

Lost Trains

Leave No Tracks

YUVAL TAYLOR

Hidden connections are stronger
than obvious ones.
—HERACLITUS

I

Baby airplanes not yet big enough to fly
wait in their hangars while their mothers search for fuel.

The golden pelican lines its nest with lemons
to squeeze over the fish it brings its fussy children.

My daughter's friends secrete their honeyed words
after sucking nectar from pop songs.

II

Our blood is red, our tears are blue;
we must all therefore have purple hearts.

A day can last weeks, a week can last months,
but an hour can vanish in a moment.

The mind comes up with an idea exactly like
the caterpillar comes up with a butterfly:

the chrysalis—metamorphosis—emergence—flight—
and the slow disintegration of the remains.

III

Old cinders no longer long for the absent flame;
but when it returns, they go wild with desire.

Clouds cry hardest when they miss the sun the most
and smother him with caresses when he appears.

But the sun burns only for the sake of the moon.
During their coital eclipse, the shadows double,

except for those of the bees, which if doubled would
blot out what little remains of the darkened day.

IV

What is sillier than one's own name?
The way one says it.

What makes men weep if not women?
The shadows women cast.

What if the devil goes out the window?
Another's at the door.

V

Spring hides
in the sap

naked. He comes out
in multicolored finery

as soon as he senses that
the iceman is no longer stopping by,

the wind is no longer calling at all hours,
the universe is at peace.

The sun pulls him out
like a bee pulls out nectar.

“It’s time,” she whispers.

“It’s time to play.”

VI

To heat ourselves takes work;
to cool ourselves takes dreaming.

An orange may not be as big as
the sun, but it's juicier.

Stories, like horseradish, are more
potent when watered with tears.

Girls' secrets, if left
unplucked, ripen and rot.

Hospitals used to have gardens.
Then the gardeners all got well.

Very few beautiful women know how to undress
a rose.

VII

Why have I never seen a sheep
act sheepish?

Why have I never heard a bird sing
“Feed the Birds”?

The kinder the rhinoceros,
the softer its horn.

Mosquito honey
tastes salty.

The stories predators tell of their hunts
are never as good as those told by their prey.

VIII

Exact quotations don't exist,
for a word's always left unsaid.

If you had only ten words left,
I'll bet one of them would be *I*.

The sweetest words of all are
the hardest to pronounce,

the quickest to fall from favor,
yet the last we forget.

IX

Trees do yoga
to keep their limbs limber.

When Spring asks them to show
the leaves they've been hiding all winter,

why doesn't she also ask to see
their roots?

Sometimes they whisper to the sun
birds of love.

X

The leaves of the poetree harbor
poeticks, vile blood-sucking creatures.

Occasionally its thorns are borrowed by
the prosebush.

XI

My words are more alive
than I am, for

not only will they outlive me,
but their meanings will change.

(Ergo, its flight is more alive
than the bird.)

XII

Only a saint could deny
the beauty of a good meal.

The camel can walk all night
by the light he stores in his hump.

The greatest works of art
renounce their own symmetry.

XIII

We should force the cruelest prisoners
to perform the saintliest tasks.

Thus torturers
would teach the lame to walk

and serial killers
would bathe the feet of the poor.

XIV

Like a hungry spider, the moon
weaves a web of moonlight

to ensnare tasty creatures
and drink up their misty breath.

If the money you lost in your dreams
you could find under your pillow,

you would soon learn to bet
on the wrong nightmares.

XV

The chinks in my armor
are its shiniest spots.

My dryest words
are my most slippery.

The names my heart gives things
I forget the fastest

and my deepest thoughts
get lost between my lines.

XVI

A two-birded bush is better
than a one-handed bird.

Seven eggs is less than
seven chickens.

Shale is made of petrified
pterodactyl feathers.

Prisoners dream of the sun;
birds dream of light bulbs.

XVII

We sleep
atop the walls we erect.

We ride
on the backs of the dogs we kick.

We travel
throughout the prison we build.

We shine
if our skin is thin enough.

We die
with every breath we take.

