

Sheryl Noethe

Poetry Samples

de facto

1

-that the flesh of a fish
contains fresh water-

She stood on the deck, sick with regret.
Thought about some promises she'd made,
Swam effortlessly to shore, her head covered in black ships
Carrying the remains of the dead king and all his jewels.
Shipped across oceans to an island at war
directly connected to the travesty.

2

To be wanted -- more blinding
than daylight,
that need to be desired.
mind-bending gravity
strong as the moon
I swoon.

You must not insult the integrity
of the wife

3

almost something almost nothing
There is only the approach to zero
in an infinite state would it exist
however undetected, almost nothing
and there's more to come and never enough.

we can't find nothing, it's too full of particles
drifting and spinning in colors, qualities and flavors
running out of names and numbers

every time you think you are at the end
it's only the middle; the cleft of the intermediate.

Grows Horns

Eventually everyone grows horns
Bob said when the man on T.V.
Married the girl for her money.

A brief collapse caused by proximity
To dead nerves beneath the snow
Not yet reconstructed by local regrowth.
Gleaming tendrils climb like ivy across rock.

I heard the starlings in the dark
Sing a hymn: "Bereft, bereft."
Every bird is edible, he told me.

Nine meals away from chaos.
God said the darkness can be felt,
According to the books of men.

In my dream I almost had it,
I would stir the dark sauce from
The bottom and clarify it in smoke.

Just as I thought I could hold
It in my hand and twist the edges,
The coins all rolled down into a drain,

Into the vent of the burner on the oven,
Into jagged metal and junked cars
The phone never worked anyway.

The old philosophers refuse to debate
The concept of zero. There is no start to it.
There is no on-and-off.

To protect us from the horrors of dreams
The body will paralyze itself, relinquish its grip.
Death, brother of sleep, where we are inert
Approaching nothing but never getting near.

2

The rain darkens Buddha's massive face
Behind him, tulips blush like they invented
Color, and nod in approval.

A stream of cool water running through
The curled bottom lip of a crescent moon.
Pushing past the laws of reason.
Still I see the dead friend, stiffly posed
In his chair under a blanket, his eyes empty sockets.
He does not remember being loved.
He remembers working; driving tractors, planting,
Careening home over the prairie from bars
Shooting birds from his bed, spilling more beer.

Does he recall being a monument, an Apollo?
There is a place where he is never lost.

He is striding into the house in his blue shirt.
No apologies required.

Gin

People drink more in the summer.
Suddenly the gin & tonic or the cold beer
Makes sense in an increasingly hostile world.
I used to have no tolerance for cocktails
Now I wait all day for my French gin and lime.
On the radio the news is about death and suffering.
In my backyard the phlox are purple, the little
Wood bridge is rotting away and the dog will not
Stop leaping at the window barking.

Old friends do not return my calls.
They are busy getting famous, while I,
Considering the meditations of Marcus Aurelius,
Try to allow my molecules to dissolve back into
The original formation without complaint.
Now the trees have gone red-golden to salute the fall.
The rocks have been moving around underground,
Seeking the roots of the forest; or maybe they
Are pulled into the web by capillary enmeshment.

Then there is the function of shooting stars.
There is the promise of healing.
A sudden golden rose comes off the mountain.
The doves are calling to each other, and the light
Is like a woman in a purple silk sari, it pulls
From her shoulders and the fringe is a glance
Through the eyelashes of a hummingbird,
Staining the mountain sunset, which seems to take forever
Moving slowly across the spectrum, which is the natural law.
Now we pray for rain, now the woodpecker land and the crows
Are chasing the hawk, and something lands on top of the
Power lines, and trills, calling out for love and territory.
Now the entire planet is on fire. Parched and broken.
Everyone wishes we could return to the past, which,
If you consider, was not so great but had less smoke.

Bloom

Small bonfires in dark futures:
That which is coming into existence is already singed.
Unthinkable limits exist within all knowledge,
Divided by time in the equation.

Time stays. We move on. I had nowhere to live.
I shared a mattress on the floor.
Leafy green trees in that city I loved.

In bars and cars with guys and guitars,
Running contradictions driving at the edge of a limit,
Which once known, is already broken.

