night  
instead of home  
applying to colleges,  
looking into wrestling  
scholarships or packing  
for the next match.

The next week  
when she said,  
"give me a ring sometime"  
he just lost it and drove  
to a secluded spot  
with his father's only hand gun.  
She went home  
to write letters and saved  
the handcuffs under her bed  
in case she might need  
them again, in case she wanted  
to relive the strange  
weather of that night,  
the times she could only  
remember in those letters,  
those fictional letters.



## Something I Heard

Once, a friend of mine told me  
a story about his aunt.  
How she often stayed glued to PBS,  
but complained  
about the length of programs  
and her lack of chances to pour another drink  
during a night of quality public television.  
There was a pause  
and then he said,  
"Turns out she was an alcoholic.  
After she died we found half full pill bottles  
of scotch  
in the medicine cabinet  
under the bathroom sink  
and in the closets."  
Then there was a much longer pause.

## The Sorrowful Mysteries

There are words that we save, whispers even, that stay in our minds when all else has left us for dead in the middle of a winter storm without a bottle of brandy to keep us warm until the minute before we pass and leave a legacy that might be forgotten with hope that it won't. But our friends try hard for the first few months, collect pictures, stories of salutation and salvation, the agony in the garden, the scourging at the pillar. Only days before my grandfather died he looked at ease, or so I thought. He turned to me in the afternoon light of his den when the television was on *mute* and said, "I don't know if I should get better or just die." Then he looked to the door to see if my grandmother was coming with his snack of carrot sticks, water, and pills. We sat and listened to the silence for a while and then he told me about his first car, the way it used to shake on the way home late at night under a full moon. He always carried two cigars on those trips out to his girlfriend's farm. One to give to her father, one for the long trip home late at night after doing deliveries around town in that shaky car. When I helped him to the bathroom he also began to shake. He said it was from a mixture of panic and love.

## Old Growth Forests like Days in the Afternoon

I went to the bar early last night,  
talked to a man about logging, about the wood industry.  
He was missing three fingers,  
kept scratching his chin with his knuckles  
saying things like, "Well, the world sure has lost something,"  
or "When pine was king we were his servants."  
And it seemed to hurt this man  
when he mentioned the cutting of trees,  
the slowing of production, the itch in his hands  
like he could still feel those fingers,  
still see new light cut out of the earth.  
After a few hours he bought me a shot and a beer,  
thanked me for listening and walked to the door,  
sawdust still on the back of his work shirt.  
And I thought about life,  
I thought about the tree of knowledge.  
I thought about wood for homes,  
wood for bookshelves,  
wood for caskets.

## Three Poems for Train Travel

### *Track One - Land*

Streets and bridges desert grey.  
Silos and dim red light crossings.  
Men lay bricks from ladders in the sky  
suspend over industrial rooftops,  
dotted water pools like eyes.  
Weeds grow over drain pipes  
connect to dark cardboard houses.  
Hills of gravel form frozen lakes.  
The city, small distant buildings.  
They look empty, dead trees,  
wreckage from Midwestern lives.

### *Track Two - Car Jumpers*

In winter white barns awaken with bramble  
choking the sky. Chimney smoke,  
distant fields of men in trench coats, empty boxcars.  
One has a short cigar unlit.  
He gnaws at it while the air duels itself.  
Grain houses and fire barrels weep.

### *Track Three - Passengers*

The man in a blue suit talks on his cell phone  
and a conductor with bitter, strained eyes  
pushes a cart with coffee and tea, water for kids  
who look out the window to a prairie land moving  
with infinite west. One asks, "Whose house is that?"  
The mother replies, "A man who waits at the next stop."



## Four Short Poems

### *It Began to Snow*

It began to snow.  
She dragged her finger  
from the window pain  
to finish putting lip gloss  
on her lips,  
then into her pocket,  
slowly kissing  
her reflection in the mirror.

