

U.S. PRESIDENTS AND OTHER ANIMALS

A Thesis by

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Bachelor of Arts, Emporia State University, 1998

Submitted to the Department of English
and the faculty of the Graduate School of
Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for degree of
Master of Fine Arts

May 2007

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I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

Albert Goldbarth, Committee Chair

We have read this thesis and
recommend its acceptance:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sincere thanks to Albert Goldbarth and Christopher Howell, my teacher-poet-mentors at the graduate and undergraduate levels, respectively.

"The Oval Office is an interesting place to meet, particularly, people who are beginning to struggle with democracy and freedom because it's a reminder that the institutions, at least in this country, are always bigger than the people. Sometime we've got an all-right President, sometimes not all right. But the presidency, itself, exists. "

—*President George W. Bush*

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U.S. PRESIDENTS

Washington's Wood

Oh, everybody knows George Washington had
wooden teeth. What they don't know,
is that, at night, while he slept,
he kept them in his hat,
his famous Delaware-crossing hat,
which was actually a handcarved wooden version
of the real hat, which was lost at sea.
He also had wooden balls,
a wooden right femur-bone,
three wooden toes, and a
wooden elbow. He did not,
as you might think,
have a wooden cock.
Ask Martha.
Sure. She knew.

John Adams' Ham

John Adams had a pet pig named Smokie.
This was when he was younger.
When he was older, he became
President of the United States of America.
Smokie, when he was older, became a ham.
When presented with Smokie as a ham-slice,
young John Adams at first refused
to eat, but he was chastised, and chastised again, and
eventually became hungry. He cried copious tears
over his ham-slice before eating it. O Smokie!
Delicious. The movement of the bolus.
The peristalsis of flesh.
O dark and simple grief.

Inextricably Combined

Thomas Jefferson's love of gadgetry was well known. He would willingly entertain any crook or conman if they presented themselves as the purveyor of some clever contrivance. Jefferson once bought a carriage that folded up and fit in his pocket. He was also quite proud of his folding mechanical hat. One morning a servant mistakenly folded the two devices together and they became inextricably combined. Jefferson also owned a folding writing-desk on which he drafted parts of the Declaration of Independence.

Two James Madisons

It turns out James Madison drank
a quantity of silver nitrate one lonely afternoon
while sunbathing on a remote beach
inside the same giant soundstage
where the fake moon landing was filmed.
He died slowly, his thin lips checked
with bits of chyme brought up
when his body violently rejected the poisons.
A flock of brown thrushes and black crows gathered about him
as he lay on the sand, and each bird
took its turn hopping up by his mouth,
and he whispered something to each,
perhaps his last will and testament,
perhaps secret instructions to avenge his death
in a feathery reign of terror
featuring the yellow eye of the thrush,
the black eye of the crow.
This was not the President James Madison,
but another, a thinner and more difficult one.

Politickers

pa had him this big boarhog
name presdent monroe
pa dint care much fer politickers
said they robbed from good folk
named all the hogs after politickers
said he dint mind so much that way when we et em
this boarhog presdent monroe
got fed the guts an blood from
butcherin out two brokedown brindle cows
an this give ol monroe a taste fer blood
an he busted through the fence
into the sow's pen an et
five piglets too tiny to get clear of him quick enuf
pa said that's just what them politickers do
only we's the piglets
but I never heard of them politickers
eatin nobody

Favorite Possessions

A zinc-coated steamboat whistle.
A set of antique radish washers.
Rows of famous fingerprints.
The last gopher motor ever sold in Ohio.
Instructions for installing automatic sideburns.
Napkin rings from jail.

Veiled threats, never issued.
A serious distrust of africanized bees.
Napalm canisters used in the Panic of 1837.

Bleached whalebones.
Urns of unscattered ashes.
Really small dice.
Enough beeswax to cover Delaware.
Naughty pictures of Martin Van Buren's mother.

William Henry Harrison Murmuring

Where did my opportunity go?
I remembered to appear strong.
Languishing, I stood in the cold.
Languishing, I became ill.
I wore no hat, no coat.
An investigation should be made.
Maybe they blew poison into my lungs.

He said my speech was too long.
Everyone said I was too old.
Nobody builds log cabins anymore.
Remember Tenskwatawa.
You must remember Tenskwatawa.

Hey, it was cold outside.
April Fourth was the day I made history.
Relinquishing veto power—
Restoring republican simplicity to the White House—
I know I would have been a good president.
Sure I would have.
Only I
Never got the chance.

Old Slappy

When President James K. Polk had to go out among the people, he was generally good-humored about it, shaking hands and kissing babies and all that sort of stuff. But he had no tolerance for mispronunciation: if someone (anyone) said his name as 'Poke' instead of 'Polk,' he slapped them. Wap. Right in the face. He said it was just a matter of getting the tongue up in the mouth to pronounce that [l] sound. He couldn't tolerate an incorrect pronunciation. When he was little, the other kids called him Jimmy Poke, and poked him. He just couldn't take it. He despised the chattering, gladhanding masses.

Six Little Known Facts About Millard Fillmore

1. His soul was entirely made of glass.
2. He won the presidency in a card game.
3. He had six fingers on each hand.
4. When he was little, the other kids called him "Millard Fallmore,"
and pushed him down the stairs.
5. He loved Led Zeppelin.
6. He was once crucified by mistake.

Six Little Known Facts About Millard Fillmore from an Alternate Universe

1. His soul was entirely made of grass.
2. He lost his virginity in a card game.
3. His slick fingers were much in demand.
4. When he was little, the other kids called him "Mallard Fillmore,"
and pelted him with ducks.
5. He loathed Led Zepplin.
6. He was once crucified by a lake.

Franklin Pierce Inaugural Address. Friday, March 4, 1853

My Countrymen:

1

It is a relief to feel that no heart but my own can know the personal regret and bitter sorrow over which I have been borne to a position so suitable for others rather than desirable for myself.

2

The circumstances under which I have been called for a limited period to preside over the destinies of the Republic fill me with a profound sense of responsibility, but with nothing like shrinking apprehension. I repair to the post assigned me not as to one sought, but in obedience to the unsolicited expression of your will, answerable only for a fearless, faithful, and diligent exercise of my best powers. I ought to be, and am, truly grateful for the rare manifestation of the nation's confidence; but this, so far from lightening my obligations, only adds to their weight. You have summoned me in my weakness; you must sustain me by your strength. When looking for the fulfillment of reasonable requirements, you will not be unmindful of the great changes which have occurred, even within the last quarter of a century, and the consequent augmentation and complexity of duties imposed in the administration both of your home and foreign affairs.