Stretches of years actually roared past
Red, light-breaking speed requiring humans to age.
Hoping you'd notice the violins and the quiet between.

Emptiness continues to vibrate and we feel its memory

The sense of loss remains
Stirs pre-history, and the buried dead
Riffle our gardens; bloom.

Un-perishable

One neighbor says *we'll be out of chickens in 3 months*
Another tests an AR-15 rifle in his back yard.
They confer in secrecy but are obviously determining
Which of us to invite into the local street militia.
Supply lines and distributions systems will fail by summer,
He says over the fence, *Fill the basement and garage, store un-perishables,*
Build fences, withdraw from banks, train your dog to defend the fort.

Mid-August and tall yellow flowers droop in disbelief
Maple tree leaves, seeds and debris plummet out-of-season
In greater numbers over the last thirty years.
Volunteer bulbs choke out the Iris, breaking its waist in orange rot.
Insects previously benign are aggressive with stinger and mandible.
Ever more gigantic carpenter ants busily muscle aside the stones
In a pathway and by morning the creatures have pushed them out,
Left them behind like trophies.

I would think I was dreaming but I heard them
Laughing deep in their hoarse throats at me,
Growing in size, taking over parts of the back garden.
Even the reclusive earworms rear back, open-jawed,
Affix themselves to a finger and draw blood.
The daddy long-legs spider bit my foot, chewing
Ferociously. Gnawing and sawing away intently.
I simply couldn't hate him.

I dream I walk the streets of a lonely city
In darkness strangers pass like shadows.
If we have no future the greatest loss will be the imagination.

Particle

*Only when the air and water are poisoned and
the animals gone you will learn that you can't eat
money.*

Chief Seattle

1

To define a structure,
Warm it with your gaze, look
For lines that want edges
In the form of a tragedy or a great sound,
Nonfiction or instrumental.
Use the voice of a friend.

2

Stretch a point into a line.
Square the line. Cube it.
Position it in space.
Give it a spin, a color, try to name it.
After you use up most nouns and verbs;
Out of descriptors,
Identify the velocity, flavors, and qualities.
Move on into the negative numerals
if you can get to zero.
If zero exists: the old philosophers
Are tired of arguing about it.

3

Forced back into the 3rd dimension
Human debris falling from the sky
Damaged; maimed, charred
Beyond belief, dying with every
Breath just as we are now.

4

Thinking only of breaking the atom and accumulating value,
They couldn't fry or boil the dollar bills crisply enough
Without burning them and when broiled they chewed like shoes.
Marinating in oils and sauces only caused the ink to run.
No one could remember what the letters meant anyway.
It was too tough to digest so they gave up.

cracking the whip

The planet Jupiter cracks at the end the whip;
A rustling sound as it swings around the bend and back
In the roaring vacuum.

We were in deep outer space and the star of our system exploded
Each of us flung entirely out of the galaxy, elsewhere
Through the bottom half of the light into dark history.

The world changed completely and then changed some more
Suddenly our lives are not what we thought.

The force of gravity is twenty-five percent of everything.

Expanding and narrowing and the ones
far outside the circle go silent.
It takes a long time to even notice.

The masked terrorist on the video says,
No matter what happens here
The people of your country sleep very well.
They do not care about our dead children.

They do not want to get out of their big cars
They choose comfort and possessions.
It does not bother them when we butcher our citizens.

If your military hasn't already.

The imagined life

1

No explosions or gunfire

A quiet peace:

The sound of the knot

In a silk scarf

Loosening.

2

Empty drawer with hidden images of soft things.

3

Space traversed

By the simple impetus of words,

By the atoms of language,

4

The imagination creates a nerve fiber:

Something like jute: natural, durable, impermeable

Strong enough to build a tent, slick as sharkskin

It does not age or weaken it does not have to obey natural law

No nuclear force can contain it.

5

So silent this morning I can hear the cat lapping water.

6

There is no end to the liberties nature takes with our minds.

Waiting

Despite the sorrow and hatred
I was led to beautiful strangers.

Wait most of your life for a person.
Then separate, without hope.
Nevertheless you find yourself wanting.

The planet yearns to find its one true love:
Tiger, elephant, child of ash.

