

A large flock of birds is flying in a V-formation against a sky with a warm, orange and yellow sunset glow. The birds are silhouetted against the bright background. The title 'DISTANT PLACES' is centered in the upper half of the image in a large, white, sans-serif font.

DISTANT PLACES

John Robert Colombo

All the Poems of John Robert Colombo (2005)
Parts of the World (2006)
Autumn in August (2007)
End Notes (2008)
A Far Cry (2009)
End of Greatness (2010)
Entresol (2011)
Less of Light (2012)
A Standing Wave (2013)
A World of Differences (2014)
Late in the Day (2015)
Immense Estates (2016)
Here for Now (2017)
More of Less (2018)
Future Considerations (2019)
Remains to Be Seen (2020)
No Longer Now (2021)
Every Other Word (2021)
All Over Once Again (2022)
A World Elsewhere (2023)
Notebook Six (2023)
Wonder Words (2023)
Distant Places (2024)

Distant Places

Poems and Effects of 2023

John Robert Colombo

2024

-3-

Distant Places: Poems and Effects of 2023

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ISBN-10 1894540-98-0

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Cover Design: Bill Andersen

Dedicated to Ruth with Love and Affection

Printed in Canada.

Quotes

Wise saws, and modern instances.

William Shakespeare, playwright, “The Seven Ages of Man,” *As You Like It* (1623), Act 2, Scene 7. The words come from the famous speech “All the world’s a stage” which is delivered by Jacques in the presence of the Duke. These are the so-called ages: infancy, schoolboy, lover or teenager, young man, middle-aged man or judge, old aged man, dotage and death.

He who knows the camel knows the worst.

Observation made by Bimbâshi Barûk of the Camel Corps of Africa in the mystery story “The Bimbâshi Meets Up with A 14” in Sax Rohmer’s collection *Bimbâshi Barûk of Egypt* (N.Y.: Robert M. McBride & Company, 1944).

No form of therapy has ever been initiated without a claim that it had unique therapeutic advantages. And no form of therapy has ever been abandoned because of its failure to live up to these claims.

M.B. Parloff, psychiatrist and student of psycho-therapies, quoted by Jerome D. Frank and Julia B. Frank in *Persuasion and Healing: A Comparative Study of Psychotherapy* (1961) who add the following observation: “To our knowledge, no therapeutic school has voluntarily disbanded because empirical findings convinced its members that its rationale was wrong.”

He asked me my name and where I lived
I told him a name from my book of tales
He asked me to come with him into the wood
And dance with the kings from under the hills

One verse of the song “The Magic Wood” as performed by Joan Baez on her album *Baptism: A Journey through Our Time* (1968), lyrics adapted by Peter Schickele based on the poem composed in 1945 by Geoffrey Trease.

Only the light that continually falls from the sky provides a tree with the energy to sink roots deep into the earth. The tree is truly rooted in the sky.

Simone Weil, moral philosopher, *The Need for Roots* (1949), newly translated by Ros Schwartz and published by Penguin Classics in 2023.

There is, it seems, a hidden link between theories of literature as *Écriture*, of speech feeding on itself, and the growth of the totalitarian state.

Czesław Miłosz, poet, Nobel Lecture, Stockholm, Sweden, 8 Dec. 1980, *Nobel Lectures: Literature 1968-1980* (Singapore, 1993) edited by Tore Frängsmyr.

Two possibilities exist: Either we are alone in the Universe or we are not. Both are equally terrifying.

Arthur C. Clarke, scientist and author of science fiction, quoted by Michio Kaku in *Visions: How Science Will Revolutionize the 21st Century*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1997).

Contents

Poems and Effects, 7 - 262

It's Not That at All

It's not that at all, after all.

I'm not here, I'm not there. It's just that I'm not myself, here or there or anywhere else. So I must be elsewhere.

Is a birth certificate a licence to live? Is a certificate of citizenship the right to do wrong in the country of one's birth or adoption or choice? Is it such a certificate or diploma or degree that grants the right to practise a trade or a profession? Is a marriage certificate a licence that entitles men and women (or both together) to enjoy the legal recognition of the right to live together? Is a *curriculum vitae* more or less than a listing of one's abilities and / or one's accomplishments? Or does it serve as the backbone of one's obituary notice? Will the obituary notice double as one's death certificate and thereupon signal the

end of the *c.v.*, and (to end this philippic) is it proof of little enough or of not enough or of anything at all?

Enough of this or that for now forever and never again.

Elsewhere is also elsewhen, as different eras host different ages, and as different regions sponsor different domains. Space and time are collections of spaces and times, each one incompatible with its siblings – cousins, nephews, nieces, etc., neither neighbours nor non-neighbours.

Elsehere. Elsewhere. Elsewhen. Elsewhy. Elsehow. Elsewith. Elsewhat. Elsewho. Elseanyhow.

Is it *that* all? No, *not at all*: Far-off Places ... *Distant Places*.

After reading the poetry of Iman Mersal, 5-6 Jan. 2023

Acting

Theory

A movie star or a stage actor?

An actor or instead a reactor?

To review one's own memories?

To imagine details of one's fictional character?

Stage, silent screen, radio?

Motion pictures, television, video?

Person to person, personally?

Practice

Konstantine Stanislavski

Moscow Art Theatre
The Group Theatre
Actors Studio
Lee Strasberg
Elia Kazan
Stella Adler Studio of Acting

22-23 Dec.-Jan. 7, 2022

Anthesis

Effervescence: frothiness
Inflorescence: flowering
Efflorescence: blooming
Anthesis: blossoming

22-23 Dec.-Jan. 7, 2022

Scape

Beholden to Gerard Manly Hopkins

landscape
seascape

skyscape
mindscape

spacescape
scrapes

inscape
escape

1 Jan. 2023

Time

I admire Robert Priest's quip: "I'mpermanent. Temporarily."

30 Dec. 2022–1 Jan. 2023

Fragments

farewell and hail
forearmed is forewarned
goodbye and hello
half mast half staff
mots bon
push and pull
seek and hide
since and before
to cut a short story long

2 Jan. 2023

Flags

Union Flag.
Union Jack.

Old Glory.
Stars and Stripes.

Maple Leaf
Forever?

Flag or rag or tag:
What do *you* mean to *it*?

2 Jan. 2023

Canadian History

Canada was constructed not block by block but *bloc* by *bloc*.

2 Jan. 2023

Words by Years

I myself appeared in the world in the year 1936, and there are now-familiar words that first appeared in print during in the same year. That is according to the website of the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, which I accessed on the Web on 9 Jan. 2023, to learn about the common words (among many others) that first appeared in print during the course of that year. Indeed, I have

selected thirty-six of them to appear here for good measure!

All-points Bulletin Anal-retentive Anasazi Androgen
Autarkic Auto-sexing B-girl Borscht Circuit Bush Pilot
Cloud Nine Double-talk Falafel Fifth Column Hidden
Tax Hot Money Ivy League Knock-Knock Joke
Metalanguage *Objet trouvé* Pinball Machine Post
Capitalist Psycholinguistics Rheumatology Scavenger
Hunt Schrödinger Equation Set Theory Short-Stop Sight
Rhyme Skin Diver Slap Happy Sleep Together Supreme
Soviet Telegenic Trendsetter Trickle-down Theory
Worry Wart

It is hard to believe that the Anglo-Saxon world got along before the year 1936 deprived of such words as these – among the hundreds noted on the dictionary’s website – but perhaps it did! Our traditions seem not to be as old as we assume them to be. But I am still around, and so are they.

9 Jan. 2023

Turgidity

Is the difference between affluence and flatulence more than the just the difference between a scent and an odour?

10 Jan. 2023

Meditation

Meditation is a form of mediation without medication.

10 Jan. 2023

Mike Snow

For the first two weeks of January 2023, there was no sun that shone in the skies above Toronto and no snowflakes that fell on the city's streets. Most unusual for this month of the year. So Mike Snow died in this city during this period of uncharacteristic darkness. His death occurred on January 5, 2023, at age ninety-four.

It is said that no two snowflakes are ever alike. Nevertheless, Torontonians feel that a snow storm – ideally a sudden blizzard of snow – would have been appropriate, given the stature of the artist, no two of whose creations were ever alike, except for his intriguing and widely reproduced profile of the Walking Woman.

Some day I may write about my first exposure to this image in the artist's studio, how its creator was still ambivalent about it, along with my suggestion to him for its duplication.

16 Jan. 2023

Commercial Messages

Radio, Television, Video

Stay tuned. Don't touch that dial. Listen carefully. Do not hang up. Fill in the coupon. Right now. Dial the number on the screen. Right away phone this number. Do not delay. It's only a few cents a day. Free information. It costs you nothing. It saves you money. It makes money happen! Or do you want to meet a helpmate, a life's companion? There are no strings attached. Claim your free sample today.

16-17 Jan. 2023

Mount Athos

In memory of Nikola Roussanoff

Few human beings have ever made the pilgrimage to Mount Athos, the age-old Holy Mountain of Greece and Eastern Orthodoxy. Age-old, sage-old. Yet each and every one of us has been trying to achieve or avoid the summit of Mount Pathos during our short sojourn on Earth, with little or no success.

16-17 Jan. 2023

Art

The opposite of *art* is believed to be *commerce*, but that is

wrong, if only because the opposite of *art* is *artifice*.

16-17 Jan. 2023

Passing Thought

I can't wait.
It's a frequent complaint.

We must rush, you and I,
Otherwise we'll be late, too late.

No, it's not "an important date."
It's not even fortunate,

But it is one's fate.
So *we* must wait.

16-17 Jan. 2023

Sojourners

All of us are sojourners on Earth, the ground of the planet that given time turns into our earthly sojourn, this so-jo-*urn* – our planetary *urn*.

16-17 Jan. 2023

Songs Unsullied

For Robert J. Sawyer

“Now is the time for all good men to come – ” not really “to the aid of the party” but to meet the needs of all the good women in their lives.

*

“So may the outward shows be – ” not “least themselves” but “blessed” because “the inward shows,” though seldom seen with clarity, are often the “most blessed.”

*

“And did those feet, in ancient times” – no, though it’s an inspired thought.

*

“There’ll always be an England” – but lately we’re not so sure about Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

*

“Surely you’re proud” – who’s this Shirley you’re praising?

*

“With glowing hearts we see thee rise, the True North strong and free.” Well, that may have been true at one time, in the heyday of Alfred Lord Tennyson perhaps, but who in this country has a “glowing heart” these days?

*

“So late into the night, though the heart be still as loving, and the moon be still as bright” – though not as bright as some of the

satellites that circle the Earth and are said to threaten the planet these days.

*

“There will come soft rains, and the smell of the ground” – rather like the wind and the rain and the earth of Chernobyl in Ukraine.

*

“Let us rest our eyes on fleecy skies and the cool Green Hills of Earth.” Well, the clouds might be “fleecy” and the hills might be “cool and green,” but that is so only here and there on the surface of the Earth.

*

“Land of Hope and Glory, Mother of the Free.” It goes on and on and to beseech “God, who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet.” Has the deity ever done that? Does the deity ever answer such requests? (Perhaps that is why critics have referred to the country as “Land of Dope and Gory” on purpose!)

*

Who would identify the following English words as translations of the French-language refrain of “La Marseillaise” (aka “*L’Hymne National Français*”)? “Grab your weapons, citizens! / Form your battalions! / Let us march! Let us march! / May impure blood / Water our fields!” These words sound more like a battle-cry than they do a national hymn!

*

“Pebble in the Sky”? Is that a description of Earth? Science-fiction author Isaac Asimov thought so, but it was astronomer Carl Sagan who suggested instead that Earth is a “pale blue dot” in the expanse of the cosmos and a vision of man’s home in space

in images taken by the crew of the Voyager Interstellar Spacecraft from a distance of six billion kilometres from the “home planet” of every one who has ever lived.

18-20 Jan. 2023

The Seasons

All we want is for the rain to cease to fall, for the clouds to part and the sun to shine down upon us during the day, for the moon to reappear at night, and for all such natural phenomena to reliably occur. Alas, this has yet to be our experience so far this year!

21 Jan. 2023

Memory

I am intrigued with the differences between *memory* and *memories*, between *memories* and *memoir*, and between *memoir* and *memoirs*. It is obvious that the past, the present, and the future keep changing, obviously, but in ways and means that are not always so obvious.

21 Jan. 2023

Live Transmission

A message delivered to Earth from Outer Space would astonish all of us and quicken the consciences of all human beings. But such a message, if from another Solar System, would be of immemorial age, having been recorded for broadcast in antiquity, and presumably the opposite of a Live Transmission. Of what use could it be to aliens or humans, even if – a big if! – it was received and then interpreted?

22 Jan. 2023

Disclosure

“Full disclosure” is a phrase that is useful to characterize a release of information that everyone suspected to be true if not already knew to be true.

23 Jan. 2023

Impatience

The statement “I can’t wait” is a signal, an admission, that I should wait because there are considerations than I have failed to regard at sufficient length.

24 Jan. 2023

Seriousness

It is a frequent complaint, infrequently taken seriously, that serious matters are of lesser interest than are unserious matters.

24 Jan. 2023

Politics

The subject of the predicate is chatoyant in a speech delivered by a politician who aims to be considered a statesman.

24-25 Jan. 2023

Eroticism

The erotic and the exotic in the daily life of the healthy human being are tantamount to the neurotic and the psychotic in the daily life of the unhealthy human being.

24-25 Jan. 2023

Muezzin

A spire, like one that soars above a Christian church, is meant to inspire its members, using bells with clappers, whereas a spire that towers over a masjid with a muezzin is there to inspire all

Muslim congregants to attend to their prayers.

25-26 Jan. 2023

Instrumentalism

Instrumentalism is a philosophical approach to the world that values the usefulness of ideas, favoured by contemporary philosophers, whereas latter-day spiritualists regard the approach as a pragmatic system based on mentalism and its principles that see psychic agency operating beyond the boundaries of the known world.

28-29 Jan. 2023

Posse

It takes many years for a young man to appreciate the fact that a mature woman does not exhibit a characteristic *pose* but instead exposes a *posse* of poses.

28-29 Jan. 2023

Wise Word

A wise word is inevitably a *word to the wise*. The expression that is couched in the singular and expressed in French is *bon mot*, which sounds more authoritative than does the French plural,

bons mots.

29 Jan. 2023

Aphorisms

Not every reader or browser of this collection of would-be aphorisms is made immediately aware of the fact that each entry commences with a heading in **bold**, incorporates a statement in “roman,” and concludes with a dateline in *italics*. It has been found that this format is suitable for browsing, reference, and consideration.

29 Jan. 2023

Sex

A hendiadys is an expression like “nice and warm” (a rhetorical device not unlike “free gift”) which in this instance is a reward for taking part in a sex survey: a sexample.

29 Jan. 2023

Man’s Death

A portmanteau word for man’s fate: *buriedead*.

29 Jan. 2023

Man's Destiny

Man's destiny: *deadended*.

31 Jan. 2023

Phrases, Fragmentary, Memorable

Here are some phrases that please me inordinately:

Q. Where did the Bulgarians come from?

A. Beyond the Sea of Azov.

Earth abides.

From the depths of the soul of mankind.

Hope among the stars.

Lustres in the dark.

Miracles do not occur but miseries always come to pass.

Nothing escapes the gravity of the planet Earth.

The Jetavana Temple Bells ring the passage of all things.

The spirit expires in time, the body in space.

Q. Who goes to art for answers?

A. Only would-be artists, it would seem.

31 Jan. 2023

Earth

Thanks to space artist Jon Lomberg

From time to time I console myself – and sometimes dismay myself – with the observation that “nothing escapes the Earth.” Our planet’s gravity has been so crushing that it is only spacecraft like the two Voyager Interstellar probes that have escaped its gravity and that of our solar system and are continuing on their different ways to unknown destinations in deep space. Those two launches took place in 1977. It is anticipated that the twin probes, now traveling thorough seemingly endless interstellar space, will lose all contact with the planet Earth, perhaps commencing during the year 2025.

31 Jan. 2023

Artwork

Any work of art may be said to be a block of stone or even a boulder once it has acquired the veneer-like surface of ashlar. Is not that appropriate?

31 Jan. 2023

Critique

“Do you doubt what I say?”

“No, I have not a single doubt, but I do have multiple doubts.”

4 Feb. 2023

Attention

Without attention there is no retention, only tension.

5 Feb. 2023

I and My

I am not as yet my own ideal. Will I ever be?

5 Feb. 2023

Personal Effects

The words “personal effects” make a memorable reference yet they fail to take into account any of what may be called “personal defects.”

5 Feb. 2023

Neckwear

I have never understood the difference between a kerchief and a

scarf – or an amice, an ascot, a babushka, a band, a bandana, a boa, a cap, a cape, a capote, a capuche, a cloak, a comforter, a cowl, a cravat, a dolman, a fichu, a gaberdine, a handkerchief, a headband, a head cloth, a head covering, a headdress, a head scarf, a hijab, a hood, a kerchief, a madras, a manteau, a mantilla, a mantle, a mozzetta, a muffler, a neckcloth, a necktie, a paletot, a pashima, a pelerine, a pelisse, a poncho, a rebozo, a serape, a shawl, a stole, a tabard, a throe, a tie, a tippet, a vandyke, a victorine, a yashmak, a veil, a wimple, or a wrap.

6 Feb. 2023

Business

The plural of the word *business* is *businesses*, and that word in the plural may stand for both *busyness* and *businessexcesses*.

8 Feb. 2023

Sure Thing

It is an idiom that means ... well ... “sure thing.” The problem (and there are always problems with matters like these) is that nothing in life is “sure.” There is no surety, no certainty, in society, in theory, in life, in the world, or in the universe. The idiom applies not just to “things,” it seems, but also to “notions,” “emotions,” “beliefs,” etc. There is a recognition that certainty has never yet been a characteristic of existence in space and time.

9 Feb. 2023

Regime

Every major *regime* is worth its weight in its weapons systems, in its ideologies, and in its theories of combat – plus its *regimen* and its “*regimemes*.”

10 Feb. 2023

Tibet House US

In the pages of a current issue of *The New Yorker*, I paused over a full-page photograph of a life-sized image of what is identified as a Seated Buddha Torso. Among its notable features is the absence of the head and an arm. Yet without difficulty I could imagine what is not there: the size of the head and the features of the face as well as the placement of the seated figure’s right arm. These were missing but not absent, so to speak.

Then a few unrelated pages later, I read a very short article about Tibet House in New York City, which is usually referred to as Tibet House US, to distinguish it from other such “houses” or museums and cultural centres that were opened in other countries around the world to preserve traces of the rapidly disappearing age-old Tibetan culture, which since 1950 has been overtaken by the People’s Republic of China with its 1.4 billion population. Now the population of Tibet, officially Tibet Autonomous Region, is 6 million Tibetans and 7.5 million Chinese.

Opened in 1987, Tibet House US is one of nine such cultural and social centres established in foreign countries. Tibet

House US serves as the official residence of Tenzin Gyatso, Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

10 Feb. 2023

Unidentified Flying Objects

Spotted in the skies over North America in February 2023 were unusual weather balloons or high-flying surveillance devices. They are not to be confused with UFOs (Unidentified Flying Objects). Instead, they are Unidentified Flying *Subjects* – being the *objects* of innumerable discussions.

15 Feb. 2023

Farsi

The official language of Iran, officially regarded as Persian, is also known as Farsi. One of its unusual characteristics is that it has a Present Perfect Tense which presents past actions that continue to affect the present. (It is sometimes referred to as “is-was.” For example: “Have you been to this place before?”) Another unusual feature is that Farsi is Gender Neutral, lacking as it does all gender markers. Here are three words – “assassin,” “bizarre,” and “candy” – that number among the many words that come to the English language from Farsi. The Sufi poet Rumi

wrote his ever-popular mystical verses in Farsi in the thirteenth century.

15 Feb. 2023

Collections

The characteristic of a *collection* – paperweights, books, videos, vintage automobiles, hockey cards, etc. – is that even after the *accumulation* has become a *recollection* it continues to exist at least in part to enrich one's *cabinet of memories*.

15 Feb. 2023

Plague

My wife and I find ourselves apologizing to our children and through them to our grandchildren for failing to foresee the coming of the plague called the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic which has extended from January 2020 to the present date and presumably well beyond that as well.

15 Feb. 2023

Stairs

To an elderly man or woman who suffers from arthritis, the way to refer to a “*flight* of stairs” is unforgettably as “a *fright* of stairs.”

16 Feb. 2023

Earth

Since our Planet Earth is known to be solivagant, its population is known much of the time – in point of fact, close to all the time – to be either divagate or heteroclite or heteromorphic.

18 Feb. 2023

Earthlings

Because our Planet Earth is solivagant, its population divagates all the time.

18 Feb. 2023

La Mise en Abyme

Inspired by Danica and Bill Andersen

Every artwork or handiwork or design of mankind is what the French refer to as *la mise en abyme*. It is a production that is a smaller version of the world itself.

18 Feb. 2023

Hidden Variables

Hidden *variables* are not always concealed *valuables*, though they

could be *invaluable* and hence justifiably kept in hiding.

20 Feb. 2023

Poetry R.I.P.

It is often suggested that serious English-language poetry died or at least began its precipitous decline in public interest in the year 1922, and that its appeal had pretty well expired by the year 2022. The first year marks the inaugural publication of T.S. Eliot's long modernist poem "The Waste Land" in the premier issue of *The Criterion* (October 1922), the literary quarterly which he himself founded, edited, and published in London. The second year marks the centennial of the first appearance of both "The Waste Land" and *The Criterion*, the first wave of modernism in Western literature.

22-23 Feb. 2023

Mortal Considerations

I am not sure whether the days we must endure are growing shorter or the nights that we try to endure are growing longer, but I am reasonably sure that such anomalies as these, and their reverses, apply to whatever it is that we used to experience as normal. Our sense of the passage of time seems to have been compromised and in the process its previous certainty has been curtailed. Anomalies like these may be due to the blight of the

plague or to the plight of old age with its senility, both of which affect us amid our periods of innocence and weakness every moment of daytime and nighttime. It is not very pleasant (in fact it is appalling) but at least it is not permanent, for there will arrive a time, not just a period during the day or the night, when another sense of time altogether, along with its mortal and not immortal considerations, will assume its own command and mastery. It will presumably be unappealing as well as no less appalling.

23 Feb. 2023

My Person: The Wealth of Words

I enjoy amusing myself and my readers with the wealth of words that are afforded by the English language.

I particularly appreciate the way they interact with mind and memory.

Please note that this is *play*, neither linguistics nor philosophy, certainly not philology. Here goes

Person. Key word. A human being.

Personality. Derived term. The impermanent aura of the human being, so to speak.

Persona. The more-or-less permanent character in life and art of the key word.

Personnel. Group of characters, followers rather than leaders.

Personification. Incarnation of these characteristics in one word, the technical term being *prosopopeia*.

Impersonality. The impermanent character in life and in art of the key word.

Persona non grata. Latin for “person not welcome” in the singular, the plural being “*personae non gratae*,” familiar from foreign affairs.

This ad hoc consideration of the word *person* leaves me with the following query: “Are the two words *my person* beguiling or are they duplicitous?”

23 Feb. 2023

Existential

I observed a change in a word’s meaning, specifically its emphasis or significance, that took place since the advent of the Coronavirus Pandemic and the new use is likely to remain with us and indeed obscure the original philosophical meaning of the word in question. That word is existentialism, notably in its adjectival form: *existential*. The philosophical dimension of the word has been sidelined in favour of the notion that the word now refers to the hardships that accompany human existence, for instance “existential threat.” Jean-Paul Sartre, who coined the original term for his philosophy that “existence precedes essence,” would be dismayed to hear it spoken or to read it written and trivialized and hence sidelined.

24-25 Feb. 2023

Life & Death

I wish I could agree with Alice Walker who wrote in her journal, “I love life which I know, better than death which I don’t.” Loving life for its super-abundance of richness and variety is a positive act, but does one ever know what the remainder of one’s life has to offer? I doubt it. Yet one does know instinctively that living includes dying. It is true nobody knows anything at all about death, for there is nothing there to know and certainly nothing at all to know about. How could this ever be “a positive act”?

24-25 Feb. 2023

Nation or Notion

In memory of Tommy Douglas

A “nation” could refer to an miscellany of features – an army, a country, a government, an ideology, a land, a nationality, a state, a territory, a tradition, a realm, a people, and so on – yet unless included in this miscellany is a “notion,” a notion of what it was, a notion of what it is, or a notion of what it could be, or a nation is not really very much at all.

24-25 Feb. 2023

Nature

The planet Earth (third from the Sun) is generally indifferent to the way it provides for its inhabitants, whether inhuman or human or non-human, and it carries on regardless of the baleful or baneful consequences of its actions and reactions. We human beings (with very few exceptions) take this indifference in our stride with a woeful pride. (By now you are probably tired of reading about such matters. Is that not so?)

25 Feb. 2023

Characteristic Expression

Characteristic of my speech are three words. I repeat these words from time to time, especially when required to be particularly thoughtful. The expression, a harmless one, goes like this: “In any case ” Then I taper off. Until it was pointed out to me by listeners, including The Reverend John Webster Grant, last editor at The Ryerson Press, that I was aware of the use (the overuse) that I was making of this common English expression. It is a way of stalling or a way of being non-committal. From time to time it leads the way for a conversation to be inclusive if not all-inclusive. Needless to say, it is time I found a substitute expression, as overuse is poor use. I am searching even now

25 Feb. 2023

The Orient Within

In memory of Denis Saurat and Harold Saurat

We seek without that which cannot be found within. We seek within that which cannot be found without. The problem is we continue to seek whatever is never to be found or fabricated ... neither hither nor yonder. There is no need to seek ... thoughts, feelings, sensations ... no need to accord or discord in concert with them ... they form and fade all by themselves ... seeking them is an act that comes to no avail. All journeys end in vacant and cavernous time. Such is life's journey's end. The Orient within? The Occident without. There is no difference.

1-2 March 2023

Last of Life's Inventory

I find I cannot talk clearly; words resemble garbled sounds. I find I cannot stand up straight, as I seem to be about to pitch over. I find the room I am in appears to tilt and change its size, shape, and hue. But for all this annoyance I would collapse into a deep sleep. I feel fear but know that there is nothing I can do about what is happening to me. That is, there is nothing for me to do. Nothing except rub my teeth with the edge of my tongue, as a tooth is loose. Is this going to go on for much longer ... as long as forever? Is it a permanent condition or a temporal one that will pass soon enough? I feel cold, I feel hot, I sense nothing at all. I

feel alone, observed, ignored, upset. I seem to feel unfamiliar even to or with or beside myself. Yes, I am detached from myself. I am less than once I was. No longer am I me. Disjointed, disarticulated ... me. Less than I am is me. Once serviceable, now bad tempered and unproductive.

The first sign that something serious was happening to me is that I am restless and my arms and legs are moving of their own accord for no purpose of which I was or am aware. I open my mouth to speak but I find I am mumbling and some people are staring at me showing signs of consternation and concern on the features of their faces. I find I have things to say – answers to offer, questions to proffer – that I cannot even ask, nonetheless answer. Memories and names are in short supply. The answers would be nonsensical to be sure. What is happening? Spur of the moment inventory: My skin is cold like sheets of ice; it is red like flames of fire. I am edacious; I am lethargic. I fear that no good could possibly come of this disorientation.

My hands are jittery, my vision is watery, my mouth is dry, my mind is muddled, my stomach is upset, I cannot concentrate, I am upset, as much as you must be merely reading this! This is *the or an ending*

1-2 March 2023

Strange Sounds

When I was quite young, my father returned from a trip and handed me a gift. It was a large seashell. I had never seen a

seashell before. He explained what it was, that it came from the sea, and instructed me to place it against my ear, either the right one or the left one. If I listened carefully, I would be able to hear "something." I did so and when I began to frown and looked puzzled, he asked me, "What do you hear?" I replied, "I hear some strange sounds." "What are those 'strange sounds'?" "I don't know," I admitted. He then said, "Those are the sounds of the sea where I found the seashell." I looked puzzled and then dubious. When I pressed him for more information, he replied, "I'm kidding you. You realize you are not hearing the sounds of the sea. Instead you are hearing the sounds of the blood that is passing through the veins of your body. The sea roars, the blood races." I was a puzzled anew by these explanations which were novel to me. At first I found it was preposterous, but later on I realized that what my Dad was telling me was true. Whether the sounds were those of the waves of the sea or the stream of blood through my veins, the audio effect was quite remarkable. All of this occurred a great many years ago.