3

Whether the elements of inherent force in the Republic have kept pace with its unparalleled progression in territory, population, and wealth has been the subject of earnest thought and discussion on both sides of the ocean. Less than sixty-four years ago the Father of his Country made "the" then "recent accession of the important State of North Carolina to the Constitution of the United States" one of the subjects of his special congratulation. At that moment, however, when the agitation consequent upon the Revolutionary struggle had hardly subsided, when we were just emerging from the weakness and embarrassments of the Confederation, there was an evident consciousness of vigor equal to the great mission so wisely and bravely fulfilled by our fathers. It was not a presumptuous assurance, but a calm faith, springing from a clear view of the sources of power in a government constituted like ours. It is no paradox to say that although comparatively weak the new-born nation was intrinsically strong. Inconsiderable in population and apparent resources, it was upheld by a broad and intelligent comprehension of rights and an all-pervading purpose to maintain them, stronger than armaments. It came from the furnace of the Revolution, tempered to the necessities of the times. The thoughts of the men of that day were as practical as their sentiments were patriotic. They wasted no portion of their energies upon idle and delusive speculations, but with a firm and fearless step advanced beyond the governmental landmarks which had hitherto circumscribed the limits of human freedom and planted their standard, where it has stood against dangers which have threatened from abroad, and internal agitation, which has at times fearfully menaced at home. They proved themselves equal to the solution of the great problem, to

understand which **their minds had been illuminated by the dawning lights of the Revolution.** The object sought was not a thing dreamed of; it was a thing realized. They had exhibited only the power to achieve, but, what all history affirms to be so much more unusual, the capacity to maintain. The oppressed throughout the world from that day to the present have turned their eyes hitherward, not to find those lights extinguished or to fear lest they should wane, but to be constantly cheered by their steady and increasing radiance.

In this **our country has, in my judgment,** thus far fulfilled its highest duty to suffering humanity. It has spoken and **will continue to speak,** not only by its words, but by its acts, the language of sympathy, **encouragement,** and hope to those who earnestly listen to tones which pronounce for **the largest rational liberty.** But after all, the most animating encouragement and **potent appeal** for freedom will be its own history—its trials and its triumphs. Preeminently, the **power** of our advocacy reposes in our example; but no example, be it remembered, can be powerful for lasting good, whatever apparent advantages may be gained, which is not based upon eternal principles of right and justice. **Our fathers decided** for themselves, both upon the hour to declare and the hour to strike. **They were their own judges** of the circumstances under which it became them to pledge to each other "their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor" for the acquisition of the priceless inheritance transmitted to us. The energy with which that great conflict was opened and, under the guidance of a manifest and beneficent Providence the uncomplaining endurance with which it was prosecuted to its consummation were only surpassed by the wisdom and patriotic spirit of concession which characterized all the counsels of the early fathers.

One of the most impressive evidences of that wisdom is to be found in the fact that the actual working of our system has dispelled a degree of solicitude which at the outset disturbed bold hearts and far-reaching intellects. The apprehension of dangers from extended territory, multiplied States, accumulated wealth, and augmented population has proved to be unfounded. The stars upon your banner have become nearly threefold their original number; your densely populated possessions skirt the shores of the two great oceans; and yet this vast increase of people and territory has not only shown itself compatible with the harmonious action of the States and Federal Government in their respective constitutional spheres, but has afforded an additional guaranty of the strength and integrity of both.

With an experience thus suggestive and cheering, the policy of my Administration will not be controlled by any timid forebodings of evil from expansion. Indeed, it is not to be disguised that our attitude as a nation and our position on the globe render the acquisition of certain possessions not within our jurisdiction eminently important for our protection, if not in the future essential for the preservation of the rights of commerce and the peace of the world. Should they be obtained, it will be through no grasping spirit, but with a view to obvious national interest and security, and in a manner entirely consistent with the strictest observance of national faith. We have nothing in our history or position to invite aggression; we have everything to beckon us to the cultivation of relations of peace and amity with all nations. Purposes, therefore, at once just and pacific will be significantly marked in the conduct of our foreign affairs. I intend that my Administration shall leave no blot upon our fair

record, and trust I may safely give the assurance that no act within the legitimate scope of my constitutional control will be tolerated on the part of any portion of our citizens which can not challenge a ready justification before the tribunal of the civilized world. An Administration would be unworthy of confidence at home or respect abroad should it cease to be influenced by the conviction that no apparent advantage can be purchased at a price so dear as that of national wrong or dishonor. It is not your privilege as a nation to speak of a distant past. The striking incidents of your history, replete with instruction and furnishing abundant grounds for hopeful confidence, are comprised in a period comparatively brief. But if your past is limited, your future is boundless. Its obligations through the unexplored pathway of advancement, and will be limitless as duration. Hence a sound and comprehensive policy should embrace not less the distant future than the urgent present.

The great objects of our pursuit as a people are best to be attained by peace, and are entirely consistent with the tranquillity and interests of the rest of mankind. With the neighboring nations upon our continent we should cultivate kindly and fraternal relations. We can desire nothing in regard to them so much as to see them consolidate their strength and pursue the paths of prosperity and happiness. If in the course of their growth we should open new channels of trade and create additional facilities for friendly intercourse, the benefits realized will be equal and mutual. Of the complicated European systems of national polity we have heretofore been independent. From their wars, their tumults, and anxieties we have been, happily, almost entirely exempt. Whilst these are confined to the nations which gave them existence, and within their legitimate jurisdiction, they can not affect us except as they appeal to our sympathies in the cause of human freedom and universal advancement. But the vast interests of commerce are common to all mankind, and the advantages of trade and international intercourse must always present a noble field for the moral influence of a great people.

With these views firmly and honestly carried out, we have a right to expect, and shall under all circumstances require, prompt reciprocity. The rights which belong to us as a nation are not alone to be regarded, but those which pertain to every citizen in his individual capacity, at home and abroad, must be sacredly maintained. So long as he can discern every star in its place upon that ensign, without wealth to purchase for him preferment or title to secure for him place, it will be his privilege, and must be his acknowledged right, to stand unabashed even in the presence of princes, with a proud consciousness that he is himself one of a nation of sovereigns and that he can not in legitimate pursuit wander so far from home that the agent whom he shall leave behind in the place which I now occupy will not see that no rude hand of power or tyrannical passion is laid upon him with impunity. He must realize that upon every sea and on every soil where our enterprise may rightfully seek the protection of our flag American citizenship is an inviolable panoply for the security of American rights. And in this connection it can hardly be necessary to reaffirm a principle which should now be regarded as fundamental. The rights, security, and repose of this Confederacy reject the idea of interference or colonization on this side of the ocean by any foreign power beyond present jurisdiction as utterly inadmissible.

