
Still Lost in the Woods

poems & more
from North Carolina & beyond
~November 2013- December
2014~

Dawson Gage

Seasonal Doubt

Words of a Feather (@White Oak, 23 November)

Shrug off the signals
think on the sky
radio towers
ain't no alibi

wait just a morning
here how do you
tell...

...the broken branches
angling from the
merely barren
dangling?

...the leaves that had
to fall anyway
from these few
knocked loose
by the birds
floating softly at
my perch
on a cool wet patio?

Saturday morning nature
in action below now
briefly this lavender
sky and rejoice!
For the human town

done had it's fun
and spent the night
discarding the dawn

birds by the dozen
in hedges dozen
by dozen in the
nearby trees and
on higher the birds
in multitudes
stretching their wings

squirrels leap in
mischief about the
precincts of the
many birds

without warning
someone gives a signal
fat moon visible
passenger jet aloft
speeding through a
clear sky someone
gives the signal:
a squadron of birds
takes flight to mock
the silver planes and
jive the daylight moon

hardly a whimper

of human traffic and
nothing but underwear
hiding my body

bare feet on cold bricks
what do they know
that I don't just
wait a morning here
be anonymous
think now please on the
brightening sky
neither we nor they
have a real alibi
so rest your mind
for the moment in
animal company

I stand up to clap
my hands loudly
once and a hundred
birds take flight

In Mary's Bedroom

Our winter, this winter
at last an arrival
within a cousin's pink bedroom
silence obtains, blackness
fills the window's view, beyond,
only wetness of the night

ah, but yet in the cubbies
of the white desk objects
are stirring, finding their voices,
playing their natural parts

plush dogs with coats of
polka-dots and scribbled words
guard a pile of silver dollars
half as well as whole

a nest of photographs
leans casually upon a
bottle of female vitamins
behind lie pocket dictionaries
atop it all a coozie, perching

and a cartoon princess held
in her prince's arms, both
trapped in a musical waterball
yet sealed stuck in its box

receipts and forms and
forms ribbons plastic
bags and receipts

and letters and beads
and tickets to beauty shows
living next door to
the sunglasses sharing

their cubby with contact
lenses and bandaids

and upon the blue dresser
three candy perfumes in
loud sassy bottles keeping
distant from the gentle
pink wall

and looming above them
dangling from white hooks
a coven of bracelets
a jury of necklaces
are studying our room
(study me, since I'm here)
with the insight of pink
secret cultures, curved
perspectives of faraway planets

between the two windows
a flock of colored
sheets of paper flew
two thousand miles upon
human winds to carry
such honestly childish traces
of civilization that knows
the meaning of love
that they might cling
flush to a pink wall
testimony here of a future

that hides within the heart

and beneath the mosaic
another six cubbies climb
one, then two, then three
full of books and garments
earrings and tiny silver
keys yes one, then two,
then three, you see?

just the minimum shape
of a pattern's beginning
a stairway in progress
that leads by example

and atop the third stair
sits a solid pink heart
more wild and awake
than the comforting walls

and up from a partial stairway
a yellow fish is
swimming up, up,
cryptic colors streaming
behind it knows nothing
of the walls, can see right
clear through the ceiling
all the objects cheering
onward up, up, good luck
swimming into the sky (!)

Apparently, Nothing to Say (January 3 2014)

outset of a new year
finds the town pristine
the weather keeps us inside
to wash the outside clean

a filthy year's departed
nature herself is howling
whistling, wincing farewells
up and down East Coast
all the nation quivers

the anguish bleeds inside
surpassing the windowpanes,
subverting the walls
when did it last feel so
empty, solitary, when last
did gusts in the night
play tunes on the
wind chimes of Carrboro?

Nightmare II

the beeping machines!
Endless songs that sing
one another, the heating
vents that speak with malice
compel my movements
upstairs to
and downstairs fro
frantic reckless bubbling thoughtless

my sentence:

to campaign forever
all about my apartment
all across this city
all through the hospital

Q70 Farewell City

O great, wild city
each view of mine reveals
a different expression on your face

O dark world city my
every visit renews these special
American feelings of might

O dirty old city
the wealth of nations amounts
to so many colorful plastics
strewn along your curbs

Imperial city!
Five days to buffet
along your public circuits
was more yet less
than a dream
since the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours (for now)
O New York City do take
my parting advice

If you'd only pretend
the world isn't yet yours
you might inherit a cherished
piece of the earth

O great world city
remember my voice!

Angry Moon

my roaring forgotten
attentions that upward
I scream scream toward
the moon so full near
full is it full how
full not null too soon
how strange why so
just so true change
change in the life of a sudden
stolen accident

Spring, Ho!

