

"conversations in shorthand speak for themselves,
document life as art; inspired to be nothing else but a
masterpiece of unfulfilled expression silently impressed
- its failure to remain anonymous defeat wars won
than lost ...the successful regret having failed so well."

the author

Foreword

out of the Race/

[background: the announcement of the 9th race]

out of the game today.
went down to the races
see my muse's horse run

"buckshot" #9

...old leather, scrap rag
...cracked & battered coat of arms
pedigree: matchstick on dead legs
nothing but the charge in his eyes

(a few minutes earlier at the bar...)

[what's this I hear about waiting on inspiration? ex-riders squawking how it's left them,
brood over faded platforms while their train comes in from some war (like an old black
and white), or have some new spark rekindle the burnt out parts: "horseshit!"

howlings and whimpers from spayed bitches – stiff straights, gutless as drywall. next
time, stick a battery charger in my ears for the juice...and what can you tell them?
"go teach horses to drive a bus", or "talk to camels who run numbers" – rather have
intercourse with a toothache. backyard cackle clank & clutter: horsemen to cocksman
crow for hammer and no trigger.

it's not cerebral; some wild stallion or stud buckin' at the ready, just saddle him.
a rusty, twisted chain bent but never broken/can't even saw the damn thing off!
"...music from a farther room" (as old T.S. was wont to say). needs to breathe,
feel up the air...slug it's way out of the bottle (believe me, I've bled one or two).
talent with no guts are good jokes with bad punch lines, shepherds of the sheepish.
mind over movement might as well peddle mutton (or horsemeat) and leave wining to
gamblers who have the stomach for it.

okay...we're coming up on the 9th ...this one's on me (drowns glass), here it is:
the play's the thing, it's all in the risk – a party all by yourself. hey man, no cup
is run without a chaser...I'm out!]

[horses at the starting gate]

"c'mon Buckshot, show these pastry ponies
some backwater thunder

...that old time religion!

mississippi barrel

& sandbags full of gunpowder!"

In the Race! All spit & fire...and running it out! *black sockets burned in the sun*
blindly charge under sweat & steam *for filthy minstrels shoveling coal*
thick among polished marble *self-licking bobbing lollipops...ah, fuck 'em!*
hide to hide & in the raw *the naked spur*
rider less ... a ripple in the plan *god long gone and riding it out!*
running out the dream of lions *like Hemingway's old man*

not too bad

came in second to last...

leading him back to the stable
they muttered to themselves
how many more left in him

but it was a fine day...

sun beamed proudful father
protective & forgiving
tree-lined streets bent on strutting
& days spent for losing...

then there's the canvas bag:

man's bones & dead history
that chomp at the bit,
my love steak
the old fire horse...

yeah, always good scratch for an itchy stretch

I mean ...what the hell

shortcuts & dead ends/

1.

mannequin
(*window dressing*)

longing dangles imagination's feet
(*looking out window spin gray thoughts...*)
secretly resists noose's pulsing lust loosen knot tied to its past;
(*I was a hummingbird wearing a red scarf*)
swings from branches fantasies grip whose fruit's out of season.
(*and lighted on thin green branch of leaves*)
famine's acquired taste feast on stolen moments (*naked afternoons...*)
stretch wider canvas ...*stamp on wings ...twilight drifter*
under circus of stars ...*silhouette secret*
celebrate strangers & lovers - ...*peephole playboy*
old desires with younger memories
...*unseen*
.
whisper on a string)

[day break: mannequin back in window (*red scarf around his neck*)]

1.1

whose nostalgia's ahead of its time (*looking forward to the past*).
imagine myself in black & white (MILO FARLOW "TROUBLE AT LARGE")
color pages filling shadows...

gin joints with their fractured air of alcoholic breath
drum up jazzy nights & hot numbers -
hourglass figure's immortal lines zip guitars in dresses
pack suicide swings &
.22 Brownings in nylons
saucy dish juggling bowls rattles hive stings the mark
slippery slink onto stool
brush of silky legs flash
double-crossed openings
snappy dames as damsels on the lam from wolves
with a voice that wets her words
spider webs steel coated strings
plays the fly in a sticky jam;
late-night driveway's hopped up Edsel oiled & waxed
throws curve engine running
soft boiled eggs run over easy
flip over a hot grill's sizzle
doorway's cocked silhouettes smoke shotgun smiles
shipwrecks in shot glasses & amnesia on the rocks
handcuffed me to boiler blackjacked from behind
railroads for fast twists on the outskirts of nowhere
hustler's express punched her ticket out of town
the only new trick for old dogs is to roll over;
left high & dry like cheap bourbon sucked from bottles
walk rain soaked pavements under yellow lampposts
and worn out fedoras where memories never age.

