

Orbital Mechanics/ National Poetry Month 2014/ 30 poems

by Gary Hardaway

01/ Scripts

The tablets shed a little light
in the brain's dark corridors

and muzzle the loudest
existential shrieks and arias.

The white space is less cluttered,
transcription feeling so less urgent now.

02/ At 20,000 Leagues

Captain Nemo never died.
He cruises all the seven seas
below the waves in Nautilus 2,
her seventeen impeller screws

spun by cold hydrogen fusion
with an air field on her back
where the Boeing, with a whack
of tires, landed safe as houses

as the crew of the Nautilus 2
spread sheets of 300 count
flaxed and woven seaweed

in staterooms reserved for those

who come and never leave.
Bid adieu to passengers and crew
of Malaysia H 370, family,
friends and CNN. They dine

on fine sustainable delights
beneath the surface of the sea
with the elegant captain and crew
of the not yet legendary Nautilus 2.

03/ Where and When It Started

Inimitable
blue and green mid-April Dallas,
1968.

04/ Inversion

If I could see the universe
from outside the universe

would it look like a snowflake
within a shower of snowflakes

floating down
through a blue-black Empyrean?

05/ An Agent of the Positive Writes Home

Dear Jenny,

I've learned that everything they taught at the Academy is true. Depressives put up little resistance to the Program. They seem to almost welcome it, in fact, as if relieved.

You never know, though, how the Bipolars will react-- submissive and cooperative one minute, wild-eyed and elusively energetic the next. We always get them in the end-- with nets, if they're still manic, or with a helping hand once they crash.

The dangerous ones are the three-phasers—sad and hysterical as a child losing a mother, crazed as a cornered wolf, or-- and this is when they're most dangerous-- stealthy as a snake under a rock, waiting for you with a knife or broken bottle instead of fangs.

We see our work as weeding the yard. We want a thick and uniform grass, trimmed and healthy shrubs, and just the right beds of seasonal color. The sad and angry are the dandelions and crabgrass that must be pulled and burned for the good of the whole landscape. What we do is vital for the health and beauty of all the lawns in all the neighborhoods.

My Commander says that once we get all living Negatives tracked and eliminated, we'll begin to focus on the dead ones whose books and paintings, music and movies, act like hidden seeds of the sad and negative weeds we're pulling up by the roots now. I wonder,

as she does, how we let these ugly things
remain so long in our museums and libraries
without removing and destroying them.

I think I have a bright future in
the Program. Whenever the Commander brings
us all together in the Hall of Joy
to celebrate our progress, she seeks me out.
She says I have a wonderful smile and such
enthusiasm for our campaign. She's even
asked me to join her table for dinner
more than once. Your Bobby may make Captain soon.

Yours in the Most Positive Way,
Robert

06/ Natural Causes

Someday, I will have
an original idea.
The shock will kill me
before I write it down.

07/ First Amendment Rite

Perhaps it is what passes for self-expression--
affluent renegades, he at the handlebars and she behind,
in matching black leather jackets, astride
the loud-piped Harley with its radio and speakers
blasting Radioactive and other indie hits, cruising
the early spring Sunday boulevard as church let's out.

08/ Disquieting Weather Haiku

An expectant sky-
gray, but undecided- can,
in April, open.

09/ Infuriating Fluid, Time—

will not be dammed,
diverted, bottled.

Is always has been
and will be—

a ceaseless river
washing what you were

downstream, toward
the sea, unseen,

of depthless possibilities.

10/ New Glasses

Six years ago, I could choose designer frames
and add the coating to limit glare. When time
diminishes, one seeks value in one's optics.

My wife says they look like Elvis Costello.
The guy at work says Buddy Holly. I see
eighteen bucks. Pity- the cheap frame collection

didn't offer the big black round ones

made famous in different circles by photos
of Eliot and Le Corbusier. The twenties

were stylishly Modern- Tom with his
Fisher King and Corbu with his house
for the brother of Gertrude Stein.

In six years, the twenties will come again.
Perhaps the cheap frame line will offer circles.
For now, I see my reflection clearly enough.

11/ Book

There were none of the things he'd hoped for.
No unsolicited accolades by reviewers.
No imaginative and penetrating exegesis by critics.
No interview on NPR,
no appearance on The News Hour.
No second printing, the first being an ample supply.
There was just the book which, after the long wait,
had to be enough.

12/ A Murder of Crows

Six of them pecked and scratched
something at their center
in the middle of Virginia's lawn—

something smaller and gray-brown
I couldn't make out
in the flutter and thrusts

as I turned onto my driveway from work.

I stopped the car and ran to see
a screech owl, still as dead,

as the crows flew off
to safety in the trees.
As I came closer, the owl stood,

stretched its wings,
stared me to a stop,
and then flew silently away.

Next morning, as I fetched the News,
I found an owl, face up,
with holes where eyes should be.

13/ We the People of Walmart

I'm here for the cheap generics
and the lowest price
for a box of White.

I'm not in spandex
stretched to its elastic limit.
My buttons aren't strained

by an enormous gut.
I'm not in pajamas
or sweat pants. No part of my skin

which shouldn't be seen
by an American public can be seen.
I'm not the self-parody I laugh at online.

In the disheveled aisles

and tedious lines I see
pieces of the mirror's face,

the haggard, beat-to-shit resolve
of the economic trench
that widens and lengthens

and threatens at every moment
to collapse around us all
as we scramble to escape

another hurled canister of gas.