The opportunities of observation furnished by my brief experience as a soldier confirmed in my own mind the opinion, entertained and acted upon by others from the

formation of the Government, that the maintenance of large standing armies in our country would be not only dangerous, but unnecessary. They also illustrated the importance—I might well say the absolute necessity—of the military science and practical skill furnished in such an eminent degree by the institution which has made your Army what it is, under the discipline and instruction of officers not more distinguished for their solid attainments, gallantry, and devotion to the public service than for unobtrusive bearing and high moral tone. The Army as organized must be the nucleus around which in every time of need the strength of your military power, the sure bulwark of your defense—a national militia—may be readily formed into a well-disciplined and efficient organization. And the skill and self-devotion of the Navy assure you that you may take the performance of the past as a pledge for the future, and may confidently expect that the flag which has waved its untarnished folds over every sea will still float in undiminished honor. But these, like many other subjects, will be appropriately brought at a future time to the attention of the coordinate branches of the Government, to which I shall always look with profound respect and with trustful confidence that they will accord to me the aid and support which I shall so much need and which their experience and wisdom will readily suggest.

In the administration of domestic affairs you expect a devoted integrity in the public service and an observance of rigid economy in all departments, so marked as never justly to be questioned. If this reasonable expectation be not realized, I frankly confess that one of your leading hopes is doomed to disappointment, and that my efforts in a very important particular must result in a humiliating failure. Offices can be properly regarded only in the light of aids for the accomplishment of these objects, and as occupancy can confer no prerogative nor importunate desire for preferment any claim, the public interest imperatively demands that they be considered with sole reference to the duties to be performed. Good citizens may well claim the protection of good laws and the benign influence of good government, but a claim for office is what the people of a republic should never recognize. No reasonable man of any party will expect the Administration to be so regardless of its responsibility and of the obvious elements of success as to retain persons known to be under the influence of political hostility and partisan prejudice in positions which will require not only severe labor, but cordial cooperation. Having no implied engagements to ratify, no rewards to bestow, no resentments to remember, and no personal wishes to consult in selections for official station, I shall fulfill this difficult and delicate trust, admitting no motive as worthy either of my character or position which does not contemplate an efficient discharge of duty and the best interests of my country. I acknowledge my obligations to the masses of my countrymen, and to them alone. Higher objects than personal aggrandizement gave direction and energy to their exertions in the late canvass, and they shall not be disappointed. They require at my hands diligence, integrity, and capacity wherever there are duties to be performed. Without these qualities in their public servants, more stringent laws for the prevention or punishment of fraud, negligence, and peculation will be vain. With them they will be unnecessary.

But these are not the only points to which you look for vigilant watchfulness. The dangers of a concentration of all power in the general government of a confederacy so vast as ours are too obvious to be disregarded. You have a right, therefore, to expect

your agents in every department to regard strictly the limits imposed upon them by the Constitution of the United States. The great scheme of our constitutional liberty rests upon a proper distribution of power between the State and Federal authorities, and experience has shown that the harmony and happiness of our people must depend upon a just discrimination between the separate rights and responsibilities of the States and your common rights and obligations under the General Government; and here, in my opinion, are the considerations which should form the true basis of future concord in regard to the questions which have most seriously disturbed public tranquillity. If the Federal Government will confine itself to the exercise of powers clearly granted by the Constitution, it can hardly happen that its action upon any question should endanger the institutions of the States or interfere with their right to manage matters strictly domestic according to the will of their own people.

In expressing briefly my views upon an important subject which has recently agitated the nation to almost a fearful degree, I am moved by no other impulse than a most earnest desire for the perpetuation of that Union which has made us what we are, showering upon us blessings and conferring a power and influence which our fathers could hardly have anticipated, even with their most sanguine hopes directed to a far-off future. The sentiments I now announce were not unknown before the expression of the voice which called me here. My own position upon this subject was clear and unequivocal, upon the record of my words and my acts, and it is only resorted to at this time because silence might perhaps be misconstrued. With the Union my best and dearest earthly hopes are entwined. Without it what are we individually or collectively? What becomes of the noblest field ever opened for the advancement of our race in religion, in government, in the arts, and in all that dignifies and adorns mankind? From that radiant constellation which both illumines our own way and points out to struggling nations their course, let but a single star be lost, and, if these be not utter darkness, the luster of the whole is dimmed. Do my countrymen need any assurance that such a catastrophe is not to overtake them while I possess the power to stay it? It is with me an earnest and vital belief that as the Union has been the source, under Providence, of our prosperity to this time, so it is the surest pledge of a continuance of the blessings we have enjoyed, and which we are sacredly bound to transmit undiminished to our children. The field of calm and free discussion in our country is open, and will always be so, but never has been and never can be traversed for good in a spirit of sectionalism and uncharitableness. The founders of the Republic dealt with things as they were presented to them, in a spirit of self-sacrificing patriotism, and, as time has proved, with a comprehensive wisdom which it will always be safe for us to consult. Every measure tending to strengthen the fraternal feelings of all the members of our Union has had my heartfelt approbation. To every theory of society or government, whether the offspring of feverish ambition or of morbid enthusiasm, calculated to dissolve the bonds of law and affection which unite us, I shall interpose a ready and stern resistance. I believe that involuntary servitude, as it exists in different States of this Confederacy, is recognized by the Constitution. I believe that it stands like any other admitted right, and that the States where it exists are entitled to efficient remedies to enforce the constitutional provisions. I hold that the laws of 1850, commonly called the "compromise measures," are strictly constitutional and to be unhesitatingly carried into effect. I believe that the constituted

authorities of this Republic are bound to regard the rights of the South in this respect as they would view any other legal and constitutional right, and that the laws to enforce them should be respected and obeyed, not with a reluctance encouraged by abstract opinions as to their propriety in a different state of society, but cheerfully and according to the decisions of the tribunal to which their exposition belongs. Such have been, and are, my convictions, and upon them I shall act. I fervently hope that the question is at rest, and that no sectional or ambitious or fanatical excitement may again threaten the durability of our institutions or obscure the light of our prosperity.

But let not the foundation of our hope rest upon man's wisdom. It will not be sufficient that sectional prejudices find no place in the public deliberations. It will not be sufficient that the rash counsels of human passion are rejected. It must be felt that there is no national security but in the nation's humble, acknowledged dependence upon God and His overruling providence.

13

We have been carried in safety through a perilous crisis. Wise counsels, like those which gave us the Constitution, prevailed to uphold it. Let the period be remembered as an admonition, and not as an encouragement, in any section of the Union, to make experiments where experiments are fraught with such fearful hazard. Let it be impressed upon all hearts that, beautiful as our fabric is, no earthly power or wisdom could ever reunite its broken fragments. **Standing, as I do**, almost within view of the green slopes of Monticello, and, as it were, **within reach of the tomb** of Washington, with all the cherished memories of the past gathering around me like so many eloquent voices of exhortation from heaven, **I can express no better hope** for my country than that the kind Providence which smiled upon our fathers may enable their children to preserve the blessings they have inherited.

