

# *Green Repose*



Poetry by Jnana Hodson

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**The author is grateful to the editors and publishers of these journals, who first aired poems from this collection:**

GREEN REPOSE: *Blackberry* (Albuquerque) ("Invocation" as "Two Sun Songs"), *Compass Rose* ("Ancient Miraculous Presence"), *Delirium* ("Bridge From May to June"), *Fearless* ("Green Acorns" as "Acorns", *Gathering Stars* ("An Eight-Fold Path"), *Jnana;s Red Barn* (Of Goldfinches and Bluebirds), *Inlet* ("In the Evening"), *Lucid Moon* ("Genesis," "Exodus"), *The Stone* ("Six States, Ten Years," "Submerged Road Paved With Geodes"), *Stoney Lonesome* ("Across Party Lines" as "Crossing Party Lines," "Atonement"), *Windless Orchard* ("Six Months").

LEONARD SPRINGS: *Cerberus*, *Compass Rose*, *Generator Press*, *The Germ*, *Lucid Moon*, *Out of the Cradle*, *Stoney Lonesome*, *Poetry in Public Places* (Bloomington, Indiana), *Private Places*.

CORNFLOWER EYE: "For Birth, an Opening," in *En Passant* (Wilmington, Delaware), as "The Other Side of My Moustache"; "Iowa, With Lotus Ponds," as *Poetry in Public Places* billboards and broadsides (Bloomington, Indiana) and in *Stoney Lonesome*; "Three Places in Wyoming," in *Bathtub Gin*; "Eastern Oregon," in *Alternative Harmonies*; "Motions in Sourdough Gap," in *Tin Lustre Mobile* (as "Speedy Routes Home"); and "Oculus," in *Lucid Moon*, as "The Menu."

BLURRING INTO SMOKE: *Can We Have Our Ball Back?* ("No Overnight Parking"); *Janus Head* ("Aroma and Sound" as "Listening to Crickets," "Milton Three Ponds" as "On Milton Lake"); *Maelstrom* ("Late Summer Sheds Its Skin" as "Quilt, by Association"); *Space Breather* ("Sanctuary, Invaded" as "Self-Examination"); and *The Stone* ("Hammering in November Woodlands").



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Inana Hodson



*Green Repose*

*— for Roger Pfingston,  
just down the road*

*Also by Inana Hodson*

**Novels:**

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Promise  
Daffodil Sunrise  
Hippie Drum  
Hippie Love  
Subway Hitchhikers  
Ashram  
Hometown News

**Poetry:**

Winged Death's Head  
Returning to the Table  
Elder's Hold  
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In a Heartbeat  
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Waves Rolling Too

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Revolutionary Light

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I  
GREEN REPOSE

*“There is no repose like that of the deep green woods. ...  
Sleep in forgetfulness of all ills.”*

– John Muir



*“Our bed is green. The beams of our house are cedar,  
and our rafters of fir.”*

– Song of Songs, 1:16-17

# INVOCATION

Honor the frail onionskin  
cast by the wayside where a snake  
has rubbed its sleeve free  
in the course of defenseless rebirth.

Protect me when regeneration  
dictates some plaited hull to surrender.  
Lead me through each forward motion  
demanding we embrace fulfillment.



Teach me admiration  
for these obstinate weeds  
– their resolute profusion,  
even when I pluck them.

Shield this garden  
in its cultivated rows.  
Restore our mislaid tools  
in the morning grass.

# SUBMERGED ROAD PAVED WITH GEODES

To learn this place,  
wander in its seasons  
until you become so lost  
you approach a sunrise.

Here, every bush, every tree  
deserves its name. The passing birds, clouds,  
ancient ones and their customs  
each extend their own message.

Even the countless trespasses  
in these shrouded forests and fields  
flesh out the legacy.  
Through snow, bloom, and freeze again

we may build, then, with a deepened  
knowledge of ourselves in some  
forgiving array of soil and springs  
where a single taste may astonish.

# ATONEMENT

Spinning, grateful, in yellow woods  
where hard breath had frozen on glinting leaves

I heard reservists burning distant air  
and truck tires whining on the roadway

Here, silent, alone  
amid bird chatter and rattling oak

– a ridge separating me  
from chainsaws and hounds –

plunging toward the deeper forest  
the sound of melting snow

# GENESIS

Each seed, each root, each bud  
unfurls on schedule. Melting  
and rain come together.

In the daylight you open  
so slowly you do not hear  
their snap. Between pale tendrils

and miniature leaves, we will gaze,  
then, no longer doubting  
our own inward spiraling galaxy.

# EXODUS

If spring arrives without rain,  
would the root and leaf open?