Meaning never freezes.
Whatever we use to describe it is only
Equal to our tools of measure, does not choose its form
Until we come looking for it

Unaware, we make constant interpretations
It depends what instruments we use,
Relative to our expectations.

Replace the word "is" with "seems."
It's all a huge coincidence,
Subatomic smoke and mirrors.
When the magician reaches into his hat,
the rabbit complies
or decides to be a dove,
if that's what is expected.

Eating Clouds

It appears I am now working in the restaurant that never stops.
I befriend the toughest waitress and the meat-cutters.
With our stained denim aprons and greasy faces we make a world.
Sometimes we stay overnight, as it takes hours to walk through and get to the door
At the front where a stylish mahogany bar serves expensive liquor and fancy drinks
While people wait for tables. Across the aisle, in the open kitchen
the bakers are rolling and punching bodies of dough, frowning and cussing
Under their breath in clear contempt for the tourists. Behind the mirrored walls
of the of banquettes in a labyrinth of six-top and twelve-top tables and shining
booths; private and separate like chambers and cells.
In the back of the house in the heart of the kitchen, dozens of workers
Slicing and boil, chop and haul with so much tension between them
and management they don't make eye contact or speak.
The wealthy owner uses representatives to convey information.
When I was upstairs, serving, there were no clean glasses.
All of my section was filled with people wanting water.
The head waitress hissed at me that customers were walking out.
When I finally carried a tray with a plate of special seafood,
the customer was frightened by what looked like liver molded
in the form of an octopus. The customers were furious.
They shouted and gesticulated and charged out.
However, there was a comrades-in-arms feeling among us.
I knew the knife and saw-wielding butchers would stop
any danger coming at me, and the grill line and the welders,
and the biker gangs were always ready to beef.
Cruel as we were to each other we were soldiers and no one
was ever left behind. I had a secret agreement with the bus boy.
Huge stoves and forges made it hellish underground, while
the diners above us were surrounded by fresh air and music.
They were four-deep at the bar and getting restless.
We stumbled through them. We did not get any actual
work done. Our time was consumed with evasion and denial.
The owner swept in with some friends. The red hood of her coat
Was of real fur. She was always laughing in her crowd
but when she dealt with us it was with fury and distrust.
She felt certain we were all thieves and liars, and tried
to pry information from each other to tell her. We played
dumb. The guy mixing dough is the most beautifully
dressed and coiffed man in the city. The chef scooping
a dish into the oven was an artist so brilliant no one would know

for decades. A potential prima ballerina hustled, clearing dishes.
A muscle-man, sweating and grunting, cigarette in his mouth,
Could win any contest but for now he is guiding a sword in one
Single stroke between the ribs of a bull like a Samurai.
I did not earn a nickel in tips and they told me I was wearing the wrong shirt.
I made a mistake over some missing silverware or a small accidental fire.
I was hunted by security-forces but the staff hid me and made
frightening meals which I could not recognize as food.
In the front of the house a new pizza oven flared into the public mind
It was twice as popular and packed with anger and hunger and deceit.
As usual in my sleep I can't remember where I live, but I took comfort
in a vague direction in the dark seeking my mother's house.

Skin-Walker

I commit a number of serious felonies,
After each crime I step calmly through a door into a hallway
One of many that beckon, in a series of right-turns,
To an elevator in the basement into another building,
into back yards and over fences to strangers' living rooms,
I smile, excuse myself and pass on like a dream
Wandering down long alleys snarled behind houses
and the dark icy iterations of the river
toward campus: clocktowers and palatial buildings;
hundreds of identical rooms tessellating diamonds
Shattered light particles echoing off bright walls of windows
Extensive suites, water features, thick carpeting and vast staircases
Ascend Into theatre seating, balconies of purple velvet drapes and secret passages.
I know where they are, I elude them
I could hear sirens in the distance I could hear silence from afar
Another location appears.

Immaterial

There is no better life.
The wars never stop.

Simply drop from the news
Replaced by sales, celebrity, and scandal.

Big screens vomit advertisements
Into the living room, causing desire without limit,

A blinding separation of children from nature
Leaving a lifelong sense of deep loss within.