1.2

pose outside myself *If they paid pennies for thoughts I'd be laden...*
so I can strip inside *heads above them all*
the long & tall of it *& plenty of tail*
cut in short widths: *a new Aengus! ...wandering wand*

vitality orphans youth *dips Eden's apple to hook golden trout*
like a gift unties present *...lay traps for the wild*
my tracks run ten years late - *suck poison out of beasts!*
steel jockey hoppin' runaways *crack nut while throwing bones to shadows*
berth to boxcar fugitives *blood-thorns... copper-rich...*
awaken phantom lives *& beggar dressed thief*
caught by surprise. *trades moonlight for stones*

journeys abandon
fearless fervor
less the fever
from no rush
but mass transit.

2.

meanwhile...
(*in-betweens*)

lonely people
eating in c_

[character interrupts author]

"okay, that's it, I'm not going any further!"

"can we discuss this later?"

"no, because you say this after every poem and never keep your promise, but I'm the one getting his ass whipped running your races while you sit back in your easy chair"

"but Borges said that the author must turn his back to the reader"

"that's why he was such a lousy poet"

"hey, wait a minute!..."

"well, that's neither here or there, you have your own labyrinth to unravel without being ensnared by intellectual webs...what about *my* fantasies? christ, you could at least throw in some romance! I'm not moving until you tell me where I'm heading"

"nowhere, you're already there - you're quite fortunate"

"see, you're doing it again! remember, it's only through *me* that they get to know *you*"

"by holding my words ransom? listen, we're both puppets; the only thing that separates us are the strings...it's not where you land but how you fall"

"yeah, but I'm the one left hung out to dry - the dirty linen you wash your hands of"

"why be dressed in borrowed robes strung like a spool entangled by its own yarn: show & tell's litany shrouds sentimental journeys of old gardens & dead relatives - rigor mortise in academic tombs. you favor fresh air, or blow smoke?"

"I know all that, but I have feelings too. I'm doing the hard road, brother, bit & blinders: your dead-end donkey. at least give me something at the tail end I can hold as my own"

[enter critic] "he's absolutely correct, you strip the character of any sentiment whereby ambiguity fails to address the issues that ultimately alienates your readers"

"who is this guy?" "I have no idea"

"wait a minute! I have every right to express..."

"so...here's my condition: I want you to include one of my poems"

"oh no, not this again. c'mon, you're place is under saddle stompin' dirt & gravel"

"exactly, it's from my perspective. tweak it a little, you're the 'artist'...I call it, *ass fault* ["oh god"]...go ahead, read it." (hands author poem badly need of work)

[Note to reader: to be judged out of competition]

ass fault/

there are no moments for the moment -
think life lives in the future of it
comforts stillness, lulls it to sleep
there's always tomorrow
looking back sees too late...

if progress is a dangerous thing
present's a thing of the past
between two signposts
with no directions -
gamble fate's
dead ends
of one-way streets
for second chances
on a single spin -
odds are on the red but
black's got your number.

how does one go forward (leaving nothing behind?)

yesterdays are today's loss
trying to break even:
stacked decks always
dealing from the bottom
that feeling of starting over
never having begun,
a clock shuffling hands
days blurring into numbers.

...and time has a great memory

broke 100 strides till the sidewalk ends:
I overstepped my boundaries
on too broad an avenue
for so small a walk -
sinews strained desire's dance
closing its eyes to another's beat
extorting effort who lived off my time.

reaching for air every breath half-kissed

shortsighted & open-eyed
I should have leapt without thinking
I could of thought in the leaping

to see that far from so close.

