

Autumn Pantomimes

Poems by Steve Conger

Autumn Pantomimes

Autumn Pantomimes was written in the Fall of 2018.

Timelines was written in 2017, Summer into Fall.

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Autumn Pantomimes

To my family, who have, for the most part, given up on wondering what I do for so long in the spare bedroom turned office.

To my Favorite English Witch, who lives somewhere in London and has a wonderful twitter feed.

Autumn Pantomimes

Pantomime:

an ancient Roman dramatic performance featuring a solo dancer and a narrative chorus.

technique of conveying emotions without speech.

Πάντα all, μίμησις to imitate; imitation of all

Autumn Pantomimes

It's a god's power to make unsullied light
 arise from black night
or to veil in black clouded shadow the pure
 brilliance of day

Pindar (fragment)

Autumn Pantomimes

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Autumn Pantomimes

Late September

Autumn Pantomimes

Afternoons, sometimes, we walk
to the bridge

—isn't that what we say—
it's all water under—listen,

I have wasted too much time
thinking about time

gnats in a cone of sunlight
(all possible relations)

entropy: the fallen log
decaying amid blackberries

fragrant shadow of cedar bows
above ferns

crows flapping away
on the path ahead of us

as if there were a way ahead

time only exists
because we do

small blaze of fireweed
any thing that is, is in an instant

all time wasted wasting time

paradox of the immovable now
moving forward toward—what?

looking deep into the dark
under bramble

nothing before
nothing after

Autumn Pantomimes

The cat's a god in its first life
balancing the fence crest

this clear light
summer's last

blackberry vine
pushing between fence planks

intrusion—science seeks
the most abstract

formula: the essential
relationships

(numbers stripped
of the particular)

quanta of light
refracted toward blue

green leaf
tip curled brown

yellow jacket browsing
a fallen berry

this cat
jumps from *this* fence

(wars have been fought
for words that mean less)

this sky
and all that is under it

Autumn Pantomimes

Slate skies behind low hills
glow of morning light

boundaries

reading notes from
my favorite English witch

mushrooms, berries, rosehips and apple
gathered in Epping Forest

*two gods, one laughing
offering candy in the shape
of Quetzalcoatl*

dream time

(time, perhaps, to read
The Plumed Serpent)

(her eyes grey, under grey skies
as if the rain (forecasted) fell only in her—
wetting some inner field gone to weed
and muddy ruts)

first fruits :: county fair

sawdust, stacked hay bales
smell of shit, waffle cones

lighted Ferris wheel wheeling
behind roofs and canopies

harvest crowds

witch dolls beside pumpkins
painted dragons

so many longing for a world
that never was

Autumn Pantomimes

equal nights
(close enough)

spatter of rain on wood shavings
black pavement

Autumn Pantomimes

Gestures

only

today the tree (young maple)
is the dancer

pivoting, twisting
in wind gusts

proceeding rain squalls
then, stillness

sun shaft lingering briefly
on wet leaves

(when you are made of words
it is impossible to be mute)

there is that about a tree
which has nothing to do with us

its purposes
its dance

Autumn Pantomimes

Men have come by
to clear the neighbor's lot

(ambulance there, some nights ago
lights, silent, flashing)

they have cut bramble, trimmed branches
all thrown into a pile to burn

bonfire, not "good"
possibly "bane"

smudge of white smoke
against gray cloud

"but in whorsipp of seinte iohan
. . . clene bones & no wood
& that called a bone fyre"

ignis ossium

garden pyre

the too dry summer
the life grown brittle

(he seemed to give up
when his wife passed)

bone tired
bonfire

for whatever saint haunts
this smoke-smearing evening

Autumn Pantomimes

Eyes that look out
from another world

brafn brafn

(white winged once
before Apollo's wrath)

contemplating the paradox
the unchangeable ever changing

thought and memory
skimming shadows over mountain lakes

one, on the highest limb
standing sentinel

(Morrighan watching)

myth is the shadow of history

lone tree in a field
as empty as time

korax corvus corvi corvidae

I have seen them mob eagles
driving them from a carcass

I have seen them gather
at twilight to roost

dark legions arranged
in silent formations

night's messengers

scatter some bread and nuts

small thanks for once
having stolen back the sun

Autumn Pantomimes

Moon's blush at sun rise

domes and ribbons of mist
over moist fields

my favorite English witch
is hung over in London

smell of herbs drying
on a window sill

“influencing events
by hidden natural forces”

crypt cryptic encrypted
half seen, half guessed

mystic in the myst

words that dissolve
under slightest scrutiny

we have always wanted to believe
we control more than we do

magic is the ability,
perhaps,

to touch the open wound
of the world

Autumn Pantomimes

Penalty, perhaps, for wanting
what can never be

how long must I wait?

