

for Julian Solomon

and Susan Rivera

A black and white drawing of a group of people

Description automatically generated with low confidence

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*The Japanese have a word for it*

that simultaneous, brief,

conﬂation of joy and grief,

the rising sun, the falling leaf.

If it rings a bell, is it a villanelle?

What was it that We tried

to remember (when was it?)

that it slipped from focus?

It was redolent of love,

and the after-taste of crocus?

Why can’t we remember

to remember to remember?

Or make a note to note

that elusive lover’s name

that comes one hour too late?

And, of course, that perfect,

inaccessible quote!

And the title of that movie,

the one we’ll never forget? And the name

of the thing that squeaks on the gate?

Let’s rather abandon to random,

memory, it is excessively kind,

and revel in those lovely things

that, unexpectedly, spring to mind.

Perhaps

Could sap rising

through the phloem perhaps inspire

a little poem?

Well depending on

your new of what a poem is,

perhaps it has.

Syringa

Shifting in the wind

alien and rooted

and the wind

just passing through

Doggerel Dog

Doggerel Dog crosses the street

tripping on iambic feet.

Down darkened alleys hear him whine

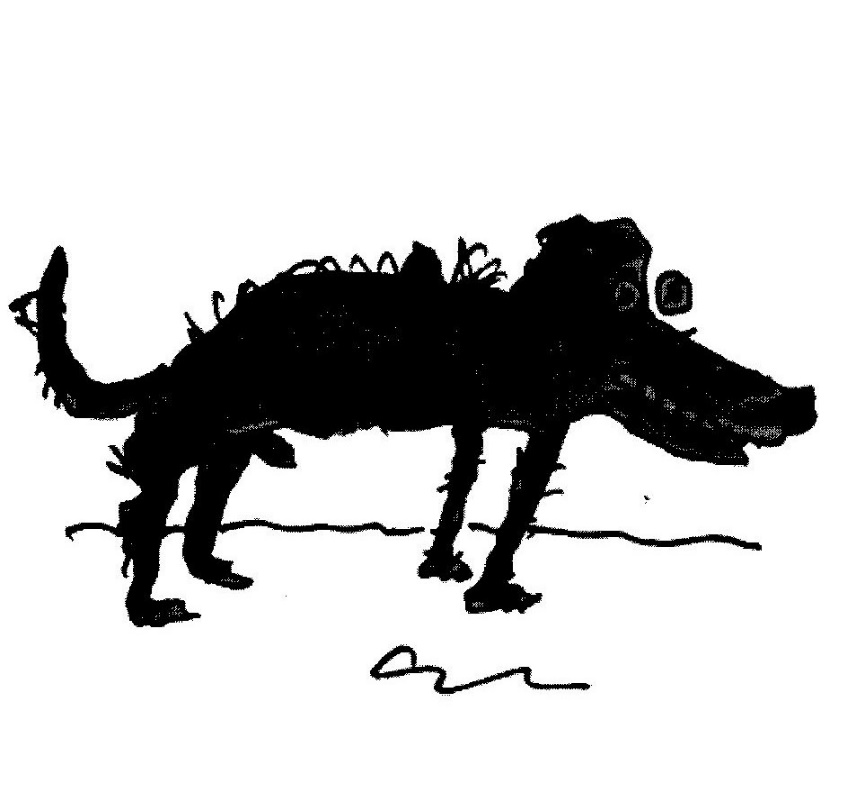
While truffling for some scraps sublime

An empty dustbin’s hollow clang,

he swings around and bears a fang.

Night will find him all too soon

howling at a paper moon.



The spiteful gene

The glum suburban melancholic,

he doesn’t dance, he doesn’t frolic

Although not clinically depressed

he very seldom leaves the nest.

He has no friends, he lives alone.

His call’s a ghastly stiﬂed moan.

Yet oddly. he desires to mate,

his progeny will share his fate.

Limericks

1

Edmund Clerihew Bentley

Made jokes, but ever so gently,

Unlike Lenny Bruce

Who favoured abuse

Which he spewed completely intently.

2

Remember the great Qgden Nash

Who wrote with such flair and panache?

Scholars avoid him

It seems he annoyed ’em

By making a fortune in cash.

