

## **This Far**

To think we've actually made it this far  
despite the viruses space dust and dark matter  
the missile envy the failed brinksmanship  
in Seoul City Ho Chi Minh City  
the City of Angels the City of Brotherly Love  
all those remote horror movie locations  
despite the pills and the Pill the antibiotics  
the solar storms traversing us each  
eleventh year since Hiroshima  
to this end of the second Christian millennium,  
this Piscean Age Virgil said would be Golden

Having had our second coming-of-age  
Freedom Summer to the Summer of Love  
those delicious years as the world blossomed  
on spindrift between the killer waves  
of open markets and rightwing populism

Having endured the aftermath underground  
coming down to earth to find ourselves  
a place to sit out the storm collect our thoughts  
tend our gardens and mind our own beeswax  
letting our offspring outgrow such makeshift nests  
as we were able to piece together in darkness  
letting our imaginations attempt  
solutions that don't require sacrifice

Not dying before we were too old to be trusted  
or know first hand what gravity does in time,  
not completely worn out from making a living,  
adolescent in some ways even now  
in love more than ever with these ephemeral bodies  
(what time looks like in three dimensions  
the form it takes in these latitudes)  
making up with pointed consciousness  
as best we can for loss of faith in a god  
(that foregone conclusion) as well as in works of reason  
that were supposed to save us from ourselves  
by building a post-lapsarian paradise  
out of the allocated abundance of goods

Nervous as never before about the failure  
of vital organs: kidneys heart brain

Congress Supreme Court Presidency  
the rising cancer and morbidity rates  
the inner workings at ward and precinct levels  
but passing our Saturn returns, our seven times seven  
in a breeze, passing fifty-five the year  
they raised the limit again, passing gas  
more than ever but here, weathering  
the unending death throes of Romanticism  
the days and nights when rage was all the rage  
the dying from sex instead of just for it  
the worldwide jump in US arms sales  
since the walls came down Berlin to Soweto  
the gales of free market democracy  
bringing Bretton Woods to Suriname  
leaving where the cold warriors had been a gap  
the Righteous Right was only too happy to fill

Still torn between the conviction that everything  
is predetermined, a matter of cause and effect  
(freedom of choice at best only choosing to do  
what we have power and inclination to do)  
and the niggling suspicion that everything  
especially inside where we think we are  
is open-ended and subject to acts of will,  
still bleeding from scratching that last seven year itch,  
but fairly fit otherwise, considering,  
though more than a little tired at this stage  
of all the lines, excuses and other bullshit

—tired of having the public good sold out  
to private greed: the forests clearcut  
the air and water becoming viscous the soil  
sterilized the politics of person  
personality and ecstasy  
conflated with rugged individualism  
liberty with state capitalism  
world peace with the Pax Americana  
property rights with the ark of the covenant  
the right to bear arms with the sweet lightness of being

—tired of republics built on slavery  
democracies based on ability to pay  
cities of God with walls around them  
churches invested in arms manufacture  
revolutions that don't gladden the hearts

of the people as the *Book of Changes*  
says they should but end up as only  
flip sides of the coin or hit singles  
by and for the usual suspects  
with clean nails who always seem to believe  
in the words of one of our founding fathers  
the country ought to be run by those who own it

—tired of lowest common denominator  
democracy tyranny of the greatest number  
unanimity without amity  
no censorship just good manners  
the body counts not counting those disappeared  
always having to remind ourselves  
the Constitution is not a suicide pact  
or writ of servitude to Daddy Warbucks

—tired of watching the fortunes of war trickle down  
through the polished fingers in charge of the till  
then evaporate before hitting the ground  
down here where misfortunes rain like red ink  
coagulating in the eyes of children  
fermenting in the bellies of misused women  
shrinking the dreams of once-virile men

—tired of be bop doo wop hip hop  
played in the cadence of shop shop shop  
coming into us in thumps and pulses  
the steady diet of predigested worms  
pouring into our ears so we can't think  
in any rhythm or register but cash,  
every instrument of every culture  
morphed into a financial instrument  
every note of every song we sing  
a bank note no more than legally tender  
strip-searched at customs and only allowed in  
redressed in blue jeans, logos and credit cards

—tired of the political *can't* whenever  
we mention economic democracy,  
everyone sucked into the cash nexus  
struggling to keep their heads above water  
in pursuit of money as happiness  
who can't imagine what a self might be  
except in terms of private property,

millions hungry in history's richest nation  
fighting each other for left-overs while fortunes  
are paid to players to play with little balls  
showing their perfectly eager bodies on screen,  
*for what it's worth* universally understood  
as the definitive Americanism