About a week ago, I remembered the seashell and its sounds. Even though I was lacking a seashell, with my hands I cupped my ears and listened closely expecting to hear again "the sounds of the sea." To my surprise I heard not "the sounds of the sea," neither did I hear "the flow of blood through my veins." But I did hear some other sounds quite clearly. But what were these sound, these chirping sounds?

It occurred to me that I was hearing the sounds from interplanetary space, the electronic chirping sounds of the presence of alien beings, Martians, communicating among

themselves. Why was this so? How could it be so? It was so because I had, carelessly, forgotten that I still had the hearing devices that I use in my ears. Forgetting to remove them, I had cupped both ears with my hands and suddenly heard these electronic sounds and fancied that I could understand the meaning behind “the communications of the Martians.”

The sounds of the sea, the flow of blood, and the communications of the Martians ... the little delights of a long life. I have no idea what the Martians were discussing. They sounded like some race of insect-beings. Could they have been discussing a planned invasion of Earth from their Red Planet? I have no idea. I am only sorry I cannot tell my long-deceased Father about “my discovery.”

2-3 March 2023

Northrop Frye

Perhaps the earliest insight of the literary critic Northrop Frye was an appreciation of the following fact: The poet and artist William Blake was not a mystic but a visionary.

4-5 March 2023

Gender

According to the agenda, each one of the genders has its own *genre*.

5 March 2023

Noumenal

The adjective *noumenal* could be pronounced “now mental,” suggestive of “phenomenal.”

5 March 2023

Man and Woman

No element of mankind is *permanent* ... except perhaps *per(wo)manent*. Such considerations are the antitheses of considerations that are *phenomenal*.

5 March 2023

Fourth Way

The Fourth Way is a movement and school of thought established that endeavours to turn Man Limited not into Man Unlimited but into Man Incorporated.

6 March 2023

Ukraine

In the past it was known as “The Ukraine.” These days it is called simply “Ukraine.” Nobody knows what it will be called in the

future: either the one or the other; neither the one nor the other.

8 March 2023

Crimea

Crimea is the name given the peninsula of Ukraine that extends south into the Black Sea. It is currently occupied by Russians. If the peninsula ever felt the need for a motto, it should be the following warning: “Remember: Crimea doesn’t pay.”

9 March 2023

Winterize

We have the verb *to winterize* and every Canadian knows what that means. In case you have forgotten it means dealing with snow, ice, and cold. We also have the verb *to summerize*, and although it means the opposite of *to winterize*, it is not much used. I am not sure why. People prefer to spell it *to summarize*, in other words *to sum up*, which has nothing to do with the sun and heat or vacations or seasons of the year, unfortunately.

9 March 2023

You and I Are Here

Tundra lies all the way to the North Pole,

We cross the Atlantic to the seashores of Europe,
Tracks crisscross the trails across the Prairies,
A Pacific Ocean takes us on route to the Orient.

A riff on Canada's location on the surface of the planet inspired by the Hungarian author László Krasznahorkai's long-titled, short travel book *A Mountain to the North, a Lake to the South, Paths to the West, a River to the East* (2003) translated by Otilie Mulzet in 2013.

10 March 2023

Books vs. Looks

The politician or the official *looks* to the law *books*, whereas the activist leader worth his or her salt *looks* at the state of affairs that the laws and bylaws have created in the past; the latter reader acts independently for positive change in the present for the future.

10 March 2023

Three Stages

The thrust stage of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, introduced to North America by British theatre director Tyrone Guthrie in the early 1950s, bears the passing image of both the U.S. Senate Chamber and the U.S. House of Representatives Chamber, which are located respectively in the North Wing and the South Wing of

the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. It is at best a “passing image,” for both the Festival and the U.S. Government attempted to move the centre of action on the “stage” close to the “audience” itself, seated or standing in the area once known as “the pit.”

14 March 2023

Things that You Cannot Do

For Nick Drumbolis

Remember your actual weight to within a pound or two.
Imagine your ideal height to within an inch or two.
Anticipate in advance the day that you will die.
Whisper “thank you” to your long deceased parents.
Explain the meaning of the word “dispositive.”
Disregard the actions of a long-time enemy.
Rewrite or revise in part the script of your life.
Say “sorry” on the proper and appropriate occasions.
Feign forgiveness of another’s cutting words.
Forgive *sans* forgetting; forgetting *sans* forgiving, etc.
Imagine what it is impossible to imagine.
Such things as these are those that we are unable to do.

15 March 2023

Enemy

Is it true that the plural of “enemy” is “enema”?

15 March 2023

Our Grandchildren’s Genealogies

Composed for James Callum Wallace Lourie

The genealogies of Ruth and John are indeed diverse,
As varied as could be. Both were born in Kitchener,
Ontario, the month of March, the year being 1936.

Ruth’s ancestry is at once both Polish and Jewish;
The ancestry of John is, believe it or not,
Greek, German, Italian, and French-Canadian.

The couple produced three quite dissimilar children:
Jonathan, who married Suzanne Conway,
Of French-Canadian and Maritime ancestry.

Cathie, who fell for Stuart Lourie, a canny Scot
(whose background is Celtic, French, and German).
Theo, who married Annie Bergeron, a Québécoise.

Each couple has raised two children,
Six grandchildren in all for Ruth and John –

Here are their names and backgrounds:

Jonathan and Suzanne: Alexander (aka Alex) and Julia;
Stuart and Cathie: James and Findley (aka Fin);
Theo and Annie: Nico (aka Nicolas) and Thomas (aka Tom).

What to make of all of this? Anything at all?
Nothing of this? *Everything in the world!*
This ancestry is veritably a world in small!

13-15 March 2023

Television

Television offers its viewers an abundance of miniseries that are rife with miseries.

16 March 2023

Priest

Description of a priest who is pious but garrulous: “*altar* egotist.”

16 March 2023

Disorientations

There are tides in the affairs of the skies. There are winds that

gust through the waves of the seas. There are cyclones that tie the rainbows in knots. There are fierce fires at the Earth's core that have yet to be described and will never be extinguished during the lifetime of the human species.

16 March 2023

Words in Volumes of Poetry

It is rumoured that there are phrases that are printed on the pages of those volumes that detach themselves from their companions in order to accumulate in heaps of individual letters and punctuation marks at the bottoms of their pages. Indeed, some of their words even fly about gracefully in the ambient air before descending on their own steam all the way to the bottoms of the pages where the alphabetical letters will not be blown away. A few, a very few, depending on you, the reader and I the writer, as well as the wordage in question, will once in a while fly in your face, enter your body through the irises of the eyes, and then settle deep in your heart and soul, where they become veritable soul-mates.

16 March 2023

Social Media

“Social media” is a misnomer. No medium is “social.” By its nature every medium is “un-social,” and a number of these are

best described as “non-social” or even “anti-social.”

18 March 2023

Numbers, Irrational

Irrational numbers are succinctly expressed through fractions. They may also be expressed less systematically but more informatively through decimals, in which case their values are never fully expressed, certainly not succinctly.

18 March 2023

Science

The benefits of science are made manifest to everyone who gives them more than a moment’s thought. Yet there are some people who regard the scientific method as some sort of *omniscience*.

18 March 2023

La Grande Peur

La Grande Peur is French for “the Great Fear,” a reference to the social panic that preceded the French Revolution. It might be said that in the past and present the French populace and State have been given to many such panics.

19 March 2023

How to Say “I” in Twenty European Languages

<i>unë</i>	Albanian
<i>jo</i>	Catalan
<i>ja</i>	Croatian
<i>jeg</i>	Danish
<i>ik</i>	Dutch
<i>minä</i>	Finnish
<i>je</i>	French
<i>eu</i>	Galician
<i>ich</i>	German
<i>Egó</i>	Greek
<i>én</i>	Hungarian
<i>io</i>	Italian
<i>Ech</i>	Luxembourgish
<i>jac</i>	Macedonian
<i>I</i>	Maltese
<i>ja</i>	Polish
<i>eu</i>	Romanian
<i>jaz</i>	Slovenian
<i>yo</i>	Spanish
<i>Rwy'n</i>	Welsh

19 March 2023

Slavery Reparations

What to call Slavery Reparations? How about changing one letter in the word “negotiations” to read “negrotiations”?

21 March 2023

Who Would Have Been One Hundred This Year?

The title above is wording that appears in a great many essays and articles about *long-lived* individuals. Nobody I know who is still alive will be one hundred years old this year. So no centennial celebration is in order!

The most *long-remembered* human beings (all males) are founders of religions and/or religious philosophies. As a matter of curiosity, here are the names of six of the most important figures in religious history who would be at least a thousand years older than they ever were had they lived to the year 2023.

Moses was born in 1407 B.C.E. Gautama Buddha in 949 B.C.E. Laotze in 531 B.C.E. Confucius in 479 B.C.E. Jesus of Nazareth in A.D. 27. Mohammed the Prophet in A.D. 632.

22 March 2023

Lay Figure

A lay figure is the term used to refer to a small-sized, jointed human figure made of plastic or wood that is employed by artists

and designers as models for artistic purposes. Sometimes I think our art, dance, and literature consist in the main of herds of lay figures.

22 March 2023

Republicans & Democrats

Republicans and Democrats represent the rank and file of the political class system in the United States during the second decade of the Twenty-first Century. And by “rank” I do mean rank.

23 March 2023

Elections

Observers of the American political scene are not wrong when they complain that it seems to be true that Americans are forever holding elections and hence always electioneering. Right this moment there is an election being held somewhere on some level or other somewhere in the United States. Better than being a politico or an elected politician is to be a pollster, of which there are a great many, or a news commentator on television, of which there are a too great many!

23 March 2023

Cause & Effect

Greater than “cause and effect” is “*clause* and effect” because nothing is as it sounds or seems to be in U.S. politics. The effect is to be based on the “clause” introduced into the discussion and the deliberation by – guess who? – the lawyers and attorneys, political and cultural commentators, and no end of personalities and so-called pollsters and legal consultants.

23 March 2023

Saliency in Poetry

What I find to be missing from most contemporary poetry is any amount of saliency. The fact that the majority of widely published poets and poetasters and even academics who explicate such matters will have to check the meaning of that term and its relevance in the context of literature, especially contemporary literature, proves my point. (Note the pun.)

23 March 2023

Life

I woke up and I was eighty-seven.

8:07 a.m., 24 March 2023

Words: Some Suspicious, Some Suggestive

Akin to skin
Breasts and the rest
Curves and crevices
Exotic even erotic
Lithe legs, long legends
Tits and titillations
Virtue versus virility
Zeros as Arrows of Eros

24 March 2023

Questions

Which one is worse? The question unasked or the question unanswered?

25 March 2023

Collector of Canadiana

I consider myself one of the world's leading collectors of Canadiana. What I collect are quotations about this country and its peoples as well as references to some of its peculiarities among the nation states of the world.

So it was with the pleasure of surprise that one day I came across a reference to Canada in a drawing by Saul Steinberg, the

celebrated Romanian-born, American cartoonist. In fact, the reference appears, innocently enough, in what is probably his most famous and influential coloured pencil drawing, the one known by various titles, notably “View of the World from 9th Avenue.”

It has its own entry in Wikipedia. The cartoon originally appeared on the cover of *The New Yorker* on March 29, 1976, and subsequently elsewhere, as it has been much imitated as an amusing though clever satire. It is best described as a Manhattan-oriented view of the world. From the vantage-point of a skyscraper, it names, as if in their approximate locations on the periphery of Manhattan, a series of familiar foreign countries, including China, Japan, Russia, Mexico, and even if not inevitably Canada, which appears as nothing more than a flat surface! Nice to know that “we made it.” It brightens the day of every Canadiana collector I know!

29 March 2023

Manhattan’s Chinatown

I was in my early teens when my parents took me to New York City where we spent a few days being tourists who were enjoying the sights and delights of Manhattan Island. The year must have been 1950 or thereabouts when I was about fourteen years old. A number of sights moved me greatly, including being a member of the studio audience of an early radio quiz show. One of the show’s panelists was the great cartoonist Al Capp (whom I had a

second occasion to meet about forty years later in Toronto). But the greatest thrill of all was touring New York's Chinatown. Not that we saw any unexpected sights, like kidnappings, murders, etc., but the one memory that remains vivid is staring at two street signs. They identified the meeting of Pell Street and Mott Street. I immediately connected the intersection of the commercial and residential streets with a reference in one of Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu mystery novels. I decided on slim evidence indeed that here, and not in London's Limehouse, is where the action of one of the novels was set. The sole problem with this memory is that I distinctly recalled the sign to read "Peel St." and not "Pell St." but the other sign certainly did read "Mott St." I wanted to point out the street sign to inform the tourists around us the following fact: "Here is where Sax Rohmer set the action of one of his novels!" But instinct told me that nobody would care, hardly anybody would know about Rohmer and Dr. Fu Manchu or find it worth pausing over if they did, and my parents would say, "Forget about it! Don't make a scene." So I learned a little about withholding what really excited me. Recalling this instant, which may have lasted for all of one minute, I learned to simply enjoy without necessarily sharing. What I also learned is how malleable memory is, confusing (as I suppose I did until a few minutes ago when I decided to tap into this vivid memory) only to realize there is a confusion over Peel and Pell in Manhattan's Chinatown. Odd!

29 March 2023

Aleister Crowley

I made the decision to part with the five cartons of the papers of the late Alexander Watt which largely consisted of letters and manuscripts that expressed his interest in Aleister Crowley, also the late. After asking and checking around I came to a insight that had not occurred to me until that very moment. The insight is as follows: There is no active market for Crowley materials, but there do exist, scattered hither and yon, avid individual collectors of his and related materials. For this I am grateful! It is also a relief to have dispatched my obligation to the sons of Mr. Watt and to have preserved the manuscripts (largely letters to and from Crowley, texts of talks, etc.) for a period of at least two decades. Crowley is someone I have yet to write about, but the task of doing so at this point in my life is not to be taken lightly ... or even at all.

29 March 2023

Legends

Nowhere on Earth will be found that there are any ends to the legends of *man-kind*.

31 March 2023

Chyrons

It is unfortunate that life comes complete without a series of chyrons to set the stage, to identify the actors, and to explain the

significance of what is happening, has happened, or will happen. Life remains incomplete and sometimes incomprehensible without chryons.

31 March 2023

World

The world is wise beyond the reach of wisdom, active beyond the call to action, emotional beyond the beat of the heart, expressive beyond the need for explanations. In fact, the world, whenever it embraces such features as Heaven and Hell, in the form of Purgatory and Limbo, has within its reach immeasurably more than one man or one woman may ever know.

31 March 2023

Linear Perspectives

To revise a familiar warning on side-view mirrors, objects in the mirror are less often closer than they appear, or more often farther away than they are, at least until a collision occurs, when they may be one on top of the other!

3 April 2023

Counterfactual Matters

The word *counterfactual* (with or without the hyphen between its two components as in *counter-factual*) should read as *counteractual* for the simple reason that the *factual* is often not

the *actual* or the *actual* is not often the *factual*. All that is to be respected or to be suspected is to find the two of them in combination.

3 April 2023

Notes, Cautions, Warnings

1.

No hazmats.

I'm not a robot.

Not to be found in stores.

Prices and conditions may vary.

Objects in mirror are closer than they appear.

2.

Existence,

Exists,

Exist,

Exit,

Exeunt.

3.

Do what thy manhood bids thee do

Love is the Law, Love under Will

A breath, a wind, a sound, a voice,

A tinkling of the camel-bell.

3-4 April 2023

Obligatory & Voluntary

I know it is stretching a definition in musical notation as well as extending a spelling in musical annotation, but to me *a voluntary* is the composition that the soloist chooses to perform as well as how to perform it, whereas *an obligatory* is the composition the soloist is required to perform as well as how to perform it.

6 April 2023

India

The Republic of India is known, mistakenly, as a “subcontinent,” based on its shape and size, but that description fails to take into account India’s essential status and character as a “supercontinent,” a gigantic mass of land that is super-rich in arts and crafts, religions and philosophies, that will seemingly endure forever.

6-7 April 2023

Mafia

The so-called Code of the Mafia is said to be *honour*, but in this usage the single word *honor* in its American spelling should be coupled with the French word *noir* to produce the following neologism: *honoir*.

6-7 April 2023

Miraculous, The

Is it actually possible or even conceivable that the miraculous could be considered to be “*genuinely* miraculous”?

6-7 April 2023

Partition of India

I was all of eleven years old and living in the Dominion of Canada so I knew next to nothing about the Partition of India in August of 1947 with the formation of Northern Pakistan and East Pakistan (subsequently renamed Bangladesh) so in no way may I be held responsible for the bloodbath that accompanied it with consequences to this very day. But as a human being I do feel responsible for this tragedy of mankind.

7 April 2023

Self-styled Epitaph

of Saadat Hasan Manto, Pakistani writer (1912-1955),
famous for his Urdu fiction

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful:

Here lies Saadat Hasan Manto and with him lie buried all
the secrets and mysteries of the art of short-story writing

Under tons of earth he lies, still wondering who among the two is the greater short-story writer: God or He.

*

However, on the insistence of his family, the text of the epitaph that appeared on his headstone was an alternative one, which he also authored, inspired by a couplet from Mirza Ghalib:

“This is the grave of Saadat Hasan Manto, who still thinks his name was not the repeated word on the tablet of time.”

Found on the Web, 7 April 2023

Venice on the Adriatic

About fifteen years ago my wife Ruth and I spent four nights in a regular room in the Hotel Principe in Venice, as well as one more night in a premium room with a balcony overlooking the Grand Canal. What we most recall about that night and that fabled vista was what the tourist literature fails to mention – two of Venice’s characteristics: the obnoxious odour of the Canal and the all-night noise and racket that its traffic generates.

7 April 2023

The Lorelei on the Rhine

With my wife I motored along the Rhine Gorge between Koblenz and Rudesheim in Germany at the time when the country’s capital was located in Bonn. We admired the limestone site known as the

Lorelei (also spelled Loreley), the structure so fabled in romantic German poem and song. The Rhine River itself was not so charming, as it was heavy with freight and tourism traffic at the time, rather like Ontario's busy and noisy Highway 401 (aka Macdonald-Cartier Freeway), the Toronto segment of which is the busiest highway in North America. The Lorelei would shudder at this comparison for the Rhine is 1,232 kilometres long, whereas the "401" is only 828 kilometres in length.

7 April 2023

Point in Time

"At this point in time" is regarded as an idiom when it is not disregarded as a cliché. Do the five words mean more or less than they identify or imply? Does time itself exist and does it "have a point"? Does it "point out" anything? The hands on the face of a time-piece have a point (or rather two or three points in all) but instants seem to succeed one another, having a serial existence, but no prior or post existence.

7 April 2023

Solar System

In honour of the world's amateur astronomers

Through these binoculars – twin telescopes, each of the eyes – I

am able to search the sky by day and by night. The contents of the sky, from suns to planets to *débris*, are all there, somewhere, but hardly close at hand. The results of the search inspire such casual memories and impressions as these.

Sun. Emperor. Light-bringer. *Sine qua non.* The source itself is too bright to out-stare. Emperor indeed. All hail!

Mercury. Your surface contours and colours remind me of a child's marble, called an alley, with many streaks of faded tones.

Venus. You remain in my gaze, a woman gauzily veiled like the lover you are reputed to be. C.S. Lewis, who felt this too, named you, mysteriously, Perelandra.

Earth. "Fourth from the Sun." This is the sole planet that we know supports both intelligent and unintelligent life. Robert A. Heinlein called it "the globe that gave me birth" and celebrated "the fleecy skies and the cool green hills of Earth." The solar system and the cosmos would be the lesser if the varieties and forms of life were subjected to nuclear irradiation.

Mars. The sand on its surface is the shade of dried blood. Yet the Martians are not those world-destroying creatures depicted by H.G. Wells; instead, they are the ethereal spirits and shape-changing creatures so memorably portrayed by Ray Bradbury in stories in *The Martian Chronicles*.

Jupiter. Ribbons of colour. "All these worlds are yours except Europa. Attempt no landing there." Stern words of warning about Jupiter's icy moon Europa in Arthur C. Clarke's prophetic novel *Odyssey Two*.

Saturn. The planet is "rich in rings," and this set of rings is

one of the most distinctive features of our solar system. No one imagined these so-called rings as dramatically and romantically and as mightily and movingly as the well-loved space artist and illustrator Chesley Bonestell.

Uranus. Opaque. It bears the name of the Greek God of the Sky and is sometimes depicted as an Ice God, the Grandfather of the Greek Gods. Uranus's name, is quite often mispronounced. It all depends on where you place the accent – on the first syllable or the third!

Neptune. It seems to be one vast ocean, though not an intelligent sea like the semi-sentient one on the extra-solar planet Solaris, immortalized in fiction and philosophy by Stanisław Lem in his philosophical novel titled inevitably *Solaris*.

Pluto. Once upon a time it was the outermost planet of the solar system. It was so regarded between 1930 and 2006 when it bore the name Pluto. Now it is regarded as a nameless “dwarf planet” and part of the Kuiper Belt. With more eloquence, it lies, almost out of vision, “beyond the seas of Neptune.”

Such are some of the parts of the solar circle of the heavens visible through my binoculars. Be sure to take into account what is missing – miscellaneous asteroids, comets, meteors, moons, and *débris*, some of it man-made ... not to mention in the background the tapestry woven of the light of the enigmatic stars of the countless other solar systems, both those that are visible and those that are beyond the reach of visibility.

10 April 2023

Cabin Fever

No one I know realizes that “cabin fever” has an opposite – its upside, so to speak – which I refer to as “cabana feast.”

11 April 2023

The Married Couple Face Mortality

We, the two of us, know we will eventually die. There is no doubt about it. What we would like to know right now is the following: Which one of us will die before the other and why? Why it seems so important is a puzzler to me, but that is the nature of things, or so it seems.

11 April 2023

Television News

Television “news services” that are anonymous end up being monotonous. Television “commercial messages” are monstrous as well as atrocious.

11 April 2023

Wife

You exist in my heart, no longer in my arms; you persist in my

mind, no longer in my thoughts; you endure in my wishes, no longer in this world of toil and trouble. Yet these inexplicable sensations remain all very troubling experiences.

11 April 2023

Death

The word “death” appears on the reverse side of this sheet of paper – or it should! On the obverse side of this sheet of paper, on this book page indeed, appears the word “life.” If pages in books indeed had three sides (a novel idea!) what word would appear on the third page? Would it be “living” or perhaps “loving”?

11 April 2023

Love

I have no idea why love is so moving; indeed, why the sensation is so *commoving*. Maybe someone who is still in love will explain why this is so.

11 April 2023

Whenever and Wherever

For Mira and Geoffrey Clarfield

Whenever I am in New York City, I walk around and gape at Times Square and wonder, “Could this bustling and hustling conjunction of the avenues of the world really be the crossroads of the world? Or is the centre Fifth Avenue.”

Whenever I am in Sofia, Bulgaria (yes, Bulgaria), I wonder how a capital city in modern times in Eastern Europe could have a yellow brick road with strolling teenage girls who hold each other’s hands as they amble along it.

Whenever I am in the London, the capital of England and of the United Kingdom, it occurs to me that Bond Street is the capital of the European Continent and centre of the English-speaking population of the entire world.

Whenever I am in Paris (France, inevitably), nostalgia brings me to seek out the Left Bank which holds my attention for its architectural and cultural interests and its human values, not to mention its cafés.

Whenever I am in Toronto, which is almost all the time, because I live here, I try to enjoy a stroll down the city’s Yonge Street, but I find it has changed so much and not for the better since my last amble that I have no particular affection left over for it.

Whenever ... wherever ... whatever ... but enough is enough, for there are capital and other cities with main streets

galore, all glamorous and gorgeous in their own fashion, though some of them are no more or not quite what once they were.

12 April 2023

Tinnitus

What I do not understand about Tinnitus, which is the auditory condition that refers to a ringing noise or some other repetitive distracting sounds that the inner ear somehow “hears,” is how the word is to be pronounced?

The word is Latin for the verb “to ring.” Is it “tin-it-us” (three equal emphases) or is it “tin-eye-tus” (slack-stress-slack). Audiologists and other inner-ear specialists seem to embrace both pronunciations, even in the same sentence, hardly aware of doing so. Maybe they too are suffering from this very hearing difficulty!

14 April 2023

Realis and Irrealis

Mood and modality need to be explained to fully distinguish between these two words, both adjectives. In general it is true that while *realis* refers to states or events that have occurred, *irrealis* refers to states or events that have not occurred or at least not yet.

14 April 2023

Beside, Besides

I will not take the time to define and then distinguish the meaning of each one of these two words, except to note that a work of art, such as a painting, hanging on the wall of a classical museum or a contemporary art gallery, with visitors in attendance, enters into a sensorium that includes the viewer, so it is possible to say the individual work may be described as “to be beside itself.”

16 April 2023

Reanimated Meanings

Evening as I fall asleep, I reflect on the meaning of words and phrases and expressions that I have encountered throughout the day; every afternoon, when I am awake and have the time available to me, I ruminate and speculate on how to put these “relics” of language to good use. Now and then I am successful in expanding on the possibilities inherent in such sounds, characters, letters, syllables, and statements (like these), and am able to turn them into semi-aphoristic expressions or structured shapes vaguely suggestive of recognized or yet-to-be accepted poetic forms. The constructions that result give me pleasure; the pseudo-ones are retained for further consideration. It has occasionally taken years for them to be “reanimated” as I like to express it. For me, literary expression is a quest or pursuit, indeed an ongoing errand, so to speak, that on occasion reaches its destination, attains its goal. I hope that the readers of these

compositions will agree with me because they feel much the same as I do.

17 April 2023

Medicine Chest vs. Medicine Bundle

For M.T. Kelly

In the bathroom of each house, apartment, or condominium, at least in the residences in the larger cities of North America, there is a treasure chest that is recognized to be one by everyone. It is fastened to the wall above the sink in the lavatory and usually there is a mirror fastened to the face of its hinged door. Swing open the door and within you will find all manner of goods and commodities that guarantee services and improved health and welfare! Here are some of those, at random:

Medicines and remedies for afflictions that ail us; a bottles of acetylsalicylic acid, aka aspirin; jars of pills, tablets, and lozenges; tubes of toothpaste; small cartons of prescription medications; various drugs; large bottles of mouthwash; his-and-her comb and hairbrush sets; a package of band-aids; a pair of finger-nail clippers as well as a pair of scissors with a couple of varied shaped nail-files; numerous cosmetics, compounds, lipsticks, etc.

Such a veritable treasure chest like the one described here is known a “medicine cabinet,” though it is not to be confused with a “medicine bundle” carried by the indigenous people, a

reticule that has fewer items within it than this stationary “treasure chest.” Yet which one is more potent or more useful?

I cannot answer that question but I can share with the reader the experience that I had many years ago on the Chippewas of Rama Reserve, near Orillia, Ontario, where a young brave brandished his “medicine bundle” and glared at me when I foolishly asked him if he ever told anyone what was inside it. “I never tell. No one knows.” He glowered. I took my cue, excused the question that was prompted out of idle interest, and assured him I had learned a lesson. The lesson is don’t ask questions out of school.

Yet I still wonder about what his bundle contained.

17-18 April 2023

The Holy Bible like a Flipbook

The charm and fascination of The King James Version of the Bible is that the Old and the New Testaments are like two flipbooks in one. They are flipbooks that have no pictures but instead they do have innumerable words including personal names and place names that evoke images in a manner that may be described as “passing strange.” Yet if you flip these pages, while they lack pictures that move, you may imagine the histories of entire peoples and civilizations passing before your very eyes. This experience is what I take to be the chief appeal of the KJV.

17-18 April 2023

Universe

The profoundest of questions is the following one: Is the universe asyndetic or syndetic?

It may also be asked in this manner: Is the universe an asyndeton or a syndeton?

Warning: The answers may or may not be identical.

18 April 2023

Idiopathy

Are the most serious problems idiopathic in life, in health, and in nature, or are all of them subordinate to one idiopathy or another?

18 April 2023

Amen

I am willing to make a wish and end it with the word “amen” as long as the word is spelled “amenities.”

21 April 2023

Taxis

Parataxis and hypotaxis are words that have nothing to do with

the preferential position of a given taxi at a taxi stand, but with the emphasis given to subordinate phrases and clauses in a sentence.

21 April 2023

Source of a Work of Art

The present work of art, *i.e.*, this idea and ideology, this sentence and sentiment, words and phrases like these, were not created or otherwise constituted by a semi-idle AI Chatbot: “The Church of St. Ucco is made of stucco.” These words are not the product or the production of the human imagination or the intellect of any single man or woman or any single group of people. They are the result of the process of *excavation*, a delving into the spirit of the remains of Early Man who lived and died some four hundred thousand years ago. The remains are the products of pain accompanied by the terror engendered by the experience of living and dying. The arts are thus productions that are early human, or early prehuman, in a sense, and they express for us today what we understand of our predecessors on Earth ... their planetary burial ground, now their planetary bone-yard.

