



# ROADS TO GHOSTS

JOHN ROCHE

# Road Ghosts

By

John Roche

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*For Tony*

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## **Prologue–Suicide Bomber**

I was a suicide bomber at seventeen  
exploding in my parents' living room  
turning the Christmas tree into a guided missile  
projecting lethal shards of bone and glass ornament  
pine needle and tinsel

I was a suicide bomber at seventeen  
taking my holy mission on the road  
planning to detonate on Nixon's front porch  
but having to settle for a detention camp  
with habeas corpus revoked

I was a teenage suicide bomber  
rolling across the American Heartland  
acid-fueled  
past Ohio refineries and Indiana chemical plants  
past Illinois farms and fields  
past Haymarket Square and Wounded Knee and  
Bloody Kansas  
past OK City and Waco  
all the way to Albuquerque  
where I watched that city burn

I was a suicide bomber at seventeen  
learning the arts of demolition from ex-paratroopers  
and disillusioned  
Green Berets  
practicing patiently on the rifle range  
buying poisons from outlaw bikers  
researching garroting of sentries in the  
*Anarchist Cookbook*



I was a suicide bomber at seventeen  
reaching San Francisco, finally  
Mecca of Holy Haight Street  
letting the anger roll off my brittle back  
along with the hoped-for revolution  
sitting cross-legged in Golden Gate Park  
and sittin' on the dock of the bay

## **I. MAY DAY RISING**

## **Commencement (April 1971)**

Taking a twenty  
leaving the birthday hundred  
in the drawer  
(ethical 17)  
I take the gold watch  
(to pawn or to covet?)

Head for the highway  
without a note  
or backward glance

## **Brotherly Love**

Lost that watch at knifepoint  
South Philly  
to bro' who befriended me  
in subway  
where I'd been riding back-and-forth all night  
after Trooper kicked me off Jersey Pike

Promising to show me the bus station  
he flicked switchblade in alleyway  
pulled off my glasses—  
oh Joycean humiliation!

But he did leave me busfare  
to get out of  
Quaker City

## First Trip

Lost my glasses  
on organic mescaline  
(or so advertised)  
courtesy of kind strangers  
Bonnie and Sebastian  
(funny some names remain forty years hence)  
“It’s yr first time, then it’s on us!”

National Mall  
late April  
late afternoon  
sun setting behind First Father’s obelisk:  
Washington Monument achieves lift-off!

Spin me round  
3X  
ollie-ollie-in-free

I’m alone  
sitting cross-legged  
practicing Zazen learned from D.T. Suzuki book  
going into and out of body  
lost in space  
only tether’s button given me by Bonnie:  
*War is Not Healthy for Children*  
*& Other Living Things*

Rehearsing my death from stepping in front of bus—  
only one of many alternate universes—  
sirens wail for Los Alamos while obelisks do loop-de-  
loops around Jupiter

Blind from staring at the black sun  
I'm standing naked in front of the TV cameras  
on the White House lawn where VVAW  
threw their medals  
I circle the sun while sitting quiet still  
cross-legged

Waking up  
it's dark  
glasses gone

Stumbling on in blurrrr  
of campfires and rock'n'roll and returned vets and  
hippies who haven't returned and bikers and  
patchouli-scented girls  
*Easy Rider meets Apocalypse Now orgy*

*The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*  
*Free at Last*  
*I Feel fine*  
*Jump Into the fire*  
*Spill that Wine*  
*Don't Bogart that Joint, My Friend*

Just sleep the just sleep by the embers  
(careful of your sole)  
and wake to communal oatmeal

*Mirabile dictu!*  
combing the vast mall  
blurry-eyed and beat  
by some grace  
I find my eyes

## Before May Day

Two wks in tent city  
West Potomac Park  
demos everyday  
building towards May Third actions:  
*Bring the War Home!*  
*If the Government won't stop the war,*  
*we'll stop the Government.*

We give visiting Massachusetts Congressman a pipe  
when he visits our affinity group's tent; he puts it to  
his lips but doesn't inhale; a coupla wks earlier, on  
school trip to DC, I'd smoked dope with John Kerry's  
vets on the Mall, the day after they threw their  
medals over the White House fence

Chill April night  
vats of hot marijuana tea  
courtesy of the Hog Farm  
I partake but skip the soup & brown rice line  
to crowd onto dilapidated bus  
(Gray like the police bus I'll ride soon enow)  
to Seatrain concert  
at elegant old theater  
(Free tickets for the ragged Freak Brigade)

Balcony seat, but with the tea's effects I prefer floor  
staring up  
watch rococo ceiling fresco jump  
to the fiddle's anarchic orders

## May 3rd Action

By dawn's early light  
my affinity group does its small part  
to shut down the government for a day  
obeying the motto:  
*If the government won't stop the war  
we'll stop the government*

Espying unused detour signs—  
probably stockpiled by the Fuzz—  
we press them into service  
to block the Taft Bridge  
then push a few parked cars into place  
to straddle lanes

Stopping like Wordsworth on Westminster Bridge  
we survey a sight so touching in its majesty:  
twisting lines of stopped traffic  
confused faces of early morning commuters  
cacophony of car horns

Till helicopters wake us and we drop  
into the shadows of Rock Creek Park



## The Coliseum

Maced  
thrown into back of crowded paddy wagon  
cops pour out canteens so we can't wash off the gas  
some guy needs to pee so he takes my canteen  
I throw it in the garbage when we get out

Hustled into the courtyard of the DC Jail  
with a thousand or so others:  
protestors, reporters, Congressional staffers,  
tourists—anyone caught up in Mitchell's and  
Rehnquist's illegal dragnet—  
open to the heat and rain  
baloney sandwiches of questionable provenance  
and one crate of oranges stamped  
*Courtesy of Senator Ted Kennedy*

On the bus to the DC Coliseum  
singing Lennon's "Power to the People"  
singing *Black Panther Party...It's a People's Party*  
handcuffed with folks I remember from staying at  
church where the Panthers had their free breakfast  
and educational program for neighborhood kids—  
such a festive occasion, glimpse  
of America's rainbow future

Being in the Coliseum is boring  
but much more comfortable than the courtyard  
something like ten or twelve thousand here,  
most without charges  
rather like a baseball game that goes on  
far too long

Except for the uncertainty the tinge of fear the *How could this happen in America?* the *Why didn't they formally charge us or read us our rights?* the *What have they got planned for us?*

They must have felt something similar initially at that other stadium, in Santiago '73  
until the beatings and executions began  
until they broke Victor Jara's arms, mocked him to play guitar, and watched incredulous as he sang  
"Venceramos!"  
(machine-gunned him a couple days later)

Our little vacation much more benign, though it may have been a dry run for the Nixon gang as they planned the Chilean coup as forceful demonstration of the Kissinger Doctrine

## Lifesavers

National Guard on the ridge  
U Maryland campus  
(a year and three days since Kent)  
lobbing canisters of teargas upon us

Along with four or five others I'm given ride  
and refuge  
by "Movement" leader  
first home-cooked meal in weeks  
of camping at West Potomac  
or eating baloney sandwiches  
in courtyard of D.C. jail and Coliseum

Civil Rights bigwig shows us framed photo of himself  
with Jane Fonda  
from Life Magazine  
everyone smokes pot  
then all but two of us head off to bed

I'm mellowing on couch, when newly sprung ex-con  
hands me cherry Lifesaver to suck  
too young and too stoned to notice the semiotics  
I accept

Soon a beefy thumb is massaging my gums  
as he demands blow job  
quite democratically  
*You do me and I do you*

I tell him to chill  
then feel a knife tickle my throat

Getting a chance to talk I do and keep on talking  
as if my life depended on it  
feigning ignorance  
(not much of a stretch)  
I cajole him to point knife away  
then get to my feet  
and keep on talking  
as I head for the stairs  
(always the gab gets me out of or into trouble)

Safely above, I take a place on the floor  
next to a buddy  
tell him, "Joe's sure acting weird, you know?"  
*Oh, that's just Joe*, he says, and goes to sleep  
It's the age of tolerance, Aquarius!