XVIII

If the turtle announces that under his shell is his heart,
will the camel be as proud of his hump?

Some kisses blossom, some take root,
some bear fruit, and some grow thorns.

Fallen leaves are the color of flame.
Bare trees are the color of ash.

When it gets hot, everything
mercurial grows.

Where does one bury
a dead tornado?

Somewhere dry rivers
still burble.

XIX

The rain in Spain
falls mainly in Spanish.

At nightfall waves sigh;
at dawn they roar.

The word *shut* is as narrow
as the word *open* is wide.

The “yo” of the coyote,
the “hy” of the hyena,

and the “wo” of the wolf:
these are the three foundations of canine slang.

XX

Explorers plant flags where they want to be remembered.
We common folk plant gravestones.

To paint a true picture of the future
would take longer than the present will allow.

The golden grain of wheat or the
black plum pit: which heart is yours?

The one that will be crushed and ground
or the one that will become a tree?

When will the voiding of
past treaties expire?

The smaller the nation,
the bigger its stamps.

For those in love, every day
is in a different language.

XXII

If worms were words,
the dead would be Proustian.

Leaves turn yellow when they've lost
all hope for permanent attachment.

Night puts tiny holes in her hat
so that the wind won't blow it away.

XXIII

When we forgot about hell,
it fell into disrepair.

Our attempts to replicate it up here
have only been short-term successes.

A permanent success
would ensure us immortality.

(Besides, there we could auction off
the right to destroy priceless works of art

by hanging them
on our driveways.)

XXIV

A meticulous translation
of the mockingbird's song

would still be nonsense
in every language except

the one turtles use
when they're winning the race.

XXV

Nothing is more important than
giving corpses reasons for hope.

There is only one church in heaven,
for there no one prays.

Instead it's used for requiems
for those who have just been born.

The sirens are immortal, and immortal things
taste bad (or so find the sharks).

XXVI

The Greek gods would have never allowed
the Hebrew god to go unpunished.

Even the most powerful idols
get lost in the streets of Jerusalem.

Mystery requires
the possibility of evil.

(Apply that to your god
if you dare.)

XXVII

A letter to oneself usually begins,
“Dear me.”

One’s humility should increase
with the enormity of one’s subject

just as one’s ambition should increase
with its triviality.

Is the last note of a bird’s song
its signature?

XXVIII

Not everyone is naked under their clothes:
some nudes retain strippable shreds of dignity.

But anything that reveals itself fully
topples—trees and emperors, for example.

The most perfect orange
rolls farthest from the orchard.

And lost trains
leave no tracks.

XXIX

If I come back as a mushroom,
how does evolution work?

When love dies, does it come back as
a different love, or antipathy?

If God sends people to Hell,
does the Devil send them to Heaven?

Which is more omnipresent,
life or death?

XXX

What a shame that our idea of reason
has nothing in common with the sea's.

For if we thought it was reasonable
to attack everything we can reach,

or to prematurely age
all that we caress,

perhaps we wouldn't feel so lost
in this world of unfathomable depths.

XXXI

The same sun rises every day,
but the sun that sets is different.

We humans are the only animals
that simply can't sit still.

Yet no matter how much we travel,
our bones only live in one place.

The cart isn't afraid of the horse—
it's the road that makes it tremble.

XXXII

People were always happy to see you
since then they could talk about you behind your back.

Now you have no more wine, women, or songs.
So why do you still hurt?

Even if you're the only one left,
you can still lie to yourself.

XXXIII

When apples fall, why don't they
burn up like meteors?

Where in the heavens one goes to
depends on the manner of one's death:

the drowned go to Neptune,
and suicides to a black hole.

At the end of the rainbow lies a pot of
witches' brew.

XXXIV

The harder you try to find yourself,
the easier it is to get lost.

The things you are too busy to do
will bite you like fleas when you're old.

The words you waste tonight can create
enough dust to blot out the dawn.

XXXV

The mysteriousness of children
isn't as cool as that of the dead.

A flag at half-mast should be upside-down
since the departed will see it from above.

