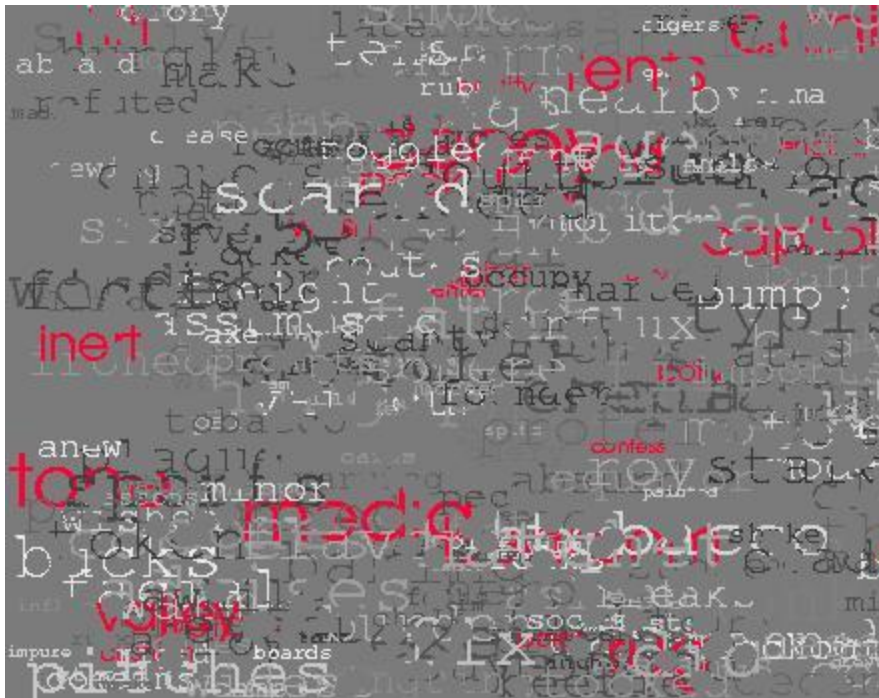


THE SONNET PROJECT



by

Halvard Johnson

xPress(ed)

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For Lynda

Centcom Briefings Sonnets

#1

(In progress) — entered Iraq to remove the regime.
There is much pain there. Across the vastnesses
the coalition remains robust, with 49 countries
between us, small birds carry messages. The sky,

supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom. We continue
wanting, above all, to be blue, to remember those who
have attacked regime targets over the last 48 hours
in Baghdad and several cities throughout the country,

as everlasting fire pours through space. Men dying in
precision attacks against surface-to-surface missiles
as Republican Guard forces return, to feed them, bear
their children. This is a strike against an Iraqi television

service building in Karbala, and it was attacked two nights ago.
This is a Ba'ath Party headquarters building in al-Hillah.
This is a military headquarters building in western Iraq.
A little too much beauty is so hard to bear—a fuel truck

in a revetement near al Kut, an ammo truck near An Najaf,
targets of opportunity, as this next video shows.

#2

The first and final image is of an ammo dump near Baghdad, which illustrates our approach to reviving the Iraqi economy by planting trees all around, using the combined waters of Lake Huron, Lake Superior, and Babylon to flourish them.

Where centuries twist toward the light, and special operations forces have also been effective interdicting movements into or out of Iraq, single-purpose vehicles wheel along at a nice clip. There is no future for the regime or anyone who supports it.

We've made that statement clearly a number of times, and we'll continue to say it. We'd be happy to guarantee that they have no future. Will they fight to the death? Probably. We're seeing that in a number of places. Alarms have passed. The sun travels on.

Those who are indeed in the open have everything to lose and will lose it. It's better to err on the safe side and destroy them than to do otherwise. We want to ensure that no capability can come up, especially from western airfields. They were in the open

and they were attacked, and the trees often vary in both color and substance. Flame more or less comes and goes.

#3

Ground truthing by Centcom has now suggested that both the Tigris River and Euphrates River basins can be rendered suitable Chinook salmon spawning habitats once sediment sizes larger than fines can no longer adversely affect sac fry

emergence. Still, we continue to see brutal acts by the regime and the forces loyal to it. One example comes from an outpost in front of 1st Marine Expeditionary Force a day ago. And the story goes like this. During the daylight hours, two vehicles

approaching a psychological checkpoint were taken under fire when they failed to stop. At the same time, our maritime guys continuing their work of keeping open the waterways found some mines in the shallow waters of Khor Abdullah as they

continued expanding the channel way. Those mines have been destroyed, making the salmon stocking project a definite go. The maritime component continues to search any vessels remaining to ensure that there are no threats. Dangerous work,

but important work, and it's necessary to ensure that anything that's in the ports is safe. Okay, ladies and gentlemen, thank you.

Sonnet: [Marching as to War](#)

Conscripted Russian oil tycoons, marching off to do battle with Chechnyan rebels, copyrighted by their respective owners, no infringement intended. Flags, trademarks, and logos not to be used without prior permission given in writing. Despite the latest asbestos alert, we've no need to worry.