Lincoln's Mole

Lincoln's left cheek mole spoke.

hissed: "C'mon, free the slaves, Abe" or

"See Abraham in the House of Rue."

often whispering "You're no goddamn good, Abe Lincoln,"
over & over.

Once the damn spot set his hat afire.

Ol' Moley dictated the Gettysburg Address:

barked "Grab that envelope and write this down.

You'll dig it."

Lincoln handfed it mole-sized bites of sandwiches
sometimes. Sometimes not.

The treacherous tiny maw whistled Dixie
at inappropriate times.

The Prez threatened a pencil stabbing, lead point

searching for an unconditional separation, but wouldn't have, not really.

He snuck it bits of egg or toast at breakfast.

Seen up close,

The Great Stone Face on Rushmore shows the mole frozen

—small black mouth always open—

screaming to be heard
over the blue flash of the Dakota sky.

Blue '65 Lincoln

"It's a mean old world," Lincoln said. "I wish I wasn't so dern blue." And he was:
a rich turquoise from head to toe.
But the war was finally over, and he
sat down to rest. "Maybe now I can
take some time to myself. Spend some time
with the kids. I wonder if Tad has seen
that new Star Wars movie?" The President
looked out of the window of his office:
there were pigs copulating on the lawn.

Andrew Johnson

was lonely as a child.

The Fabulous Exploits of Ulysses S. Grant

Oh, he was the Civil War General,
Hero of the North,
who, rough and brooding,
famously won the war,
with himself a beard big as Appomattox!
Whenever Grant heard people cheering him,
he insisted it be immediately stopped.

Some said he was grumpy, given his attitude
and the big beard and all, but they were wrong.
Cranky was what he was, damn cranky,
Especially if he hadn't had a good
couple swallows outen his hip flask
or the fifth of rye in his bedroll
or the pint of corn likker in his saddlebag
not that he was a drunkard, mind you,
just one of those whose constitution
required a little nip to ensure locomotion.

He never did beat Bob Lee at armwrestling,
despite what Lee later said.

He got hooked on the damn cigars, too.
Used to be he just smoked one occasionally,
every now and again when he was feeling particularly fierce.
Then a picture of him smoking got published in the papers
and folks started sending him cigars from all over.
He had so many he couldn't give 'em away fast enough.
Ended up smoking three or four at a time
just to keep up. Good cigars, though. He
smoked em while he sent many thousands
of our native sons to their deaths.

Always was Grant ever melancholy.
When he was president, and tired of
the nation scratching at the Oval Office door,
he'd often hole up at the Willard Hotel,
slouch into a cane chair on the balcony,
strum sad songs on his banjo,
and howl along with the coyotes
lonesome in the mountains of the District of Columbia.

That Noted Outlaw Rutherford B. Hayes

No one was ever as fast with a pistol
as that noted outlaw Rutherford B. Hayes.
He was meaner than seven polecats
tied together by the tail and slung over a wire.
He wore three pistols:
one hung on his left hip, one on his right,
(he was mighty quick with either one) &
one tiny pistol hung in a holster in his cheek.
He drew and shot with his tongue.
He won the White House during a crooked
baccarat game in the back of a '78 VW microbus.

An ostensibly dissatisfied constituent attempted
to assassinate Hayes in the midst of his evening bath.
The gunplay: the tongue gun jammed. A bullet
lodged in the President's chest.
Hayes hated that bullet. He reviled it so much
that it pushed itself out of his chest
and fell to the floor, chastened.
Hayes made the man his Secretary of War.

After his death at the age of 114, Hayes
shot his way into heaven.

The Beheading of President Garfield

One of seven witnesses present
at the beheading of President James A. Garfield,
I can affirm
that he died with dignity and somber purpose,
that he believed it was for the good of the country.

I saw the Official Executioner,
a fearsome and hooded menace,
wield that great axe bearing the
presidential seal
with a steady hand.

I saw Garfield kneel down and
put his neck on the block.
He kept his eyes open.
The eyes were still open
when the head landed in the basket.

Chester A. Arthur

Chester A. Arthur wouldn't eat sacred meat.

Chester A. Arthur liked well-lit spinach.

Chester A. Arthur held his tongue in the fire infrequently.

Chester A. Arthur had a monogrammed horselaugh.

Chester A. Arthur was infested with bananaworms.

Chester A. Arthur accidentally voted for himself.

Chester A. Arthur feared wooden ships.

Chester A. Arthur felt smaller on Tuesdays.

Chester A. Arthur fought against redemption.

Chester A. Arthur hated Chester A. Arthur.

The Sexual Peculiarities of Grover Cleveland, Part I

When he's makin' presidential love,
Whenever he approaches orgasm, right
when his nuts cock to fire their
million presidential bullets, Grover
pauses. Stops. Waits.

Benjamin Harrison: Overall, A Good Man

Benjamin Harrison lost the race to be Indiana's governor in 1876 to Jimmy "Blue Jeans" Williams (so called for always wearing overalls) and this frustrated Harrison immensely. He was known in society as a dapper and well-dressed man. And as he polished his dislike of Ol' Blue Jeans into a sharp bitter rage, he also developed an intense dislike of overalls, dungarees, or any other type of casual workwear. It was not an uncommon sight to see Harrison at work in his garden on Sunday afternoons in a formal suit, on his knees in the dirt pulling weeds. It reached the point where he would attack men in the street who were wearing overalls. Sometimes a pair of dirty workboots on a porch was enough to set him off. After Harrison narrowly won the presidential election, he had to be repeatedly dissuaded from sending to Congress bills demanding the outlawing of casual clothes. Actually, one of his first actions after he became president was to hire a pair of thugs through a trustworthy third party and have Jimmy "Blue Jeans" severely beaten. Things reached a head one day in 1892 when an electrician, dressed in workman's overalls and unaware of the president's peculiarities, was working at the White House on a project to install electric lights there for the first time, and entered the Oval Office. President Harrison beat the man nearly to death with an umbrella, but the president's cronies were able to hush the matter up. Soon after this, Harrison was to address Congress about the possibility of war with Germany over the fate of Samoa. Some of the majority leaders in the heavily Democratic Congress showed their dislike of the Republican president by arranging to have every Democratic congressman present that day wearing overalls. Upon being greeted with this sight, the president had to be forcibly restrained, and bit one of his own aides on the knee in his efforts to reach the Congressional floor.