21 April 2023

Broken and Woken

Readers of these texts in the future may wonder about two words

that are repeatedly heard and read on a daily basis and that are taken to describe the quality of our achievements today. The first word is *broken*; the second word is *woken*.

It seems all public works are broken and ought to be discarded as they have broken down and stand in the way of real critical reform. As well, it seems, all of our attitudes are not aware or woke to our blindness to issues of racial injustice, so we have to wake up to what is going on in society. Such speech is part of “critical theory,” yet proponents of it seldom consider the merits of waking up to the notion that what is broken is often easily repaired and what is considered to be illusory is platitudinous. Perhaps what is woken is what is broken.

21 April 2023

Arabic Language

I am not quite sure why this is so but it is at least a curious fact that the Arabic language, the fifth most spoken language on Earth, has eleven words for *love* whereas it has one hundred words for *camel*. Most surprisingly, it has another one hundred words for *God*.

21 April 2023

Live or Lead

“This is the life that we live or lead.” I am never quite sure what

the idiom is. (Live? Lead? Does it matter?) The idiom is idiotic, however, as it is Life that bites us by the scruff of the neck and drags us away from ourselves. (Or is it Death rather than Life that does the biting and the dragging?) Again, I am not quite sure. (Is there anyone who is reading this who is quite sure and knows?)

21 April 2023

Out of Order

Five one four two three
Flow and ebb
Scène en mise

White and black
ZYXWV
You and me

22 April 2023

Aphorisms

A collection of aphorisms like the present one may be the end result of a scavenger hunt conducted by the aphorist who is on the lookout for tiny treasures that have been overlooked by other people and been scattered by time. Certainly the present collection is the end result of just such a disarray.

22 April 2023

Progression

O on one once ounce pounce pouncer pouncers propouncers.

22 April 2023

Problems, Problems

There are problems with this world and indeed within the minds of men and women and in the entirety of creation, that is, the cosmos.

We are faced with this world, but we want to recall an earlier one, or we wish to anticipate a future one. Much of the time we are ahead of the time or behind the time, not on time. Alas, it happens betimes.

22 April 2023

Womanizer

w wo wom woma woman womani womaniz womanize
womanizer womanizers

23 April 2023

Opposite of a Womanizer

I have been unable to find a word that is the opposite of the word

womanizer. Odd. There must be an antilogy. Gentleman? Man of honour? Monogamist? Husband? *Valet de chambre*? Actually, a *seductress* would be the opposite of *womanizer* in terms of gender, a *seducer* or a *man-chaser* also, but not in terms of male attitude. No appropriate word was found – by me!

23 April 2023

Funniest Line

An inadvertently funny line appeared in a mailing of fund-raising material prepared by the Humane Society International. The list is titled “How You Can Help Save the Animals” and it consists in all of one dozen practical suggestions for home-dwellers and land-owners to protect their properties and all of its occupants. The list suggests how “you can help protect wildlife and their habitat in your home and yard.”

Here is the fifth suggestion: “Install bat houses – happy bats, fewer bugs.”

26 April 2023

Our World

Most people, in the Western world and in the 2020s in particular, subscribe to the belief that life for the average person in the world today improves hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month, decade by decade, year by year, century by century,

etc. I am not so sure that this is so, so I am neither among the optimists nor among the pessimists. Yet one would like to believe that there is evidence for this.

But there is also evidence against this. Yes, the life span of the average person is longer in the present than it was in the past. Yet for so many people in other parts of the world it is not longer at all, but due to disease, depression, oppression, hunger, war, violence, etc., it is even less long than it once was. Technology breaks down and collapses as regularly as it is put to the wrong use and the inherent costs mount. I could go on in this vein but will desist.

Our world is truly ours, except that its rewards seem to benefit the few rather than the many.

26 April 2023

Reality

The longer we regard the world as we behold it we become aware of its “ephemereality.”

30 April 2023

Lives Out of Order

What is wrong with our lives these days is that “what should be within is without” and “what should be without is within.”

30 April 2023

Politics

What is wrong with our political parties and policies and practices is that entities become extremities rather than what they should be, and what they should be is non-entities. But political parties cannot agree even on that.

30 April 2023

Witches and Warlocks

Wishes of witches are unseemly when not indecent. Warfare of warlocks is deathly when not deadly.

1 May 2023

Alucard

Vampires are befuddling and befuddled creatures. They believe that to pronounce “Dracula” will kill people but that it is only anthelmintic to pronounce its backwards equivalent “Alucard.”

1 May 2023

Funerals

The main problem with spelling the word “funerals” is that they are so frequent and “real” the word should be spelled “funereal.”

1 May 2023

End of April 2023

One rainy day follows another rainy day
two weeks of night-like days in succession
nature is obsessed with its own gloom

Gloomy Sunday and Gloomy Monday
and so on through the days of the week
or more properly the nights of the week

One month or more of such weather
such that whether one lives or dies
little matters or matters not at all

*Abhorrent acheronian aphotic charnel
chthonian dispiriting funereal ghastly
ghostly mirthless sepulchral stygian*

1 May 2023

Betwixt and Between

This is an old expression in English (apparently first recorded in 1789) which means “neither the one nor the other.” The word “between,” which implies distinction not partial convergence, goes back to the 12th century in English. Perhaps “betwixt and between” should be regarded as an early expression of the notion

of “liminality.” The word *liminalité* was introduced into French-language folklore studies in 1909.

1-2 May 2023

Problems, Problems

It’s a problem that I have, and I have had all my life, all my life, at least so far anyway.

I am unable to distinguish between my brain and my mind, but I still can distinguish between my left hand and my right hand.

I am said to be somewhat brainy, but I believe myself to be only fairly mindful, and that is only some of the time.

I enjoy the presence of other people, but in limited numbers of them at any one time.

I enjoy my own thoughts, but as I grow older I think less and less of or about them, fortunately or unfortunately.

I dislike my own looks and find I differ with other people about them, women mainly, who say they admire them.

I dislike and despair the life I have been living, through little or no fault of my own, but see no way to change what is happening.

I anticipate what is ultimately in store for me, for all of us when I come to think about it, but with less dread and some dispassion.

I anticipate that those people who will read these lines will disapprove of them, though I am not in the least bothered by this.

It is also true that there are people who will approve of these statements, though probably, when pressed, for the wrong reasons, oddly.

Still, I am finding it awkward composing such lines as these, a problem, this poem, as I know it could and should continue for another ten or so admissions.

3 May 2023

Girls and Women

Girls, being younger, go about as if bra-less; women, being older, go about as if bra-lost.

4 May 2023

Gordon Lightfoot

The death of popular singer and songwriter Gordon Lightfoot at the age of eighty-four died in Toronto on May 1, 2023. His passing was widely and deeply mourned. He composed and performed such favourites as “Early Morning Rain” and “If You Could Read My Mind,” not to mention such classics as “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald” and “Canadian Railroad Trilogy.” He was unique for being a “country singer” without “the twang,” whose “country” was Canada, and not some Western part of Canada or some Southern part of the United States. He celebrated the land and the people with lyrics are immediate and

contemporary. They are also powerful. Try to listen to the “Edmund Fitzgerald” elegy without being as moved as Lightfoot is moved whenever he performed it.

It occurred to me that if there is a composing and performing artist who deserves an uncommon tribute it is Lightfoot, and that tribute should be to have the likeness of his facial features carved into the side of a large mountain in the Rockies or outlined in boulders on a hillside like the Cerne Abbas “Rude Man” near Dorset, England. His words call out for it. Casting about for a companion or a competitor for such an honour, I think of the poet Al Purdy, whose work was rough-hewn and “big,” his territory being “the country north of Belleville,” as he describes it in one poem.

Yet Canadians are not generous enough with its artists to think in such terms, and poetry itself is an art form that is less accessible to the reading public than listening is to the public for popular music of quality. Yet both artists deserve outsized tributes. Imaginative ones, or if not imaginative ones, then at least sizeable ones!

4 May 2023

Lingering

Our eyes betray us.

Darkness itself huddles in the night; brightness itself cowers in the light. Here is what we must learn:

To linger elsewhere, neither in the dark nor in the light,
may save us.

5 May 2023

The Strength of the North

There are four lines of free verse (one dozen words in all) that express the essence of the strength of the North. They were composed by the Montreal poet A.J.M. Smotj and they bring to a close his poem titled “The Lonely Land” (1936). It is included in *Complete Poems of A.J.M. Smith* (2006) edited by Brian Trehearne.

This is the beauty
of strength
broken by strength
and still strong.

5 -7 May 2023

Special Effects

When the colours yellow and brown are mixed together, depending on the admixtures, they produce such shades as beige, tan, khaki, and olive. These are the colours of urine and feces, human waste matter, excrement, in short, or the colour of mud.

6-7 May 2023

Human Clock

An ordinary clock goes tick-tock. The human clock, the one inside the human breast, goes tick-*talk*, as its “tock” or “talk” warns us how quickly time flies. It’s mankind’s semi-human, semi-mechanical beating heart.

7 May 2023

Far Far Away

Succinctly expressed:
Away forever and far-ever.

8 May 2023

How many heart-beats are there in a lifetime?

The number of heart-beats in a lifetime of an average man or woman is an astronomically large number. Assume 75 years to be the length of an average lifetime, though these days the average lifetime is a lot longer than that.

There are 72 beats per minute; 4,300 per hour; 103,680 per day; 37,843,200 per year; 2,838,240,000 per 75 years.

So the lifetime’s total exceeds 2.8 billion beats.

8 May 2023

Promises

To make a promise and to keep a promise are two resolutions that are as distant as the North Pole and the South Pole.

11 May 2023

Words

Words may not be as sharp as the blades of swords but words are more numerous than the blades of swords.

11 May 2023

Family

Every clan has a claim on every one of its members, just as every one of its members has a claim on the clan. These claims are not to be denied.

11 May 2023

Coitus

Coitus has the energy to turn the two of us into the one of us.

11 May 2023

Vampire

Q. What is the proper way to address a proper female vampire?

A. Here's the proper way is to address her – as Miss Vamp, as Mrs. Vamp, as Countess Vamp, though *not* as Vampira.

12 May 2023

Hypochondriasis

Living with a hypochondriac, that is a person suffering from hypochondriasis and no end of symptoms, is no pleasure. It may even be as painful as living with someone who exhibits the behaviour of the Munchausen syndrome of fictitious disorders.

17 May 2023

“Liberty Enlightening the World”

Eleutheria, Libertas, Lady Liberty, Liberty Enlightening the World, Statue of Liberty, Freedom

State of Liberty
Statement of Liberty
Statue of Liberty
Stature of Liberty

Status of Liberty
Statute of Liberty

17 May 2023

T H E E N D

T H E E N D
H E E N D T
E E N D T H
E N D T H E
N D T H E E
D T H E E N
T H E E N D

13 May 2023

Science

I find science to be both complex and complicated, crowded with details, difficult to understand and next to impossible to recall. For instance, an axon transmits electrochemical signals to the cell body of a neuron, whereas a dendrite receives electrochemical signals for the cell body of a neuron. Confusing, at least to me. Yet science is rich in human interest. For instance, neurons are called “cells” and it is said they were so named because of their

appearance. It seemed they resembled “cells,” not prison cells, but monk’s cells!

18 May 2023

Misplaced

The longer I live, the more people I meet, the more convinced I am that I was born in the wrong cast, in the wrong class, in the wrong country, on the wrong continent, and during the wrong century. Be that as it may, by now I know that there is nothing at all that I can do about it, except accept this sad fact, this sad truth.

18 May 2023

Helping Other People

When I was much younger than I am now, I believed I could help the people I loved, or knew, or met, to deal with many of their problems and concerns, not solve them, but at least assist them, with advice that turned out to be gratuitous when not resented. It did not take me long to realize that my attitude was caused by *hubris* on my part. It was painful to learn that nobody can help anyone else unless he or she so agrees to be helped, and how few do! It was a difficult lesson to learn. From time to time there was someone who was helped, or who appeared to have been helped, but that person never seemed to remember that I was the source

of the proffered advice and not some casual stranger! One “unfine” day it occurred to me that I was incapable of dealing with even my own problems, even the minor ones, not to anticipate dealing with any of the major ones! The result? I was a little wiser, but only a little, and nobody else was affected.

18 May 2023

Way Back Then

It happened way back then

In the mornings I would wake up fully rested, glad to greet the adventures of the days ahead. At mealtimes I was hungry and I enjoyed eating what was being served. In the evenings I fell into deep rewarding slumbers, some blessed with pleasant dreams. Weekends were extra-special times, as were holidays and days like birthdays. Then there were those dreams that turned the nights into what are known as nightmares.

Everything changes over time, not rapidly but gradually, with so-called adventures turning into ill-assorted ventures that became the causes of abiding concerns.

I wonder when it was that everyday life turned into dark mornings followed by stressful afternoons that merged in vengeful evenings and nights. Not that each and every moment was so awful, but most of them were accumulations of the fears and the pains of the day and the human body which continued in its inexorable decline.

Alas! But that’s enough for now.

19 May 2023

Experience of Life

The Morning of X is followed by the Mourning of Y and concludes with the Requiem of Z. It has ever been thus.

19 May 2023

Things I Should Have Done

These are some things that I should have done.

Please excuse the word “things,” which is the plural form of a nonce word, one that covers a multitude of things (objects as well as attitudes and thoughts). I should avoid using that word as much as humanly acceptable and possible. It is a stand-in word for an unclearly expressed idea. Once again I should have avoided using it!

I never did learn to swim. Reasons? My parents did not know how to swim and we never owned or rented a family cottage and I did not attend summer camp. I never succeeded in doing more than staying afloat in still water because I found Ontario’s bodies of fresh-water lakes much too chilly to be enjoyed. I admire swimmers and marvel at the feats of stunt divers and the talents of rowers and boatsmen, of course. But command the waves? Not me, too bad. A real shortcoming.

The Land of the Midnight Sun and the Northern Lights are essential and defining features of the great Canadian landmass –

the experience of living here – but I have not been that far Up North, or at least far enough North to expect to behold on “special occasions” these “natural wonders.”

While I love to travel, travel in primitive places was never one of my pleasures. Thus as an adolescent I immensely enjoyed reading the books about the breath-taking adventures written by Gordon Sinclair, correspondent and broadcaster, and in later years I even told him so, to his genuine pleasure.

Though at different times in my life I was quite friendly with Stan Obodiac and Dick Beddoes, I marveled at the way that amateur and then professional hockey took over their lives. It was not for me. I even dedicated a book to the sayings of Allan Lampert and on two occasions was his guest at Maple Leaf Gardens, then viewed as “the centre of Toronto,” enjoying roast beef at the Hot Stove Lounge and box seats at Leaf’s games.

Perhaps the only way I resembled the late Pierre Berton, the writer who was known as “Mr. Bigfoot” for his height, stature, and fame. He professed to have no time for hockey or for the world of professional sports in general. For “professional,” read “commercial” sporting events.

As for athletic or at least indoor and outdoor activities – acrobatics, biking, boxing, canoeing, exercising, hunting, rowing, skating, skiing, wrestling, etc. – it was the same. But I must confess that my wife and I did enjoy a decade or so of our weekly Tai Chi sessions under various Daoist instructors. We felt healthier for the effort.

In sum: Such activities, except for Tai Chi, were ones I

never took to. Nor did they take to me. Had I pursued a number of them, I might have benefitted from more physical agility in later life.

19-21 May 2023

Things I Should Not Have Done

These are things that I should not have done.

I wish I had traveled more than I did when I was younger, but jet travel had just then been introduced and it seemed quite costly along with the regular costs of unaccompanied tourism. Flying across the Atlantic was quite an adventure in itself, as trans-Atlantic cruises must have been in their heyday. Approaching middle age I did travel more, though less in Canada than I had hoped. The senior years are difficult years for would-be travelers these days. I knew the adventurous traveler Jan Morris and his son and admired both of them, Jan for her humour and appreciation of life's amenities and his son, poet and Welsh patriot Twm Morys, for his commitment to the Welsh language and way of life. They struck me as ideal travelers who put Wales "first"!

If I had a wish it was that I wished I could to speak foreign languages. I never could speak much French so I was stuck with English which I decided, instead, to perfect. But I fear I never did really perfect it!

For too long I assumed everyone older than I knew more than I did based on months or years of experience. Instructors,

teachers, guardians, priests, professors – indeed, anyone older than I was to whom I listened with attention. I did not necessarily or at least very often agree with older people, but I kept my mouth shut and listened. In other words, I overestimated other people based on their own assessments of themselves. I should not have attempted to estimate any of them at all!

Not that I learned very much except that people sound off about subjects about which they know nothing at all. Gradually it dawned on me that the more such people talked, the less sense they made and the less convincing were their arguments.

At one point for about a decade, I led courses in professional public speaking with the Canadian Management Centre. During these sessions, I made an interesting observation about the adults who enrolled in these courses. I noticed that they could talk extemporaneously about their hobbies or occupations (which they knew backwards and forwards) for a short period of time, about three minutes, before running out of things to say. Once that happened, they began to stumble and then they started to repeat themselves and even disqualify what they had already maintained. At the same time, it became apparent that professional men and women who took these courses because they needed to “public speak” for a living could talk for much longer, having taken the course, about five minutes without repeating themselves or denying what they had previously said. Given the opportunity to prepare in advance, professional communicators could speak extemporaneously for ten or more minutes. After completing the three-day course, they knew that a few minutes of preparation was enough for them to speak with

no strain to speak of!

I took a one-day course in speed reading with instructor Joel Bonn of Montreal and learned a lot. I found it helpful for concentration and retention that I am only sorry I did not take it when I was a highschool student rather than as an adult who read a lot of manuscripts and books for a living!

For a short period of time, for about six months, I was a smoker. I was a light smoker, and it was not cigarettes that I enjoyed, but the occasional cigar and now and then a slim and flavour-some cigarillo. After a couple of weeks of my new-found diversion and pleasure, I noticed that I no longer appreciated the taste or flavour or scent or aroma of tobacco products, or even had any evidence of them in my mouth except for a cloud of smoke in the air and ashes here and there. One day I renounced the habit with no sense of loss, ever. I simply quit, as they say, "cold turkey." Now there is no one in my social set who smokes, at least in public.

It took me a fair length of time to realize that the female psyche differed markedly from the male psyche. While some of these differences are ingrained, many and perhaps even most of them are acquired traits. Characteristics of women include a ready and willing sympathy, a love of young children, an acceptance of youngsters, innate good taste, a sense of style, enjoyment of family life, and the appreciation of "a manly man." Comparable characteristics for men could be named, but it would seem that in the comparison women were at a social disadvantage on most occasions. It took me a long time to realize this handicap, and I have not been alone of my sex to recognize how

men simply “take over” conversations and conventions. Like many men I harbour a secret admiration for the male who is a womanizer, or at least the male who appeals to women for good or ill. I am glad I have never been a womanizer, but I wish I had known more women in both the biblical and the non-biblical senses of the verb.

It’s a small matter but I never took to fine wines. As a student I would enjoy dining with friends and consuming a light meal and sharing a bottle of Madeira, then a newly introduced vintage wine from Portugal promoted as “Fine Old Malmsey.” It was so sweet it was not long before I found it too cloying to imbibe. The truth is that I was never made to be a drinker of wine.

Beer I found went well with meals but not by itself. Thereafter I graduated from wine to alcohol, but I never fancied rye. At the time the popular drink was rye and water or rye and soda water. One day I discovered Scotch and that event marked the ending of my series of disappointments. My Father had the same experience. Since then I limit myself to “a Scotch a day,” sometimes with a splash of water, whether a single malt or a blended malt makes no difference, and I am content with that. Scotch “on the rocks” will redden my cheeks. Why this happens I do not know. I am content not to know why it happens this way. I just enjoy it. One drink a day, no more.

21-20 May 2023

Questions

There are some questions that are too naive to ask and there are some questions that are too naive to answer. Youngsters persist in asking the most naive questions and oldsters persist in answering them with the most naive of answers. Some questions are indeed nonsensical, just as some answers are equally nonsensical. In short, there is no question or answer that is other than “questionable.”

21 May 2023

Jeff Koons

To be prepared to like him as a person is to be prepared to appreciate his art works as actual works of art. To be prepared to dislike him as a person is to be predisposed to dismiss his art works as kitsch. Yet whoever was it who mistakenly maintained that a work of kitsch cannot be as well a work of art? (It was Susan Sontag who had marked views on such matters but I forget where in her writings she discusses them.)

21 May 2023

Level Best

“To do one’s level best” is an interesting idiom in English speech and expression because it describes an individual making his or her best effort possible to achieve a given end. What is not immediately apparent is why that end should be described as “level,” yet it is picturesque enough to permit one to visualize

working on “on the level” or “on a level plane.” The verb “to level” describes the process of “leveling off” but also, curiously, of razing or dismantling, “to level off,” “to level down.” Thus it might be said that the word “level” (as a verb anyway) is not really “on the level.” It includes its opposite, like much of life itself.

22 May 2023

Wisdom of the East

The urge to unite (or reunite) the Wisdom of the East with the Energy of the West, or however the neat phrase has it, is a nugget of “wisdom literature” long identified with the Fourth Way of G.I. Gurdjieff.

The formulation was first brought to public attention by the metaphysical writer Denis Saurat who remembered a conversation with Gurdjieff at the Priory in Fontainebleau in 1923. The original remark, translated from the French, goes like this: “I want to combine the mystical, Oriental spirit with the scientific, Occidental spirit. The Oriental spirit dwells in the truth, but only in its tendencies and general ideas; the Occidental spirit dwells in the truth in so far as its methods and technique are concerned. Only Occidental methods are good in history and observation. I want to create a type of sage who unites the spirit of the Orient and the technique of the Occident.”

It is possible that a contemporary expression of the remark, using current terms, could seek to blend or reconcile “the

metaphysics of the East” with “the physics of the West.”

24 May 2023

Life Sentence

These two words, “life sentence,” have one meaning to a lawyer or a magistrate and have another meaning to an author or a writer. No one convicted of any offence whatsoever wants to serve a “life sentence” in prison. Every author or writer worth his or her salt yearns to compose a “life sentence,” that is, a sentence that is so well written that it expresses to each and every reader the essence of human existence. So that each convict or artist makes a considerable sacrifice for a “life sentence,” the convict for freedom, the artist for an immense aesthetic effort and achievement. Yet they are at the opposite ends of the scale of humanity, the one convicted of an enormous and indictable offence, the other yearning for a special semi-sorcerous effect and bearing the considerable cost to bring it about. I could continue to reason or ramble at some length about the twin meanings of “life sentence” but I expect, by now, you, whether convict or artist, have fathomed my meaning – my meanings – which is all to the good, and all I have to offer.

25 May 2023

Telephone Talk and Manners

I am always taken by surprise when people who telephone me out of the blue and do not bother to introduce themselves clearly before they begin to talk. Either they assume that I will respond to their voice and remember their name, or they identify themselves at the speed of lighting as if everyone knows who they are. I am not referring to friends or frequent callers but to people who infrequently or almost never call me or want me to agree to some sales proposition or other. I no longer ask them to repeat their names. If the problem persists, I simply hang up. Another difficulty to place next to poor or non-existent telephone training or manners is the difficulties created by a “foreign” accent. I cannot hold possessing one against these callers, but they speak regardless of not being heard clearly or understood. Most cannot speak their names intelligibly to be recognized or retained in English. Clearly they do not hear themselves speaking. I find a firm “Sorry, no!” followed by abruptly hanging up the phone is a justified reaction. Harsh but true.

27 May 2023

Philosopher Par Excellence

Someone I regret never having met or ever having heard deliver a lecture was the philosopher Ian Hacking. He was born the year I was born and early on established himself as a brilliant thinker and philosopher who taught at a series of leading institutions,

including Cambridge University, Stanford University, University of Toronto, and Collège de France. I never understood his work or the varied disciplines to which he made major contributions but I always meant to “catch up” (to the degree that such an achievement would be possible for the layman with a minor in Philosophy!). About the only point of identification is that Dr. Hacking was born in 1936 (like me, as mentioned) and died in 2023 (unlike me, so far). To my shame I never paid any organized attention to his achievements and career, until a science journalist I respect, Ivan Semeniuk, contributed Hacking’s obituary to *The Globe and Mail*, May 27, 2023. The full-page account took me by surprise, as did the brilliance of the man’s mind. Ivan has a very sharp mind too. A good meeting of two minds!

27 May 2023

Advisories

Alert Amber

Before Best

Change Climate

Closer Than They Appear Are Objects in Mirror

Do Not Police Line Cross

Humidity Relative

I before E, except after C

Parking No

Say Not the Struggle Nought Availeth

Sign Stop
Smoking No
Tense Future
Turn Left No
Warning Storm
Watch Gale

30-31May 2023

How Wordy Is the Bible?

Q. How many words are there in the Bible?

A. Although that question may be easily asked, it is not to be readily answered, if only for the reason that there are so many versions of the Christian Bible, that is, editions in different translations in English with varying word-counts. The simplest answer to the question is to be specific about the first and most influential edition. The King James Version of the Bible dates from 1611 and is widely regarded (whether rightly or wrongly) as the earliest and also the finest complete English translation from the original texts. The text of this Bible consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament, a total of sixty-six separate books. These books are divided into innumerable chapters and verses, individually numbered. As for the word count, the number of words is said to be 783,137. I know no one who has counted them, although I have read every one of them, once.

Leo Tolstoy's long novel *War and Peace* is estimated to be 587,287 words long in one of its English translations. Marcel

Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, first translated into English as *Remembrance of Things Past*, is a sequence of novels that are said to total some words 9,609,000 in English. In comparison, the revered book of Islam, *The Holy Quran*, is quite short, at 77,797 words. So the King James Version of the Bible, and all subsequent English translations, may indeed be described as “wordy” but not really lengthy!

31 May 2023

It Seems

It seems the season of Summer has arrived, metaphorically speaking, leaving behind, figuratively anyway, the season of Spring. Spring was a disaster, cold, dank, dark, rainy, etc. A sinister season. Summer seems now to be hot and humid, at least in comparison. An insensitive season is Summer. Autumn or Fall and Winter are not part of the equation, here and now, but they probably will be, given time, as long as I lag along.

1 June 2023

Terses

1.
Every so often by accident
I glimpse myself –

And what is it I see?

A head of me, a behind of me, one side of me, another side of me,
over the top of me, under the bottom of me, inside me, within
myself –

And what is it I am able to see?

Merely, only, solely, me.

2.

Whenever I face the future
All that I am able to lay eyes on and face
Are the grimaces of the past.

3.

If only the past, the future, and the present were synchronized
and / or coetaneous, time itself would appear sharply turned out,
sporting on its wrist a non-stop stop-watch.

1 June 2023

State or Nation

The greatest state or nation of all, the most evolutionary, the most
revolutionary, is the state of the human imagination coupled with
man's will. The "triumph of the will" perhaps but not all the time.

2 June 2023

Intestate

In the end, regardless of our last wills and testaments, all of us will be left intestate.

2 June 2023

Commonweal and Commonwealth

The word “commonweal” served as a synonym for “general good” or “general wealth” before it receded into the past. Now the word “common-wealth,” as a synonym for a “political association,” is vanishing into the same past too. What word will be the next to disappear? Perhaps that word is “common” itself. Such change! Such progress! Such losses!

2 June 2023

Memory and Me

I find there is something slightly haywire about my memory. Here are some instances:

I never seem to be able to remember the word “pumpernickel,” which refers to a slightly sweet, dark brown rye bread which we enjoy eating heated and slathered with butter. When I visit United Bakery in Lawrence Plaza next door to us, to purchase a dozen such bagels at a time, I find I stumble embarrassedly as I try to remember that word “pumpernickel.”

By now the clerks know to supply the noun and lessen my irritation with memory.

Then there is the pills that I have taken on a daily basis for the last four years, ever since the arrival of Covid-19. When the medication was prescribed it was known as Cipralex, a word, simple enough, that no matter what I did I found that I could not remember it. I finally wrote it down on a slip of paper and carried the slip around with me. At the time I assumed I was embarrassed to be prescribed Cipralex, hence the avoidance of even the sound and spelling of the product's name. Things got even harder when it was renamed Escitalopram, which now I find a little easier to remember, though not how it is spelled! Same pharmaceutical but different name. It is an anti-depressant that belongs to the SSRI class (Selected Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor). Oddly I had or have no problem remembering SSRI and its meaning, perhaps because I once attended conferences organized by Dr. Edward Shorter where its effects were described and extolled by specialists.

