

Tributes

On the Bus

Paging Doctor Bebop

Mr. McPhee's Class

Attending

The Audacity of the Jaguar

## On the Bus

Life into legend, legend into life —  
I once was you, Alex Supertramp — fresh  
out of school, half nuts, no money, no wife,  
no work, no matter. The sins of the flesh  
were behind me, beneath me, beyond me.  
Another self-inventing dharma bum  
on the road to anywhere, off to see  
the elephants, bound for glory. And from  
such dry, dreary soil I'd sprung — I was you,  
Alex — naked in my cast-off clothes, so  
full of myself, so empty, just a few  
well-tasted words were enough when the low  
clouds to the west whispered, Get on the bus,  
and I got on, and you got on — we wanted  
more, magic, furthur, Alaska — I must  
have crossed the river. But you? You were gone.

*for Chris McCandless*

## Paging Doctor Bebop

The good doctor, he knows all that book stuff —  
the flatted fifth, Italian baroque — hell,  
he wrote the book, and that would be enough  
if books were enough, but he won't just sell  
you on the art of listening, he'll give  
you the real medicine, body and soul —  
the silver horn, the music that you live  
for, music that you die for, that the whole  
world needs to hear, *now* — the clickity klack  
of time on the rails, the spike in the blood  
and the colors of sound. Where have you gone,  
Doctor Bebop? And when will you be back?  
Life's so syncopated — starts and stops. Good  
music, though — man, it just goes on and on

*for Howie Brofsky*

Mr. McPhee's Class

Jouncing. Dolos. Craton. Words you serve like  
oranges, unpeeling their sounds. We're not just  
horsing around in canoes, or hitchhiking  
newly made reefs, measuring the crust  
after the quake — we're holding words to our  
nostrils, inhaling, truly tasting them,  
getting them down. Yes, we love this class. Our  
urgently unhurried task: stratagem and  
structure, a sense of where we are. You  
model the hair shirts we'll wear, naturalized  
citizens of this country we've come into,  
promising too much, eager but unwise,  
hardly writers yet and our hearts don't break  
even when you tell us: keep squeezing, guys —  
every good word takes as long as it takes.

*for John McPhee*

## Attending

He loses every case — it's hospice, he knows that. Isn't medicine supposed to mean saving people, healing them, saying no to death? The right technique, the right machine, the right dosage — isn't that what a doctor should know? Coax fire from the spark of life — is that what he should do? But no one walks out of here. Nothing is fixed with a knife in here. They're goners — we all are. So when did doctor stop meaning teacher — is that where we went wrong? Best to call him attending physician — here to bear witness. What else can the white coat mean, if not surrender — tending what is broken, what is not.

*for Derek Kerr*

## The Audacity of the Jaguar

My world is not your world. Who was here first?  
And who is the master? My amber eyes,  
they're voiceless mirrors — imagine the worst  
of me, call me coward, devil, beast. Why

should I burden myself with your fears? You  
peer into these eyes and see nothing that  
you know beyond your own reflection. Who  
are you now? My wanderings are no matter

of yours — if you gaze into my coat  
of a thousand eyes, I melt into smoke,  
into spirit, into memory. Go  
to bed now, lie beside your wife. That low

cough — just her soft snoring? Sleep. Dream your dreams  
of all that you will do with fences, fire —  
your farm, your *finca* — oh, everything seems  
to be yours. And when you awaken, I

recede and I wait and I watch until  
you send your shadow man. And I'll remain  
here, hidden, choosing what I want to kill.  
Closer — I can bite you through to the brain.

*for Alan Rabinowitz*