quick wind sweeping
dust, litter, a few leaves

all measurements of time
are bound *in* time

walking down hill
blank glass of bank towers

cries of gulls circling piers

paradox of the barber who must,
must not shave himself

restless mind
that rests on nothing

limits of logic

desire: nest of yellow jackets
angry at summer's end

salmon colored horizon
as sun sets

crow silhouetted on an eave
offers no pity

Autumn Pantomimes

Some late September
afternoons

offer pale reflections
of summer days

sun glints off water
slight breeze, not cold

whispering through bamboo
beside the coffee shop

(we have the whole world
to weep for

to begin would mean
to never stop)

evening dissolves
into smoke and mist

webbing branches
drifting over bramble

a sudden chill
that is not only in the air

my favorite English witch
dies her hair the colour
of dying leaves

trees silhouette
against rose yellow skies

Autumn Pantomimes

September wedding

lake shore

wind whipping white caps

pinetrees creaking, sighing

rustle of plastic canopy

better for memory than, say,
a perfect day

(calm lake, blue sky)

without memory

there is no musing

memory is how we make time

wind gust exploding
through yellow leaves

waves crashing, withdrawing
clutching gravel

what we will remember here
what you will remember

music pulsing
through the night

at the ending of so many things
it is fit there are beginnings

Autumn Pantomimes

October

Autumn Pantomimes

The leaves, as if overnight—
isn't that always the case?

we turn away
and when we look again
all is changed

standing on the train platform
spatter of light rain

these are the days
I am most myself

thoughts, which had settled
dry and stale as dust

stir in the cool wind
whirling into new shapes

twisting with a sense
of both promise
and loss

(the self is mostly a story
we tell ourselves

to bind together
the detritus of time)

the first of the fallen leaves
scurry like mice
beside the rails

my story is full
of autumn mornings
and train stations

sudden flights of pigeons
above scarlet trees

Autumn Pantomimes

Etymologies of light

| | | |
|------------------|---------------|------------------|
| Amber | | the seven colors |
| green | <i>pulvia</i> | blind |
| gray | <i>lux</i> | the eye |
| some combination | | |
| of | <i>fiat</i> | |

regen licht/half light

| | | |
|-------------------|------------|---|
| <i>lumin</i> | luminosity | (some etymologies have Dios as shining) |
| <i>regn regna</i> | | |

dawn dusk twilight

glistening in the head lights

photogenic
born of light 300,000 kilometers per second

what is brought to light

**leuk lukeē lux leht loeht*

light as the leaves that drift (different root)

| | | | |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| photon | photon | photon | photon |
| photon | photon | photon | photon |

what waves break on what distant shores

| | |
|------------|-----------------------|
| the light | <i>omnia qui sunt</i> |
| that is in | <i>lumina sunt</i> |
| all things | |

there is never a definition
always a cluster, a clot, a conglomeration
of related usage

through the rain light,
home

Autumn Pantomimes

That things are ripest
just before they rot

fungi, herbs, sweet fruit
and sour, roots, nuts

magic demands
an intimacy with the earth

treasures secreted under leaves
in hollows beside stumps

red leaf, blackened vine
logic of the hidden

an ancient wisdom
undocumented on-line

a power given especially to women

micce mtifei
(origins obscure)

care and anger
compassion and anger
love and anger

the richest harvest
already scented with death

naming
and taking the named
into oneself

mystery that nourishes
the world

October stew
in a slow pot

Autumn Pantomimes

Politics intrudes on every wind
leaves rustle with rumors and lies

corn maze: labyrinth
of green stalks, ears and silk

searching a map to find a clue

autumn wisdom:
the truths we tell ourselves
were never true

here, corn stalks are broken
where someone, in desperation,
broke through

we have always been a nation
of old white men
making rules to protect themselves

smell of soil and sawdust
patch of blue between leaves

a wedge of geese

the poor are left to fend,
if they are lucky

(if they aren't imprisoned
or shot)

dead ends and loops
that lead nowhere

autumn wisdom:
all empires collapse

it is our lot to find a way
to live in the ruins

Autumn Pantomimes

Restless evenings that come too early
(Sundays) a certain translucent gray
bluing into twilight, a few stray lights
porches, windows, illuminating nothing,
mist of dark rain,

(that certain sadness that comes with the rain
embraced as a friend

(reminds

you of who you are

)
)

slight headache,
pulling book after book off the shelves,
a familiar line, a paragraph
but nothing captures—time that refuses
to settle,

a cat
unable to decide
between couch and cushion
between now and then—

work tomorrow

the time
we sell
to
have

time

biding time before bed
half afraid
of

laborious
dreams

Autumn Pantomimes

In capitalism all consume
until all *is* consumed

even these October days

roses in her garden
recently wilted

edges of petals curled brown
or fallen on black soil

beside rhododendron leaves
brown stems and vines

*nothing is worth more
than what it can be sold for*

a red capped toadstool
shades a white stone

“in wildness,” said Thoreau,
“is the preservation of the world”

this may be among the last autumns

two degrees Celsius

(deserts grow)

what worlds will our children know?

the saving value
in what is worthless

her ruined rose garden
our true fortune

Autumn Pantomimes

Eighth month, mis-numbered after Caesar's reforms

cup
between
abundance
and
deprivation

old woman in the park
in rags, a tattered shawl
eyes gray as endless rain

autumn

Demeter
in mourning

Etruscan

“harvest” the season, when men still gathered wheat with a scythe
birds drunk on fallen fruit
“season of mists and mellow fruitfulness”
consumption

dying
and resurrecting
gods

Attis
Adonis
Osiris

and

Ishtar/Astarte
descending
like Persephone
to hell

(and the bull would not mount the cow
and the man rolled away from the maid)

blackened vine
leaves black and limp
drooped over the edge
of a pot

(sufferings of Dionysius
groom perhaps to Persephone
if Hades=Dionysus
Eleusis)

cider

new wine in casks to age

winds to whip the seas into storm
(hurricane, typhoon)