I wish I had taken some memory training decades ago. It would have helped me to remember those phrases and facts that affect me emotionally and intellectually. Over the year I have paged through serious books about memory training but there is some inner resistance to putting their principles of association to work. Is it laziness?

The first and last names of people, whether casual strangers or even close friends, too are bug-bears. I have often noted that successful people, especially those in the limelight, seem adept at recalling names, even those of people from the

distant past.

I once spelled an hour and a half being driven from Winnipeg to Brandon and to my delight the other passenger was Paul Martin Sr., the federal politician, whose memory was said to be fabulous. (I must admit I had to pause here for some minutes to recall his name.) On the journey Paul stared out the window and asked the limousine driver questions about the owners of the farms that lined the route. The driver was a local man who knew the territory but, it seems, did not know the names of the farming families at all. No matter: Paul knew them, all of them, it seems. *En route* he must have identified two dozen owners and their family members despite the fact that he was visiting the area for the first time in some years. I have no doubt that his active memory assisted him in his political career. It was proverbial.

I have a reasonable memory for words spoken by Canadians, otherwise I would never have tackled compiling a half-dozen sizeable volumes of memorable quotations by Canadians or about this country and its characteristics by non-Canadians. But I notice that slowly some of the less familiar words and expressions are slipping away. As, it seems, is the culture of the country itself.

2 June 2023

Agita

This word *agita* is seldom if ever encountered in print or in speech. Maybe it should be pressed into use more often for it

refers to agitation, aggravation, anxiety, or stress, conditions that are known to afflict all of us: “Are you suffering *agita* again?” It sounds like a very lively condition!

3 June 2023

Abduction

The noun “abduction” and the noun “induction” are found in dictionaries to be opposites in meaning, yet the word “abeduction” is a concocted term that is found in no dictionaries at all, despite the fact that a “bed” is assumed to be common to the performance of both of these actions.

3 June 2023

Martin Amis

Few are the devotees of the satiric prose of the late novelist and essayist Martin Amis who are appreciative of the fact that his name is an anagram of MARTIANISM and that Martianism was the designation for a school of poetry somewhat popular in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s, one that describes human beings in disorientating ways, as if they were Martians or being depicted by Martians.

In the same vein, add an “s” to the poet’s last name and it becomes “amiss” (*i.e.*, haywire or awry) which describes some of his prose – the spirit or style of some of his writings which are

most congenial to the disorienting spirit of Martianism.

3 June 2023

Martin Amis, Again

A remark attributed to the novelist Martin Amis, along with some other well-known novelists, is the following statement: “Writing is freedom.” That may be so, but equally true is the statement that follows: “Writing may be freedom, but publishing is liberty.”

4 June 2023

Suffering

We may all be different yet we are all members of the same single species who are suffering a series of different indifferences.

4 June 2023

Sunday Morning

Sunday morning. Woke up well enough rested at 8:15 a.m., albeit following three interruptions of the night’s restful sleep, then rose with slightly stiff joints that soon cleared up. Much to do. Make bed. Wash. Dress. Prepare breakfast first for self, then for wife’s self. Take yesterday’s kitchen scraps to garage bins in the

garage to await the weekly pickup on Thursday. Assist Ruth with her lavabo and dressing and breakfast. Then serve it, and we eat as I read aloud some of the columns in the Sunday edition of *The New York Times*'s "Opinion Section." Each Sunday morning she watches Fareed Zakaria's hour-long television news show devoted to national and international news called *GPS* (for Global Positioning System). Then we quickly cover as best we can the rest of the *Times* and attend to other household matters, including lunch, then dinner, visitors, etc.

3 June 2023

Sunday Afternoon

If lucky while Ruth is busy elsewhere while I am reviewing some of these entries, partially revising or completely rewriting those that require such attention, which is usually the majority of them. I find I am caught in a trap of words in that I try to compare and contrast conventional interpretations of common words or unconventional imaginations of uncommon words in epigram-like ways. I head for the immediate effect, which means the long-range effect of a long-form statement which means a dramatic format is out of the question at the present time. Maybe latter the poems or effects which assume such forms as seem to resemble regular poetry. Let me hope they do so soon! Anyway, the revising and polishing keeps me busy, avoiding too many infelicities of expressions and ambiguities of statements along the way.

5 June 2023

Sunday Evening

This day which means the beginning of the new week (or the ending of the old one) starts to end at four o'clock in the afternoon with our "happy hour," using the *cliché* for the drink for Ruth and a drink for John in our living room. Ruth enjoys "a rusty nail," which refers to a blend of Scotch and Drambuie; I enjoy a run-of-the-mill Scotch the most, whereas I reserve a single-malt Scotch for special occasions, of which there might be six or so a year. I avoid drinking a single malt straight or "on the rocks" (*i.e.*, with ice or cold water). Most often when I take to a blended Scotch, I will often drown it in a dollop of cold water (but preferably not cubes or slivers of ice). I find it is best to avoid drinking all Scotches "on the rocks" (*i.e.*, with ice), reserving ice cubes for very hot days or evenings. I also prefer sparkling water to tap-water. Beers go with heavy foods, wines with delicate foods, but Scotches are drunk or sipped "straight" without food. Just drink it! While imbibing we review the events of the day and the week now safely (maybe) behind us, occasionally raising our glasses to toast friends and near-friends, with whom we have had interesting encounters over the last seven days. Then dinner, then showering, then reading in bed, then sleeping, then another week.

6 June 2023

Life

Life is a sequence of sentences: not grammatical sentences but

life sentences like those that are imposed by a Judge of a Court of No Appeals. Most of these “sentences” are expressed in the past tense but make use of the future tense.

4 June 2023

Life Again

There are four requirements for a good life and a satisfactory lifetime. Here they are in no special order: health, wealth, leisure, pleasure. Try to live even half a lifetime without one of these and you will suffer accordingly.

6 June 2023

Wildfires

Earlier today my friend Philip and I had a long chat on the telephone. When I asked him how his younger sister and her family were getting along in California, he told me that until a few months ago they had all been long-time residents of Arcadia, near Pasadena, which I have always assumed (after one visit there decades ago) was some sort of paradise of climate and culture. Recently they moved to the small town of Windham in Connecticut, where the climate and the culture were reported to be even more agreeable. As well, she and her husband wanted to be close to their adult children who had attended and graduated from universities in the East and who had no plans to return to live in California, especially now that life there was threatened by wildfires. It seems no sooner had they moved than the haze

from wildfires in Northeastern Ontario and Southwestern Nova Scotia descended upon Connecticut, like a ghost that never gives up. *Eerie*.

As I write this, there are reports that New York City and other major American and Canadian cities are engulfed in a thick haze of smoke, and that the air in Toronto is even less clear than it has ever been. *Even eerier*.

7 June 2023

Impression and Expression

When does a work of art begin; when end?
Why does it ever begin; why always end?

Where does a poem, a story, or an essay start or stop?
Will it always start; will it always stop?

While a work of art, like a composition of music,
Is a thrilling twilling of chords and discords, or not,

It may be neither harmonious nor inharmonious
Who affirms the differences between such distinctions?

How do they persist or prevail?
As a forethought, a thought, an afterthought?

Long or little, from primaeval to ageless Earth,
Annoying or annealing as the case may be?

From impression to expression, the saying goes:
More later still and still later more.

10-11 June 2023

Trinkets

For wish you what careful be.
If you wish for war prepare for peace.
If wishes were beggars horses would ride.
The thought is father to the wish.
Whom the gods wish to make mad they destroy first.
Your command is my wish.

12 June 2023

The Situation These Days

The weather has been deplorable.
The economy, undependable.
The morality of businessmen, lamentable.
The ethics of government officials, repellent.
The state of society, divided.
The health of the general public, woeful.
The food supply is affected, worryingly.
The prospects for the future, likewise.
Is life these days worse than it ever was?
It depends on who asks and who answers.

14 June 2023

Weather

The weather remains unsettled.
The air retains the odour of seared forests.
The sun appears, disappears, reappears,
As if embarrassed to be shining at all.
People cough and remain indoors.
Wild are the fires, day and night.
Flash floods recur. However long
Will such conditions continue?

15 July 2023

Questions, Unanswerable

Is gesture a part of texture or is texture a part of gesture?
Are they a part or apart?
Unanswerable questions.

16 June 2023

Physics

Q. What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object?

A. The question is obviously (or not so obviously) unanswerable.

Note: The editors of Wikipedia devoted numerous screens to this subject, a number of them demonstrating that the question is a non-question because such a force and such an object would have to be the same entity, should one or the other or both exist at all. Bertrand Russell is one mathematician who devoted much time and attention to this question and related questions and came to that conclusion.

17 June 2023

Soviet Russian Prophet

Andrei Tarkovsky, the leading Russian/Soviet filmmaker of his day, was a prophet of sorts. He was attracted to Stanislaw Lem's Polish novel *Roadside Picnic* and he filmed it as a Russian-language film called *Stalker*. Both the novel and the film are brilliant and captivating. The novel and to some extent the film version depict how modern life has been affected by the five "zones" of the Earth's surface that served, presumably, as the "dump sites" for alien artifacts left there one evening by alien visitors from space.

The weird distortions introduced in the "zones" seemed to take on a reality of their own with the 1986 nuclear disaster in Ukraine. The No. 4 Reactor of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant near the city of Pripyat in the north of the Ukrainian SSR went out of control in 1986 and the consequences do at times recall the events in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*.

Then there is the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station at

Enerhodar, Zaporizhzhia Oblast in southeastern Ukraine. It is the largest nuclear power plant in Europe and among the ten largest such sites in the world. Currently situated in a war zone, the plant has been under Russian occupation since 2022. The irony is that, in 1994, Ukraine renounced its nuclear weaponry and now finds itself hostage if not to destructive aliens then to Russians with imperialistic designs. The human imagination stops short of the nuclear disaster that is possible given Russia's war in Ukraine.

The "zones" distort human nature and economic and other considerations, including biological and anatomical, leaving mankind puzzled by ... what comes next?

17 June 2023

Defund vs. Defend

A political party will always find it to its economic advantage to defend the country through the process of defunding its greatest defining achievements.

20 June 2023

Arts, Fine

What are called "the fine arts" have become increasingly "less fine" or "less refined" over the years, over the decades, over the centuries, and over the millennia. And thus it goes

20 June 2023

Opera, Grand

As a youngster I was an ardent listener to the Metropolitan Opera Radio Broadcasts on Saturday afternoons courtesy of CBC Radio and the sponsor Texaco (“The Star of the Open Road”). At the time I wondered why of all the arts opera was the only one to be characterized as “grand,” as in the phrase “grand opera.” After all, “Mr. Opera” himself, Boris Goldovsky, always called it “grand” during the intermission features. As a teenager I began to feel why this was so and that it was quite appropriate. As a mature male (maybe, maybe not yet!) I soon came to the realization that “grand” is the sole adjective that describes such compositions that so movingly and so memorably combine performances at once pictorial, theatrical, dramatic, balletic, and musical.

20 June 2023

Enlightenment

Well known is the word *enlightenment* but unknown is the word that should be its opposite and would be its opposite if only it existed! The word I am thinking about that does not exist (at least yet) is *endarkenment*. If comedy and tragedy are opposites, rather like pathos and chaos, then *enlightenment* is comedy and *endarkenment* is tragedy. So it should exist.

20 June 2023

Pictorialism

There is one period in the history of the visual arts that I find quite *creepy*. The name given to that movement is Pictorialism and it seems an odd word to refer to the period of time between the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century. That is the period when photography came to be regarded as an expressive art rather than as an interpretive art. It is a period that is visually characterized by being heavily atmospheric. It corresponds as well to the rise of the spiritualistic movement and the ghosts of the first World War. Portraits have a ghost-like aura surrounding them. The photographs regularly capture impressions rather than report events or experiences. I am not going to name the early photographers who contributed such pictorial scenes as instances of advanced photography, though many of them are major contributors to the familiar history of photography, most notably renowned for their later and post-pictorial styles, but I will say that such scenes and portraits record ghostly and often macabre characteristics. To repeat what I said above, I find the pictorialism movement to be quite *creepy*.

20-22 June 2023

Purgatory

I believe in the existence of neither Heaven nor Hell, but I find I do hold some sort of belief in the existence of Purgatory, as

long as it is considered to be nothing more than the term that the ancients employed to refer to the world in which we live.

24 June 2023

Scriptures and Sense

Citing sacred scripture is selecting a short extract from a lengthy and involved or convoluted passage of traditional religious revelation, reasoning, or remembering that would otherwise be meaningless.

24 June 2023

Scriptures and Slander

Is there a single passage of sacred scripture that has successfully survived translation without the slander or the defamation of another passage or another set of beliefs?

24 June 2023

Deposition

My position in the world and in society owes more to my disposition than it does to any possible deposition made by me or about me by some observer.

24 June 2023

History

Contrary to the popular belief that at any one time there exist both “the right side of history” and “the wrong side of history” is the unpopular belief that history has no sides at all, or at least that what we call history is so many-sided that it resembles if anything a polygram or a polygon.

24 June 2023

Morality

We anguish over whether actions or even thoughts are right or wrong given sets of circumstances and peculiar conditions, when what we should be doing is analyzing the persons we were and are and will be in order to determine the decisions that we will be able to tolerate.

25 June 2023

Earth

It is unlikely that as part of the Orion Arm of our Milky Way Galaxy there exists a solar system that has a planet more minor with a population more divided than our own planet's.

29 June 2023

Passing Strange

William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* (1603), Act 1, Scene 3. The Moor is speaking.

My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs;
She swore, in faith 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange;
'Twas pitiful. 'Twas wondrous pitiful,
She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
That heaven had made her such a man

Some thoughts are indeed “passing strange” and Desdemona knows full well of what she speaks, whereas Othello seems less aware of what she knows, but not necessarily of what she means.

Indeed, much of modern life is “passing strange,” and the longer one lives, the longer extends the senses of “estrangeness.” It is protracted and hence one's existence is attenuated and irremediably distorted.

Strangely distorted, allow me to add.

30 July 2023

A Round Unvarnished Tale

William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* (1603), Act 1, Scene 3. The Moor is speaking.

Yet (by your gracious patience)
I will a round unvarnish'd tale deliver
Of my whole course of love – what drugs, what charms,
What conjuration, and what mighty magic
(For such proceeding I am charg'd withal)
I won his daughter

Before the Duke of Venice and its Senators, the Moor defends himself against the charge that he turned to medications or magic to woo Brabantio's daughter Desdemona to elope with him rather than using his own charm.

30 July 2023

Forty Million

On the morning of July 1, 2023, known as Canada Day, formerly called Dominion Day, I checked the population of Canada on the Web, to see how many of us there are. Now there are numerous ways to represent national population figures, so I simplified the accounting and simply rounded out what I found. Today there are 40,000,000 people living in this country. Forty million Canadians, most of them citizens and many of the rest of them on the verge of being nationalized.

The year that I was born was 1936. Then there were some 10,950,000 Canadians. The Centennial of Canadian Confederation in 1967 saw the population come close to

doubling to a total of 20,408,056. As can be seen, the country's population is rapidly increasing, if only because for many years it has been the government's policy to encourage immigration from Europe and Asia and elsewhere to compensate for the generally low birthrate here.

Not many people know about the Century Initiative, which is a charity launched by the Laurier Project Foundation, quite active today, that aims to increase Canada's population to 100 million by the year 2100. This feat will be accomplished through changing the immigration regulations, *i.e.*, loosening them. Not many of us, if any of us at all, will be around long enough to celebrate this population milestone! If a celebration is in order.

So in the meantime, let us celebrate our population of forty million men, women, and children ... on Dominion Day, not Canada Day!

1 July 2023

Earlier I Wrote

Earlier I wrote: "It seems the season of Summer has arrived." It certainly seemed to be so at the time that I wrote those words. I felt we were facing another "endless summer" of heat-wave followed by heat-wave. But it was not to be.

On the whole the weather for the last month, it being June, has been cooler than usual. It has also been weather that I like to describe as "in-between" – no one knows whether it is hot or cold, for it seems to be both at the same time. Sweat like

snowflakes. Burn like sharp winds. Most disconcerting.

Smoke is the reason for this, not smoking itself, but burning forests that are sending particular matter into the atmosphere that thicken the air we breathe into a haze, impenetrable but to the delight of still photographers of cities on the Eastern seaboard and inland, like New York and Philadelphia and Toronto. It resembles, a bit, though not at night, London during the Blitz. What a cheat! What a discrepancy between what should be (for us) and what is (before us).

1 July 2023

Miracles Enough

There are miracles enough, notably the love of family members, the kindnesses of friends, the breath-taking beauties of the natural world, the wonders of the man-made world, not to overlook the sights and (some say) the sounds of the star-studded night skies.

Yes, these are miracles enough for regular times, but for irregular times there are never enough at all. Irregular times are not awe-inspired but inspired by (shall I say) dread ... dread of this and of that, of what may happen now or may not happen ever. Worries trouble the mind and then distress the emotions, leaving one limp with apprehensions (in the plural) as the consequences of our lives and situations in life are contrary to logical outcomes.

Enough of miracles? An idea to consider, contrary to fact

but not to what we know of life and its innumerable manacles. For if not happiness, if not contentment, but for the day-to-day events, let us dismiss them and concentrate on lowering the tension of the times and considering the plights of others like ourselves. Enough (for now).

2 July 2023

Dull Days and Dull Nights

What have I been writing? What have I been composing? What have I been imagining? (No, these are not images of the imagination but experiences worries generated by society and the life we live and the brain and the mind.)

The quintessence of my thoughts, emotions, feelings, sensations ... the accumulation of my hopes and fears, dreads and bodily responses ... these present problems. (What more could it be? All that I have ...)

Nothing more than that. It is like the rehearsal of a death, a day that is wasted, with so little that may be said on its behalf. Time diminished in agitated sleep.

Such matters are these about which I have been writing and composing ... as well as complaining.

2 July 2023

For Meteorologists

The weather has improved as the skies have suddenly cleared of smoke and soot and the heat is now as difficult to take as was the

damp cold for the last week. Better the hot than the cold, better the dry than the wet. This is the summer that was missing. Boy, is it hot!

3-4 July 2023

Manufacturing

Manufacturing has wrought more changes in psyches and societies than can be imagined. Some of the changes and alterations are positive in effect, others negative in defect. Manufacturing is assumed to be an unqualified good but that is not unnecessarily so. Manufacturing is mixed and should be considered to be a form of “manufacturing.”

5 July 2023

Serial Killers and Mass Murderers

These days serial killers are few and far between, and they seem to have entirely dropped out of style. Now their kind has been eclipsed by mass murderers, who are more numerous and who seem to be anxious to die along with their victims, though not by their own hands but by the actions of police constables and officers of the law. Mass murderers are cowardly and indiscriminate; they lack the premeditation and daring of serial killers. The proliferation of assault weapons may have tipped the scales.

5 July 2023

Signs of the Road

Reserve Parking

No Parking

Yield

Do Not Yield

Stop

Do Not Stop

Slow

Caution

Speed Bump Ahead

Exit

Do Not Enter Exit

This Vehicle Stops at All Railroad Crossings

5 July 2023

Read and Read

For John Porter, poet and essayist

There is a slight confusion between *read* and *read* as in the sense of *to read* and *to have read*. The first activity is expressed in the present tense, the second activity in the past tense. If only Jorge Luis Borges had been writing in the English language, I feel certain that he would have made use of this linguistic gift or, if I may so express it, this magical concurrence. When we *read* we

experience what we already knew; when we *reread*, we often discover what we never really realized before.

5 July 2023

John Newlove

Today's email brought a request from someone collecting reminiscences of the life and work of John Newlove for a long-overdue biographical study of some sort. He asked for reminiscences. Now I could not in good faith recall anything that might be of interest to him and to his readers once his book is published, so many years following the poet's death. As well, I found myself rather sour about Newlove. I never questioned his talent, just his character as a person and as an educated writer. He was ungenerous to a fault and a thoughtless man. I found that to be so at the time and increasingly so in the two decades since his early death. His health was poor, though I was not privy to those circumstances. In those years I found his poems to be strong and vivid, but less interesting as the years have passed. Odd and sad. But the truth.

5 July 2023

Rearrangeables

an England be there'll always
desist and cease

drang und sturm
essence precedes existence
ever life lasting
futile is resistance
honi soit qui pense y mal
lately has the iconic become the ironic
lead not us into temptation
sins of forgiveness

7 July 2023

Words of Offence

Aim and claim are words of offence rather than defence, though they are not in themselves offensive words. Yet they do imply or connote a change of ownership and relationship, as in love affairs and in real-life battles.

10 July 2023

Dr. Fu Manchu

The insidious Dr. Fu Manchu has been my favourite fictitious villain since my youth and that alone must make Arthur Sarsfield Ward, the fiction writer of Irish-English background who published his writings as Sax Rohmer, one of my favourite all-time authors. It is a sorry admission (in a way) to add his name to my short list of “bests” or “favourites” that includes such regal

and regnant names of Rainer Maria Rilke, Walt Whitman, John Buchan, Evelyn Waugh, and numerous other “quality” novelists, short-story writers, and poets. Make of that what I will, all I can conclude is that Ward-Rohmer “came first,” *i.e.*, earlier than the others. In those days I was but a youngster!

What I continue to find intriguing about Rohmer’s *oeuvre* is that the public identifies him as the creator of “the insidious doctor,” despite the fact that Rohmer never visited China, hardly ever wrote stories or scenes in novels set in that country, and much preferred the literary possibilities of life and loves in the Levant and the Maghreb, the adjoining countries of the southern Mediterranean Sea. So the reading public sees him the way that I see him, as someone who wrote thirteen suspenseful novels about this “monster” versus his opponents who represent law and order and that the combat of near equals made his fortune. There are many other villains, but none as infamous or as villainous as “the doctor” and none so valorous as his adversaries, notably Sir Denis Nayland Smith and his true-hearted companion, Dr. Petrie. It reminds me of the memorable dueling undertaken for so many decades by Professor James Moriarty who was so steadfastly stalked by Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

This is another version of the eternal duel between good and evil. No wonder why to this day Sax Rohmer’s version has remained so popular with the reading public.

11-13 July 2023

I Have No Idea ...

I have no idea how this sentence will end, now that I have begun to write it, but it will presumably conclude with a period or a question mark or an exclamation mark or a colon or a set of ellipses, if only because I am able to imagine no better ending for it, given the fact that a blank space is out of the question, though it could ramble on, line after line, because I have no idea how this sentence will end –

13 July 2023

It Would Be Good If ...

It would be good if

Please feel free to continue this sentence, this thought, this hope, this aspiration, this consideration.

Yes, it would be good if all that is fine could be preserved because it is infinite and what is not infinite will be fully forgotten in time, the passage of time and men and women being what we are.

It seems that if men were in the musical sense *mensural* (so few are), if women were immense in the sense of a *diapason* (as they are by nature but few being receptive to the sensation), life would be more intense and at the same time less tense.

13-14 July 2023

Humanities

The word *humanities* has special meaning in democracies but in autocracies its meaning and spelling are *inhumanities*.

19 July 2023

Arctic

In Canada the Arctic is powerful territory but one that is characteristically inarticulate.

19 July 2023

News

I like the phrase “breaking news” not because it features current affairs of newsworthy public interest but because news accounts have the characteristic of breaking down what we formerly thought about current developments.

19 July 2023

Zion

Zion is a synonym for Jerusalem the Holy City as well as for the Land of Israel as a whole. Hence it is a place of hope despite the fact that it is as well a place of “exploZions.”

19 July 2023

Inside Insight

US
LUSI
LL IO
ILL ION
ILL US ION
ILL ION
IL IO
LUSI
US

19 July 2023

Theosophic Arithmetic

O
ON
ONE
ONES

19 July 2023

Agacerie

The word *agacerie* is more commonly employed in French than it is in English. In both languages the noun means allurement, enticement, enchantment, coquetry, exasperation, etc. Television commercials have been described as *agacerie* with respect to their annoying and cloying nature.

19 July 2023

Merely a Poet Am I

A Fantasy of Sorts

A poet am I, but merely a Canadian one, hence there are certain honours and awards that I have never received and that there is no chance that I will ever be accorded them.

I have never been invited as a performer or even as a guest to the premises of the renowned 92nd Street Y in New York City, now known as 92NY.

In the same vein, I will never be invited to read my poems or speak in the main gallery of the Frick Museum of New York City alongside Rembrandt's great 1658 self-portrait, as has Mark Strand, poet, essayist, and translator. Born in Prince Edward Island, he served as Poet Laureate Consultant in the Library of Congress in 1990. I could only imagine what all that was like.

I am never invited to contribute reviews to *The New York Times Book Review* or *The New York Review of Books*. None of

my books bear the imprint of, say, New Directions, Alfred A. Knopf, or Farrar, Straus and Giroux. No Pulitzer Prize for me.

Crossing the Atlantic, I guess I will never be appointed Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom. For that I would need the attention and good wishes of the Monarch of Great Britain and the advice of its Prime Minister. Tough to arrange at a distance!

Merely. Never. Unlikely. Only. Anyway, it's something; what I do have, though, is modest enough!

18-19 July 2023

Phrases I Try to Avoid

course college
course literature
fiction science
order implicate
study critical

20 July 2023

Phrases I Do Avoid

concerned am I
as far as I am concerned
on the one hand
on the other hand
or so it seems
turvy-toppsy

20 July 2023

Multiplicities

A revolution is said to disclose a revelation, and while that truism may indeed be true, the revelation itself comes at a terrific cost to the lives of human beings and to the world of nature.

21 July 2023

Tarkovsky, Andrei

The human being for whom film served as the embodiment of the fate of man and for whom the future of cinema was the fulfillment of human wishes and the depiction of inhuman miracles was once and inevitably remains the Russian director, Andrei Tarkovsky.

21 July 2023

Aphorisms like These

Lately I have been spending most of my time writing short observations which I regard as aphorisms though that is perhaps not the best term to use to describe them, for they are really brief observations about aspects of the world today that are hardly ever singled out for their inherent interest. If I had more time at my disposal I would probably write long paragraphs rather than compose short observations about subjects that are of interest to me and to other readers of contemporary poetry and brief inquiries of a philosophical nature. Probably but not necessarily.

I find myself drawn, ineluctably, to artists like Andrei Tarkovsky, the leading Soviet Russian film director, despite the fact that I find sequences of his feature films “hard to take.” They resist being embraced because of their primitivism (after all, he had much to depict when it came to his visions and views of Russian history) and it is seldom noted that he directed his feature films not in the glory of the Hollywood Hills but in the gory of the steppes of Eastern Europe, and that his was the period of what still photographers describe as Pictorialism, that is, black-and-white when not either sepia-and-white or brown-and-white and faintly indistinct. I am no fancier of the still photographers and the experimental cinematographers of the Pictorialism period, but the period has much to whisper to us today about human nature. So the reader of these short “aphorisms” or “characterizations” should bear in mind that whatever man has experienced all men may re-experience. “Aphorisms like these are non-Pictorial reviews of Pictorial views.” It seems that Ingmar Bergman may have had that in mind when he wrote in his memoirs, “When film is not a document, it is dream. That is why Tarkovsky is the greatest of them all.”

21 July 2023

Newspaper Headlines

“Headlines” (like those in major newspapers) are as often as not “head-lies” (like those in most newspapers).

21 July 2023

Some Soaps and Detergents

All
Arm & Hammer
Bon Ami
Gain
Lifebuoy
Old Dutch Cleanser
Spick and Span

22 July 2023

Solaris and Stalker

*To the memory of the two cinéasts and friends,
Gerald Pratley and Elwy Yost*

Two of my favourite films were produced and directed by the same person, the Soviet-Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky, and the two films are adaptations of outstanding science-fiction novels: *Solaris* (published in 1961; filmed in 1971) and *Roadside Picnic* (published in 1972; filmed as *Stalker* in 1979). The first novel was written by the Polish author Stanisław Lem and the second novel by the Russian brothers Boris and Arkady Strugatsky. What attracted Tarkovsky to the novels may have been the single theme that they have in common: the fact that it

is impossible for a human intelligence to understand an alien intelligence.

21 July 2023

Such Transportation

Literature is able to transport us from miracles to manacles or from manacles to miracles, and then backwards or forwards again, seemingly without effort, the magic is so great it must be intermittent. That is why literature has lasted whereas writing has known anguish and has languished for it cannot be affected without great effort and even greater good fortune.

