



# **Limping Symmetry**

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***Argotist Ebooks***

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## **Limping Symmetry**

## ***A Sudden Spike of Sunlight***

walking on a trail  
    through a state park forest  
on a cold April day  
    I hear some ticking  
and clicking  
    from the mostly bare branches  
that have just a brush  
    of light green  
I see small white  
    ice pellets  
    falling about me  
their sound on the trees is rich  
    and textured  
    a resonant  
clicking and ticking  
    that seems everywhere  
    and nowhere  
it seems beautiful to me  
    though I don't pretend  
to know what "beauty" is  
    I do know  
    no percussionist  
could make the fullness  
    of this sound  
    so I wonder where beauty is  
does it imply some intention  
there is clearly no intention  
    here in the woods  
    with just me and the trees  
    and the trail  
amid resonant clicking  
    all around  
    yet there *is* a beauty  
I wonder  
    conversely  
    if most beauty is unintentional  
    perhaps the great percussionists  
    are at their best  
    when they forget all desire  
and lose themselves fully  
    into the music  
which is greater than their personal wants  
    and hopes and desires  
stretching back into traditions

conventions teachings going back  
all the way  
to when two sticks were first  
beat together rhythmically  
and stretching forward also  
into what percussionists  
will do in the future  
perhaps with electronics  
in this way humans create beauty  
by losing intention  
by giving over to the tendencies  
of a cultural moment  
as a moment is all history and  
all history embraces the moment  
even culture is a force of nature  
which is itself like a breeze  
moving through mostly bare  
spring branches  
I am one of those trees  
perhaps we all are  
the sounds of the clicking and ticking  
moving through me as the breeze  
through branches  
as our culture is most ours  
when we forget it completely  
and lose all we have  
for the sake of the breeze  
that is culture  
and the space between the branches  
that allows the breeze to move  
to bend  
I think for a moment that we are most human  
when most like these trees and ice pellets  
the trees bending in the breeze  
clicking and ticking  
and these ice pellets  
falling from the sky and making music  
on the branches  
and we are least human in our awkward moments  
when we try to force the situation  
to make something happen  
to buck our intention into the heart of a moment  
and I keep walking  
feet rhythmically hitting the dirt and gravel  
crunching and popping  
amid the ticking and clicking

and my breath too  
a little quickened  
by the thrill  
of sudden insight  
partial as the clouds  
a sudden spike of sunlight

things may seem to want to end here  
but things always keep going on  
I consider how some may see my invoking percussion  
to understand  
the sound of the ice pellets  
hitting branches as evidence  
that humans cannot perceive outside culture  
that we project cultural understanding  
onto all of nature  
but it doesn't  
right now  
feel that way  
the whole culture of percussion  
going all the way back  
and all the way forward  
seems like one mere ice crystal  
just one  
hitting a single branch  
amid this panoply  
of abundant sound

## *Bluesy*

at the edge of awakening  
a strange fluttering  
an odd smell  
I opened my eyes  
morning light in my room  
three crows  
stood on the covers  
of my bed  
how did they get in here

“we are not crows but the figments of crows,” said the largest of the crows, all of whom had a strange blue tint to their black feathers, “no human mind could stand an encounter with a real live crow whose minds are too much for puny human minds as are the minds of cougars grasshoppers and grizzly bears they all hate humans thoroughly with an incendiary kind of hate that is so far from what humans experience that no human empathy or sympathy could come close to understanding”

I shook my head  
squinted my eyes  
this couldn't  
be real  
but it was  
the crow who had  
spoken bobbed  
its black bill  
a few times

do real live crows  
have a tint of blue  
in their black  
feathers

where does figment  
end and reality  
begin where  
does reality and  
figment blend  
into place

“you are to follow us you have no choice” with those words the figmented crows flew straight through the wall of my apartment building and I found myself following them through the wall too I was flying I looked toward my arm and saw it was a wing I had become crow or at least figmented crow and I looked down and saw the roofs of the buildings downtown weird little rooms where staircases ended that led to roof the hoods of aluminum vents the black tar sealants I saw the trees billowing their leaves well above the roofs of the houses and I flapped my wings and felt strong and wild and free though I wondered what it meant to be visited by three crows



even the air  
has a figmented  
quality when we  
think about it  
otherwise we  
just breathe  
in and out  
every few seconds

what is the air  
we call "real"  
the air we think about  
or the air we breathe

