



# Cautionary Tales

poems: colin j. holcombe

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Colin John Holcombe

Ocaso Press 2022



# Cautionary Tales: Long Poems

Colin John Holcombe

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All characters are entirely fictional and do not denote persons either living or dead.

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## Professor William Bates

*'From first a warm, deep brilliance in the air,  
a god or hero in each passing face,  
a feeling ill-defined but everywhere  
pertaining to this ancient, myth-filled place.*

*That pride in body that the Greeks possessed,  
where limb and body made one perfect whole.  
A mind as beautiful, and more so blessed  
with health's embodiment in depth of soul.'*

Remember I was young, a tad too young  
to safely mentor at those schools in Greece,  
a well-intentioned foreigner among  
those splendid denizens of summer's lease.

A scorching whiteness in the terraced streets,  
and deities the hills and streams would know,  
the legends, as it were, of shimmering heats,  
with gods still living in great depths below.

5. The morning's molten glitter off the sea,  
the drench of sun in simple happiness,  
the body in its glistening spending spree  
that's pampered into warm togetherness.

I was the foreigner, the new-come friend  
who after working hours would tag along,  
and sometimes at a loss when drinks would end  
with just the two of us, with bar-side song

to guide our steps across the shadowed sands:  
just two good friends who rarely said goodnight,  
but went their own ways with a touch of hands,  
and smiles that smouldered on till out of sight.

And so a call for strict propriety,  
where sentiments can never ambush truth,  
but walk together, talk and let life be:  
the freckled summers, if you will, of youth.

"There's a party. I can't go on my own.  
You'll need a business suit and quieter tie."  
Obligingly, I went, a harmless drone  
when laughing Circe should have spelt out why.

10. The yacht enormous, about the best I'd seen.  
Though stunned to find such luxury exists,  
this was the world today, a brilliant scene  
with guests selected from the best of lists.

And all knew Ariana well, and most  
spoke perfect English though my Greek is good.  
I was Odysseus on his spellbound coast  
who wandered, half bewildered, as he should

until the time arrived to make our thanks.

"As you wish," said Ariana. I was led to one small man among the thinning ranks, who smiled when "Goodnight, Pops," she said.

We drove on back in silence: things unsaid were all too obvious for us to speak.

I glanced and sideways at that profiled head, so tangible, so close, and very Greek.

She smiled, a little sadly. "That is how the proper Englishman behaves? You might in kindness condescend to show me now what heart should murmur when we say goodnight."

15. I kissed her quietly, the warmth of which would stay with me through long succeeding days, and one not well-connected, charmed or rich was lost in Adriatic's glittering haze.

I do not need to say much more. We were so young and heedless: every care was tossed in that continuum our lives incur of paradise but glimpsed and briefly lost



in mundane chores that obfuscate that view  
when washing, dressing, getting out a meal  
of things essential, what we have to do  
beyond that larger sense, where we can feel

how soft the bodies sitting in some chair  
will be, the glowing warmth of silhouette  
that's also stocky, heavy, with an air  
of plain insistence that we can't forget.

That other land for which we always yearn,  
imagined differently, but beautiful,  
of scenes to which we later must return,  
declared the antiquated, love-crossed fool.

20. But always some things live with us: the flash  
of laughter in the liquid depths of eyes;  
the delicacy of eyebrow's curve and lash,  
how happily the sleeping body lies.

So many things, of course, the sea's soft foam  
that effervesces like a fine champagne  
and something far away but also home,  
intrinsic to ourselves, by which we gain

those heart-stilled moments of our lives, a place  
that we were happy in, and wholly so,  
where lives thereafter are a fall from grace,  
the purgatory to which the ageing go.

A month of pungent smells and sounds,  
the tang of citrus fruits, the thundering sea,  
the time when evening makes its quiet rounds,  
the eyes that look and for the first time see

the lingering sadness with which all bright things  
submit to providence and in time will be  
not glittering radiance the morning brings,  
but evening wraiths that count as memory.

25. So Ariana took her fill, moved on,  
with graceful thanks, of course, as I did too:  
that first fierce hunger of the limbs had gone,  
and now no impetus to follow through.

What could I offer when our brief affair  
was only one of such expected flings,  
that fortune's children should be made aware  
how soon they settle to the scheme of things?

Harvard, business studies, happy match:  
where he is rich and handsome: business ties  
that make them both be counted quite a catch,  
but she the brains behind each enterprise.