If you hire a double to take your place while you sleep
eventually you'll stop waking up.

XXXVI

When in labor we holler to stop ourselves
from coming up with names like Bartholomew.

The Mirrorpage™ is a piece of paper on which
appears a written description of what it faces.

Divide the amount poured by the amount drunk:
the result is the percentage of beer which is foam.

The clouds hoard their raindrops like misers hoard gold.
When their sacks burst, they let out a great roar of loss.

Our gratitude for their quick and fruitful gifts
is best expressed by twirling our umbrellas.

XXXVII

Words matter
but are not matter.

Literally,
they have no weight or substance,

and even at high volume—even when voluminous—
no volume.

They come out of dictionaries
like ghosts from graves

and haunt us
like things we tried not to forget

or think we remember
but have yet to encounter.

XXXVIII

Why are depths
more compelling than shallows?

Is it because we dwell
on the rich bottom

and only come up for air
on brief and sterile flights?

Or is it because the dead
rise to the surface?

XXXIX

If we leave no stone unturned,
won't the Earth be inside out?

In the desert, do not sing
"You Are My Sunshine."

We navigate our journey from home
using stars of oblivion.

XL

The original single of Ray Charles's "Drown in My Own Tears" got wet every time you played it.

Only a diamond needle is sharp enough to make all those little holes without breaking the matzo.

Too bad Kurt Cobain's favorite singer wasn't also his dad. Leadbelly might have taught the kid whom to shoot.

XLI

If leaves were informed of their autumn fate
they might stage mutinies against the trees.

When you fail to keep a promise, it flies away
and joins flocks of others roaming the winter sky.

Spring's subjects are happiest
when she exercises absolute power.

Only honeybees could bring summer
to the moon.

XLII

If insects could read and write,
would butterflies use scents for letters,

leaving suggested itineraries
for the bees?

Would ants describe their exploits
on their tunnel walls?

Would fleas text each other
about my tastiest freckles?

And would crickets score their harmonies
or their cricket games?

XLIII

Love never dies. Instead it hides
in folds of skin and in pauses between words.

You can't change the view from your window
without getting your hands dirty.

No matter how perfect our mirrors may be,
we can never truly gaze into our own eyes.

When waves play the blues,
the sky smells of sweat.

XLIV

We should send enough snakes to the moon
to fill in all its holes.

Or should we use those holes
for a long, slow game of golf?

Anyway, we should fill them in somehow
before light leaks through to the dark side.

XLV

Why is literature not promoted as a cure for obesity?
Those who read my poems are thinner than those who don't.

Even in a hundred years, those who remember my hat
will refrain, out of respect, from offering their opinion of it.

But those who remember my poetry will have no such qualms,
and will critique it as if it were a vintage wine.

Whatever may be my modest claims to originality,
my poems are wholly indebted to Pablo Neruda's.

XLVI

Only the last dead end
is also a one-way street.

The flowers in dry seabeds
are crystalline.

Who sews the seaweed
that clothes the drowned?

If played right, each bone,
like each bird, has its own song.

XLVII

Why don't they make special paper fans
to warm you up in wintertime?

My cold gets jealous of
my wife's, which is twice as bad.

Although Christmas is usually
the longest month,

occasionally November
can last years.

XLVIII

The finest cloth comes from
the raggedest animals.

Trees are idiots.
They undress when it's cold,
and wear snow
to keep them warm.

Why must girls hang up their dresses before bed?
Flowers never pick up their petals.

Disrobe on your best couch,
for clothes enjoy wearing fancy furniture.

XLIX

Only after the thousandth cloud has called her an airhead
does the volcano lose her cool and blow her top.

Children know what artists forget:
the making is more important than the finished work.

A cat has seven basic questions:
who? what? how? where? when? why? and meow?

When we run out of places to bury our dead,
gravedigging will be one of the great lost arts.

Tears not yet spilled wait in invisible ponds
behind the ears for hurtful words and sad songs.

L

A fly enmeshed in a poem
spends its entire life performing tricks.

Every line of this book is to be read
as if you had to turn the page to reach it.

