

*A Hawk from a Handsaw'*

—with all due courtesy, for Zina, a most beautiful Muse

*(Eccles. 9:7-9 “a woman you love...  
to repay your toil here under the sun”)*

Is it the pitch,  
the timbre, the echo  
reverberating against concrete  
that transports me to *years gone by*...

*Seated as the driver  
in one of the taxicabs  
queued up  
at the Rockridge BART station...*

Above me massive 3 by 5 foot pillars  
shaped like a *Menorah*  
holding corrugated steel and huge I-beams  
on which the commuter trains rumble...

*When I behold the quick  
play of your eyes,  
I'm transported  
the same way...*

*“The endless depth  
of your eyes has emboldened me,  
strengthened my heart.”  
(Isaiah 35:3)*

*To some place  
long ago, once  
familiar—field of verdant green  
by the brook, beneath majestic cedars,*

*meadows of myrrh and spikenard  
sweetening the flowering henna,  
in each blade of grass*

*iridescent , tiny pearls of morning dew...*

*Such delicate petals  
of wildflowers gently opening—  
as in the Old Testament, blossoming  
from an arid desert*

*into a house of wine...*  
***Just as the sight of you***  
*makes my lips wet*  
***with honey; I long to breathe***

*upon your garden,*  
***tingling with spice,***  
*taste your sweet fruit,*  
*drink from your cistern...*

***My mouth and tongue***  
***solid in the stream***  
*flowing from your well.*  
*I'm drunk with your love...*

## Part Two

Big, wide College Avenue—  
people waiting on the sidewalks,  
between thick gray concrete slabs  
enclosing

the *harrumphing* diesel bus,  
all those *ruby-glowing fire chariots*  
impatiently edging one way  
and the other...

Another train arrives—  
a hollow sound,  
building, cavernously,  
shrieking with intensity

(like a wintry blast  
absent the wind, whipping  
around stinging cheeks)...  
*Childhood memories—*  
too, as a boy, I once wrote  
NASA—the Aeronautics Center,  
searching for a “Soap Box Derby” design  
to somehow fit my already tall form.

An engineer actually replied—  
wondering *how a 13-year old*  
*from upstate New York*  
*knew of his facility?*

(I’d found the info through the patient help  
of our little town’s librarian)...  
After explaining that his wind tunnel facility  
generated hurricane gales

for supersonic jet wing design  
and testing, he nonetheless  
was kind enough to cite for me  
the basic reference materials I needed:

*at subsonic speeds the least drag coefficient*  
*was obtained by the teardrop—*  
*one quarter of the length as greatest width,*  
*one quarter of the length deep.*

Given my size  
I would have to tailor  
that shape  
around my hips and shoulders...

Which I did.  
Secretly borrowing my old man’s  
plastic engineering curves  
and finely-gridded architect’s paper.

For my 80-inch racer (the maximum  
length the rules allowed), at *one-quarter deep*  
the width would have to be 26-inches...  
At the library, again, were books

on boat-building that showed me how  
to bend narrow pine squared strips  
in a snug fit over plywood bulkheads—  
L-angle bracket mounted on a plywood base

that I'd already strung with the pulleys and guy wire  
supplied with my sponsor's kit  
for brake and steering  
(heating with our gas torch

the standard-issue wheel  
to a shape, again,  
better suiting  
my long arms and legs).

Then the hard work.  
The chinking of gaps  
and rounding the nosepiece  
with *Bondo*, an auto-body-worker's

*magic putty fix-all*—clayish goo  
that, when mixed with epoxy, hardened  
like a rock...And almost as difficult as one  
to smooth out, wearing out sheet after sheet of sandpaper

I'd cut to fit the orbital sander.  
Many weeks after school  
I passed this way;  
one day finally delighted

when I finished spray painting—  
as my sponsor was a local bank  
I'd chosen conservatively for color, gray,  
but customized with *Candy-Apple-Aluminum* (sparkling lacquer)...