falling, all the while, toward winter

Autumn Pantomimes

A brief
discourse
on the nature
and feeding
of gods

we don't need the gods;
the gods need us

the most striking attribute
of any god
is their essential nonexistence

to stare into the eyes of a god
is to stare into void

and what, after all,
reveals us more to ourselves
as ourselves
than to see our thin,
wavering lights
against divine nothingness

it is enough, in the end,
that I would make a small altar
and burn sweet grasses

Autumn Pantomimes

Sometimes we walk to the bridge
river pouring
through its deeper channels

always the same; always changing

bare boulder and gravel spits
exposed along its edges

bridge river path
the structure is constant

afternoon sun slanting through leaves
cottonwoods green
but blending toward yellow

a few tall firs like green shadows

white clustered snowberries
blackberry leaves red or wilted brown

the particular is
always in flux

Autumn Pantomimes

Time is relative, they say—
a relative perhaps—

an aunt who has grown old
looking like the grandmother

who long ago became
only words and memory

dreams of your grandfather
returning up a dredged creek bed

wanting to tell you something
about wood and smoke

and the stars you see
between the branches of trees

your mother putting laundry
on racks to dry

(your first memory)

buried years ago, on a day
mixed snow flurries and sunlight

your strong father
grown frail and deaf

remembering all his travels
the places he stopped

the cousin who was a brother
wilted so thin and light

he blew away, a leaf,
a whirl of dust
on an evening wind

Autumn Pantomimes

Sunlight suffused through mist
pale disk, melting gold

the time we have

on the news, a very wealthy man
who will not see this dawn

long shadows on lawns

a kit of pigeons
banking left away from the tracks
then darting right
over the roofs of houses

the rich as much as the poor
(though the estate sales
will bring in more)

in the new light
trees burn a brilliant red

the time we have

this, the gold
we must gather

Autumn Pantomimes

Everywhere,
the sky is full of birds

portentous?

what are the auspices?

is my favorite English witch
deciphering the horizon?

orange pumpkins in rows
throughout the field

what profit margins?

(edges of paper (notes on))

fantasy and desire
if what I want can never—

low mist edging river banks

time enough
to regret time

forecast (a record-breaking day)
warming toward our ends

how can you lose
what was never yours?

(Persephone in the dark
mourning light)

it's not even beauty
life lusts after more life

flying arc, a hundred geese
winging into the distance

Autumn Pantomimes

Half-moon Mars beside it red
time as spiral time as straight
line time as illusion crows
in their roosts black wings
folded black eyes gleaming
stare through time
unimpressed elder gods names
long forgotten drift through
trees unseen awaiting Orion's
rise over the southern horizon

Autumn Pantomimes

Light on leaves
sunlight without warmth

pumpkin patch, Saturday
together with family

sawdust paths
hot dog smell
apple cider

bins of pumpkins, gourds
bundled corn stalks

dry, rattling in wind

(time was
when it was
was it?
if it was
ever)

grown up: grown apart

people pushing wheel barrows
full of pumpkins

hay bale benches

I remember when she
was like that toddler
over there

straw witch beside the door
small shop selling

candy corn
pies
plastic skeletons

Autumn Pantomimes

Arrogance
and ignorance

autumn wisdom
all that flowers
wilts

all bright leaves
blow

away

misogyny
racism
xenophobia

(not even pretending
to care)

when it seems as if it couldn't get worse

not to
lose
the hope
you
never
had

things
have been/ will be
worse

*(Zeus gave her
to Hades
without a word
to Demeter,
her mother,
or to her)*

to burn it all down
to rake it all into a bonfire

but do we, then,
live in the ashes?

the cold fog that clings to your coat
and beads in your beard

exhausted exhausting

the moon not yet risen

you would think by now
we would have mastered the dark

quilting shadows to cover
our beds

Autumn Pantomimes

Always present, as the chlorophyll
is blocked a corking of the veins
natural carotenoids (yellow) and
anthocyanins for reds and purple
brown of cell walls coevolution
of trees red out of season warning
insects of a dying (mocked) sap
drawn inward to protect nourish
the trunk against whatever cold
winds should blow

nonfluorescent chlorophyll catabo-
lites

drop

and drift

a scatter across streets and lawns

black in gutters

rain

pools

blocked

where

or

Autumn Pantomimes

And the rains return

patches of sky shine from puddles in parking lots

brilliant leaves that played across streets and sidewalks

deflated and limp

all the sadness of rainy days

damping down any expectations of hope

crows cross shadows under clouds

unchanging time changed again

Autumn Pantomimes

When dawn feels like twilight
gray morning winds

it is almost always a mistake
to look into the news

my favorite English witch
(although she has never claimed
to be a practitioner)

is on a train in London
seeking job interviews

the bomber has been apprehended

more leaves on the trees
than on the ground

though the balance is changing

chestnuts and rosehips
insufficient for a living wage

the air the color of rain
though rain's not falling now

cats are restless

synchronicity says Jung
is the relationship things have
by occurring together in time

bullshit overall

but each is a patch
in the quilt of the moment

blue dawn graying into day

and again
rain

Autumn Pantomimes

Breath without body
a haunting memory

the moon slipping in and out
of clouds, a shining

afterimage on a screen
fading to black,

a remote possibility,
to sail quietly with little or no wind

a semblance, a stain,

a red blood cell
that has lost its hemoglobin

memory that lingers,
gliding smoothly into the mist

to sever connections
suddenly and without explanation

(will you talk to me?)

