

## Poems for Sixfold 1-15

### Evanescence

Southwest  
the Santa Anas ridge  
green and brown beneath  
the clouds' tectonic flow  
into the blue western sky  
enshrouding peaks  
and sending skeins of  
misty gray down canyons  
up and out above the talus slopes  
above the valley where  
ten thousand homes and streets  
evangelical churches,  
schools and shopping malls  
replace what once  
were orange groves greening slopes.

Standing in the early morning sun  
I'm pumping gas. I watch  
as rainbows drift across  
the mountains' face,  
pale, evanescent, fading  
then growing bright  
as a million tiny raindrops  
prism in the light.  
They break out bands  
of red, orange and yellow  
bright against the slopes as  
this last mist of spring turns  
to vapor in the heights.

As I watch the rainbows come and go,  
a mother and her little girl approach.  
She sees the light as it begins to fade  
grabs a hand and says,  
"Look, Mom, look, a rainbow!"  
Her mother, looking up,  
says, "Hurry up, we're late,"  
and bundles both  
into their car and off.  
I pay the price.

Then I too, am off,  
ocean-ward to work.

## **Dawn Song**

For my Mother

Caught,  
bedazzled in bright dawn  
by the sun's pale rays  
in the shadows time spreads  
around those days,  
what is it that I praise?

The memory  
in these middle years  
of seasons shaped  
by childhood's first tries,  
of us together walking out  
past white apartment blocks  
to shop for some sweet prize.

It wasn't long  
'til you stayed home  
and watched while I went out  
to the ice-cream store alone  
for a nickel cone  
of sherbet fresh and sweet.  
I can taste it still,  
in the sugar cones I relished  
on melting summer days.

And this is the spirit song  
inspired by those rays  
the memory's reprise of all  
I set against the tears shed  
in darker times than those  
of fears met by love and strength  
by night-lights lit to shine against  
the raging bears I saw  
in nightmares when I slept;

and everything released itself  
from serenity and shape.

I cried. You came.  
with a quiet voice  
to hold me in your certainty  
that dawn would come  
with sleep and time  
to fix things in their place.

You built the frame of family  
that I brace against these days;  
Against the shock of towers dropped  
into haunted deadly streets,  
Against the nearing certainty  
of that step into eternity  
that looms beyond this praise.

We live our lives from day to day  
though futures may look bleak  
and memories, though dear,  
may not be quite as right  
as ice-cream cones to children are,  
or dawns to those who wake.

But mother,  
when the shades of night are rampaging  
through graying palls of time  
and certainty is lost,  
The memory of your loving care  
brings comfort as it shines.

### **Mountain Pastoral**

For Fern

Along Sierra slopes  
beside white cataracts  
of mountain shattered spume  
the river raises lady ferns  
on rainbows, spray and sun.

And if we climb north slopes a ways  
we find the shield or wood fern grows

amid decay and filtered light  
by yellow pines, gray rock.

In brighter spots,  
the spring-fed meadows, graze for deer,  
there grows the green and powdered gold  
of gold ferns curled like hair in sun;  
while on the barren hillside there  
rank bracken fills in burns.

Further up these slopes on rock,  
parsley ferns break granite,  
and bird's foot ferns grab sun from cliffs,  
where none but goats can pluck them out  
and eat themselves to death on what,  
because of stems both stiff and sharp,  
are poison ferns, no doubt.

### **Tollway to a Life Without**

The news last night,  
in this election year,  
was of another bomb  
in the sun, in a marketplace  
far away in the East. It blasted  
shards of metal through  
a square full  
of the bodies of men  
and women and children  
who fell, bloodied,  
crying out in pain  
from their injuries,  
or from the injuries  
and deaths of those they loved.  
An American soldier died;  
and some were wounded too--  
burned and maimed  
by the blast.

This story reminded me  
of stories from Vietnam  
that colored my youth  
with images

of death brought home  
through TV screens and news reports,  
and by the Government's draft,  
which threatened me  
with a war I didn't believe  
was worth the blood it cost.

I think of this as I drive  
the 91 toward Fullerton to work.  
As I drive I watch  
A decrepit eighteen-wheeler  
shedding a tire  
that bumps and bangs the road until . . .  
Boom! It explodes,  
throwing chunks of rubber  
up and out a hundred feet--  
another aging retread  
spreading its dreck across  
the tollway's cracked concrete.

Such is the wrack  
of business in America,  
the detritus of trucks loaded  
with the urgency of commerce,  
of products made at home,  
or bought abroad,  
carried to Los Angeles,  
perhaps, to ships in port,  
or to airplanes bound  
for Afghanistan,  
or for some other distant place,

Some arbitrary place  
in the imagination, perhaps,  
like Vietnam was  
a lifetime ago  
on TV screens,  
in magazines and newspapers,  
everywhere we looked  
when we looked  
up from our everyday,  
from the jobs  
and things we wanted  
for ourselves  
and for those we cared about.

Those images remain,  
embodied by the grizzled  
Vietnam era vet  
still stuck on the street,  
homeless and dirty,  
living a life of despair  
in a land of freedom and wealth,  
sitting beside his friend  
a young man in his twenties  
baring the stump  
of his left leg--  
blown off, I suppose,  
on some dusty street  
in a crowded marketplace  
in the searing middle eastern sun  
of some fanatic's  
improvised explosive device,  
or rocket propelled grenade,  
where a dozen others died.

I turn my face away from them  
as I drive  
through the Southern California spring  
remembering  
the ashen gray  
of bombs exploding,  
of hillsides burned each fall,  
now bursting out in greens  
aflame with orange and yellows,  
vermillion, blues and white,  
alive again to rain on the slopes  
and the napalm of  
our righteousness  
protecting us  
from fright.

### **Simple as Day**

Dawn's dusk,  
obsession with wealth,  
debt, what's left  
of winter's wetness

drained from walkways  
dried by sun drilling in  
to wake the singular sense  
of doom descending,  
crows ascending  
into what was once  
ahead of us,  
fallen now behind,  
the smog that's come  
to surround  
this house of cards  
we've built  
from possibilities lost  
and losing us,  
what we've come to,  
what has come to pass,  
the loss of lust  
for all those things  
we left 'til later  
roads, schools, music, art  
now passed beyond us  
what we've tossed  
with little thought  
the sunlight synergy  
that we don't trust  
those possibilities  
of youth, of hope  
that dawned sundrenched  
in a new-borne day  
in us become  
days gone to rust,  
lost.