

In Isolation

what I miss not living in the desert
is the quiet where every sound
has a meaning important to the day
I miss the crunch of gravel beneath
my feet the two bitches I gave away
too large for a townhome licking
hands my feet my face I miss
the agrarian chores of the buzz saw
stuttering against broken limbs
and the trunk of the fallen mesquites
after a night of a ninety south wind
I miss the awkward how-do
of people who'd rather be left
alone I miss the not being able to take
a piss anywhere I want especially
when the coydogs are near being alpha

Going Hungry

for the unrelenting goading
of friends who had never tried
I close my eyes and extend a hand
into the banks of the American River
past sludge and silt and roots and twigs
for the croaking frog-legs we will grill
from a mud-soaked hole they call home
and I can't bring myself to stretch
to the shoulder much less grab a leg
repulsed I retract empty handed
only to display a fistful of mud
for the unrelenting goading

Gutter Black Jellyfish

plastic black plastic
liquor store
lung bag
puffed
with gutter air

handles
stretch out
with the wind
draw in
with crackle
end over end

a jellyfish
a crow
rushing
crawling
the trench
filled
eucalyptus
leaves
stained
darkened
by rain

passing
soaked nests
shattered
eggs
and
bloated
pigeons

Playground Politics: a Villanelle

children gather on a field of asphalt
to wait their turn to rule the blacktop
where one-two-three 'not it' earns a no-fault

the north-end boys swing on seats of cobalt
arching high for the show that is non-stop
children gather on a field of asphalt

while Southern kids bounce four-square by default
and climbing hands discover who's on top
when one-two-three 'not it' earns the no-fault

Western ballers quake and it's nobody's fault
gambling dad's money and raking in pots
children gather on a field of asphalt

while the Eastern girls roll in somersaults
the oldest and boldest down to their spots
when one-two-three 'not it' earns the no-fault

children will freight hop the rails to Gestalt
our mindless media they try to adopt
our children chance on a field of asphalt
where one-two-three 'not it' gets the no-fault

Wogs' Crossing: Entering the Kingdom of Neptune (1812 to Present Day)

your body is dead weight from sleeping
after a hard day's work of lifting that barge
and toting that bale and swabbing the deck

like a clown they call you Swabbie in your bunk

you're a tadpole a slimy pollywog wiggly thing
and you're blasted out of bed by a horn

someone has already put a finger up your ass
and called you their bitch you belong
to a shellback who has put a collar around

your neck and you're given the freedom to put
everything you will wear for the next twelve hours
on backwards your T-shirt is inside out

and backwards your jumper is backwards
and you button it up to slip it on – backwards –
your skivvies have streaks that are in front

your pants are zipped up and backwards – no socks
you are barefoot for the rest of the day
grateful you don't serve on an aircraft carrier

where the deck gullies are as sharp as razors
nothing can prepare you for the crossing
except the cryptic notice that the clothes you wear

will never be worn again – pay attention
you are entering the realm of Davy Jones
locker you don't question the order

to eat your breakfast from a plate
set on the floor at the shellback's feet
there's plenty of green eggs and ham plenty

of Irish die for you to consume
you're going to need the protein and carbs
you're treated as a dog because you've never

been south of the equator before
and the rite of passage is the same for you

as it is for the captain who's first time below the line

is the same for you side by side everyone is equal
every seaman is subject to the laws of Neptune
even Farragut Roosevelt and MacArthur endured

too many eggs stuffed down the pants and smashed
with the other huevos in the crotch the back the crack
of the ass so many times you can tell when the yolk

didn't break but gravity lets it slide down
the length of your backward inside out pant leg
reminding you of the semen rolling down

the prostitutes thigh how many ports ago
before you're brought to the Court of Neptune
an ensign deigned to reign over the court

of the uninitiated now initiated
Neptune deigns that you're unworthy
and commands you to crawl through

a baptism of filth to equal your station
of garbage you must crawl through a mess
of vinergarized potato peelings bananas

apple cores and discarded biscuits and gravy
of shit on a shingle set aside for this day
just for you and thirty other slimy pollywogs

including the captain and other midshipmen
who will not decline the offer to jump through
the hoops of crossing because there will be

a permanent black mark on their record
if they don't accept the naval traditions
and the ensign who crawled before you

vomited through the piss and vinegar
and you have to crawl after his disgust
and put in your mouth a treasure hunt

of banana peels apple cores and paper plates
or you'll have to go through again to meet
on the other side the Royal Baby the fattest

member of the crew greased down
for your pleasure and pick out with your teeth
the maraschino cherry buried in his navel

and the metaphor and synonym are not lost
on them or you as you enter your coffin
created out of a barrel as water is forced

at one hundred and twenty five pounds
of pressure to give you a magical enema
while you are tested repeatedly and asked

are you a wog or a shellback a wog
or a shellback and no one believes you
and the water hurts and you ache all over

are you a wog or a shellback and you say
I'm a shellback a shellback a shellback
and finally they accept you you are

a shellback worthy of the crossing
worthy of being a man no longer a wog