a semblance, a palimpsest,
an ethereal unease

specter that disturbs
these October evenings

Autumn Pantomimes

(

The god that walked the desert—
a storm on the horizon—
walks now among leaves
(scattered like splattered blood)
quiet as rain,
in his eyes, abyss
the evil men do sink
into his silence—
that the rain soaks his hair
and flows down his face—

)

Autumn Pantomimes

Events sadden the day
more than rutted fields
and piles of abandoned
pumpkins rotting in mud
a sun break between clouds
brightens houses and streets
for a moment—
roof moss glows green
then darkens, the sun
covered in gray
the wounds that time
is supposed to heal
leave scars that pucker
and ache in the cold
driving home at dusk
mist rises from fields
the exhaled breath of all
who died voiceless
forgotten

Autumn Pantomimes

November

Autumn Pantomimes

Red October burns
to a brown November
88 years wears a body down
are there hierarchies of sorrow?
(my father's wheelchair)
tomorrow will be
one day closer to winter
time changes (our measure of it)
days grow darker
sooner, my oldest lines
and my newest, thoughts
images always circle back,
spiral rather, always,
but not quite, the same
blame these autumn skies
growing wise is mostly
growing tired, only coffee
keeps me going

Autumn Pantomimes

Twilight, all day
conversations at work,
about work, that work
their way into the desolate
landscapes of our dreams
the sadness of the season
rhymes with more general
sadness, time that escapes
time we cannot escape
(her eyes tear at mention
of sufferings that surround us)
scrape of scrap paper
over plaza tiles
poetry is what I do
in the silence between
other words, a poem
she will never read
about the sadness
in her eyes this long twilight

Autumn Pantomimes

Rain mutes the day's colors
painting varnished and lacquered
year after dusty year
smoke colored window
viewing an idealized past
gray road stretching between fields
house disappearing under a wave
of ivy and green moss
black horse standing, almost
invisible in the shadow of cottonwoods
shed half collapsing into darkness
the timeless nature of things
ruined by time, now is when
we begin to brood on the end
of things, casual entropy
of fallen leaves
flight of crows through the rain
each a syllable in a language
spoken only by the most ancient gods

Autumn Pantomimes

Wind combs the grass
green blades shine
like silk in brief sun-
gray drifts back
the day feels like smoke
after a fire has died
afterworld of Heraklitos
bare twigged branches
lattice my view of the street
as I look through my window
pondering words, ponderous
words, dropping like stones
down a dry well
speak to me, don't,
it doesn't matter
the day has a silence
words can't penetrate
dull thud, hitting bottom

Autumn Pantomimes

Unexpected sunlight
bathes the wet world
in sudden optimism
limbs almost bare,
ragged leaves, gleam,
even shadows seem
less dark—light checks,
balances the gray
puddles in parking lots
shine like your eyes
in the morning light
silver blankets of luminous
fog cap the low hills
but the western horizon
is slate on which is
written the fate
of our brief hopes

Autumn Pantomimes

First frost

fields white under the translucent light of pre-dawn

brittle tufts of grass

slight glaze on the surface of blackberry leaves

scraping the glass of the car

if only my thoughts could be so cold and clear

for each night its ill-omened star

for each day its tragedy

Autumn Pantomimes

My favorite English witch
is contemplating mortality

red ochre and charcoal
blown around the fingers
of a splayed hand

thousands of years in the dark

what remains of us

why board the train each day
endless mobius loops of futility

work home work

through the thinning leaves
I can see the lake

pewter like the sky

traveling past it each day
I often forget it is there

behind the veil of trees

meaning is what we do
in the mean time

a handprint in the dark

Autumn Pantomimes

Oddly,

one would expect
some kind of architectonics
and overarching structure
a palisade of trees bent over a path
carpeted with leaves

the sun has no warmth today
100 years since Armistice

so (a war so brutal
many they thought it would
useless end wars
wars hope mocked
by all the wars that
followed)

poppies (and memory, said Celan)

(the English witch reading
her great grandfathers diary
(trenches, mud))

the poem's structure an accident of time

the dead know nothing of heroism

stories we tell
to steel ourselves
to send others
to die

enough

Autumn Pantomimes

A

philosophical

aside:

language is abstract
even the simplest terms

“cat”

a Linnaean family
containing genres,
species, billions
of furred individuals

language distorts the world
abstractions abstracted
from layers of abstraction

| | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| we are cataloged | the emptier |
| classified | the word, |
| gender, race | the more emotion |
| economic, political | invested |
| status | |

“patriotism, the last refuge of a scoundrel” Twain? Shaw?

equation: science is the effort to find
the most general rule
that applies to the most cases

the particular existence
is always an exception to the rule

(I would like to say that poetry is the search for the particular
but history would not bear this out)

(I accept science, but, by its own definitions, it cannot
be the whole truth)

spilled blood is always particular

grass, we say, of a general green
as if each blade did not embody
a crucial difference

gods are always particular

how often do we see a thing for what it is?