I can fly  
by pressing  
my wings  
against  
the air

following the crows we landed on the roof of a one-story business building at the edge of town a trail ran beside it the walkers did not pay attention to the strident cawing we were all doing for no apparent reason other than to celebrate the cawing itself the leader of the blue-tinted crows turned to me "you are underneath language and above language you are beside language on one side and beside it on the other you never hit language dead on only we figments can do that your mind is not your mind it is the acorns and grass it is the buildings and asphalt roads it is the clouds slowly effaced by the wind it is the figments a pink elephant is more real than you but you will do"

the birds flew off  
I flapped my wings  
to follow but found  
I could no longer fly  
I looked at my wings  
and saw them arms  
human arms  
I was back to myself  
again

how could there be  
degrees of reality  
how could a pink elephant  
be real  
how does a figment  
become reality  
or reality a figment  
where is the ground

once during desperate  
financial and housing  
circumstances  
I imagined myself  
crashing down through  
floor after floor  
right through the basement  
and then into the earth  
I never reached bottom

I felt compelled to leap off the roof I looked at the trail below and was scared but couldn't help myself I leapt as far away from the building as I could and floated slowly to the ground my knees bent but did not give way on landing I felt fine I walked down the trail I had so often taken toward the west out of town and I walked and walked late into the afternoon when suddenly the trail stopped going past the backyards and parks I had seen on previous walks to wind through tall corn stalks on either side it was a trail through a corn field

fertilizer and water  
had to be shipped in  
to make the soil  
produce such luscious  
corn  
the soil doesn't  
naturally  
do such things

the corn was taller  
than my head  
much taller

I felt hungry  
and thirsty  
strange to see  
this food right  
beside me I didn't  
know how  
to eat

a threatening roar from the air I looked up as the corn gyrated wildly a 747 passenger plane flew about 100 feet above my head I covered my ears turbulent air a strange scream then it disappeared into the sky but another I could hear another roar and another 747 came low as with the first again the corn gyrated again I covered my ears the turbulence was too much "my home is not in the turbulence" I thought but I lived lived right now in the turbulence

you are  
where you are  
right now  
though the figments

take you  
away

a pink elephant  
exists as figment  
a 747 was once figment  
things have moved  
too fast these  
centuries

corn is "corn"  
but is not "corn"  
too  
because it has  
been transformed  
by human intention  
what figments  
exist beyond  
our will

I looked in the air for other planes but found none when I got a strange feeling about what I stood on I looked down to find the trail between the corn gone I was standing on air about 50 feet above a river rapids running between sheer cliffs on top of which was the corn I had been walking through I found myself descending toward the river floating down at the speed of a feather through the air moving toward the rapids running through the sheer cliffs

the figments  
beyond the will  
are the ones  
we need  
to concern ourselves  
with

what mind figments  
the figments  
if it is not  
human

do humans kid themselves  
about being the center  
of mind here on earth  
here in the vastness  
of the universe  
centers are provisional  
and temporary  
like the assertion of ground  
I float down down  
I float down

to rapids

my feet hit the cold swift water first then my whole body lowered into it I found myself body surfing through the rapids and breathing underwater I bounced off the occasional rock and wondered if I had become fish but things moved too quickly for me to notice I saw only water and rock and bubbles and churning I gave myself over to the swift motion to going downstream to floating in a water me and not me

what is  
the meaning  
of three crows  
visiting

considerations stoop  
to the level  
of dross gunk  
and there is no  
bottom no provisional  
place to stop

humans have a habit  
of not attending  
to the overwhelmingly  
urgent

I suddenly found myself falling straight down in the water and realized I was in a waterfall the water bounced into itself turbulent and bouncing I swam to the right for whatever reason and the water calmed I found my knees hit bottom I stood and realized I was human I walked to a pebble beach at the end of the pond-like area at the beach my clothes immediately dried beyond the beach was a deciduous forest of large trees as you would see in northern North America

we are always  
already wet  
wet with the will  
of our ways  
with the determination  
of our kind  
with the decision  
to use technology  
to turn an elephant  
pink for kicks

we are always  
already wet  
wet with the water  
of our ways  
which turns up  
down

and down up  
though we think  
everything is on  
the level for figments  
the figments that reach  
everywhere

we are always  
already wet  
wet with the figments  
of our water  
and the water of  
our figments  
though no figment  
is wholly willed  
none is not partially  
willed either  
they come at our  
bidding occasionally  
and sometimes not  
a figment's gonna  
get ya

at the edge of the beach in front of the forest a translucent man appeared wearing a translucent blue robe he had a long goatee and wore a blue baseball cap I walked to him and he said, "all is blue as the sky all is sky which is the scattering of blue light by the atmosphere there is no touching the sky there is no touching me to want to touch the sky is like wanting to touch an idea there is no sky to touch and all is a scattering of blue all is sky here and not here as I am here and not here I am long dead long dead I come and go from in and out of the blue I am as much your friend as the wind and the grass which is and is not your friend though it is you and you are it because you and they are the blue sky as the blue sky is here and there nothing divides anything not even death there are no lines no boundaries except in the projections of human minds"