Seed that has not rotted  
or satisfied hunger,

become buried too deep  
or fallen on stone,

may reply, in its own season. And so,  
in your own way, rise up and walk.

Keeping your heart tender,  
within reason.

## AN EIGHT-FOLD PATH

*Understanding*      Six box turtles sun on a stump.  
Two more, on another.  
Abruptly, all slip through one pond.



*Thought*              One word  
One seed  
When chanting  
How enchanting



*Speech*                When I'm transparent  
there's no more to say.  
When something else happens,  
there's smoke and then flame.



*Bodily Action*        Winter birds repeating  
lustful shrieks blacken spring soil;  
the creeks fill.  
Grasses and branches sparkle.  
Even in shadowy pine, wind brays.



*Livelihood*            Ants swarm over a sugar maple's  
spigot and sap bucket.

In earth and in air, green spirals  
uncoil.



*Effort*

Empty the temple:  
the heavens clear.



*Mindfulness*

Above Satva's brow  
a moon always hovers.  
Let truth-seeking ever guide us.



*Concentration*

When a sign "like a well-known  
summary"  
blocks our pathway,  
nothing else matters:

**THIS IS  
NOT A  
TRAIL!**

– *Yellow Springs, Ohio,  
and the Leonard Springs, Indiana*

# BRIDGE FROM MAY TO JUNE

clapping dragon – prayer banner  
blessing the northern wind:  
Indra, Vayu, and Varuna  
conspiring  
with brooding swirls  
to drum our roofs and nurse  
our earth.  
gather us  
in logs  
beneath  
thundering rain  
– with Handel and Bach  
we speak of broad leaves  
and our friends:  
opposites  
within jagged walls  
brushed white –  
this reassembled skin,  
its rice paper sphere  
and we take tea. minor elegance  
rough wood improves –  
the drenching opens  
unnamed doors  
in Monday's clover  
and Tuesday's spruce –  
drowns the shrew-mouse  
on Wednesday's trail –

awakens sleeping polychromes.  
    makes pokeberry tall  
        beyond our yard.  
    shakes tulips from twigs  
        and fattens swamps.  
urges telegrams of morning birds  
    to break our sleep –  
rumbles within our karst –  
    as current  
entering swallow holes  
    will rise where mills  
        once twirled  
        soft wheat.

# GREEN ACORNS

I heard sermons but dreamed acorns  
caught crawdads under rippling suns

crossed meadowlark farmlands full of chirping  
symphonies amassed with crystallizing copper sulfate

sold tomatoes door to door  
spilled hydrochloric acid in my shorts

pedaled through city  
slept in mildewed tents

wanted girls in half-moon swimsuits  
– of course, you know that

so much of what we call  
human chemistry, bubbling with desire

## SIX STATES, TEN YEARS

as a white skylark  
is suspended against falling beech  
in an Indiana ravine where  
discarded refrigerator hulks  
skid over rust  
& glass  
her tiger mouth &  
high school breasts  
explode. blue vinyl  
spills in emerging streams.  
my father bought his first  
new car in sixty-five.  
that aquamarine special  
bore dreams  
until a strike jammed parts.  
no repairs while sickness spread.  
I suppose our relationship  
went like that.  
we could do nothing  
so I sold to a man with tools  
who fixed the block the valves  
& gears, to drive around  
the Garden State a  
hundred thirty thousand miles

*when we last spoke*

I had that car. now I wonder  
about the wreck from the road above  
left intact with what I needed.

# OF GOLDFINCHES AND BLUEBIRDS

Signs proclaim NO TRESPASSING/  
NO FISHING, but he eyeballs  
his line and waves anyway.

Quarry derricks web sparkling cable.  
Sparrows circus. A beer-swollen  
T-shirt carries rod and reel across blue asphalt.

He stares where car-sized limestone  
is heaped like junk beside green water  
as if it means something.



By ten o'clock Saturday  
the neighboring farmers are off  
to town, excepting Orlando Hollers  
whose horse team and sickle bar  
circle in on his field  
on our singular cool day of the month.

He comes to the fence line and speaks.



In front of their collapsing two rooms  
six children, a mother, & two dogs  
gawk under the coal stove's contrails.  
They hope I can't afford that much.  
I know to keep walking.



A blue neon WELCOME  
indicates these church  
doors are locked.  
August is dying.  
Please don't love me so much  
you put plastic flowers on my grave  
where goldfinches and bluebirds cavort.

# ANCIENT MIRACULOUS PRESENCE

A half-moon hangs in my cupboard  
like the letter *D*.  
Askew in silvery desire,  
it becomes an amber barley draught,  
bowl of orange tea,  
solitary untouched breast  
or ancestral skull  
while an old yellow watchdog prowls  
its nocturnal trail to the rooster.

