

Fifty-Two Sonnets
(A murder of crows)

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Each year I decide on a new way to write a journal. Often these journals are in verse. For 2016 I decided I would write a sonnet a week, fifty-two sonnets that would reflect the events of the year.

Sonnet: a “little song,” a form with a history, from Giacomo Da Lentini in the 13th century to the present. Petrarch, Dante—who had some interesting variations on the form-- established the Italian flavor of the sonnet. In English, it is Shakespeare’s spirit that appears, after “wandering to and fro across the earth,” like Hamlet’s father, to haunt any poet who would dare venture to write a sonnet. In a very real sense, Shakespeare exhausted the sonnet form in English, brought it to its fulfillment. All sonnets after are shadowed by his specter. How does it compare to Shakespeare? Does it have the brilliance of “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day,” or “When in disgrace with Fortune and men’s eyes,” or “Nor marble, nor the gilded monuments/Of princes, shall outlive this pow’rful rhyme.”

I doubt my sonnets have such brilliance.

Despite this shadow, I found I enjoy writing sonnets. I enjoy the puzzle aspect, finding the right words to fit the meter, finding the right rhyme, ideally just a bit unexpected. I also enjoy trying to keep the form while subverting it: enjambling the ends of lines to undermine the rhyme, to force it into a more subordinate role. I use far more caesuras, and have far more variant metrical feet than is usual in traditional sonnets. I also used all the varieties of the sonnet form, Italian, Spenserian, Shakespearian, even the Occitan form and Dante’s somewhat eccentric structures.

Working with the sonnets, I found that I actually prefer the Italian forms to the English, even though, or maybe because, the rhyme schemes are more challenging, perhaps because the Italian forms of the sonnet create some distance from the shadow of Shakespeare. Also, I am not fond of the terminal couplet in the English designation of the sonnet. It draws too much emphasizes.

It is almost impossible not to use it to summarize the verses above with some sort of platitude, and, if the rhyme and sentiment are not exactly right, it tends to undermine the stanzas above. The Dante variations on the sonnet form, which mark the center of the book, were especially challenging and engaging. They required finding words that could be rhymed six times for the first two stanzas and four times for the last two.

Beyond the structural challenges of the sonnet form, I also added an arbitrary rule. Every sonnet must mention crows. There is no particular reason for this rule other than that I like crows and admire their intelligence. Also, I like the idea of a murder of crows, a murder of sonnets. I will admit that sometimes the crow is forced into the sonnet, but sometimes their shadows glide gracefully through the verse

Fifty-two sonnets. One year. It was, in many ways, a disaster of a year.

A year of celebrity Losses:

Bowie: "Stardust glitters on a wave/ then's no more."

Judge Alito: "A justice dies,/but many would say justice died long ago."

Ecco: "Who spoke the name of the Rose?"

Harper Lee: "The mockingbird is dead."

Prince: "I think I know the sound when doves die."

Ali: "I still hold the memory/of when he fought. His fights seemed to be/for more than a heavy weight belt. /In a way, each fight was for dignity, /and not just his own."

Elie Weisel : “Elie Wiesel deserves a mention./ “Who will witness for the witness.” (The quote/from Paul Celan). Yet, that is what we do/best—forget history. “

Orlando: “news breaking through/of mass murder in Florida. All too/common now, as if they could murder time--/I feel defeated.”

Alan Rickman—though I didn’t actually note this in a poem.

Gene Wilder: “Gene Wilder dead. Loss, still, laced with laughter.”

Leonard Cohen: “And now,/Leonard Cohen is dead. As if the pure/sorrow of this year could prove a cure to hope.

Fidel Castro: “Corpse as cold as the cold war reviled by/ many, mourned by many. “

Roy Glass: “a firefly in the dark,” maybe not a mover on the world stage like Castro, but I liked him in Barney Miller and as the priest in Firefly.

John Glenn: “four sun rises in one day/orbit forever—obit”

Zsa Zsa Gabor.

George Michael, though I wasn’t that much of a fan: “Even on Christmas death has its gift to/give.”

Carrie Fisher: “This year that could leave nothing untouched. Carrie/Fisher dead at sixty.”

Debbie Reynolds: “Mother follows daughter.”

Many other celebrities also died who didn’t come to notice in my Sonnets: Alan Thicke, Greg Lake of Emerson Lake and Palmer, Florence Henderson, Gwen Ifil, Leon Russell, Edward Albee,

Morley Safer, Merle Haggard, Patty Duke, Gary Shandling and George Martin, the Beatles Producer, to name a few.

Beyond the celebrity, of course, there were many other losses. Thousands died in Aleppo and in Syria generally. Pakistan. Afghanistan. Iraq. Terrorist bombs. Natural disasters. The overturned rafts and swamped boats of refugees. All those that were cold and hungry anywhere in the world that died alone.

Is this the place we will meet
those nameless dead, those who have yet
to stir a memory, who died alone in sleet
and rain, curled in corners in a sweat
of defeat? They press against our windows
at night. A tap against the black pane.
They stare out of the black eyes of crows

A Year of Politics: an especially nasty year, the end of which is probably best left to silence and an attitude of resistance.

Why so angry? The politics of discord
prevail. Crows waiting for carrion.