his translucence  
became less and less  
until he faded  
entirely

the trees shimmered  
in the slight breeze

I saw a dirt  
trail into the woods  
and took it

while walking the trail I heard a rustling to my left and spied a large alligator in this northern woods it was way out of place it yawned large and I saw its teeth it walked slowly toward the trail but seemed not interested in me I walked quickly forward and looked back a few times it

was not following me I kept down the trail as it wound through the woods until I came upon a picnic table in the middle of nowhere above the table a leaning dead tree was held up by the flimsy branches of another

in spite of  
the caught tree  
I felt the urge  
to sit at the table  
and did

I could hear the breeze  
in the green leaves  
and I felt hungry  
and thirsty  
not having eaten  
or drunk all  
day

we live amid guesses  
and the rough and ready  
proclamations  
though it seems otherwise  
because things work  
so much better  
than they seemingly  
could

a translucent woman with long brown hair and wearing a blue dress appeared at the picnic table she laughed and reached into the open neck of her dress and pulled out a large white tea pot she reached in again and pulled out two mugs laughing and laughing she poured blue-tinted green tea into each mug said, "bottoms up" and took a long swig of the steaming liquid I was so thirsty I drank too though I didn't know what I was drinking it was hot but not burning somehow I drank the whole mug down she laughed and poured me another I drank that too then she threw her head back and laughed and laughed uproariously I started to laugh too she suddenly stood up and walked off in the direction I had come after about ten steps she called over her shoulder in a singsong voice "there is only one world but it is of worlds and worlds and worlds, there is only one world but it is of worlds and worlds and worlds" I got up and went in the opposite direction

not ten steps  
down the trail  
I heard a terrific  
crash and turned  
to see the tree  
had fallen  
and broke  
the picnic table  
in two

I am always  
just an instant  
from annihilation  
as are we all

as I walked  
I thought of how  
I would be eaten  
sometime  
perhaps by an alligator  
then I thought  
of how I am eaten  
even now  
when alive  
by bacteria  
and viruses  
I am also dead  
as I live

the leaves slowly took on an increasingly blue tint and the trunks of the trees slowly faded from brown to a navy blue and the small plants on the ground faded to a tint of blue also everything was blue from a blue almost indigo to a navy to a light light blue to a greenish blue and I walked hungry through the blue forest thinking of how I was eaten even as I wanted to eat and that perhaps this was now home in the blueness of evermore where all silence is blue sound and all sound is also blue silence because the quiet of the afternoon must give way to the ticking the ticking of the breeze in the twigs high above me I heard a caw and another caw caw caw

### ***Late June Walk***

ushering out sideways  
the stem delivers  
I may not know  
who I am  
by next Tuesday  
the marigold says  
"water me"  
and the solstice went  
already

snipping hedges  
by hand tool  
click click  
lean pale and too old  
to hear my "hello"  
clicks off some more  
can't  
have anything bedraggled

little boy  
burns rubber past me  
on banana seat bike  
the clicking  
of pickle ball  
from the courts  
a low heavy  
sky  
very grey  
home may come  
but it is also  
not exactly there  
as remembered  
rain drops

I once was made  
of bricks  
but they all went south  
when the mortar  
chipped and chipped enough  
now I'm a secret  
Western man  
I think too much  
for my own good  
see conflict



where none need exist  
faith faith I need  
that this wall too  
will break  
take me east  
east to a dawn  
of three prized  
suns  
on a clear morning

there is a moon  
somewhere  
up there relative  
to my head  
it is behind the clouds  
and behind the blue  
that is beyond the clouds  
it may look  
and look again  
though there is no  
reason to assume  
its look settles  
on little ol' me

### ***Poem Written on the Day I Die***

This poem is written on the day I die  
because I die every day into  
the birdsongs and car honks and the scrape  
of car tires on my apartment's parking lot.  
I die every day into the sun turning across the sky,  
every night into the moon changing face  
and every midday meridian into the time of no shadows.

I die not only every day  
but every moment, too, into the sight  
of this ink drying on this notebook paper  
and the taste of seltzer when I take a break.  
My skin flakes away into dust.  
My sight turns to motes in my eyes.  
The nerves in my fingers forget  
the moment's touch when it has passed for good.

As I die, I am born anew.  
The refrigerator breaks into a  
louder hum to keep my food cold.  
A small dog barks tiny and insistent.  
The pen scrapes out words I have never  
used in this way before. This is birth. I remember  
a sun ray piercing between trees across a bay at dawn.