Our thoughts are inconceivable
more often than we think.

If this poem were twice as long
it would have half as much to say.

LI

Cypress roots
come up for air

while willow branches
reach down to drink.

Why doesn't one autumn
teach the next how to behave?

If a kiss can last a lifetime,
so can a blink.

LII

Peace is not the dove, but the olive branch in her beak.
War is not the leopard, but the zebra meat in her mouth.

These distinctions are especially important to the professors
who murder certainties like vermin.

When swallows are late for swooping school
their ration of easily digestible truths is reduced.

Some say they write letters and even words in the sky,
but they're really trying to draw clouds in motion.

LIII

If fireflies started fires
could waterlilies put them out?

What intergalactic insect
brings us stardust on its wings?

If bees sip from moonflowers
will they have delicious honeymoons?

Which is holier,
the Pope or the moon?

And which is more likely
to be right?

The happiest collectors
collect clouds.

The worst actors
look the most like stars.

Does the fountain of youth
flow into the Styx?

There is no homework
in fairy tales.

Will a killer's remains
turn poisonous?

Is the smell of the dead
deadly?

Does anyone thirst for
a vampire's blood?

If rings were made from the gold
teeth of the dead,

would marriage
survive?

LVI

We pan for gold in cornfields
and dig for diamonds in junkyards.

Only at midnight can a CD
produce an ancient sound.

From the depths of Loch Ness, the monster
sings love songs to the birds.

Watermelon smiles when it's cut
and chuckles when it's bitten.

Lies taste better with
a sprinkling of conviction.

LVII

The death of a dog makes his master weep
but the death of a slave makes him curse.

Ignored by the jackets and pants too long,
the vests are taking up arms.

A written word is buried alive,
and can only be freed by reading it.

Each raindrop is a human soul
who has tired of being in heaven.

LVIII

Who cooks for the dead
in the underworld restaurants?

Do they stir the soup with bones
and serve it in skulls?

Are their ovens fueled
by putrefaction?

Or do the dead only eat
raw worms?

LIX

The noise the moon makes
comes from its dark side.

I wish Cervantes could write the foreword
to the story of my death.

The rainbow reminds us that the great flood will never recur;
the rain reminds us that it just might.

Only in the land of the blind
will no one pursue a blind man.

LX

Imagine a tunnel whose entrance is forgotten
and whose exit is invisible. This is your life.

Its only illumination arrives
in sudden and blinding flashes.

Imagine trailing a pool of blood
that wanders from morgue to morgue.

Imagine: the only reason for God's actions is
to prevent us from predicting them.

LXI

If a shark is bleeding,
she attracts other sharks.

If you want to hear the sirens,
listen to a woman whisper, "Come."

If the octopus lived in a tree,
what creatures would she snare?

It's best to blame shipwrecks
on the bloodstained fish.

LXII

Memories keep warm
by association.

The first drummer
played by heart.

Is fear the only remedy
for the sin of pride?

When you sleep
your ghost is awake.

LXIII

The battle against chaos cannot be won.
Yet its perpetual continuation constitutes victory

since perpetual continuation of anything
is impossible if chaos rules.

Therefore all treaties should be signed
eight times

over eight days
with octopus ink.

LXIV

Who wakes up whom?
The birds or the sun?

Contentment thrives on lies
and worry on the truth.

How do you sing
a question mark?

LXV

Does it hurt
to be dead?

Do drowned fish
come back as birds?

Why don't babies
have friends?

Is it their pride
or their ferocity?

Is French jazz
American cheese?

Being dead
really stinks.

LXVI

Interplanetary intercourse
is out of this world

due to the irresistibility
of gravitational attraction.

Yet the marriage of heaven and hell
took place aboard a train:

while the locomotive wedding bells chimed,
the furnace belched hot flames.

LXVII

In the great skymap of windflows
only the eye of the hurricane is blank.

The world will end not in fire nor flood
but will slowly be covered by decades of mud.

The comic acrobatics of falling leaves
help autumn appear doubly tragic.

LXVIII

I'd like to work as hard as
the sun, shooting flames all day.