Greece returns as springtime does: again  
we make our odyssey or fruitless quest:  
the white magnolia opens in the rain  
in shaped resemblance of a perfect breast

retired but beautiful, more beautiful  
that any on this saddened earth will see,  
where all our loves, alas, are mutable,  
or worse, recalcitrant, and will not be.

30. That was an age ago. I'm white-haired now,  
detached and kindly, with a sober name  
well-known to academics who allow  
the toiling diligent their tilt at fame.

Back then I was the venturing innocent,  
where waves break silently on unknown capes.  
To Ariana's dream-tinged shores I went,  
for Circe, as they say, takes many shapes.

What can I tell you of that crowded stage,  
of predecessors in their Attic shapes:  
Antigone's defiance, Creon's rage,  
the Lapith's madness from fermented grapes?

Through those mythologies we briefly live  
again in long rehearsed eternity;  
the shadowy depths of wisdom verse can give,  
or marbled wholeness only sculptors see.

In range of interests I stayed the same,  
not quite convivial, but with a friendly air:  
there was no reason to it, still less blame,  
that years ran quietly on and fined away

35. to worlds of scholarship, where I became  
a name that's spoken of with some respect,  
and, if one's happy single, I may claim  
more happiness than joys on wild shores wrecked.

So said antiquity. Our tears and laughter  
are bred of all too febrile, passing stuff.  
Let us welcome all the lives thereafter  
as beautiful, enriching, but not enough

to offset what the sober Greeks would fill  
with sad reflections that assuage the heart,  
and Ariana, careless and enchanting, will  
remain forever in a world apart.

## Engineer Bob Steiner

We found the letters carefully boxed by years  
that time we did the audit: doubtless read  
and thought on constantly: the plans and fears  
of both of them by then a long time dead.

A private correspondence, but with clues  
on costs and throughput, what the likely grade:]  
rough information that you have to use,  
although it is their lives the mine betrayed.

Each month he'd written how the prospects stood,  
Each month she'd begged and waited his return:  
Soon, soon, he said, it would all come good:  
a decent farm is what the strike would earn.

The vein would thicken out: the last month shone  
with hopes he'd struck at last the mother lode,  
then sniffs and grains that kept him toiling on  
beneath, it must be said, an added load

5. Of debts and strange occurrences. The ore  
would fade to pyrite or come in fat small pods  
that kept him solvent for a month or more,  
against the bank, the letters, against the odds.

We, of course, were more detached in such assessments, saw how average grade trends ran: there was a chance, as always, but not that much. But that is mining surely, as it first began

To exercise its power. Delusive hopes as Samuel Johnson put it, not to speak of costs, recoveries or type of stopes but had the apprehension, week by week

Of prospects growing fainter, into less, how calloused manners fill an aching void that must and does in time regress across the plain normalities we can't avoid:

A growing old, contented, with our wives and monthly get-togethers with old friends, by baby-sitting, living grandson's lives in quiet diminution of our ends.

10. But here's there's nothing. He will be missed a month perhaps or only some years hence. The coroner will call, and they will list the next of kin or any unpaid rents.

A blank, a total absence, where the sky will look down calmly as it one time did, indifferent to us, where the shadows lie with consequences that are nowhere hid.

We've scouted desert lands: it was not here,  
we've walked the heights of mountains but the air,  
intoxicating, was but thin and clear:  
go where you will or must: it is not there.

But only otherwise that distant land  
where those once close to us may always be,  
though in the memory, that orphaned hand  
eludes our touch, and will continually.

We wake and go about our business, find  
the hours are fitted out in business clothes,  
continually, for centuries out of mind,  
our hurts are as the lonely heart disclose

15. Itself in destinies that weren't to be,  
the courtship long deferred that came too late  
to change the fundamentals we'd agree  
were all too pertinent to our rough fate.

And those who have the recompense  
that comes to ordinary, homespun lives,  
plain jobs, plain livelihoods, the sense  
of living constantly with bills and wives

Are all anathema to spirits lost  
to dreams of new-found wealth, the fabled strike  
that turns the hardship, hurt and cost  
to dreams of luxury, or very like.

It is a hope that drives the marsh-gas light,  
that flickers on before you, never stops  
through drive and adit still the mocking sprite  
puts grades beneath the heaviest timber props.

Into the hardest quartz the gold is thrown  
in scattered specks and granules, all too soon  
this flinty unrewarding ground has grown  
the dreams of avarice, the haunting tune

20. Imagination hears its whole lives through,  
and work for in the cliff and river bed,  
in dusty hills, in mountains lost to blue,  
in far, far vistas of the road ahead,

Which they will ever keep to, ever hold  
with pickaxe, truck and dog for company.  
The dreams when young become the dreams when old,  
there is no end in sight or leniency.