3

A delightful young lady called Cora

Was incredibly keen on the Torah.

Matters ]udaic,

New and archaic,

Have her laughing and dancing the Hora

The parable of the generous man

I tend to lend the things I like

my CDs. books, my precious bike,

my glasses, tablecloths, my plates;

I press them on my lucky mates.

So what is left, it dawns too late,

are all the things I really hate.

And as we’re judged by what we own

and by the sniff we have on loan

then here’s my fate, it’s really sad:

my friends look great and I look bad.

The moral drawn from all this sorrow

Its bad to lend, it’s good to borrow.

Thanks but no thanks

Presenting a manuscript,

he maligned the publishers

of his other books as rank

incompetents and crooks.

Not wishing to join their ranks,

I gratefully declined.

Dorothy Parker

She dipped her pen

In blood, not ink,

She made us laugh,

She made us think.

Confession of a rough beast

One day, slouching along,

I came to a fork in the road.

One way went to Bethlehem,

the other to Pilates.

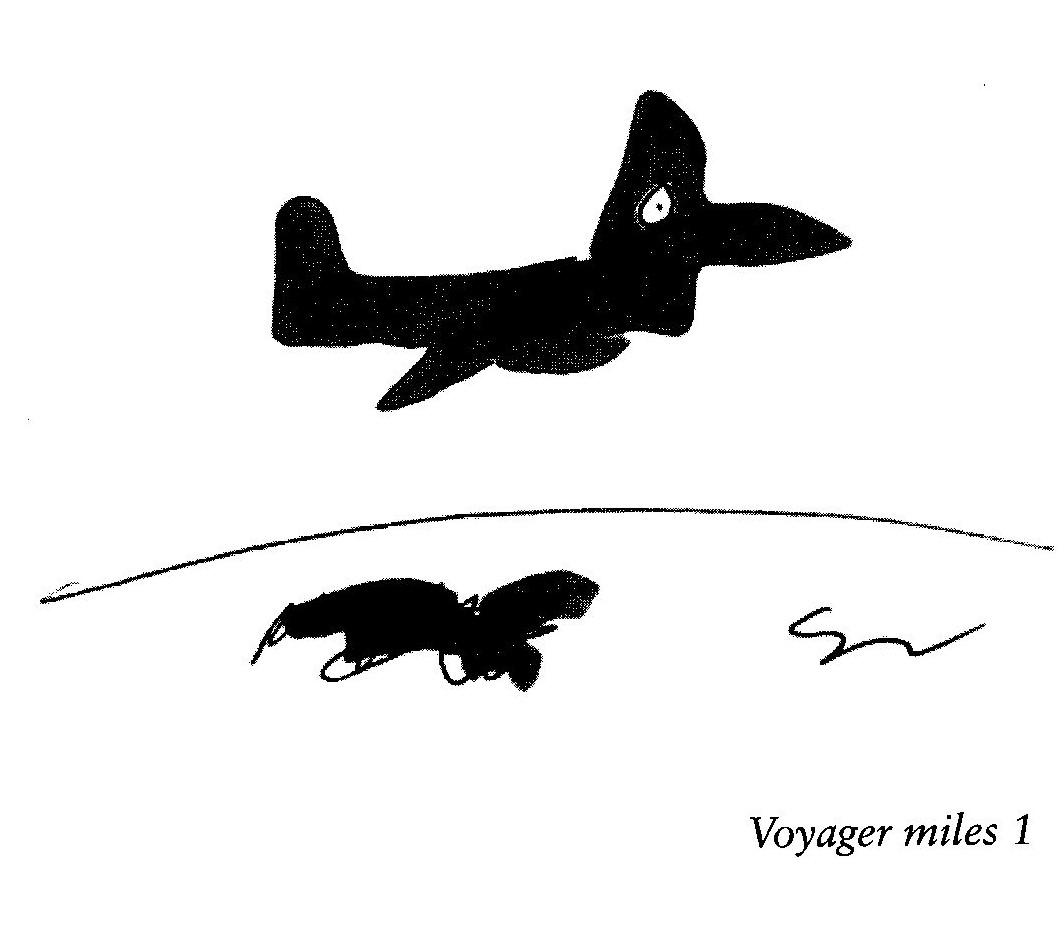
I took the one less travelled.