### *Estate Sale*

The glamour of attics,  
sound of death.  
Someone buys the story.  
Dust smells like bourbon,  
her drinking in secret.  
Curtain cigar stench.  
Diaries from 1944,  
discharge paper soldiers  
with alligator wishes.  
Bid farewell to hatches,  
sterling silver, beheaded dolls.  
Mother has moved on.  
Strangers sort accumulations.

### *Homage to the Lady with the Last Supper Tattoo*

No empty  
space  
for a body  
of work.  
Travel  
the world  
on pirate ships,  
bodies rest  
and motion.  
Crusaders  
sold her skin,  
a sadistic grin.  
Apostles'  
gaping holes.  
Ticket box  
two dollars.  
Hammered on  
sideshow wine.  
In flesh,  
make Jesus wink.  
Salvation,  
optional.

### *Marathon*

Bumper stickers  
announce new craze  
in marathon running.  
How many young joggers  
know the origin of the word?

## The Man Who Shot John Lennon

One of the first times I was in Ireland,  
in Sligo, of all places,  
I was in a pub near the Cathedral  
and I was talking to some friendly Irish folk  
among fellow English major travelers  
from Omaha or some other typical Midwestern city  
when someone started talking about John Lennon,  
about his music and his life, his death  
and I was trying to remember  
who the guy was who shot John Lennon  
and why said guy had bought a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye*  
a few weeks before the day he stalked and gunned down  
the ex-Beatle and musician outside The Dakota  
and why couldn't I remember that guy's name.  
But it was probably because I consumed far too many pints by this point  
and it was late in the day and still as bright as ever  
for I remember I could see the light coming through the windows  
above the small red wood benches,  
within the slight hint of cigarette smoke and conversation,  
in front of the gentle, drunken smile I had on my face.  
But then, I suddenly took a deep breath  
and went off to the jax and when I returned, relieved,  
I was clear headed and I remembered his name.  
The man who shot John Lennon was Mark David Chapman  
and he did it because he wanted to rescue the youth of the world  
from the torture of Lennon's supposed adulthood,  
the reality of a painful world,  
the sudden realization that the older we get,  
the less time we can spend in a bar,  
and the less time we can devote  
to discussions about poetry and music with friends,  
the less time we have to drink away the days,  
while hoping for some truth to the Wilde desire  
of never growing up completely.

And I was glad that I finally remembered his name.  
So I immediately went to the bar and got another pint  
to toast the Holden Caulfield's of the world  
because at the time I was still in college  
and didn't have to worry  
about such trivial and useless things as growing old.