But work and sweat beneath the same hot sun,  
red bull-dust plains and eucalyptus trees  
whose very vividness is apt to stun  
with something other that they cannot seize,

Which runs as dust through fingers, as the skin  
grows harder, more abraded, laced with scars  
that are their lives and let-downs that begin  
to take on aspects of the outback bars



They more frequent, as do the pressing flies  
with wire-entangled, flickering fluorescent lights,  
their loose-clad floozies with their sad, blank eyes,  
the shakedown joints that make the overnights

25. When outbacks round about seem but hurtful void  
to that first Eden, ever-fruitful land,  
when all their effort must be re-employed  
to find the gold-filled fables more to hand.

## Captain Edward Tucker

The heat, the flies, the gritty desert air,  
the rough togetherness of fighting men  
in comradeship that will not come again,  
the vacant realms not fully grasped out there.

A great adventure was the voyage out,  
a rite of passage to the wild beyond,  
a mix of hope and hazard, and a bond  
across an emptiness still veiled in doubt.

At night we slept between the shadowed guns,  
neat rows of hundreds on the upper decks:  
good-hearted countrymen then far from wrecks  
when months accumulate as winning runs.

There was no place for ethos, house or school,  
nor foolery of empire in those past cadets,  
but blistering heat and hardship, night-time sweats  
and one unspoken of, unneeded rule.

5. Do not get killed. Or worse, be maimed. Let each  
act dumb and check out every friend and foe,  
obey the orders, and to no more know  
the plan than rifle kept in easy reach.

We were one body now, the army corps:  
the months of training made the outline clear,  
a long, long voyaging to bring us here  
to this most taciturn, unfriendly shore.

A drab, smooth emptiness of sand and bluff,  
and brief entanglements of waves that broke  
in razor sharpness, where the hard rocks spoke  
of toughened manliness and such like stuff

the army drilled us in. Fatigue and pain  
had marked these awkward squads of war-soiled men,  
that asked no ifs whatever, only when  
the loud eviscerating came again

that we'd be equal to it, acquit ourselves  
with honour, dignity, be on their feet  
and dogged marching through the noonday heat  
in some frayed semblance to their former selves,

10. not name and number only, men who cursed  
the orders, Jerry and their own C.O.  
against the worst the enemy could throw:  
in 'grin and bear it' they were not unversed.

War is evil, doubtless. Good men die,  
are lost by dozens in the blistering heat,  
but all the same it is not wise to treat  
them all as simpletons, not reasoning why.

Not king and country only, but for truth  
in common decencies, in household names  
they bought at corner-shop, the trusted claims  
that they were privileged in, as was their youth.

Across the whole wide world there was the sheer  
uncertainty, the sweated fear that drilled  
right through the finger bones, and filled  
the fraught encounters that each hour brought near.

Each day it lurked in unmarked stopping spot,  
in every sideways glance or lip-pursed look,  
it came up suddenly in hands that shook,  
or how impenetrable the orders got.

15. We'd seen too many burnt-out stumps of men  
as what was living turned a smouldering stain,  
or, mutilated, howled for hours in pain,  
and would be them as maybe turned to when.

The army is a self-believing thing, at best  
imponderable as body's poise in bone,  
but loses impetus when on its own,  
dispirited and headless as the rest.

Two days I wandered round, half-crazed with heat,  
till found by Jerry on some odd patrol,

and their state too was not some Sunday stroll,  
but willed themselves from dropping on their feet.

They could have shot me, no doubt would have done  
had I been less correct and by the book.  
I caught some admiration in that wind-creased look,  
some decency my Englishness had won.

The rest of us? they asked. Kaput, I said.  
A well-aimed mortar did for them, when I  
was at a call of nature hard near-by,  
my war-time friendships in a moment dead.

20. They shrugged, and I was made to fall in line,  
with orders crackling elsewhere, faint, withheld,  
become in time just one of them, compelled  
to march beyond the orders, theirs and mine.

From star-bright nights to sun-drugged, heavy days,  
we made a staggered, cautious, run-out line,  
where there was loss of life in ambush, mine,  
past dune and wadi and the desert haze.