No one here thinks they have enough;
Lives jammed with purchases, no why to fancy needs.

What gets abandoned is the immaterial
Which is almost everything.

Our extreme comfort costs someone's
Life where, trapped between warring clans,

Each bullet lasts forever.
The family escapes the burned rubble

of an exploded home, goes to another
village, which is no longer there.

Once in the refugee camps
the children are already making friends.

Tent

The longest memories of earth, held in ice and water.
Far off in the distance in sheer silence,
Hesitation and a slight shift in direction
Solicitations of the larger, more-than-human field
A brief demarcation of known dimension.
Found in the drifting space between definitions
Truth is what always happens.

Kelp forests sway in tidal winds and lunar pull
The moon, enough in itself; needs no metaphor.
Bigger, getting closer, sad and gigantic, waiting on top
of the mountains and forests, perched;
inhabited, smeared in clouds
Vivid fruit the color of fire; blue as duck shit
gleaming crescent sharp as a sword.
The stars themselves will bring news of their own death
Leaving us with their undoing and debris.

2.

Scar tissue separated me from the other children
Before he left for the war, he burned up my future
Into acid, into metals inside a volcano, an entire life, in a night,
rendered useless
In a series of sloppy events that caused the loss.
In a few moments of poor decision-making, a chance
for something quick and ugly that has never stopped.
Cells are rebuilt in these experiences and can only
recall rather than progress even if the child does not
remember the horrors the body will build a place around it.
Stored in the brain as suffocated neurons,
bioluminescent nerves mapping out the occasion.
Satan shows up as a mass shooter in a hotel.
We are desperate and trying to hide and crawl
to the doors. Once outside we are running in a group
when one of them stops and says, You can't outrun the devil.
He's already everywhere. We freeze.

Hegel and the Bad Infinite

Nothing can exist without its own end
Looking at the absolute and its opposite,
Implicitly affirmed in the attempts to ignore it,
Supersedes the logic of identity.
Doubt itself is not doubted but affirmed:
Say 'indeterminate,' and you are determining just that.
Say 'no more,' and you have said 'more', implying a region.
To know a limit is already to have gone beyond it.
The mere absence of zero is not enough.

Nothing less than the whole of a thing can be the truth
In the immediate world of sense and all its squalid particulars.
The absolute, represented without form, has chosen
From within itself to give the spectacle of all its evil
Rather than a denial of evil.
Moving from difference to difference is a necessity of thought.
The finite, other than what it is, surrenders and turns
Suddenly into its opposite.

Numerical digits stand for senses rather than numbers.
The prime vision of a truth visible converts into a certainty or possibility.
Whatever involves its own alternatives as elements
Is its 'own other,' a self-reflecting recurrence;
No loose ends hanging out for foreignness to get a hold.
Forever rounded in; closed, not strung along, open at its ends like a simple form.
Called by Hegel the world of the 'bad infinite,' with the concept of justice
Placed in the beyond.

The untrue is the impossible, and the infinite is the untrue.
God is but one member of our symmetrical system: the ideal portion.
He and we stand outside of each other;
Just as the devil, the saints and angels stand outside both of us.
We are but syllables in the mouth of the Lord.
If the whole sentence is divine each word
Is completely what it should be, in spite of all appearances.

Distraction

A body involuntarily pulses in immediate magnetic response
From touch decades past.
Usually addressed only in sleep, where we don't resist.

There is no story your dreams don't know already.
Something there was real remains.
I have what we were down in my skin.

Inside the volcano time is measured in metal.
Our ages are defined by stone and bronze and iron.
The negative possibility of it: eighty-seven times more invisible than it seems.

At the turn of the twentieth century painters
Abandoned the horizon just as science tried to redefine time and space,
Thus preparing the citizens for Einstein's ideas.
Relative of course to the observer.

Everything reaches to match in instinctual mimicry,
Perfect twins, identical, strung in the golden sequence;
Symmetry tucked inside the expanding Nautilus shell.
Each cell composed of the two before it:
nature's answer to growth without distortion

The desire for repetition, for one's own reflection.
The desire to see something move.
The need to be something that moves, before nothing happens.

Stopped

What's the longest you've been without a body?