Autumn Pantomimes

A
necessary
pause

(the morning's blue skies
pale,
then silver into gray
weak light still on the neighbor's house
calmness of a morning
seen through flu glazed eyes
furnace kicks on
blown air incites the curtains
on the sliding glass doors
to dance
the cat gives them a glance
then curls deeper into its bed
these days
in which the world barely intrudes
cocooned against the daily outrages
out of necessity
trying to read
nursing a healing tea)

Autumn Pantomimes

You have always suspected
 you are not good enough

that perfection,
which you can't define,
but which some poets achieve
in rare moments—

 forever elusive

words that burned in your dreams
 ash your tongue

November thoughts:

 last leaves clinging
 to bare branches
 in a mist of rain

Autumn Pantomimes

Twig net
through the red twigs of the little dogwood
outside my window
webbed over an improbable blue sky
to enmesh the soaring crows
or a wandering moon—

it should be raining
still,
in these too short days
the lingering light is—

(I have accomplished nothing)

slant glow of afternoon sun
red tint on grass
daylight rusts into night

Autumn Pantomimes

Frost, still, in shadows
where the sun has not—

crab brittlegills, tawny funnels
puffballs, a red toadstool

(fly agaric (poisonous))
kicked over on the duff

my favorite English witch
is gathering in the woods

(filling my basket
with her words)

fungi are fundamental
their own kingdom

heterotrophs, digesting
rotting wood and soil

more like us than the ferns
that shelter them

mycologist, she searches
the forest floor for secrets

words, too, are spores
ejected into air

hoping to light on
some fertile place

and be revealed
one November afternoon

Autumn Pantomimes

The last rose petals

(her sheltered
garden)

powdered with

frost

Autumn Pantomimes

Travel in November is full
of uncertainties

rain phasing into snow,
flurries against the windshield

fir trees on the pass
gray green against gray
upper boughs bowed with white

I am apprehensive

we are the measure
of ever vanishing time

my father, 88, mostly deaf
only recently acceding
to a wheelchair

now unsteady on his feet

truck beside us sprays
the windshield with slush

autumn wisdom is
we travel because we must

rain into snow
snow into rain

highway stretching ahead
colorless landscapes

Autumn Pantomimes

I wanted one last poem
for November

but what is left to say?

bare limbed trees,
desolate skies,

mud rutted fields
abandoned to starlings

wild geese huddled in rail yards
by pewter puddles,

breeze ruffling feathers
scuffing water's surface

this,
a time beyond time,

a time that falls into the cracks
between when and whenever

gray days dying too soon

how do I hold take it all in?

landscapes
lonely as time

landscapes
falling into darkness

landscapes
even beyond despair

Autumn Pantomimes

Early December

Autumn Pantomimes

As we come to the end
of endings
if you wish—even if you don't
the gods of autumn
turn their faces toward winter
their eyes are cold
I am not ready for the cold
my favorite English witch
attends a funeral—her first—
I have stood beside
so many graves
a certain clarity
cold air against my brow
movement toward silence
autumn losses are what shape us
to be winter's creatures
you must let go of enough
to make room
for snow

Autumn Pantomimes

These black stems trailing from
a ceramic pot full of rain water
presidents die and for the day
at least all sins forgotten crows
I have not forget them feast
on the kill beside the road the
ditch flowing with a thread of
gray water fields sodden and
green in failing light tree
clinging on to its last yellow leaf

Autumn Pantomimes

Once December: a monolithic focus:

new testament
offers no clue

Sextus Julius Africanus
221 first, perhaps
to coopt
dies solis invicti nati

(acknowledge a northern bias)

Yule jôle gēol solstice
Odin, patron of the Yule

when the light falls
between standing stones

symbolism birthday of the invincible
always sun
solar

juniper smell of fir
myrtle throughout
mistletoe the house
the rites
of

Horus

Saturnalia: giving of gifts

(the birthday of my favorite
English witch)

chistemasse, first 1038

feasts in preparation of famine
cattle slaughtered
because unable to feed them

complex mix
spirit and
capitalism

consumers consume
else it all collapses
into the void it is

719 billion in sales this year (U.S.)

Hibernal solstice

until then it is still technically
Autumn

Autumn Pantomimes

Books smell like autumn

dust, cinnamon,
dead leaves

(her hands picking up the bookmark
as she smooths the open page)

in dreams, the bookstore
under a stairwell

ramshackle mall along a boardwalk
beside dark seas

a shelf remembered,

disorganized, random,
forgotten books

alchemy, grimoires, old poems
lost Greek originals
translated into Latin

cracked bindings, torn pages
marginalia in strange hands

commenting on mystery

(her eyes as she reads
focused on a different world)

autumn smells
like those books

a swirl of leaves

the treasures I seek

Autumn Pantomimes

Venus hangs off the horn of
the moon stars ice crystals
pre-dawn frost so heavy it
lies like snow over moonlit
fields the autumn gods
have grown transparent
and thin as the ice that skins
puddles plumes of steam
rise from factories driving
cold morning toward dawn

Autumn Pantomimes

As autumn unwinds
so does my autumn energy

hands cupping a coffee
waiting for the train

time drifts
in steam rising from the cup

compelled to migrate home
driven to hibernate

confused geese wedge south
then whirl back north

is there a better place
than this?

