

## Retirement

Whenever I ran in place, I sought  
a working treadmill under my feet.

A contemplative  
who attacked contemplation,  
I squeezed something out of nothing,  
I put stillness to work, my idle time  
was *quintessentially* idle.

I grabbed the reins of the earth  
and rode it round the sun,  
every day of my life, we invent  
these work orders for ourselves.

I took up the occupation of my history,  
but the tiger in the jungle has no title.

What does a poet say,  
that's not the work of the poet?

He takes a deep breath and says, "Ah..."

## Shorb's Horse

In the film "The History Boys" the question is asked  
if the distance of history, the distance of language,  
is not a perversion of experience, whether a thought  
is not *good*, but *true*, then reading Michael Shorb's  
"Gallopig Horse Unearthed at Leitai, China",  
I read as if I hadn't read anything before,  
mouthing words for the first time, unearthing  
the thought, to feel the newness of sound.

His poem came alive, like a  
sparrow on the flank of time.

There's nothing to write about,  
the first poet was no performer,  
instead, he embodied what he  
saw in what he said.

## Dear Bud

Windy here, I walked to the café,  
after working in the studio, organizing,  
cleaning, remounting a painting.

The people I see are the sort of people  
I'd see if I were living in Moline, Illinois,  
or McCook, Nebraska, my old hometown.

My brother writes from Honolulu,  
there are different faces there,  
but the wind blows there, too,  
and the beauty becomes  
uniform to the familiar eye.

The preacher's bulldog has puppies.

I woke up with a smile, hours later,  
I can't imagine what might thrill me.

I'm a doer not doing,  
I'm doing, without a doer,  
I'm nothing doing, doing nothing.

I want to name myself  
out of my namelessness,  
to clothe myself  
out of my nakedness,  
but the sun is on my side,  
burning away my clothing.

## Wives of Work

Imagination loves to play,  
there's no denying imagination,  
it would be cruel.

*There is nothing but play.*

I've been serious in my time,  
enough to have the right to play,  
but no one needs the right to play,  
play is the natural right of being.

When I think of play, *to play*,  
the idea of play is taken away,  
a true thought dissolves in itself,  
serious is another way of play.

It becomes a challenge to speak of these things  
without them becoming semantic and useless.

In the Fifties, men went to work, and their wives  
stayed home with the children, but in the moment,  
there are no husbands or wives of work.

## Buddha Sat Under a Tree

This thinking life is living once removed  
from life itself, yet we are thinking beings,  
it is our birthright, shall we think of life,  
or shall we think inside it?

Every infant thinks inside himself or herself,  
even this paired thought has yet to be thought,  
there's no he or she in the undivided mind.

I saw a baby carried by its father  
on a country road in California,  
the baby's face a facsimile  
of the round world we walk,  
a glass globe, a crystal ball.

It was none of what I say it was,  
I can't say what it was I saw,  
I saw a baby's face, I saw  
my experience of seeing,  
I saw a living life, I saw  
life that had no face.

Every attempt I make to say what I see  
becomes speaking, then finally a way  
of speaking in these words with words.

It's my choosing to speak of life, to tell  
the things of seeing, to reconstitute reality.

We're clever monkeys who began to think,  
and time has been our cosmetic surgeon,  
making us beautiful in our own eyes.

*Buddha sat under a tree, and something happened,*  
thus, the origin of centuries of practiced thought.

A man of wealth and privilege, Buddha stayed  
in the forest with the wisest of the wise.

Then, one day, he sat under a tree, and his  
mind went to its origin and never came back.

His mind did come back, to speak for  
those who don't have a tree of their own.

This is the story of the human race,  
we have stayed in thought for the others.

This blessed curse of thought, product  
of our existence, has become our obsession,  
as if Buddha became a botanist, a landscape  
artist, a gardener, Joyce Kilmer in a dhoti.

## In Its Own Eye

The lubrication has gone from my thinking, these days,  
it's metal on metal, tires blown, skidding on the cement.  
I smile at the barista with kindness, then a cold reckoning  
returns, or what I dully call depression, it may only be  
the absence of kindness for myself, or it may be fear,  
the stock in trade of my unembellished character.

I used anger and then romantic love to quell fear,  
not fear of life but the steady drizzle of being afraid,  
something I imagine soldiers at the front suffer,  
despite their recent and future heroism,  
a draining apprehension of threat and danger.

Low grade anger and romantic thinking are gone  
from my available lubricants, with which I masked  
this raw state of uncomforted consciousness.

I congratulate men and women who live without  
beauty, strength, skill, or wisdom, with no power  
to make something satisfying of their condition,  
who seek no savior in this life or any other but  
stay at being, with no resort to peaceful release.

I birth myself backwards, further into the origin  
of this being, beneath loss is the never lost,  
it has no antidote in ease and comfort,  
true grace is not a romance of gods or men.

The essence of grace is buried in simple being,  
it is a nothing of nothing, nameless and faceless,  
the bare element of existence, it no more shines  
than does the sun in its own eye.