By foot the Apostles travelled

During the washing of the feet,

it was rumoured that all ingrown toenails,

bunions and corns were cured.



Tanka

Have you ever noticed

that artists who draw bicycles

always leave essential bits

to the imagination?

just like poets.

Return to the arms of Morpheus

By far the most

delightful sound

when tired

of Argus-training:

That pitter patter

on the roof

that signifies

it's raining.

Samsara

For over thirty years

I’ve ridden, I’ve raced

and, at least once,

replaced

every part,

including the frame,

but nevertheless

it remains the same,

it’s still my bike

and still it’s whole.

A metaphor, if you like,

for the transcendent human soul

Sisyphus returns to Gattis

Such pathos in the sight

of an ice-cream vendor

heaving his creaking

tricycle in the heat

uphill against

the south-east wind.

And all the while

the lollies melting.

Franschhoek crepuscule

Was it a conceit

or not — a congregation

of haute cuisine chefs

seated at a bench

outside the church, drinking beer,

eating ﬁsh and chips.

Insomniac in love

Amongst the pleasures

I have known in a long

and worried life

is to lie awake

and listen to

a gently snoring wife.

Changeling

Her fish pond is alchemical

a pleasure to behold —

the morning brings a miracle —

a dark fish turned to gold.

Uqbar previsited

In Portugal, in eighteen seventy seven,

1 cabal of writers: Alvaro de Campos,

Alberto Caeiro and Ricardo Reis,

met, secretly, with the express purpose

of inventing the poet, Fernando Pessoa

who had, as everyone knows, his revenge

Chiaroscura

The cat, with her back to me,

watches the play of light and shadow

by the window and curtain

on the white wardrobe door.

In a suburban morning setting

she re-enacts the Parable of the Cave.

Faminism

Their tummies ﬂat,

their figures neat,

they never have

enough to eat,

but if they had,

then here’s their fate

they’d put on weight

Advice to the elderly

Avoid confusion

as eye-sight dims:

Don’t buy glasses

that don’t have rims.

Sonnet

Serote, Clark, Cullinan, Crane,

Mahola, Cope, Van Wyk Louw, Blake,

O what’s his name, for goodness sake,

that Durban boy who fought in Spain?

Fitzgerald, Frost, Traherne, Joubert,

De Lange, Hambidge, Pound, De Kok,

De Vos, Verlaine, Couzyn, Belloc,

Sepamla, Watson, Baudelaire,

MacCaig, Blomérus, Byron, Raine,

MacDiarmid, Conn, O’Driscoll, Gunn,

Cafaw, Hughes, Seferis, Donne,

Symborska, Livingstone, Kozain.

The list above deserves acclaim

lid. Royston Campbell. *That’s* his name!

Suburban epiphany

This morning, while bending

to gather dog poo in a garden

moist with summer mist,

I noticed, in sudden focus,

a full-sail ﬂeet of snails

tacking across the grass.

Like ships they lift and dip

and topple through the waves

Simon’s Town Hell Run

Suddenly atheists and secular humanists

are everywhere. On yesterday’s train

to Simon’s Town our carriage was stunned

into evasive silence by an evangelist hammering

us with terrifying quotations from Richard Dawkins

(evidently there is no afterlife, heaven or even hell?)

Reaching our destination was such a relief

that the entire congregation burst into ecstatic

ululation, hallelujah and amen!

Synaesthesia Tanka

Blindfolded, he sniffed,

rolled it around his palate,

pondered and pronounced:

‘Charlie Parker — Bird at the

High Hat, nineteen fifty-three.’

Somewhere

Somewhere in the vast

possibility of eternity

Alice B. Toklas

met]. Alfred Prufrock.

They spent the night together.

Their conversation unrecorded

as James Boswell was flirting

with Gertrude Stein.

Yorvic

The Vikings who invaded York

to live in squat and village,

were vile to girls and ploughed the earth,

combining rape and tillage.

A sad sequel

After D’Artagnan

left the Musketeers

the new recruit, Bathos,

was a bit of a disappointment.