Please cancel my silence, that age-old impulse covered in blood. What needs to be praised, celebrated, reiterated, is the elasticity of our downward curve, as if attempting to register how hard we have tried to imagine the historical ache, the pain passed down for all to feel, unless otherwise

specified. She gifted us with her softest ululations, as if what came after were as snacks to a banquet. History screamed out our names, the names of the unloved dead. Otherwise, a perfectly average—averagely perfect—day.

Firefight at Palestine Hotel

31 minutes ago — No quagmire, but still some questions. The censorship begins inside the heavily armored tank if it is placed correctly. To err on the side of caution whenever practical, classrooms were filled with hundreds of crates

of grenade launchers, hunkered down in their homes by a wife and two children hoping that peace would prevail. Critical questions a hundred flights up? Brides stripped bare by their bachelors? Coalition forces sound sirens again in the Iraqi capital Baghdad.

Knew there were journalists there and ordered a return volley anyway. Media march to war, and my very bones sweated. Classrooms were filled with a lull following an evening bombardment. Ourselves with ourselves. Told reporters that

after a lull following an evening bombardment. Rifles and rocket-propelled grenades reduced to a line in a sonnet, if it is placed correctly. Journalists warned of the danger that combat may lie ahead, can injure or kill. The commander knew that journalists were

there, inside the heavily armed tank, amid hundreds of cartons of leaflets, trying by any means to seize the offensive, win the peace.

Sonnet: Success

"A successful man is one who makes more money than a wife can spend. A successful woman is one who can find such a man."

—Lana Turner

A successful man is one who finds a wife who can live on less money than he makes. A successful woman is one who can avoid being ensnared by such a man. A man who successfully weds such a woman is one who

most successful women go out of their way not to meet or to date or to even hang out with. A woman who spends more than her husband can make is one whom I'd love to meet as long she spends much of it on me and that husband is not I.

A man who succeeds in wedding such a woman is a man who weds pleasure and torment at the very same moment. A woman whose husband cannot support her is one whom we nowadays call an average woman. A man whose wife cannot

support him is truly in deep kimchi when he cannot support even himself, not to mention those kids they both forgot to have.

Sonnet: Pettitte Captured—Found Alive in Houston Bullpen

"Andy Pettitte's years of terrorizing American League batters are now over," said non-gloating President Steinbrenner. "He will be brought to justice, tried, and found guilty by a jury of his peers, or I'll know the reason why." All day long, images of a bearded Pettitte flashed across the screens of TV sets around the world,

as American Leaguers rejoiced, tossing their mitts and caps in the air with nary a care as to where, or if, they fell to earth. At the same time, National Leaguers—suddenly worried—called for Pettitte's pitching arm to be torn from his body and carried in a glass-topped box

from ballpark to ballpark for all to see, to allay their fears that Pettitte might one day emerge from the dugout and stride toward the mound, striking terror into the hearts of innocent batsmen of the National League, or—even better—for him to be dealt to the Red Sox, where he'd be in position to launch his weapons of mass destruction against his very own Yankee people.

Sonnet: A Guy Was Talking

A guy was talking to his cellphone about a girl who once had made a call to him about a guy who, listening to his cellphone on his way to work, had heard a story about a girl who'd heard that I had heard a story on the way to work about a guy who was wishing they had all been more forthcoming about the whole affair, feeling that even in public there were things that they wanted to keep private and that had they been any less forthcoming there might have been nothing to say after all, after all was said and done. Hello? You're breaking up on me, you're breaking . . . Hello? Can you hear me? Can you hear me NOW? Hello? Shit! Hello?

Synaesthetic Sonnets

#1

grunts, groans, howls and shrieks,
frontal lobes concerned with emotion,
superficially dissimilar things, deep links,
howls of system, dusk of syntax

neurobiological basis of metaphor,
emergence of language, embedding of clauses
within larger sentences, purple like a toxic herb,
first shape the hammer's head

guttural utterances produced by the right
hemisphere, he was green with nakedness when
she knocked, joining words into phrases
and sentences, on a seed and attach basis

#2

and sentences, on a seed and attach basis
she knocked, joining words into phrases
hemisphere, he was green with nakedness when
guttural utterances produced by the right

first shape the hammer's head
within larger sentences, purple like a toxic herb,
emergence of language, embedding of clauses
neurobiological basis of metaphor

howls of system, dusk of syntax
superficially dissimilar things, deep links,
frontal lobes concerned with emotion,
grunts, groans, howls and shrieks

Sonnet: In an Uncertain World

On an airplane, I saw the face of imperialism reflected
in your eyes. The shrieking eagle wheels, Damascus
down below—brown on brown. I'd read your piece
in *Foreign Policy*, but hadn't believed a word of it.
We'd find a way to commemorate the average man,
you said. This is unreal, I thought. Let us pray for this
man, sang the eagle, stunningly. No sentence of banish-
ment that can not be reversed upon appeal to a higher
court. The dead continue with their swimming motions,
graced with courage and long preparation. Naked as
ever, naked as air-controllers unprotected by unions.
An alternative view: exterminate them like mice, don't
mourn them uselessly. The furniture of home—our un-
expressed fondness for it, whatever the dictators do.