Finally, the weather: weather has always been a major topic in my poetry. It is a testament to our physical presence in the world. Rain, wind, sunbreaks, summer heat, the movement of the trees, frost on the grass, all recall that there is a world that is not entirely in our minds, that is indifferent to our concerns. Not that I can claim not to have indulged in an occasional pathetic fallacy.

1.

Armed police, snipers on rooftops. New Year.
(A crow's feathers white with frost. Moon cold
among old stars) marketing alarm, fear
the driver of profit and control. What's sold
to comfort us. Grand Narrative--what's not
still a possibility. "Philosophy
is its place comprehended in thought."
Our place, their place, a hidden history.

How is it terror came to define
us? (White winged once, before cursed by Apollo
for tattling). What passages should I underline?
"Freedom is the ability to say no"

Each year balanced on an arbitrary scale.
Listen, I have discovered a new tale.

2.

“The primary fact of the modern age was not that the earth circled the sun, but that money circled the earth.” Uniform gray canopy of winter sky. Gravitational waves, long sought, perhaps found. Do crows feel the warp of thought rippling the field of gray sky. Memory blurs, blending with dreams. The lottery is worth over a billion. What they bought : a desperate hope for freedom. A cold stillness in the bare limbs of the willow next door. Everybody keeps dying.

Capital’s no guarantee of ripe old age. Gravity wages a long slow war against the upright. Was she crying?

3.

A fish tank bubbles, a waiting room. I dream
of the sea sometimes. (Stardust glitters on a wave
and then's no more) If intellect could pave
a way, it would have. Harder than it'd seem.

The rain whispers in my sleep at night, night stream
turning stones, murmuring in tongues I crave
to understand. There's nothing here to save.
Rain, wind, the earth warms. Weather's more extreme.

The sea will rise and erase the shore.
(Crows know us. They can remember a face.
They do not forgive.) Wind scratches at the door,
a stray cat. Why debate these issues more?
a walk at the tide's edge makes a case
for silence. What's speech against the surf's roar?

4.

Against all the noise in the world, this quiet rain.

The past was not better than now. That's old

age preferring its youth, no longer bold,

afraid of the new. It's best to refrain

from criticism. (From treetops crows explain

our errors. If anyone, let them scold

us). We mostly do what we are told.

The rain puddles around a blocked drain.

They say the planets will align tonight,

a curiosity, hidden behind

cloudy skies. Who bears the presence of mind

to see past their own decline? The light

grows day by day as we leave winter behind.

The last African black rhino is dead.

5.

In half light, fir trees glow against the gray.

One seeks some recourse in philosophy.

Can there be enough rain to wash away
the stains that darken our memory?

“ . . . a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea”

: *l’homme monde*. Shadow of a crow’s flight.

((Bed bugs have developed immunity
to our best poisons)—a sleepless night,

a tired day.) Some say we have lost sight
of some fabled home, some imagined past.

Are we truly beyond history? Might
not the season be turning at last?

At the end of the day it’s hard to care. I keep
what I can. Scattered dreams, a restless sleep

6.

*In the long night of history, a few gray
cats. . . Nothing's worth more than its selling price.*

Sonnet, a crow's wing. I've nothing to say
or, at least, nothing that would suffice.

Nothing happens and yet nothing can stay
the same. Pundits proffer their advice.

For the wealthy, wealth increases day by day.

The hope of change is enough to entice

conformity. Pale sun in a pale sky.

*Midwinter spring, sempiternal, sodden
sundowns.* The question is, when we try,

do we try for the wrong things? What do I
want, in the end? That things are broken
is simply entropy. Still, we get by.

7.

A consumer holiday for a saint
whose life is obscure, more of an invention
of Chaucer than the church. Below cracked paint,
crocuses thrust through black soil. Election
news can sour any sweet. A justice dies,
but many would say justice died long ago.
A line of fir trees brushed against gray skies,
rain whispers on the streets. They say a crow
mates for life—black wings across the gray--
Love's also a product, bought and sold.
What endures, what marks the hours of our day
is a certain boredom. Against the cold
the furnace pushes air through the vents.
What we crave's a certain violence. . .

8.

I want to write a poem the color of rain
at first twilight. Who spoke The Name of the Rose?

As time moves on the empty desert grows.

We lose one, then another, a flinch of pain,

then forgetting. A crow calls from a tree,

another answers. The mockingbird is dead.

I search my book shelves—what's left to be read?

Do I choose philosophy or fantasy?

Departures, arrivals. The plane on the tarmac

taxies to the runway. A full moon shines

on pavement. We seek to define a place

that is ours, but all places blend back

into a blur of strip malls and the lines

of parking lots, passed through, leaving no trace.

9.

To leap a gap of time, a day lost among
other days. *At dawn crows fold the dark sky
under their wings.* There are the things we try
to say, there are the songs we leave unsung--

Every word was shaped on another tongue.

Kiss me and I will pass this word from my
mouth to yours. It'll bind us together by
saliva and breath. At odd moments sprung

from memory, its flavor will surprise

us. It will add a strange spice to the taste
of all other words. The first cherry trees

are flowering. Standing water mirrors skies

in flooded fields. Wild geese. Winter gardens laced
with daffodils. Our warmest February.

10.