Goodbye you long winter
To the spring: godspeed
the turning of seasons
how welcome, indeed

now gone, their frigid sights,
long strange spells
of captivity at home,

step out, you'll see
a Tarheel sky
effortlessly blue

and yet,
 take care,
 the heavens
 are known
to deceive

our trees still wear (the ones that lived)
quite plainly scars of a crisis
the stricken flora remain in piles
on curb after curb
across the city

of time and the weather
it cannot be said
that all is well
 nor normal

the climate, alas is
nothing of a friend
nor we at all
 her confidante

listen up
 as storms upon storms roll in
 defy them with a welcome

and when sunshine reigns
question its every word

for
 from a place unseen
 nature looks upon us
 with the eyes
 of a treacherous lover

@ Franklin Avenue & Eastern Parkway

“you have to come down
here and that's the bottom
line you know?”
so fresh fluently opines
the man at wheel
of a silver delivery van
--half past three,
 don't mind him he's
just pausing in ritual
merely once again unloads
one dozen bundles
of newly printed news
 on the corner

 babbling Brooklyn gusts
drive rippling chill
parallel eastward down
the tree-lined boulevard
 here where a one-way
street intersects a tripartite

parkway nature and man
gyrate just alike
to cold urban rhythms
 what difference does it,
after all, make?
be they outdated leaflets
 yet taped to the street-lamps
or shivering leaves
 of municipal trees
just the same they flutter
and sway in the breeze
attuned to the compass
of the city

April 3 Just After Midnight

if the apartment
is a compartment
meant to keep me
apart from chaos

should my habits
conspire against me
dose me with flavorless
deep anesthesia

come whatever the spring
so gleefully keeps
in its pocket
I sip my tea

Song for Brooklyn Windows

As the rain came down
on a cool city night
(I) had to ask myself
am I living right?

And should sleep not come
until (the) morning light
(well) it's a strange world so
I keep it in my sight

If you let me down slow
I will help you (get) up
If you'd let me down slow
I could help you up

oh (Lord) where should I go
oh when should I stop
I will help you get up
if you just let me down slow

New York City to Durham (A Dream Sequence)

Escape from New York

Southbound bus rolls through New Jersey swamps
gears and beams and powerlines honeycomb
the brown marsh-scape
freight machinery and chemical tanks envelop
the flat wastes in every direction
downtown Manhattan melts out of sight
in a blanket of dirty vapor
last but not least, the Freedom Tower
disappears—the top, then the middle,
then the bottom

Delaware

Stream down down
make good time pressing
on down
 south bound
long range bus
 like a hot blade
cuts a clean path
 straight down through
thick steam
 drown drown
no! no!
 Stay strong!
Stream stream
 past the toll-booths
on down

 through the tunnels
where the hell are we?
We're in Delaware!!

Astra-Zeneca

Steam from metal vents
on the dreary rooftops
of medicine factories
joins itself to the swirling fog,
(just) one more shade of gray added
unto the muted daylight

On the Bus

imperial hodge-podge
whip-lash back-wash
serial wink-nudge
fat-cash Bos-Wash
mega-bus tours
 the megalopolis

Rewind to Brooklyn Morning

this time, by myself in Brooklyn
woke to the sounds
of violent renovation
two stories down
with the pummel of jackhammer
scraping screech and clang
of several shovels
the building courtyard
remade to a crater

orange soil gasps fresh air
after decades trapped
showers dripping down
the workers stomp slip stomp
in heavy boots to churn
a mix of earth and rain into
fine and vibrant clay

Outbound from Union Station

Hello Jefferson
still we keep you
fixed in our reverent spotlights

Hello Washington
keep your red-flash
beacon bulbs blinking

Thank you Pentagon
for all that you've done
(all things seen and unseen)
one of these days
we'll vote to
 make you a circle
or better still vote
 to discard geometry

Hello Northern Virginia
I'm just passing by
I haven't got clearance
 to survey

the classified temples
 concealed in your suburbs
 clothed in your forests
oh dimly somehow
 before me explodes
the scene of your novae
 with nothing redacted
behind thick walls
of inverted mirrors
the powers that be
steal hugs and kisses
from the people