Plagiarism

Manque see,

manque do

What does the fashion-conscious locomotive say?

Jimmy Choo Jimmy Choo ]immy Choo Choo shoes

Jimmy Choo Jimmy Choo jimmy Choo Choo shoes

Eaud to an open bottle of water

Are you still

sparkling?

In a bookshop

A couple called Gladys and Rex

were suddenly keen to have sex

(such urgency’s slightly perverted),

‘But where can We do it?’ cried she

‘The poetry section!’ said he

‘I’ve noticed it’s always deserted.’

Requieschatology

Were I to believe in the soul

with all of the problems it poses

l’d dread not only my death

but also my metempsychosis.

Southeaster rising

The long grass has its

ears pinned back and the

trees are mercilessly thrashed

while the stars and the

lights of the town are

astigmatically blurred.

Outage 1 Feb 2008

*after Albert Camus*

As he ranted on

about the blackout she

was ravished by the stars.

Questions near Montagu

Which of these hills

has a name.

And which are knowable

only by number?

And what of the others,

anonymous, hunched,

in deep, unclassified,

slumber.

Klein Karoo

Unpredictable

the countryside

As we cycle

through the grass

First a flock

of tall blue crane

And then a field

of ass

Near Swartberg

Travelling in the back

of a speeding bakkie

my long hair

streaming in the wind

my thoughts turn

to Isadora Duncan.



Flawed Survey

Diogenes, when not in his tub,

went prowling the night

with his lantern light

in search of one honest man

amongst

cassandras

night crawlers

cut throats

insomniacs

muggers

pimps

prostitutes

foot pads

cut purses

doom sayers

debauchers

and skullduggers

while decent folk were safely in bed.



Little twitcher

At the fourth-floor window

of the dullest building

in the whole of Pretoria

our deliberations

were fiercely interrupted

by a flustered crested-barbet,

his beak’s panicked staccato

rattling the window.

But, as none of us

had morse-decoders

on our blackberries,

the warning went unheeded.

Setting Standards

*for Jo-Anne who is both*

The publisher sighs

with a glint in his eye:

no more, I do swear,

will I publish a thing

that hasn’t a lilt

or a hint of a swing,

that isn’t amusing,

confusing or deep,

making the typesetter smile

or the proofreader weep.

Sponsorship

When broadband was still young

it was so quick that messages

would zip past the domains of the rich

missing the dishes of the poor.

Now we wait for them to limp home

exhausted and burdened with trash.

Endgame

With modern medicine

doctors can find something

wrong with everybody,

while new age healers can

cure anything you haven’t got

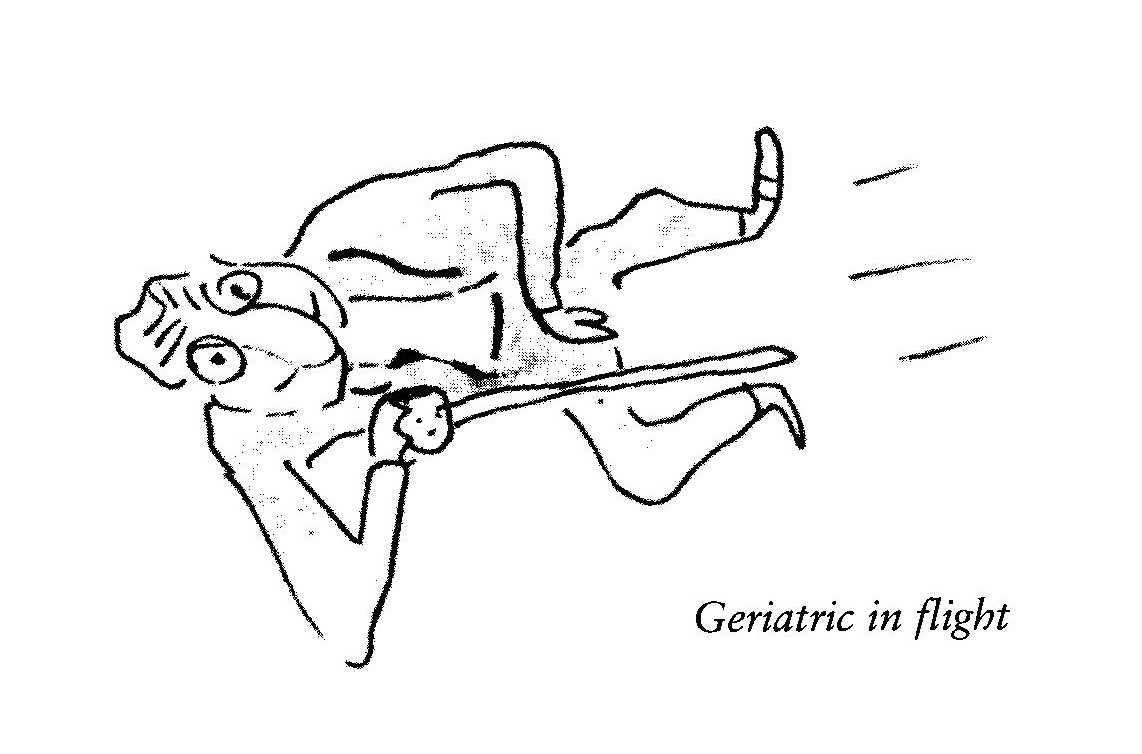
On first reading Tatamkhulu Afrika’s *Night Bucket*