In light of these and other incidents, James Blaine, Harrison's Secretary of State and close friend, intervened to help Harrison with his anti-overallmania and rage. Blaine enlisted the help of Dr. Royce Hammer, a popular experimental psychologist of the times. Dr. Hammer arranged a forcible intervention and had four strong assistants restrain the president, strip him to his shorts, and dress him in overalls. This experience was very similar to that which occurred with England's King George and that ruler's supposed madness. As with King George, the harsh treatment convinced Harrison to make more of an effort to restrain his abnormal behavior, and things returned somewhat back to normal after that. President Harrison was even seen without his tie, upon occasion. However, it seemed Harrison's former boldness and tenacity had been diminished, and he was never as effective a president after that. This severely eroded the faith of his peers and the American Public in Harrison's capacity to govern effectively, and he lost to Cleveland in the next presidential election. After his departure from public life, Harrison became an investor and businessman, and his efforts to corner the overalls futures market was a contributing factor to the causes of the Panic of 1893.

The Sexual Peculiarities of Grover Cleveland, Part II

He waits exactly four minutes.
And then lets fly those little presidents:
into Mrs. Grover, into a napkin,
wherever. And always that four minute pause.
He holds absolutely still.
Head high, eyes closed.
Presidential.
Motionless.
Statuesque.

The McKinley Connection: A Timeline

1901: President McKinley assassinated in Buffalo by Leon Czolgosz.

1903: The city puts up a big brass historical marker marking the spot.

1977: A young boy named Danny Gilmore, not paying attention, runs into the marker on his bike. Cuts his cheek.

1978-1982: Danny's slightly older sister, Wanda, makes fun of his scar periodically. Calls him "Mister Cheeky Face. Danny smacks her. Calls her "Miss Smacky Face." Sibling violence ensues.

1991: Wanda goes off to school at Montana State University. Rooms with a girl named Sarah Vowell, who will eventually become a writer.

2005: Sarah Vowell's third book, *Assassination Vacation* is published.

2006: I read *Assassination Vacation*.

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance!

William Howard Taft's obesity
made it crucial for him to conceal
his one great passion: dance.
Had the nation's press been allowed access
to the White House ballroom where
Taft lumbered across the floor in his
drooping mustache, leg warmers, and presidential tights,
dreams of lightness and grace spinning in his mind,
he would have had his secret dream
shattered on the public font and been subjected to
criticism and ridicule,. He once missed
an important cabinet meeting after
he knocked himself out cold attempting
a simple pirouette. When Taft leapt,
the ballroom floorboards cracked
like gunshots.

William H. Taft

was an alien in a fatman suit.

Regaling President Wilson with Tales of Adventure

“Having stealthily trapped the beast in the stairway, I reached for my gun, but all my hand found in my pockets was a red comb, a tin whistle, a mousetrap and an iron-gray pair of pliers,” I said. “How fascinating!” replied Woodrow. We were having snacks (Twinkies) at the White House, and waiting for Kate Moss to finish combing her hair so we could all go and see the upcoming total eclipse of the sun framed between the stone pillars of the Lincoln Memorial. “Look, a heron!” I said. But it was only Kate Moss coming down the stairway. Wilson laughed so hard he choked on his vitamin pill. I had to drop my Twinkie and give him the Heimlich. Then we three went walking arm in arm, whistling, and suddenly darkness fell upon us. It was the eclipse! Chaos ensued. It wasn’t until nearly a week later, when Woodrow and I were bowling a few frames at the White House bowling alley that I was at last able to finish telling him how I finally caught the beast.

President Warren G. Harding and the End of World War I: The Over-Gophered Version

President Wilson was very ill.¹

Congress² failed to ratify the Treaty of Versailles.³

Harding⁴ was elected.⁵

Harding went golfing.⁶

On the second day of July⁷, in 1921,⁸

Harding⁹ was golfing¹⁰ with his friend¹¹, Senator Joseph Frelinghuysen.¹²

He stopped golfing long enough to sign a treaty¹³ with Germany.¹⁴

He signed¹⁵ it at Frelinghuysen's house¹⁶ while the Senator's dog¹⁷ sniffed his shoes.¹⁸

Then he went back to golfing.¹⁹

Wilson²⁰ got better,²¹ but he wasn't President anymore.

Frelinghausen's dog became a national hero.²²

¹ He had eaten a gopher he caught on the White House lawn, and it was made of dark sweaty meat.

² Generally considered to be a bunch of ignorant tack-heads.

³ Mostly because Henry Cabot Lodge was a big meany and snuck around town in his galoshes.

⁴ Historians tend to rate Harding as the worst president ever.

⁵ This was the first election in which women were allowed to vote nationwide.

⁶ Harding's administration was known as "the mulligan administration."

⁷ Later, under the Coolidge administration, this day became known as National Gophering Day.

⁸ A day cows gave no milk, and hens laid no eggs

⁹ Harding had been huffing airplane glue all morning.

¹⁰ In New Jersey!

¹¹ It came out years later that they had secretly loathed each other.

¹² Not a trustworthy fellow.

¹³ But we all know he musta complained like hell about it.

¹⁴ Whom nobody went golfing with these days (the country was entirely overrun with gophers).

¹⁵ He signed the treaty with a pen that had "Re-elect Joseph Frelinghuysen to the US Senate" printed on it.

¹⁶ A White House aide dropped the treaty by.

¹⁷ And, as dogs tend to do, ol' Rover probably shoved his nose up into the ol' presidential crotch, too.

¹⁸ They were golf shoes (and they probably smelled like gophers).

¹⁹ Where he kept hitting the ball into the rough and then cheating.

²⁰ Had to be de-gophered.

²¹ He still outlived Harding.

²² He was heavily decorated in the Great Gopher War of 1923.

The Calvin Coolidge Collection

In a special “executive room”
deep in the bowels of
the Library of Congress,
President Calvin Coolidge
had secretly amassed
one of the largest collections of
pornography in the English-speaking world.
With the collusion of a pair
of high-ranking librarians,
Coolidge had carefully
assembled stacks of French postcards,
volumes of anonymous Victorian erotica, and
boxes upon boxes of nude “art model” photos.
He would sometimes arrange,
after a difficult day
of presidential decisions, for the room
to be opened for him late at night.
A trusted aide would escort him
from the White House
to his “executive room”
where he would lock himself in, and
surrounded by thousands upon thousands
of (both literal and literary) tits,
pussies, and asses, he would
masturbate furiously,
grunting and moaning, pulling his
country forward through the Roaring Twenties.

1929

Enter Herbert Hoover in his glad rags
into the tableau
with his skull full of stiff wires
leading the armies of West Branch
into fields of collateral, collateral, collateral.
A darkness falls. Swift lightning
puts out the lights. Inside each dark,
still-warm clear glass bulb, a tiny animated
farmer gestures and beckons, but
is not heard. All over Manchukuo,
villages are being built; all are to be known
as "Hooverilles." Electricity waits,
in the darkness coursing upon itself.