26 July 2023

“An Epitaph” Alphabeticized

An Epitaph

a beautiful Here lady, lies most
and heart Light of she; step was
beautiful I lady most she the think was
Country. ever in That the was West

beauty beauty But passes; vanishes,
be; However it rare – rare

And crumble, I remember when who will
Country? lady of the This West

An Epitaph

Here lies a most beautiful lady,
Light of step and heart was she;
I think she was the most beautiful lady
That ever was in the West Country.

But beauty vanishes, beauty passes;
However rare – rare it be;
And when I crumble, who will remember
This lady of the West Country?’

Walter de la Mare, “An Epitaph,” *The Listeners and Other Poems*
(1912).

27 July 2023

Approval, Disapproval

gritty nitty
two goodie shoes
tattle tittle
faddle fiddle

31 Aug. 2023

Thirteen Plus One Magical Terms

Abracadabra
Alakazam
Behold
Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo
Hocus Pocus
Holey Moley
Mojo
Open Sesame
Presto Chango
Shazam
Sim Sala Bim
Tada [Tadaaa]
Up, Up, and Away
Voilà [Wallah]

29 July 2023

She

After the persona of Suparna Ghosh

She is the Hope Diamond and the hopeless human condition.
She is the lady dressed in black with the greatly rimmed hat.
She is the woman whose eyes appear bright like egg-whites.
She is the girl who sees all even when she looks away.
She is Dame Edith Everage and Dame Edith Sitwell.

She is the female or the *fille* of the fiercest species.
She is the personification of both rest and unrest.
She is the Grand Dame or the Grand Daimon.
She is Madame Bovary or Madama Butterfly.
She is the youngest miss or the oldest peeress.
She is nameless and not in need of a name.
She is the princess of engaging thoughts.
She is grouchy and / or good-natured.
She is and she is not but ever will be.

29 July 2023

Books

As an inveterate reader of books, I always begin with reading a book's *doublures*. There are so few self-styled, habitual book readers who even know what a book's *doublure* is.

1 Aug. 2023

Love

Love comes in many different cartons of caring. Yet so few people even realize that it is much easier (though less rewarding) to love a distant divine being than it is to love a nearby earthly human being.

1 Aug. 2023

Retiring

I am somewhat retiring by nature and that is one consideration. The other consideration is that I am now retired by age. Let me share a secret with you. There is hardly any difference at all between being retired by nature and being retired by age. These retirements are forced retreats from life and are part of the same human condition, the same sense of demoralization and depression.

1 Aug. 2023

Cults

Every cult, collective, or club devises and preserves its own traditions and teachings that are shared by its leaders and adherents and withheld from the attention of non-members. These ancient truths make hardly any sense at all to outsiders of the group – as well, it must be added, to some if not the majority of the regular members of the group too.

1 Aug. 2023

Kolob

Sometimes I muse and wonder if it could it be true. Would life be lovelier and less litigious if all of us on Earth were simply and spontaneously transported *back* to Kolob, which is the starry or

nebular or planetary system closest to the Celestial Throne of the Godhead. It is true that Kolob has never been seen by astronomers because its present location lies outside not only our Solar System but also our Galaxy. It seems it was originally part of Earth's planetary system. It was here that mankind originated in the original Garden. But with the Fall of Man it was relegated to its present remote position, yet with the arrival of the End of Days, it will be returned to its original station next to Kolob. It is a strange place. One day on Earth is one thousand years long on Kolob. All this accords with the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I sometimes muse and occasionally wonder about such matters, whatever their nature and source, whether they are material or immaterial.

2 Aug. 2023

Against

Being against is what we experience when we are resolutely and perhaps thoughtlessly going against someone, something, or some idea. It happens that we "go against" ... again and again.

3 Aug. 2023

Weaponizing

Politicians, public figures, and newscasters are talking seemingly without end these days about "weaponizing" this and that for good reasons or ugly purposes. What is seldom mentioned is that

they have indeed been successful in “weaponizing” not only this or that but wealth itself, so that corporations, associations, and political parties are now wealthy beyond reason or responsibility and able to pursue their ends without serious limitation.

3 Aug. 2023

Poésie à clef

Despite the compositions of France’s traditional bards, modernist poets, and contemporary singers, what they have composed, sung, and inscribed – all their *poésie à clef* – is a composition based on two keys: a musical key-note and an allusive clue or meaning. Indeed, traditional, modernist, and contemporary poetry of all cultures and countries is composed, written, and performed in both of these clefs or keys.

4 Aug. 2023

Luggage We Take with Us

attaché case backpack bag baggage briefcase carpet-bag carry-on bag chest doctor bag duffel bag fortnighter garment bag gear Gladstone grip gunny sack handbag haversack hold-all kitbag knapsack luggage overnight bag packsack portmanteau purse rucksack satchel steamer trunk suit bag suitcase tote bag traveling bag trunk under-seat bag valise wardrobe weekend bag weekender

The words luggage or baggage used here refer to clothes, of course, but the *bona-fide* luggage or baggage is packed inside our brains and mind in terms of language.

So many words for the carriers of the contents of the mind and the brain. Imagine that!

4 Aug. 2023

Strange Weather

We did not seem to know whether the weather was cool or warm, frigid or heated, as we experienced the climate many years ago in the mornings on the beaches of San Diego. Ontario's beaches now resemble California's: with temperatures either-or, neither-nor, both-and. What to expect with this strange weather; what not to expect? When to over-dress; when to under-dress? (Shorts or pants, etc.) Decisions have to be faced ... and should ... or must ... be made ... by us.

8 Aug. 2023

Strange Time

I find myself with time on my hands. Time to kill, as the saying goes, but it is time itself that does the killing. Human beings are its victims, hardly ever its agents. It is only in the latter years of one's life that one acquires a genuine appreciation of this fact, this experience. As the days go by, I feel the truth of this insight increasingly deeply – the untrustworthiness of time and its so-

called “passing” – and at length its “non-passage.” It is simply or complexly “there,” until it is no longer ... anywhere.

9 Aug. 2023

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English

I have owned my copy of a well-worn, well-stubbed, hard-bound edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* since 1964 when H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler edited its fifth edition for the Oxford University Press. For decades I used it to check meanings, definitions, spelling, etymologies, etc. On a daily basis I have opened it with a pressing question about spelling or meaning and closed it with a number of answers, confident of the volume’s virtues and values. For editing or writing or checking, it has been a necessary *vade mecum*. Yet it was gradually replaced in my affections not through daily use of a successor volume: the bulky boxed edition of *The Complete Oxford English Dictionary*. But that is another matter entirely.

What I gave little thought to at the time of the ascendancy of “the Concise” is that while “the Concise” has not changed, the world of English has expression has changed irreversibly, so that now it amounts to a record of the receding past, still valuable (in fact invaluable) and more stable than simply expression and understanding itself. If I had the time (again the presence of time intervenes) I would give some instances, citing some entries and their definitions and etymologies. What “the Concise” registers and in a way immortalizes is bygone modes of expectation and

expression.

If ever there was proof that the past overtakes the present as the present overtakes the future, it is dictionaries like these.

9 Aug. 2023

Warhol

Andy Warhol is an outstanding artist whose work is widely admired and widely collected. But he is one visual artist whose work in bulk is less impressive than his selected works. The use of silk-screens and other methods of reproduction renders its bulk less impressive than his selected works. I find the more of his artwork that I see, the more often I say to myself, “Yes, he did that and I can see why.” That however does not mean that the viewer appreciates his work all the more; all the less, perhaps, as he might be undecided about what is his most effective design or colour-scheme. It is as if he requires the viewer to make the selection that best catches his view. After all, how many “Silver Liz”s do we need?

10 Aug. 2023

Report on Anna Weyant

Anna Weyant, who was born in Calgary in 1995, received her training in art at the Rhode Island School of Design where she graduated in 2017. Since then she has been based in New York

where her specialty has been producing figurative paintings that include somewhat surreal or at least unreal yet appealing contemporary elements. She is quoted by *Galerie Magazine* in 2021 as saying, “If there’s humor in my work, it probably goes hand in hand with some sort of misery.” Quite true.

Once she found attention and representation by the Gagolian Gallery, her work became highly prized and extremely expensive. In May 2022, Weyant’s *Falling Woman* (2020) sold for US\$1.62 million at Sotheby’s in New York.

10 Aug. 2023

Art at Crypto Currency

Bitcoin is a form of crypto currency that has been popular among investors and speculators since 2009. A different form of crypto currency (to press a point) is contemporary art, especially the paintings and drawings and other forms of artistic expression created (or at least produced) by leading contemporary artists whose works are regarded as collectable and frequently offered for sale privately or at public auctions. Artists and art dealers can command stellar prices for works with no known or with little-known provenance. For instance, in 2017, a Saudi prince successfully bid at Christie’s in New York for the canvas known as “Salvator Mundi” or “Saviour of the World” which depicts Jesus Christ full face with an globe in his left hand; he is blessing the viewer with his raised right hand. It is maintained to have been painted by Leonardo da Vinci over half a millennium ago.

Heavily resorted during a tumultuous history, it is maintained that the painting is now in the possession of Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammed Bin Salman, and the auction price paid for it is said to be US\$450 million. Sudden wealth from nowhere. To risk a pun, that is "not bitcoin" but it is "a bit of coin."

10 Aug. 2023

July and August of 2023

The period of time or era that we are living through is characterized by a hot July and a cold August. Innumerable forest fires and countless floods dominate the news (along with accounts of insurrections and invasions) so it is a nervous-making period of estrangement from both the natural order and the social order. It makes people feel uneasy, even those who are not directly facing calamities such as these. Also, it seems the two words "climate change" have lost their theoretical air, edged out by "weather crises" on a vast scale that has been knowingly described as "apocalyptic."

11 Aug. 2023

Next Time

In the back of my mind, deep in the recesses of my memory to be specific, there are the stirring words of the Spiritual – or the Negro Spiritual, as they were in my childhood called – spring to

mind. (It was James Baldwin who made great use of their familiarity with his people and their memorability for all mankind in his writings.) “Mary Don’t You Weep” is the title of one of these songs or hymns and it includes these memorable lines:

God gave Noah the rainbow sign
No more water, the fire next time

The passing of Noah’s flood is the occasion and God in effect assures Noah that presumably for all time and for the rest of mankind “once is enough.” No more flash floods; maybe droughts instead. It will be “fire next time,” presumably flash fires with the world’s forests incinerated to cinders before our very eyes.

For whatever reason (as the reasoning of God is unknowable to Man) it did not turn out this way, for what mankind is experiencing is more flash floods and more flash fires though not simultaneously or in the same sector of our world.

Yet these are two lines, these sixteen syllables are, a fragment of the widely sung hymn, with its allusion to Noah’s flood, that remain with us. There are plenty of rainbows, but there are also plenty of droughts. Fires and floods abound. Fire and water. Wave and flame. Wrath and wickedness.

It is desirable but unlikely that anything will be different the “second time around” even assuming there will be a “second time around.” It turns out that the Scriptures are not as revealing as the Spirituals.

11 Aug. 2023

What I See when I Look Around

When I look upwards: the sky is heavier than the ground.
When I look downwards: the ground is wetter than the rivers.
When I look about: the rivers are angrier than the winds.
When I look around: the rivers are more destructive than ever.
When I look aground: the world looks as though it as been
grievously wronged and is wreaking vengeance on us.
And it would seem that this is so.

12 Aug. 2023

Later the Same Day

The conditions that are described above lasted until about three-thirty in the afternoon. Then the clouds no longer obscured the sun. (Where did the clouds go?) Then the sun shone and shared some of its heat and warmth during the late afternoon. (A relief!) We sat on our small porch amid the runks of the pine-trees there and talked about present friends and absent enemies for thirty or so minutes, basking in the unaccustomed warmth, as well as the lack of rain, and enjoyed a reprieve from the morning's dire conditions. It is more like Toronto of old than the misty San Diego mornings that we experienced so many years ago. (Weathers change, climates alter, times fly.)

12 Aug. 2023

The Aurora Awards 2023

The Canadian Science Fiction & Fantasy Association Hall of Fame

I am pleased to have my modest contributions to the canon of Canadian fantastic fiction (science-fiction, fantasy-fiction, and weird fiction) recognized by the Aurora community and drawn to the attention of readers as knowledgeable as yourselves: notably the diligent Mark Leslie Lefebvre and the ever-vigilant and exceedingly generous Robert J. Sawyer.

I consider myself a fan of this literature if only because way back in the 1950s, when I still lived in my hometown of Kitchener, Ontario, I discovered this literature by myself on the paperback and magazine racks of the original location on King Street of the Walper Tobacco Shop, which is considered to be Canada's oldest tobacco shop, built in 1891.

I then sought out hardbound volumes from the Kitchener Public Library which was erected as a Carnegie institution in 1910. I bought paperback and pulp magazines from the Tobacco Shop; I borrowed hardcover books from the Kitchener Public Library. Then I frequented Kuhl's Used Book Store, also on King Street, with its basement full of old and odd and interesting books.

Ipso facto, Shazam! I emerged "a fan."

The so-called Golden Age of Science Fiction extended into the early 1950s, so as an enthusiast for this literature I guess I was part of it as a reader and sometimes collector. I particularly

cherished the works of such writers as H.G. Wells, Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, and “Canada’s own” A.E. van Vogt.

I must not fail to mention Judith Merrill. A great day in my life was when she (along with the urbanologist Jane Jacobs) moved from New York City to Toronto where I met both of them. I cherish what Judy wrote about my writings, after she discovered my interest in establishing the past history for the country’s imaginative literature, with the anthology, notably titled *Other Canadas*, issued in 1979.

With that anthology – and a few others – I was anxious to add SF&F to the roster of Canada’s literary past. So I was something of a scholar, something of a seer. If in this account I have favoured the past over the future, it is not because I no longer care for SF&F; it is because my past is very real to me, as your present should be very real to you. Notable works of literature are being written every day and published every season of the year.

As it happens the SF&F titles I published are long out of print. A few of them should be reprinted, or at least borrowed from libraries. I hope my membership in this Hall of Fame will accomplish that aim and bring pleasure and insight to the readers of fantastic literature.

Addendum

I am frequently asked if I have “favourite” books. Alas, my favourite literary works of the fantastic imagination are not

Canadian; both of them are European: *Solaris*, the powerful Polish novel by Stanisław Lem; *Roadside Picnic*, the powerful Russian novel by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, the so-called Strugatsky Brothers. Both novels have been memorably filmed by the outstanding director, Andrei Tarkovsky.

13-15 Aug. 2023

The Exorcist

A long and intelligently reasoned and well written article about the movie *The Exorcist* appears in this morning's issue of *The New York Times*. It was occasioned by the death of its director William Friedkin and it takes the form of a critique of the religious values of the Roman Catholic Church in light of the secular values of the contemporary world. It is an argument, in a way between a youthful doubter and an elderly mentor, both priests.

What struck me when I sat through the movie in 1973, the year of its commercial release, was this debate or argument, but also something much more elementary. "Here is a superior movie," I responded. "It is superior to all the other horror films that I have seen for one simple reason that it is much more than yet another horror film with a religious theme. It was scripted and filmed on the assumption of the actual existence of both good and evil. There was no over-the-top attempt to explain what is happening, no rationale for the existence of evilness or for that matter for the existence of goodness. Very few movies operate on

such a basis; the exceptions are a series of films directed by Ingmar Bergman for whom evil's existence has a tangible feel to it. One of his films that moved me immensely was *Winter Light* produced in 1963 which portrayed just such an encounter. *The Exorcist* has that feel to it though Bergman's movie was not a horror film *per se*. The question I asked myself about Friedkin's movie is which exorcist of the two is it really about? To whom does the title refer? To the contemporary doubter or to the traditional believer?

I could go on in this vein for some time, but this is neither the time nor the place to do so. All one has to do is remember *The Exorcist* and think about its two approaches to the existence of evil: Is it intrinsic or is it extrinsic? Also, is goodness intrinsic or is it extrinsic?

13 Aug. 2023

Box of Useful Screws and Nuts and Bolts

Every household has somewhere, perhaps in the spare room in the basement or in the closet where out-of-season clothes are stored, a medium-sized box of useful screws and nuts and bolts.

Screws: They were and are used to hold things together but over the years they worked themselves loose from component parts and fell to the floor and someone saw them there and picked them up and dropped them in the box reserved for odds and ends like once-useful screws.

Nuts: This is what we call men and women and even

children who behave in crazy ways and fail to conform. Those human beings who refuse to act in reasonable ways are dropped by other householders in the box and forgotten. The box is as you can imagine a noisy, unruly one.

Bolts: Better known as “bolters,” these are males generally as few females fit this category, who create needless problems, assume tasks they can never complete, fail repeatedly, sometimes acquire criminal records in the process, and as far as the Law is concerned, they are “bolters.”

The box itself, neither big nor small, is not otherwise notable, except for its random contents – some human, some subhuman, some semi-civilized, some completely uncivilized. A lot may be learned about life inside or outside the confines of the box by simply observing the activities that take place within.

14 Aug. 2023

Artists and Writers

We speak of “the body of an artist’s work” as long as the artist remains alive. But the nomenclature changes to mark the artist’s passing. Then what we recognize is “the work of the artist’s body.”

15 Aug. 2023

Love

It’s a word that seems to be more meaningful to infants than to

babies, to tiddlers than to toddlers, to girls than to boys, to young women than to young men, to married women than to married men, and to grandmothers than to grandfathers. The meaning of the word *love* is simplicity and maturity itself. It means “deep affection and desire.”

15 Aug. 2023

World without End

I fail to appreciate or even comprehend how the three words “world without end” may mean “the end of time,” “the end of history,” “the end of existence,” or the “manifestation of the divine plan” (the Greek word for which is *eschaton*). Certainly the three English words connote “endlessness” or “never-ending” or “eternal” and not in any sense of the word (except perhaps the poetic) “the end of time” itself.

15 Aug. 2023

Depersonalization

Neatly expressed, depersonalization differs from derealization in that the former refers to the want of a sense of self whereas the latter refers to the want of a sense of the world. Both psychological conditions are eerie. If I may risk an unneeded pun, Lake Erie is the most southern of the Great Lakes and the smallest of the five Great Lakes by volume.

17 Aug. 2023

Wildfires of the North

Who would ever have guessed that more than two hundred individual wildfires would require the mass evacuation of Yellowknife, capital of the Northwest Territories? Or that deadly flames would threaten its entire population of 20,000 men, women, and children, as well as the threatened destruction of all the city's buildings? It seems improbable, yet it is predicted to occur shortly, as I share this expression of concern, coupled with momentary admissions of disbelief.

There was a time, not too long ago, when the Arctic region in whole or part served the world's superheroes as the country's "Fortress of Solitude." Even Superman re-established his sense of purpose in this remote region of regeneration amid the ice and snow of the polar North. It would seem that this Fortress is now under siege.

I am overcome with the sensation that this catastrophe marks the end of the seeming isolation of Canada from world events on an apocalyptic scale.

18 Aug. 2023

Imagine

Imagine, if you will, if you are able, for a short period of time, no more than one minute and a half, never to exceed ninety seconds;

Imagine, *now*, please, that you are silently reading one of the most intriguing and most interesting poems ever composed;

Imagine, if you may, that such a poem, also a most skillful one, is the present poem, that will remain with you until the end of our days;

Imagine, as you could, and should, that beautiful words like these are among the richest of those of the human heritage;

Imagine, to be sure, that all wisdom and all knowledge lie among and even between all the words and phrases of this one poem;

Imagine, all of this, concurrently, and what you have in and on your mind is without question the present poem.

18 Aug. 2023

Today's Temperature

Today's subject is today's temperature.

It should be hot, but instead it is cold. It should be dry, but it is rather rainy. It should be pleasant, but it is the opposite of pleasant, that being, I hazard, unpleasant.

So permit the scribe or writer or author or commentator or observer here – *me* – to be ill-natured enough to write a slightly unpleasant poem, though a short one, like the present one, with the title “Today's Temperature.” Here it is.

Well enough done.

18 Aug. 2023

Women's Athletics

Women are now being invited to join a number of those acrobatic, athletic, and sporting events that were once solely the reserve of men, as well as forming their own women-only competitive events. The arrival of women is thus proving to be a boon to sports photographers who seldom miss an opportunity to snap photographs of women performing “gymnasstics.”

19 Aug. 2023

Sudor

Fervour like *ardour* is an inner, emotional fire, whereas *sudor* is like perspiration or sweat, an outer flood of the body's flesh. It resembles *ordure*.

19 Aug. 2023

Sometimes and Other Times and All Times

Sometimes the world is a caring and comfortable planet that makes its way through our own minor solar system of the Orion wing of the Milky Way Galaxy. Other times the world is an indifferent planet, one that is at all times actively hostile to its inhabitants, living creatures that range in size from viruses to dinosaurs as well as all the races of man. The span of life on

Earth (as the habitat is known to those of its inhabitants who speak this language of English) seldom exceeds one century of circling the system's central sun, but the latter delude themselves at all times into believing that there is conscious life that succeeds human life that extends into eternity, poor souls!

Souls? Who has anything to say about "souls"? Who these days even speaks of "eternity"?

23 Aug. 2023

Pleonexia

"Pleonexia" is a word, taken from the Greek, one that refers to "excess greed." I find I associate it (somewhat unheedingly perhaps) with the late United States Supreme Court Judge Antonin Scalia. Remember him? He was the brilliant jurist who was so admired for his deliberations that he was the recipient of a special posthumous honour. For some days, following his death in 2016, his remains lay in repose in the Grand Hall of the U.S. Supreme Court Building. In his decisions he was concerned with the initial meanings of the acts in question, regardless of their social consequences.

He described himself as a "textualist" with statutory interpretations and as an "originalist" with constitutional interpretations. There is something rather naive if not Roman Catholic about his thinking about such matters, as if the essences of words were immortal. Should there be any single person responsible for the present-day covetous state of the political

parties of the Union it must be Antonin Scalia, one of whose rulings oversaw the flow of seemingly unlimited wealth from the coffers of billionaires and philanthropists to those of politicians. This was made possible by *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 558 U.S. 310 (2010), a landmark decision of the Supreme Court of the United States regarding campaign finance laws and free speech under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The court held 5-4 that the freedom of speech clause of the First Amendment prohibits the government from restricting independent expenditures for political campaigns by corporations, including nonprofit corporations, labor unions, and other associations. It found no compelling government interest for prohibiting corporations and unions from using their general treasury funds to make election-related independent expenditures. As for politics, it seems that too much money is as ruinous as too little money. This is a form of pleonexia, rightly or wrongly, that I associate with the late Antonin Scalia.

25 Aug. 2023

Romance

It used to be that women admitted to swooning over men who are “tall, dark, and handsome.” It seems that since “Black Lives Matter,” many women will now express a preference for men who are “tall, Black, and handsome.”

28 Aug. 2023

Wolverine

Wolverines are large and vicious and voracious carnivores that are native to remote northern regions characterized by subarctic terrain, alpine sites, boreal forests, stretches of tundra, etc. French for wolverine is *carcajou*.

Wolverine (with a capital and in the singular) is the name of the sole Canadian superhero of *Marvel Comics*, who made his initial appearance in issue of *The Incredible Hulk*, No. 180, October 1974. In this comic book series he is depicted as a ruthless creature – half-animal, half-human – a costumed superhero who (or that) wears a multi-coloured costume and sports deadly razor-like claws who fights all forms of criminal activity – with a vengeance.

Further details about wolverines and Wolverine, including information about the latter's creators and artists, are dramatically described and illustrated on so many sites on the Web that there is little sense in reproducing that material in whole or part here. The general feeling is that Wolverine is unlikeable as a character but quite reliable as a crime-fighter.

28 Aug. 2023

OULIPO

Do structures equal strictures or do structures equal scriptures?
This is a matter for discussion.

N.B. It's a discussion worthy of members of *OULIPO*

(sometimes *OuLiPo*), the French association of writers and thinkers known as *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*), which focuses on expressions and their suppressions.

30 Aug. 2023

Coffin and Casket

A body comes in a coffin and a coffin comes in a casket, whereas our human remains after being burnt reside in urns.

30-31 Aug. 2023

A Life in Seven Lines

Some Early Memories

I have a memory of sitting in a tub full of cool water and splashing it on a green front lawn under a hot sun.

I have a memory of being driven in our Pontiac across the Niagara River from Ontario to New York State and of asking my father what was inside those water-edge structures. I was confused when I heard him say “turbans” when he was saying was “turbines.”

I have a memory of accompanying my mother on a walk that took us from the Heinzman’s house to our future house on Pandora Avenue and asking if the wooden fishing boat that was

in the backyard was to be ours too. To my disappointment it wasn't.

I have a memory of the first time that I walked to from our home on Pandora Avenue to St. Mary's School and back again, twice a day for almost eight years.

I have a memory of Father Lalonde, our French teacher at St. Jerome's College, who was obviously hung-over following a night of drinking, shaking and in the morning slugging a recalcitrant student.

I have a memory of simply walking into the Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational Institute for Grade Nine and signing all the papers that were distributed to already registered students. The first term was a month over before Principal C.R. Philip discovered I was yet to be registered.

I have a memory of borrowing copies of *Mechanix Illustrated* when the tall senior librarian at the Carnegie Library put a copy of *The Hills of Varna* in my hand and said authoritatively, "Read this. You will enjoy it more." She was right. Since then I have reread it numerous times.

28 Aug. 2023

Wisdom

As we increase in age we have the opportunity to learn some remarkable lessons. In time, we may forget what we recently retained. Youths merely fantasize about the wisdom of experience, but elders have opportunities to learn from real-life

experiences. An adult who is a know-it-all is essentially a minor with a learning deficit caused by arrested social development. We learn to listen rather than to speak. The average intelligence quotient is said to be one hundred degrees so the average person is one of limited intellectual ability, whereas superior intelligence is possessed by non-average persons who may never use it. It is useful to turn to acquired wisdom rather than to sheer reasoning power because the latter is generally divorced from emotion and common sense. With years we appreciate that other people have a right to their own opinions. The opinions expressed here are true and generally applicable and if not they should be widely acceptable and accepted rather than moot points.

31 Aug. 2023

A Life in One Line

As a youngster I found that if I asked an adult a question and it was not answered, all I had to do was keep asking the same question over and over again, and that it would soon be answered or I would be told to shut up. That, I found, is a form of rote learning that is not in any way to be recommended.

31 Aug. 2023

A Life in Two Lines

Listening on the Stromberg-Carlson radio on Saturday mornings

to half-hour broadcasts of “Let’s Pretend.” Frequently retold was the story of “Snow Drop and the Seven Dwarfs.” My friend Richard and I used to correct the announcer: “It’s Snow White!” Failing to hear us, the broadcaster continued to refer to the sleeping beauty as “Snow Drop.” We took comfort in the fact that at least the “Seven Dwarfs” were not the “Seven Midgets.” I now wonder if it was a copyright matter or a different version of the fairy tale that was being presented.

Listening to “Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons,” a half-hour, weekly detective program heard early evenings on the CBS. So popular was it that it was carried by one network or another between 1937 and 1955. In each episode the detective with his assistant succeeded in finding “a missing person.” The theme music was appropriately chosen, being Noël Coward’s elegiac “Someday I’ll Find You.”

31 Aug. 2023

Atomic Bombs

“Little Boy” and “Fat Man” are the code names of the first two atomic devices – bombs, as it turned out – that were dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but neither describes the most powerful device of all, the brain of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the American theoretical physicist who headed the Manhattan Project which tested the device at Alamogordo, New Mexico. The devices themselves were referred to as “gadgets.” At the Trinity Test site nearby, the world’s first atomic device was

exploded on 16 July 1945. Oppenheimer called the experiment “Trinity,” a word that attracted the physicist’s attention in John Donne’s poem “Sonnet XIV” which begins, “Batter my heart, three-person’d God.” He was also known to quote the words spoken by Vishnu in the *Bhagavad Gita*: “I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” In point of fact, Oppenheimer, a student of Sanskrit, preferred his own version: “I am become Death, the shatterer of worlds.”

2 Sept. 2023

Television News

These days news reports on American television seem to consist of little more than daily election coverage for all fifty states of the Union as well as future presidential coverage for the Union itself. It is safe to say there is hardly a month in the States when someone is not standing for elected office. Reports of these are followed by reports on the everyday activities of Donald Trump and of the successes of women who are forming their own professional sports organizations or breaking performance records. It is a good time to be in the polling business but not a good time to be an average television viewer who is overwhelmed with all this activity that leads to ... nothing special. The commercials come as a relief from this punditry because here there is innovation when it is not being dulled down by repetition. The “medium” is not “well done” but it is, shall I say, “well done with.”

6 Sept. 2023

Model of Human Embryo

Scientists at the Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot, Israel, have grown the whole model of the human embryo, without sperm or egg. – News item, Internet, Aug. 7, 2023.