We talked at halts, occasionally; their wives  
and sweethearts, where they came from, that I knew,  
back home the jobs they had, the things that drew  
them from sufficiency of small town lives

And each of us at times would pause and stare  
into those threatened deeps of coming loss,  
an instant obliteration of all that was  
both real and comforting, and then not there.

But in that interlude, as all knew well,  
was disembowelment in the sudden breath  
that scorches us, and which we know as death,  
where fall the spinning dice as time will tell.

25. And so there grew a kinship, welling flood  
against privations, hardship, the constant foes  
of hurtful propaganda, where no one knows  
the worth of anything not weighed in blood.

I'd be the prisoner handed over, one  
of countless others, thousands left to face]  
dishonour certainly but not disgrace,  
his tour of service ended, duty done.

But then the Brits came back. We were too tired  
to dive for cover or return the fire.  
We all surrendered, we, mere men on hire,  
who saw the proper course of things expire.

I was stunned, astonished. But they were shot,  
all five, deliberately, at point blank range.  
I could report on that, but would that change  
the dubious charge-sheet I'd already got?

They were the enemy, the hateful ones  
they'd seen goose-stepping on the newsreel screens,  
which nothing human stays or intervenes  
in these blunt-helmeted, original Huns.

30. There was much worse, of course, the raid  
on Dresden, Tokyo, the killing squads;  
the lies that men will tell to cheat the odds:  
biographies for which the others paid.

At firesides, later, with our loving wives  
and children round them, in another life,  
we edged past shadows and ignored the knife  
that picked at sinews when the new-made thrives

At being someone else, at getting by  
from year to year, supporting wife and kids:  
all of that seemed normal, acceptable amidst  
the noble enterprise that veiled a lie.

And so that long-forgotten incident,  
one lost into the blur of great events,  
diminishes a little how life itself presents  
like some great trophy with a tiny dent

That's hardly visible but hurts the trust  
in rough good fellowship of boys at play:  
there was no end to bloodshed, where it lay  
was but convention, a partial, skin-thin crust

35. Above volcanic depths of hurt and pain:  
we walk in blood-rimmed footprints of the dead,  
with gaze averted, thinking how instead  
to cultivate the thoughts we'd entertain

Of life as ever-turning, fragile marionettes  
that have no purpose, nor can paint the soul:  
the world is terrible, in part and whole,  
which no one living in it quite forgets.

Normality turns down the volume of distress:  
of friends who lost a limb but never cried,  
that odd wild look their sarg had when he died  
they felt their life retreating into less

and less to celebrate, tell stories of, to sing  
in this cold country with its decencies,  
its rationing, rain-filled skies, hypocrisies,  
and all the afterwards a far worse thing.



## Dr. William Hoskins

Why not? I asked myself, the gifts were there,  
and the more the character, the kindly air  
of polished judgement, poise, the studied care:  
alert and balanced and, above all, fair.

The urge to make neglected subjects live  
in vast new provinces and have our name  
embellish papers, have approval give  
our alma mater its small nod to fame.

With then preferment to the Ivy League,  
The hallowed halls of learning, the pillared stone:  
a name to pique our colleagues, and intrigue  
the schoolboy enterprise they'd onetime known.

So, if you're wise, you marry young, and one  
not academic, but is good with kids,  
respectable, supportive of the role you've won,  
which any erring on your part forbids.

5. And so we were, and Bethany in turn  
was early sweetheart, fixture and a wife.  
Just two good people who would never yearn  
for doubtful turnings on their path through life.

Unchanged, my life went on. At thirty-two  
I had three children and an open home;  
well-liked and competent: my students knew  
me focused on their interests, not to roam

Through student pastures dotted with their fruits  
in fresh-faced innocents one has to teach:  
the worlds of longing lay down dangerous shoots  
to girls that bloom more firmly out of reach.

So how and why that guileless Brooklyn was. . .  
whatever you may call our brief affair,  
conversion on the way, perhaps, because  
of that mad moment when we all must dare

A life to come against perpetual loss,  
our wives, our homes, our whole careers;  
it is a line we sinners should not cross,  
that brings, as mentors told us, only tears.

10. Innocent, abandoned, in a dream:  
and then how carefully she'd give herself  
as though that soft and clotted breath would seem  
to come as embassies of darker wealth.

More rich, more gratifying, something there  
that I would only find by living deep  
within that strange forgiveness, aware  
of endless avenues of sun-filled sleep.

At times a mischievous and playful air  
would come about her as all actions there  
were sexual warfare on a land laid bare  
as wind on ramparts of rich, golden hair.

