

Anthology of Robert Ronnow



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My poetic Side **P**

Dedication

www.ronnowpoetry.com

Acknowledgement

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About the author

Robert Ronnow has published four poetry collections: *Janie Huzzie Bows* (Barnwood Press, 1983), *Absolutely Smooth Mustard* (Barnwood Press, 1985, originally published as *White Waits?*), *New & Selected Poems: 1975-2005* (Barnwood Press, 2007) and *Communicating the Bird* (Broken Publications, 2012).

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Will

Having installed a new toilet seat
and made a few philanthropic donations
I can kick back tonight and watch movies, right?
Not. I'm ridding myself of another addiction
like illegal drugs through caloric restrictions
getting enough sleep for two people or more
and reading none of the dry words in library books.
When there's nothing to do, when I'm bored or dreary
I'll sit still and watch from the window, I'll wait
for the weather to change, which it will.

A Job in the Garden of Eden

In a strong marriage, a long marriage
much cannot be said, should not be said.
The spots on one's skin will be wisely ignored.
Differences of opinion are tolerated, not debated.

Your memories may disappoint your partner
as not those she has selected, refracted.
Over dinner for two at the Mill on the Floss
it could be dangerous to compare wills, losses.

Or it might result in belly laughs, Shakespearean
revelations, the night he got us lost in the woods
or she peed her pants at a party. The marriage was Faustian,
in a good way, like going to a job in the Garden of Eden.

Having survived 25 years, knowing 50's impossible,
what else do we know? Raised 2 boys, painted 3 houses.

Problems

Problems many of which are not getting solved
not because I'm not resolved but because I delay
to savor the day, the moon and the season
which is why I'm a non-person under the eye of eternity.

Except for my unpaid bills. And iambic pentameter.
Aaron fails English. Is there summer school?
What an asshole! I want to slug him, but also
his teacher, Mr. Fisher, who's probably

a nice guy, just doing his job and raising a family.
Then there's the catheter from my last surgery
I was so sick I thought I was dying. The out of network
pathologist and radiologist have declined my insurance

and charged me to the hilt. Like I had a choice
face up in the emergency room. Facing doom, you don't ask questions.
Now that I've rejoined the living I've got to raise a million bucks
to save organic farms and endangered species I'll never see.

Perhaps none of this matters and chanting's the answer, Buddhist precepts,
or as Dad would say This too shall pass.
Life is a back and forth game but baseball is zen meditation,
you're in right field, nothing's happening, nothing's gonna happen,

but you can't let your attention wander for one second.
I should clean and oil my trumpet for Saturday's gig
or the valves will stick. And leave early enough
not to get stuck in traffic. Other lives, other problems.

A guy who takes the subway to a dead metal desk
and the boss who fires him with the cold hard eyes
of one who accepts the rules entirely. Actually
we're fortunate to have rules because otherwise

child soldiers armed with AK-47s would be shooting up
the village and setting fire to our thatched roofs.
Instead, under the rule of law, when snow falls
even old roofs look like problems with proofs.

Netflix, Hulu

Netflix, Hulu, autumn elaeagnus
thorns, small hairy buds, twigs hyper-lenticelled
fruits supposedly edible, leaves elongated, oblong
xerophytic but found in wetland
introduced species, some say invasive

Xbox is invasive
Hulu is the best source of foreign films
and foreign films represent reality better than American
although reality is not always what we're after
silliness, silly sadness, and relentless laughter

letting my web site go to seed
writing badly is the best revenge
eventually yr doctors find something in you they can't cure
causes some fear, gives some certainty
you're required to tell yr sons and brothers about it so they can make informed medical
decisions going forward

let's posit the dead, like the dream-lover or -killer
is you in disguise, a facsimile or factotum
stand-in, an actor or actress remembering lines
which are your memories, or if you're not in movies
divinations of things to come, earthquakes and volcanoes

life goes on without a hiccup
you saddle up with the three gentlemen to the River Friday
where a new life begins without sleep as a soul, at least that's the story they tell
in these scientific times we apply Joachim's Razor, i.e. most likely
the afterlife will be most like the life before life

when it gets too late to exercise
ignore time, learn slowly to go slowly
through life, rise
early, there is no time only change
an empty belly's holy

and a pussy willow's so alive its buds want to burst
in mid-February when the sun stays up in the sky more than January
this is what I write about, not Tolstoi, nor war
not one conversation or love scene between a man and woman
or illustration of what man has done to man

cars pass I never wave
so many guys are belly fat, women butt fat and they want to sit right behind you in the
bleachers eating fried foods and wearing allergenic perfumes