Black coffee bitters the tongue. Sad fields beside
the tracks. Muddy ruts gleam gray with rain
water. Gulls ghost. On river's surface, a stain
of cherry trees. I've no secrets to confide
these damp mornings. I've no thoughts to pride
myself on. It's useless to try and explain
this state, this world between worlds, this train,
this suspended realm in which I ride
between work and home, neither here nor there.
Wind ripples the puddles' surfaces. It blows
through fir trees lifting their bows. Who knows where
we came from? In the window, old eyes stare
back. Above a field, a murder of crows
rises, swirls and banks into the morning air

11.

Crow's feet around the eyes—my aging sight--
it seems I only just looked away
yet the winter twigs and branches overnight
burst into flower and perfume the day.

Logic, he says, is not about a way
to think, but rather an attempt to define
the truth. Without that, there's no way
to know what's up or down or how to refine
one's thoughts. What is the logic in wine
or in spring flowers? We are the clearing
in which being is revealed. Blackberry vines
bud new leaves. The equinox is nearing.

Hyacinth and daffodils. New mown grass.
To nurse a coffee and watch morning pass.

12.

That one sentence, built clause by clause, phrase by phrase, each modifying each, with distinct aspects of the current equinox, succinct images: new leaves that glow against the sky, cherry trees lining roads, petals that fly a blush of snow across sidewalks, linked lawns with grape hyacinth, purple, inked amid new grass, dandelions that try to spread their gold wine beneath the sun; that one such sentence could, in the end, stand sentinel, like a crow, over the blend of the season, that it should be able to run through all the sensations and comprehend the whole is, of course, impossible.

Taxes tax us, while politicians debate
how and who to tax. Caucuses vote.
Everything and nothing changes. The note
of the wind chime on the porch rings late
as the wind rises. Rain will inundate
us again. I suppose the lilies denote
resurrection. Still, I will not devote
any time this Easter to perpetuate
dogma. If I worship, I'll worship rain.
A crow hops on the roof's edge, then glides,
a shadow in the air. Swallows swoop, skim
above the newly mown lawn. A moss stain
paints the porch steps. How decide who decides?
The fate of the world can turn on a whim.

Old crow, a touch of frost around its beak
and tail—it is the travels that stick with him now.
He can remember every highway, speak
of each rest stop, city and camping place, how
they ate at that cafe forty years ago.
It's what animates him, lifts him out
of the fragility of old age. I know
a bit of that wanderlust. I know about
the road winding toward an ever more
distant horizon, cloud shadow on the hills,
the glow of cities against the sky at four
in the morning, and how, at last, dawn spills
its light and the city windows melt to gold.
Who can drive far enough not to grow old?

15.

The scent of hyacinth in April air.

Two crows pull straw from my back lawn to make
a nest. The world comes to us through care.

We are of the world before we take

It into cognizance. It is not there
as objects we encounter—Descartes's mistake--
the crows make nests in the world we share,
geese cast their shadows across the lake,

and the lake is glad to receive them. The day
shifts between light and shadow. First rain
then sun with steam rising off pavement. Say

what you will, the season finds a way
to renew our energies. It is plain
that we are of this world and its display.

16.

The vaguely evocative songs at play
in the bookstore cafe. Afternoon coffee
before the train ride home. Philosophy
book open on the table. I can't stay
much longer. The words are blurring anyway,
concentration interrupted by memory
or by daydreams, occasional fantasy,
unable to focus at the end of the day.

Outside it is over eighty degrees--
the hottest day ever recorded here
in April, the hottest week. A slight breeze
curls through city streets and stirs the leaves
of potted trees. I could use a beer.
A crow settles in the shade of a building's eaves.

17.

The coffee tastes as if it has sat all
afternoon. Eighties rock on the sound system.
Outside the wind stirs new leaves on the small
trees that line the street. I remember him,
though I was not the fan that many were.
Pale sunset through broken clouds. Another day
finds its end. Time is the issue. We prefer
ignorance, clinging to what passes away.
No new wisdom here. Clichés, the same old
thoughts return. I would like a breakthrough,
a sudden burst of insight and a bold
vision of how to make the worn out new.
Tepid coffee. Crows in a darkening sky.
I think I know the sound when doves die.

18.

The revolution, when it comes, will be heralded by a murder of crows. Today is not that day, though April's become May, and there will be protest marches in the city.

Broken sky. How often do we look up to see the clouds? To avoid tripping, our eyes stay fixed at our feet. Most anything you say can be made political, endlessly

arguing. Purple irises bloom beside the sidewalk on which I walk home after getting off the train. The pavement dyed

red from fallen petals. A fragrant tide of lilacs. Wisteria hangs from a rafter.

So May displays revolutionary pride.

19.

“We have not thought deeply enough about time.”

There is the time that ticks in the alembic
of stars, there is the time of volcanic
processes, drift of continents, the climb
and fall of mountain ranges. There's the time
of empires fallen, fading into fantastic
stories of the past. There is the tide's lick
at the shores. There is the clink of the porch chime
while sitting by the window counting breaths--
There is the eternal now. All time's present
in this moment, from the light of the first star
to the last ember—there are these moment's deaths,
as the next eternal now arrives. We've spent
our time. The crow mocks us from afar.

20.