—tired of hearing that driving someone to ruin  
is rational and moral that nature's law  
divine law requires that some of us  
suffer poverty and inordinate pain  
that *karma* means reward and punishment  
a contract between a feather's weight and our heavy  
hearts so afraid of losing what little  
we've got we spend our lives as good consumers  
addicted to endless growth and acquisition  
unable to answer the question *How much is enough?*  
willingly buying ourselves into bondage  
to corporations programmed to replicate cancer

—tired of trying to end the war by electing  
one lesser evil after another  
in one popularity contest after another  
the equation of democracy  
with business-class neoliberalty  
a nationalism that makes people believe  
what's good for GE is good for us all,  
fundamentalist religious movements  
in bed with fundamentalist economics  
the top one percent worth more in dollar terms  
(what counts, as they say) than the rest of us together

—tired of born-again candidates slicked up  
with that old-time religion signifying  
that freedom *of* in no way means freedom *from*,  
that faith is morality's sole source, that those  
without that faith aren't fit to hold office  
and are in fact the main reason our great  
nation is headed for perdition and ought  
to be made to see in faith-based schools,  
battalions and prisons the error of their ways

—tired of consent and consensus manufactured  
by international conglomerates  
that twist fluff-dry and spin public opinion

in cybernetic brainwashing machines  
headlines that say the majority think  
the opposite of what the majority think  
the polls skewed by design and data-juggling  
justices who rule for injustice  
landslide victories claimed for slim margins  
(if that) in elections where more than half  
the people eligible to vote don't bother

—tired of being told by those who believe  
a little bit of tyranny is OK  
that privacy is a luxury in times  
like these when crime is rampant in the streets  
market boardroom pulpit and White House,  
that if we have nothing to hide we should be happy  
lying in bed with the bugs more secure  
for the cameras on streetlamps  
the webs of information homing devices  
the hidden algorithms of search engines  
the greenbacked obelisk looking over our shoulders

—tired of the chemical imbalance  
the fossil fuel conglomerates induce  
in air water land and living tissue,  
insinuating their toxic substances  
into every available opening  
farm to pharmacy cradle to grave  
writing the laws and regs that permit them  
to poison the planet and its inhabitants  
piecemeal in the guise of environmental  
protection with only a slap on the wrist  
as each dirty secret is found out  
each compound is taken off the market  
to be replaced with another then found out  
so forth and so on as the glaciers melt  
the world turns into a hazardous waste dump  
while those leading us in the march of progress  
weep all the way to the Chemical Bank

—tired of genocide ecocide suicide  
king of the mountain and queen bee mistaking  
technological and financial for moral  
social legal and lately even genetic  
superiority, misconceiving  
ability as imperative (based

on nothing more than the drift of words  
toward their own reification) reducing  
religion to platitudes dogma and lines of credit,  
the nostrums and tribal notions sold from pulpit  
bench oval office and ivory tower  
silvery things with wings like angels and missiles  
packaged in holier-than-thou condescension  
patriotic gore and the rule of gold:  
liberty narrowed down to product choice  
equality put off till the *danse macabre*  
fraternity an undergraduate pledge  
big money and dollar-sign minds controlling  
the triple threat of schools / media / work  
the tiger biting its own tail become  
Saint Economy Ouroboros Mater  
Magna and Paterfamilias rolled into one  
big enchilada on our merry-go-round  
altar to what passes for sound reason

—tired of all the mystical mumbo jumbo  
crackpot theories and haywire revelations  
propounded in the wake of each of our lost  
generations and failed revolutions  
by backlot philosophers barroom prophets  
drugstore geniuses and self-help hucksters  
the specialists in public righteousness  
the psychedelic snakeoil salesmen  
recycling the greatest stories ever told  
trying of all things to talk us into it:  
transcendence ghosts in the machine  
unification by analogy  
salvation by prefigured imagination  
love by subscription and pie in the sky when you die—  
desire and fear turning ignorance  
into mystery mystery  
into divinity divinity  
into reputed immortality  
the fossil record devolved to deluvial silt  
deposited by the sick notion of sin

—tired of the Serial Goddess model  
this theater of cruelty and farce:  
the knotted string of beggar and fisher kings  
the game show winners celebrated each spring  
toasted all summer plowed under after each harvest

bearing their brothers' blood and fathers' guilt  
twined like ivy and snakes around their arms  
served up the following fall as fond object lessons  
for Our Lady of Perpetual Orgasm