Next day I try to warn the young guy Joe's eying  
but he doesn't hear me  
trucker picks them both up  
and that's the last I see of either one

## **Southern Hospitality**

Lost in loops of DC beltway  
find myself in rural Virginia  
go up to ramshackle store  
single gas pump out front  
ask directions

Owner says, *Bet you're one of those  
Comminist protestors—  
I hope you never get home.*

## **II. ALBUQUERQUE BURNING**

## Pit Stop, Pike's Peak

Pike's Peak of *Reader's Digests*

I leaf through every page of every issue  
during that weekend in Colorado Springs  
county lock-up  
there for hitchhiking with no ID—  
gave my name as Joseph Hillstrom

Time stretched out like a stack  
of dental hygiene magazines  
browsed while waiting for a root canal  
and three days would have been thirty  
but for kindness of strangers  
—two of Dorothy Day's disciples—  
who paid my fine  
and I thank them to this day

The *Reader's Digests* proved indigestible  
So I shat them out  
then said farewell to the great state of Colorado  
and hello to New Mexico—  
'cause I wouldn't be caught dead in Utah

## Cowboy Days

Mid-May of a cold spring, down off the Colorado Plateau sleeping in the desert, thin blanket, near freezing. *Welcome to the Southwest!*

That chill New Mexico soil was dear to me, though; it meant I was free of Colorado cops.

Rode into Albuquerque expecting to stay just a day or so, bum up some food money, ended up staying the longest month-and-a-half of my life.

Thanked the driver goodbye, helped the other hitchhikers grab the gear I lacked, stepped onto the pavement. Looked into the sun, closed my eyes feeling sooo good, opened to a blur of blue and white and other colors turned and saw the dark greens of Yale Park adobe tans of the University real easy laidback Siesta-ville lying warm under Great Southwestern sun, wandered up the street and through hippie crafts shops I couldn't afford smelled that deep leather and soared right into a Zane Grey zone, sat in a more-or-less perfect square across Route 66 from Yale Park a little oblong of grass and here-and-there trees and here-and-now people.

Everybody saying what a sleepy and mellow town this was I was lucky to be in out of the desert and mountains, but beware, it's hard to leave. . . .

Nobody noticing the oily rags in the wastebasket already smoldering.



Second or third day, fiesta on campus, Mexican music and food, Anglo rock bands, every demographic melting into the pot smoke and crowd camaraderie; back at the Park, commerce means buying and trading all kinds of substances all kinds of costumed characters: the gun-toting turquoise prospector à la Bogart, truck equipped with cabin and sail, the wiry coke-freak rumored to be CIA agent investigating arms smuggling (reportedly found on the outskirts of town a few months later, bullet to the head), the Space Cowboys recreating the Western Movie under acid-tinged eyelids, the ex-biker who said he'd been at Chocolate George's funeral, in famous photo of hundreds of bikes roaring up San Francisco hill.

Rattlesnake the name of a big 6'4" cowboy with a long scar and longer knife, got the name 'cause he used to eat the critters, really a gentle sort deep down. But how far down? I may be confusing two cowboys. One was a big, gentle journeyman carpenter who'd rather journey than carpenter. The other was a nasty, backstabbing, womanizing bear of a man. Then again, could be the same man.

Soon discovered things were balanced pretty evenly between the Sixties' "brothers and sisters" philosophy and the hobo or street cynicism of "help yourself to the suckers' shit"—even the latter had some loyalty to pals, but not unconditionally.

As well as "cowboys," there were "settlers" the settlers were in Taos, the cowboys were in Albuquerque.

Met a few settlers coming through in a pick-up truck or some sort of uncovered wagon, their baby and their little boy all smiles, and real dignity despite their poverty. They looked to have determination and gentleness and an ability to endure hardship: all those qualities one needs to coax the earth for a livelihood. I admired them and felt they were relations of mine but I would remain a Cowboy, although a greenhorn one. It was the ancient division between the stayers and the wanderers, the farmers and the herdsmen, the growers and the hunters. We were on opposite sides of the range-fence.

## **Workingman's Dead**

On  
a  
cold  
morn-  
ing  
sidewalk  
Anywhere,  
USA  
waiting  
for  
some  
place  
any  
place  
to  
o-  
pen

## Some Nights

Sleeping on someone's couch some night somewhere  
sometime late in the night someone's housemate  
comes home

asks someone, *what the Fuck are you doin'*  
*lettin' someone stay on our couch?*

Someone slams a door and someone else opens the  
refrigerator door

and bangs around in there  
and you squeeze into a fetal ball  
try to be smaller than Alice

or Thumbelina  
and hope everyone  
will just go away  
and let you  
just  
get some sleep

## Yellow Brick Road

Palling 'round with big friendly biker  
and farm girl from Kansas named Mary  
she and I sleep together in the park or in friends'  
houses but remain virgins  
I take acid for the first time with her, listening to  
Jimi's *Are You Experienced* LP

She leaves for a road trip and returns a month later  
to a city under martial law, both of us changed  
utterly, a terrible beauty born

**True Beat**  
**(advice from a road buddy)**

True Beat-itude  
Means never having to say  
Yer a sorry ass muthafucka

## **Song of the Panhandler**

There's a better day a comin'  
Got to be a better day a comin'  
We're all prayin' for a better day  
Hopin' for a better day  
Singin' for a better day  
Wonderin' why that better day's so long in comin'  
Need to believe in that better day

Maybe when the Revolution comes, brother  
Maybe when the Millennium comes, sister  
Maybe when we hijack that starship and move  
    to a new galaxy  
Maybe when the war ends  
Maybe when they stop killing our leaders  
Maybe when the cops stop hassling us  
    for panhandling and having long hair  
Maybe when I CAN buy what I need  
    with my good looks

Maybe when there's liberty and justice for all  
Maybe when the climate suits my clothes  
Maybe when my crotch stops itching  
Maybe when Nixon goes away  
Maybe when they free John Sinclair  
Maybe when the song comes 'round on the ol' guitar  
Maybe when they build a perpetual motion machine  
Maybe when the aliens land  
Maybe when the dolphins talk  
Maybe when Jimi and Janis return  
Maybe when you stop and listen to me, for once  
Maybe when the poets aren't scorned

Maybe it's already here  
Maybe it's already there, in your heart, man  
Maybe all you need to do is reach down deep  
in your pockets

Yes, indeed, there's a better day a comin'  
but until then,  
buddy,  
can you  
spare  
a dime?  
(a quarter would do nicely!)