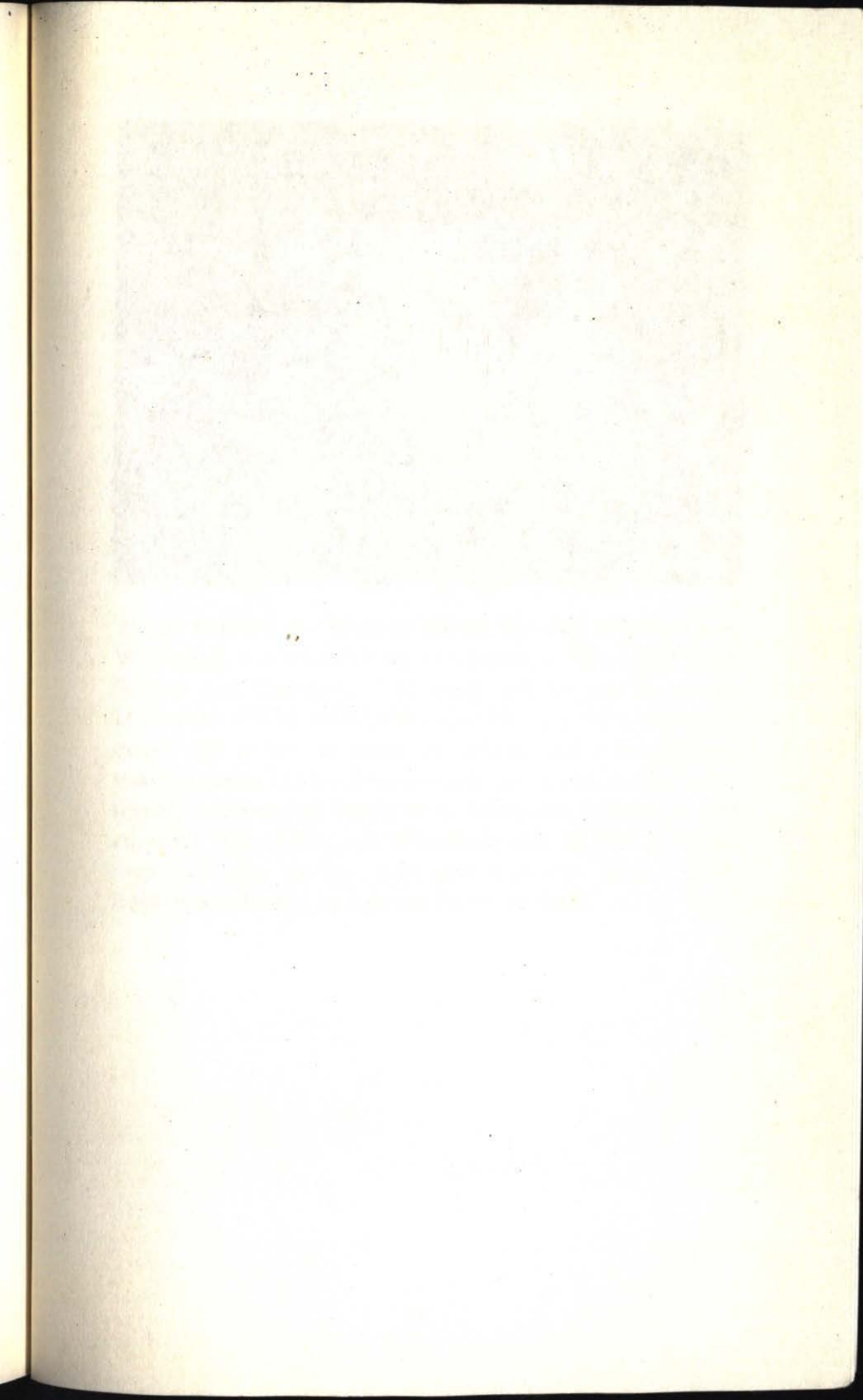


## Postcard Written After Viewing the Book of Kells

Dear Janet-

Here I am in Ireland  
enjoying the country,  
but not the weather.  
When we got back  
to Dublin so late  
I was afraid I wouldn't  
be able to see this  
old book. But the great  
walled library is open  
on Sundays during  
the summer just  
for tourists. Was I  
ever glad. Coming back  
soon from 8th C. Eire.

Love, Louise







TYLER FARRELL was born in Illinois, grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was educated by the Jesuits at Marquette High School and Creighton University, and by layfolk at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He has published poems, essays, and reviews in many periodicals, and a biographical essay for James Liddy's *Selected Poems* (Arlen House, 2011). He teaches writing and literature at Marquette University and currently lives in Madison, Wisconsin with his wife Joan and their two sons. His first collection of poems *Tethered to the Earth* was published by Salmon Poetry in 2008.





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In **The Land of Give and Take**, TYLER FARRELL's second collection of poems, a variety of characters appear as on a stage: teenagers and grandparents, priests and poets, the wise and the foolish, professors and proles. Their stories are told by an acute narrator, or often by the characters themselves, and as one poem says, "someone buys the story." The reader buys these stories for their authenticity and pathos. Shadowing many of the poems is a conflicted Catholicism, sometimes resentful of the churches claims, but recognizing that nothing else gives weight and meaning to the lives of these transient personalities.

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