

## Self Poem

How can I take – or focus on – or use –  
my ordinary unknown self – as a model –  
or prototype – or archetype – of something  
human, maybe universal, maybe not,  
maybe just a feeling you and I might share –  
when the Supreme Selfist – the Most Egregious Ego –  
sucks up all the oxygen in our public Room?

How can I paint – or outline – even sketch –  
a poetry self – an I-and-not-I – part “real,”  
part “made-up” – a metaphor, a creation of my  
imagination that you could trust, and in your  
imagination enter into, to share selves,  
when the Supreme Selfist – the Most Egregious Ego –  
makes mortal enemies of *I* and *not-I*?

How, in memoir – autobio – or other self-story –  
can I speak – across the divide – from wall –  
to canyon wall – to you, of events, emotions,  
endurances in my life – when any fact,  
however objective, can be called fake  
by the Supreme Selfist – the Most Egregious Ego –  
and sucked up by all the sycophants in our Room?

How can I approach – or face – or even present –  
me to myself – when rage – and fear – at the Supreme  
Selfist inside – deform me – into the mirror image  
of the monster – and victim – I do not want to be –  
until I face – and confront – and prevent –  
the Supreme Selfist – the Most Egregious Ego –  
from sucking up all the oxygen in my inner Room?

## Country of Laws

This is a country of laws.  
Break the rules, and whatever the cause  
you face consequences.

She wasn't surprised at the collar.  
When, the previous November, they got her  
because, under her wig, she possessed no less  
than 60 bags of marijuana and 14 of crack cocaine,  
she thought, at first, it was for the false address.

This time, she is being arraigned  
because she lives over there, not *here*,  
and faces prison up to 20 years.

Being black doesn't color this arrest.  
The laws are blind to color.  
If a white suburban mother  
tried to use her baby-sitter's address,  
thinking it was super-cool  
to get her kid into an inner-city school  
instead of one in her leafy burb,  
she, too, would find authority "disturbed,"  
and be guilty of fraud.

And that's a good thing. We applaud  
that this is a country of laws  
applied equally to all,  
not some banana republic  
where men in power simply call  
the shots however they like.

Of course, here we assume – well, certainly  
she won't get the full twenty.  
After all, as well as consequences,  
there are circumstances.

Upholding the law against theft  
while using the leeway of his craft,  
the judge, mercifully, accepts a plea:  
only five years  
for the stealing of one  
of her six-year-old's son's free  
public education.

(Plus payment, as restitution,  
of sixty two big ones.)

Yes, regardless of race  
or class, this case  
warns every son's mother:  
in the education market,  
know your place.

## Out Of The Rubble

### 1

Do not doubt that you are in the right.  
You have every right. Liberty is your lodestar.

Hold up your face to the mirror of your iPhone.  
See the light in your eyes,  
The warmth – the genuine – in your smile.  
Savor it! Click and post it! Do not doubt  
You are a good person.

Sign on, check in, track down –  
Your friends, your games, your passions. Hear  
What your networks are saying, but listen  
To your heart. Follow your dream.  
Stay true to you.

That loyal cell phone. Stare  
Into those eyes, and do not doubt  
You are in the right.

### 2

We are in great peril. Nothing less  
Than the fate of the nation is at stake.

Take any measure, any statistic:  
Collapsing bridges, failing schools, out-of-control banks.  
You are smart. You know the debt  
Hanging over your kids, the threat  
To your job, your future, even your safety.

And so I say to you:  
Only *you* can save you.

The old rules no longer rule.  
Like a game that's fixed –  
And the game *is* fixed –  
It's every man for himself.

One stroke of bad luck,  
A lost job, cancer, a failing not even your fault –  
A fall by your aging mother,  
Your child in a car accident –

And who will offer a helping hand?  
Who will come to your rescue?

Only the strong will survive.  
Be ready. Rely on yourself,  
Never doubt you are right.

So I say to you:  
Only *you* can save you.

### 3

Our enemies twist facts like ropes,  
Wrench acts and context asunder.  
They hide greed in their pockets  
And whitewash privilege with hogwash.

They come on with collie smiles,  
But contempt seeps from their laughter.  
Their lies are long, and without shame,  
They would cheat their own mother.

Do not doubt: they intend to destroy us –  
You, me, the country as we know and love it.  
Be clear: they fight tooth and nail –  
No holds barred, no tricks too nasty.