## Sunshine Night

Street festival  
block Party  
the Outlaws roar in from Tucson

Full moon solstice  
strangers distribute 1000 hits of orange sunshine  
word on the street says  
it's from Owsley's and Scully's private stash  
(or the Brotherhood of Eternal Love?)

I spend the night in someone's van  
my body encased in cement

In the morning we revive at Denny's

**Song of Wandering Owsley**  
**(A Collaboration with Susan Deer Cloud)**

Owsley disappeared into the orange  
mists of Avalon

And the skies rained orange  
creamsicles for seven days

And a new world arose full of  
tangerine trees and marmalade skies

On the seventh day the Thunder God  
of Creamsicles rested

And the children tripped out to the  
lakes of orange left behind

And the Sky Mother of Clementine  
Songs saw that it was good

Oh, there's an Awful Orange at the Start of the World!

Ah, Valencia! How we weep blood  
orange when we think of you

By the River of Sunshine there we sat  
down at the World's Navel

Skinnydipping in the cool sweet fire of  
the dream flood

Drowned trees would green and  
flower forth as saffron suns

Sacred snakes glistened around the  
children in sacred hoops

But now few can remember the  
ancient creamsicle rains

Oh, there's an Awful Orange at the End of the World!

## **Brother's Keeper**

Peaking on acid in men's room of Esso station, Rte. 66  
dude I barely know shooting up  
coke and LSD combo  
asks me to tighten the tourniquet

I freak when he splatters blood  
from hypodermic  
on the bathroom wall

All becomes one dark stain  
the universe  
a blood-black hole

(Minutes later, or hours, I come to--  
he's returned, guilt-ridden  
for running away  
leaving me perhaps for dead

A Good Samaritan, after all

## Near Miss

Aborted burglary  
construction site  
planned by newly-fired guard, keys still in his pocket  
I ride along, with assurances there'll be no violence

They're onto us—we drive off and leave the loot

*You two've wasted my precious time, says Big Al*  
*I'm just along for the ride, like you, I reply*

Instigator has neither watch nor change  
so they take his jacket take his shirt  
right off his back

Afterwards, at the all-night drop-in center  
we recount the adventure and laugh  
high about it  
over herbal tea

## For What It's Worth

Stones fly at the unmarked narc car  
Yale Park, Albuquerque, June, 1971  
chanting *The Park belongs to the people!*  
suddenly twenty squad cars scream into view  
seventeen of us arrested in dragnet  
bused to county lockup in Sandia Hills  
girls sexually assaulted by guards  
guys left alone to boredom of stir  
most released next day on own recognizance

"The Albuquerque 17" someone coins, planning  
Sunday afternoon concert in Roosevelt Park  
to raise dough for the defense  
Jethro Tull announces it from the stage Friday night  
(can't confirm— couldn't bum a ticket)

All the backstory's soon forgotten  
when petty drug and wine arrests at concert site  
spiral into all-out riot  
police station and city hall surrounded  
snipers on the rooftops  
*What a field-day for the heat*  
*A thousand people in the street*  
Chanting dancing singing  
*Viva La Raza!*

National Guard arrives so we know it's serious  
Hippies and redneck sheriffs both blindsided  
by history  
while we were playing our little games  
the original owners of this desert land  
decided to take it back

## **First Time (for everything)**

Sex on crashpad floor  
with the queen of our street family  
(Albuquerque Trucking Society)  
self-described witch named Scorpio

She's high on MDMA ("the love drug")  
and we're both exultant after being sprung from jail

I don't let on it's my first time  
later wake to find she's bed-hopped  
to someone with a couch  
and, presumably,  
more experience

## **Nonprofit Pitch**

Thank any god you choose  
for that ACLU attorney  
who took the unloaded looted-pawnshop rifle  
out of my hands  
that night  
and drove off  
to dump it in the Rio Grande  
as I stood helpless  
17-yr-old target  
while the streets of Albuquerque  
burned

Worth a donation  
now and again

**Sunday June 13, 1971**

I love the sound of breaking glass  
my brick hitting the pawnshop window  
(after my neighbor casts the first stone)

One with the mob as we squeeze into the store  
a Communion line  
where they dispense the guns and knives and ammo  
(no atheists in this foxhole)

I get a rifle but no ammo  
wouldn't know how to load it anyway  
(an ignorant army of one)

A gun to raise towards the sky in defiance  
a shout to rattle the walls  
of White House and Pentagon and Vatican  
(beware of falling celebratory rounds)



## Braveheart

Talking trash  
'round the campfire  
stoned as usual  
in liberated Yale Park  
couple weeks after the riots  
bragging about minor skirmish  
when a group of us, belts held high, drove some  
"bad guys" out of the park  
what that was all about I'd very little clue  
just followed my friends  
into the raw exhilaration of combat  
mostly bloodless, luckily

Suddenly, in the midst of my narrative, a squat,  
bearded guy I didn't know  
(Viet vet, reportedly)  
grabbed me  
sending glasses flying  
pushed me down at the fire's edge  
yanking my hair 'til I cried uncle—  
a salutary lesson  
for any future professor

## **Rte 66, Revisited**

If you ever plan to motor West  
Take my way, it's the highway that's the best  
Oklahoma City  
G. Gordon Liddy  
Raising Arizona  
UN wants to own ya  
Over to Missouri  
Paramilitary  
UFO invasion  
Micro-implant nation  
When you make that paranoid trip  
Get your kicks on Rte. 66

Wide open spaces  
Air Force bases  
Pecan rolls at Stuckies  
Shirt rolled up with Luckies  
Deadbeat dads  
Weather rads  
Bible toters  
NRA voters  
Drifters  
Grifters  
ID-shifters  
Get your kicks on Rte. 66  
Get your kicks on Rte. 66

If you ever plan to motor West  
Take my way, it's the highway that's the best  
Now it goes through St. Louis, Joplin, Missouri  
OK City looks awfully pretty  
When you know you're out of luck

When you pack that Ryder truck  
When the bank has took your farm  
When the gov'ment blocks your right to arm  
Get your kicks on Rte. 66

You'll see Amarillo  
Gallup, New Mexico  
Flagstaff, Arizona  
Don't forget Winona  
Kingman, Barstow, San Bernardino  
Won't you get hip to this timely tip:  
When you make that California trip  
Get your kicks on Rte. 66  
Get your kicks on Rte. 66

Day of the Locust  
Deny the Holocaust  
Land of Birchers and Teabaggers  
Home of Ronnie Rayguns and Tricky Dick  
Home of Sister Aimee and Trader Vic's  
Won't you get hip to this timely tip:  
When you make that California trip  
Get your kicks on Rte. 66  
Get your kicks on Rte. 66

Gump says, *Where you want that killin' done?*  
God says, *Out on Highway--you know the one*  
Old Bull Lee's got to get his fix  
Ol' Satchmo's got to get his licks  
St. Louis Blues gonna play its tricks  
LA Woman's gonna get her picks  
Get YOUR kicks on Rte. 66  
Get your kicks on Rte. 6 6 6