These little songs, one would like to say
that they will last forever, but few'll read
them. The number of days for reading may
be fewer still as we nurture the toxic seed
of global warming. The wind stirs a reed
beside the tracks. A crow hops aside.
Still, the future was never guaranteed
we only hope that the earth will abide
and remember us. The remorseless tide
of oblivion has engulfed most.
Even if earth endures, it is only pride
that assumes we'll be more than compost.
Still one struggles to compose even one
poem that will endure until all is done.

21.

Why so angry? The politics of discord prevail. Crows waiting for carrion. The skies are unlikely to rain down fire. The wise, as always, are patient; they are in accord-- all things will fade away and move toward balance in the end. What would surprise us now is humility. The crow's black eyes stare out at the fading world. Who can afford to wait? Like it or not there is only this moment. It is now we make our past and future out of our nightmares or dreams.

April showers have come in May. We see lilacs and roses bloom. How can anger last? Nothing's ever be as important as it seems.

22.

Remembering those lost to what we call
history. On the cusp, as they say,
of summer. A pair of crows fly through gray
skies. Who can say what matters after all?

A sense of absences. No list for those who fall
outside of memory. Worlds die every day.
And worlds are born. In a dream I find a way
to a poet who sings of a harbor. Tall

ships are burning. A flight of birds arrives.
They will restore the world. I don't know
what the dream means. Anyone who strives
to create some kind of meaning in their lives
must contend with dreams. Trees cast their shadow
across the lawn. Later, the dream survives.

23.

“Float like a butterfly.” There have been no butterflies of late and few bees. I see only wasps. They build their mud nests below the eaves. I still hold the memory of when he fought. His fights seemed to be for more than a heavy weight belt. In a way, each fight was for dignity, and not just his own. This year has felt like one long funeral. So many lost who seemed so lasting. Crows pick at dead possums beside the road. Too much just tossed aside. It is difficult to measure the cost of time. Too many punches in the head and heart. A bus belches a blue exhaust.

24.

I have not thought about time for some time now.

Five more minutes until the train departs.

Rails gleam in dull light. Isn't it odd how
pigeons flutter down in fits and starts

like newspapers thrown from the ramparts
above the station? So much left to do

that has nothing to do with those parts

I am expected to play--news breaking through

of mass murder in Florida. All too

common now, as if they could murder time--

I feel defeated. A crow picks at a few
scraps as if investigating a crime.

The train lurches forward I see rain black
against the sky—as if winter were back.

25.

A breaker of ocean spray spreads its foam
of white flower over the path. Sheep graze
in a meadow just past a fence and a blaze
of fireweed. A small doe and two fawns roam
beside a patch of alder. Cool winds comb
the tall grass. Crows cry. The whole scene conveys
a literal pastoral as if the lays
of Theocritus or Virgil's tome
were made fact. I have never understood
the appeal of those idylls. They seemed
too stylized—a peasant's life no peasant would
recognize—a way that the urban could
pretend a simpler life, a way to be redeemed.
Yet here I am also escaped to the wood.

26.

It's hard to dispute the world's gone crazy--
England's amputation—now all can see
its bloody stump reaching toward Europe. Day
light in Turkey reveals a disarray:
shredded luggage, pools of blood. Hard to say
what could ever end this insanity.

Half a year. Half a year to go. Debris
is scattered through our tired memory--
let it go. It is enough to focus on the play
of the poem. (A sonnet? No less than Dante
says it is) On the porch flower baskets sway
in a slight breeze. All this news that comes at me
on television and on the internet
in a sense, has nothing to do with where I
am, working on poems. One can only try
to find some peace. Best, perhaps, to let
the news rumble in background, forget
the endless suffering. A half dozen crows fly
toward the mountain. Branches lift and sigh.
I can only sit and watch the sun set.

27.

If there were gods, one might offer to pray
that the rest of the year doesn't betray
all our hopes. Still, though the way's never clear,
we are focused on the future. What we fear
and what we hope for is always with us here--
care is our nature, Heidegger would say,
care for the world and those with us is the way
we move from this now into the next day
making time out of being. The fourth is near.
There will be parades of old cars and John Deere
tractors, old soldiers, boy scouts. Flags will appear
everywhere. At night fireworks will spray
the skies with colored plumes. I don't know
what it means, if anything. It would seem
that we are nostalgic for a dream
of a past that never existed. Is there no
future that does not frighten us? A crow
flaps across an empty field. A stream
winds through cotton woods. Twilight's last gleam
filters through the leaves with a soft glow.

28.

Elie Wiesel deserves a mention. “Who will witness for the witness.” (The quote from Paul Celan). Yet, that is what we do best—forget history. Still I would vote

to forget this week: Two men dead, both black, by police hands, then police gunned down in Dallas. Violence we can’t take back.

Hate and anger rising until we drown.

How many times have the flags been half-mast?

A crow gives meaning to an empty sky-- between angry gunshots and the bomb’s blast, It’s hard to remember why we try,

yet try we do. We get up every day even if we have run out of words to say.

29.

Smoke from spent fireworks drifts over a scene
of carnage--I can't remember a year
like this: So many worlds disappear,
so many violent events that mean
nothing. Filtered sunlight drifting through green
leaves. All too many succumb to fear
and fear breeds hatred. It is quiet here.
Cats chirp at birds through a window screen.

The recycling truck grumbles up the street.
Somehow, it seems, we are recycling these
events. They just return in another form.

