

## **Stalking Egret**

Still,  
as a statue carved  
from the best Carrera marble,  
White, on black stilt legs  
in the water running off  
toward the blue Pacific,  
with his neck stretched out  
above the shallows where  
He stands  
in the Santa Ana River,  
or every now and then  
takes a slow step toward  
where another fish might lie,  
Indifferent  
to the sun shining down,  
or to the heady glare  
of those eyes above him  
looking down  
Watching  
for that first sign of life,  
a fin's flicker,  
A minnow  
that he can stab and stop  
against the sandy flat,  
above the flying shadows  
of ripples moving on  
toward meaning,  
toward that hint  
of transcendence left  
when wavelets die  
Unnoticed on the shore  
he stalks.

## **The Birds: A Migration**

Out of evening they return,  
the birds, (European Starlings)  
come back again  
to the Winter's end of Spring.

At rest across the way  
they chatter and scream  
in the half-dead Eucalyptus trees,  
a mock until,  
suddenly silent,  
caught in the rush of dusk's  
empurpling spokes, they fall,  
swoop, and rise again to perch—  
black motes held  
swinging in the breeze.

And far below them, there  
beside the fountain,  
next to stairs,  
the people stop and stare.  
Intimations of wonder  
touch their spirits as  
stretched  
along the thinnest,  
convoluted surfaces of mass  
They rise and turn again, to fall  
within themselves,  
then rise again to catch  
the darkened ragged edges of  
those heights.

And when the moment straightens  
out, when once again  
the chatter starts,  
the movement past  
the modern fountain, up  
and down, around the corners  
there, where memory is lost.  
They fit it back  
into the edges of  
their lives. The work of moments  
they extract themselves,  
the token mystery  
from sight

And I  
swung in colors drawn  
from Starlings, I  
take on the mimicry  
of flight.

## **Texas Longhorns, 2010**

They do them up in bronze here  
in Cowtown USA, longhorns,  
beef on the hoof bred tough enough  
to fight off panthers  
ticks, tornadoes, floods  
and the long drive north  
along the Chisholm trail to slaughter.  
They're the next best thing to bison,  
near extinction now,  
in America's mythic West  
but at home in our cowboy hearts.

Anachronous in this land of oil wells  
and the Barnett shale, they've been replaced  
by Black Angus steers, bred behind barbed wire,  
shipped by truck to feedlots and efficient stockyards  
hidden from sight in the broken-down corners of our society  
where we now live years beyond our means  
in foreclosed neighborhoods, along rusted ribbons of steel  
and leaking pipelines under concrete highways bred  
years ago out of enterprise from the American Dream.

Throughout the great Midwest, our heartland,  
where values reign unchallenged and compassion  
eats the dust of America's fundamental myths  
revolution, independence, infinite expansion,  
captured in that dream of Tea Party injuns  
boarding merchant ships, destroying all they see.  
There's a straight but narrow road ahead  
shimmering in the heat of changing climates,  
disasters loom—hurricanes, tornadoes, floods—  
stretching north to the horizon,  
as flat and featureless as  
our future without grace.

## **Reading Charles, I Think of Gary**

In Memory of G. D.

Dead at Christmas time,  
of the bullet you put in your head  
in Sunnymeade,  
you left your poems,  
dozens of unset poems,  
the undone like the rest,  
to Bob, who is a successful poet now,  
though not, perhaps,  
a major one like Charles--  
who's famous in France  
like Ezra Pound  
or Edgar Allen Poe.

For their place in the sun at last,  
each has a *Selected Poems* in which  
they have pulled from culls  
the "best."  
And so, Bob tells me,  
he's going to do for you--  
select from among your thin remains  
the best,  
a Charon's craft,  
to carry us past your death.

Will these then be,  
Like yew or rosemary plucked fresh  
the last reprise  
of that life through which,  
you took your craft;  
or will they be  
but a sunlit static place in which,  
after you've passed on the rest,  
cold epitaphs collect?

I can't give it up—  
I'm angry at your death,  
and I miss your grace,  
The crazed unfettered daringness  
With which you made no peace.  
You've left us all bereft, able only  
To imagine the crack of that 44  
With which you took your life,  
In the silence that it left.

## Varieties of Snow

These words are snow  
in wind as are the white  
petals fallen A drift  
from trees in spring

Awakenings for all to see  
of summer's green trees  
The flutterings  
of snow-winged butterflies  
against the edge of shadows  
under which I walk

As I look up and see  
in the fall sun's glare  
White as light made soft  
a sift of down floating down  
of cottonwood seeds aloft  
And these are also snow

As dropped  
like flakes of ice  
on singing wings  
The waking up  
of dour winter calls  
The crystal snow  
of time home  
to all