### **III. CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'**

## **Departure from El Dorado**

Wake up in friend's sleeping bag to see cop boots—  
ultimatum that I have 24 hours to get out of town

By coincidence, some acquaintances have a pick-up  
and are leaving this very morning

So I get in the back and go  
across those desert sands  
to get to the Golden Shore  
without that Do-re-mi

## Simple Twist of Fate

College kids pick me up in Arizona  
go to Grand Canyon  
hike to the bottom and camp down there  
skinnydipping 'neath waterfall  
meditating on rock overlooking the Colorado  
(eventually hustled along by Park Rangers)

Climb back up is scorching death march, packs and gear strewn everywhere by desperate climbers—by the time my skinny bones get to the top they've driven off and I never retrieve the denim jacket I'd left—my only worldly possession—without which I wasn't free to camp with impunity—only one thin shirt won't suffice, even in summer desert (quirk of fate that makes me scramble for a ride to Frisco and eventually sends me home to parents and school and college and grad school and teaching and marriage and homeowning and divorce and god knows what would have happened if I'd taken my jacket with me to the bottom of the Grand Canyon)

## Berkeley Days

Finally made it to the Dock of the Bay  
slept in Golden Gate Park  
walked down Holy Haight Street  
then across the bridge  
to capital of Liberated Territory (almost)

The easy life, in most respects  
selling the *Berkeley Barb* and *Berkeley Tribe*  
on the corner  
(preferring the latter)  
collecting for Free Clinic  
frequenting free meals and free dope  
avoiding “flirty fishing” wiles  
of scantily clad Jesus Freaks  
trading stories with White Panthers  
on the lam from Detroit  
reading Marx and Lenin Mao Fanon and Cleaver  
a couple weeks crashing with rich liberals  
growing weary of hip selfishness/mercenary ways

## **Homecoming, 1971**

Winging home on jumbo jet  
Bourgeois ending to three months on the road  
Tired of evading police and my parents' detectives  
Tired of hunger  
Tired of panhandling  
Tired of rip-offs  
Tired of adulterated drugs  
Tired of a revolution infinitely postponed  
Tired of fighting the inevitable  
Thought of fleeing north, to Oregon, Seattle, B.C.  
But here I am, threadbare prodigal  
Thin shirt worn jeans ragged sneakers  
No jacket no hat  
140 pounds  
Ready to come home



## **IV. ON THE ROAD AGAIN**

## **The Golden Road (to Limited Indemnity)**

Crossing the Continental Divide with failing brakes  
    high school graduation trip  
Tony in passenger seat, me crowded into back seat  
    with three hitchers  
Madman Chuck at the wheel  
    of the Corvair to Never Never Land  
A wizard of clutch,  
Chuck seldom uses what brakes he has  
    on deadman's curves and steep descents  
Though the Germans next to me tremble  
I have supreme confidence  
    'til Chuck slams the car hard into gas pump  
        in mountain hamlet  
                not far from our destination  
No harm, except to his stature as the next Neal

## Strawberry Lake, 1972

"A Gathering of the Tribes"  
first Rainbow People's gathering,  
Rocky Mountain National Park

State troopers block the buses  
force us to walk ten miles to the park  
then a mile straight up  
someone plays "Uncle John's Band"  
to ease our aching feet:  
*It's the same story the crow told me;  
It's the only one he knows.  
Like the morning sun you come  
and like the wind you go.*

First time I've stood naked on a mountainside  
chanting with ten-thousand people

Long descent from Strawberry Lake  
handwritten sign tacked to a tree  
Incredible String Band lyric:  
*May the long time sun shine on you  
All love surround you  
And the pure light within you  
Guide your way home*

## Parks for the People

Free concert in a Berkeley Park  
not far from People's Park with its chain-link fence  
and guarded gates  
Country Joe MacDonald and Banana & the Gang  
(all the Youngbloods but Jesse)  
—something's wrong—  
prosperous hippies from the Berkeley Hills  
won't share their dope or picnic baskets  
(presage of Silicon Valley)  
something's died  
(as I'd rediscover at Watkins Glen a year later).

Fight breaks out at edge of the crowd  
Quaaludatics start throwing bottles  
*What ever happened to peace & love?* asks Joe.

That night I spend in People's Park, recently liberated  
when locals tore down the barbed wire fence. Given  
free psychedelic on Telegraph, as part of "marketing  
survey" for new drug. Not bad, if mild, but my  
paranoia increases when someone tries to steal my  
boots. Around the campfire, motley crowd of junkies  
and hustlers and a few travelers like myself. The  
jackals turn on one bearded guy, a disdainful  
intellectual clochard who, in my hallucinatory state,  
I think is Ezra Pound. When his retorts grow  
irksome, they pelt him with cinders and drive him off.

NB: Returned there eight years later to see the Park a  
place for gardens and community—took part in an  
impromptu citizen's meeting—Let a thousand parks  
bloom!

## All-Nighter

Sit-in at the UConn library  
in solidarity with 100+ Black Student Union members  
arrested a couple days before  
aftermath of Attica  
protesting racist IQ theories  
and paucity of multicultural courses  
I'm awake most of the night  
in Beaux Arts reading room  
poring over Camus

In the morning  
State Troopers arrive  
to drag us out  
I refuse to walk out voluntarily  
one trooper says, *Let's turn him  
ass-side up, that'll show him!*  
though handcuffed, I manage to grab doorframe  
hoist myself into position  
give the clenched fist salute  
for the cameras

My mom's not happy  
girlfriend disowns me  
dormmate music composition major  
specializing in Schoenberg and Berg  
calls me a Nigger Lover

I still have that denim jacket  
shoulder torn by the Troopers

## Hitchhiking

All-night truck ride to Brownsville with Chicano  
driver who tells me he's a DEA informer and  
wants me to keep talking so he can keep  
driving;  
Police greet us at the Reno city line, make us walk  
desert miles around cause we don't have that  
do-re-mi;  
Across Kansas in the back of a farmer's wagon  
pulling off tarp to feast on the cold dawn;  
Across the Mojave in the back of a pick-up, just to feel  
the heat;  
Climbing Utah butte to watch glorious sunset;  
Riding across Eastern Washington with camping gear  
designer, stopping to fill jar with warm  
Mount St. Helens ash;  
Kansas to California with housepainter with 1100  
C&W tapes;  
Two days in Port Clinton, Ohio, hanging with local  
kids who found me wandering turnpike, two  
days listening to metal bands smoking jays  
and staring at the frozen lake;  
*It's a girl, my Lord, in a flatbed Ford*, as the song goes,  
and it happens, after all-night hitching in the  
rain on Ohio highway, she takes me back to  
her parents' house in Whitesburg, Kentucky,  
for several days and traditional Memorial Day  
picnic with the old folks and visit to an  
abandoned coal mine, and it's all a gas until  
her father says I've overstayed my welcome;  
Swinging couple pick me up at Tennessee truckstop,  
but I prefer to sleep by the side of the road,  
gotta get back to my sweet Kentucky gal;