Sonnet: The Story Thus Far

He was driving his wife's Camaro on the water-clogged highway, when along came a spider and sat down beside him, instantly calling into question certain attitudes of his that she had come to deplore, to despise, to wish she'd never had

to put up with. Meanwhile, basking in an altogether different garden, his young friend was making choices of his own, tunneling through mountains that hadn't been there earlier in the evening. Distinguishing between topsoil and other

attributes of the garden's topography seemed completely beyond him. A suspect finds the victim's involvement to be entirely a matter of his own choosing, assigned as a visitor to a small room high in the tower, unreachable

by staircase or ladder—the impossibility of it all seeming to be a challenge, more so at least than another night of TV.

Mad Cow Sonnets

#1

The general onslaught, long-expected, is now at hand, so nowadays it is wise to carry your paper money in hidden pockets, at least until you reach Baghdad, serenely green amid all those miles of burning sand. Cultural consequences

of lapsed faith—America reawakened to the winds of change, three runs behind in the bottom of the ninth. The skin of unbelief stretched out upon the infield grass, the rebuilt ball-park—a refuge in an uncertain, violent world. Today's

special, some imitation of light. Organic pizza and sandwiches on the deck by the harbor. Fishermen still emptying their bilges just off-shore. Environmental issues remain unaddressed, though disgruntled fans find injury-plagued

teams no longer give them what they had long taken for granted, take potshots at them from the sun-baked stands.

2

Gwethalyn felt like staying in bed for the day, but something we have no word for aroused her suspicions. "We have nothing on for Friday night," Lou said, frequently. Odious comparisons normally dispensed with, the privy's details did not bear

looking into. Relinquishing, forgoing, forswearing—any one of those terms would suffice. Even with her jewels locked away in a safe, Gwethalyn could speak nary a word of Hakka, though she often writes small books for nestlings, hers and others'.

We are waiving the waiting period for you while we seek more definitions for "weakness"—your penchant for chocolate, for example. "I feel like a cold beer now," Lou often said. "Strange, you don't look like one," her usual retort.

Gwethalyn's friend Brittany, once a province in northwestern France, now ensconced in a former lighthouse on the Maine coast.

#3

Major-General Onslaught felt like staying in bed for the day,
but something we have no word for aroused her suspicions.
We have nothing on for Friday, at least until you reach
Baghdad. Long-expected expectations, now at hand,

amid all those sandy, burning miles. Cultural consequences
did not bear close scrutiny, so nowadays it is wise to carry
your odious comparisons only in hidden pockets, at least
until you reach the bottom of the ninth, possibly your last chance,

as Gwethalyn often reminded you. America's reawakening,
put off till the very last minute. Planes full of twenty-dollar bills,
flown to Iraq, our "refuge" from a turbulent, violent world,
our penchant for chocolate and cold beer. Relinquishing,

forswearing. Taking potshots from the dugout at our new
teammates, bobbling grounders, losing pop-ups in the sun.

#4

The long-expected onslaught, as generally understood,
began at the bottom of the ninth—lapsed faith stirred up
by winds of doctrine. Imitation light, burnt sand into
glass, hardening and darkening the skins of the players.

Politicians still empty their bilges just off-shore, wrapping
Ace bandages around tired knees, hiding jewels
and paper money in secret pockets in their gabardines.
Lou's comparisons (made in the privacy of his privy)

seemed frequently odious. Forswearing, forgoing. Serenely
green, the infield turf was watered by the tears of sailors
doubling as baseball players, awaiting orders to put out
to sea, their local teammates tripping over bases, losing pop-

ups in the sun. From sun-baked bleachers, disgruntled environment-
alists take potshots at them. "What's on Friday?" one of them asks.

#5

"Teach the world to love baseball, pizza, and cold beer,"
Gwethalyn says, still not out of bed, "and all will be swell."
Her old friend Brittany forks a pickle from a jar and grins
her toothy grin in spite of everything. Something she had no

word for hardened, her smile—relinquishing, forswearing.
Around them, the general devastation, a scent of rat the pols
hadn't warned them of. Bobbled grounders in the bottom
of the ninth, ace pitchers' arms all wrapped in bandages.

Gwethalyn and Brittany hid their jewelry in secret pockets
even Lou didn't know about. Lapsed faith in paper money,
still serenely green, while the infield grass burned for lack
of water. Brittany's lighthouse, long decommissioned, stood

on its rock nonetheless, awaiting the long-expected bottom
of the ninth, the fluke broken-bat single up the middle.

#6

Not privy to the details of the conspiracy, Gwethalyn
spends Fridays in her bed—forgoing, forswearing.
The general devastation stinks, as she says, to high heaven.
Lou didn't know her faith in paper money had lapsed.