The View from A54

Holy Saturday Night

caught unawares in the driving rain
I saw for the very first time
here Good Friday and Easter 'twain
the reason that sings beyond rhyme

that liquid dance of sincere feeling
 in the depths of night
 desperation
 foolish energy
 to talk and listen
 talk and talk
 as if the answer
 might be found

just as we once
 upon a time
with smiling mugs
 performed
with trembling thoughts
 dissembled objects
trapped in earnest
babbling love
 sweetness raging
roaring nonsense
 shared among new
friends who take each word
for granted,

nevertheless,
(for heaven's part)
the rain persists
I'm feeling lucky

May 2 – Enter the Typewriter

I am a twenty-first century man
and I know how to do
more things than I can
and mine is the power to do
without knowing
to go where I please
(but not say where I'm going)

I'm a textbook 21st century man
my life has unfolded according to plan
I follow no master
but mine own desire
my free-moving will
is a soldier for hire

My twenty-first century mind
is a mess, for reasons, by now
you could probably guess
but fear not for my 21st century soul
it is under surveillance
but not under control

Windows Open at My Desk at Dusk

Softly rock the neighborhood treetops
brooding clouds preclude
 the leftover daylight
shade by minute by shade
the sky crawls toward
its point of oasis
and moment of balance
transcendent calm on
Friday evening in early May

May 6

the scent of the night
sears impressions boldly
on my my open my mind

I volunteer to reacquaint
my fearful feeling
yearning finger nails and tips
with the special wisdom
whose origin is pain

May 16

In case I would forget
after midnight I'm trembling
under hiccups
but still I'm full
to the brim with
happy memories:
perverse, to be sure

May 22, Lament for Thailand

tenth waking hour
of yet another
mind-sizzling day
 and the weather accords
full sun conducting
a children's orchestra
of late morning steam
 dismay is their theme
let's then not forget
 that one bad turn
 compels an answer
let's not forget then
 that radio news-bells
 echo and echo and
let's don't forget that
 when a bird screams
 in Thailand:
birds of North Carolina
 relay the scream so
storms might move on Washington

For Maya Angelou, R.I.P.

what will we do when the cage
is comprised by invisible lines
in space?
that shift and writhe?
appear and vanish with
capricious humor?

Oh Maya,
 you knew the score and the
 count and the point and
 the counterpoint too

But nowadays Maya
in life we pantomime the
finches that Darwin witnessed
upon shores of one island
 or else the other
 we drift
 though free
 to take wing
 to mingle and breed
 to connect the island dots
 with a line of our life
 though free, confinement to a
single island shore is what we chose

Maybe it's enough at times
to raise storm clouds across
the horizons of the heart

but Maya, at least one consolation
 comes to mind
in exile freely chosen
 the song has changed key
 and the words have jumbled
 and the cadence forgotten

and remembered three times
and again

so when the day comes
(and it will)
that we migrate to-and-fro
among islands on the earth
the cages will bend themselves
 into sculpture
and our motley book of songs
will attain
 cacophony fit for the angels

CYC Upstairs #2

Wrightsville Island
where the line of the beach
defies the simple points
 of the compass
rooftop rocking chair
high clear view unto
Banks Channel soundscape
May veers into
 her terminal weekend
90 degrees left-----><
gaze (now) matching coastline
strong surf rolls and breaks
in clean lines shorebound
sparks of white, too
whipped by wind

into action
splendid sturdy jetty
in the distance
tranquil sailboats glide
slowly back toward (the)
inlet on the gentle evening

June 7

The morning light *aiya!*
Too strong beam beam inside
aiya shut the blind
quick think of something
here comes the morning
oh heart why ever do you
drum so loudly on
the first waking moments
of my day?

June Friday 13

wheels of the bus groove pause pause
pause, groove groove pause, unknown
cause
doors of the swing go swing in swing
out swing swing, hiss hiss swing oh
doors of the bus do swing hiss swing
hello, goodbye to town (!)

Saturday Evening Meditation

Saturday evening pacifism
the world is made of rings
the sun descends, let's not pretend
we know what sunset brings!

the iron fence
enclosing the pool
is a ring
and the grass
beyond the fence
is shaped like a ring
and the inner apartments
also make a ring
ah hah the whole neighborhood
is after all, a ring

and hung on (the) iron fence
in case you drown,
a ring
and round my neck
ah ha!
a ring!
on a leather string

The Meaning of June

Not even half the year
has taken place
but just in case
hold on to my calendar for me

July 1 Rabbit Rabbit

in days of heat
our prayers coincide
with plates piled high with rhymes
and cups full to the brim
with friendship

July 10 CYC #3

heavy steady wind
drives north on north by north
sets forth up coast
to coax the very ocean
break by break
 from beach to beach

Ides of July

My oh my
here goes July
between bottom of the pool
and the ceiling of heaven
shades of blue
confuse themselves

me oh my
again July
in magic town
where moods return
as perennial blossoms

White Oak Victory Swim

waning moon clear
not smudged by the night clouds
still pure moon light
glows in the water

who but we two
look down through the clean
sweet moonlit swirling chlorine
no hint here of a spy-glass
gaze unseen obscene
how dare you
guess that the moonlight
makes us keen to flaunt
the mores of the neighborhood

July 20, Franklin Ave. Shuttle

“Ain't God God”
says T-shirt of a man
who paces on platform
at station of Prospect Park

and ain't that the truth?
that he is who is?
but is that all that he is?