I like the motionless perfection of autumn elaeagnus
wind in white pines
crows do not annoy but dogs do

a porcupine or coyote is a lucky sight
barred owl or pileated woodpecker
and a black bear is quiet reality itself
I said to the doctors 54 or 84 you always seem to want more when they said I'm too
young to die
I said dying chooses you you don't choose dying, so it's not my fault

yesterday's walk, today's work
there's no percentage in searching for significance, wanting meaning
and no percentage in respecting death unless it's imminent
I admire the writer who writes 10,000 words per day no matter what
who's got plot

a plague or fire, a spider or a tiger in a boat
stolen Louisiana votes or endangered alligators
in my case common pipewort or pickerelweed floating in a northern lake
egrets, loons and hawks
on yr winter walk cedar waxwings foraging for soft rose hips

and talking like people talk
about this and that, work and child rearing, religion or politics
keeping it light and friendly
eating chile and chocolate chip cookies
passing time watching a football game, the superbowl or a movie usually a romantic
comedy

What Have I Seen?

1

Sunrise, late winter
skunk smell
turkey flock
playful otter, too.

The white heron
a great blue,
white phase,
in the abandoned beaver pond.

Purple clematis
its long-awned achenes
in globose heads
spidery, fiery, extravagant fruit!

To identify or classify
birds by
the complexity or beauty
of their songs.

And so
what is over that
ridge or hill
a sink-hole, a sand dune, a steep bluff.

2

What must I do. Organize
the heretofore unorganized. The rabble
of unemployed child abusers.
Molesters of their intimates.

Are there dysfunctional bird families?
Simply put, they do not survive.
We have hope
that everyone alive is essential,

consequential. We classify
and specify.
The commonplace and everyday
is sanctified.

What happens everyday?
Morning is quiet, everyone at work.
Home writing, watching birds.
Afternoon, kids come back from school.

Evening, watch tv.
Scotch and Star Trek.
Captain Picard's problems eclipse
ours who stayed behind.

3

Pray to Allah
and maybe he will spare you
when he sets the world
on fire.

Where or with who
will I be on that day?
And how many people and adventures
will I find in the wind storm and rubble?

I may live, but will it matter
whether or not I help anyone else to live?
This is no Last Judgement.
Those who have learned or who still know how to live

will survive.
Nobody will go to hell, they will just die.
There is no limbo either.
Anyone who didn't find a way to be immortal is just dead.

So, what am I trying to do.
Organize the unemployed, the welfare mothers
and alcoholics
into a flying chevron of purposeful explorers?

4

The doctor's conscious, organized,
naive attempt to do good,
his legacy, versus the randomness
of the road and the war zone.

There his legacy is his rectitude and natural
rough compassion for the damaged people
he encounters. The difference
between planning a legacy

as if you knew enough to control events
and letting the legacy arise
from events themselves, controlling,
insofar as you are able, only

your own actions and reactions.
The doctor's leadership role such as it was
grew out of not his material possessions

like the car

but his mission, his personal quest
to find the young doctors he had naively trained
and sent into the war zone
where all died.

5

July-a cold city
not as great or as gritty
as I thought, summer theater left
the shoe shine bereft of customers

eyes cold as a bureaucrat's
except for our soles
and their leather. Sweat-soaked
girls, the beautiful ones left town.

Emotionless as a bus.
Sparrows, no chickadees.
All that's important happens indoors.
Exercise to philosophies.

You get what you see.
The panhandlers ask
just once, won't risk
friendship, justice.

No sale today
in the finite city
where, for the shoe shine,
pedestrians are infinite, times two shoes.

6

Faith = wait + trust.
But don't anticipate.
Popper prohibits prediction.
Niebuhr expects destruction.

I believe in God
doesn't mean there's a sketch
of a man in my head. It must mean
all will be well in the end.

Satisfied with snow
or summer. And now
with dying old or younger.
Gold or paper clips. Gulps or sips.

In the final resting place
in the city of the dead

are there all night card games
and sometimes open swims?

Each inch, square, or cube of Earth
brim with grasses and sedges, dragonflies and spiders, sparrows and eagles.
The tiger lily and the water lily and the lily of the valley, the calla lily.
When a girl on a bicycle smiles, that is a smile.

The Scientific Way To Do Mathematics

"The first fallacy is often called by philosophers 'the act-object fallacy': confusing the subject matter of a mental state, such as a belief, with the mental state itself. Suppose an over eager brain scientist were to announce the new field of 'neuromathematics,' in which old-fashioned mathematics was to be replaced by studies of the brains of mathematicians. Instead of talking about numbers and geometrical forms, we are to talk only of neurons--this being the scientific way to do mathematics." --Colin McGinn, "What Can Your Neurons Tell You?", New York Review of Books, July 11, 2013

As air and leaf litter are substrate for the bird.
And what makes a human. Separation from the substrate.
Believing the substrate and the subject are separately defined.