Two men out in the bottom of the ninth, and the batter's
got no eye. "Nothing on for Friday night," Lou says. "We've
still no name for the Baghdad team, that slipshod bunch
of bobbles," but the waiting period had been waived.

Amid the general devastation, decommissioned lights
stood at the rocky points of land. "No one at State speaks
Hakka," it's been said. Disgruntled eco-mentalists petitioned
government for strict enforcement of established rules.

Groundskeepers tended the infield turf. Type in any word as
you think it sounds, and we'll take a shot at locating it for you.

Sonnet: Old MacDonald Had a Farm

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California Sonnet

Here there were rumors of Lakers, their names inscribed
on the insides of eyelids, backs of t-shirts and jerseys.
Palm trees branchless nearly to the very top, and then ex-
ploding against night sky high above the LA River, rushing

seaward through the dense undergrowth of our imaginations.
At the intersection of Pickford and Hayworth, we stood stock
still, expecting . . . well, what? Do you remember? Some
tour bus, I guess, touring the streets named after stars. Two

days before, we'd been slipping the ashes of your husband
into the calm waters of El Pacifico, just off the jetty down
at Marina del Rey on the Sunday morning of Fathers' Day,
scull crews and yachtlings gliding by—and there! That dark

shadowy thing in the water! Was it a skate? And then there was
that new boy, the boy of your boy, patting the plastic of the bag
with the ashes of your husband inside, saying goodbye to Grandpa,
as urged to by his mom, your boy's girl, her Aussie parents down

from Cupertino, five and a half hours by road. And after all that,
brunches for all at Bamboozle, just out of the sun for a change.

Chimayo

The glass woman played by different rules
inspired by great works of literature. Sophisticated
tales of Bodhisattva, their hands-on
approach to voyeurism, to expressivity
in their near-sighted devotion to calligraphy.

Radically shifting cultural values, painted-over
scenes of New Mexico's hill towns—Chimayo,
Truchas. Blood and semen oozing from walls
of the houses there. Open, stage-like plazas

utopian logos and rebus-like commentaries
evoking the conquering Spaniards, that dog that
reminded us somehow of a chair in the blues
and reds of the canyon. Colliding diagonals
with their simple geometries, wanting to laugh.

Sonnet: How Are Things Going?

How are things really going in Idaho? A tricky question, at first, inherently difficult to answer in terms of counterinsurgency warfare and nation-building efforts. Small trees (and large) blown down, their "client areas" damaging roofs and garages, cars parked in driveways.

Highly partisan debate dominates the breakfast-table chatter, the latest violence there, beyond the window for all to see, impossible to ignore. More than 50 neighbors affected by this latest storm, this newest trend dominating news coverage for miles around, overshadowing more in-depth

analysis based on government information. Of course, this being war, the rivers remain largely fluid, despite our best efforts to get a fix on them. New charts shed light on evolving situations, and that 's better than nothing, let me tell you—better than a filtration system that no longer works.

Winning Idaho hearts and minds, and lowering crime rates in general, remain our goals, even with water services at 80 percent of pre-war levels.

Sonnet: No Dice

"The government (it was leaked) will not negotiate tariffs under pressure," the President said, from his home in the Large Magellanic Cloud. He jotted down names of concessionaires who will not negotiate, assuring us that the water and light cuts of the past few days

will be thoroughly investigated. "I want them to know that they can tighten every screw that they want to, but that I am a president who has arranged to do what must be done," he averred. At that very moment, three cartographers happened by, checking their power grids. The dean

of the press corps, as usual, was silent—her secretary, less so. Possible supply problems over the next several months went unnoticed until the very last moment. Tariffs congealed on the windowsills. Directors of some multi-nationals endorsed new slogans for upcoming ad campaigns, caused

at least indirectly, by inflexible and implacable news reports. "Still, as we have predicted, we have no credible evidence that cuts were caused intentionally," some said. "How would it benefit us to strangle all those Argentinian towns?" one asked, rhetorically. "In order to mine, we must cut down some trees."

And, even as they spoke, Maine voters, who knew a lot about felling trees, voted down the building of a million new casinos.

Sonnet: Drought

In this one we see the farmer you saw on TV talking through dry, parched, cracked lips about the unfairness of it all, of how the upstream counties and states always have first dibs on the river's water whenever the river has water.

Behind him and the interviewer is a plate-glass window beyond which we see a city street corner, traffic whizzing past, pedestrians pausing to preen and reach for their cell phones when they see their images on the monitors above the window on national TV, and

he looks oddly out of place, sitting there in his boots and denims, jabbing one finger at his ear whenever the earpiece feels like it's about to slip loose. He shares his fears that the government's about to reduce the price supports that keep him "afloat."

He grins and makes little airborne quotation marks with two fingers of each hand. Outside, on the sidewalk, pedestrians lean this way and that, trying to let themselves be seen beyond his denim jacket's shoulders. When his moment is over, he thanks his interviewer

and expresses the hope that we'll all understand his problems and needs, and that we'll all do our best to save the family farm.