Eros, rosy-lipped and damp down at the billiards hall,
shooting pool in his diapers: his wings filthy, straggling rags.
Alcoholic Viet Nam war vet in a wheelchair at the bar
behind the radiator in my bedroom, in the closet Cupid grew into a devil
With shimmering cape blowing in doorways and windows, in shadows,
Drew black-marker X's over my eyes, wrote *No* and *Ugly* on all my clothes
while downstairs, without imagination, the grown-ups played cards.
He followed me from school, chased me, floated overhead in a damp cloud of
urine
He ruled my sleep, my sleeplessness was his. I watched as he watched me.

Just now, an impulse fills my hands and lips,
If I wasn't so exhausted, he says, if I had some money,
We'd run away to--
We say Paris with one voice.

Why this desire for the radiance in dishonor?
I long for that which cannot reply.
I asked *What do I look like?*
He answered, *you are built like a deer.*

This tentative Orpheus, five times stronger than steel, cannot take form
I ran into him downtown, in an empty boxcar, feeding strays
In the hard splash of rain on concrete
weak as he is, I can almost see through him in his black raincoat
Ghost of my libido, my own tragedy, my fidelity.

Do not expect love in return.
If the doe finds the fawn has died.
Does this mean it went back to the other world?

Helplessly we adore it the untouchable, indecipherable, impenetrable.
The stopped world that pulls so.

Observations on a Life

- 1
In our lifetime we swallow, on average, eight spiders in our sleep.
Our lips, aphrodisiacs, taken for orchids.
- 2
Microscopic particles in a vast pool of soup
Moving in waves and strings and dark, shimmering mucus
Where occasional lights flash.
- Only fourteen light years away, in another version, you are sober.
The human psyche operates in thirteen dimensions.
Our bodies have only three.
- 3
A time-shift, a magnetic surge: gamma rays or solar storms.
It could have simply been a slight bump in the exchange.
Light bulbs explode, as if on cue.
The god particle reveals itself to the particle blaster.
- 4
A sudden adjustment too fast to perceive
And then, to him, it became a room in a café in Paris
Look over here! I said. Come back! I'm here!
We just barely missed each other, $1/200^{\text{th}}$ of a second, an eon
Could be translation missed a fraction of a decimal.
Mail is waiting for me in my sleep and I'm afraid to open it.

The Quote

All organic life, created to fill the interval between planets,
Regards the Universe as continuous vibrations consisting of waves.
All of our functions are subject to the same laws as sound.

Only the results with value accompany memory
Which is so poor it only keeps alive moments of self,
Otherwise you do not exist in the observation and then what is it worth?

The problem consists of in directing the attention to oneself without
Obliterating or weakening the attention directed on something else.

New atomic items appear everywhere: anti-particles,
Extraterrestrial gravity, flashes of dying neutrinos.
There is no tool miniscule enough to study their detail

We begin smashing them into each other at high speeds.
Deconstruction. It's what we know
This something else could be any of us.

Having begun to do one thing, we, in fact,
Constantly do something entirely different
Yet continue to think we are doing the thing we began to do.

All phenomena is the result of simultaneous principles:
The first is deviation of forces: nothing stays in the same place
Or remains what it was.

Going somewhere, changing, and develops or dies,
Fluctuations rise and fall, octaves descend,
Nothing can stay on one level.

Ascent or descent is the inevitable condition of any action.
The history of the planet is about the decay of atoms over time
The future is in between breakdowns.

Annihilation

This goddess here
Set time to zero
In the first second after
Pre-atom radiation soup
Banged or unfolded.

The ruling super-force
splits and destroys perfection.
Gravity molds matter and breaks away
expanding slowly enough to form DNA.
The inflationary universe is not the speed of the stars
but the speed of the spaces between.

To discover form, analyze debris.
Elementary particles smash; matter without mass.
We feel the force of the god particle in our cells.

Matter won the balance, one extra
Positive particle made the cosmos
Otherwise everything would be identical but negative
Composed of antimatter, the evil twin;
Ghostly puppet-master who shapes everything,
May have created the universe backwards, inside out.
Wobbling starlight suggests the unseen irresistible grip.