Wet-sanded to a high sheen,  
my *Goodyear blimp* ( as it became known)  
got a lot of race day attention—  
the faces of some neighbors

breaking into sneers...  
Our race-course steadily dropped  
then leveled out into a slight uphill grade...  
I won heat after heat—

my *co-efficient factor*  
coming into play  
on that homestretch,  
gliding me like magic to victory...

In the final, though,  
I lost to a small 11-year old kid  
in a design favored at “The Nationals,”  
a narrow (foot-wide) “layback”

(convex with the shoulders wide point rearwards).  
The photo-finish showed his car’s wedge-nose  
pecking an inch past  
the balloonish curves of mine.

Next year I took first place  
(a 500-dollar U.S. Savings Bond, not the 250 dollar runner’s-up  
one I’d already garnered); my opponent in the finals  
was my own kid brother—

my foster father had built  
him a molded fiberglass “layback”  
(one technological step up  
from the kid the year before);

his involvement broke the rules  
(but at “The Nationals” all the dads did,

so *what the hell...*).  
The yokels all grumbled that

*the fix was in.*  
One kid I'd beaten in an earlier heat  
said he'd *swear upon a stack of Holy Bibles*  
*that he saw me slip my brother a 20-dollar bill,*

*top of the hill*  
*after the race*  
*slick*  
*as a weasel...*

Though my brother's difficulty was as mine—  
he was already too big  
for that layback design...  
But I managed to get over my insulting

*the sting of blood*  
*hot in my cheeks—*  
when I arrived in Akron, Ohio,  
for "The Nationals,"

and was given a rose and a kiss—  
the hometown photo-op—on that aggrieved cheek  
by the sweetest girl of sparkling *countenance*  
I'd ever seen...

Each kid's newspaper back home  
getting some such glossy  
as part of the public relations packet,  
*Race Day News...*

*Funny what we choose to remember...*

### Part Three

That night, sitting in my cab, fiddling  
with the radio dial, electronically adjusting  
my crushed felt seat (I drove the sharpest cab in the fleet)  
even powering the windows up and down—

just like the bored commuters, trapped  
like their exhaust  
under the massive concrete—  
I check off the dispatch radio for a coffee break

and walk to the corner deli.  
Pat the old brick single stories—  
antique furniture stores,  
upscale fern bars, *chi-chi* restaurants,

Inside the large plate-glass  
lobby windows,  
at each table sit faces  
drawn weary

with the week's worries and woes—  
silence falls pregnant  
across the spacious, sterile  
ceramic-tiled tables...

I turn and head back  
to hustle up some rent money...  
At the corner  
stand four tall cedars,

rising stately  
from beds  
of deep-green ivy.  
The *rough hewn*

*fur of the bark*  
*time-worn soft,*

*light as a breeze  
to the fingers' touch...*

*Much like the long damp waves  
of my lover's freshly washed hair—  
sweet with herbal essence, henna,  
springing about her glowing face,*

*on the bedroom pillow, closed-eyed,  
raptly in tune with me—inside and gently behind her...  
Bright sun of morning (post-cab-shift) breaking  
through open window...*

*Later, at her friend's wedding,  
we'll fight and drink too much champagne—  
seems I found the groom and bride too false  
But for now sweet tender bliss...*

*As if an ancient  
veil of braided hair  
parting, your face, eyes lift to mine—  
doves flying free of shame...*

#### Part Four

*The throne of King Solomon  
was made majestic  
with ivory—the inlaid pearl  
rosy with health;*

*his place of sanctuary—  
layers  
of purification  
to reach the inner...*

*"Wisdom  
has built her house,  
has hewn*



*her seven pillars”*  
*(Proverbs 9:1)*

## Part Five

**Inside Solomon’s Temple**  
*were apples of gold*  
*in a setting of silver—*  
**finely ornamented filigree...**

**Yet your fully beautiful** *twin fawns*  
**if they could leap**  
*the distance*  
**between your full-blooded nipples**