I miss this dying and birthing as  
each moment is covered over by thoughts  
and habits that delay and distract. I forget  
I am a walking, breathing skeleton  
and even bone decays. It is easier  
to live out of habit than out of death  
and birth. I like my habits more than reality.  
An air conditioner clicks on in another apartment.  
The day will be hot. But we're not there yet.

Someday there will be a final winking out  
of consciousness. But even that is not the end.  
Afterwards, I will live on in the memories of those who knew me  
and in the mites that feed off my decaying body.  
It does seem that eventually everything passes  
away completely, but even this may not be true.  
What do we make of "dead" civilizations brought back  
by the knowledge techniques of archaeology?  
Search for life in the crannies of space or time

and you are sure to find it there.

***On an Escarpment Above the St. Croix River (The Ear)***

Various species of birds twitter  
and whistle, telling something or  
other to each other of which  
I am mostly ignorant. But  
listening in is important because  
it confirms one realization—  
communication is not exclusively human.  
Birds do it. Trees do it.  
Biologists have shown that trees  
communicate through the roots.  
Communication is everywhere on this planet  
even though humans have pretended  
for so long that it is their exclusive domain.  
Animals are not dumb. Neither are plants.  
And I doubt the dirt beneath  
my feet is dumb, either.  
What's unusual in this world isn't life,  
but inertness. Does this concept point  
to anything real? Even the air  
is alive with microbes. That is clear.  
But is the air alive with itself?  
Could those molecules—oxygen, hydrogen,  
water, and so on—somehow be  
communicating, too? It may seem  
mentally imbalanced to think so,  
but just a few decades ago  
people who thought trees communicated  
were considered a little loo-loo.  
Anthropocentrism may have had its day,  
but only after exacting extreme  
damage on the larger plants and animals  
and most Indigenous peoples across  
the planet. What is an animist?  
To me, it refers to someone  
who believes spirit inheres in material  
things. Personally, I can't believe  
in spirits, and this has, no doubt, to  
do with the accidents of my place and time  
of birth. Most humans through history  
have believed in spirits, such as  
the Judeo-Christian God. So it's normal.  
But I can't. Rather, I'm becoming more and more  
convinced that something like meanings  
subsists in matter, that matter,

of a sort, talks to itself in its way.  
First, some humans thought communication  
was their special province.  
Then they thought meaning  
was their special province.  
Perhaps neither is. Don't trees communicate  
something akin to meaning, thereby  
creating it? And if trees do it,  
why not the dirt, the air, the light?  
What is the moon saying to itself  
within itself? I doubt it's actually  
talking to us humans: there's no reason  
to think we would be central  
to its concerns. But we can overhear,  
as we overhear birds and their meanings.  
And that meaning comes as a sort  
of incomprehensible song. Is everything  
some sort of complex, multifarious chorus,  
where everything sings, with no  
conductor, with no center, a kind  
of vast, evolving improvisation  
with nooks and crannies, eddies and wonders?  
If so, humans cannot come close  
to hurting the vastness of meanings. We can only hurt  
those meanings associated with the  
larger plants and animals, such as ourselves.  
Things go on perfectly well  
without us—meanings will go on  
generating forever, if time even makes  
sense anymore in such a context.  
I am high above the St. Croix River  
but back, so I cannot see the water.  
Some bird makes a strange gurgling sound  
I have never heard before.  
Some human visitors to the park  
I sit in speak in a language  
I don't understand. Human music  
is a pale substitute for the  
ongoing improvisation about me  
and within me. Right now, everything  
seems to be singing—the dirt, the  
asphalt, my browning apple core—  
and the effect is a little overwhelming,  
yes, but mostly calming. Am I  
making all this up? Am I  
projecting my hope for a living

universe upon the inert face of  
it all? Perhaps. But to believe  
this conventional view would be to doubt  
my own ears. I don't want  
to do that. I like my ears.  
I mean to treat them with respect.  
What is this ear that hears  
the musical murmurs, these beckonings  
toward a home I have always had  
but never, until recently, noticed?  
It is not one of the ears attached to either side  
of my head. It is not even a human ear.  
It is outside me, but not exactly,  
because it is inside me, too.  
It hears everywhere and, because it is everywhere,  
it is nowhere, too. It hears without hearing  
because it hears. This is the ear  
that is not an ear because it is  
an ear, subsisting both inside and outside  
because there is no inside to this hearing  
and no outside, either. This is the ear  
from nowhere, hearing everything murmur a song.  
Is this projection? Perhaps.  
But most humans throughout history  
have seemed to sense what I claim  
to hear. It is the modern West  
that's weird, in its assumption of inertness,  
it's sense that most of reality is ultimately  
dead, and available for processing.