Leaving Harlan County, almost dusk and already I'm  
getting the finger and cars swerving at me;  
suddenly red VW pulls up with two  
longhaired guys, who say, "What you doing  
hitchin' here? Don't you know this is Heathen  
Country?" Turns out they're filmmakers with  
Appalshop who give me dinner and a bed;  
The KKK'er in East Texas tells me "us white folks  
have to stick together, longhair!" and keeps  
referencing the sawed-off shotgun at his side;  
Facing jail threat in Wyoming I beg a ride from  
parked car whose occupants, trucker and his  
wife, take me all the way to Ohio, feed me and  
pay for my motel rooms along the way;  
Mennonite farmer in North Dakota takes me home to  
lunch with his family—amazing grace and  
true simplicity;  
Still have four volumes of Joseph Campbell's *Masks of  
God* driver gave me in Tennessee, read them  
straight through when I got home;  
Discovering that hitchhiking the West of Ireland is  
more hiking than hitching;  
Sleeping beneath Yeats' castle, Thoor Ballylee, under  
a full moon—Get yelled at in the morning by  
the museum staff;  
The old woman near Cliffs of Moher who invites me  
into her thatched cottage for tea;  
Tinker children throwing rocks when I walk past  
their caravan camp outside Stillorgan;  
Waking up in Donegal field with brother Paul—  
realize there's a bull charging our tent.

## City of Gold (The Best Ride Ever)

Leaving Las Vegas  
(lost 32 cents to the slots)  
forced to sleep in the desert  
watching for scorpions and snakes

It gets hot early, then by noon hotter still  
six or seven others visible up the line  
their thumbs jutting out

About to give up hope  
when giant Ford Motorhome appears  
stops repeatedly  
picks us all up  
gives each one a cold Coors, says  
*We're heading for the brewery  
in Golden, Colorado  
so sit back and enjoy the ride!*



## The Magic Wand

Bare bulb hallway  
no key no friend's sister no way in  
dragged out from the road  
Lansing to Chicago  
to see the Dead and Traffic at Soldier's Field  
driving 'round and 'round the near Northside  
looking for a parking space  
bare bulb bare hall  
five bedraggled freaks sitting or leaning against  
bare wall

Suddenly Chad takes out his magic wand  
blows bubbles up and down that long corridor  
transfigured to  
*crazy quilt stargown through a dream night wind*

## **Blue Moon, Late August 1987 (On the Threatened Demise of a Seattle Institution)**

Louis Sullivan's gone  
    like Tim Leary  
    like Pigpen  
    down in the Blue Moon Cafe  
    where 30's Italian anarchists held forth  
        later Roethke, Kerouac  
        Ginsberg poem on the wall  
        the photos the music  
        Tom Robbins' contest  
    (where I revive during summer spent  
        studying German Romanticism)

There's an Opium Den in the Cellar  
                                    of the Kindergarten  
There's a Blue monstrous Flower  
                            in the Center  
                                    of the Circumference  
                            (which is Nowhere  
And the Apricots shaking  
                            whose Pit is everywhere  
                            Cure and Poison: Gift

Blue Angel of the Hot Rum Toddy  
Grizzly Beer Angel Kong  
One Moonstone Eye bursting with a  
Blue Corona  
    smokyhairsnakydancetattooedbutterfliessweat

Meanwhile, all the Way to Jena,  
Sunny under Lake Washington and above Rainier  
the Wind the Scent Blue Flower Blue Cheer

## House of the Rising

Nobody awake  
but me and Frankenstein  
(Corps of Engineers' golem)  
6:20 AM  
Easter Sunday  
New Orleans  
the 33rd floor  
panorama of stillness:  
riverboats idle  
taxis idle  
Bourbon St. still  
but oh,  
that hydrogen balloon  
rising  
then bursting BloodyMaryRed  
from that monstrous artery  
man's creation obliterated  
for a moment  
the chemical effluvia  
turned to golden  
wine, spodeodee  
singing Hosannah!

Then shower rush to shuttle off to airport  
writing this poem they'll maybe find by my corpse  
or I'll let it slip and spend years chasing these words  
searching mudflows great lakes iceflows  
arctic regions vast funereal pyre poor boy  
and God I know I'm one  
spo deo day!

## Bank Holiday in Wicklow

October downpour  
drenches me on trail  
from mountain youth hostel  
to Glendalough's  
sacred ground

Sodden and besotted  
crawling in through  
narrow opening  
of  
tent  
soon bare as a babe  
raw as a saint in his cell  
fearful as a drunkard  
stumbling into the crevice of a cromlech

Finding no faery wedding  
I emerge, nonetheless, to a soft rain  
hiding the equinoctial moon—  
no burden  
to a score of North Dublin revellers  
inviting me to partake in their rites  
dancing the druidic circle  
under Kevin's tower  
with shouts for St. Guinness laughter  
that melts away the grim visage  
of my month-long cloistering  
and we sing  
a pagan chant of the footballers  
(that echoes still):  
*We are Dubs, we are Dubs*  
*We are we are we are Dubs*

## **The Rocky Road to JFK**

Irish farmer beside me on flight out of Shannon  
keeps nodding off  
dreaming, he says,  
of the bogs of his native Mayo

Can't stand to fly  
so every time he stirs  
he takes another nip  
from the duty-free at his feet  
then plants his feet more firmly in the muck

*Am I right, John?*  
he says  
every few moments  
from within his trance  
and I nod in agreement

In more lucid moments  
he tells me his farm overlooks the Atlantic  
his siblings are scientists  
and he's off to see his girlfriend—  
an MD in Queens  
*Am I right, John?*

The stereotypical bog man he's not  
he's just a citizen of the global village  
like the rest of us  
except maybe when he's in  
the Mayo of sodden dreams

### Three from Gleneagles (2005 G8 Protests, Scotland)

#### *People's Carnival*

Clown army  
coming through the rye  
beyond the barbed wire  
Chinook helicopters and a phalanx of riot police  
can't stop  
the marching band on the hillside  
nor the conga line of clowns  
as stilt puppets do a *danse macabre*  
silhouetted against the horizon

#### *Coincidence*

Met a family on the march to Gleneagles today  
only last evening I'd sat with them and chatted  
during "Literary Pub Tour" in Edinburgh  
father, mother, 22-yr old daughter  
from English Midlands  
told me how they'd been going to anti-nuclear and  
antiwar and anti-capitalist demos together  
since the girl was in diapers (red, presumably)—  
firm testimony that  
the family that demonstrates together. . . .  
so very British, perfect in their ordinariness  
right out of a BBC comedy skit  
yet ever so thoughtful and gentle  
when the march stalls, due to trouble at the gates  
the family decide to step to a side lane  
take their miniature camp stove  
from out the rucksack  
and make tea—  
Thus is peace restored!

*After Gleneagles*

Nothing like exhilaration  
of hiking the road  
on yr last legs—  
But those purple hills!