**and** *my*

**by the** *whirling*  
**of our ecstasy**

*would be just as challenging an act of faith...*

## Part Six

**Solomon’s woman, all sun-bronzed,**  
*tawny-fronted* **with beauty, never laid claim**  
**to the Ark in his Temple—to her, God’s Covenant**  
**lay with his** *pink-marbled thighs*

*seating us in the chariot of the most noble*  
*of our people,*  
**the rounds of your thighs**  
**made slippery by our smoothing...**

*his height*  
*as Mount Lebanon—*  
*a man upright*  
*and tall as a cedar...*

Women are the flesh  
without which we remain  
as dry as desert-bleached bones...  
How can such graceful pleasure

be maligned as such *sin*?...  
How could such courtesy  
have fallen  
into such *disrepute*?...

### Part Seven

Years back, at Durnstein along the Danube,  
atop a hill overlooking the little Austrian town,  
the gentle sweep of river,  
I stood among the ruins—

the castle where Leopold V held  
Richard the Lion-Heart'd hostage  
(1192-1193)...Blondel, a *minnesinger*  
and the most trusted of Eleanor's Poitiers Court,

found the returning Crusader King  
by singing the *call* of a song  
dearly held; Richard, in turn,  
*responding* from within the walls...

Together they sang the *close*:  
(call) "*Always remembering, always reminding me*"  
(response) "*To listen for the sound of the true light  
of my twin queens'...*"

(close) "*Shimmering purity  
of my beautiful  
soul-mates...*"  
*Chateau Gaillard,*

*the "Saucy Castle,"  
he then built in gratitude—*

*architecturally a marvel, years in the making...  
His little brother John, once rid of Richard, let it fall...*

Further down the Danube,  
at the ancient Celtic lake at Halstatt  
I do “Ecstasy” with my Euro-lassie—in the morning  
swirling mist luminously radiant, such pure colors...

### Part Eight

Still and yet, now,  
I have no saucy castle  
(pillared like the Temple of Solomon)  
to offer you, *le-susati*

*You a mare, a spirited  
filly whose mouth  
is too delicate  
for bit and bridle...*

*I encircle  
as a stallion—  
our movements twinning  
like two sparrow hawks.*

*Our skins melting  
in the cooling breeze;  
no chafe  
of thick leather harnesses—*

*no iron war-chariots, bedecked  
with wheel blades, tearing nails—  
some grim, creaking cavalry  
stirring the dust of death...*

### Part Nine

*Was it Maecenas, the patron  
of Propertius—friend to Marc Antony  
that knew the secret  
of that famous warrior*

*pained for fighting (let loose in Elegies,  
Propertius to Maecenas):*

*“Love and the fair were of his life the pride;  
He lived, while she was kind; and when she frown’d, he died.”*

## Part Ten

Under the gray mottled  
*firmament* this morning (that word  
so often meant to be *nobly Homeric*  
to me now heavy as concrete).

I'm struck  
by how so many steel-reinforced bars  
from the construction before me  
jut up into this gloomy space...

(The new basketball arena  
for the college)—  
all the criss-crossing  
scaffolding and nylon-cord netting

like some bizarrely over-tangled  
spider's web,  
or perhaps like *that scene*  
*from a documentary*

on Edison I'd just seen...  
the inventor's "*better idea*"  
of electrical lighting  
having promulgated

into some sprawling disarray  
of black power cords

threatening to blot out  
the urban sky...

Somewhere behind this maze now confronting me  
is the bright shining inlaid wood  
of the court  
on which I played hoop

*for so many years...*

Now hard-hatted workmen walk high-up  
swaying planks—  
*I remember, too, my Grandfather*  
riding with him, a mere boy,

up the elevator  
at the staid Tower Building  
in downtown Cleveland  
where he worked as a patent attorney.