It may be too early to admit defeat.
A few black crows settle into the trees
to shelter in place and await the storm

30.

Fuchsias seem to draw the most humming birds.

These quite mornings before others wake--

too often I waste the time I should take

to write to read the news. Afterwards,

I am restless and it's hard to find words

for those poems I want most to make--

that hover like the humming bird—a break

in time—paused--before darting upwards

and away. There's a hidden nectar here,

a sweetness, if one can find it. One knows

objectively there's little cause for fear.

But often the way forward is not clear.

On the lawn, two of the necessary crows

hop through white blossoms of morning clover.

31.

There is no end, but why, after all, would
one want an end? Death is the only end.
A respite, perhaps, in a quiet wood
where sunlight and green leaves blend
on the surface of a stream. Cattails bend
and whisper in a slight breeze. Dragonflies
hover above flat stones. Here one can suspend
anxieties, forget the world as it tries
to tear itself apart. Beneath blue skies
it is clear that all is always the same.
The world is always ending. No surprise.
Crows wait on branches to descend and claim
the carrion. But, here, the stream mumbles
words of calming. Rest, while the world stumbles.

32.

Paper lanterns float on the outgoing tide.
Memoriam. For only so far
as we remember--their shadows are
printed in glass in our minds. There is no pride
in destruction. The day's news will provide
no assurances. A murmuration of star-
lings bank over an empty field. A car
rusts behind an old house collapsing beside
the train tracks. There is a certain quiet here
far removed from the fiery hell of that
moment long ago. Tonight, comet dust
streaks through Cassiopeia. What we fear
is distant. A flock of crows will rise at
dawn and fly into skies the color of rust.

33.

“So, language is the *shelter* of being.”

Derrida on Heidegger. These words I keep,
these words that keep me. It is hard to sleep
in this heat. Fragments of dreams bringing
me mazes, endless hallways, rooms shifting,
disappearing, fragile maps falling into a heap
of dust. Language is such a maze, a deep
labyrinth of shifting meaning,

a house in which the rooms are never quite
the same. Crows squawk outside. I walk from room
to room, the familiar bathed in the light
of an unfamiliar sun. Even in the bright
light of day there is a certain touch of gloom
at the edge of things, shards from the night.

34.

The sun blazes. The lawn has turned to dust.
These are the hottest days. Even the crows
don't venture from the shadows. Night, we trust,
will bring slight relief, when a light breeze blows
through the windows. Winters, I long for
Summer; summers, I long for the Fall.
All seems to come together in October
when mist domes in wet fields under tall
firs, and the cottonwood leaves burn red
and gold in slanting shafts of morning light.
In summer my slow thoughts lie in a bed
of sweat. In autumn, they reignite.
For escape, a brief trip to Paradise
where cool winds descend from glacial ice.

35.

Everything that we were, we are now.
Even if erased, I wonder? Memory
wiped by Alzheimer's disease? History
begins in our own awareness of somehow
having been. The shadow of a fir bough
blurs on shallow water. A mossy tree
branch trails in a tea colored eddy. Are we
the surface or the depth? Do we allow
for a time that transcends the living mind
recalling time? Or does it drift away
floating like a twig on the foam spray
of the current? What if no one can remind
us of how the crows mourned that day?
Gene Wilder dead. Loss, still, laced with laughter.

35.

Rain through the smoke of barbeque pits:
the state fair. Autumn is near. On a few trees
leaves are beginning to turn yellow, though it's
probably from the recent heat, not these
cooler nights. A lone crow floats on a breeze.
A Labor Day without labor. Sunlight
diffused through clouds. The season's last bees
gather water drops from the grass. The light
fades. These shorter days pass through dull to bright
to dull. Soon Orion will rise in the south,
and stars will shine clear and cold in the night.
Furnace pushing air, warm cider in the mouth—
An autumn fantasy more than a reality,
still, I welcome the change in scenery.

36.

Dust devils whirl across the desert plain
between barren ridges. Such solitudes
would have filled me once. In the multitudes
and lights of Vegas, I would still abstain
from humanity, a crowd, aloof-- distant
mixed with a desert longing, and all such moods
would be turned to poetry. But attitudes
change with ageing. It's easier to maintain
a certain calm, to relax beside the pool
under palm trees, and leave the high plateau
behind. The question is, am I less the fool
or less the poet? Is there some cosmic rule
that we must lose intensity as we grow
older? Is the quieting of age kindly or cruel?

37.

Dark flocks of crows calling as they gather
for their evening roost, even as the leaves
fall and summer ends. A call together,
as if I were someone who believes

in fresh starts. Murders darken the news,
as always, it seems. I must brace myself
for the return to work. The trend line skews
down. Restless, I peruse books on my shelf

looking for something occupy my mind,
a distraction, perhaps a heroic quest,
a journey in which heroes struggle to find
what they had all along, or perhaps it's best

to read philosophy and focus on
fundamentals, on things here or gone.

38.

Morning, cold enough to restart the furnace,
dormant for so many months. The push of air
comforting in the quiet house. Skies where
crows fly against the gray. The nearness
of, what? Being? These thoughts that turn us
away from what is closest, what is there,
around us, but forever the most rare
of things—what questions, if asked, will earn us
insight into the fleeting? Autumn roses
bloom above ruined gardens. Morning mist
domes the damp fields glowing in the slant light
of the rising sun. A lone white horse poses
by a cottonwood, flanks steaming. What is the gist
of it all? Is there a way to get it all right?