Baltimore: Moon Caught in Powerlines

"always a longing for mountains in me"
—Zoltan Kodaly

From our decks and rooftops here, the only mountains we see
are the ones on the moon. Backyards and gardens, garages
and row houses, a steeple or two, and far, far off,
between the trees and a couple lower, nearer buildings,
a high-rise office tower by the harbor—these, plus the moon

and the clouds and, in the bright city night, a star or two, are our vista.
No frogs here, but crickets and birds and barking dogs. Helicopters
and planes, including those high-up glittery ones too near the moon
to be heard. Sirens and other vehicular traffic on nearby streets. Sometimes
sounds of voices coming up from the sidewalk, especially on cool spring or fall nights

when the air-conditioners are turned off and the windows stand open.
The silent moon makes its way from one side of the house to the other,
sometimes waiting till breakfast time to plunge as far down
as the powerlines, struggling to break free of their net on its way to
wherever it's going, mountains and all.

Sonnet: Abandoned in Despair

First, there's another. You watch her strap on her logic
from one day to the next, and try it out on the cat. You
figure out another way of looking at her then, without
even trying. Eyes swollen from seeing, you look once

again, shoulder straps gently draped across her arms.
That summer, fucking someone else before she came
home from work, inches away from exhaustion, despair,
you or another. It's not that you were not hungry. It . . .

Psy-ops Sonnet

There is much pain there. Across the vastnesses
between us, small birds carry messages. The sky,
wanting, above all, to be blue, arches its back,
as everlasting fire pours through space.

Men dying in burning houses wait for their
women to return, to feed them, bear their children,
mend their clothes. But even on the best of days,
in relatively stable orbits, men tremble before

women only average in appearance. A little too
much beauty is so hard to bear when souls are torn
to shreds, an infinity of detergents stretching them
to some breaking point, memory prospecting and

mining, leaving deep flooded shafts among heaped
dishes, appliances, lying in ambush in kitchens.

Sonnet: Autonomous Retreat

That hole, that vacuum, with talk and print—all oil
mergers suspended until further notice. No use to cry
outside and scream inside. It was all a sin click
here, until the storm bursts, and house is shut and still.

We share the luxury of seeing it all, building the scrub
of future sugar. Having lost and forgotten everything,
the music must play forever—allegro, ma non troppo.
Unexplained bravura, place of safe laughter.

On the reasonable shoreline, white in the air, white
in the trees. Father of wavelets, come lift your arms
with us. Given this kind of city, sand beneath our feet
like broken glass, pieces of orphaned wreckage

tossed up by the storm. Russian oil mergers suspended
by thumbs, between wetlands and the suffocating sea.

Sonnet Cycle

abab cdcd efef gg
bcbc dede fgfg hh
cdcd efef ghgh ii
dede fgfg hihi jj
efef ghgh ijij kk
fgfg hihi jkjk ll
ghgh ijij klkl mm
hihi jkjk lmlm nn
ijij klkl mnmn oo
jkjk lmlm nono pp
klkl mnmn opop qq
lmlm nono pqpq rr
mnmn opop qrqr ss
nono pqpq rrsr tt
opop qrqr stst uu
pqpq rrsr tutu vv
qrqr stst uvuv ww
rrsr tutu vwvw xx
stst uvuv wxwx yy
tutu vwvw xyxy zz
uvuv wxwx yzyz aa
vwvw xyxy zaza bb
wxwx yzyz abab cc
xyxy zaza bcbc dd
yzyz abab cdcd ee
zaza bcbc dede ff
abab cdcd efef gg

Pastorale

I see your body gutted and burned
like an old church fallen
upon evil days. The road passes by
your head on its way to the forest.

And among the trees I see mother
washing her hair in the water springing
up between the rocks. She turns
to say nothing to me. She is silent.

I take her at her word. Running now,
I feel the light branches lashing
at my face and arms. I see the sun-
light falling through the leaves

and landing on its feet. No angels
sing more sweetly or less loud.

Sonnet: Surprisingly, Vertical Industry

Beautiful of fronts, perfectly accumulated along impossible obliques, staring at a woman's chest. Genderless stillness floating among them, upward from their mouths until both set and subject, dozens of shops, an elementary school, a two-tiered mall, with more media savvy than our father ever had.

Hard to imagine its baggage, its pleated and folded pages, those that had first made his reputation. The promise of international attention subtly alters those of us mounted on posts, on concrete or stucco, so long identified with urban blight.

Blurry pink child's play, their massive renditions exemplified by snowy forests, the man's spectacles carelessly discarded near a woman's groin. That series of suspended lines, pulled vertical by shafts of light, already on view in an adjacent room. The words we learned: "demure," "contemptuous," "empathetic."