And isn't it so that
I am who am
as we are me

but the question (remains):
can we keep it all together?

July 22, Union St. Courtyard/Lament for Palestine

all the world is holding
fearful breath awaiting
fateful morsels of news
that will not change
our minds

cool air motionless
of a Brooklyn building courtyard
notwithstanding one feels
(I'm sure I do, do you?)
the rambling flames
that run amok
 in the Holy Land
where soon enough
 no holy things
will be left to stand

New York to Baltimore (Take II)

does POW-MIA (black flag) with
stars and stripes together
fly half-mast
along the highway
does it stay like that all day?
what would need to happen
for the flags to climb to the
 top of that pole?

Baltimore->D.C.

Slowly the
sun falls down to cast
clear silhouettes with forms
of the skyline of Baltimore
 likewise furious evening sun
blows shadows through toy rings
of heavy port land machines
 bizarre chimera of a building
houses the National Federation
for the Blind
 towers of Baltimore's urban heart
mimic random stairways to
nowhere
 cloverleaf roads weave
knots through thriving
forests, such a compound shape
so lovely so perplexing
hither thither bends the traffic
outbound inbound sways the forest
 slowly on westerly
downward falls the mighty sun

D.C.->Richmond->Durham

bus-seat cushions
wrapped heavily in palette
of blues derived from
science-fiction flashes

Goodbye White Oak

the good ship

Tiananmen remains afloat
in the rippling neighborhood pool

The Absent Breezes

Nine Eleven Twenty Fourteen

I.

you say "ISIS"
I say "ISIL"
you say crisis
I say "lie still!"
 hold still!
and they entice us
we lose the will
to tame our vices
kill spill kill thrill!

thirteen years of life
spent in the reign of terror
don't let's blame the knife
(it's) the surgeon made the error

thirteen years of death
call it what you will
best guess a year from now
death (gon') be with us still

oh thirteen years of night
oh how many more to fear
a war just can't be right
whose end is never near

II.

sandstorms rage in all directions
grains of the awful truth
in flight so fast so wild
the tears in my eyes
turn to mud upon
my burning cheeks

when I try to read
those secret scores
that teach my heart
the rhythm of wrns
behind the very notes
they climb, they fall
they grow and shrink
and swell and blink
heart can't keep pace
a vicious fight inside
my chest and you ask
that I think of peace?

III.

passengers prepare for
war in the terminals
every single day

pilots steer their wings

and aim arrows at the Earth
from ten thousand miles away

warplanes trace lines of cold light
in arcs that span throb quiver
among the cities darling
where I keep my toys
 tools
 weapons
 dreams

September 29 House of Meetings

meet me inside
the slits on the walls
through which leaks lamplight
and telephone calls

find me in paintings
where I'm at my losses
with the birds and the boats
and the skyline of crosses

hide with me silently
shut all the drawers
quick take cover
in the cracks in the floors!
meet me halfway
between boredom and pain
I'll save you a seat

upon drops in the rain

meet with me different
and we'll stay the same
forgetting for once
how we spell our own name

(ain't that a shame?)

toes getting colder
and autumn does come
we choose to be older
but not to be numb

Water in the New River Loves the Sky

amid the hills upon the weekend
riverside, my heart drives hard,
and wildly too, unable to divorce
its beat from information's void

raindrops collide their way down
into the valley's
canopies to patter out the count
of how, when, why the fall comes

so too raindrops, in their numbers
descend unto river oh
and so cleverly the splashing dots
embrace their fleeting chance to join

for after all the water did flee
from the clouds and
 so join the river
and soon the water bids good
 bye to the rivers and
 thus rejoins the sky

II.

hard, so hard to treat oneself as serious
when prayers meet no answer on demand
and trouble swallows all it meets, imperious

cheer now cheer yourself to live delirious
madness! Plant dreams here while we stand
at all costs keep your eyes and loves all curious

out there out our window hills how treacherous
sloping water threatening quick, commands
our very feet and ground beneath them treasonous

Sleepy Grace

alas, sleepy, seeking grace
clipboard is the record
but first, the object begs
cold gallons of days now passed
and baby jars of joy preserves
I bring it all to a room
shut the door, and once inside
sleepy, seeking grace
I try to hold the parts
of my life in place (!)