39.

A crow glides above the corn field. A maze
cut through green leaves and stalks. We wander lost
more often than not, a piece of corn silk tossed
in the path as a marker. These paths are ways
we have gone before. The blue of the day's
skies blends with gray. A bank of clouds has crossed
the southern horizon. We've yet to exhaust
this labyrinth, even as the sun's filtered rays
fade on the flat of the leaves. There will be rain
before morning. Most paths lead to a dead
end. There are tokens to be found, a mystery
to solve, even if there is nothing to gain,
even if, after everything has been said,
we are no closer to any sort of victory.

“Of mists and mellow fruitfulness,” if I recall correctly. Ode to Autumn, Keats who I have not read in years—dawn greets, a diffuse gold through a fog shrouded sky.

Driving to the train, through soft morning light. Pleasant now, but a storm is on the way, not metaphorical but actual. They say the remains of a typhoon will hit tonight with high winds and torrential rain. This too is autumn, season of storms and winds tearing at the clinging leaves, raking through the corn fields. After winds, a pale blue sky above a pumpkin patch. A crow sends out an alert. After storm, all is crisp and new.

41.

Rarely has political discourse been this ugly.
Crows feast on carrion. These days I rise
before the light. The dark falls swiftly
as I drive home. Rain clouds darken dark skies.

It can seem as if these autumn days comprise
a long tunnel through the night. It can seem
as if the only light that enters our eyes
is of headlights and room lights. The sun's a dream

for other days. Roadside trees are a theme
brushed in ink, gray green, blue and gray.
Low mists drift above the curl of a stream.
None will be persuaded, whatever we say.

They say fears breed in ignorance and dark.
The decisions we face are clear and stark.

42.

We are in the middle of a mass extinction.
The burst bubble of a universal sphere:
foam on a pebbled beach. What we have here
is a failure of concern. All distinction
between the real and any private illusion
lost—if it ever existed. The public fear,
generated by media, a means to steer
us into a proper state of submission.

Listen. I have seen crows harass an eagle
and drive it from the beach. There is still time,
though, in perhaps the world's oldest crime,
it's stolen from us. There's no question of legal
recourse, argument for the defense sublime
enough. Sixty seven percent vanished.

43.

The scrape of a leaf blown across the street.
The branches of a tree weaving a net
across a dark sky. Clouds veiling a discreet
moon. The smell of earth and old leaves, wet
in the gutters. Is this the place we will meet
those nameless dead, those who have yet
to stir a memory, who died alone in sleet
and rain, curled in corners in a sweat
of defeat? They press against our windows
at night. A tap against the black pane.
They stare out of the black eyes of crows
accusing us of forgetting. Who among us knows
how many have vanished without a stain?
They poison our dreams with their sorrows.

44.

That there should be rain squalls; that the trees should bend
and shiver in sad winds; that the tall grass
should mourn among dead leaves— “this will not pass”
so the crows caw as they rise, black, on the wind.

The Romans kept a fire for virgins to tend,
the hearth of the Empire. As long as the flash
of flames reflects on the pool, the empire lasts.
The flame is dead. We have seen the end
of Democracy. The world will endure,
probably (there is some question). And now,
Leonard Cohen is dead. As if the pure
sorrow of this year could prove a cure
to hope. The wind lifts and drops a bough.
How can any year leave everything so unsure?

45.

Resistance: there are things we cannot allow.

Bare tree limbs net a tattered sky.

A matt of black leaves beside the drain, by
the curb. What is that we should do now?

Can we resist the wind? Winter comes. How
do we preserve some memory of high
suns and warm fields? Shadows, silent crows, fly
toward their evening roost. We must vow

not to abandon others to the cold.

It will be all too easy to let the days
play out, to huddle inside by the fire,

but we must resist temptation, be bold
and caring. There are still many ways
we can prevent a funeral pyre.

46.

A thankless year, all said. A crow's caw greets
the sodden morning. Each day a new
disaster. The family gathers and eats,
even if the blessings we count are few.

We humans possess a very tenuous
relationship with physical reality.

We live in bubbles, a synthesis
constructed for our private immunity.

The furnace blows warm air to displace
the cold. I see the wind stirring the firs
through the window. I see the trace
of rain on the glass, as the view blurs.

What, if anything, is left to say?

Be thankful, year's end is nearer each day.

47.

Corpse as cold as the cold war, reviled by many, mourned by many. It's true that no revolution rises to its promise. No tyranny not ultimately replaced by another tyranny. A bitter wind sweeps by the railroad tracks. The rain has stopped. No snow, though there is a possibility. No crows flying through the gray sky. We live by maintaining old habits, as if nothing is lost nothing gained. A flat aspect, a dull plain stretching to some drab infinity.

A firefly in the dark. Another bright star lost. Cold as a corpse. Some days, hour after dull hour aches restlessly toward infinity.

48.

A tissue of ice on puddles between
the railroad tracks. Wild Canadian geese stand
and strut beside the puddles, while a band
of crows flies over parked train cars. A sheen
of frost whitens the rails. Storm warnings 've been
issued for tonight. Our issues go hand
in hand with our prosperity—our bland
lives, now that the struggle to survive's been
superseded. Four sun rises: one day,
orbit forever—orbit. The train has slowed
to a stop. Coated, scarfed passengers unload.
Later: white blur in the headlights, the long way
home. Windblown snow snakes across the road.
It will all turn to rain by morning.

