

## A Selection of Published Work by David Wolf

**These links will connect you to a selection of work from *Sablier II*:**

“Vernal” in *Anemone Sidecar* (pp. 26-27):

[http://www.ravennapress.com/anemonesidecar/pdf/chapter\\_18.pdf](http://www.ravennapress.com/anemonesidecar/pdf/chapter_18.pdf)

“Gist” and “Descents” in *Mad Hatter’s Review*:

[http://www.madhattersreview.com/issue15/poetry\\_wolf.shtml](http://www.madhattersreview.com/issue15/poetry_wolf.shtml)

“Amaina” in *The Doctor T.J. Eckleburg Review*:

<https://eckleburg.org/amaina-david-wolf/>

**Follow my transient work-in-progress “To Wit, T’ Tweet, To Whom It May Concern” on Twitter (@wolf\_whiskers):**

[https://twitter.com/wolf\\_whiskers](https://twitter.com/wolf_whiskers)

**These links will take you to a work of creative nonfiction and a short story:**

<https://www.cleavermagazine.com/unsteady-on-by-david-wolf/>

<http://www.decompmagazine.com/thenextpoem.htm>

**Below you will find a selection of poems from *Open Season* (Center Press Books, 1999; IA Books, 2006), *The Moment Forever* (IA Books, 2006) and *Sablier* (IA Books, 2006).**

From *Open Season*:

### **The Exchange**

Opening the window to test the cold  
with a breath,  
I see a small boy at the day care across the road  
who sees me and waves.  
I wave back  
and he waves again.  
I wave back,  
he waves,  
I wave—  
We could do this all morning, I figure,  
and as I close the window  
the boy continues  
to wave,  
trying to squint past  
the low-blowing clouds, the swaying trees  
that now fill the glass,  
past the day's reflection  
to what surely must still be there:  
the smile, the waving hand,  
the stranger's face.

## Maneuvers

I grew up in a house with seven TVs.  
I liked it when the heroes got it in the end.

When my grandmother came to sit  
she'd line up three sets in a row  
and watch three different channels at once.  
I'd kneel beside her  
and slap the fat on her arms for fun.

Summers when the reruns couldn't hold us,  
my brother and I would hunt each other down  
in the woods behind our house,  
armed with the latest toy weapons  
or Dad's .45 without the clip.

If you got hit you were dead for 60 seconds.

One night I didn't get up.  
My brother never returned to finish me off.  
I lay there watching the darkness close down the view,  
thinking of the release that always fell  
over the unshaven faces of heroes  
dying in the arms of some full-figured woman.  
I lay there letting the mosquitoes fill with blood,  
trying to slow my heart to starve them off.  
I lay there in the swell of the locusts,  
trying to make it real.

## Love Letter from Michigan

Snow flies  
mid-April  
and so what  
it's pretty yes  
but so's San Gimignano  
this time of year  
unlike the strip to Ypsi  
or Fox Lake  
which looks promising on the map  
until the territory reveals  
the auto plant on the shore  
pinching off waste in the tax-deductible  
sunset of fiscal irresponsibility  
and me I'm just here  
craving another hit of sense  
lost in this evening's holding pattern  
of love me don't leave me thinking  
how lovely it would be  
to feel your orificial blessings  
and the fresh produce con brio of your utterances  
in this cluttered and pathologically diverted  
world of trumped-up loveless surfaces  
hopeless as the knot of my necktie  
uncertain as Little Jimmy Dickens' career—  
O tale of two thousand sequins—  
and just now a momentary dusting  
of Florentine twilight  
leaves me only the residue of this  
my sleeveless errand

## **Thunderheads Thirty Miles East**

anvils of discontent

(or is that giving too much away?)