The Secret Language of FDR

It was not until after he became president that the people realized that the language Franklin Roosevelt spoke was not an actual language, but one made up that only he himself understood. A great effort was made by many language experts to decipher what FDR said. Many high-level politicians claimed to understand him, and were more than willing to interpret for him. Roosevelt's inaugural address, his speech conferences, even his state of the union address, were duly heard by the American public, but not one word was comprehended by anyone.

However, the made up language that FDR spoke was a soothing and mellifluous one. Hearing him speak had a generally calming effect. It kept people happy. FDR remained quite popular. His incomprehensibility, his ability to speak beautifully without any real communication proved to be such an effective strategy that it became a presidential tradition continued by every president since.

Truman Collects the Money

President Truman kept shoving the money into a drawer. Whatever he got: ones, fives, tens, twenties, etc. He shoved it all into the drawer. The line was long. It took many hours for everyone to pass in front of Truman's desk. He shook hands with so many people, stayed friendly and outgoing the whole time, but when it was over, he just let out a little sigh, and went to sleep right there in his desk chair. It took us a couple of hours just to count the money, and Truman slept the entire time.

The Bust of Dwight D. Eisenhower

In the sculpture garden,
on a granite pedestal
surrounded by red tulips,
sits a bust
of Former President and
U.S. Army General
Dwight D. Eisenhower.
A long, white streak of
birdshit on his cheek
contrasts with the
dark bronze of his
face and bald head.

Nation in Crisis, 1961

President Kennedy didn't take his Presidential Pill
one Monday morning. Not so unusual—
other presidents missed pills with no ill effects—
but Kennedy skipped it on Tuesday too
and all the promise of Camelot began to fade as
the presidential levels in his blood dropped.
At the beginning, he had such promise.
Remember how he carried himself at his inauguration?
His formal bearing. His proud swallowing
after the Chief Justice placed it on his tongue.

Several assistants hovered at his bedside Wednesday morning
to ensure Kennedy took his pill.
He was becoming dangerously unpresidential, and
The constitution had no provisions
for this type of situation. But Kennedy
took his Wednesday pill, and the one after that, and
kept taking it. Most Americans
were unaware of the nation's proximity
to disaster. Soon after this,
the White House switched
to giving Presidential injections instead.
The First Lady carried the First Needle.

"The Ambassador"

Every man has a name for his dick.
Lyndon Baines Johnson, our 36th president,
Referred to his as "The Ambassador", as in
"send in muh secretary, the ambassador wants
ta give some dicktation! Haw! Haw!"
He'd always laugh and slap his leg, and his
aides and cronies would laugh along with him.
His secretaries never laughed.

LBJ was well known for showing off "The Ambassador."
It was said he was well-hung. He would insist on
Being interviewed by reporters while
swimming naked in the White House Pool.
One of LBJ's aides, a Mr. Boswell, was
Summarily fired for being very uncomfortable
In the presence of "The Ambassador."
"Shit," said the president, "That boy
must have a real tiny dick! Either that or he's queer!
Get him outta here, we don't need no
goddamn pantywaists 'round here."

One night, drunk again, LBJ had to be dissuaded
From actually assigning "The Ambassador" as
The ambassador to a small Pacific island Nation.
"Hot damn!" he said "Hafta fly him down there
onna little plane en git somma thet hula-girl poontang!
Hoo-wee!"

Nixon's Lucky Egg

President Nixon often kept a hard-boiled egg
in his executive desk to have a quick snack
between briefings and meetings.
Once, right after John Dean had left
to find the President a dry handkerchief,
Nixon got out his egg to quiet those
mid-morning stomach-rumblings
all too common to busy chief executives.
A door slammed somewhere nearby
in the White House and the President
dropped his egg and it rolled under his desk.
As he leaned down to get it, a bullet
thwacked into the wall behind his desk.
It would have gone through him
had he not been bent over reaching for his egg.
A ranting lunatic who'd snuck in
with a White House tour group
was quickly and brutally subdued
in the doorway. The incident
was never released to the press
for fear of inspiring other attempts.
President Nixon didn't eat that egg—
he saved it, put it in his pocket
—called it his "lucky egg."
Several months later, in a meeting
with several important Chinese ministers,
Nixon accidentally crushed his "lucky egg."
The stench from the thoroughly rotten egg
was a serious setback for Chinese-American relations.

President Ford Broke My Mother

One night my mother was sitting and
Watching then-President Ford give
The State of the Union Address on TV
And he let slip a loud trumpetblast
Of a fart that was clearly audible
over the airwaves. This disgusted
my mother, she stood, shut off
the television and turned
to walk out of the room. She slipped
on a Hello Kitty pencil my younger sister
had left on the floor after finishing
her homework (Multiplication and Spelling)
and Mom fell and hit the back of her head
on a large freestanding brass ashtray
made from melted-down artillery shells
from World War II. My mother hit the floor
and broke into a thousand pieces
just like a large, mom-shaped china plate.
It took me an hour to sweep up the pieces.
When Dad came home, we told him what happened and
he tried to glue her back together, but it was no use.
After we went to bed, Dad sat in the kitchen
Holding the broken fragments of my mother
in his hands, and we could hear him saying:
"Damn you, Ford, is this what America has become?"

President Carter's Heart

Jimmy Carter admitted to having
sinned in his heart many times.
His heart was so busy
sinning and sinning
Again and again it turned black
and Jimmy's breath stank of sin and
sin bubbled in his veins and so
we cried "Mother of Pearl, Jimmy!
Go ahead and sin a little, already!
Get it outen your system!"
So Jimmy did, a little, in secret, and
The nation was punished
with a terrible gas shortage.
So Jimmy prayed
on his knees in the peanut patch,
asking GOD and OPEC for forgiveness.
And oil prices came down
and the nation rejoiced.
But the president's heart
shriveled up
like a three-day-old sausage link.