14/ Satiety

I am long accustomed to satiety.
I can't imagine hunger
that persists for weeks instead
of the few hours between
missed lunch and early dinner.

I know the visible effects
of long hunger from the news bites
and charity pitches that show
shadowed ribs above the swollen bellies
of dark-skinned children
in dirt road villages of failed states.

I know pictures, framed and cut
by professional spin machines
wringing dollars from the well fed.
Of actual starvation I know nothing.
I prefer my fleshy ignorance.

15/ Blood Moon

It's no big deal- just
heavenly bodies moving
as heavenly bodies do.
It has no import,
even to the bodies involved.
Pretty fucking cool to watch
from here, though.

16/ When All Danger of Frost Is Past Haiku

The morning glare eats
the last frost of spring. Replant
now those hasty beds.

17/ Orbital Mechanics

It helps somehow to think about the moon
and of the thousand other satellites
that orbit the earth as he thinks of his own
diminishing circumstances.

Another abandoned comsat falls
in a fiery arc that no one notices.

When the moon's momentum
dissipates enough, the earth's tug
will pull it down. Long gone by then,
no one will know the cataclysm.

18/ Haiku Haiku

The hope is always
that the thrown stone sends ripples
all they way to shore.

19/ April, 1956

The weeds were already in flower-
there were the small yellow ones
one could eat, the bunched, lilac-
colored ones, with round leaves
instead of blades, and the dandelions,
yellow still instead of spherical,
delicate and white.

I don't know why,
but I thought it might be fun
to pick some weedy flowers-
not the iris or tulips- and arrange
them in the shape of an egg-
a large, decorated egg.

I started in my own yard
but ran short of fine grained
yellow and lilac. I was sure
that Susan Chapman's parents
wouldn't mind, nor Susan, my one
year older girlfriend. I gathered
fistfuls of yellow, greens and lilac,
careful to avoid the ivy where,
my older brother said, black widows lived.
I'd seen the funneled webs he pointed out.

My egg mound grew
but needed a few more handfuls
to complete the oval and the patterns.
I eyed the Bullock's yard- no ivy,
no spiders, just the few clumps I'd need
to finish. The Bullocks were older
and had no kids. Our connection was polite
but tenuous. I took a risk and hoped
they wouldn't mind my flower theft.

I liked my egg. I thought it beautiful.
I offered it up to Jesus- not the man
on the cross, or the one in the Garden.
The one before the Romans and High Priests,
but not the baby in the manger. I pictured
Jesus five years old, like me. Before
the sorrow and the glory. I knew
he smiled and blessed me. I felt
no need to show what I had made
to anybody else.

20/ Fattened Feral Kittens

for Blanche, Medea and Moose

The wild lives more in you three than the other cats.
Though most of your lives have been spent
in a dry house with air conditioned against the seasons
and you eat with regularity ample enough

to have given you generous guts,
when you smell the spring-- the time
we calculate your birth to have been—
wafting in through screened windows

and watch the bird play and squirrel play
and the twitching of cottontail noses
and press your paws against the back door glass
and stare transfixed, ears erect and alert,

we know your six first weeks
among the weeds, shrubs and tree bark
and your mother's damning eyes
pull at you like the moon on the oceans

and you want to scratch the eyes
out of the furred and feathered things
that chirp and strut their freedom
just beyond the glass, just out of reach.

21/ Hobgoblin Test

If I should fail
to contradict myself,
please check my pulse.

I might be dead,
a room temperature mouthpiece
for history, revised.

22/ The Divine Rites of Music

If you account survival fortunate,
we are lucky there is no God.
Wrath and disappointment
would otherwise mean our end

unless whatever God might be

is charmed by melodies
and the rhythms that bear them.

If a God beholds us,
music saves us.

23/ Root and Talon, Thumb and Nail

The energies involved
in just one leaping sunspot
would incinerate the earth.
Imagine those of a supernova

and the Bang itself
that started all this violence-
quantities we can calculate
but never comprehend.

The worlds whirl and shatter,
spin, collide, and collapse without intent.
It takes life to annihilate
with ravening goals in mind.

24/ The balloon of you

is filled at the start
with something lighter than air--
perhaps a mix of spirit, ether, and time--
and, buoyant, lifts above the gravitied ground
to float and move with the wind-- but all balloons have
porous skins and spirit, ether and time leak out,
imperceptibly (unless thorns burst you open),
and the mass exceeds the buoyancy

and gravity pulls you back,
slowly, to the dust ball
that made you.

25/ Inequity

Poets and comics
both pen the human
and observe the wriggling.
People pay to hear the comics.

26/ Progress Is a State Not an Attribute

We have evolved. The plangent
doesn't resonate across the
new tympanic membranes
and the latest retinae see the red
of actual blood as grayscale.

27/ At a Loss

I had so many, once,
I didn't notice my nouns,
proper and otherwise,
leaving, one, by two,
by three, by more, until
I reached for one one day
and it was gone. I fear
my verbs will follow, after.

28/ Lunchroom Haiku

Someone's having Chi-
nese. Microwave Mexican
will now disappoint.

29/ Successor

The wife walked like a penguin.
From behind her hips reciprocated
like the pistons of a motorcycle.

The biomechanical conjunction
fascinated and disquieted
as if she might become progenitor

of a race of biomechanical
ascendants to the next tier
in the crown of creation layer cake.

30/ May Day's Eve Haiku

April's last morning
and a cold wind delivers
snow's forget-me-not.