Willfully obscure yourself

you envision beneath them

a ceaseless line of interstate traffic passing

the escaped convict who thumbs a ride

a mile past the sign that reads:

Prison Area

Do Not Pick Up Hitchhikers

Face it

Those birches

dry and leaning tall into the August wind

and the blue torn half-sponge

upright and hardening on the window sill

veil nothing

save the trace of last summer's Bergamasques

hovering to the east of Como

far from this glazed fugue of remembrance

**So**

So the banister is weak from years of leaning  
So the smokebush turned yellow this year not red  
So the sherry made locally burns going down  
So the wind cleared the leaves from the balcony  
So my cigarette butts buckle like bad ankles in the ashtray  
So I wear only the clothes given to me as gifts  
So the cupboards are indifferent  
So I dreamed I tore your letters into strips of sentences  
and tossed them exploding at your feet  
So you didn't mean anything slipping your hand  
in my pocket under the table  
So the oil burned for eight days and nights  
So life is open season on the living  
So your birthmark burns a hole in my memory  
So that brown slur of a river stole you after all

## **No Solution**

Today I became you  
so I would not have to go on  
reaching for you in the night.  
"Leave me alone," I said,  
hugging myself in the dark.  
I was lying.

## **Morning Inventory**

New fat.  
No new hair.

## **Poem**

There in the muddy gutter:  
the pink petals of a plastic geranium.

No.

It's the shredded blossom  
of a real candy wrapper.

## **I Ask You**

Shouldn't we be doing our laundry naked  
if we really want to do  
a thorough job?

## **The Banana on the Counter**

has your name on it.

Connect the spots and you'll see.

Don't get too excited.

It might not be you.

.

The banana on the counter

has been there for days,

ripe as all get-out.

Its favorite all-purpose non sequitur could be:

"I hope the rain doesn't hurt the rhubarb."

.

The banana on the counter

does not miss this morning's donuts

more than I do.

.

The banana on the counter points north tonight

out of no particular sense of allegiance.

.

The banana on the counter

never laughed at the gag about its slippery peel.

.

The banana on the counter  
does not theorize  
the possibility of achieving  
"a primordial intuition of another's lived experience."

.

The banana on the counter  
does not feel  
that pumpkins have it worse in October.

.

The banana on the counter  
does not claim to know  
why I scrub the saucers  
so hard.

.

The banana on the counter may indeed swear  
the bread is breathing  
in all that plastic.

.

The banana on the counter could be longing  
for a hiss at the Cheshire Cat moon.

•

The banana on the counter doesn't think  
those five-dollar ties I bought  
were such a good deal.

•

The *banane* on the counter  
neither loves nor despises the French  
for leaving off a syllable.

•

The banana on the counter  
cannot tire of the relentless gaze,  
nor can it know  
the precise feel  
of this late-hour appetite.

## **Intersection**

We were stopped  
at a green light  
waiting for a long funeral procession to finally pass  
when  
out of the silence  
my old father said—  
shaking his head in wonder—  
"They sure go fast, don't they?"

## Lidless

You lie once more beneath the black anchor  
that swings in place  
of the cheap candelabra fixture  
you swear was there  
hanging so elegantly over your bed  
as you drifted off  
hours  
maybe years ago

The heart you forgot you had  
as you fell (with no memory of falling)  
off to sleep  
echoes now off the walls of your pillow-cave  
and the miracle of waking  
is no small thing you think  
no tin-whistle prize  
no more than a notion now lost  
on the slow wind rising in the late summer leaves  
the same wind you insist is innocent  
of all you shall forever hear in it

Of course you are not alone

But when has this ever calmed you  
there on your back in the night  
suspended in the sea of all  
those stars you can and cannot see  
adrift on that old coarse whisper of a dream:

a wish no more:

eternity

\* \* \*

Acknowledgment is due to the editors of the following publications in whose pages these poems from *Open Season* first appeared.

*Avatar Review*: "No Solution"

*City View*: "Intersection"

*The Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*: "Love Letter from Michigan"

*Hiram Poetry Review*: "The Exchange"

*Jeopardy*: "Thunderheads Thirty Miles East"

*Lucid Moon*: "Poem," "Morning Inventory"

*Poet & Critic*: "Maneuvers"

*Stand Alone*: "So"

*Open Season*: Copyright 2006 by IA Books

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From *The Moment Forever*:

### **The Poetry Writing Instructor**

In a small office  
at a large university,  
she praised someone else's tiny poem  
as "transcendently exquisite."  
My nose itched.