—tired of the I Am That I Am version:  
the magic delta (hand eye mouth)  
intoning the holy strictures of *thou shalt nots*,  
the parade of daughters sacrificed on the smooth  
stone of patrilineal reproduction  
wanting above all to be wanted,  
or cast in the runway treadmill fashion  
sex upstaged by sexuality  
disporting themselves in various modes of undress  
their lovelives self-censored simulcasts  
digitally enhanced for viewing pleasure,  
or turned into sexless workers for hire and hive  
their labor a red mark in a two-column ledger  
a hymn to piety and drudgery  
so He can be on top of it and her  
as if Lilith weren't here from the first

—tired of love that isn't allegiance  
a sacrament of mind / body / heart  
each becoming oneself in another  
loving enough to let each other be  
whatever we need to be to be free  
a gift not just a token of exchange  
not pay-on-demand obedience a ripoff  
numbers game circus act perverted  
into abortive productions in a ring  
that doesn't liberate but binds in fear  
and abject co-dependence: marriage  
as rape and mutual assured destruction  
sexual politics a state of affairs  
Big Brother and Big Nurse in our bedrooms  
enforcing the law of diminishing returns

—tired of poems about poetry and poets  
ink-blot exercises and gut-spilling  
in spurts of breath all over the page,  
phrasemakers egging each other on  
with in-jokes and arcane innuendoes  
the *morts-petits* of post-modern hindsight  
propped up for viewing in the *lebensraum*

the inner dialogue of Logos and Eros  
expressed into stand-up comedy  
community as a literary conceit  
pursuit of novelty as a way  
to get out of thinking through the given,  
titillation and shock aping those arts  
generated closer to the heart  
as if concocting bizarre metaphors  
were a kind of self-creation allowing  
the dying animal at the moment of death  
to die satisfied knowing what it had done

—tired of the thickening line,  
the coarsening of civic idiom  
from butter wouldn't melt to gutter mouth,  
freedom of expression abstracted  
into the blob that ate the city of angels,  
fun and games into the death of art,  
furniture rearrangements a face-saving  
for nothing to say but *look how sincere I am*,  
extravagant metaphors expedient motives  
florid and fluorescent graffiti-figures  
outrageous caricatures grotesqueries  
this month's personality disorder  
over-estimating the ordinary  
promoting the ugly as beautiful  
the garish loud and trashy as radical chic  
a mishmash of stuff as sublime—  
superlatives and surreal juxtapositions  
inane and pathetic images  
disjointed broken field running  
obligatory symbolisms supreme  
fictions houses of cards we willingly enter  
sales pitches of any frequency  
snow jobs of any kind obfuscations  
deliberate misdirection and outright lies:  
each life is too short and all our lives  
together still more too short  
to hoard or falsify any information  
to block any course of inquiry  
that might be to the point or otherwise useful

—tired of trying to figure out the meaning  
of meaning, the difference of difference,  
being *qua* being, the in-itself



and for-itself, this in terms of that,  
you in terms of me and *vice versa*:  
sympathetic to the instinctual search  
for things in themselves, the essence of being  
at home with ourselves at one with ourselves  
having the time of our lives this time but not  
forgetting the suffering words can bring,  
the pain and humiliation that come from thinking  
of things as ideas ideas as things real  
flesh and blood people as characters  
personifications allegorical figures  
categories in some double-blind scheme  
mere statistics examples of something else

—tired of infinitive expectations:  
*to know to understand to have to hold*  
the putting off into the subjunctive  
at best the ablative absolute at worst  
all we could possibly want in our reflex  
for instant gratification here where we are  
now— infinity and eternity  
getting lost in one another at this  
intersection where metaphor and fact  
cross each other while all the traffic lights  
are flashing all their colors all at once

—tired of incremental strategies,  
that lockstep into Zeno's paradox  
leaving the poor poor the hungry hungry  
binding the feet tighter and tighter till leaps  
become impossible the promised land  
unwon longing unrequited forever  
landfall never made where love might take root

—tired of being enthralled to the ruling eye  
the mess and clutter of life as lived  
edited only by turns of the head or shutting  
of lids sight without insight  
wit absent that agenbite of inwit  
our ancestors in crime charged us with,  
seeing the world turn into the sun  
each morning, rising to meet the step of the one  
turned toward her, petals blushing in  
these cryptic hands we cup them lovingly in  
even knowing the slightest touch will bruise

the perfect cast of their unfolding complexion.

Over-educated well-read almost  
terminally hip and p.c. tuned in  
to sub-text pre-text nuance double entendre  
hardly ever missing a bet a beat but still  
dumb as stones about whole universes  
inside, still at a loss about who we are  
what this is where we are what we're doing  
ought to be and might be doing here  
what our work together here is  
how to open the heart without so much hurt  
why Venus still finds us in the dark  
whose horse that was that ate the blue rose of Sharon  
where Sylvia is and what comes next

from *Mr America Drives His Car*