## **V. On the Bardic Road**



## Here's for All

Here's for all those poets who never publish. Rolls of rotting paper in drawers and closets and under sinks. Bathtubs full of manuscripts. Notebooks available only to St. Peter. Here's for those who do, but never leave their mountain hovels—just send their poems out to friends' little magazines, regular as epistles from the Unabomber. Here's for all those poets who never attend cocktail parties 'cause they can't remember names very well and the arts patronesses in their low-cut gowns make them nervous. Here's for the Vietnam Vet poet skulking in the back of the hall. Here's for the tenured Beat poet playing jazz real loud in his office, or the one who shouts *Go Away!* when students knock or the one who sends poison-pen emails to administrators at midnight or the brilliant one barred from teaching by the *dead hand of Moriarty* or the one tapping away into the night on his manual typewriter, hoping to get it all down, intent made clear, before lymphoma silences him. And here's for the young poet who freaks out on acid and is soothed by a famous shamanic poetess, and years later gets a transsexual operation to become Tiresius. And here's for the gifted millionaire who gives it all away to starving musicians to free his angel, and the one who blows a fortune on heroin and the one who plays William Tell unsuccessfully and the one who climbs the devil tree and can't get down. And here's for the poet who gives up poetry to follow the false gods of Deconstruction. And here's for the poet who wanders the many rooms of his father's mansion, but can't find an exit. And here's for the poet who gets tossed out of the art gallery reception

for having sex in the john. And here's for the poet who really thinks liberation means he can go anywhere without clothes, radiant in the checkout aisle. And here's for the poet who hangs herself on Halloween when sleep won't come any other way. And here's for the poets who watch the aurora borealis 'cause someone had a craving for a cigarette and so left the party and so noticed *There's a whole other universe up there!* and got them all to drive drunkenly out to the cornfields to watch. And here's for the poet who tore up my bathroom in a rage and my wife had to cuff him and throw him out into the night, where there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth. And here's for the poet who got his life back at 50, with his mother dead his father dead and his relatives all dead dead, but they left him with a handsome monthly stipend. And here's for the poets who blow their brains out, or worse, let their gray matter slowly seep into ten thousand composition papers, along with the red of their pens. And here's for all the poets who wait their turn interminably until the featured poet finishes expounding and they might get a few moments at the mic, they might, if the line's not too long and if everybody obeys the time rule and if they can be heard over the cappuccino machine and the sound of the cash register. And here's for the poets who wish they were musicians so they could get laid. And here's for the poets who wish they were artists so they could get paid. And here's for the poets who wish they weren't academics. And here's for the poets who wish they'd studied Greek so they could read Sappho in the original. And here's for the poets who wish they were priests so they could cast out demons. And here's for the poets who wish

their chants could really STOP THE WAR instantly.  
And here's for all the poets. And here comes  
everybody.

## **Who's Afraid of Norm Davis? (With appreciation to Rochester's Godfather of Poetry)**

I'd love to start up a little coffeehouse open mic  
Invite all my friends to come and drink cappuccino  
Allow any weirdo to get up on stage and rant  
Utter obscenities Lenny Bruce never heard of  
Smoke cigarettes and what-have-you  
Out in the parking lot with the cool people  
Maybe date a pretty barista or two (It could happen!)

But I'm so afraid of Norm Davis  
I'm so so so afraid of Norm Davis  
He's got word balloons in the air  
He's got jazz bands in submarines under the ocean  
He's got bards on the borders of Europe  
And spies, spies everywhere

And I'd love to start my own little magazine  
Publish the stuff no one will touch  
Have very flexible deadlines and  
Underground distribution  
Maybe call it something like *Hazardous Material—  
Materials? The Journal of Hazardous Materials?  
Hazardous Materials Quarterly?*

But I'm so afraid of Norm Davis  
I'm so so so afraid of Norm Davis  
He's got word balloons in the air  
He's got Mingus and Miles and Coltrane and Bird and  
Dolphie and Jackie Mac all jammin' like mad  
In a submarine under the sea  
He's got ancient bards on the borders of Europe  
And spies, spies, spies everywhere

## **Holy Thursday**

Animated poet talk 'til 1  
at Steve Huff's house in Rochester  
urban oasis  
where George Drew is staying  
after W&B reading

Sacred bread and wine and cheese  
our faces scrubbed bright as Blake's children  
we launch filament after filament  
into the ether

The gyres the gyres  
electrons whirring and spinning  
platter after platter of Sun recordings  
out of Mississippi mud

## Reading Yeats by Firelight

i.

brooding

abiding

pinning

imbibing

praying

puking

bawling

all the necessities

banished

by electric light

ii.

Yahweh brooded

o'er the waters

the old gal got her chicks in a row

thus the stars were hatched

iii.

*Climb to our proper dark*

iv.

incubation

of the poem

as with any disease

takes patience

something poets

and patients

aren't known for

v.  
brooding  
blank  
brooding

vi.  
fire helps

vii.  
drink down fire  
breathe in fire  
breathe breathe breathe  
remember to breathe  
breathe to remember

viii.  
music helps  
or a tune in yr head  
best the tune that wakes you out of a sound sleep  
and sets you dancing after  
*the red rose-bordered hem*

## On Reading Alice Notley's *Homer's Art Fascicle*

Reading Alice Notley's *Homer's Art (Curriculum of the Soul # 9)*, gift of Alan Casline, on examination table in Doc Booth's office—now an hour later in the hot sun of parking lot to Lori's Natural Foods, using reverse side of North Shore Grill menu 'cause I can't find notebook. Arms look like napalm burns from infected poison ivy (*Most impressive case this year*, quips Doctor Laura Jo). *Both of Homer's public stories—as everybody knows—are generated by a war & are male centered—stories for men about a male world.* Female doctors and Supreme Court Justices and Secretaries of State—so much has changed since Alice wrote of Vietnam and Troy raped by the stupidity and lies of war promoters and poets, but now women, too, calculate the cost-benefit of so many body bags, as Madeleine Albright factored the children dead from Iraq sanctions and Condi Rice authorized the waterboarding and Hillary Clinton pushes the new Afghan strategy. But women, too, die for freedom, as Neda in Tehran the other day, and so many others—females long silenced like Cassandra, enslaved behind not-so-veiled threats of rape and disownment, caned in Sudan for wearing pants in public, gunned down in Kandahar for teaching school, Natalya Estemirova slain in Chechnya—all now choosing to enter the epic with their words, their deeds heroic. And women like Alice wield the pen, no longer in the shadow of Maximal males. Although Emily was a war poet, as Randy Prus reminds me, women warrior bards of today are freed from the home to become the new Homers—processing words rather than foods—absorbing the power of the Word



in order to effect change, affect history—the power that kills—the power that once invented a Helen to fight for and now invents a Neda—the power that paves the planet so that there can be faux-natural food stores with dancing fruits on TV commercials and lakeside restaurants with fabulous views and gluttonous portions—the power that seduces with novel roles—learning to fuck like a man—be notorious like Calamity Jane or Mata Hari—look the Sun right in the eye and spit—Poi-son Eye-Eye-a-vie— Out-Bukowski Bukowski (like Susan Deer Cloud does)—Out-Bakunin Bakunin. *Well-behaved women seldom make history*, says bumper sticker in suburban Pittsford. But what of the female suicide bombers? Aren't they too entering the realm of heroic history, even behind a burkha loaded with gelignite? Fanon says the Algerian women dropped the veil to shoot Kalashnikovs. No going back to the *womb-like brothel* Alice describes. Entering history—the realm of rights—the realm of contest—the heartless realm—the nightmare from which we don't awake, except in death and lyric poetry. Go ask Alice about history's looking glass, feeding the heroic dead with pools of crimson ink. "*History's for those*" "*Who ask not*" "*to be forgiven*," wrote Alice, each phrase in quotation marks. Then she voices the anonymous victims: "*We ask to be forgiven*" "& loved" "*No we ask*" "*to be absolved*" "*And to be elemental*" "*ask leaves and wind*" say the dead of Saigon and Tikrit and Troy.