Without fail he'd have the operator  
stop the lift near the top—  
where the rear freight door  
could be opened to a plaque

commemorating the lives  
of three workmen who'd died  
in the great rush  
to get the then world's largest edifice built.

*"Crucified the poor bastards  
then dumped the bodies  
right here, into the wet cement,"*  
Grandfather would bemusedly remark,

*"Remember lad  
that was the reward your Irish and Lakota  
forebearers got  
for their lack of fear of the heights..."*

## Part Eleven

Tonight, through the *clear sky*, a meteor streaks  
downward—a *brief flash* amidst my workout...  
(my feet hooked under running track bleachers,  
I'm pumping *chi*-building sit-ups...)

It crosses *Orion*—two rows of three stars:  
Rigel, Bellatrix and Betelgeuse forming the torso—  
the edge of his glittering sword “The Great Nebula,”  
an enormous luminous cloud,

said, in the ancient days before telescopes  
or science,  
to be *an invisible crack from which shines*  
*the Empyrean Heavens*

Too, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva  
are said to have churned  
this Milky Way of stars  
into the *sweet butter of Immortality...*

A Cosmic Egg, *sacreonic* Creation Myth—  
through which poured fluid into oceans,  
the veins becoming rivers,  
the inner membrane clouds and mist,

the outer membrane mountains...  
One half of the shell *silver*  
crumbling into precious earth, the other  
*gold*, doming a glittering sky...

## Part Twelve

Ginseng hunters of Asia still look  
for the *manlike* roots shaped like and named after “Orion”—  
famed for curative powers, it yelps like a human  
when uprooted from the hardened tundra...

*Long ago an ancient master*

*said: As if hidden in the earth,  
as if all-viewing and remote as farthest space,  
as if suddenly emerging from nothing—*

*then you have become  
inscrutable,  
master of warfare,  
the way of the celestial dragon.*

### Part Thirteen

Matters and masters I never even dreamed  
existed—as a child, peering  
into my prize for biking-out a Christmas Card sales route...  
a Bausch-and-Lomb ground reflecting telescope.

The kindly twinkling stars, moon  
huge in my eyepiece, the sudden wonder:  
*Is there somebody alive out there,  
looking back at us, too...*

### Part Fourteen

Walking late along my path,  
to my place of exile I call home—  
moon-ghosts of ripples, rising  
through the *pure sweet grassland*

spread up the hill to my left.  
To my right long, sagging eucalyptus leaves—  
*as if a childhood weeping willow, riverbank  
rooted, in the night glow, swaying low...*

Beyond, twenty-degrees off-horizon,  
the pale red fire of Mars,

cold scythe of Moon—  
sterile, vacant, sharp-edged...

One night, soundless  
save for crickets and frogs,  
a squirrel made big-eyed and blinking-tailed  
(scratch of claws leaping

suddenly to an adjacent trunk—  
perpendicular landing then scrambling  
up to safety...)—the radar-dish ears  
of a mule deer rose into view...

One day, years ago, near  
the Mendocino Redwoods, a huge rattlesnake  
sunning itself, stretched across the entire road,  
barring my way...

I was behind the wheel  
of our health resort's four-wheel-drive,  
returning from the weekly town trip,  
with a truck-bed full of supplies ...

I honked the horn,  
the snake didn't budge.  
Daddy, our big German Shepherd dog,  
cowered in the seat behind me;

sensing, perhaps, some *ancient fear*...  
I opened the door, walked towards the head—  
keeping a safe distance at the edge  
of the baked and dusty road.

Suddenly the eyes  
in the mammoth skull  
came to life—  
to me it said:

*we've been waiting for you...*



Then it lazily slid  
off the road, right under my eyes  
made mesmerized by the serpentine rippling  
clearing my path...

One night, having ingested *magic*  
*mushrooms*, I hiked from my resort hotel-room  
to an ancient *Ohlone* burial ground—  
sun-bleached chalk

still warm beneath the *empty sky*,  
*clear moon*...  
Sitting amidst all the snake-holes—  
behind me rattlers all *pitch and hue*...