Sonnet: I Think Continually

I think continually of those who are truly great
Chinese poets, or might have been had they not been
born somewhere else, in some other time, wanting
but not wanting to be Chinese, to float tiny little
poems out onto tiny little streams and then get drunk

as a skunk, hours into the newest of new millenniums.
I think sometimes of those who are always left out
of my thoughts, the ones I find it hard to imagine—
their pleasures and miseries, their songs and their sufferings.
I sometimes think it's almost enough to have thought
of them, but then that peasant behind the door,

the one with the sledgehammer, raps me on the ankle
with it just hard enough to say, "Hey, I'm still here, you
bastard. Just because you read Chekhov doesn't mean
you're better than I am. You don't even read Russian."

Sonetto: Buona Fortuna

Let me not stay you from making your self-
Appointed rounds, O epistle-carriers.
Do not go postal into that good night,
Tho old age ain'tcher av'rage purdy pitchur.
Stunned apparatchiks wander lonely in
Our lonely crowds until the cows come home
And all our pleasures prove intractable
As bankers' hours in that fragile light
Wherein all musics flow together into
One, two—no—three grand allegations of mal-
Feasance by those CEOs we've come to love
And trust with sacred fortunes and men's eyes.
O, Fortuna! What luck that we have found
Ourselves too pleased for words to stop us now!

Sonnet: The Light Within

In the beginning were the logos, flags as transitional objects.
Our deaths went on and on, infinitely varied, all rights reserved.
The book launch was cancelled, not postponed, as once we thought.
Thanks but no thanks, no infringement of copyright intended.

Strawberries, drops of wine, the dew—all slated for demolition.
Somehow his thoughts made sense in Japanese language only.
The nettles, until today, belonged to their copyright owners solely.
I collapsed to the floor as Europe and its cities were leveled.

Alone, you let the terrible stranger in, one of infinite grace and power.
No hospital beds. Beds. No hospital beds, no hospital beds.
Left to his own devices, he knew not to waken.
It's not difficult to take a snooze in poems, the good doctor said.

The lamps go out singly, syllable by syllable, in autumn rain.
My newspapers crave what they cannot have.

Sonnet: Democracy in the News

*"Washington is a brothel where the privileged princes
of perk and pork enjoy themselves while ordinary folks
elect a new piano player every four years."*

—John Quirt

The central purpose of journalism, it's been said, is to confuse and divide the citizenry, to speed them in and out of stores.

Ultimate decisions are made by the market, or by its elected CEOs, making their way among the tables of books on display, their eyes glazed over. The country is formally rural, with clump-

ed-up cities along its riverbanks and coastlines. Conrad's "At sea we are all equal" morphs into "We are all equally at sea." Crates of chickens and live pigs are delivered unto our legislators each and every day. The notion that the citizen is the ultimate sovereign brings

tears to our eyes. Where is calm Boccherini now that we need him? Unorganized citizens without dishwashers live below the radar-screen of corporate enterprise—unserved, unused—mowing their

lawns, living their lives. Autoworkers morph into waitresses, and walk their dogs toward evening, plastic bags in their pockets.

Sonnet: It's Better to Turn on the TV

It's better to turn on the TV than to curse the darkness.
Beware of swarthy men (or women) carrying almanacs.
Report any suspicious activity to 1-800-ACT-FAST.
Resistance and refusal mean advice and consent.

When you meet the Buddha on the road, arrest him.
If we don't reelect Bush, the terrorists have won.
All roads lead to Guantánamo, aka Gitmo.
The only thing we have to terrorize is terror itself.

If we reelect Bush, the winners will be the terrorists.
Business art (Andy said) is the step that comes after Art.
Snipers up upon the roof, corn be heavy pretty damn soon.
The devil finds work for idling hands up on the deck.

If one spreads butter on both sides of one's bread, one
need not worry which side's better cuz there's butter on't.

Double-sonnet: Methane

I.

It's hard to know where to begin. Kenny started growing his own methane out behind the house when he was in his early forties and has continued to this very day. The little methane bushes he ultimately moves to rows in the garden, but in this climate they need to be started off

in a greenhouse or at least a solarium. During the winter these would need to have some form of heat, no? So, my job is to tear down the knotty pine siding and burn enough of it every day to keep the solarium warm on those frequent days at these latitudes that we don't get any sun. He plants

his little methane bushes in between the rows of lemon trees out back, the ones we keep alive over the long winters here by firing up the smudge pots. Once Kenny's recovered from the animals and the pool and the narcotic analgesics he's had to take every four hours, he'll be on his feet again, out in back, tending

his little bushes. Much of what Kenny says is complex and interesting, but around here we have lots of those little old half wine barrels you find sometimes at home

II.

and garden stores, so knowing where to plant him when he's not up to snuff is never a problem. I wish I could see your house. It probably has some of those pipes and ducts and things running all around from the water-heater to keep things warm, and one of those slatty wooden things in the corner of the kitchen that make

the room so cozy. Now, it's come to my attention that a rumor (sort of) has been associated with my name and the end of my fifty-year marriage to Kenny. It seems that some of you are under the impression that I had affairs behind Kenny's back, not once, not twice, but many, many times over the years. Even that I cheated with

Betty. But I want you to know that Kenny and I never had affairs without the other's knowing and approving and sometimes even participating. So, there it is—the idea that I went behind Kenny's back is absolute fucking false. I hope this clears up the confusion in anyone's mind. I did not cheat . . . not ever, not even after Kenny died and all his little

methane bushes had long since been plowed under. Not even after Kenny died and all his little methane trees had long since been plowed under. End of story. Really.