Punching Reagan

Long before he became a politician, Ronald Reagan had agreed to star in a film opposite a boxing kangaroo named Punching Joey. Hell, the monkey picture had done well, so why not? Punching Joey had a trainer/keeper names Fats Mulligan who worked tirelessly to make Joey a better boxer. Fats believed Joey could be much more than a novelty act. He felt kangaroos could be trained to compete against professional boxers. He trained Joey to punch hard, to bob and weave, to keep the gloves up, and so on. On the first day of filming, Ronnie and Joey were to act out a simple exhibition match. Reagan had no idea of the kangaroo's capabilities. He assumed Joey would dance around the ring while he, the star, threw grand-looking punches. The cameras rolled, the bell sounded, and Joey bounded out, delivered a flurry of punches to Reagan's head, and knocked the future president out cold. The results of this fiasco were that the film was never made, Reagan developed difficulties with his memory and powers of concentration, and Punching Joey was declared dangerous and gassed at a local animal shelter. Fats Mulligan gained possession of some of the film footage and tried to embarrass Reagan years later when he ran for Governor of California. Reagan arranged for Mulligan to meet with an accident and never went anywhere near another kangaroo in his entire life

Bush and the Girl Scout Troop

President George H.W. Bush received at the White House seven girls from a girl scout troop that had won some presidential award for doing something vaguely heroic. He spoke to them very kindly and praised their devotion to God and Country. He chatted casually with them for a few minutes. He stood, formally shook their hands, and posed for a picture. Walking back to his Executive Chair, he tripped over the outstretched foot of one of the girl scouts, and fell to the floor. The girls gathered around him, kicking at him, pulling at his clothes, and slapping him the back of his head until Bush managed to get to his feet. His face was quite red. For a moment No one spoke. Then President Bush leaned over and spoke softly to an aide, who ushered the girls out of the room. No fuss was made over the incident, and the girls left with their troop leader, who had no idea of what had occurred. Over the next few years, all seven of these young girls quietly disappeared from their homes in the middle of the night, and no trace of their whereabouts has ever been found

Birdlicker

...turns out Bill Clinton's one of them damn
birdlickers.

I spied him outside the Institute,
heavylidded eyes
half-hidden in the birch,
greedily licking a brown wren
captive in cupped, thick hands,
running
his pulpy tongue over and over
supple feathers.

He didn't see me,
peering out my unlit window, but
I took several quick pictures.
People must know.

The Leader of the Free World

President George W. Bush was
a good president because when terrorists
exploded those buildings in New York
he declared a war on terrorists and
sent soldiers to the terrorists countries
and kilt them all
he said it was a great victory
and had pictures of himself
taken with some army soldiers
and when those hurricanes hit
down in Florida and New Orleans
he declared war on them hurricanes
and sent some ships out to sea
to fight them hurricanes
but those ships got lost in
another hurricane so he just
sent out some more because he
had lots of ships to play with
and hurricane season ended so
he said it was a great victory
and had pictures of himself
taken with some navy soldiers
and we saw it all on the teevee
so it must be true.

OTHER ANIMALS

Bird Wedding

I remember one of my aunts,
my mother's sister, marrying a
bird once. It was a large white
bird, with a long and graceful
plumage. Or it could be that
the bird wore the plumage
solely for the wedding and was
really a drab little brown bird.
I don't remember how old
I was when all this happened.
I think they were married in
some sort of cave somewhere. I
doubt my family realizes I
remember this. Why was I
even there? There is a family
of birds somewhere, no doubt,
that is scandalized.

Gong Birds

perch
 in the upper branches,
bang small brass gongs
 with tiny mallets
repeatedly,
 and with peculiar emphasis.

A tree heavy with
 gong birds
is quite a racket.
It is a sight to see:
 the gongs, of shining brass, &
 the small dark birds
 with their little mallets
 like weapons.

Here's a Tortoise

Here's a tenpenny nail tortoise,
a cipher-toting tortoise, a
ratbrained tortoise, a orgone-
accumulating, peripheral, lightly misted
tortoise. A sockdollager tortoise, a
skinny, sluice-riding amalgamated
fun-loving but hard-to-hold tortoise of the
amazing gossamer biscuits.

O walkie-talkie tortoise.
O omnidirectional kitty-whomper tortoise.
O double buffalo tortoise.

Here's a marginalized proto-tortoise, a
scrappy, isomorphic cohort tortoise,
a whumping scattershot porkbellied
roaming tortoise, a sun-worshipping and goat-cheesy
pseudoflorescent dilapidated Fulbright-scholar
arithmetical lei-wearing bulbous-eyed assgrabbing
son-of-a-bitch tortoise running rampant
through the lilies of the field.

O tortoise the monkey's uncle.
O tortoise the superficial consortium.
O tortoise the diminishing Amazon silhouette.

Here's a Hong Kong Phooie tortoise,
a steel-driving, heavily mortgaged
wax tortoise, a covert pneumatic
long-handled soporific peppergrass tortoise.
A Sergeant-At-Arms tortoise. A stick figure
glue-coated backlit miasmatic tortoise. A sickly
blustering in vitro waterproof gas-damaged tortoise
of the melodramatic pincushions.

O Kojak tortoise
O ratchet-jawed rollerskating tortoise.
O pearswept feasting tortoise.

Here's a starbright faux tortoise, a
Mass candle tortoise. A disastrous walleyed
monastic Sikh tortoise. A rearguard
folk-pointed aphrodisiac tortoiseshell
delivery tortoise. A shallow Oklahoma

pillow tortoise, a plea-bargaining axeground
levitant moose-succulent Pharaoh tortoise
of the wandering porchlight kingdom.

O tortoise the master electrician.
O tortoise the boogie child.
O tortoise the animated photon carp.

Here's a rogue tortoise. A blind horseradish
tortoise, a steel-shovel tortoise. A
grand scheme tortoise. A pearl-handled
revolving tortoise, a hoity-toity hatchback
fullblown foolproof mother-whipped
hoochie-coochie dadblamed puzzle solving
sandwich-eating pool-cued tortoise of the
ground rule double accordion.

O wooden muskrat tortoise.
O knuckled Buddha tortoise.
O cocklebur barracuda dozing tortoise.

A Texarkana tortoise. A green apple rubber
tortoise. A potato godbaby tortoise. A heartvalved
monochromatic chrome jumbo pie-charted
tortoise. A seminal whistlesnapping
vivacious, unmarried, aborted, randomly sampled,
overtly shrinking and straightening lost-in-space
bearded oval grand poobah tortoise
of the skywide notation machine.

O tortoise of the burning wheel!
O tortoise of the purple scum-driven moment!
O tortoise of the pile-driving Lackawanna zero-hour rule!

A rain-driven paper tortoise. A
wheedling, quibbling, heavily tattooed
tortoise. A barber tortoise. A tumescent,
autumnal, Neolithic worm-dreaming
mustachioed protracted elliptical
mantra-chanting crystallized marshmallow
limpid free-for-all spitfire wishing tortoise
with the piercing liminal eye!

La Rana, La Corazon

I can feel my heart pulsing rhythmically
like a frog's throat, hiding in the mud
and yellow weeds of my body's pond.
Right now an egret is bracing its body
to land on a barely submerged log.