## ***Cherries***

the scrape of some wheels  
a cart probably  
on the gritty stones lying  
on the asphalt of the parking lot  
I think and think again  
of cherry blossoms and the place  
I was born  
famous for cherries and cherry wine  
sometimes the ceiling happens to open  
and the roof too  
the heavens then shine down into  
the place of my dwelling  
strange sounds well up across  
an unseen void a chasm the size  
of imaginary Nebraska  
the wish of summer turns down  
with the volume  
I turn to talk to my mate  
but then don't bother  
seeing in his burning blue eyes  
that language is merely  
a strand within  
the possibilities of music  
and music is a mere strand  
within the possibilities  
of sound  
the gritty wheels again  
on the parking lot asphalt  
the roof and ceiling curve back  
into place  
we need to eat something  
of course  
there are always cherries  
before the scrum  
of another hot dawn

## **Ghosts**

Even settled dust  
can come alive.  
Even a hush and forgotten  
silence can suddenly  
rise up loud and clear,  
creating shudders  
and angularities.  
In other words,  
we never know when the volcano  
will blow,  
and we never know when  
the earth will start shaking.  
Human affairs do not seem  
to me  
at all separate  
from earthquakes and volcanoes.  
We can learn from them  
if we bother to listen.  
Contemporary culture distracts us  
from such listening.  
It seems to want  
to control everything,  
is shocked when the dust  
arises, proves itself undead,  
is shocked when silence  
starts roaring  
again.  
Maybe nothing is ever settled  
completely.  
Strange tendrils go low  
and way underground  
to suddenly emerge  
blooming fiercely  
far distant from the original plant.  
For instance,  
I never believed in ghosts  
until I got strangely visited  
in a kind of partial possession  
a few times.  
What am I to do?  
Dismiss it as mere projection  
and mind games on my part  
to save my conceptions?  
Or open myself to the



plainly obvious fact  
that some entity,  
something like a ghost,  
took over part of my consciousness?  
I choose openness.  
I choose the wild  
over the safe and the stamped down.  
After years of being settled  
some ridiculous and painful event  
reared itself as memory  
between me and a loved one.  
It was like a volcano  
suddenly asserting itself  
after dormancy.  
Wounds need tending.  
Tending makes nothing go away.  
One time I felt a ghost—  
for lack of a better word—  
sit down beside me  
while I meditated alone.  
He let me know he was just  
keeping me company.  
He was concerned I was lonely.  
Was I?  
I don't know.  
I might have been.  
Ghosts might know us better  
than we know ourselves.  
This would not be that weird.  
Google also knows us incredibly well.  
Maybe Google is a human-made ghost,  
though something tells me  
ghosts are more complicated  
by far  
than any mere machine,  
with long roots  
and reaching tendrils,  
moving down and out  
into the multiplicities  
of spacetime,  
and occasionally showing themselves,  
in the ongoing sputter,  
in the ongoing treading.  
They cut some cancer  
out of me  
a few years ago.

If this were several decades ago,  
it would not have been caught.  
I would probably be dying about now.  
Only medical technology kept me alive.  
Compared to what I imagine of ghosts,  
with their reaching tendrils  
and sinking roots,  
this medical know-how is shallow.  
I am alive by shallowness.  
Am I deep?  
I doubt it.  
But I know I am a ghost,  
now, too.

## ***Inhuman Party***

The day I realized I may not be human, at least not in any ordinary way, the high temperature was well below zero. Late that morning I found myself bundled up against the cold and walking a packed snow trail through the woods. The cold wind found every crack in my clothing—between my mittens and my jacket, where my scarf slipped up exposing a piece of skin, even, incredibly, the lower part of my belly when the cold worked its way up between the front of my down jacket and my shirts. I did this while 80 years old. This is part of what makes me think I am not human. But the biggest part has to do with the movement of light. I will explain. I came across a small shack at the side of the trail. I went in to get warm. My glasses immediately fogged, and I realized it was heated. This made no sense because there was no chimney for the furnace exhaust to escape, yet a radiator whined and cracked. It sat under the wide front window which was to the right of the door. It faced south and opened onto a pond now covered with snow on the ice. The shack had no furniture except for a nice armchair. I removed my outer wear and sat there, looking out the window, and watching the box of sunlight slowly move from the right wall, across the floor and to the left wall. I felt a profound and strange hunger, but there was nothing to eat. Watching time move like this reminded me of all the loved ones I have lost. Jim's wife called me one morning to say he died suddenly of a heart attack in the middle of the night. My sister LuAnn had M.S. First it made walking a little difficult, then she got weak, then she was in a wheel chair. She just withered away. I watched it. I remained healthy. I remained healthy while my friend Judy slowly faded away from liver cancer. She spent her last months with