SPERM + EGG
SPERMAEGGTOOON

6-7 Sept. 2023

Equivocation

Equivocation may be vague to the point of being evasive, when it is moral, ethical, political, or righteousness personified.

7 Sept. 2023

Pessoa, Fernando

Fernando António Nogueira Pessoa is the full name of the modernist Portuguese poet whose vital years are 1888 and 1935 and who was inspired to write poems credited to himself, Fernando Pessoa, as well as to personalities of his own invention. Pessoa supplied texts and biographies for three non-existent people: Alvaro de Campos, Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis. Yet he did not stop there. A list of his pseudonyms, or heteronyms as he

preferred to call them, number eighty, plus his actual name, which makes eighty-one. On good authority, it is said that upon his death he had left a trunk-full of 25,574 manuscript pages of variously attributed poems that were written under heteronyms and left unpublished by Pessoa personally. Impersonally, it seems, he created characters the way a dramatist creates them, giving them lines to speak, full-fledged poems to recite. His philosophy seems to have been that everything that is expressed exists. Yet not everything does exist, not half-wake dreams during sleep that dissolve with daybreak. Although Pessoa died eighty-eight years ago, literary scholars are still analyzing (and perhaps psychoanalyzing) his uncollected works for future collections, a number of which, fully edited, have already been published in Portuguese and translated into English and other languages. It is interesting to observe that the Portuguese word *pessoa* in English means “person.” One of Pessoa’s observations about life is hard for a person to forget: “In the very corner of my soul there is an altar to a different god.” Another one that grows truer by the day runs thus: “It’s been a long time since I’ve been me.”

8 Sept. 2023

Ageing

Various explanations have been offered to account for the psychological fact that the sense of the passage of time is a subjective experience and hence a relative one, even relative to

one's age as one experiences its passage. To the youngster, an afternoon seems like forever, whereas to the senior, it seems to be less than an hour in duration. Time contracts as human beings age. This account of its experience is being set down by the observer in his eighty-seventh year, but had he written it in his twenty-seventh year, it seems it would have taken up to three times the available time to be written! So time was saved but also in the process lost.

8 Sept. 2023

Rapture and Rupture

The word *rapture* is seven letters long and the word *rupture* is also seven letters long. The two words share almost all of their letters, yet the first one has no duplication whereas the second one has one duplication (the two *u*'s). Both words refer to the consequences of the apocalypse. The first word refers to its psychological dimension, whereas the second one refers to its physical dimension. A neat analogy, *n'est-ce pas?*

9-10 Sept. 2023

Beginning and Ending

No one knows about his or her genesis any more than he or she knows about his or her own apocalypse. Expressed otherwise, one's birth and one's death are kept hidden from us, as are one's nativity and one's demise. So a rebirth and a resurrection, while possible if not entirely conceivable, while potential if not very

likely so, could occur again and again, whether or not desirable, or not.

10 Sept. 2023

What Lies between Iran and Iraq?

The key word here is the word “lies” because it assumes that there are a good many places and things to be found situated between Iran and Iraq, two ancient lands of the Middle East. What is important here is that the “answer” lies – or once did – upon the soil in Iraqi Kurdistan and that what was hidden and buried is the “lost city” of Qalatga Darband, a fortified settlement believed to be founded by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. In 1996, military drones revealed the presence of the remains of this Late Hellenistic site in 1996. It is currently the subject of archaeological study.

10 Sept. 2023

Rhymes or Reasons

Two, four, six, eight.

Whom do we appreciate?

Conditions may change.

Life resembles the stock exchange.

Satisfaction guaranteed.
It's all we will ever really need.

Goods satisfactory or money refunded.
Lives are ever being blunted.

I'm flying from Toronto to Texas.
Taxes are extra.

A verse may be unreasonably perverse ...
When not worse.

One, three, five, seven.
Rhymes drop like manna from heaven.

10-11 Sept. 2023

Distant Places

This volume of poems and effects is called *Distant Places* and the title of this brief contribution to this collection is also called "Distant Places." There is a simple reason for this: the author wishes to note that the nature of this collection differs from the nature of the previous twenty or so volumes in this series that were published over the last two decades years. The present "Distant Places" includes poems and effects, as noted above, but it also admits what might be called "sketches for thoughts" or "word-plays" that may or may not be "poetic" but are certainly

“effects” with words. This variousness more clearly reflects the mind of the volume’s author than do the earlier volumes in this series, if only because there are fewer formal poems here than there are in the published volumes. If something has been lost in the process, something has been gained, and that something I consider to be an informal approach to formal literary structures, which is more in keeping with my current lifestyle and thought. Allow me to conclude on a pun. It is true the volume is known as *Distant Places*, but it could as easily be known as *Where Else*, ideally without a question mark. Variety, said to be the spice of life, is also the piquancy of writing.

11 Sept. 2023

Tuesday’s Weather

Today’s, Tuesday’s, weather resembles yesterday’s, Monday’s and will presumably be indistinguishable from tomorrow’s, Wednesday’s. That is to say: cold, dark at noon, drizzly, overcast, somewhat brighter in the latter part of the afternoon, with no languorous evening to follow to speak of. In short, unpleasant. It leaves me feeling damp inside and out, upside and down, ready for nothing at all, really, except perhaps ... to catch forty winks, to doze off, to fall asleep, to be groggy, to have a nap, to nod off, to repose, to rest, to sleep, to snooze, *etc.* Weather is whether we like it or not, as climate is a mate for life.

11 Sept. 2023

Wednesday Afternoon

The weather is cold especially for early September. Right now, it's four o'clock in the afternoon and the windows are shut and the furnace (an oil-burner) has come on intermittently. This morning I was up at seven-thirty and prepared breakfast. Anabela, the woman who visits us once a week to undertake the cleaning and laundry, a friend really, arrives at nine o'clock and stays until close to one o'clock in the afternoon. After preparing soup and bagels, I ate and then woke up Ruth and served her and read the three newspapers to her, avoiding all except the columns of so-called analysis and the repetitious articles. (Today the front-page articles are about the one thousand or two thousand or three thousand Libyans who succumbed to the earthquake.) Then I cleaned up the kitchen and (to spare Anabela) drove to Nortown on Eglinton Avenue and bought a semi-prepared piri-piri chicken as well as a few vegetables at Fresh Harvest also on Eglinton. I found this particularly tiring as parking was difficult because of the activity with senior citizens stocking up on food prior to the Jewish High Holidays. I returned home in time to prepare lunch for Ruth and myself – it consisted of bowls of soup and the remains of a meat sandwich for me and for Ruth matzah and chopped liver with onion. It was now about one in the afternoon. I arranged the copies of the three daily newspapers plus the *Sunday New York Times* for the last week and fitted them into large bags and carted them out to the garbage bins that are stored in the garage and then placed them out for the city's collection sometime on Thursday. After that I helped Ruth

prepare for her early afternoon nap in the living room and afterwards I climbed the stairs and spread out in the bed in the small bedroom where I read an article in *The New Yorker* on stockcar crashing before falling into a light sleep. It is now 4:28 p.m. and time to give some thought to dinner, which tonight will not be the chicken that I bought but two catch-as-catch-can dinners from Hearth and Home which we will eat at six o'clock while watching the TV news about the slaughter going on in Ukraine. Not very appetizing, neither food nor news. I will then shower and crawl into bed about eight-thirty and read some more and then fall asleep in preparation for a repeat for another day. Ruth remains up, watching television and reading on her iPad until about 10:00 p.m. when I will assist her and then both of us will collapse in our separate bedrooms. This is not a noble life, a dedicated life, or an instructive life. I find myself dissatisfied, as my wife suffers intermittent arthritic pain and discomfort and I can do nothing about that except show some sympathy (which I am under a strain to manifest). How long, O Lord!

P.S. Until three years ago I used to append to my poetry annuals detailed accounts of my daily experiences, like the long paragraph above. Some readers of these collections of the year's diaries enjoyed the sometimes candid accounts more than they did the poems themselves. But it was a lot of work and, of equal importance, the effort seemed to me very repetitious, as each day, it seems, I went to the pharmacy, the supermarket, or the hospital for one reason or another, and had nothing to report as there was no novelty factor involved. I felt immediate relief when I realized there was no reason for all this ratiocination and recall. Indeed,

in most volumes the diary-like entries combined were longer than the poems and texts. Hence the volumes were slimmer, as the printer, a fine fellow and careful instant printer named Stan Benaim, who has his printing office on Dufferin Avenue, immediately noticed.

13 Sept. 2023

Oldest Structures Still in Existence

The oldest of the great architectural structures of antiquity that are still in existence on the planet Earth are the three pyramids of Ancient Egypt which dominate the Giza Plain on the west bank of the Nile River. Khufu rises 146.6 metres or 481.6 feet above the Plain which lies on the outskirts of Egypt's capital of Cairo. Their construction is generally dated to about 2500 B.C. The oldest and largest of the three pyramids is held to be the burial site of the pharaoh Khufu (or Cheops), whereas the two smaller ones (but still large and mighty) are said to be the burial sites of two later pharaohs, his son Khafre and and grandson Menkaure. Also part of the Giza complex is the Great Sphinx (half man, half beast) that is said "to guard" the pyramids. If that is so, it has done fairly well doing so for the last 4,700 or so years.

13-14 Sept. 2023

A World Divided

Today the world is divided socially, culturally, and religiously as never before. Divisions themselves became acceptable in the year 1494 with the signing by Spain and Portugal of the Treaty of Tordesillas. The treaty divided the newly discovered lands outside Europe on the basis of a meridian drawn by Pope Alexander VI at Tordesillas in Spain and at Setúbal in Portugal. This may be seen as “the grandfather” of large-scale political and commercial divisions of the wealth of the New World!

15-16 Sept. 2023

The Memory of the World Programme

The Memory of the World Programme is a global undertaking “to safeguard the world’s documentary heritage against collective amnesia, the ravages of war, decay and deterioration.”

UNESCO stands for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and Science Policy. It houses the Memory of the World Programme, established in 1992, to recognize and record the existence of the world’s documentary heritage. Every two years countries nominate their candidate contributions for intellectual achievement of value to their country and to the world.

Seven instances of documentary heritage currently represent Canada:

Hudson's Bay Company's Archival Records
Quebec Seminary Manuscript Collection, 1623-1800
Mixed Traces of Memories of Three Continents: The
Sounds of the French people of America
The Discovery of Insulin and its World-wide Impact
Neighbours, the short film animated and directed by
Norman McLaren of the National Film Board
Marshall McLuhan's The Archives of the Future
Philosophical Nachlass of Ludwig Wittgenstein, a joint
scholarly nomination of scholars in Austria, Canada, The
Netherlands, and the United Kingdom

As of May 2023, 56 countries are represented by the
Memory Program with 494 "inscriptions." For further
information, see "The Memory of the World International
Register" on the Web.

16 Sept. 2023

The Twin Terrors

The days grow shorter, as the song has it, and in my
experience that is only too true, and the nights as well grow even
shorter even faster.

Daytime consists of savaging, nighttime of salvaging.
These are the twin terrors. In the end, nothing positive is
achieved, nothing is accomplished or retrieved.

In the meantime, I wonder if the cost of being extant is so

close to the price of being extinct.

Right now, I am in the vestibule, another word for antechamber, wherein there dwell the terrors that will no longer be these terrible twins.

17 Sept. 2023

Climate and Weather

A change in the climate is less immediately obvious than a change in the weather but more noticeable every decade or so. It matters!

18-19 Sept. 2023

In and Inward

Between the entry for *in* and the entry for *inward* to be found in *The Little Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (OUP, 4th edition 1969, 9th impression 1975) there are no fewer than fourteen pages of entries. They draw attention to the differences between position and perspective.

19 Sept. 2023

Breast-work

A pair or a brace of breasts make a glorious and picturesque sight, the best that nature has to offer, but to the beholder they also offer little rest.

20 Sept. 2023

Musk, Elon

The literature of the Golden Age of Science Fiction is rich in remarkable figures like Elon Musk who at an early age go their own way and pull off fantastic feats that are planetary or even interplanetary in design or nature. Theodore Sturgeon is one author who specialized in stories of this type and Ayn Rand is another. Such people from the first are free-thinkers and have a knack for understanding or at least manipulating technology, finance, and society's needs, regardless of the prevailing social norms. Elon Musk may not be known to be a writer of fiction, but he is a norm-busting science-fiction-like character, if not writer, at least to readers familiar with the heroes (and villains) of SF's Golden Age. As I write this, he is still quite young (he was born in 1971) and (who knows) he may even yet try his hand with fiction!

21 Sept. 2023

Weather and Climate

Whatever the weather that comes between us and upon us, the climate is always all around us. The weather changes but the climate sets the parameters of that change.

21 Sept. 2023

Wife

Every so often, in a state of disbelief, during a quarrel let it be

said, I see in my wife Ruth's face the features of Adam's first wife, the mad Lilith, and recoil in horror.

22 Sept. 2023

Belief

Throughout our lives, whether lengthy or brief, whether cheerful or cheerless, we advance from thoughtless belief, through unthoughtful disbelief, to thoughtful unbelief. It is a relatively painless progression for most of us.

23 Sept. 2023

Living

We may live our lives inaptly, ineptly, inertly, and inversely. It is up to us to live otherwise, if possible.

24 Sept. 2023

Changed Nursery Rhyme

One, two, buckle my door;
Three, four, knock at the sticks;
Five, six, pick up straight;
Seven, eight, lay them hen;
Nine, ten, a big fat delve;

Eleven, twelve, dig and a-courting;
Thirteen, fourteen, maids in the kitchen;
Fifteen, sixteen, maids in waiting;
Seventeen, eighteen, maids in empty;
Nineteen, twenty, my plate's shoe.

Nursery Rhyme

One, two, buckle my shoe;
Three, four, knock at the door;
Five, six, pick up sticks;
Seven, eight, lay them straight;
Nine, ten, a big fat hen;
Eleven, twelve, dig and delve;
Thirteen, fourteen, maids a-courting;
Fifteen, sixteen, maids in the kitchen;
Seventeen, eighteen, maids in waiting;
Nineteen, twenty, my plate's empty.

Iona and Peter Opie, *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*
(Oxford University Press, 1951, 2nd edition, 1997)

24 Sept. 2023

Eleven Words on the Meaning of Life

1. Nascency
2. Evanescent
3. Paradoxical
4. Loving
5. Hating

6. Exasperating
7. Problematic
8. Laborious
9. Unjust
10. Fateful
11. Demise

25-26 Sept. 2023

Life

As in flying so in living, there is a pilot for every plot.

26 Sept. 2023

Volume of One-line Poems

The poet Yannis Ritsos wrote a volume of verse that consists entirely of one-line poems. There are 336 of these Greek-language poems in his collection *Monochordia* (“Monochords,” 1979), which was translated into English by Paul Merchant in 2020. Yet three hundred and thirty-six is an odd number. What I wonder is why Yannis Ritsos did not compose twenty-nine more one-liners to complement a year of verse.

26-27 Sept. 2023

Canada

“Canada,” the name of the country, consists of six letters – three definite articles and three indefinite articles – four letters forming the word “nada” from Spanish and other languages mainly meaning “nothing at all.” It seems that the Sanskrit word “nada” in Ancient Indian metaphysics refers to “the spiritual sound that fills the entire cosmos.” Sounds hopeful.

27 Sept. 2023

Love

Love is the experience the lover feels. Loving refers to the emotion, the sentiment, and the sensation that varies with intensity and variety over the years and even the lifetimes of the individual human beings so involved.

27 Sept. 2023

Observations in Passing

As the reader will observe (or as the patient and attentive reader should observe) the present volume of “poems and effects” consists more of effects than it does of poems *per se*. Why this should be the composer of them is at a loss to explain to the reader of them (who is urged to read and perhaps even react to all of them as if these are one and the same) why this is so. I find the

intricacies of language and expression are at least as demanding and desirable as are the emotional reflections and musings. It seems to me a certainty that volumes of writings of this sort should be acceptable to those readers of all backgrounds who have a vaster array of expectations in common. The poetries of fact, the effects of ideas and impressions, all of these are present and accounted for. It may not be enlightenment at all, but it should be ideal for the entertainment of the idol of influence and then the *beau ideal* of reason.

27 Sept. 2023

Voyager I and Voyager II

For Jon Lomberg, designer of the Voyager Interstellar Record, the so-called “Golden Disk” which is affixed to each of the two spacecraft. The disks are the sole ageless works of art.

Occasionally I ponder the eventual fate of the two spacecraft launched from Cape Canaveral in 1977 to explore the outer planets of our solar system. They dutifully reported on Jupiter and Saturn and then confidently left the solar system behind, entering heliopause in 2018. Since then they have been voyaging through interstellar space – the seemingly interminable reaches of outer space between the adjacent star systems of the cosmos. They are the first man-made objects to do so, and yet they continue to transmit back to observers on Earth reports of what

they perceive in its star-studded remoteness and darkness. Their voyages are apt descriptions of the dying of man, as they are outliving their creators on Earth. Such is the destiny of these intricate and incredible handiworks of human kind.

28 Sept. 2023

A Lot in a Little

Who has ever celebrated the birth and the life and the death of the lowly blade of grass? The single, lonely, lonesome blade of grass? No one I know has done it, except the poet Walt Whitman, who throughout his life finds such an existence to be nothing short of miraculous. He even renamed a “blade” by dubbing it a “leaf,” writing about it throughout his life, page after page, his life’s work, the compendium known as *Leaves of Grass*. So little. So inconsequential. So commonplace. So green. So un-notable. So unnoticeable. So marvelous. So Whitmanesque!

29 Sept. 2023

September the 30th, 2023

There will never occur another September the 30th, 2023. Never was there an earlier one. Never will there be a later one. The past and the future are being immortalized (or at least memorialized) right here this very moment, in this second of time (though perhaps “in this first of time” better expresses this uniqueness),

this hour, this afternoon, this day of this year of this decade of this century of this aeon. Uniqueness! There never was one, there is one right now, as I inscribe this notice here and now, once and forever.

30 Sept. 2023, 3:03 p.m.

A Note for Posterity

As I keyboard this missive to futurity, I diligently (even devotedly) record the time. It is Saturday, 3:09 p.m., 30 Sept. 2023. Enough of dates: the fruit of deserts that are less edible than the figs!

30 Sept. 2023

From the Best to the Rest

The poem that appears here was composed by my wife Ruth F. Colombo who in her own right is the author of five fine collections of poetry. This is her most recent poem. "From the Best to the Rest" is unpublished, yet she has agreed to allow me to include it in the present collection, perhaps as a *divertissement*. Who knows? It deals with old age and what follows old age. Here is the poem:

From the Best to the Rest

Gone is the best of me.
What remains?
Not cremains, not yet,
But a fine residue,
And time to bid *adieu*
To the rest of me.

The poem was composed about one week ago and it adds a star-like sparkle to the present collection.

1 Oct. 2023

Favourite Poem

I do not have a favourite poem because I am unsure about the meaning of the adjective “favourite” as well as that of the noun “poem.” Besides, there are too many memorable poems and verses and lyrics to play favourites with all or any of them. Rather than delve into possible meanings, here is a verse that I have been currently recalling with pleasure.

Where I come from
Nobody knows;
Where I’m going
Everybody goes.
The wind blows,

The sea flows –
And nobody knows.

The source of the text is Robert Nathan's romantic novella of supernatural love titled *Portrait of Jenny* (1940). It is recited to great effect in the 1948 film based on that novella by producer David O. Selznick which stars Jennifer Jones and Joseph Cotten. The verse itself is seven lines long but it may also be displayed as five lines (which, inappropriately, turns its form into that of a limerick).

2 Oct. 2023

Cadaver

Wednesday morning began with the arrival of the Personal Care Worker who is a lively woman at all times but especially at times when she has a question to ask or an observation to make. She is talkative and informative by nature. Upon arrival, about 9:15 a.m., she had a question: "Do you know that in the middle of the street in front of your house there is a dead animal?"

"Really?" I asked, knowing nothing at all about this, doubting all of it. She nodded, so I walked onto the front porch and down the porch steps to see beyond the fur trees and the stretch of Dell Park that had a dead animal on it. It looked to me like the remains of a pig or some similar-sized, pale-coloured, inert animal.

No automobile had as yet run over it, as the carcass

seemed intact, but I decided to let other people approach the cadaver. Instead I thanked the PCW, who independently decided it was an “opossum.” I thought it looked a pig because of the smooth underside which was exposed. I reasoned that since it was lying upside down on a city street, it is the responsibility of the City of Toronto. The PCW knew to phone 311, the number for City services.

It was now about 9:20 a.m. and it took me a couple of phone calls before we learned that it was the responsibility of the city’s Animal Control Services and that I should phone them. ACS was not answering their phone until 10:30 a.m., so I tried various other “services” until I was directed to 311. That turned out to be the correct number. I filled out the forms: a brief description of the problem and my name and address and phone number and was assured on the screen that ACS would take care of it “within the next forty-eight hours.”

It goes without saying that was pleased that the City was “on to it” but not pleased at all to hear when the City would “take action.” I realized that being dead it was of no immediate worry but in the interim between now and “forty-eight hours” some automobiles would likely run over it making a real mess. My expression of concern did not bring about an offer of an earlier investigation – and removal. It was now 9:30 a.m.

Right now it is 2:30 p.m. in the afternoon and nothing had happened. The carcass is still residing there, looking as dead as ever, if not deader than that because it was now exposing its hairy back. No pig that. I am aware that it may not be removed for another day or so – I had read the information on Animal

Removal on the Web – but it would be preferable to remove it before the carcass is run over by a motorist. I decided to fill out another form and argue for faster removal. I stated that it is a sad sight to behold and I hope no youngsters in the neighbourhood decide to examine it. No response.

It is now 4:20 p.m. and Ruth and I are sitting on the front porch enjoying our “happy hour” (discussing mostly sicknesses) and trying not to look at the animal’s remains. Then to our surprise a City vehicle pulled up and a worker, suitably attired, emerged and looked around. By this time the carcass had been down-sided and it was apparent it was no pig – pigs do not have backs covered with dark hair – but an opossum.

The attendant opened the rear doors of the vehicle and I joined her, standing way back. The attendant was a lovely-looking young woman dressed in a maintenance uniform and she was holding both a shovel and a sack. From the centre of the road she expertly shoveled the remains into the sack. I kept my distance to both her and the sack and in a firm voice thanked her for coming. She smiled. I mentioned that I had reported the incident by phone and then by fax. She said, “Oh, you reported the matter.” Semi-apologetically she said that the Service was very busy and very short-handed, but they try to keep ahead of the two-day schedule. I thanked her for her diligence and concern and mentioned that I had reported the incident twice. She was aware of the second report bit oddly not the first. In effect she thanked me for filing it. Then looking me over she added that the City removes carcasses from public property at no cost but carcasses from private property for a set fee. Then she smiled and

added that they do not advertise their services this way, they help “seniors” who need to have such bodies removed from private property at no cost. I thanked her for mentioning that interesting fact.

Anyway, she tidied up, very quickly and quite efficiently, retreated to the cabin of her vehicle and filled out a form or other and drove away to the next site. I returned to our porch and surveying the scene saw no visible signs of any accident or the demise, so thorough was the removal. Ruth and I continued our happy hour. To me it seemed as if a pall had been lifted from over us.

4 Oct. 2023

Idle Ideas

My body of action
My will of desire
My spirit of energy

Would they would
Once in a while
Work well together

5 Oct. 2023

Forms to Fill Out

Every day, it seems, I have forms to fill out – for ordering this, for cancelling that, for querying something else. What impresses

me the most is the time and the effort that this form-filling takes, as it seems no form is ever filled out completely or correctly the first, second, or third time. Only on the fourth. I have come to the conclusion these forms are designed by civil servants who have secretaries or assistants to draw them up and on occasion to fill them out, not members of the general public. I could list recurrent problems like failing to include relevant information that should be on page one but appears at the bottom of page two, three, four, etc. The worst feature of all is the clock that ticks away to mark the minutes that remain for filling it out. Then there comes the last act: "Send." But it fails to send. We begin again. Hence my axiom: No form is ever filled out completely and correctly on the first try. Or the second. Maybe on the third.

6 Oct. 2023

Circle of Light

There is a circle of light that bathes the head of the saint at times and at other times it and may even engulf the saint's entire body from head to heel. It has many names and is easily recognized with such designations as these: annulus, aura, aureole, aurora, circle of light, corona, crown, disk, glory, halation, halo, nimbus, radiance, resplendence, ring of light. It is clearly present in one degree or another except to the dedicated halophobe.

6 Oct. 2023

Eyeless in Gaza

Difficult to forget are the three vivid words “eyeless in Gaza” which first appeared in John Milton’s elegiac poem *Samson Agonistes* (1671).

Ask for this great Deliverer now, and find him
Eyeless in Gaza, at the mill with slaves,
Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke.

Novelist Aldous Huxley was so taken with them that he chose these words for the title of his social comedy *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936).

During one night of the feast of Sukkoth 2003, that is, the evening of October 7, 2023, the forces of Hamas led the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip into a surprise invasion of Israel by land, air, and sea, taking Israeli hostages, inflicting many deaths, and bringing about considerable destruction. Onlookers around the world sympathized with those Israelis who were now not only “eyeless in Gaza” but also “‘I-less’ in Gaza.” It would puzzle Milton and, come to think of it, Huxley too.

8 Oct. 2023

Day of the Week

Today is like every other day except that we group days into the seven days of the week, the thirty-or-so days of the month, the

twelve months of the year, the 365 or 366 days of the year, etc. That grants them “character,” it renders them somewhat undistinguishable, so whether one or another is fine or foul is a matter of opinion. Maybe astrologers know why and how this is believed to be good for us and for mankind if it is good at all. Certainly astronomers are of now help here.

9 Oct. 2023

Solioonensius

It is a word that is as difficult to pronounce as it is hard to spell, and even much harder to define, though the teacher who introduced it into occult studies is Georges Gurdjieff who supplies a neat definition of the term (which he implies is of Sufi origin). His definition is two words in length. Solioonensius means or at least produces “reciprocal destruction.” These words describe the reaction of humanity on our planet to a spectral rearrangement of the planets that compose our solar system that occurs from time to time such that dissatisfactions are expressed violently and the expressions produce those reactions that are the least helpful or desirable. In their characteristic ways a psychiatrist and an analytical psychologist have made use of them in their efforts to assist their patients to deal with their “defence mechanisms.” The terms are *reaction formation* which was applied by Sigmund Freud and *enantiodromia* which was introduced by Carl Jung.

9 Oct. 2023

Dreams

I see *you* in the morning, during the day, and in the evening, but not at night, when I sleep soundly. My psyche takes account of your presence during the waking hours but my dreams are there for one purpose and one purpose only: to keep me all-but awake while the body prepares itself for the day that is to dawn early enough as it is. Dreams are fragments of incidents or images that make little or no sense but hold the attention albeit briefly. There may be other dimensions to dreams and random eye-movement and the exercise of lucid dreaming may reveal a few of them but this has not been apparent in my experience. Dream content is brief, discontinuous, and bizarre. But it does hold one's attention, such as it is, during the state of sleep which accounts for one-third of our existence. Unlike such fragments of awareness, *you* are complete awareness, not a fragment at all but an on-going reality as well as a puzzle to both the mind and the brain, the conscious self as well as the unconscious self!

11 Oct. 2023

Rondelet

Now and Then

Now Then

Then

Now

Then

Never
Never Again
Never and Again

11 Oct. 2023

Capitalists

Capitalists are profiteers, to be sure, but profiteers of one class or another. The first class is the *pirate* (who is licensed for theft by the state) whereas the second class is the *privateer* (who is not licensed at all but is not persecuted by the state). It is a good arrangement for the future of capitalism.

12 Oct. 2023

Thieves

Thieves are like magicians who make commendable items disappear into thin air and then themselves disappear, again in thin air.

12 Oct. 2023

Communism

States that may be described as “Post Communist” are the same as states that may be described as “Pre Communist,” the

Communist period between them being but a passing one.

12 Oct. 2023

Toys and Games and Activities

Yes, I remember them well.

Sitting on the front lawn of our house on a hill in a big metal tub of cold water on a hot summer's day and splashing merrily.

Erecting junior skyscrapers with my set of wooden ABC building blocks.

Using Tinker Toys to design some moving structures in different colours.

Designing odd shapes by placing pieces of many-hued velvet on a patch of black velvet.

Building complicated structures and constructing toys with cranks using my Meccano Set.

Purchasing a small fleet of Dinky Toys, which I discovered were also manufactured by Meccano Ltd. of Liverpool, England.