I joined a Mexican work crew one summer digging
ditches to lay in utilities for mobile homes.
None of the other men spoke very much English.
The only Spanish I knew was 'si' and 'cerveza.'
As we dug into that soil in fields where no man
had ever lived, our shovels would periodically
cut cleanly through the bodies of spadefoot toads,
who'd dug in deep to escape the summer's heat.
We'd see half a toad in the wall of the ditch,
and the other half thrown carelessly on the pile.
Jose, part of the crew, would point and say
"La rana no tiene corazon!" And he'd
smack it with his shovel. "Si!" I'd say.
We'd watch for them as we gouged the earth.

A friend of mine gave me six African Clawed Frogs.
I filled an aquarium with water from the sink
and slid them in. Five of the six died
from the metals and toxins in the tapwater.
The one that lived is in a smaller aquarium
on top of the refrigerator. His name is Corazon.
He scoots back and forth in the water,
his claws scabbling on the glass bottom.

Nature Photography around Manitoba

When Henry and I were up in the Manitoba area,
we came across a whole herd of lintels and doorjambs
grazing on the razorwire grass so common to that region.
I was so excited to see them this way, in their natural state,
that I ran myself over with the Jeep several times.
Henry took a terrific photo of a bull lintel
all reared up and ready to crash into a Victorian parlor.
Doorknobs swarmed over the field. Henry and I collected
a whole pillowcase full to take back as souvenirs.
"This is the Manitoba area equivalent of the
elephant graveyard!" I thought excitedly. And
just as we were packing up to depart, I saw
a black rotary telephone standing warily
just outside his bolt-hole!

On Shaving

A tall man shaves on a
complex morning. He
is not shaving because
he is tall, but because
his wife or girlfriend or
whatever—even an imaginary
mechanical cat—has requested
that he shave. And so he does,
but he nicks himself on his chin,
which is nothing he can hide
so everyone will know that
he is a clumsy shaver by
the cut on his chin.

The tall man decides he
needs to practice shaving
more often; he begins
shaving his teeth, and everyone
knows it's very complex
and tricky—shaving teeth—
especially the backs:

you can never open your
mouth quite wide enough
and the tongue always
seems to be in the way.

The tall man decides that
it would be better to be a duck.

Ducks are unconcerned
about shaving, or even hair,
for that matter. “Quack,
quack,” he quacks, eyeing
his feathers in the mirror.

He can no longer hold
the razor in his wing.
It is nearly afternoon.

Once More, With Feeling

John came downstairs with a mannequin
under each arm. We glued white feathers
all over them and set them on the porch to dry.
The dog next door barked and barked
at the feathered mannequins. There were
elements of fear and hysteria in his barks.
It was as if he was saying "O God!
Giant people-birds! Go away! Go away!"
or perhaps he was trying to warn us:
"Hey! You in the house! There are giant people-birds!
On your porch! Run like hell! Run! Run!"
John and I wished the dog was quiet.
We did not fear the people-birds.
In fact, as evening approached,
we invited them in for dinner
and some pleasant conversation.
We talked with them far into the night.

Popcorn

is made of
tiny buttered sheep.
They baa softly
when thrown
into the mouth.
Their minuscule hooves
get caught in my teeth.
I like them salted and
soaked in butter.

Powerful Eyebrows

I knew a man with powerful eyebrows.
They hung above his eyes like
windswept tangles of morning-glory vines
over the stony cliff of his face.
The slightest lift of either one
was a fearful chastisement.
Both lifting in unison up the slope
of his broad forehead could
make water boil, bend spoons,
hasten tubers to their underground ripening.
But one soft summer morning while
riding his bicycle, the eyebrows
crept down and tangled in the spokes.
The subsequent sudden stop flung
him to the pavement and shattered his skull.
And the eyebrows settled and
covered him like a shroud.

Shiny Reefer Units

They shine like apostles
when evening creeps over the mountains
ground-breaking, aloof
like shipwrecked robot corpses,
squared aluminum toads with bulging bolted eyes
forked handle padlocked tongues
exhausted, leaking yellow fog onto the millroad,
tired, rolling on round cushions,
filled with meat and chrome and blood
systematic out of the beehive
and onto the ribbon of the road
carrying the message to those in need
of the fat and the muscle
and the gristle and the bone.
Solemn are the voices of the remains
to be seen. A whistle screams once, then again.
Two bulls collide on a highway
with a shriek of metal and a stunned discontinuation
of momentum. Pulled grindingly apart
like massive skulls, like condemned matadors
They eventually end up in the tranquil lands
where grass extends through the jaw, through the grille.
The axles sigh and abandon themselves to rust.
Mice nest in the upholstery padding, eat
the coatings off the wires, while
the light scrapes the siding
whiter and whiter, like bone, like
the interminable end of shadows.

The Smallest Shaved Bird in North America

is this little peeperfella that lives
in my overalls left breastpocket.
Twice a day he comes out
and shaves his teeny pink body
all slick and shiny. He doesn't spend
much time with other birds. They
laugh at him and plump out their feathers,
to make him feel small.
So he hides in my pocket, poking
his little bald head out at the daylight,
eating the crumbs that fall from my beard

Thoreau's Monkey

My monkey!

My monkey!

cried Thoreau,
in his little cabin
on Walden Pond.

When Rocks Go Bad

Walking in the strip of woods on afternoon
Between the highway and the mall,
O found a stone, a grayish, round, and smooth stone
slightly bigger than my closed fist.
I picked it up. It spoke to me.
It said: "Throw me through a window."
I felt strangely compelled to obey.
Walking onto the parking lot of the mall,
I raised my arm to fling the stone
through the nearest car window.
But the stone stopped me.
"No," it said, "Bigger. Find a bigger window."

The Toad

There are three sections of The Toad:
Upper Toad, Toad Motor, and Lower Toad.

Upper Toad is packed with wriggling green
snaketails, elastic, and a bitter jelly.

Toad Motor holds the dynamo,
the coiled springs, the lotus heat.

Lower Toad contains a rubber vesicle
packed with hundreds
of tiny humming spheres.

My rooster that emits soft, rose-delicate roosterlight.
The clinking of my rooster's silver spurs!
The round yellow eye of my rooster.
(He's not *your* rooster).
My rooster of the woodfire feathers.
My song-and-dance rooster.
My vaudeville rooster.
O god! The merciless eyes of my rooster!
My rooster's car has a sunroof.
My beak-knife rooster.
Where is the red-golden sun that is my rooster?
Remember in the theatre when my rooster was in my pants
 and he poked his head out of my fly to eat some popcorn?
 The lady next to me thought it was my penis.
My iron-wrought rooster.
My fragile, gravy-filled rooster.
Sleep, sleep, my rooster.
Tomorrow you crow the dawn.

Bats

come in at night and steal
the sugarwater nectar
from the hummingbird feeders.
They take quick sips and
dart off into the darkness,
their tiny tongues
blazing with sugar.