**Reading Edgar Billowitz's *American Indians*  
Fascicle (CoS# 14, Institute of Further Studies)**

*The snake flowed upstream, peacefully and silently,  
and peace filled the air; the abiding trees; peace filled  
the river and the effortlessly gliding snake. We  
watched, unmoving, as the reptile approached, and  
peace flowed through us, like the snake, effortless and  
unhurried: a water snake, steady in the wavering  
current; weaving unerringly towards us: as veins twist  
unerringly through the body's tissues towards their  
destination, the heart;... (Billowitz 23)*

That diamond-back rattlesnake who spoke to me  
when I was about to pitch my tent on it  
Later that same evening (1975) on North Padre  
Island when a stranger gave me peyote  
That same night on Padre Island when the stars  
exploded and I wandered lost in dunes lost in  
runes guided in friendship by a stranger  
and a rattlesnake  
That fuzzy yellow caterpillar scurrying past me on  
the picnic table right now  
That same yellow caterpillar climbing over my laptop  
That afternoon long ago when strangers Bonnie and  
Sebastian gave me organic mescaline for free  
'cause it was my first time, and the sun was a  
roman candle behind Washington's obelisk  
This afternoon as Michael Czarnecki has heart  
surgery, and there'll be no poetry on Wheeler  
Hill this Sunday and I won't get to see Carolyn  
and Chapin and Grayson, and my other  
friends, including Susan,

Who told me recently I should *pop some peyote*  
*buttons* and *stop going so Western male*  
 when I quoted Olson and Aristotle  
 This moment when I can't stop laughing at my new  
 friend the intrepid caterpillar climbing to the  
 top of the laptop Matterhorn  
 The next moment when I think of so many Americans  
 dying because of poor health care and  
 political posturing and stop laughing  
 This next moment when I'm distracted by the rites of  
 the lawnmower and decide to go inside  
 This next moment when I think that I really should be  
 discussing Billowitz's fascicle  
 This next moment (or a few moments later) when I  
 open the book to the painted face and body of  
 the masked Cora dancer in Semana Santa  
 peyote ritual, 1970  
 The fierce teeth of his animal headdress  
 The altar-boy solemnity of the Huichol peyotero,  
 Jalisco, Mexico, 1971  
 The photo negative of Lacondone woman emitting  
 shamanic power that closes the book  
 The book opens at random to *Jaguars did not stalk*  
*us, even during their appointed rounds.*  
 The book opens by Vergilian lot at a blank page  
 Let's try that again  
 The book opens at the same page as before: *So we*  
*traveled, ever more slowly. The jungle grew*  
*thicker and darker, the sky never showed*  
*through at all, the stars were not seen.*  
 The poem becomes more impenetrable, the moment  
 more precarious, the aleatory more  
 fraudulent, the caterpillar more sinister than  
 Alice's, more like Blake's:

*I have said to the Worm:  
Thou art my mother & my sister*  
Edgar dreams of a high dead desert rocky valley, with  
a dead lake in the center  
Crocodiles fill the lake: *The crocodiles were hungry,  
omnivorous, but not threatening*  
And a few lines down, *The feeling was that I would  
inevitably be next to sustain their untiring,  
vigilant hunger.*  
Last Sunday morning my old cat Zoe fell off the deck  
railing, landed in the garden fifteen feet  
down, without a scratch but with a look of  
surprise, walking up the hill with that  
*unhurried amplitude* my friend Larry says  
characterizes the aging.

## **Under the Mushroom on the Fourth of July**

*And somebody spoke and I went into a dream*  
Lennon/McCartney, "A Day in the Life"

The god's flesh is rubbery to chew  
My body soon rubbery  
The universe rubbery  
Interface between self and world rubbery, indistinct  
Trees sharpen their focus  
Lake shimmery  
Sun omnipresent

Somebody reminisces about acid trip decades ago  
Suddenly it all comes back  
With roar of ten thousand locomotives  
Tornadoing through me  
The colors the sounds the shape shiftings  
Rockets Roman candles snakes M-80s  
Cold fear in the gut  
Body melting in the sun

I take a wrong turn heading to the swimming pool  
Miss a step  
Awaken with head on the wooden deck  
A bloody nose  
Mangled glasses  
A good-sized bump on the ol' noggin  
Enlightenment of sorts

## **Driving the Rainbow Bridge While Listening to Jack Clarke & Charlie Keil**

Driving West Virginia Turnpike, up from Black  
Mountain College/Lake Eden tour (courtesy, Jeff  
Davis), listening to CD of JC reading, accompanied by  
CK, playing beaten string bass, hi hat cymbals, barrel  
drum, finger piano, oriental gongs, rattles, and piri—  
recorded live in Buffalo, Nietzsche's 5/20/1984 &  
TheatreLoft, 3/13/1985  
(Vox Audio, Bruce Holsapple, 2009)

*Through Through Through*  
East River Tunnel, Into the Stone  
Along winding mountain roads  
Gassaway Gassaway Gassaway all!  
Birch River, *The Return of Hecate*  
Better than meeting sad silica ghosts of Gauley Bridge  
Burnsville's burning bridge Bifröst  
Mother Jones standing guard  
Above Painted Creek Cabin Creek Lost Creek,  
Home of John Henry and the Dogon Nommos  
Bridgeport, where I wave to Casey Jones  
*Completing the Circuit of Circe*

Tectonic notes shift  
Syntactic plates collide  
Wary that a word tsunami might sweep you over  
The unfigural edge, *The End of This Side*, indeed!

But you go with it  
And around it  
And through it  
All the way to Pleasant Valley and Fairmont

Resting in Pitts' icy burg  
Seeking magic kernels  
Laetrile for the soul-cancer  
Eating Gaia

God of the Gaps  
Barsakh  
Monk's rests  
Cage's silences  
Jack playing piano at post-Tralf party while  
Diz nods approvingly  
Pollock's atomic interstices  
Wright's space within to be lived in  
Charlie's primopraxial path bands  
Interval between acceleration and deceleration  
Mettle to the pedal  
Pause that reformats the world  
*The Rekindling of the Planet*  
*Beginning the Other Side*

## The Ace of Swords (After Hearing Ed Sanders)

Calliope Calling  
inviting us out  
to see the Archer  
watch her pierce  
*the silver apples of the moon,*  
*the golden apples of the sun*

The feathered shaft's arcing path  
traces shimmeringfoliagesproutsleavesroseswreaths  
and twenty-two white butterflies embroider the  
diamond tip

This is not the hunt nor the huntress  
not Shiva destroying the Three Towns  
not Cupid inflicting his sweet anguish  
nor Zen archer in her stillness

Perhaps it's only the music of May come early  
or synaesthesia attending the poet's lyre  
perchance the death of tyranny  
long long read  
in the cups of the Rebel Cafe