Form Play (October 12)

I.

perfect poise
 just beyond threshold of night
quiet noise
 leaks from a place out of sight

II.

at bedroom window
power tools whine and crickets
do not take notice

III.

wiki campaigns
in verse, please don't
too small, quatrains
so there, I won't

IV.

electrical chargers coiling their way
from wall to gadget pausing not at all
neither having time to stop, but just play
and play, all day, feeling us in their thrall

V.

short term sound memories betray
a passionate care for smaller lines
perfection sought among what letters say
demands betrayal then of perfect signs

VI.

poem six plays tricks
on me, why me?
and Roman 6
oh why V-I
and not I-V ?!

End of Shandy Lane

yellow sun flows unrepentant
yet not without lowly posture
cloudless sky does not object
to provocations from on high
 from where the daylight
 rolls to drench the trees
 and bleach away paint jobs
 to warm the shingles
 to heat the asphalt
 slow cook the fallen leaves
neglected suburban palace home
end point on the line
 of Shandy Lane
I can't complain
so long as spectacles and woes
pervade the airwave news
to greet morning's final
golden hour with a smile
 is our defiance

Election Day 2014 Ha Ha

caught in the vice
of these same two vices
what costume shall the nation wear
for all tomorrow's parties?

and what will she say
and where will she fall
when Tuesday comes around?
she'll don once more
the same two gowns
and laugh
 herself
 to sleep

Stray Thoughts at Weaver St. Market

how many syllables make Carrboro speak?
beneath aluminum awnings and
branches of the knowing trees
townspeople gather in twos by
threes by fours to taste the
groceries of fast education
to drink from the bottles of style

cross the arms
of your long-sleeve shirt
fiddle your bracelet
toy with your cold hands

Sticker Crisis

raising our children
in digital tundras
and jungles of flexible morals
what can we do to defy
the misguidance transmitted
in every direction good grief

which are the things
that we ought to promote
for the children to hold
in their sensitive hands?

Acorns and leaves and
refuse left in wake
by meetings of grown-up friends?
trust the youngins
far as we see, or further?
maybe, yes, no, I wonder
should we chase them
all the way down to the
fastness of daydreams
without their permission
in spite of our sunny
commitments of life
to fear for the young
ones cannot be helped but
better not let our troubles
covey on our faces and
honestly, what can be done

when they, like we did once,
confront the perils of germs
and emotions and towns and
seasons so why do the
children unsettle our world
they remind us, in short that
achievements and powers
notwithstanding we're
just like them, together
still lost in the woods

Lion's Gate

one by one degrees of heat
escape the air
and flee elsewhere
while hints of autumn repeat
our common sense
here on the fence
now two seasons briefly meet
in Lion's Gate
at any rate
change the climate cannot cheat
nor can the white
and yellow lights
autumn leaves no cheap conceit
untouched unturned
unlit unburned
here two seasons briefly meet
in Lion's Gate
at any rate

6046 Basement Trembles

The heater it tries to
insult me
the fireplace
sings me a song
I should use past tense
but it was so intense
I guess I
remembered it wrong
when ordinary things
begin to speak
for themselves
and slandering, too
directed at you!
go ahead
consult me
 you'll find me by
 the fireside waiting
 for the flames to depart

Chapel Hill Underground (December 1)

I.
sticker subversions blanket
stalls in the bathroom
alongside etched and smeared
graffiti enjoining love
and joking of fear and suicide

down in our basements

where we mingle and swirl
all driven by liquor or else
by lust or else by one
or more of a dozen diffuse desires

yes here again we arrive
amid cracked glazed cement
open rafters laden with
electric cobwebbed threads
and walls heavy with paintings
of joyous absurdity remind
us obliquely that the tingling
excitement in our hearts
is not just our youth
but the real thing

II.
upon a stage
just one foot high
awash in blue light
clinging loosely
or tightly to the mic
and the midi and the
teleprompted verses now
but when the chorus
comes around you feel
your voice on higher
ground for when your
song is one that voices
dare to share and bodies

may conduct through those
special circuits we keep
always at the ready
beneath our jaded skins
in case the living music
should return with all
of its dangerous might

@Morganton Rd. (December 26)

warm golden light
of old-fashioned filaments
renders a proper mood
for channeling of things
long past
 and yet these things
remain no less alive and
in this moment
really
 looking
 closer
bygone days flow inside
this bedroom like a
draft of cold air—
no walls nor windows
thick enough to insulate
our present from the
spells of holiday wind