Trying to read the *Toby Tyler, or Ten Weeks with a Circus*, a children's adventure novel that I could never bring myself to finish.

Running my Lionel Electric O Gauge Train Set with numerous accessories including a non-Lionel engineer's cap.

With a magnifying glass, burning pieces of acetate on the sidewalk in front of our house.

Setting up my own walkie-talkie by using two empty tin cans fastened together by one long piece of string. It sometimes worked!

Trying out the Ouija Board that I borrowed in an attempt to contact spirits, to no avail whatsoever.

Yes, I remember well such activities as these.

12 Oct. 2023

Wars

Whatever may be said about wars is redundant, for the reason that wars are everywhere to be found and being waged, sometimes more often than now, sometimes less often than formerly, usually repeatedly in the same parts of the world. Right now it seems that they have to compete for the public's attention with volcanic action, earthquakes, wildfires, rapid floods, etc. Nature as well as nations also wage their own wars. Mankind's wars are managed by men rather than by women for no reason whatsoever except to exhibit what has been hailed as "reciprocal destruction." Wars: capitalist. Wars: communist. Wars: socialist. Wars: authoritarian. Wars: ideological. Wars: religious. Wars: heathen, pagan, mindless, and so on. Destruction, injury, death. Wars. Wars. Wars. They are meant to bring all competitors, enemies, and opponents to their knees. No one foresees the consequences of warrants for such actions. "Reciprocal destruction" indeed. Wars, wars, wars. War, unjust, unfair. Essentially one war should bring all wars to one end, but never

does that ever seem to happen. War means *war*, *arw*, *rwa*, and so on. *Warfare*, war *unfair*. Anything but *rare*.

12-13 Oct. 2023

Israel

AAAAGHMSZ=GAZA+HAMAS=ZSMHGAAAA

14 Oct. 2023

Jesus of Nazareth

It has been claimed that there are more books published about Jesus of Nazareth than about any other person, real or imagined, including Napoleon Bonaparte! (The latter person is included to acknowledge the multitude of biographies of hard-working French scholars and intellectuals devoted to both figures.) Yet it is curious (even peculiar) that for all the serious biographies about “the Savior,” for all the references in the New Testament to “the Lord” and all the anticipations of “the Messiah” in the Old and New Testaments, nobody seems to know much about the nature of the Jewishness of Jesus. The student of such matters would think that the teachers of such matters as these would know such basic matters as the following: for instance, was Jesus as Essene, a Zealot, a Sadducee, or a Pharisee? Nobody seems to know. More to the point, nobody seems to care about what matters. Fanciers of the KJV of the Bible care the least of all, satisfied to identify Him with “the Savior,” despite the fact that

the Hebrew Savior and the Christian Savior are entirely different notions with less than a jot or tittle in common. It is as if some historian in the far future was undecided about whether Martin Luther King was an Essene, a Zealot, a Sadducee, or a Pharisee – and cared not. (Should the browser be at a loss for words: the Essene was a monastic brother; the Zealot was a religious fanatic; the Sadducee was an aristocratic legalist; the Pharisee was an upholder of the supernatural. The choice is the reader's.)

15 Oct. 2023

The Self in Sleep

It is when I am sleeping and dreaming that I feel I am in touch with another self, one that is deeply within me, not when I am awake and thinking and am out of touch with any other selves. Odd.

Semi-phantom figures, most of them somewhat familiar looking, like ones described by Dante in *Purgatorio*, appear and seemingly converse with me, making some residual sense but not really very much except to keep me asleep.

I presume the purpose of dreaming like this is the attempt of the mind or the brain to keep the body comatose during the night so the mind or the brain is able to handle the integration of the impressions acquired during the preceding day. It tells me vaguely relatable stories that enthrall me and keep me interested – and asleep. That at least is how I see the function of dreaming.

16 Oct. 2023

Israel-Gaza War

When Israelis squabble enemies attack.

Observation made by Canadian writer and musician Geoffrey Clarfield when Hamas in Gaza launched its surprise attack on Israel, 7 October 2023.

17 Oct. 2023

Wood and Night

Joan Baez sings a song with this refrain:

“You must not go to the wood at night.”

Dylan Thomas composed a poem with this warning:

“Do not go gentle into that good night.”

The lyrics of “The Magic Wood” were written by Peter Schickele and recorded by Joan Baez, whereas the villanelle “Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night” was composed Dylan Thomas and ends “Rage, rage, against the dying of the light.”

17 Oct. 2023

Mike Snow’s Cinema

I have long enjoyed viewing Mike Snow’s cinema as I have his sculptures and paintings. As well, I have always admired him as a modest man and a careful and thoughtful artist. In fact, in the early days, my wife and I purchased from the Isaacs Gallery a

large canvas of his titled “Two” which to my literal mind seemed to preserve the image of black filings on a screen of dark red held in place by an unseen magnet – if that makes any sense at all!

After a few years we grew tired of staring at it and sold it back to Av Isaacs for what we had paid for it. I am sure it is now worth a lot more than that sum, but we enjoyed it, though it seems in retrospect it was always off our wall being displayed in one exhibit or another at the painter or the gallery’s request. We remember it to be sure but we do not really miss it. (We had the same reaction to a Rick Gorman canvas which seemed more thrilling at the time than it did later on.)

Realizing that some of his cinema was being shown on the Web found me curious, but in each instance the curiosity lasted about thirty seconds before I grew weary of the repetition and speeded it up. Mike’s work – especially his sculptures and paintings – are sophisticated, but these days the avant-garde films seem rather concocted and tired and even old-fashioned! The main works are a little obvious these days, though the argument is valid that it was Mike’s work that contributed to its later acceptance among the avant-garde public.

Anyway, those or our feelings.

17-18 Oct. 2023

Literature

I have never heard it expressed that as an individual and as a species we develop from being illiterate to literate and then we

mature from illiterature to literature or we do not mature at all.

To my mind “illiterature” is a babble of sounds, syllables, words, and ideas that make little or no sense at all – whereas “literature” is a bubble of emotions and reflections on thoughts and feelings familiarly and euphoniously expressed that make sense to oneself and to other selves.

18-19 Oct. 2023

Time

If I am permitted to so express it, time itself gives the appearance of being inherently anachronistic much of the time.

20 Oct. 2023

Love

“Love” is a word that is much used and well-worn but never, it seems, one that is worn-out. It is noted that a woman will introduce it into a casual conversation before a man will venture to do so. (“Tell me that you love me,” she said desperately.) In a new relationship it is sometimes regarded as a bargaining chip: “Who will be the first person to use it without the expression of ambivalence?” It is a simple word, a short word, a single syllable word composed of four characters, each one a different one. On their own they form two even shorter words: “o” and “lo.” The exclamation or vocative case “o” expresses surprise, whereas the

interjection “lo” conveys delight – an introduction and consummation perhaps. That in itself is the expression of love, it would seem.

20 Oct. 2023

Libraries

There was a time when libraries stocked “librarities,” that is, papyruses and codices as well as unique or rare or exceptional records replete with information found nowhere else. These days they mainly stock mass-market produced paperbacks available everywhere else, plus novel items found in bathrooms, bedrooms, and living-rooms. I pity the poor sales force.

21 Oct. 2023

Destroyed

Sometimes I think nothing has gone right in the Western world since the Greeks demolished the city of Troy, the Bronze Age ruins of which are located at Hisarhk in the west of Turkey. Indeed, much was lost and even more was wantonly *desTROYed*.

21 Oct. 2023

Sex Workers

The vocabulary in English for female sex workers is a surprisingly limited one but not surprisingly it is also invidiously

critical. The Ancient Greeks and Trojans, for whom prostitution was a legalized activity, had a number of classifications for women who served men and even other women. Among their classes are these: slaves, *pornai* (prostitutes), *hetairai* (courtesans), and sacred prostitutes (who served in one capacity or the other in the rites of *hieros gamos* or hierogamy or “sacred marriages” in temples). Among the Ancient Greeks, the regular marriage ceremony itself was unknown. A good question to ask is the following, “Was this a fair trade-off?”

21 Oct. 2023

I Would Like to Be

A lover is what I would like to be, except it may be what I lack is a ready heart.

A millionaire is what I would like to be, except it seems I do not possess the needed financial expertise to amass even a small fortune.

A writer or author of eminence is what I would like to be, except it appears I have little narrative skill.

A sage is what I would like to be, except it is apparent that what I am bereft of are the necessary restraints and insights.

A gentleman is what I would like to be, except it takes training and grooming that are not at all part of my background.

An adventurer I would like to be, except that I find the Arctic to be too frigid and the Equatorial Regions too fiery.

An astronaut I would like to be, except that all the astronauts seem to be either military pilots or physical scientists

with nerves of steel.

A poet is what I would like to be, and perhaps could be, except for the fact that these days I succumb to light verse whenever I have the chance to do so!

25 Oct. 2023

Plato's Philosophy

Or.

Or perhaps.

Or perhaps not.

Or perhaps maybe.

Or perhaps maybe not.

Or perhaps not yesterday.

Or perhaps not today.

Or perhaps not tomorrow.

Or not perhaps at all.

Or not even perhaps.

Or not *now* anyway.

Or not for certain.

Or uncertainly maybe.

Or possibly so.

Or perchance.

Or could be.

Or.

26 Oct. 2023

Future Tense

The future tense is less intense than either the past tense or the present tense. This is so because, unlike the other two tenses, the future tense has never had and never will have the opportunity or the occasion to express its own form of tension in its own particular if peculiar way.

27 Oct. 2023

Alberto Manguel

I knew him, not well, but more than most people knew him, for the brief period when the linguist and brilliant writer lived in Toronto, as a gentleman scholar who knew languages and literatures rather better, perhaps, than at the time he knew himself. A fine writer, a fine philologist, a fine translator, a fine person ... period ... a man from whom one may learn much and if one listens very carefully even more than much.

Last week, to my surprise, I discovered that Alberto is now a resident of Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, where he is the founding director of the centre for the study of literature and the history of reading, a municipal cultural institution with an international vocation, in the form of the immense library of 40,000 books that he collected, known as *Espaço Atlântida* (Atlantic Space), which is housed in the impressive neoclassical edifice that bears an equally impressive name *Palacete dos*

Marquês de Pombal.

27-28 Oct. 2023

Hope

The difference between *hope* and *hype* is one letter of the alphabet and that letter is the second-last of the twenty-six: *y* as in *you*.

29 Oct. 2023

Snowscape in a Photograph

... the veins and the colours of the multi-coloured leaves still on the branches of the trees standing on their stolid trunks amid the deep woods and agelong forests of the northern regions of this world assaulted by blizzards of snowflakes in your photographic images is an attestation to the afforestation of art upon the otherwise bare fields of the unending land of the country that once served as pasturage

29 Oct. 2023

A Handful of Current but Overused Expressions from Newscasts

Bad actors [enemies]

Doxxing [releasing documents (docs) that rightly or

wrongly incriminate]
Enter the country [invade with an army]
Existential threats [psychologically damaging]
Moving forward [taking positive steps]
On your back [nagging]
Take out [assassinate an enemy leader]
Weaponizing [adding weapons to arguments or ideas]

30 Oct. 2023

Buffly Sainte-Marie

It seems to be the sad truth that the well-loved folksinger-songwriter Buffly Sainte-Marie was not, as advertised, born in Canada but in United States, and that she has “not a single drop of Indian blood in her veins” as the press express it. Instead she is a North American phenomenon, a wanabee Native Indian, an energetic and imaginative folksinger, a pleasing personality, and an outstanding show-business performer. On a couple of occasions I wrote up an account of her early years, based on public records, yet while I was doing so I always aware that there was something unusual – something haywire if you wish – about her account of her background. I will not go into the matter in any more detail here, but it turns out that Buffly (if I may) is a “pretendian,” a “white person” who passes herself off as a “redskin” (if I may). The word “pretendian” is new to me, though the fabulous Grey Owl, her famous predecessor in this regard, was also a delightful and talented and inventive personality who

rode the “prairie stallion” and was never exposed (during his lifetime and only afterwards by Lovat Dickson, his Anglo-Canadian publisher). Buffy (taking the liberty again) is a wonderful singer, a fine entertainer, a person with a positive personality, a beautiful and memorable-looking woman of stature, with a rich voice. Ultimately I am willing to forgive her for any deception as to ancestry because she is the composer and performer of power and invention. After all, she wrote one of the wonderful quasi-folksongs, the one called “Universal Solder.” It was immensely popular in the mid-1960s and was soon accepted as a anti-war anthem. Buffy (there I am again) explained: “I wrote ‘Universal Soldier’ in the basement of The Purple Onion coffee house in Toronto in the early sixties. It’s about individual responsibility for war and how the old feudal thinking kills us all.” (Maybe Buffy is not a Native Person but a Canadian or American person!) Once heard, the six-verse song is not soon forgotten. Neither will its composer-songwriter, an adopted daughter of the Crees of the Piapot First Nation of Saskatchewan, soon be forgotten.

29 Oct. 2023

German Language

I wish I spoke the German language if only because for no known reason I find some of its words to be quite remarkably expressive. I will not list those words here, though I cannot resist recalling the arresting word *Reich*, though I will note in passing

that a number of such words sound memorable and explosive – and some are sometimes much longer than their comparable English or French cousins. Instead I will refer to one such word, though it is quite compact. I have added *Waffen* to my English vocabulary. The German noun sounds to me so much more intriguing than “armed” or “armaments” in the plural. Those dread syllables *Waffen-SS* just roll off the tongue, even today. Oddly enough, in English, the word *Waffen* itself sounds soft and even cuddly and not as dangerous as “arm” or “armament” or “armed.”

30 Oct. 2023

Virtual Retirement

My days these days are taken up anticipating and then meeting the needs of other people, all worthy people, let me add. Even the nights have their tasks, assignments, and undertakings, even errands, that interrupt a sound night’s sleep. Though I am not in any sense retired, having always tried to do what I try to do these days (and nights), I never thought that any retirement would be like this, meeting the needs of others. It is not “the kindness of strangers” but a commitment to honest service. It is exhausting and it never ceases but instead ever increases. Perhaps the word “virtual” is misused – maybe the word “actual” is more appropriate!

30 Oct. 2023

Three Names, Not Two

It has been half a century since anyone has asked me, out of sheer curiosity, why I chose to sign my writings with three names, rather than with the customary two. Perhaps one reason I am not being queried about this is that the last half-century has seen the acceptance of three-named Latin writers (think of Rainer Maria Rilke, Jorge Luis Borges, etc.) in addition to the customary two in the English-speaking world of writing. Yet that is not the reason I chose to publish with three names rather than two. One reason is that while my last name, the surname, is obviously foreign (or at least Italian) I am in no wise Italian. (My grandparents represent four different ethnicities: A German grandfather married to an Italian grandmother (from Alsace-Lorraine); a Greek grandfather married to a French-Canadian grandmother (from Valleyfield, Que.). An ethnic mix to be sure, but not a mixed-marriage, as all were of Catholic background, as it happens. I felt “John Robert Colombo” made me, its namesake, sound somewhat multicultural, yet I was native-born and not at all “multi” in the cultural sense but strictly (English) Canadian though vaguely European in sensibility. That is one reason for the triple-name designation. The other reason is that my parents named me John to keep alive a family tradition that goes back to my grandfather (John Louis Colombo from Northern Italy) and my father (John Anthony Colombo, born in Berlin before it was renamed Kitchener). My wife Ruth (of Polish-Russian-Jewish ancestry) more or less continued the tradition by naming our

first-born child Jonathan, giving him a middle name of Gregory (because we liked the sound of it). For the record we have a daughter whom we named Catherine Emily (though from early on she has identified herself as Cathie Victoria) and a second son (Theodore Conrad) whose third name (of his four) is Amory, a *jeu d'esprit* on our part because it alludes to affection and recalls generally members of the politically active British Amery family. Hence three names, not two.

31 Oct. 2023

Pun

To be sure, “Heil Hitler” sounds better than “Heil Schicklgruber,” but superior to both of them would have been “All Hail to a Storm of Bullets.”

1 Nov. 2023

Wok and Work

Woke is a new word that may mean a little or a lot, less or more, depending on who is directing it against whom. *Wok* is an instance of rhetoric that leads to nothing positive at all, whereas *Work* is a word as old as the world that identifies individual effort and travail that yields tangible and lasting results.

3 Nov. 2023

Thoughts on Women as Warriors

Women are more powerful than men in combat. They wear breastplates that command attention as well as respect and protection. Their strands of hair blow and flow in the wind inspiring wonder. They are able to produce tears that appear in abundance on schedule. Their loud cries have to be heard to be heeded, and they are. Womenkind know mankind better than men know women and hence are more able to deal with the male of the species, both familiar male members and unfamiliar foreign or barbaric ones. Any hysterics, whether genuine or self-induced, have settled many an argument and have occasionally forestalled the use of armed aggression. These are only a few of the reasons why on the field of battle men in the presence of women are weak as opponents. Who would ever have guessed?

3 Nov. 2023

Time

Time and literature are oddly linked, even conjoined. The work of literature that has no beginning has no ending, no start and no stop. The work of literature that does have a beginning has no ending either.

4 Nov. 2023

To Jane on Her Birthday

A woman with
a ready smile
a comforting voice
a pleasing disposition
a graceful sense of movement
a knowledgeable manner
a delicate way about her
a nature that is highly intuitive
a sparkling gemstone
a companion who is ideal
for Dave

6 Nov. 2023

Doubts

I have no doubt that in the passage of time any doubts that I may now harbour will be transformed into redoubts.

6 Nov. 2023

Fall Is Here

Yes, the season of Autumn or Fall has finally arrived not on tiptoe but with a heavy, boot-like thud: cold, clammy, overcast weather accompanied by the promise or threat of snow and ice,

snowfalls and pratfalls on the glossy surfaces so characteristic of the next season that lasts for the three months (or more!) of Winter. During the twelve-month year of the more clement climate and more agreeable weather, we suffer Winter! Guy Fawkes arrives shortly, though his grim and drawn features are not yet as distinctive as the beaming features of those of Kris Kringle, also known as St. Nicholas or Santa Claus, indeed Father Christmas, beloved of children. Leaves tinted orange lie slain on the frozen ground, witnesses of deadly battles, having succumbed to the rigid and frigid and bloodless cold of the atmosphere. It is apparent a Summer-lover is writing these words because the magic of Fall and Winter is upon us, all of us, though youngsters delight it in more thoroughly than do the rest of us. There is no snowflake to resemble another snowflake, since each of them, though affirmed to be unique, shares the words “flake” and “snow.” Soon “flakes of snow” everywhere in Winter like “leaves of grass” in Summer.

7 Nov. 2023

Wonder and Wander

“I wonder as I wander out under the stars.” This morning this poignant opening line of a once-popular folk-song struck me out of the blue – beneath the grey skies not the bright starry skies. In the 1930s, it was sung in the Appalachian region where it was heard and collected by the folklorist John Jacob Niles. In its four stanzas of four-line verses, it affirms life to be both “a wonder”

and “a wander.” Right now that feels about right to and for me, and perhaps for you too.

8 Nov. 2023

Felix Culpa

Not alone am I in trying to “assert Eternal Providence, / And justify the ways of God to men,” as John Milton expresses the challenge in lines 26-7 of his epic poem *Paradise Lost*. It would seem to me that the challenge is well beyond reason, exceeding every level of comprehension, even evoking the concept of *felix culpa*, “the Fortunate Fall.” Great poetry but hardly much more than that, as great and as memorable as that may be. Between us, my riposte is the line favoured by business journalists who face the challenge of trying to document reports of outrageous remarks made by corporate executives with these words: “The company did not respond to requests for comment.”

8 Nov. 2023

Camera

More than any other single invention of mankind, photography captures the appearance of the past. “What past?” you might inquire. The past *era*, naturally, as it is disguised in the word “camera”: *cam era*.

9 Nov. 2023

A Commonplace Book

When I was about midway through the year 2023, it occurred to me that I was not compiling yet another “poetry annual” that collected the year’s “poems and effects,” as I had done for the past two dozen or so years, but that underway was some other sort of collection. Yes, its contents were arranged chronologically, like the earlier volumes in this long series of yearly publications, but the one that I was writing and compiling was rich in aphorisms, observations, as well as excerpts from prose and poetry, and indeed a host of short poems. It was ... what? Then it occurred to me it was a “commonplace book.” Such books were quite common in the late 19th century and used to be called “treasuries,” for they consisted of prose and poetry and stirring and favourite excerpts from classic and modern writing.

The noun “commonplace” signifies something quite familiar, though few of the passages reprinted in these pages, with sources, are more than passingly familiar at best. The finest of such publications is *A Certain World* which was compiled by W.H. Auden in 1970 and has been reprinted many times. In its pages the passages appear in an alphabetical arrangement by topic, with an index of “contributors,” making it a highly personal and individual publication, unlike *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, editions of which are usually arranged historically though sometimes thematically or topically and fully indexed.

In my eyes, *Distant Places* has evolved over the last twelve months into a personal “commonplace book” or even an eccentric

“quote book,” as it consists of quotations (unfamiliar ones to be sure) in the order in which they were written and/or compiled. Another point of difference is that all the selections in the present work are the work of one person: the present author. So it is decisively a “commonplace book” of *bon mots* favoured by the present author and in this instance the compiler of his own writings. Not a book of reference, not a literary anthology, but a compilation for browsing and musing (and perhaps for being amused as well).

9 Nov. 2023

Taken by Surprise

I was taken by surprise when my son Jonathan drove me one fair weekend morning to visit Target Sports Canada in Gormley, Ontario to observe and partake in some practice shooting. It was my first experience at a target range and I found everything to be well organized and highly supervised. Indeed, I felt scrutinized as the Range Master inspected my passport and subjected me to a cursory but pointed interrogation. After some terse sit-down instructions, we lined up in front of the targets and an instructor showed us how to hold a 9 mm Glock pistol with two hands and aim the beam of light it emitted at the distant target.

The cardboard target was the outline of a human figure. I recall that I had enough ammunition for ten attempts to stop the unmoving cellulose enemy in its tracks. With less than an eagle eye, I succeeded more than half the time in hitting the target.

What I also experienced was a deep excitement: I was instantly armed and I was seemingly invulnerable. Indeed, I was nothing less than a sharp shooter!

For one hundred seconds or so while I was holding this lethal weapon and aiming it – with an instructor at my elbow to ensure the Glock did not wander too far off target – I was invincible. On the drive back to Toronto there was no need to describe that feeling to my son, who had visited the range previously. To this day, and even though the experience seems foreign to me, we shared the illusion if not the exhilaration of being in complete control of our own circumstances.

9 Nov. 2023

Israeli-Hamas Conflict

Both vanquisher and vanquished are compromised, both of them, no matter which is the victim and which is the villain. Observers on the sidelines show little interest in being judged winners or losers but identify with the side that fully reflects the inherent interests of the observers.

10 Nov. 2023

Ethnicity

Ethnicity and toxicity ensure a fine and potent admixture.

10 Nov. 2023

Holiday Issue

I do so much enjoy spending a quarter of an hour once each year paging through the annual “Holiday Issue” of *Bits and Pieces*. The issue of this catalogue of children’s gifts arrives in the mail on schedule and in good time for Christmas sales.

This year’s issue of the gift catalogue is seventy-two pages long and if each page features five or more gifts to buy for children (and young-at-heart adults like me) with photographs and descriptions as well as prices and mail-order instructions. I have not counted the number of gifts on offer, but assuming there are five per page, that is about 360 gifts on offer though mail order.

Let me take you through the catalogue. Here are ten of the items on sale that appealed to me, despite the fact that I am not a deserving child (but perhaps an undeserving adult).

“*Spot the Difference Book.*” An album of Eastman House photographs. It’s a challenge to note the very slight differences between the sets of two photographs. \$13.50

“*Baffling Bottle Brainteaser.*” However do you release the stick in the bottle? It looks impossible but it can be done – with instructions on how. \$24.99

“*Shiny 3D Crystal Apple Puzzle.*” Can you fit the forty-two interlocking pieces to form a bright red apple? It looks pretty ... difficult. \$12.99

“*Chinese Checkers.*” Learn how to move all of your pawns to the opposite point of the star on the board. I never did play

Chinese Checkers as a kid. I wish I had. \$34.99

“Roll Up Piano.” This “piano” consists of a keyboard made of cloth (close to three feet in length) that rolls up when not being “played.” As a youngster I took piano lessons but I never practised on a keyboard like this one! Instructions included, but not the required four AA batteries. \$119.00

“Ultra Bright Never-Ending LED Flashlight.” It never needs batteries but it does need a good shaking to beam up! \$39.99

“Self Heating Warming Scarf.” Yes, it has its own heating system. But it requires three AA batteries (not included). Seemingly one size fits all. \$34.99

“Cash Boxes.” Store your valuables in this bright enamel locking box with your name or initials on the top. Ages eight plus. \$49.99

“See the Light Kaleidoscope.” “Packaged in a velveteen drawing pouch, five inches long.” See great images. I like all kaleidoscopes and octoscopes! \$24.00

“Solar Lighthouse.” Very charming. “Solar Lighthouse – Beams of Light Rotate through the Dark Night.” It stands almost sixteen inches high and includes rechargeable batteries. It makes one yearn to “keep a light.” \$64.99

That’s enough, for this Christmas! The brightly coloured catalogue is printed in the U.S.A. The Canadian distributors of these products are located in West Lorne, Ont.

10 Nov. 2023

One's Name

The spelling of one's name is particularly important and it relates to one's self-esteem if not to his or her self-identity. Hundreds of times my surname has been misspelled, once in 1964 in the first paragraph of an editorial about my quote-collecting in *The Globe and Mail*. No one has a problem with the correct spelling of John or Robert, though occasionally John turns out as Jean and Robert emerges as Roberto, perhaps as indications of a modest tribute to the spirit of multiculturalism. The misspelling of the family name as "Columbo" has been rampant since the launch of the NBC character-driven series *Columbo* in 1971; it failed to subside in 1978 even after the series starring actor Peter Falk as the Los Angeles police detective entered into syndication which continues to the present day. I find I ignore the "misspelling" though I am sure that, if he was still around, the cigar-wielding detective would spot them. After all, Christopher Columbus has had his name spelled innumerable ways since his epic voyage in 1492. The original Portuguese or Genoese version of his name is Christoforo Colombo. So there!

11 Nov. 2023

Ethics and Ethnic

The word *ethnics* and the word *ethics* look so much alike I frequently overlook the presence of the letter *n* in the first word and its absence in the second. I suppose everyone is an ethnic to

someone else and *vice-versa*. Yet people are much alike, though cultures are greatly varied, so it is certain that every ethnic group takes a dim view of every other ethnic group's full range of ethics. Disciplines like philosophy, philology, ethnology, sociology, and linguistics should caution students of these studies to notice them with curiosity and caution rather than with outright condemnation or dismissal. Would that this were happening these days.

12 Nov. 2023

Is Benny Hinn a Canadian?

No, but he began his ministry in Toronto, as he casually mentions during a healing service he conducted at the Prayer Palace in the Ontario capital in 1989. He was born in Jaffa, Israel, in 1952. As a youngster he accompanied his family to Toronto and attended Georges Vanier Secondary School in North York, Ont., apparently without graduating. Thereafter he moved to Florida and later to Texas where as an evangelist who became a televangelist he devised the format for a continuing series of ministries that attracted mass audiences in sessions held around the world. His popular faith healing "services" became known as "Miracle Crusades," and at one point he introduced the so-called "Prosperity Gospel." Attempts by the Press to prove attendees are cured of their afflictions seems to be lacking.

12-13 Nov. 2023

Artifact

From time to time an artifact, which is a natural or a man-made object, functions in such a fashion that for a time it demonstrates the singular property of generating an unexpected “art-effect.”

14 Nov. 2023

Our Lives

“Pale blue dot” is cosmologist Carl Sagan’s haunting description of the planet Earth in a view taken at an immense distance as photographed by the crew of the Voyager Spacecraft as it enters interstellar space.

Our lives are spent on the land, in the sea, and in the sky. Such is what our planet charitably provides for our substance and sustenance. Days and nights are lived in these domains that support no end of creatures great and small. It is an ample world for us and for them, but sharing it is more than we as a species know how to do. Hence at any one time, whether day or night, there are wars without number that are being waged. The earth is scorched, the plants are asphyxiated, the skies are malignant, and the beasts gasp their last breath. The evil in men turns into the devils of men. The stars in the skies above all of this care not for the devastating of the environment or the ecology. One more time, a jinxed earth. We know not whether this is the spotty

record of an intelligent race of mortals, wherever its counterparts may be found and lost again, though one hopes not. Once more, a jinxed race. There are no “armed angels” in Outer Space to save us. We are on our own. The “pale blue dot” remains blue for but brief periods of time and then ceases even to be a dot in the all-enveloping darkness. Breathe in again. One more time, at least.