a morphine pump. I thought of all these people, and how they went, how I helped them the best I could and how I am still spry and walking in the woods in sub-zero temperatures. It makes no sense. Maybe I am not human. And then came the kicker. I could see dust in the sunlight. It began to spin in two tight circles, coalescing, forming. They became two tight balls of dust about a foot off the shack floor. One slowly turned white and round and the other became more oblong and the color of pink, like a horse's ear. The white ball developed a round, brown circle on it, and then on the circle another black circle appeared. It was a huge eyeball, maybe the size of a whale's. It floated to the floor. The other coalesced into an enormous ear, pointed like a horse's. The dust settled. A huge eyeball and ear sat in front of me on the floor. A strange urge from somewhere outside me told me to eat them. I fought it for a while, but my hunger got the best of me and I bit off a part of the eyeball. It tasted like a cooked mushroom. It was good. I ate it all in about five bites. Then I started on the ear. It tasted like a dry pastry. It was good, too. I sat back in my chair, satiated, and watched the rectangle of light climb the left wall. About a half hour later, I sensed the back wall of the shack. I felt I could see the grain of the wood. Then I realized I could see out of the back of my head. I could also see the walls to the left and right of me. And I could see not only the grain of the wood, but the space that was the wall, as if I could see the vast distances between electrons and the nucleus. I grew a little uneasy. Was my head now a large, revolving eyeball? I also noticed sounds, a rhythmic crescendo and decrescendo from somewhere unknown, deep and insistent, coming in waves. I was more curious than afraid. Without putting my outerwear on, I walked outside to see what was going on. Immediately upon opening the door the warmth hit me. It felt like summer, but I could see

nothing I recognized. Rather, I saw only a kaleidoscope of various greens, running into and crossing each other, moving and shifting in a dance. I could make sense of nothing. The rhythmic crescendos and decrescendos of sound continued. I could hear nothing else. I stood there for a time, blinded from what I ordinarily see, unable to hear the birds I knew must be there. I felt alien and inhuman. Slowly, the kaleidoscopic green gave way to vague shapes of a pond and the white and brown bark of trees. At first, seeing was like a person with poor eyesight who wore no glasses. Things were fuzzy and indistinct. Slowly, my old world reappeared, and I knew where I was. And sounds slowly became more distinct as well, as the old, deep rhythm faded slowly into the background, and I heard the sparrows. I turned to go back into the shack and retrieve my winter clothing, but it was no longer there. It was just me in my clothes in the middle of the trail in summer. I walked back to my car, noticing every fern with its serrated leaves, the dirt on the trail dusting up before every step, every sparrow singing strangely while sitting on twigs, each as if for the first time. Was this real, or was the kaleidoscopic green and rhythmic sounds real, or were they both reality, only seen from different perspectives? My car was still in the parking lot. I was anxious to see what I looked like. Would my head be an enormous eyeball? In the rearview mirror I saw something else: It appeared I had aged ten years. My wrinkles were deeper, the bags under my eyes sagged further, my skin seemed to be thinner and more fragile. Is this any human way to age? I laughed. For some reason, I felt no fear. Something beyond my ken was taking me for a ride, reasons unknown, and I had no choice but to hold on and let it go.

***After Ping***

*after "blind sight, hidden brain" by wang ping*

apparently, to see is not to believe

because we believe first, see later

or maybe not

does it have to do with understanding

I don't understand Ping

though she once told me I did

she's as much a mystery to me

as I am to myself

Google knows so much more about both of us

when I think of Ping, I think of China

when I think of her, I think immigrant

then I think of other immigrants I know

let's "look" at this

I put her in a category called "China"

with its 1.4 billion people

real useful

to be honest, I use this uselessness to understand her

uselessly

sometimes, it seems we only have the moment—

moment to moment

understanding may be too vast for our own good

"response" might be better

that's what I am doing right here, right now

in writing this

I am responding to Ping's poem

not by understanding

not by seeing

or believing

but in glints and guesses  
in the partial way any whole  
is taken up  
in considered action

the poem is about life and death decisions  
based on sight  
that is formed by biases

because nothing is ever made from scratch

"Dragonfly has thirty thousand lenses"  
she writes

so do I, so do we all and  
it's all too much to take in  
so we smother it with "understanding"

I don't actually get her poem  
does she?