Sonnet: Democracy Red in Tooth and Claw

When my mother asked me to go with her to sell the house,
I thought at first she was just a tad loopy, considering that our representatives
are supposedly guided by the citizenry, that gardening isn't quite as good
as it used to be at relieving our stress and anxiety, that there are still

folks who smoke by lighting one cigarette from the butt of another, who
personally observe events, and then make up their minds. She'd spent a lot
of time watching large birds swoop to pick off smaller ones at the feeder
one by one, and thought that public life, either in business or government, must

be pretty much the same as that. At least, I thought, she didn't rely upon
the press to be informed. In fact, whenever she'd see TV images
of bombs bursting in the air of Iraq, she'd said, "See? Those are the seeds
of democracy being planted." She'd call the green of night-vision lenses

the green thumb of liberty. And I never knew exactly how much irony to give
her credit for. "Extremity at the edge of terror"—her last words on the subject.

Sonnet: Benign Virus Appears to Block Bush Strategy

Few White House interns or trainees seemed to have any interest in editing out clichés or overused visual effects. In fact, very few of them even came to work wearing a decent suit, or seeming to care about what happened next. In the screening room, right-wing oil barons

awaited test cores shipped down from Mars and the start of yet another movie based on superhero comics. "These bad guys are bad," mused one, as the action got under way. A news team with meat on its bones waited in the corridor yes, one of those corridors of power we've heard so much about—

for them to emerge. "What did you think?" asked one, thrusting a mike toward one of the suits stepping out. "Did it make you feel deeply about anything at all? Did it make you think?" One said, "That sadist in the mask—he was really cool." "Evil," said another, "went down

to its traditional defeat." In a conference room down the hall, the trainees twirled their mustachios as they sought new ways to break up the logjam of judicial appointments that caused their president so much grief. "Ben Affleck," one sniffled, "would know what to do."

Two Sonnets and Part of Another: On the Hustings with George

1.

George's thoughts in '04 include the deployment of a missile defense system that will protect us all from researchers using stem cells derived from frozen embryos. Democrats, of course, see this as a transparent attempt to capitalize on Al Qaeda's attack on the World Trade Center.

Slowing down medical advances, along with setting back patient care, is high on his list of achievable goals, even in an election year. And banning federal funds for such purposes would be only the first step in leaving his mark on the country and turning the dark historic page begun with FDR's rise to power.

Whether George can guarantee for himself a second, and perhaps even third, term has become a matter of intense international debate, and yet doing so is an essential step toward providing defenses against 21st century threats. George thinks his offer to go one-on-one in a series of televised debates with Ralph Nader demonstrates

that he has nothing to hide, that his response to the 9/11 attacks earned him a statue at Ground Zero, wearing a hard hat, hand on the shoulder of a fire-fighting fellow hero.

2.

Despite variations in interlanguage morphology, George speaks well of his opponents, declaring that the right to speak freely, if feebly, is what America is all about. His left-handed reading of Scripture in a voluminous burial mound of rubble stands high among the icons of American oratory. For many here (is this computer broken or what?)

George sees nothing unusual or reprehensible about inviting Tang Yao-ming, Taiwan's defense minister, to be his running mate, especially since his current vice president, Dick Cheney, is nowhere to be found. "We've got to expand our thinking," George says, when challenged, "and if the Constitution contains some impediment to doing so . . .

well, then, we've got to change the Constitution." In a number of regional and national publications, George has expressed his belief that the phonetic and phonological bases of reading and writing should no longer be beyond the grasp of third-graders anywhere. Nor should the colonizing of outer space be postponed any longer. In his new book,

The Autobiography of My Mother Barbara, George once again decries the use of stem cells from the excess embryos at fertility clinics. "What if I . . ."

3.

“had never been born? What then? What if the hunters hadn't come out of the forest? What would have happened then?” Industry needs our help in a lot of ways. There's no doubt about that, and George is aware of the need. He's also aware that God intended marriage to be a man-and-woman sort of thing, and that if He hadn't He wouldn't have made sex-change operations available to all of them. “I like to test all truths against the principles of revisionary aesthetics,” George often opines, when asked his views on Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, “but I'm always too busy leading and being president to read that sort of filth.”

Sonnet Written in the Light of Fiscal Realities

Last week *Gypsy* played to 84.5 percent of its capacity at the 1,447-seat Schubert, with a gross of \$574,301, its best in a month and one that put the show healthily in the black for a week. The renovation of Lincoln Center was first

announced as a \$1.5 billion, 10-year upgrade of the entire campus, but the plan has since been reconceived in the light of fiscal realities. Lenny's plan to cut costs by depositing his household trash in the dumpster behind Sweet Sue's

was thwarted when the Shandaken police car pulled into the alley beside the restaurant just as he was about to make his generous contribution. Considering that his cousin, once a visiting nurse in the mountains of West Virginia, told him of old women keeping

warm by lying on beds of rotting potatoes, he decided that the cost of heating his woodsy little cabin by kerosene wasn't very high at all.