I'd like to work as hard as
the earth, pushing out plants all night.

I'd like to stroke the dirt's richness
up the stems with my fingers

and make each flower
bloom with a kiss.

And then I'd like to work as little as
winter, killing it all with one breath.

LXIX

If our skin were like the earth's,
it would crack open when we shiver;

without warning it would spew steaming blood,
our pores becoming craters;

and the flow of our tears
would carve canyons in our faces.

LXX

Has the earth passed
its expiration date?

Would you put it in your shopping cart
or get a new one instead?

Are the borders of the universe
permeable?

And does darkness travel
at the speed of light?

LXXI

If the blues are boring
and the yellows are yawning,

look: the greens are growing,
the reds are roaring,

and the oranges are rolling
with laughter in the aisles.

LXXII

Since assassins always outlive their victims,
we should all kill those most likely to outlive us.

Why do we dedicate only new things?
We should dedicate the dying to ourselves

and then bury them under six feet
of petals soaked in wine.

LXXIII

The wise child I was
and the wise child I will be

used to be friends, but
fought over which loved me more.

I never loved either, since
I never wanted to be alone with them.

The wise child I was got killed.
The weapon was finally found:

a blunt object
of desire.

As for the culprit,
take my love and I away.

If we won't confess,
our bones will.

LXXIV

The strangers we make love to in our dreams
would never dream of making love to us.

How are the objects in our dreams
taken to the dreams of others?

There's no blossoming or ripening in our dreams.
Things are always being planted, though.

After resuscitating the dead in our dreams,
waking up is murder.

LXXV

The car sucks up air and time,
then spills its regrets to the mechanic.

If only smoke told the clouds
where to find fires to extinguish.

A mirror will soon lose its gleam
if given no clothes to reflect.

LXXXVI

Why don't rivers turn back
when they reach the devouring sea?

Even the spring doesn't yield to summer
without a storm or two,

and winter simply
grinds to a halt.

LXXVII

Give the most traditional flavors
the silliest names.

Thank the flower for its fragrance
by watering it with your spit.

Don't ever wash a dirty
American flag

for when the colors bleed
you'll get red, pink, and blue.

LXXVIII

If the sea recognizes you
it waves.

But the secrets it whispers
sound fishy.

When it pounds the rocks
for emphasis,

it's concealing its theft
of sand.

LXXIX

And when God said, “Let there be light,”
behold! there was darkness on half the Earth.

The ocean’s heart is a reverse vortex
that pumps waves toward the shore.

Stars are bright eggs that take years to hatch
but only seconds to learn how to fly.

This poem makes no secret of who wrote it,
but why it was written is unfathomable.

LXXX

Natural selection has taken from us
the light emitted by a cherry stone,

the kissing sound of the opening crocus,
the banners that squirrels unfurl between trees.

Bubbles burst
from a surfeit of joy.

The sea foams at the mouth
when it senses its prey.

LXXXI

I used to play the tuning fork
in a rock'n'roll band.

The shorter the shock,
the longer the effect.

Only the best Barbies
have bones.

How do you dust
your lawn?

Imaginary rocks
are more alive than real ones.

LXXXII

Why do you laugh when making love?
Are your unborn children tickling you?

Does the rain feel guilty for
interrupting the pond's reflections?

Is there a way to avoid deciding
whether you like a song?

And why are there no gardens
in discos?

LXXXIII

He wears a shield; a ribbon dangles from his mouth;
he grasps a leafy branch and a dozen arrows—

the American eagle is either ready for anything
or finds it rather difficult to fly.

Anyway, doesn't he ever tire of eating
Prometheus's same old liver every day?

LXXXIV

If evildoers have heavy hearts
does evil outweigh goodness?

It's easier to trust the sinner to sin
than the kind person to remain kind.

There are infinite degrees of guilt
but the innocent are all equally innocent.

The flowers of evil
smell burnt.

LXXXV

Spring gives the earth fresh clothes
to cover his rotten skin.

The seahorse needs
only one horseshoe.

The weather gets erotic
when the sky takes off her clouds.