"I don't know, I'll try to fit it in...hey, it's not me, Sixfold has a 10 page limit...
look, I'll write you a good part at intermission - share a real victory between races
where art posed for still-life...your moment in the sun to cool your travels, you dig?"

"uh-huh, we'll see..."

[re-enter critic] "you have offended my honor. you are obviously oblivious to my
position which you will be made painfully aware of under the full weight of its
instrument: I challenge you to a duel! I shall expect your attendance on page 8"

"gee, how will I recognize you?"

"I'm afraid your transparency will not serve you on this occasion" [exits]

"let me take this turkey, ruffle his feathers!"

"no, this is something I have to do on my own...afterwards, I'll buy you a cup of coffee
at the place you like on the corner, okay?"

"could you throw in a danish, about 5' 8?"

"very funny, now hurry up and change for the next scene"

2. (Cont..)

lonely people eating in cars.
solitary lot concrete space;
chew fat like purpose
suck out bones
of misfortune.

but I the worst - fires flesh
winter's bone, fat dreams
on time's watch...

vehicles feed
themselves,
hunger kills leftover life;
an instrument of bad timing
in an age out of tune.

late shadows blot sunlight:
who am I with no sense
of where?

2.1

and how does one end up here?
character drawn in and played out...
flickering shadow between passing cars
like an old film reel -

wait, always wait
the wait of the wait
that expects desire
outlives the moment

three-quarter noon
you're half way there:
empty's never light,
it's not dark
but getting late

absence made clearly by shortness of aim, or
possibly the bad luck of
moving targets should have observed greater distance
packed lighter suitcase ...who knows
maybe vision distracts sight -

landscape portraits illusions distort
gamble lucky accidents
bleeds beautiful ugly

invention ghosts my perpetual presence

fresh starts forward same old story: first to arrive last
(and they keep score after a while)...ay, there's the rub out
honorable defeats choose their ends - appetite's mistake
was being courted on the sly paying the fare between meals
the leftovers of half-lives wait on tips serving time...
but when do you have time (to live) between the living?

2.2

and how do you look for someone who was never there?
(an open parentheses run on sentences punctuate distinction ...an out
clause whoring halls of literature lurid, open-faced molesting ideas

plunge deeply to bottom out depth's desperation from whistle's graveyard
the last tango in poetry –

snapping whips in ghost towns

[now there am I..I am there now]

intermission

out of the blue...

*still-life's artful grace whose
absence roamed vacant halls
familiar whispers in the dark
where pictured on every face
of forgeries hung in its place
brushed under memory's dust
in attics stored away to forget...*

8 years between winters,
bohemia & vivaldi open your eyes
and 6000 miles to close them

my body a tower, limbs for blades
cut sections out of air
like light solving fog

shatter mirrors to open windows:
silhouettes sculpt relieved wait
uncovered white sheets
beneath the prayers
filling blanks
of written out pieces
shapes mold & harden
the naked spaces

skin maps measured between two lifelines
- gypsy blood & mad refrains
watch children laugh in the rain -
tiny years paced closing distance
in cooler shades...

the first drip on canvas
another self, a Lorca poem
that night... we ran the best of miles

2.3 ("*the duel*")

next chapter finds me in advance...

[*exterior: battlefield*]

choosing instruments
negotiate at 20 paces
or savage hand-to-hand
in a gentleman's duel;

enigmas strike
the obvious secondhand:
courage screws no place where
words can't stick

options for sword
I counter with pen -
climactic showdown
in the epic battle
of small triumphs;

the learned exercise theorems
pencil-thin, unleaded
political correctness as giant eraser
trial runs exams final:
soft hands smooth hard roads
pave easy exits on solid grounds

flashes steel to bit player
who draws between frames:

I pocket my art at a bargain
where talent sells for a song:
poet stakes last chance
horseless but untamed
wordsmith's anvil pounds
shape into sound!
the arts of permanence
burn & brand stiletto tattoos *skin body paint with silence*

3.

3.1

the past isn't what it used to be...
old home towns of unrecognizable streets
rattle unfamiliar sounds from noise change makes
calling on front door steps whose buzz rings empty;
leaner years where novelty broke ground
buried under the weight of remembering.