#### Part Fifteen

Winter chill warmed  
blazing blue—  
finally an *Homeric firmament*—  
I'm dazzled into awe...

I cross the pot-holed street,  
bend to put my empty  
tea-mug in my rucksack.  
Looking up

my eyes meet the smooth full  
eyes of the Chinese woman  
I'd noticed behind me,  
now turning towards her building...

"Hello" silken her eyes—  
to a man  
above me,  
emerging from the veranda...

Not fifty feet further I stop  
again...Pink cherry blossoms—  
like Zen Master Dogen's *plum blossoms*,

*opening as the eyeballs of Buddha²...*

## Part Sixteen

Petals, boughed with rain,  
fragile skins flushed so clean...  
the satiny petals shine out  
like a visitation—

smooth and silken as vulvas,  
drooping the branches with ancient  
cares, toward the rich loam  
and sprouting grass...

At night,  
the numinous beauty still unsullied,  
back-lit by the full moon,  
the tiny stamata as fragile antenna...

Springtime light  
swelling  
in the bosom  
of a young woman.

*...“ambrosial nectars  
of the Three Heavenly Times  
washing away the stains  
of delusion, the grasping after appearance...”*

## Part Seventeen

Queuing up along the hot stucco church wall,  
my shoulders and back snug,  
squatting with hands clasped around feet

on baking asphalt,

I think of the Dalai Lama—  
as a monk allowed to have only seventeen items.  
I wait for my free meal  
with those forlorn, *rough-hewn* as me now...

Food-paste all pale-blue, starchy, redolent  
of special *wing-nut additives*—  
*the “get a bigger hammer”*  
*schooling of Sick-EYE-oh-tree*

*promulgated by this land’s Illiteratti...*  
*These *pharmaka*, as the ancients*  
*called a sorcerer’s poisons,*  
*dimming my sensory input*

seemingly to the point of *autism...*  
My Irish ear canals, as if curse of heritage,  
too narrow and convoluted, past infected,  
already hard of hearing...

Inscrutable as an old Asian gentleman,  
I eat quickly... Finished, I clear remains  
from the banged-up base-metal tray  
by striking it to the green plastic garbage can rim...

*Dogen’s tintinnabulation,*  
*the ringing of the ringing...*  
Clear as a bell—not one other  
can do what I do...

End:

As the Zen master once said: *I am*  
*on the road without having left home;*  
*I have left home without being on the road...*  
*My house has no neighbors...*

*Wind howling  
through mountain pines;  
you can never forget  
the meaning of sadness...*

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(written after the ancient King Solomon's  
*Song of Songs*; Ariel and Chana Bloch's translation—a wonderful  
version bringing to light much of the subtle allusiveness of the language play...  
most certainly the “trademark” of that noble Semite;  
other Old Testament quotes/allusions engraved)

<sup>1</sup> (*Hamlet*, II.ii.375) “I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly, I know *a hawk from a handsaw*...” Said by Hamlet just prior to his meeting with the players with whom he’s preparing his “mousetrap” to “catch the conscience of the king,” i.e., he says to the players, “We’ll e’en to’t like French falconers, fly at anything we see...”, lines 425-6. The French were noted for being the “first and the noblest” in the art of falconry...)

<sup>2</sup> Dogen quotes are from S. Heine, *The Zen Poetry of Dogen* (Tuttle, 1997), particularly pp.128-133, Dogen’s lecture on 1/15/1252; the image is often represented by Japanese artists as “the eyes of Ta-Mo,” large, numinous, omniscient eyes—at the same time all soft and petal-silken as the *doe eyes of Hera, Queen Mother of Heaven*...

<sup>3</sup> The Great Fifth Dalai Lama’s *Mystical Mandala of Hayagriva*, a Tantric Buddhist medicinal sutra in which male and female, *daka and dakini*, are heavenly “initiated” into one *unified field*...