(there are worse)

words that fell like yellow leaves
carpet the ground

only a few cling, quivering,
waiting to be said

a warm room
an open book

cold slows time

Epilog:

Vedic Hymn

Book 10 CXXIX

Autumn Pantomimes

No being, no nonbeing
no air or sky beyond

what covered?
what gave shelter?
was there water in blue depths?
no death

no immortal
no line dividing night and day
the one, breathless
breathed its own nature
apart from it

nothing
darkness
and concealed in this darkness
all that was

was chaos

void
formless
born of warmth
the one
thus desire

the primal seed
the wise who searched with their hearts
discovered the kinship of being and nonbeing
they drew the line of separation
what was above?
what below?

there were origins
there were tremendous forces
energy, action

who knows?
who can actually describe how it came to be
how there is something rather than nothing

Autumn Pantomimes

the gods came later
so who can know its beginning?

perhaps he, the one at the origin of it all
whether he created it or not
he whose eye watches this world
from the highest heaven—surely he knows

or
perhaps not

Time Lines

Time Lines

Twitter, mostly. But also, Facebook, Tumbler, other social media. Eyes on the phone while commuting on the train to and from work, like everyone else—the world through the windows with its warehouses and bushes, its ever-changing skies, unobserved, for the most part. A stream of text, short bursts of news, jokes, personal revelations, promotions, politics, cat pictures and curiosities.

This is our world now.

Not one moment, but a Time Line. All the disparate announcements that flow beneath your eyes and fingers as you pass ghosting through the world.

“Distracted from distractions by distractions” wrote Eliot.

Time and space, intimacies, proximities blurred.

I worried about a Danish girl who was anorexic, who cut herself and was a poet. I encouraged a novelist in Toronto drafting their first novel. I was enraged at the injustices of our government that were presented to me with thousands of specific citations.

I barely noted the tents of the homeless under the trees along the train’s route.

Aware and oblivious, all in one.

I am old.

I remember a world before personal computers, let alone cell phones. I remember when getting information was difficult. It meant digging through libraries and book stores, ordering things that would arrive weeks later through the mail, going places to see what could not be shipped or moved.

I remember when there were no ear buds. When, if you wanted a sound track to your life, you carried a transistor radio turned loud and annoyed everyone around you.

Time Lines

Distractions were harder to come by.

That said, I do not believe the past was better than the present. Memory is selective. I was young then. One remembers one's youth fondly, at least if you were white and male. Others. I am sure, have less fond memories.

I like being able to access instantly so much more information than I had ever imagined. I like the expanded sense of who is in the world and what concerns them. I like being more aware of events, happenings, movements. I like cat pictures.

I am as addicted to media as anyone.

Still, one should not forget, the people and things close around us are also in our time line.

Time Lines

1.

Misogynistic misinformation
ever prevalent

Cassini imaging of Enceladus

each statement eclipsed by the next

“the future is ceasing to exist
devoured by the voracious present”

—J. G Ballard

clever words to map the impossibility
of tears. Who enters

the names of the dead into databases?
Necrologs.

what matters are the daily word counts
against oblivion

you too can make a future in media

monsters among us
in positions of power

“We live in a 2.5 billion dimensional space.”
—Smolin

a little toast by the window
in the morning breeze

(for all you haters)

I have little use for platitudes

all facts will be held in check
until further notice

a book as bound time

not all is right with the right whales

Time Lines

depression as disease
not this ever-present sadness

sexual predators prey
politicians pray

the sea warms

another hurricane in the gulf

time measured as the scroll
of messages across a screen

I have forgotten
all I knew

Time Lines

2.

“Chthonic” as in what cave
leads to the shadows below

the smell of beef slow cooking
in your kitchen

tiki torches, nuclear first strike
a toxic masculinity

how account for a spike
in hate speech

we need a stronger word
than hypocrite

coffee, life’s blood
before the daily assault

ancient viruses in our DNA

day’s sunset in Costa Rica

things to learn before exploring Mars

you can’t just do nothing
nothing will convince

outrage, or in rage, every. day.
how to create the perfect antagonist

prime number breakthrough,
the gist

gone, but his digital signature
will remain, his voice prevail

at least until the power grids fail

storm surge rising and wind

in dreams I walk radioactive
landscapes, the ruin of worlds

Time Lines

hump backed whale tangled in a net

true to my brand

electric honey combs form
when nature gets out of balance

thaw of arctic ice faster
than anticipated

Time Lines

3.

Time scrolls: text, picture, video
ghosting your time line

the cat walks the rail

as if it were indecent for a truth
to go naked—William James

ear buds in, each their own soundtrack
to their own favorited apocalypse

when do we look up?

trees turned to torches

Time Lines

4.

The struggle institutionalized

I have thought a lot about time
but still I seem to always be behind

not that it matters, which I suppose
is the heart of the matter

a smattering of jokes
to lighten the burden

your continued frustration and rage
their continuing goal

it's ok to turn away
there are, in the daylight, flowers

cats in the flowers, birds

with what is left standing

this unutterable sadness

the resistance becomes academic
matter of dissertations

the dark side of the moon
is thicker than the bright

lacrimae rerum

the tears of things

shot by the police, how many

some colors matter

Time Lines

5.

Here, a picture of you
circa five years past

when last you spoke

a beach? Are those horses?
Who are those people?

the day closes around you

the line of breakers along the sand
a flurry of sandpipers

clouds colored by the afternoon sun

memories of many
such excursions

but not this one

what has time undone?

Time Lines

6.

An existential threat to democracy

no longer able to feel outrage

super volcano in Italy

magma moving

Too busy to learn a new language?

I have made a list of things

that could end us all

hillside ablaze with Fall leaves

a growing consensus that he is

indeed a moron

what we need is to redress

certain basic inequities

how address the structural

flaws of late capitalism

for all you haters

waters around Greenland

are growing less saline

hurricane aimed at Ireland

has there ever been?

read this, a rollercoaster

of thrills

all the feels

a compendium of extinctions

Time Lines

7.