14 Nov. 2023

Orion

From the earliest of my years and since then,
There is one word or name that has fascinated me.
Why this should be so, I have no notion.
The word or name is that of *Orion*.
As I said, I have no idea why this should be so.

Observers of the heavens have bestowed
Immense numbers of imaginative names
On the celestial bodies, planets and stars.
Non-observers have given these names
To jet engines, spacecraft, and much more,
Including a rock band, a movie, etc.
As I said, I have no idea why this should be so.

Non-observers of the heavens, like you and me,
Appreciate that the Arm of Orion is the name
Given the Orion Nebula, part of the Orion

Constellation, which harbours the planet Earth.
As I said, I have no idea why this should be so.

15 Nov. 2023

Loving

You assure me you love me;
I assure you I love you.

On this we readily agree;
It is a form of *déjà vu*:

No need for a *umiak*;
Any *kayak* or *canoe* will do.

16 Nov. 2023

Hamas Communiqué

There is a circular logic to the wordings of the *communiqués* released by Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement in Gaza) about the aggression of the IDF (Israel Defense Force) during the Israel-Hamas war of 2023. This one may be exaggerated, but not by much: “Yesterday the IDF (Israel Defense Force) was responsible for deaths in Gaza of 400 Palestinian citizens, 800 of them children.”

17 Nov. 2023

Television

Television (also known by its initials TV) is by no means *bizarre* (its electronics are relatively straight-forward) yet it has emerged as a *souk* or a *bazaar* (for the electronic sale of commercial products and services).

18 Nov. 2023

Poems

Over the years the poems in these collections have grown shorter. It is not that they have been shrinking; it is that they are not growing longer but are remaining as close as they are permitted to do to their causes and meanings, which are generally verbal confusions. As well, they are somewhat negative in tone and tenor in the sense that they are individually if not collectively critical of the *status quo* of the language and the ordinary meanings of the words that compose or comprise them – or consist of them, bearing in mind the respective meanings of these verbs.

19 Nov. 2023

Words a Day

I try to write a few words (or more than a few words) each day. With regard to the number of daily words, I make the following distinctions: fists-full (fighting words), hands-full (offerings of

words), and arms-full (loads or payloads of words). It is not true that “the more words that are written the better”; instead, it is true and relevant that “the words that are written should reveal worlds that have previously been hidden away.”

20 Nov. 2023

Intelligence Quotient

These days it seems we hear little and learn even less about I.Q., *i.e.*, Intelligence Quotient. Political polls never reveal and seldom if ever even refer to the level of intelligence of the people polled (or, come to think of it, the level of intelligence of the pollsters themselves and the questions that they ask). The average level is taken to be 100. Maybe that alone accounts for the peculiar or odd political preferences that people affirm in a good many instances!

21 Nov. 2023

Existentialism

The opposite of existentialism as a personal philosophy is transcendentalism as a political philosophy. Jean-Paul Sartre would be neither impressed nor amused as his coinage for existentialism refers to irreconcilable opposites.

21 Nov. 2023

Strictures and Structures

Much of modern art, especially contemporary literature and painting, including also advanced dance and music, is concerned with strictures and structures, specifically overcoming strictures with structures and vice versa.

21 Nov. 2023

Ernst Jünger

It seems there are serious writers in every country whose lives and works defy easy categorization. This generalization undoubtedly applies to the eighty-odd books written by the German novelist Ernst Jünger as well as to the checkered life that he lived, both civilian and military. It seems that it is quite demanding for someone of his ability and energy to be simultaneously a member of both the Order of Angels and the League of Devils.

21 Nov. 2023

The Paperless Office

The “paperless office” is a fantasy that goes back to the introduction of the modern computer to homes and business offices in the mid-1970s. These days I find there is mail delivered by the post office (currently five days a week) and there is a

bundle of both wanted mail and unwanted advertising matter that is hand-delivered into the slot on our front porch door or simply thrown onto the porch. In addition there is usually a bulky drop-off of advertising matter privately delivered of little or of no discernible use or interest. And in addition to that, there is email which is “delivered” twenty-four hours a day: some of it takes the form of receipts, etc., that require to be printed (more paper!). So this is the long-promised paper-free office. What I have been finding is that paper is everywhere, most of it of no more than marginal interest at best or of no interest at its worst. Now the desk in my home office is ever cluttered and the waste-paper basket overflows and has to be emptied every couple of days and delivered to the garbage, the apotheosis of print. Mainly paperless? Mainly mindless, I would add.

22 Nov. 2023

Life

How long is life! How long life is! To a child, the days seem endless, the nights unending. When we are middle-aged, the disappointments take over, loom up before us, cloud our minds, bring tears to our eyes, and then they descend upon us, squatting on us, and then vanish, only to be displaced by other fears and frights and cares and scares. Some go nowhere, but where others go is nowhere known.

23 Nov. 2023

Confusing Words

I keep encountering words that are easily confused. For instance, *gantlet* and *gauntlet*. The former term is familiar from the expression “running the gantlet,” a form of military punishment: the miscreant races between two rows of men with switches which they wield. The latter term recalls “throw down the gauntlet,” a challenge to an opponent, a gauntlet being a padded glove worn along with mediaeval armour to protect the hand in combat.

24 Nov. 2023

Found Poetry

It always dismays me when educated readers are “know-it-alls” who pontificate at length and most often do so dismissively about subjects of interest to other readers about which they know nothing at all. Recently members of an academic panel pronounced authoritatively on “found poetry,” disregarding it as nonsense that was introduced into this country’s literary circles by yours truly. Two errors there. Nor did they show any knowledge or appreciation of Ogden Nash and his skilled form of light verse (*The Golden Trashery of Ogden Nashery*). With regard to “finding poems” in the prose of other peoples’ writings, which “finding” does, they showed no interest in the salient feature of the would-be genre, displaying no awareness of individual volumes of mine, notably *Translations from the*

English (a miscellany of light found verse) and *The Mackenzie Poems* and *John Toronto* (two volumes that compare and contrast the insights and debates of W.L. Mackenzie and Bishop John Toronto) not to mention *The Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire* (a melancholy evocation of that great conflagration). On the basis of reading one of these books, the late Raymond Souster regarded Mackenzie as “the first poet of British North America.” Elsewhere I have described Found Art as a minor genre favoured by a number of writers of the Modernist period. Whatever the academics regarded the genre to be will never be known because it remains unread and thus easily dismissed. There is no knowledge or common sense there at all.

25 Nov. 2023

Triune Titles

The Triune God is a reference to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In terms of contemporary business practice, these roles may be equivalent to Chief Executive Officer, Human Resources Manager, and Administrative Assistant.

25 Nov. 2023

Religion

Life is difficult enough to endure as it is without encumbering our days and nights in this world on this planet in this solar

system with all manner of principles and practices of religious, ethical, and moralistic consideration.

Query: Should we regard these practices as “inventions,” for the reason that most if not all such rites and rituals, rules and regulations, are at the heart’s core “man-made,” especially when they are presented as “god-given”?

Answer: I think that yes, we should so regard them. But you, reader, browser, what do you think?

26 Nov. 2023

Imaginations

Come to think of it, the word “imagination” has no plural, though advertising copywriters have occasionally pluralized it: “American Imaginations” or “Canadian Imaginations” for product lines or product styles. Interestingly, Lowe’s is a Canadian-owned company that refers to “American Imaginations.” I think of imagination as unitary rather than national or international.

27 Nov. 2023

Some Halves: A Sonnet

a half smile
a half truth
a half of a half
a half of a whole

half life
half a life
half human
half an hour

a whole world
a half world
half-hearted
halves

aliquot
catalexis

27 Nov. 2023

Neologism

Since you ask me about my health, here is how I regard it: I am either *illwell* or *wellill*. Perhaps I am *weill*.

28 Nov. 2023

Force

With public policy it is only a matter of time before a *tour de force* turns into a *tour de farce*.

29 Nov. 2023

I Have Said It Before

I have said it before and I will say it again. I am not a poet. Instead, I am a reader of poetry and a writer of poems, a person who does not dare to define myself as “a poet” yet a person who composes those poems that he wants and feels he needs to write in the way that he needs and wants to write them whenever he feels the need to do so. That fulfills the needs I feel!

Reviewers and critics, editors and anthologists, not to mention readers of contemporary writing, and last but not least purchasers of current books of literature, will agree with what I have written in the two extended stanzas that appear above. There is also a third stanza (perhaps merely a paragraph!) that is relevant.

First stanza: If I were an earnest poet or even a mere versifier, and hence declared myself to be so, it would be expected of me that I would subscribe to newsletters and current publications, join writers’ circles and associations, take other writers seriously and have opinions on them and their writings, etc. I do not do these things, although at one time I did much of that journeyman’s work. There are reasons for this reluctance and restraint on my part.

Second stanza: As Auden wrote, “Poetry makes nothing happen.” Do not lament or despair that this is the case, for it might well be a poem’s sterling quality, its enduring characteristic. It is a testament and not a nullity. It exists for itself; it is its own *fait accompli*, and a highly personal achievement, attainment, even accomplishment. Those poets and

versifiers with talent and effort will make names for themselves and their works; those without such qualities will blame others for lack of belief or support. Such is the order of things. Why argue with nature and art? Is there not enough great literature right now for each and every one of us?

Third stanza: The answer to that rhetorical question is that there is enough poetry, so the problem is not quantity or variety or quality. If only it was being read by the public and taken with the degree of seriousness that it deserves and requires.

29 Nov. 2023

Involvement

It is one thing to “go away.” It is another thing to “go astray.” (Here the noun “thing” may mean affair or matter.) One of the alternatives is curable, the other not, but which one is which?

29 Nov. 2023

Public Discourses

It is a world of shouting in the streets and groaning in the back alleys, a world of gesturing in the boulevards and whispering in the board rooms. It has always been like this and presumably it will continue to be so.

30 Nov. 2023

Captains

Captain Nemo would be right at home in outer space, but there is no place anywhere in the reaches of space for Captain Ahab.

30 Nov. 2023

Comparative Literature

I wonder why no scholar of Comparative Literature has ever compared and contrasted the relationship between Canadian and American literature in terms of the literatures of Austria and Germany. I offer this suggestion with no strings attached to any bilingual scholar who is able to imagine the possibilities here.

1 Dec. 2023

Premature Notice

During an idle moment this morning, I keyboarded my full name into the search engine on my computer, a vanity act to be sure, and was not only a little surprised but also a little mortified by what immediately appeared on its screen. It was a simple question: “Who was John Robert Colombo?”

I am not bothered by the statement itself as much as I am surprised by the use of “was,” the past tense of the verb “to be.” Even to me it seems somewhat premature! Presumably it is a typo for the present tense of the verb – “is.” At least I hope so!

1 Dec, 2023

First Snowfall

Today is the first day of “baby snow,” that is, slight solitary flakes with some blob-like pellets of frost forming on surfaces and some globs of ice falling from the clouds before our surprised gaze. Before too long galoshes and snow shoes will also be appearing.

1 Dec. 2023

Kletic Poem

A kletic poem is a poem or hymn that summons or beseeches a deity to come to the assistance of the speaker. Today such a feature is uncommon but it was quite common in the recitals held in Ancient Greece. Contemporary poet and scholar Selby Wyn Schwartz has written, “The poet is always living in kletic time, whatever her century. She is calling out, she is waiting.”

2 Dec. 2023

Extravaganza

No. The semblance is false. The word “extravaganza” is not known to be a synonym for the word “extravagina.”

2 Dec. 2023

Pereipety

This is a Greek literary term that means “a sudden and unexpected change of fortune” or “a reversal of circumstances.” It is commonly encountered in academic studies of works of drama and literature. Its spelling is wonderfully varied, so before being used the current spelling of this ancient word should be checked in a scholar’s dictionary of literary terminology. Pereipety is characteristic of the fast-changing world of characters.

2 Dec. 2023

Bittersweet

It has been suggested that the word “bittersweet” was first used by the Archaic Greek poetess Sappho. The authority for this claim is not assured but her lyrical poems about love and desire do combine, presumably for the first time in literary history, both the bitter and the sweet, the sadness and the happiness, the sorrow and the joy, of the human condition.

2 Dec. 2023

What Was Needed

What I needed then, what I need now, and what I will need last
....

The lists of qualities and quantities are three in number and not one of them is extreme at all. Here are some of the essentials.

Then: Parents, two in number, ideally. Milk and honey. A mother's love, a father's pride. A woman's love for a boy-child, a man's regard for a girl-child.

Now: A house that is a home, in a law-abiding land, with a companion and presumably the members of the family, with some awe-inspiring views and vistas.

Last: A reasonable memorial in terms of reputation and remembrance, some modest words spoken with the element of emotion.

See, it might seem complicated or complex or both at the same time, but it is neither the one nor the other, just the right qualities in unremarkable quantities, yet in a way so simple as to be exceptionally memorable.

3 Dec. 2023

The House

The house that is our home is one that has a gate to the property, a doorway that serves for us to enter or to leave the house. Plus windows that open inward to some degree but to a greater degree outward to embrace the natural world around it. A chimney, a furnace, running water, etc. All such conveniences are designed to contribute to our well-being.

4 Dec. 2023

Eight Body Parts

Children are introduced to “eight body parts” through this nursery rhyme which is one that encourages the development of the child’s physical movements and memories. Here is one version of its catchy lyrics.

Head, shoulders, knees and toes,
Knees and toes.
Head, shoulders, knees and toes,
Knees and toes.
And eyes and ears, and mouth and nose.
Head, shoulders, knees and toes,
Knees and toes.

At times I think this rhyme incorporates or at least recalls some of the movements of the practice that has been called “Sufi turning” or “dervish dancing” or “Sufi whirling.”

4 Dec. 2023

Pretense

If there is one way for us to live without pretense, it requires that we recollect how to return to a state prior to pretension.

5 Dec. 2023

Whirling Dervishes

Ears hear
Nose knows noise
Sounds resound
Taste of grace
Eyes like I's
Feel of the real
Much favoured behaviour
Appearances disappearances

6 Dec. 2023

Much to Do with a Sheet of Paper

There are many things I may do with a simple sheet of paper.

I may carefully fold it into the shape of a flying wing and whip it into the air where it will remain aloft for a short period of time, travel a short distance, before it harmlessly crashes before my eyes.

I may cautiously fold it to resemble a flat-bottomed fishing boat and release it upon the surface of a pond where it may float for some time to come.

I may put it to inglorious use in the washroom (along with the three p's) and flush it away after inglorious use.

I may impress upon it the few words of the incantation that it seems I have known for all my years and in effect change either the world itself or our perception of it.

Or I may scribble a verse on it and turn the otherwise blank sheet of paper into a manuscript that will inspire whoever holds it and reads the text after rescuing it from oblivion.

I may do other things with my simple sheet of paper, but these will occur to me only after the words of this poem (or effect) have achieved the state of publication.

5 Dec. 2023

Canada Changed

It is my opinion and perhaps mine alone that the nature of Canadian society was fundamentally altered in mid-1974. That was when Rape Seed Oil was renamed Canola Oil. The latter is a somewhat refined version of the former for cooking and baking. (Wink, wink!) Thereafter no one has any need to blush when referring to it. The society began to *seem* less prudish.

7 Dec. 2023

Stories

There is something magical or at least enchanting about storytelling. The oral art is one that is often derived from a written art. Printed on the page the stories themselves may exert their magical effects as well, but when they are shared – from lips to ears – they are mesmerizing and most often unforgettable.

8 Dec. 2023

No Notes

The occasional morning I wake up in a state of disappointment that there are no notes that I scribbled to myself in the notepad that sits on my bedside table, notes derived from the early evening's reading or from a partial recollection of the dreams of the night. This Saturday morning is the sad beginning of one of these days. There is always the possibility that the waking hours will give rise to some overlooked notions, emotions, ideas, or insights. Then again, maybe not.

9 Dec. 2023

Again No Notes

Once again I lacked the opportunity or the interest to jot down suggestions for poems or effects to record for later review and perhaps rewriting. So much of the time I am too tired, as is Ruth, with barely enough energy left over in the evening or in the next morning to add an entry or two to this "commonplace book." Wikipedia has much to say about these collections, "personal anthologies" I guess they could be called, including the distinctions between collections of commonplaces and collections of quotations or passages of social or literary interest, *i.e.*, anthologies. So today's entry is a note of no more than passing interest.

10 Dec. 2023

Grand Tours and Tourists

There was a time when the Grand Tour was the privilege of the student-princes of wealthy parents or well-born patrons who to assist them to complete their educations upon graduation through visits to the older and entrenched cities of Europe by which they were thus enriched for the balance of their lives.

Today's equivalents are ... nothing of the sort. There is instead the impersonal uncashable wealth of the Web which transports viewers like the fabled magic carpet that takes them where in space and time and even in the future and into non-existence or wherever it is they wish to be. Its "trips" like the opium states of the past are a great deal cheaper and shorter than those that take place in the world of reality, if the computer deals at all with the real rather than with the surreal. It is not education that is served but entertainment when not amusement itself.

Yesterday's travelers were argonauts and were enriched; today's are holiday-makers and tourists in today's divided and impoverished world.

11 Dec. 2023

If I Were a Poet

If I were a poet I would wish to be one who since 1920 has moved the hearts and minds of millions of readers and listeners with but thirteen words: "the best lack all conviction, while the

worst are full of passionate intensity.” Or the poet who has surprised millions more since 1946 with a mere four words (eight syllables in all): “Poetry makes nothing happen.” There’s rare, rare talent there, to be sure; who would attempt to compete?

11 Dec. 2023

Opinion of Self

I have never been what I thought I was because I have never been content with what I thought I was. Having made that upsetting admission, permit me to backtrack a little: I thought I would to be luckier in life than I was, with the result that now my opinion of myself is less than I thought it could and should be, should that make as much sense to you as it does to me!

12 Dec. 2023

Prizes and Awards

Literary prizes and cultural awards are quite different in nature. The former recognize popularity and generally come with a blare of publicity and cash prizes. The latter offer recognition with a modicum of publicity but are generally free of remuneration. Prizes acknowledge popular and commercial considerations whereas awards attempt to acknowledge achievement of continuing merit.

12 Dec. 2023

My Writing

I admit that it is true: My writing is awful and barely readable. My handwriting, that is – hereas my keyboarding is artful and swift.

13 Dec. 2023

Life

As we age, life grows grimmer and slimmer.

13 Dec. 2023

Relief

Genuine relief from anxiety is notable when the two words *real* and *relief* are combined, at which point it is considered to be lasting *realief*.

14 Dec. 2023

Various Kingdoms

Mankind thinks of matter and other materials both living and dead in terms of kingdoms. By tradition there are a number of kingdoms.

One Kingdom – Antique: Human.

Two Kingdoms – Ancient: Human, Animal.

Three Kingdoms – Traditional: Animal, Vegetable, Mineral.

Four Kingdoms – Scientific: Human, Animal, Vegetable, Mineral.

Five Kingdoms – Living Things: Animal, Plant, Fungi, Protist, Monera.

Six Kingdoms – Current scientific research in North America: Animalia, Plantae, Fungi, Protista, Archaea (or Archaeobacteria), and Bacteria (or Eubacteria).

15 Dec. 2023

Vladimir Putin

Ruth, my wife, has a quip that she enjoys sharing with people who are appalled by the ruthlessness displayed by Vladimir Putin. Here is what she says about the longtime President of Russia: “To understand him, all you have to do is add three letters to Putin’s last name. These three letters are ‘Ras.’”

16 Dec. 2023

Gain or Loss of Function

It has been a good many decades since I studied calculus at college so I must strain to distinguish between integral calculus

and differential calculus to appreciate the meaning of an increase or a decrease of function.

17 Dec. 2023

Else

The word *else* as well as related words has multiple meanings to distinguish the location of something as distinct from where it is expected to be. Thus *elsewhere* (as in the working title of this volume) refers to a misplacement but ideally a meaningful one.

18 Dec. 2023

Teething

A sure sign of growth is teething caused by the formation of one's first teeth, the so-called baby teeth; the appearance of the full set of adult teeth; the decay of the adult teeth individually, then as a group, through the appearance of chipped teeth, fillings, implants, extractions; then the introduction of dentures; the first set of false teeth, etc. Nothing is forever, especially a mouthful of teeth, *en route* to being "gone forever."

19 Dec. 2023

Halloween

I was quite mistaken about two decades ago when I rashly

predicted that the spirit of Halloween would disappear in the United States and Canada. Instead, strips of white gauze (like ectoplasm) began to appear on trees and bushes on lawns and on mantle-pieces in living-rooms a few days before October 31st and youngsters dressed like loveable monsters would knock on neighbours' front doors and cry out "Trick or treat!" Far from dying out, the spirit of Halloween took on a new life that embraced the spirit of commerce. Indeed, the spirit of commerce lives on as does the commerce of the world with the spirits! I thought: Here is yet another older tradition that is dying out during our materialistic times. How wrong I was! The commerce continues and no doubt will continue as long as there are youngsters who love candy and parents who are eager to indulge them one night of the year. So the spirits of the monsters of Halloween will continue for some time to come continue to be *scareful!*

20 Dec. 2023

Five Days to Go

How much I enjoyed Christmas and especially the expectation of the approach of Christmas Morn with the tree, the lights, the gifts, the merriment. Then the visitors and the meals. So much of this means so much but lasts only so long. Now the whole endeavour after leagues of years is more a series of pains rather than it is a panoply of pleasure. Who would ever have guessed that this would transform this child's delight, this commercial

cum religious feast and festival, into a slew of work for adults?
December 25th, alas!

20 Dec. 2023

A What and a Why

What I need is a planet to live on
A small one will do the job nicely
A sun to brighten it during the day
A moon to lighten it all night long
And an immenseness of stars to do
Whatever stars are supposed to do

Whatever some stars are said to do
Any intrusivenesses of stars will do
A moon to sooth it all night long
A sun to soften the time of day
A small one will do the job nicely
A planet to live on is all I need

20-21 Dec. 2023

Handwriting

My handwriting reveals – no, betrays – not my innermost thoughts – no, my feelings. What should be done about it? Anything at all? Nothing it seems. If I stare at the page that I am

copying, the line I am writing rises or falls for no reasons at all. If I stare at the script as I print it, its letters look either too cramped or too gravid. The sense that I have when this happens, which is almost all of the time, is that my handwriting denounces or divulges my motives which are regularly mixed. Is this commonly the case? If so, what may be done about it? If not, what may not be done about it? After all, handwriting is writing by the hand, by the heart, and by the head.

21 Dec. 2023

Depths of Darkness

Dark is dark? Not really. There are different degrees of darkness. These are illustrated in the levels of the darkness based on the depths of the oceans of the world. Here is a snapshot of those conditions.

Sunlight zone: surface to 700 feet.

Twilight zone: from 700 feet to 2,600 feet.

Midnight zone: from 2,600 feet to 3,000 feet.

Abyssal zone and Hadal zone: from 3,000 feet to 3,600 feet or so. The hadopelagic zone refers to the depth of the deepest trenches of the world's oceans where there are deep-ocean creatures that (like fireflies) generate their own illumination.

For this summary, see Elizabeth Kolbert's "The Deep," *The New Yorker*, 21 June, 2023.

22 Dec. 2023

Nature of Man

Hyperbole aside, man is mortal but not moral; not immortal but oft-times monstrous and immoral.

23 Dec. 2023

Nature of the Natural World

The nature of our world is a lovely one to be sure; but as well it is a decidedly deadly one.

24 Dec. 2023

Lessons of Christmas Day

Christmas Day ... it is a long time coming ... but it is a much longer time going and then gone. Children love the kitsch and so do advertisers and merchandisers. If there are lessons or messages that ever were attached to this day of the year, they have long been detached by time and tide. I suppose the lesson we should learn is the need for good will and how difficult it is to locate and demonstrate good will on even a single day of the year, especially when so much of the world is up in arms.

25 Dec. 2023

One Anne, Two Anne

Women who read books in this country come in two kinds: there are those who most enjoy reading books like *Anne of Green Gables* and there are those who most enjoy reading books like Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*.

26 Dec. 2023

Boxing Day

Today is Boxing Day, as the day after Christmas Day has been known in Merrie Olde England since Victorian times. Originally a religious holiday that celebrated alms-giving, these days it is a civic holiday in much of the English-speaking world and a day of excesses that celebrates shopping and buying boxes of gifts from the stores and shops of merchants busy discounting and unloading their unsold Christmas wares. It is also marked by the heavy eating of the rich foods left over from the previous day's Christmas dinner.

27 Dec. 2023

Faith and Fear

You have faith and I have fear or vice versa. It amounts to the difference between meaningfulness and nothingness. The former is affirmed to be helpful for the human being, the latter ruinous

to the human condition. The jury is still out on this matter and especially any possible determination that meets approval, but the idea if not the response does make some sense.

Carl Jung, asked months before his death in 1959 by the British television interviewer John Freeman if he believed in God, looked lost for a moment, before replying, “I do not need belief because I know.” Then he beamed. It was a great reply but in this instance something in this viewer hesitates to believe his words. The answer made his point for television viewers but begged or at least side-stepped the question.

27 Dec. 2023

Most Memorable Words

Q. What do you regard as the most memorable words ever associated with a Canadian?

A. Never once have I been asked that question, but if someone ever does express an interest in its answer, I have a reply handy. Here it is.

The most memorable words to my ears and eyes are a phrase that is only three words long. It is not only the title of a book, but it is also to my mind the key to a great many other books and much music and fine art. The precious and powerful phrase is “being in being.”

The three-word phrase comes from the following volume: *Being in Being: The Collected Works of a Master Haida Myhteller, Skaay of the Qquuna Qiighawaay* (Douglas &

McIntyre, 2001). The words speak volumes to me.

The book is the contribution of the poet and authority on design Robert Bringhurst who lives on Quadra Island, British Columbia. Here he is identified as the translator of the work of Skaay, aka John Sky, a blind, 19th-century storyteller, who could neither read nor write but whose words in Haida were preserved by the anthropologist John Swanton. Now identified as a “mythteller,” Skaay has dictated words that have been rendered into contemporary English by Robert Bringhurst, a poet of substantial power.

“Being in being.” Reader, make of these words what you will.

28 Dec. 2023

The Destruction of Alderaan

To this day I feel the remnants of the pain I felt when I first heard of the unexpected and total destruction of the planet Alderaan which occurred “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.” I was forty-one at the time and it took place in *A New Hope*, the first of the *Star Wars* series of space opera movies to appear on the movie screens of the world. In 1977, I was old enough to know better but none the less I felt a great and unexpected loss when the mobile battle station named *Death Star* displayed its power and might and simply obliterated Alderaan, the homeworld of Princess Leia of the House of Organa. This was the “original sin” of the Grand Moff Tarkin, commander of the *Death Star* and a

leader of the Galactic Empire, who set in motion the first in a seemingly endless series of destructions in this ongoing saga. Yet the pain of the first destruction persists even after forty-six years. A wonder to me to this day.

29 Dec. 2023

Approaching the End

“Approaching the end” is a neat phrase, but its variation “ending the approach” is a phrase that is even neater. It may even be the neatest of all such idiomatic expressions if only because it takes into account all that has gone before and the little that still lies in wait to be experienced. It will be a bygone before anyone notices it has passed away into ... another word ... another world ... another place not-quite-entirely.

30 Dec. 2023

The Last of Life

“The best is yet to be, / The last of life, for which the first was made ” These two lines introduce Robert Browning’s poem “Rabbi Ben Ezra” and in the past they were frequently quoted as a guide to a long life. They appeared in the English poet’s collection *Dramatis Personae* (1864). The poem itself is quite long – a total of thirty-six verses, each verse six lines in length

and skillfully rhymed – and the sentiment expressed is indeed quite moving. Yet today I wonder if there are many people who believe the sentiment to be in any sense true or in any way relevant to life these days.

31 Dec. 2023

Distant Places: Poems and Effects of 2023 consists of the gleanings of one year in the life of the author – that is the thoughts, remarks, observations, impressions, readings, quips, quotations, etc., not to mention the “poems and effects” produced during the calendar year of 2023. It may or may not have been a vintage year, but it was a productive one, at least when it comes to examining one’s thoughts about what has been happening to and in the world, its abrupt changes and stark calamities, as well as its long-lasting achievements and technical accomplishments of one sort or another. The author in question is **John Robert Colombo** who includes in this mix some of his own poems and quotations along with the social observations of other people to create an admixture that might be considered to be what was once known as “a commonplace book.” Yes, that is what **Distant Places** is ... a way of finding the whole in an aggregation or assemblage of its parts.