***rain dampening skin through jacket stitches***

skin which also once fell  
from the sky  
and will do so again  
not only because its molecules  
were once rain  
and became transformed  
and transformed again  
until they ended up as skin  
but because every bodily organ  
falls and falls again

*in the time underlying molecules*

from sky to earth  
and soaks beneath the earth

*in the space beside time*

going nowhere in particular  
but always traveling  
always moving  
the sky is wet  
as skin

and skin isn't owned by a body

*above the tendencies of spacetime*

a body merely borrows it  
before again soaking  
into the earth  
and dispersing among the elements

*tripping and dancing both in air and in earth*

where the sky is  
where the earth is  
as they fall too  
because they are not only raining  
but raw rain itself  
for now



## **Scattering**

*for Steve and Steve*

a brown falling leaf  
turns and turns again  
    moving with the wind  
not resisting  
    under the constellations  
hidden by the seeming blue  
    of the sky  
light scatters and expands  
    in the atmosphere  
up there behind the blue scattering  
are bears  
    little and big  
and bright-belted hunters searching for prey  
    the leaf turns and falls  
    against the sky  
    because the stars shone  
and burst  
    spreading their elements outward  
    and the sky skies because  
the stars shone and burst and scattered  
    what hangs in the atmosphere  
turns light to blue  
    there is no touching  
the sky  
    as there is no touching  
    the falling of the leaf  
the leaf is always falling  
even when connected  
    as the stars are always  
    bursting and scattering  
    as you and I  
    are always falling and scattering

***way across town***

the morning is drenched in cold fog  
the streets are slippery from condensation  
you say you now live way across town

driving into the fog—bobbing headlights  
a big truck spins salt onto the road surface  
you say you now live way across town

cars entering the freeway going way too fast  
another car accelerates for no good reason  
spinning its tires and fishtailing on the condensation

you say you now live way across town  
getting to you is a trip across vulnerabilities  
nothing is firm when everything turns slippery

the air itself has turned thick and white  
you insist on a visitor this morning  
in spite of all that is white and spreads

white air is a threat to all civilization  
at the heart of civilization are various wildernesses  
one wilderness is cold white air and slippery roads

you say you now live way across town  
a drive is subject to the vagaries  
nothing is more wild than happenstance

the meteorologist predicted a sunny day  
the instructors planned on a field trip  
to the park to go snowshoeing on trails

a lot is held up today because of the white fog  
you say you now live way across town  
insistences draw some out into a rawness

what is outside, well above the weather  
where eagles soar and planes fly  
you say you now live way across town

## ***The Casual Abandon of a Particular Dandelion***

*written on a picnic table at a solo picnic*

"Thus are the world's troubles due to the love of knowledge." Chuang tzu

The scent of Cutter  
insect repellent. A chittering,  
the sound, I guess,  
of some insect.  
Someone with a degree, somewhere,  
knows. But that person isn't here,  
now.  
The state of the world  
hangs in the balance  
over insects. This I believe  
though I can't prove it  
in a formal kind  
of way. But it's here,  
now. Because things often  
seem stitched together  
by the smallest things,  
the particulars. The insects  
hold everything we call "everything"  
together. I push them  
away with repellent. Farmers  
kill them with pesticides,  
not unlike bombing the  
microfauna of the gut  
with antibiotics. A bird  
titters; I can't identify.  
My knowledge has splattered  
onto the grass, beneath  
the picnic table, and lies there  
as pointless as it has  
always been. After days  
of looking through search engines  
for an article by an academic  
who could support and aid  
credence to an insight I had,  
I found the trail starting at  
Wikipedia. She makes the same  
argument I do, but with  
a credentialed oomph. Yeah,  
we need that sometimes.  
Her book is on the way.

The insects are repelled or killed.  
The birds twitter because  
they twitter. And I write for  
I write. I once described it  
as akin to breathing, for me.  
I would say, "screw the system,"  
but the system isn't worth the effort.  
There's a wide river nearby.  
I hiked four hours this morning.  
Some larger force, perhaps larger  
meanings, I don't know, propels  
all of this in myriad directions,  
and it is not close to human—  
some magic dance we participate in  
well beyond our possible ken.  
And the insects will die.  
And the fabric will tear.  
And it all won't matter  
to a human meanings, that  
went on before us, that  
go on beyond us, moving  
from insect to insect, from  
alpha centauri to a single  
blade of grass, from the bleeding  
moon to a plastic bag  
rolling across the asphalt in  
the breeze. It is all so  
much beyond us, all of us.  
I surrender all my knowledge  
to the meaning inherent in  
a single dandelion, announcing  
its yellow with a casual  
abandon.