49.

A world that is livable for all
its inhabitants. Cold, clear skies. We danced
in air, without wings. We have advanced
this far, freed from the burdensome pall
of necessity. We can spray paint the wall
with boredom and frivolity: enhanced
richness of time and choice—we have chanced
on infinity. The old structures fall
and are spread like foams at sea
edge. The question remains how
dismantle capitalism without inadvertently
causing the deaths of millions. What do we
do with our new-found richness? Now
time will free us all for prosperity.

50.

That the darkest day should mark the slow turn
toward light (Northern Hemisphere). The tree,
evergreen, to symbolize that life will burn
still in the cold and dark. The memory

of pagan rites coopted by Christianity
and buried in a frenzy of consumerism.

Fir trees, black and green, brushed in shadowy
silhouette at twilight. Capitalism

sings its carols. (Face reflected in the prism

of a wine glass.) In dark trees crows roost, shadows
on branches, creatures of a paganism

older than time. Around us a light grows

shining out of windows. Interplay of light

and darkness on this hibernal solstice night.

51.

Even on Christmas death has its gift to
give. The belt of Orion glitters high
above frosted windshields. The winter sky
cold and clear, moonless. We look for a clue
to the coming year in its wordless black. No view
of the future, only the ancient firefly
flicker of dying stars. It's futile to try
to read anything here. Tomorrow will do
whatever it will. Crows will spread their black wings
above the white fields and rise through mist
into the dawn. Whatever the future brings
there will be this. Some say starlight sings
in us. I don't know. This year won't be missed.
The next approaches full of misgivings.

52.

This year that could leave nothing untouched. Carrie
Fisher dead at sixty. To make New Year's
resolutions seems an act of futility.

Silence. Rain. The winter morning appears

to have been wrapped in a shroud of gray.

Mother follows daughter. There is a race
into darkness. What more can this year betray?

The crows caw in mourning. We must brace

against the coming year. No sign that it
will be better, though there is always hope.

Now, in the last hours of the year, I sit
watch robins comb frost whitened grass. We'll cope

with what comes. In the end, there is no choice.

It is for us to give the coming year a voice.

Random Notes

1.

The armed snipers in NY as security for the New Year's ceremonies.

"Philosophy/ is its place comprehended in thought." I was reading Sloterdijk's *In the World Interior of Capital*.

I came across the story of the white crows in Kallimachos' Hekale :

δ] <ε>ίελος ἀλλ' ἦ νύξ ἢ ἔωδιος ἢ ἔσσετ' ἦώσ
εὔτε κόραξ, ὅς νῦν γε καὶ ἄν κύκοισιν ἐρίζοι
καὶ γάλακι χποιῆν καὶ κύματος ἄρκωϊ ἀώτω,
κυάνεον φῆ πίσσαν ἐπὶ πετερὸν οὐλοὸν ἔξει,
ἀγγελίης ἐπίχειρα τά οἱ ποτε Φοῖβος ὀπάσσει
ὀππότα κεν Φλεγύαο Κορωνίδος ἀμφὶ θυγατρὸς
Ἴσχυϊ πληξίππῳ σπομένες μαιρόν τι πύθηται.

but it shall be evening or night or noon
or dawn when the crow,
which now shares the colors of the swan,
or of milk, or of the finest cream on the crest of the
wave
shall put on a sad plumage, pitch black,
the reward of Phoebus one day
when he gets the bad news that Korains
the daughter of Phleguas has run off with Ischius,
the horse driver.

My translation.

2.

"The primary fact. . ." Sloterdijk again. The sentence occurs in both *The World Interior* and *Spheres II, Globes*

There was a record lottery amount that week.

3.

David Bowie died.

4.

News notice that the last African Rhino died, and that the species was officially extinct.

I thought this form of the Italian sonnet, with its unrhymed last line was ideal for this kind of jarring news.

5.

“a face drawn in the sand. . .”: Sloterdijk.

6.

Same.

“Midwinter spring,”: T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding.”

7.

Valentine’s day.

Justice Antonin Scalia died.

8.

Umberto Eco and Harper Lee dead.

My wife and daughter took a trip to Arizona, thus the tarmac.

9.

Leap Year.

10.

The daily commute.

11.

Reference to Heidegger and his *Logic*

13.

Income taxes and Easter.

14.

For my dad.

15.

Reading Heidegger.

17.

Prince died.

18.

May Day. Always an occasion for protests and riots.

19

“We have not thought enough about time. “: quote in a magazine article from some physicist. I forget the name of the article and the physicist, but the quote lingers.

21.

The politics of this election year are full of rage and racism.

22.

Memorial Day.

23.

Mohamad Ali died.

24.

Mass shooting in a nightclub in Florida.

25.

A brief vacation to Lopez island.

26.

Dante calls this form a sonnet.

England votes to leave the European Union.

A massive bomb in Istanbul's airport.

27.

Fourth of July

28.

Elie Wiesel died.

Seven police gunned down in Dallas.

29.

A massacre in Nice on Bastille Day.

30.