These images I carried everywhere,  
in lecture halls, tutorials, in my sleep,  
just me alone, moreover, none to share,  
a new dimension that was mine to keep.

As some strange token of a kinder land,  
the which in Brooklyn made all women so:  
vast worlds of beauty stretched at every hand  
where we, poor penitents, must always go

15. As Virgil heard it, to that radiant song  
in which Niobe poured her sorrows out,  
that immolation for which we mortals long  
continually through fields and woods about.

And even that now seems a life ago.  
I see the plump ebullience of the breast  
that makes us cognisant of that bright flow  
that emanates and claims us for the rest.

And that was that. It passed, a violent storm;  
the water hadn't settled six months on.

But Bethany is good for proper form  
accepting life as is, by which we don

The rounding semblance of conformity  
where each one dresses as his neighbour does,  
and thought is gathered in a coterie  
of right opinions that we don't discuss.

And now in every article the smell  
of life that's shuttered comes across: we stay  
with Sunday worship, barbeques, and dwell  
the less on bar-bills that we cannot pay.

20. And life is not the careful scholar's notes  
but more the over-brimming, brilliant tide  
that wells beneath and lifts all stranded boats  
to land us on that far, estranging side.

And so it was, with keener, hurting eyes  
I saw in life's mythologies of youth  
that larger part of us, the well-read wise  
belatedly, in sadness, call the truth.

And what we want to teach is how life is,  
how strange, recalcitrant, not wholly there,  
but more of mirages, of promises,  
beyond the steeps of wanting there is only air.

All that you have, and grasp in your two hands,  
will only have a thin fragility,  
and the real things, strangely, are the shadow lands.  
Like friends in childhood that we now more see,

But think of odd times afterwards, without  
the least conception now of how they'll look,  
except they'll be as we are, rimmed by doubt,  
some fading mark in time's unplotted book.

25. Mere gaps or hindrances in life's events,  
like sediment the waning current drops,  
mirroring, as it were, a name, and hence  
a point of stasis when the music stops.

That all our paradises are in the past,  
short intervals at best that time puts by,  
and, being in no wise real, are never cast  
as characters that breathe and live and die.

So all the books we read and write about  
are made by consciences akin to ours,  
where cultivation is a drunken lout  
and not in sober outline can be true.

Let art be art, and life the thing it can:  
a truth that won't be evident till most is past.  
Perfectibility is for God, not man:  
it is the things you make, perhaps, that last.

The heartbeat in my western canon course,  
which freshmen sit in waiting innocence,  
the more concerned with name and date and source  
and not at all with shipwreck some time hence.

30. 'Who knows?' I say. 'You may be Carroway,  
Prince Vasili or Madame Bovary.  
Life has its own perplexing algebra  
we cannot solve but only try to play.'

A joke. A faltering smile goes round at this.  
Which I acknowledge, smile weakly back, although  
around them stretch the lands of human bliss  
but edged with bitterness they'll come to know.

That life is lived through certain qualities,  
and to the furthest reach or not all.  
Books will sometimes point to what that feature is  
but mostly have quite other needs on call.

And no one thinks of their own lives  
will be no better than the also ran,  
that laughing beauties will at last turn wives,  
the bronzed lothario a family man.

And hopes we place in children, foremost sons  
are apt to have quite different aims,

the writer's offspring is obsessed with guns,  
the son of champions dislikes all games.

35. Then everything we own will come at cost,  
the fruit of knowledge have a bitter taste,  
and long, long afterwards, when all is lost,  
we leave the paradise in pain and haste.

Be brave, be men and women, learn to be  
alert in summer to the winter frost:  
only in books do we live vicariously,  
take care that pale, thin line is never crossed.

## Chief Ahanu Davids

The salmon leaped for them, the waters pooled  
with tench and carp, and to their net  
came swaggering catfish and the evenings cooled  
from tree-lined narrows into fretted jet.

In long, thin strips they grew their tasselled corn,  
the women helping in the dusty fields:  
so was dependence on the seasons born  
and bred within them all that summer yields.

A sense of goodness in the wind and trees,  
some otherwise with which they twinned,  
a faint aurora in the passing breeze,  
some voice that carried on the wind,

That reassured them they were not alone,  
that those who went before them still reside  
in stream and mountain, in the patterned stone,  
the eagle with its talon-trailing stride.