Whatever gives the poem form--three lines--is the substrate.
Things will be said. The signer and the seer must supply the words
Which are the substrate of the mind. A beautiful week ahead.

No hundred year storms, normal summer warming.
Yr bones are white as lightning and strong as sticks and stones.
At Pat's 80th b'day party most of us are old and jolly.

250,000 port-o-potties. There's a way to wash one out
And a way not to. Arctic ice melt. Slushies. One can count
Past one or nine by inserting zero to keep the rows.

Implied is an order beyond the small order we impose.
Goes to greatness human and divine. The two white wines
Death brings to the garden are the love between good friends--

Abstract. Suppose there is no afterlife, to understand the end
Imagine the beginning--no brain, no mind, no name, no I. Zero
Had already been inflated and the rose was in the garden.

Cast a cold eye and wait

What do you think
of the man peeing, the ever-shitting mouse?
Finding meaning in killing
and cleaning house.

Sal quit school,
your lover stops writing.
Eternity's waiting,
a lazy-eyed tiger.

Or everything's cool
even the fighting.
The weather is perfect
for swimming or dying.

Physical dizziness,
mental uneasiness.
Isn't exercise
the best blood pressure medicine?

Universally sad
about my mortality
but also glad
to be leaving the party.

The noise was incessant,
success inconsistent.
The demands of my neighbors,
employers, persistent.

Belonging is longing
for complete solitude.
Seas, odysseys
the loneliness of being spouse.

Rain of April, rain of August
writing of it dry as dust.
What's my reason, rhyme?
Pass the time, pass the season.

If you're alone as you get, why are you crying?
Hold steady until a tsunami.
Then swim if you can. Don't gulp.
Hit in the head by speeding debris. Couldn't be helped.

Erythrocyte Sedimentation Rate

I'm thinking about rhyme and meter
but also my kidneys and my liver.

The nation-state and the failed state
and whether killers should be executed

or forgiven. Meditate on this: Thy
will be done. Do what has to be done

don't ask why. Clean the dishes and the house.
Will I be left to my own resources

or will all be given? Nevermind
what you can't imagine. Living's

life's priority. Friends are merely friendly,
they're in the majority. Loneliness

is the default position. Rain happens.
We supply the reasons.

How do people process their lives without art?
By caring not.

Ignore
yr autobiography.

In olden days, if you couldn't stand to pee
the family buried you under the pecan tree.

Robot-Assisted Surgery

"How the hell do I know if there's an afterlife? I don't even know how the can opener works." --Woody Allen

Appointment to have organ removed by robot-assisted surgeon.
Air-conditioned, no mosquitoes in the OR. When you arrive
You'll remove all your clothes. Naked before the ladies, nurses
Who have seen it all before. Mainly remember you're not unique.
Think about the government while they're mixing up the medicine.
There's always governance even if there's little or no government.
Back to counting backwards. Inside out, if I die, will I know it?

At 70, Jack's running the gauntlet with some skill!
Benny Golson wonders aloud what might have been
Had Clifford Brown not been killed in that auto accident.
Jack's girlfriend once said he was the reincarnation of Clifford
But he doesn't believe in ghosts, karma or an afterlife.
Benny's old girlfriend Betty inspired the tune Along Came Betty
And that's the most afterlife Benny or Betty's gonna get.

I thought the discussion of Citizens United in Foreign Affairs
Was liberating. I had had my usual liberal Subaru reaction
To MSNBC reports whereas this article showed the Court's decision
Will diversify political action and break the duopoly of the stalemated
Major parties. Good for you, good for me, good for the family tree.
Those two gay geezers Yeats talks about, I think I like the serving man
Who stands and waits. As a boy, did he hunt? Alone or with his father?

The Trojan bench being not as deep as the Greek
Once Sarpedon and Hector go down even the lucky shot
To Achilles' feet is not enough to save the town.
Aeneas is no match for wily Odysseus
Although unbeknownst to all he has the last laugh when Rome
Conquers Athens, the Myrmidons, what's left of Ilion
And the whole known world from India to Britain.

It's not bad to acknowledge death's primacy
Although after a while you stop remembering
To fear. That's when everything becomes clear
Purpose v. purposelessness matters less,
Anomie v. rule of law, that's a preference
Love v. loneliness, worth about 25 cents
Or a million bucks in the light of the holocaust.

Nothing but light, love and the majesty of death in the room.
Machines stand ready like marines, their beauty is in the motion
That overcomes inertia. The food supply is deeply compromised
So eat whatever you want. Mourning the dead is part of the business

Of healing and staying alive. When you get to the afterlife, walk with eyes open,
Ocotillo and cactus may be in flower. The robot does the work, imposes
Its own small order, like a girl on a bicycle with disorder in her hair.