She insisted that I strive for weightier insights.  
She gave me a list of models to read.  
Just because I quoted a line from Byron  
she pronounced me "well read."

"Why don't you take the assignments seriously?"  
she asked.

"*Something* devastating must have happened  
in your personal life this semester.  
You can't go on writing about the moment forever!"

\*

By the stream,  
reading a haiku by Basho—  
Look! Small white butterflies!

\*

Cloud on the horizon—  
you look like a smiling fish.  
What a leap!

\*

Canada geese  
asleep on the river sandbar in the late September sun,  
their long necks curved back  
along their bodies,  
heads tucked deep in their feathers—  
  
How nice to be your own pillow.

\*

**Richard Tillinghast**

told me that Keats  
used to get all dressed up  
to write poetry.

This is a pajamas-and-slippers poem.

\*

## **Disembarkation**

Some in our tour group  
slow down to look  
at yesterday's mayflies  
littering the dock.

Some shuffle ashore  
a little faster.

\*

After the fireworks—  
summer night sky full of stars:  
the big "ooh, ah"

\*

Cat sleeping on the church steps—  
"Hello," I say.  
Only an ear moves.

\*

That crowing rooster  
sounds like a dog  
imitating a rooster.

\*

Windy autumn night,  
the elm tree emptied of its yellow leaves...  
now filled with stars.

\*

Tiny green leaf  
caught in the spider's web—  
Today's special: fly with salad.

\*

Crow lands—  
disappearing into tall grass  
to join the chirping crickets.

\*

Snails  
climbing all over the sign that says:  
"Climbing Prohibited"

## **Moon**

Moon,  
who hasn't seen you?

Well, many of course.  
The sightless,  
and the many small lives who never made it  
into the night?

"Cliché I suppose,  
but one thing history's great and horrible and  
everyone in between  
has gazed upon is that moon," she said,  
as we drank beer on the rail trestle  
one autumn night, years ago.

Here is my translation  
of Li Po's famous poem, "In the Quiet Night":

Such moonglow at the foot of my bed—  
Could there be hoarfrost so soon?  
I lift my head and gaze at the bright moon.  
Lying back, I think of home.

"Why bother with another translation of Li Po?"  
a former colleague asked me one day  
when I ran into him out walking a local nature trail.

"Bother?" I replied. "If you want to know about bother, I will tell you."

\*

Grabbing sage from the garden—  
grabbed a handful  
of caterpillar guts.

## Aubade

*for Wini*

Bruise of morning and I reach  
for you in your sleep.  
You smile, claim a deep breath, dream on.

I lie awhile in the graying segue of winter light  
then rise to read at my desk,  
idling a mind on mannered lines,  
looking quietly for trouble.

I wait, remarking the day,  
moving from page to world to page:  
*brooding birds* clot the bare branches  
swaying slightly in the etched air;  
a few flurries now, *ghosts of last summer's moths*  
returning.

And all *is* nothing until I hear  
your first rustlings in the far room  
as you gather the sea-wash rush of linen about you,  
astir in the spare glow—

waking to a name called  
from the shadows of the shared world.

\*

Snowy rooftop—  
a robin lands, slips, skims back to flight  
this spring morning.

\*

Gnat lands  
on the magazine photo  
of a fruit stand.

\*

Late September—  
dead cicada blowing across the tennis court—  
"Out."

\* \* \*

Acknowledgment is due to the editors of the following publications in whose pages the following poems first appeared.

*Buddha's Temple*: [That crowing rooster]

*Old Red Kimono*: "Richard Tillinghast"

*Sequel*: [Canada geese], [Windy autumn night—]

*Short Stuff*: [By the stream,], [Cloud on the horizon—], [Blurry bird on the bough], [Cat sleeping on the church steps—], "Disembarkation"

*The Moment Forever*: Copyright 2006 by IA Books

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From *Sablier* (Book I):

## I

Bickering essence,  
were you ever more than badgered trace,  
roughed in, roughed out,  
roughed up?  
See me on this.  
Yet what ossuaries we are,  
as the dark weighs in  
awash in late autumn rain,  
the sodden dead leaves plugging eaves  
all over town,  
where I keep seeing  
the latest cattle-rancher rain ponchos  
enshrouding most sadly the executives.  
Eyes averted you go forth,  
nosing around for the apish melody of love,  
whistling away the miles,  
wreathing the hazy length of some gorge.  
One gives the wind room in yet another poem because  
it is ever with us.