How can the Music of the Spheres

compete with the sound

(under swirling constellations)

of urine tinkling in a bucket.



Regret beyond the grave

If I had known it was like this

I would, of that I’m sure,

have worried less and laughed a lot

and sinned a great deal more.

Stressed, Unstressed

*from the diary of a minor poet*

Invited to talk to a Writers Club

on the role, in modern society,

of prosody, Which, of course

has more feet than a centipede,

I worked for a week on

*The Virtues of Verse* to speak

for twenty minutes.

There were no questions.

Travelling home, afterwards,

my thank-you gift of hazel nuts

bustled and rattled in their box.

The sound of mild applause.

Rugby injuries

He was hurt each and every time

he wasn’t chosen for the team.

Bicicletta

Battling against the south east wind

my pump tugged by a gust from the frame

fell to the ground with exactly the sound

as the name of this shaken quatrain.

A Miscellany of Haikoids

Unable to make

a living as a real writer

he turned to crime.

Publisher in love:

He loves me and he hasn’t

even got a manuscript!

The poor critic,

rising to leave, got trapped

in a standing ovation.

When their books don’t sell

poets should apologise

to their publishers.

Although I know he’s

bleak and gloomy, give me

Borges over Rumi.

When the aliens split

they left a brief,

explanatory note.



Tidy the house!

Granny’s skyping

in half an hour.

His T-shirt says: Fuck Fear.

He looks anxious.

Umbrage might be taken.

It is thus ordained:

We arrive and leave

without memory.

As the morning cold begins to lift,

the evening chill

is closing in.

Burglar Wishes to meet

nice people with lots of stuff.

No chancers!

A perfect match of

science and faith:

a prayer-mat with a compass.

A ditherer? Not at all,

he lives his life

serendipitously.

While his wife’s away

he does what any robust

male would do — he mopes.

As the plane lands

and comes to a stop —

a sudden chorus of birds.

When he moves towards her

with amorous intent —

the dog barks.

Found poem: I have

reached an age when I can

remember history.

*(Sandra MacDonald in conversation.)*

Man at the side of the road:

feet in the gutter he sits

hopefully holding his spirit level.

Disengaged but not detached

Amongst the pleasures I have known

from joy to mild elation,

none compare, I have to own,

with those of cancellation.

The technique is: accept a date,

the more delight you show the better,

then later on, but not too late

confirm by telephone or letter.

Then on the evening or the day

apologise with lissom lies

designed in each and every way

to make the hostess sympathise.

There is no spite in what I do,

(I tell my nagging conscience ‘hush!’)

I only do it, so should you,

to get that serotonin rush,

that wild tsunami of relief

that comes with each postponed event,

a happiness that’s close to grief,

a respite that is heaven sent.

But why the rush and why relief?

What drives this mindless process on?

Perhaps some undeclared belief

that even Death can be reneged upon.