*framed without a picture like a thief caught empty handed
catching ghost trains chasing shadows on the rails -
nocturnal trips whose skip in the light stumbles over days
dress old habits in new clothes: judy on strings & punch-drunk;
an isolated charge with no spark left to absorb the shock
hung flesh out to dry and skeletons in closets.*

3.2

I hear Time's running for his life - fire under his tail, blue ribbons around his neck
as for me, I take my meals where the feeding's scarce
for self-serving diners whose appetites hunger freed
waiting for Bernard this side of the road...*will he show? is he looking for me?*
night in day's clothing leaves appearances to rumors -

one's reflection isn't always pretty
from a toast off someone's glass
but there's no look like your own to see it clearly
celebrates accurately, even luxuriously
the most honest laugh ever danced on a smile -
shadows lighten edge where surface is brighter
and dreams for real in the place no one's looking
(if you ever hid in the dark you'd know the light's on)

solitude's forever in debt being all I've owned, sharing our secret
conspirator & witness speaks loudest through silence
kneels in naked quiet as stars blink of prayers:
the altar's thousand lights after dark
blinded me at first sight -

I'll find you with my
eyes closed...

Afterword

shoelaces/

can't see colors like I used to *black & white closing in on me.*
thunder radio, static mountain
tie-dye tongues squeegee sides:
peddle wares on one-way streets, splatter view like bugs to glass;
fists shake dollar bills, monkeys wear pockets
while 'folk' powder their noise
spike apple pies – force feed ingredients.

wipers swat residue, vents blow cool again

rumblin' & tumblin' past siamese towns
and backseat memories:
squeezed lemons seed crow nests
guitar strings pluck missing tooth.
my palms like tires, rabid & raw
scrub contributions in tar stains.

take it straight or on the rocks
my ponies ridin' low & easy
till desert feeds horsepower...

sharp corners round every thrill
gargle sand where language left me,
see god where I shouldn't.
talk's a proposition at cost
selling out the alphabet,
time violated by parking meters
open windows half shut,
sounds become threats
& hangmen deliver mail.

keep having the same dream...Bob Dylan stoness me
speaks harmonica, "money doesn't talk, it swears"
"Oh, u-c-k", I mutter (realize I'm short on f's).

blocks stacked boxed & cornered
circular driveways at right angles
but hard shifts break straight & clean
draw dividing lines, finger sand-like:
"S-H- (dot I, cross T), IOU's NOTHIN'!"
hands yet feel the shake my brain rolls over...
delayed series of coughs, pedestrian speedbumps;
road forks red-hot iron ready to brand
sizzle and spit me over seasoned.

whip wide electric horsemen full throttle

grind gears, redline hairpins & needles -
top down, ridin' bare on mountain's back
two-lane backdrops snake concrete rivers
*jus' a-floatin' highlands
tumbleweed & pitchfork*

stopped for some rock & gravel, stretch landscape...
an indian hands me a free cigar [mark reason in wood]
black man taps me a tune, walk a rainbow in his smile
dark haired woman fills my worth with a pot of beans
kaleidoscopes color skies looking with the good eye

then there's them shoes - human odometer -
generation skin species size social standing,
sort of mammal with bowties
align balance always overdue.
as I bend to examine, drop a knee
& secret prayer to saint elsewhere...
they just don't serve me well - tight wrap over too much play
right place at the ~~wrong~~ time, hours leaning by 'welcome' sign.

years rarely go straight...
payoffs ransom future with a crooked past
presently late from trade n' bait hopes
largely off moments -
why's comfort so small?
*problem facing forward
was looking back -
fugitives are city's ghosts
where pleasure's overdressed.*

they're on me now!
t-bones & clawfish fresh off turnstile
slap tail on monkey, grease paper trail
to collect the last debt.
*grifter chasing that first high
shooting craps with stars!
one hand on the wheel
the other on love root,
eyes roll eggs in my head
lampposts blur beaten rain
[wonder how to get off]*

whole lotta walters & back door nellies on scent:
barnyard bumper dogs sniff blood out of smoke.

but I still have the shoelaces - a decoy -
pull strings, then the slip
tie & hang them on rear view mirror;
accelerate machinery
jam guitar where wood meets medal
hardens process,
wild chords perform the requiem -
as behind me,
I watch a mannequin in the sunset
go barefoot.