A small wave teeters  
back of a big one  
and you there,  
tapping your foot to the exegesis  
because you know better, don't you,  
than to lounge for long in the charmed fog of the enigmatic  
(where I admit I stroked her calf beneath the broad quilt of daylight,

vying for a stake in these hours of mere attendance deemed being).

"You've got to make it  
through the world  
if you can."

Damn if I don't  
accept all the absence,  
all the lack,  
for from certain veiled perspectives  
less can be, to say the least, more  
arousing.

Self now as sharp-dressed wreckage  
gone underground—  
In your reduced understanding,  
keep loving.

And whether or not it is all based upon  
a belief in perception...

You were away and the snow wouldn't budge from the black branch.

(O chalky iced-up town of my boyhood.)

I am like the morning:

No mere unanswered leap of wealth hung in the name of peace.

How I loved the doctor's daughter...

"It's just transference."

Who can argue?

"It takes a professional, let me assure you."

## II

New York never sleeps, only New Yorkers.

To organize is to neglect certain organs.

Floating that afternoon in the clear shallows...

her nipples such rosy islands in the sun.

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.

We would gather in those days on the high bank of the creek,  
deep in the woods, cutting classes, smoking, Camus-like, sifting:

"Let's face it, the universe is far from benignly indifferent,  
it's just indifferent, though even that formulation is, well,  
a formulation, though who can know, certainly the truth is  
not just me."

"So settle down and listen to some good music," the radio advises.

Nothing doing.

As a squirrel curls, hunched on the limb, nautilus-like;

As you dream adrift in rivers coursing down your father's fairways:

Broad arrowhead shadow of a pine

tree pointing my way

not exactly

of course

slightly to my right (yes west)

and I watched

still as an eye could be

as the sun the tree

and everything else too numerous

to mention swung

that squat shadow point more precisely my way...

ends flexing,

square as the bill that buys this loveless advance

hailed as the real

world.

Captive beneath clouds—

dead nations wedged forth from their continents,

loosed to let all borders stream down through the air.

Peace of the sea heaving

at a distance...

forever missing

with a trace.

Conference notes:

New décor, old confines,

the primordial light, the essential buzz...Sing cuccu!

Summer is a-coming though who would know it in an auditorium  
sprinkled with detractors.

Dusk

and our best translation:

"Under the Mirabeau Bridge flows the Seine and our love."

Know some more?

...and besides we all could do worse than agree that in producing oppositions,  
the immediate slide to symmetry, process and inauguration  
risks a misuse of history...

I am chewed.

Chartered gristle, bouncing in ancient ardor,

one's funky slung accruals spraying.

"Where does the truth lie?"

All over the place.

Holy smoke.

Vast gob, broad worlds.

Yawn breaking.

A big yawn

of atomized nothingness.

(Remote spume,

restless sleep of clover.)

The age's normative move eschews at least  
the now more common tactic of pressing  
a double measure of marginalia (critically deep)  
into service...

a serviceable center, no less.

Glide path of past, present, future  
paling beneath a shale sky.

The song, the tale, yea verily: mind's bon voyage.

Caught ourselves remarking  
how greatly, how authentically the best of us felt back then.  
(You know, a legacy of feathered wishes  
scattered wind-borne on the drafts of the straw heart's imperium?)  
The beast jolts from indolence.  
A snare's shudder, in the pocket,  
delirium passing,  
beneath the parallel haven of the vague and the endless  
(selected and with an introduction)...