5. Real truth was in the pith of things, the bite  
of saddle tether and the tepee thread:  
rough hides still held the animal's delight  
in unfenced grasslands, the heart that fed



On plains that lifted to the pine-clad hills,  
the blur of contour, the far sierra blue:  
all that the heart holds, and, holding, stills  
into the quintessential, always true.

How could the earth be offered otherwise?  
When life so given them was theirs to bless,  
and who could say the ancient trails were lies,  
or pressured out of them by past duress?

The wind has spirits for us, the clouds disclose  
a swelling majesty now looking down  
on things they would not see: the garden rose,]the  
smoke-stack industries, suburban town.

All have their messages, their words for men  
and gaze attentive to that large because:  
that is their nature, and in now again  
became of the future of each is and was.

10. This warm and fragrant prairie land was ours,  
each cataract and foam-filled mountain pool,  
each spring that came with hillsides thick with flowers,  
the broken limestone cliff that's beautiful.

It was our patrimony, what we had  
from earliest ancestors been told about.  
I see their sepia photos, faces clad  
with eagle feathers in the shapes of doubt.

The names they'd lost in treks from Wounded Knee,  
the long privations in the Trail of Tears,  
the high-plumed bear-teeth chiefs I would not see,  
but more the dry attrition of the years.

In time you took it all. Our lands were yours.  
You built the stagecoach, made the railroads run,  
and year by year you added yet more laws  
till tribulations thus were scarce begun.

You stole our livelihoods in buffaloes,  
piled on the treaties with their hidden loads;  
across the plains where still the warm wind blows  
you gave us endless tar-macadam roads.

15. Each factory pipe and smoke and cooling towers,  
suburban plot with sprinkled lawn and tree  
were lands once sovereign to the tribal powers  
of Pawnee, Sioux, the Creek and Cherokee.

And what was given us? Suburban lives  
with slights and regulations, rates of pay,  
existences so spiritless that our fierce wives  
must stare bewildered at the end of day.

We get up later, tardily, we face  
more irritations, small distracting things,  
some gnawing matter that devours the grace  
we'd greet the sunlight with, when morning sings

With all its hues and odours, through the streets,  
the verges, lawns and parklands, while the trees  
dissolve to shimmering summer heats,  
that stilled continuum contentment sees.

Me, I come from reservations, bred  
resplendent cockerel with the dowdy hens:  
anything was mine: a nod of head  
switched bright casinos for the gambling dens.

20. The which I didn't want, or want that much,  
and were in money terms more total loss.  
I worked, did well, but seemed more out of touch,  
a something missing from the life that was.

I sold insurance for a while, was seen  
as red blood magic in an ancient skin.  
They met a real-life Indian chieftain, green  
to white-skin ways but not that taken in.

At last I turned an author. 'Indian Trails'  
has grossed two millions copies: not that bad.  
Branched out to shoot-outs, rodeos and county jails.  
forgotten lives my readers never had.

Because there is a wanderlust in all  
who drive their kids to school and mow their lawns,  
excitement in the blood each spring and fall,  
who, got up early sometimes, see the dawns

ablaze and throw their shadows under trees,  
the brimming hope of yet another day  
and flush with colour that the full dawn sees,  
how beautiful, but in a mindless way.

25. At last, of course, I married, settled down  
as all of us in time are pledged to do.  
I love my kids, my Sheryl, this small town,  
becoming prosperous and one of you.

So all men know, but we original tribes  
conflate the springtime with the winter frost.  
And all these taunts and small-town jibes  
dissolve to essences where time is lost

in that great passing of ourselves, that roar  
we heard at night beneath the folded bones

that chilling sound that pierces to the core:  
like some great switchboard where the phones

are ringing constantly. We do not sleep  
but pull a track-suit on and walk the streets,  
listless, earnestly past cars that beep  
at some soul lost upon the well-lit beats.

Becoming in the end those listening posts,  
which face horizons like a smudge of hills  
and what's inherited are lands of ghosts  
subsisting in us while the spirit wills.

30. Decay and leaf are seeded in the earth,  
the generalities will come again;  
in harvest is fruition but also birth:  
these are the silent messages for men.

The trembling aspen in the springtime breeze,  
the satiety that comes with summer's heat,  
the close-confiding tints in autumn trees,  
the snow-white filigree when the cold winds meet.

The hills continue, and the restless streams  
run through the mossy boulders and the stone  
is ground to grit and sand, reviving dreams  
to see ourselves as others, not alone.

All life is interlinked. We hurt our souls  
if we, but for a moment, lose that trace.  
Here are no personal stories, sinewed goals,  
but life-blood given an extended grace.