"the necessary crows." Required in every sonnet.

32.

Anniversary of Hiroshima.

Also, the Persoid meteor shower

33.

The first line from Derrida's lectures *Heidegger: The Question of Being and History*.

34.

Record heat. Global warming.

I am inordinately proud of the internal rhymes happening in the first stanza.

Paradise at Mount Rainier.

35.

Still reading Derrida's lectures on Heidegger.

I started the poem this way:

Everything that we were, we are now.

I am not one who lingers on my past.

Things that happened a year ago or last week pass without notice. I allow

it all to slip quietly beneath the prow--
the ship of the moment—if I may cast
such an overused metaphor—a vast
vague sea of memory that somehow

keeps me afloat. Still,

It is a bad sign when you have to apologize for a metaphor. Also, it was unforgivably bland and vague. So, I decided to redo it with more concrete detail, though I think I still fell back into old—what are for me at least—well-worn images.

Crows casting shadows over an empty lot.

A river full of voices that I forgot:

murmurs, whispers, stone against stone. How

many lost memories... Only dreams allow

their secret return. . .

So, a third take. . . News alerts posted Gene Wilder's death at 83. He had long suffered from Alzheimer's disease. Still returned to the river and it was very difficult to work the crows in. Not sure, in the end, that what remains here as the sonnet is significantly better than what I threw away.

35.

A Spenserian sonnet.

Labor Day. Puyallup state fair.

Orion is still below the horizon.

36.

We drove to Vegas for the week, crossing the Great Basin—the high desert plateaus in Nevada.

The question of intensity is one I have often pondered. When I was young everything had a certain numinous intensity, a certain painful otherness and strangeness that I could never let go of, never relax. It left me with a self-conscious, social awkwardness, a loneliness that I both despaired of and embraced. Everything was poetry. Now I am more relaxed with myself and the world, even if it is not a perfect fit, even if it still met with a certain awkwardness.

For the most part I am glad of the changes, but there are moments when I miss those intensities, even if they were

mostly hormones and a certain social autism. The poetry was so vibrant and vital then.

37.

Convocation, a bringing together of voices, the beginning of school. Also, end of Summer beginning of Autumn.

Another rejected sonnet:

To call together, like dark flocks of crows calling
as they gather for their evening roost--
to begin again, even as the leaves are falling
and summer ends—a tired attempt to boost
energy for the coming quarters. School
has always mapped the rhythms of my days.
A return to habit. The unspoken rule
of the endless commute. Traversing the maze
of classrooms and offices and meetings
even as the wind whips rain against the glass
and the day's light becomes but a fleeting
glimpse of gray between darkneses. I pass
ghosting through the hallways and stairwells

It is too conventional, too limp, if I can use that word, not enough tension. The bit about the “rhythms of my days,” the “ghosting” of the halls seem sappy and overly romantic to me. As always, not sure the replacements are significantly better.

Murders : shooting a mall north of Seattle, five dead. Police shootings of unarmed black men in Charlotte and elsewhere. . . more of the same

38.

A little bit of Heidegger.

39.

Corn maze season starts the end of September and runs through October.

40.

The storm took a last-minute turn to the west and was not as severe as feared.

42.

The meaning of life according to the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* –

Not this poem.

The note about extinction from news stories. By 2020 67% of all wild species of animal on earth are likely to be extinct.

Also, the third volume of Sloderdijk's Spheres Trilogy, *Foam* arrived, hence the foam on the beach and speculation about private vs public illusions.

43.

Halloween, sort of. . .

44.

A failed sonnet, discarded, especially given the circumstances of the presidential election:

Corvus brachyrhynchos hesperis, black
iridescent feathers, omnivorous,
smart, social. They are monogamous.
When wronged they remember and attack.

Today there are three in a cul de sac
tree overlooking the wet street. Raucous,
cursing dogs who have begun a continuous
barking at the tree from fenced back
yards. I don't doubt that if I were to claim
a spirit animal it would be the crow

The election itself was a gut punch, and Leonard Cohen's death
an additional sadness.

45.

Still reacting to the election. Trying to drum up some resistance,
trying to avoid "normalizing" the situation.

Still I don't think it is my best sonnet.

46.

An English Sonnet. Thanksgiving, and musings on Sloterdijk's
third volume of the Sphere's trilogy: *Foam*.

47.

Castro died at 90. And Roy Glass.

I thought it might be interesting to use the same words for the
rhymes, even though that is not technically a rhyme.

48.

I started with this:

abba abba cdd cde

A tissue of ice on puddles between
the railroad tracks.

Four sun rises in one day,
orbit forever—orbit.

Snow snakes across the road
it will rain by morning

The weather and the death of John Glenn, the astronaut. I
remember his orbit around the earth. (That's how old I am.)

Go in peace among the stars.

The following is reflection of Sloterdijk's *Foam*, my morning
reading on the train.

Our issues go hand
in hand with our prosperity—our bland
lives, now that the struggle to survive's been
superseded.

49.

A world that is livable for all
its inhabitants—

Buckminster Fuller. The rest is from Sloterdijk's *Foam*.

50.

Winter solstice.

51.

George Michael died on Christmas at the age of 53.

52.

And now Carrie Fisher, a princess that didn't need saving, and Debbie Reynolds dead the day after—mother following daughter.