Do not let up for one moment.  
Core values must not be compromised.  
Yield on tactics, never on principle.  
And do not doubt you are in the right.

### 4

I do not come to you out of vanity or ambition,  
Not hunger for publicity, nor the “honor.”

I am with you, I am one among you,  
I am on a mission –

For you, and everybody like you.

Do not fear being strong.  
Stand tough in support of measures  
Unpopular, but necessary.  
Do not fear criticism, knowing

that you are in the right.

This is a fight for our souls,  
And the soul of our country:  
As I will not, so do you not, falter.

5

I say to you – there is hope.  
Follow me, and do not doubt  
We are right.

Out of the rubble, from the vacant lots of devastated cities,  
From the empty farmlands and the hollowed-out small towns,  
A new man will arise.

He will lead us to a brighter future, a more just society.  
He will rise above the incompetence, the corruption, the lies,  
Turning hesitation into hope, fear into confidence, darkness into light.

His vision will be our guide, his clarity of purpose  
Our North Star, his firmness of will our salvation –  
He will lead us out of the valley of darkness and despair.

Do not imagine it will be without struggle.  
We will fight evil, and lies, and people fighting change.  
We will root out decay, and corruption, and treachery.

We will move forward, always forward, toward a world  
Where fairness and opportunity exist for all –  
Where right rules, and people are free, and happy.

## Belgrade, October 5, 2000

By the hundreds of thousands they streamed into the streets,  
they choked the tiny medieval ways of the old town,  
they flooded the broad allées and plazas of the new,  
and they danced, clapped, sang, shouted, and cheered and cheered and cheered.

By the hundreds of thousands they flowed into the streets  
to overthrow Him, the One, the Supreme Selfist.  
A handful stormed the Parliament building,  
the petri dish that cultured the mold of greed, and gleefully  
tossed desks, chairs, files out windows into the joyous midst

of the hundreds of thousands who massed in the streets,  
and another few set fire to the state TV center  
that for so long had spewed out the smoke of lies.  
Yet it was not the few, nor the burning of buildings,  
that would make a bend in the river of history, but

the hundreds of thousands who stayed in the streets.  
It had not started out that way. Defiantly, but also  
cold with fear, miners and truck drivers and teachers  
struck, blocked roads, shut down the country, facing  
the police, with its tear gas, truncheons and bullets.

Then the hundreds of thousands poured into the streets,  
bent not on destruction (except of the One),  
their rage transformed into a riot of joy,  
dancing, clapping, singing, shouting, cheering.  
Finally, bitterly, the One, the Supreme Selfist, yielded

to the hundreds of thousands celebrating in the streets.  
When it was over, each man, each woman, until  
the day he or she dies, can say, "I was there.  
I was part of it. All of us, together, overcame the One. I  
was but one, but together we won, we the hundreds of thousands."

## Two Chiefs

### 1

The chief of poetdom, laureate,  
sings for her native tribe, her people,  
uprooted from their homeland two centuries ago  
and force-marched, over the Trail of Tears, into exile.

The chief of the kingdom, illiterate,  
sings to his nativist tribe, his people,  
deracinated from the land they were born into  
and abandoned, through years of sorrow, to internal exile.

The chief of poetdom, laureate,  
weeps for the victims, her own personal ancestors,  
and the wrongs, the existential wrongs,  
perpetrated by Them, the unidentified, the nameless.

The chief of the kingdom, illiterate,  
snarls for the victims, foremost his very own self,  
and the wrongs, the ineffable wrongs,  
perpetrated by Them, serially named individuals.

The chief of poetdom, laureate,  
from a self whole enough to step outside itself,  
offers empathy for others, the *done-tos*, then and now,  
but no way forward, societally, to right the wrongs, then or now.

The chief of the kingdom, illiterate,  
from a self so damaged it shivers inside its silo,  
offers no trace of empathy for others, now or ever,  
but a way forward, poetically, for the *lock-em-ups*, now and whenever.

### 2

Poet and king meet  
as push-pull magnetic opposites  
as if along a thin diameter  
through the center of the earth;

poet and king bond  
adherents and acolytes in victimhood,  
eliciting sorrow and grief,  
stoking rage and revenge-lust;



poet and king wall off  
any and all outside the tribe,  
stoking a love of Us,  
eliciting a hatred of Them;

neither poet nor king,  
from their molten core,  
reaches out to the circumference,  
not on an arc of longitude, pole to pole,  
not to the equator, endlessly encompassing the globe.