To face the consequences
of their behavior

a cat in my lap
I guess no work today

the surprising empty gap
between Saturn and its rings

serial rapist

cereal repast (oatmeal,
English muffin)

what do I in fact know
about Korea?

I once owned a Kia

Egypt's mummified cats

when two sufficiently massive
bodies collide

collision blocking the center lane

gravity lapping against our shore
now (1.6 million years since)

found in a Viking grave boat:
a necklace
coins from Baghdad
bones of a rooster and large dog
Allah

Life exceeds logic —James

ALERT: electron 2MeV integral flux
exceeded solar weather

a cat in too small a box

Time Lines

Aurora's, perhaps

souls have worn out both
themselves and their welcome

—James

yielding to the seduction
of our metaphor

—also James

science: a story we tell
to cover what facts we know

the slow disclosure of the guilty

other facts other stories
but also
other stories, the same facts

infinitely so

gold and platinum nebula

I am an old man
among children

words spawn words spawn words
until nothing's left

vocabularies of oppression

logics of hate

Korea, protectorate of Imperial Japan
until 1945, divided between

Russia and the United States

because of the Korean war
my father met my mother

(yes, I am that old)

Time Lines

82% reduction of Germany's
flying insect population

collapse immanent
we're told

Time Lines

8.

No hurricane so far north, ever
banshees across the moors of Ireland

his indecent need to always be
the eye of the storm

if the world is swept away

(roofless, in the dark
drinking from toxic pools)

people are resilient
they cope

it is hard to remember hope

Time Lines

9.

Each discreet moment

passed before comprehended

forgotten before remembered

66 frames per second

background microwave radiation
(are those screams in the static?)

beginning

ending of all theory

a subliminal hiss

whatever I say

sent into void

crickets

(not even)

Time Lines

10.

It is time for the singularity

I am tired of this routine

it is hard to become
the perfect machine.

Time Lines

11.

Whatever wisdom for those
who are no wiser

Nuclear bombers
on twenty-four-hour alert

why stir from the tent
flaps sighing in a dry wind

children playing in dirt
with a ball of taped paper

listless with despair

all strangers and beggars
are from the gods

—Homer

for those with no home

a new season will upload
spoilers

don't let the world end
until I have seen Rome

thousands of hurricane damaged cars
returning to the market

barring some unanticipated
(or anticipated) disaster

I am so tired

time accelerates as we
approach the end

interstellar comet (asteroid)

Time Lines

low hills, rocks, pink sky
Martian panorama

raising fees on national parks
loving them to death

I miss the forest trails

I am so tired

contrails, thin, streaking
toward the mountain

where are they jetting to?

any covered doorway
any overpass

what's tonight's repast
at the shelter?

grammar is part of the problem
we conjugate the world

I decline

committing no crimes
but complicit in many

that day when our creations
shall judge us

heroin cheaper than prescription

bankrupted by hospital bills
sick and alone

someone will judge us

can he atone?

leaves blaze yellow and red
as they die

Time Lines

why this autumn calm
before winter storms?

collusions, treacheries
labyrinth of deceptions

(what minotaurs lurk
behind the bristling hedge?)

how many millions have fled
Myanmar? Narrow paths
through swamps

“Living like a refugee”
(and his voice, too, gone)

blue skies, late October sun
offers little warmth

the crows are vociferous
with their complaints today

she is, she was, she will
have been this at some future day

cogitating conjugations
creating time

yesterday I would have told you
where I will have been
the day after tomorrow

except

the indictments are sealed
until Monday

some days there is not enough
coffee in the world

legitimately

Time Lines

for the dispossessed homelessness
is not a metaphor

James, William. The Pluralistic Universe
for 50 cents, also The Will to Believe

pandemic
sooner than we think

U.S. carriers in the Pacific
amid Korean tensions

carbon dioxide blocks
sublimating and carving scratches
into Martian dunes

cat on a keyboard

so much data, so little time
distinguishing false trend lines

nothing private
nothing secret anymore

for whatever reason
the season is longer now

first frosts later

a strudel, warm with ice cream

for all you haters

did I tell you already?

So
tired

Time Lines

12.

If all is in doubt

How can I believe this autumn
did not always exist?

nothing before, nothing after.

Russian trolls, Cyrillic graffiti
under highway bridges

Descartes did not question enough

morning mist, the gold
of leaves behind a veil

I just want to curl up and sleep

replacing humans with machines
in positions that save lives

we have always been
a plutocracy

if I can doubt it
can it be true?

wealthy Virginians
freed from toil by slaves

is it a revolution if the goal
is to preserve the status quo?

our heritage

Time Lines

13.

Taco cat, a palindrome

also: capitalism has made it
so the only value is dollars

and this: the most haunted
hotels in America

also: climate change's impact,
irreversible

and, the Russian president's
fake niece

or, is this how democracy dies

but never say never
in this forever now

the civil war a failure
to compromise?

4 million souls worth 1/6
a man each in the electoral count

we empty history
to avoid shame

or blame

proof that even a 4-star general
can be full of crap

the gold of these leaves
in morning sunlight

tonight, they say,
the spirits of the dead walk

Time Lines

14.