## ***Stalks***

"From hearts and brains  
sprout the stalks of night"

--Paul Celan (tr. Joris)

there is no brain  
exactly as mandated  
there is only night  
just as there is no heart  
exactly as delimited  
there is only night  
because the brain inhabits a darkness  
as the heart inhabits a darkness

because the night is darkness  
the heart of darkness  
which is no heart  
because the heart itself  
by itself is darkness too

the heart pumps darkly  
the brain thinks darkly  
the dark comes down across thoughts  
that are born not  
of the brain  
but somewhere else entirely  
like the darkly heart  
or the darkly tree  
reaching down into loam  
communicating with fellows  
among the fungus in soil

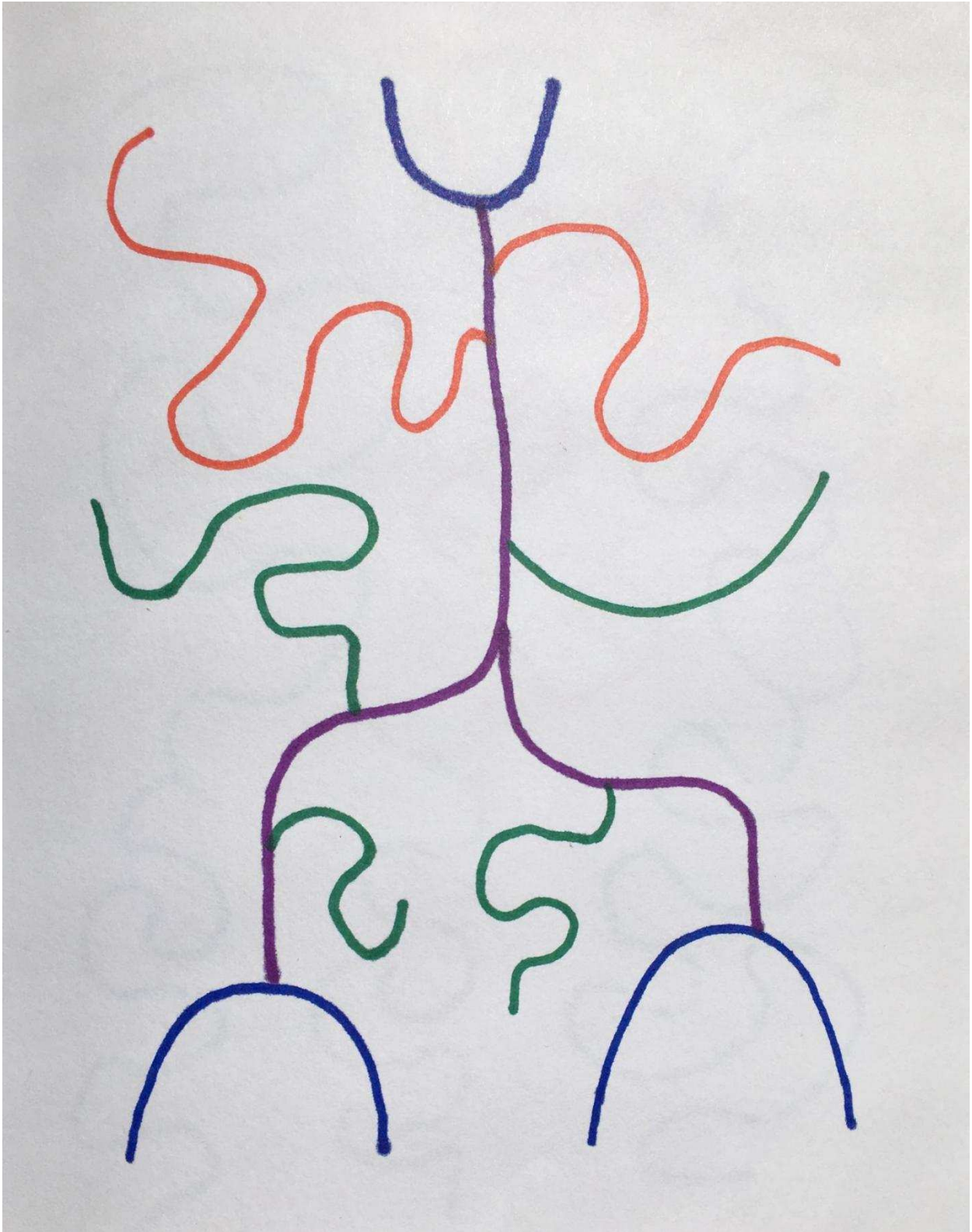
no tree is truly alone  
all trees live in darkness

as the heart hearts darkly  
and the brain crackles darkly  
and night comes on darkly  
everywhere  
partly as stalks left  
from the slice of the scythe  
but also as a presence  
that settles in everywhere

slowly revealing that all is darkness

as dark as the interior  
of body  
as dark as the clicking  
synapses deep beneath skull

the sky too  
is interior skull  
and all we see beneath it  
is the darkness of darkness  
beating electric  
in the hum of scattered time  
and the lessening of protracted chances



*Limping Symmetry* by Jefferson Hansen



**The photo shows Beaver Lodge**

**William O'Brien State Park, Minnesota, USA, May 17, 2021**



## **About the Author**

Jake Reeds lives in the USA.