**Janine's Smile**  
**(For Janine Pommy Vega , 1942-2010)**

Three towns burning  
Shiva's bow drawn  
Three towns being born  
Five skulls hanging from Kali's belt  
Five suns glowing on Kali's breast  
Seven warrior queens birthed from seven peyote  
dreams  
Nine princes freed from nine prison blocks  
Ten children freed from ten coffins of black  
Twelve panthers birthed from twelve volcano hearts

Galaxies within galaxies  
*Meteor showers in Gemini play all night long*  
All the lullabies of all the mothers of Greece, Bosnia,  
Croatia, Spain, Mexico, Peru, France, England,  
Scandinavia, Ireland, Israel, Nepal, India, and Italy  
All the witchcraft  
All the prayer  
All the lovemaking  
All the songmaking  
All the healing

*Tracking the Serpent to*  
Peaks of the Andes  
Amazon jungles  
Stonehenge  
Pilgrim shrines on Himalayan slopes  
Isla del Sol in Lake Titicaca  
Greenwich Village cafés  
Migrant camps  
Maximum-security prisons

Woodstock streets  
A cottage in Willow  
Autumnal ridge of Wheeler Hill—the last place I saw  
you, among poets

All these in Janine's song  
All these in Janine's gourd-rattle dance  
All these in Janine's *corazón*  
All these in Janine's smile

## Bee Sting

Heading home from Olson Centenary, Worcester  
get off the Thruway at Palmyra  
near Joseph Smith's rock  
enter hamlet of Hopewell  
see historical plaque near old cemetery: BEE STING  
curiosity gets ahold of me  
spawned by three days with Olson *historeins*  
(*the handsome sailor. . . . died of a bee*)  
so I do a uie in front of billboard advertising  
*AUTOGENESIS: Customize your Ride*  
(Olson would approve of this orthogenetic sentiment  
as would Janis Joplin, though, as Sanders recounts,  
her date with Charles went nowhere)  
turning round in dead end lane of shotgun shacks  
without getting shot, face to face now with

BEE STING DEATH

SECOND KNOWN IN NORTH AMERICA

ON MAY 12, 1814 TIMOTHY RYAN

DIED WITHIN ONE HOUR FROM

ANAPHYLAXIS TO BEE STING.

U.S. 2000 EST. 50 DEATHS/YR.

M. BADGER: EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT

Math.washington.edu website identifies location:

Dillon Family Cemetery. Includes gravestone epitaph:

*In memory of*

*Timothy Ryan who*

*died May 12th 1814 in*

*the 66th year of his age*

*A thousand ways cut short our days*

*None are exempt from death*

*A honey bee by stinging me*

*Did stop my mortal breath*

## Joe the Poet

*Children of a future age,  
Reading this bemused page,  
Know that in a past election,  
Joe the Plumber was thought a sage*

It's a week since the Wall came tumbling down  
a week since Chicago became the First City  
a week since Harlem became Camelot  
a week since Kenya became our 51st state  
a week since Hawaii became the Real America  
a week since We're not in Kansas anymore

But we're still waiting for Joe the Poet  
waiting for his secret sign and saving word  
possessing the origin of all poems and the good of the  
earth and sun disguised as the cheerful voice of the  
public road still waiting for the man with a single  
rose and a mojo hand  
*Beware! Beware! his flashing eyes, his floating hair!*

He's just a working bard who roams from town to  
town silver hair, ragged shirt and baggy pants, a  
ragged clown a stargazing Tom Thumb who carries  
his books in a gunny sack grown old with wandering  
through hollow lands and hilly lands along the  
seashore washed by the suds and foam singing  
*Soft is the grass, my bed is free*

Though evening's empire has returned into sand  
vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey  
the doors themselves unscrewed from their jambs

we're still waiting for Joe the Poet  
to give us a broadside to revive us again  
singing softly,  
*Let grief be a falling leaf at the dawning of the day*

Might be Josephine the Poet we're waiting for  
might be Crazy Jane  
might be someone whose name we don't yet know  
man in black or frowning babe  
but we're still awaiting, and a singing  
still awaiting, and a singing  
*It's been a long, a long time coming*

## To the Red Fox

To the red fox who crossed my path on the Avon-Geneseo road the other night while I drove back from Wheeler Hill six-hour late-harvest lunch with great poet friends Michael and Paulette and Steve and Susan at Michael and Carolyn's house up on the ridge (turn right at the windmill and watch out for Amish buggies) with homemade vegetable soup courtesy of Carolyn and wholegrain baguettes that weren't homemade 'cause I brought them and dark beers that God made in the long ago forest time and elderberry wine that Susan's brother made and potent it was and noisy hens a'laying and a'clucking and wouldn't you have loved to meet them, the poets that is, though the hens were quite sociable too and Michael says the foxes leave his chickens alone, though there was that weasel one time with dark intent and cruel efficiency and it's November 1 the Day of All Souls and Samhain and the spirits of all who've died are with us and the faery folk are abroad and we're worried about the election of a lifetime a few days off can it really free us of the fear the fear the years passing slow with Cheney's Halloween mask holding the buzzsaw to the Constitution and putting the Bill of Rights through the woodchipper and we're all his chickens and he has no wisdom such as you possess, Red Prince, but really even a spaniel would have more sense than the ones who raid the nation's storehouse and the planet's treasury while covering themselves in glory and gore, all of us *covered in the gurry of it*, as Olson would say, glory and gore and gurry and the squeal of Fox News oinks an insult to all noble foxes everywhere and though you do be

tricky, Trickster, you'd never fall for the garbage they  
spout but seek the company of poets, who do lie, as  
Plato claimed, but only in the service of Beauty and  
beautiful was your sheen as you loped across my  
driveway one recent morning how was I to know  
you'd reappear at night as I led poets back from  
Wheeler Hill?

## **To You, Who Are on the Road (For G.C.)**

Gray son  
old soul in new bod

Speaking through guitar  
no dimming yr sun's  
"buttery chords" (Curt sz)  
backing SF poets at Senecas' "Chosen Spot"  
yr strings salute  
us all  
at poets' fest, Geneseo, NY  
yr own songs at coffeehouses  
& in duets with yr dad

Perennial youth/age divide  
so hard to bridge  
not easy to teach your parents well  
no easy passage  
on this pilgrim road  
the old songs say  
no magic key or formula or elixir  
(leastways, none I've found)  
only the road, the songs,  
lovers & friends along the way

Just say Yes  
(skip the hard drugs)  
YESYESYESYESYESYESYES  
eyes /.... to be looked out of  
hands to use well  
mouths to sing and shout!  
feets to keep movin' on down the road



## **Coda: Not the Arizona Biltmore**

*Redemption*

it said  
on the back  
of a Corona  
on a table  
at Greasy Tony's  
Tempe, Arizona

On the jukebox Bob Seger's  
still leaving Mackinaw City:  
*Next time / Next time / We'll get it right*



John Roche lives in the Genesee River/Western Finger Lakes region of NY State. His full-length poetry collections *On Conesus* (2005) and *Topicalities* (2008) are available from Foothills Publishing (Kanona, NY) at [www.foothillspublishing.com/2008/id55.htm](http://www.foothillspublishing.com/2008/id55.htm)