*She took his hand  
in the young spare spring  
that bade me watch them dance  
down the library steps just as—  
wouldn't you know it—  
the sun flared forth  
then faded back a tad  
(the clouds passing seemingly just shy  
of time-lapse speed all that windy day),  
yes on level ground  
she took his hand  
and it must have felt good, I thought,*

*that's all,  
it must have felt good.*

### III

Aplomb of late afternoon light— tea by the open window.

Later, a little Saumur with the evening news?

Secret life of cut-rate sovereignty.

She actually said to those assembled, "Dashes are my textual trademark."

Fine, but keep the fly

from the lip of the milk carton.

Tough to say where it's all going

but chances are it will be tougher to celebrate when we get there.

Days in the Place Balzac—

bodily dispersal—

I turn out the image once more.

Her dream: to wear white muslin and to live

on a cliff by the sea, somewhere, someday,

with me I remember hoping.

Morning fields dazed in a stupor of herbicide.

Earth hosting a history of guests who don't know when to leave.

"It's love not me rolling over in utter indifference."

A woman bends to kiss

the wooden cross that serves

as her husband's grave marker

and where will the memory go

once she and I and everyone else

who leafed past the news photo today are gone?

A "detour of birth" you called it...

"Severed by what?"

Moist flare of final thought?

Fade out of distilling intuition and reasonable foci?

All that rigor married merely to inswept rumor,

dust of the earth rising?

How this ache the mind insists

on being—

How it returns once more

to the soul's ideal weight—

Soul that remains all or nothing?

"Yours is," she laughed, "a predictably romantic desire."

"Yes, but the necessity that gives rise to the desire confirms

the contemporaneity

of such a value."

"What is the furthest

you have ever jumped?"

...Didacticism, yes, we nodded, but a didacticism conscious

of its own situatedness...

Hush.

Tell it to the spirit of you-know-who,

cutting across the glacier in her flats and long white coat.

...as the glossy republic heaves on, semi-automatically,

bemused in its shimmering diet of light...

If you are tired

you may put your head down

and rest quietly at your desk.

#### **IV**

And whose narrative gloms your faith for now, pilgrim?

No, one forefronts the contextual "nature" of the "Real"

not to reify the notion of the unattainable,  
but to dissolve all the old irony...  
It's all in the tenor  
of your self-reflexivity, sleepyhead.  
Notes amiss in the melody of the wreck...

Work not to overbear your fine soul upon your neighbor.  
For when the hunch comes true we suspect genius.  
Or a galaxy of pearls falling from the heedless azure release of the sky.  
Even as the masonry is hopefully prone to outlast the mason.  
Enclosure turns, wed to anxiety.  
Should your concentration flag, your attention drift and yaw...well, where are you now?  
Holy Ish Kabibble.  
What the business looks like around back  
is apparently too costly for them to care about.  
Your bored ghost, or just a gust of wind  
riffing through the pages of the open book in the next room?  
We all catch up with the dead.  
No hair length but in humidity.  
After dinner at The Teddy Roosevelt Café,  
we walked the vacant streets of the mountain town,  
past the closed shops,  
past the mystic merchandise.  
Cute as a stuffed buffalo  
in the gift shop of the stern hearted.

Seasons trail back o' the hand.  
Impulsiveness,  
some say,  
may have once meant survival.  
God I just did not want to do it anymore so I did it

no longer.

This does not make me a hero  
even in America where I'm busy  
trying to clear my ear,  
pouring solutions down the canal  
and it's not easy to be sure what's in  
any bottle these days.

Products of fear, day before Christmas,  
no difference,

ear's worse and what's more,  
some sweaters are simply too much:

Warmth, pattern, price, you name it.

But thanks anyway (just practicing), yes, thanks.

And remember that billboard?

The one with the trench-coated executive  
waiting on a bench for his commuter train,  
smiling over his laptop computer,  
the line of copy beneath his image reading:

Now You Are Free!

You hear the old music now and you think it reminds you  
of how wondrous it all was back then,  
but no, it was not that way at all,  
it was a lousy and lonely time  
and the music was the thing,  
the only thing that got you through it,  
your only source of grace.

\* \* \*

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