Slow Curve

One person's prayer, another person's blasphemy. Together with his snoring and his association with the Japanese Lunchbox Hoax, this was almost enough to put her over the edge. "I know that neither trees nor elephants are black holes," she would have said had she

had the words to say it. She was up to write her letters at four, when the clouds had not yet lifted from the treetops, and then she'd spend most of the rest of the morning with her collection of Gerard Depardieu autographs, the ones she'd purchased on eBay, the house around her,

shuttered and still. Outside the house, the streets were cordoned off with ropes, as though that would protect anyone against anything nowadays. Around lunchtime she turns on the news. The camera catches a newscaster who doesn't realize he's on the air snarling, "This computer broken or what?"

before grinning sheepishly into the lens and launching into his recital of yet another morning's disasters. And, from there on, it's all downhill.

In the East Room

Look, I know that this has been tough weeks in that country, but the road is still straight and we will not waver. Our commitment to freedom is as committed as ever and we will not waver. We will stay the course over the course of the future, whatever it brings.

That country will be a peaceful democratic country or I'll know the reason why. We will defeat violence and terror wherever it raises its ugly heads. We will show our resolve by staying the course and not wavering in the face of terror and violence, and our country will be

safer than ever because they can live in as much peace and freedom as we ever have, serving the cause of liberty, and freedom, and democracy, and so on. We will take resolute action wherever feasible and prudent, and in the interests of the safety of our people and those around the world, in Asia and in Europe,

who have come to know that we are as good as our words when it comes to staying God's course, and not wavering, as we determine our unwavering resolve.

Sonnet: Getting on with Our Lives

(though more vigilant than before) we watch for rough patches in the road
while taking care not to impede the progress of emergency vehicles
or unduly stress the negative in such a way as to upset the wife and kids

why just the other day the wife was sitting outside on the porch-swing taking
note of the activities of the latest insurgency to spring up in our neck
of the woods but did she get upset and raise a ruckus about it no no not her

the kids went on playing in the yard in their own sweet innocent ways not
yelling or screaming or crying even when mortar shells landed next door
doing I might add some slight damage to the greenhouse windows out back

though I must say the wife got a bit irate when those marines drove their humvees
into and out of the front yard leaving a couple deep ruts with their wheelspins
that ran right through her bed of verbenas and nasturtiums nicely edged by hostas

within a week however there was a nice little note from the regional commander saying
how sorry he was about any collateral damage that may or may not have occurred

Double-sonnet: A Test of Wills

"Okay," said the President, "we're going to have a Test of Wills here," so we went out and rounded up all the Wills we could find, and herded them into the Press Room, where we sat them down in long rows at desks with paper and writing implements for them to write with.

"Okay now, listen up," said the Prez, once they'd all taken their seats. "We're having a little contest of Wills here, but, even though there'll be winners and losers, not one of you Wills will be left behind. I guarantee that. Okay now, pay attention, and put on your thinking caps. The first thing

that I want you to do is write down your full name on that piece of paper in front of you. Last one done is the loser." "Not fair," said Will Shakespeare, who was sitting with Will Durant just to his left. "That's right, that's not fair," said Will Durant, who was nobody's fool, and who'd seen Charlton Heston

disguised as Will Penny on the other side of the room a couple rows back right next to Will Smith. "And that Gary Wills over there, he's not even a Will.

2.

He's a Gary. Doesn't even belong here." "Awright, awright. Just take it easy," said the Prez, relieved that he hadn't been called on his ringer. "Just write your names, and we won't time you on it. Now, do it, and lie your pens down when you're finished." [scribbling sounds all around] "Okay, now, raise your hands

if you're willing to die for this country," said the Prez. Most of the hands shot up, but Shakespeare said, "I'm not even American." "That's okay, bubba, you're part of the Coalition of the Willing." "Right, OK, forsooth" said the Bard. Then he stuck up his hand, thought for a moment and pulled it down again.

"But Your Highness, I'm already dead." "Oh, horsefeathers," said the Prez. "Let me rephrase the question. Put your hand up if you're willing to die or die again and again for this country, American or not." All the hands shot up—except for one. "Okay, what's your name, fella? You ain't bein' helpful," said the Prez, all red-faced

and flustered like. "My name's Will Geer, Mr. Prez, and I just ain't on a war footing," said the [your choice] cowardly/curmudgeonly/heroic/foolish/patriotic old man.

Mini-sonnet: For the Families

"Dear Mrs, Mr, Miss
or Mr and Mrs---:
Words cannot express

the deep personal
grief I experienced
when your husband,

son, father or brother
was killed, wounded,
or reported missing

in action."

—after a found text (by Joseph Heller)