Curious/incurious
craving/overwhelmed

by novelty

with every act of terror
the ratings go up

if we were to speak of—
but we never do

wet dreams and porn streams

all eyes on their phones

diverse ways diverse resources

the possibilities of

weather forecasters predict snow
oracular prognosticators

wild geese arched over the rail yards

every minute more happening
than one can ever comprehend

near infinite
suffering

the video is buffering

where in this is time
for reflection

a splintered mirror
a spiderweb of possibilities

with each decision point
the universe splits

or wave collapses

Time Lines

(more likely)

80% of Americans
cannot see the stars

on Mars a little curiosity
at least

(dust devils across the regolith)

nostalgia
for the paleolithic

as if stone spears
could pierce the hide

of the beast
that haunts these streets

Time Lines

15.

Your evidence free, fact free
governance

for a small fee you too
can reach thousands

against the cold

addicted to addictions
your diction is deplorable

don't pet the radioactive puppies
of Chernobyl

that they lie is not even
in question

questions are of scope
and scale

past indiscretions pale
compared to current

faint honk of Canadian geese
lost in clouds

this morning rain

there is no end to endings

the stain of leaves on sidewalks

talk to me or don't
I can't bear it either way

love the dour lostness
of autumnal days

16.

Time Lines

Now that our position in the world
is diminishing

does anyone with any modicum
of power not abuse it?

blue gray of fir trees
against a drifting sky

why the powerless fail to speak

upper branches of the maple bare
but still leaves below

gold

cold days curled with a tablet
reading news

not all views are worth considering

plume of magma close to the crust
a mile and $\frac{1}{2}$ under ice
in Antarctica

always just below the surface

revolutions are not bred of desperation
but of hope

evidence is never sufficient

we will experience
third world problems

why not cancel any election
you might lose?

I choose to turn away
if only for a moment

let the wind speak

Time Lines

even if, especially if
it has nothing to say

Time Lines

17.

Are these the last of the elephants
to roam the savannah?

contrails as graffiti

the Leonid meteor showers
hidden behind clouds

starless, moonless night

crude oil, black as night,
spills onto the prairie grass
just as they warned it would

how many words
have I spilled tonight?

Time Lines

18.

filtered sunlight casting soft shadows

did I dream this?

it is wise to know that
there is nothing you can know

no show of evidence will persuade
those who doubt all
but their own beliefs

two crows arguing
in bare branches

we will take a poll to decide

tried, if not true

the palest blue skies

lies have always been the currency
of diplomacy

but never such clumsy
transparent lies

(dust of trust)

too many guns

stunned by repeated shocks
numb to tragedy

perfidious dissembling

till nothing resembling truth
remains

only in ignorance

speaking of which

Time Lines

how late will the last leaves
cling into winter?

what we call artificial intelligence
is just a search algorithm

how can something be intelligent
that doesn't despair
over its own existence

resistance is, perhaps,
not always futile

while we pause for a moment

the problem is epistemology

one among
many problems

be gone you fragments
—Shakespeare, Coriolanus

but only shards
remain

Time Lines

19.

Reason will never persuade
the unreasonable

the wind composes melodies
on the porch chimes

the trees bow and sigh
to accompany them

if the power goes out
it might be a mercy

a core failure of economic theory

the presumption that people
act reasonably

to let the tide flow
even if it flows over us

—James

science is general;
living is specific

(semicolon as fulcrum)

balanced/imbalanced

this rain ripples across
the pavement

dark
so early

a wet film night

(now that film nears extinction)

(digital age)

so, reason

Time Lines

can't say its ever
really had a run

dark muddy rivers
rage against the banks

they will overcome

Time Lines

20.

Referenced 380 times
an article that did not exist

and this, in science

no longer any leaves
even on the lower branches

so many quotes falsely attributed

disputed claims
to inflame the skeptical

bare twig mesh netting the sky

try not to trust anything
too much

yet one must believe some things
or the world falls apart

start with this
or don't

now that brown November's come

the heart of things

Time Lines

21.

Sometimes, a shrug of despair

where have we been?

what there brought us here?

fear as an instrument of control

the troll that sits

under the virtual bridge

that none may pass

there is always a last good day

but who can say

something big is about to break

(always)

write the next headline

the missile arched 2800 miles

into the air, fell into the Sea of Japan

we better hope

for artificial intelligence

none here of the natural kind

the mind always questing

to impose some kind of order

borders without doctors

or

listen, something big

is about to break

(is broken)

or

Time Lines

one's fingers cut on
the splintered screen

texting home

the words spill, misquote
by misquote

I would swipe right for you

twilight at noon
the rain so heavy

gin on ice (vodka
infused with juniper berry)

to blunt the sharp edges

listen, something big

or

a shrug

or

wind scuffs the puddles

this too is news

Time Lines

22.

Government by the rich
for the rich

hemlock saplings, bowed heads
like so many sad children

is there any recovery from this?

these early last days
this year of endings

night, the car on the road
one headlight

half blind, the road treacherous
with lurking shadows

listen, hear me out
maybe capitalism and democracy
are incompatible

a super moon tonight
if it can shine through the clouds

Time Lines

23.

Frost on the grass

this is where we start
giving parts of ourselves away

and when there is nothing left
will we finally acknowledge the theft

that left us empty

scraping the windshield
to see on our drive to work

fog hunched low over wet fields

night doesn't so much yield to day
as it passes away from indifference

a deft inference
a clever remark
a bold irreverence

I stand and shiver in the cold

Time Lines

24.

Stream of words and pictures without end
days and nights blend
into a long-irritated murmur