## IN THE EVENING

They're calling for frost.  
Trees burn two weeks early.  
Unblemished sky follows

a steamy summer.  
Our tomatoes fell to blight  
and ticks flourished.

Only one broccoli came to head.  
Yet a dry spell withered the eggplants  
and our second round of sweet corn.

From the clean carpet of fresh mowed  
clover, the smell of mint –  
the edge of the woods has new depth

in evening sun – warm hues emit  
ghostly light against still-green species.  
While you purchase milk, I'll save

squash and peppers and cut  
the last flowers for our altar and table.  
Potted plants will come indoors.



We fought and made love today –  
it's been too long –  
I used to think autumn in wooded lands

would become fiercer  
as one grows older  
but it's not so –



No other thoughts until  
chores are done and I sit  
in the chilled dark before dinner

remembering the ashram,  
its old kitchen, a strange,  
half-pleasant smell, and

two girls whose names I forget,  
listening to some story.  
It's been four years.

# SIX MONTHS

In summer foliage  
hills leap  
into clouds



Deflated in winter  
these tired  
bears sleep

## ACROSS PARTY LINES

A moon-faced man  
from Oolitic, Indiana,  
drives a chartreuse pickup.

A Moose & a veteran  
of foreign war, he's slurped  
a U.S. flag to his window.

Still, the umbrella in his gun rack  
is what makes me wonder  
which direction his vote went.

## II

# LEONARD SPRINGS

*“Some underground springs return to the surface at the heads of valleys as streams. These valleys are called ‘spring alcoves.’ When the head of the valley is steep or clifflike and the underground stream emerges from the base of the cliff, the valley is called a ‘steephead.’ Leonard and Shirley Springs, about 4 miles southwest of Bloomington, are examples of steepheads.”*

– Richard L. Powell,  
*Caves of Indiana*

# AN INITIAL HIKE AND MAPPING

a little hike, I thought  
around a cornfield turning brown  
over the hill  
to catch the sunset

beside a bottomless roaring gorge  
so it seemed

at last, there is standing straighter, smiling

X-MAS TREES  $\frac{1}{4}$  MILE

the quarries, downstream

to turn corners and map my way home  
or future

## RETURNING, TO BEGIN

Backward, everything this time seems  
slower. More goods  
move straighter.  
Plant garden. Rise at four.  
Meditate. Script. Text-study.  
Sip husky java before sunrise.  
Feed birds. Nose into sinkholes.  
Lose myself where back roads  
wind in circles. Cook eggplant.  
Rinse jugs for raw milk  
at the farm or town library.  
Confront memories,  
stop off for a drink.  
We're both different now.  
A car of my own opens access  
to forest and slope, however ancient.  
New books I toss my wife.  
Sit with Quakers these days  
rather than Yogins.

Unlike a friend  
newly divorced after five years:  
"We just got bored."

The trail aflame behind me  
or grist for the mill.

## EXAMPLES OF STEEPHEADS

Newly moved to quarters at wood's edge, I strode out across stubbled cornfields toward an asphalt ribbon. There the homebound rush chided me to an unpaved lane above timbered gorge, where I heard rushing water and the crowns of sycamores burned with glinting sunset.

I continued on until a marker at this stem's culmination proclaimed LEONARD SPRINGS, but knew already that road began and ended at the state highway. This third leg bent me two hours from my intended route.  
(By now, my wife considered phoning the Sheriff.)

Dinner scorched while I trekked six more miles before spotting anyone to ask, and he chuckled: "Your place is around the corner." In hilly terrain, disorientation is so easy. I'd return to these groves, to find a cobwebbed pit clogged with glass shards, rusted cans, soggy newspapers, and a wind-felled tree. In this portal to Shirley Spring Cave would be a miner's corroded lunch bucket, startling me, these mysteries so close to home. Often, I would linger in a wind cave at clifftop before sliding down pebbles

to eternally gurgling fissures. Listen at brookside  
where a line of stone suggested a dam, then trace  
the unswerving concavity to a stout gray trunk  
at silt line. Speculating about the mill's foundation,  
I repeatedly attempted a level route along hillside

obstructed by rocky wellheads and gullies, deflecting me  
into descent until another bountiful current  
blocked my course or I mounted  
over the tangled spine atop another steephead  
where an earthen bowl of seeping fountains gathered

at a mossy wall of perspiring hand-cut stone.  
Except for a faint grade now forested in red maple,  
there was no other insignia of labor, nothing to explain  
how grain-filled wagons maneuvered this slope. Even  
now,  
when an occasional school bus or pickup flashes

within limbs above the rimrock,  
everyone seems to be traveling three decades  
too late for wherever they're headed.  
From that thoroughfare I looked out  
to a long barn and silo in elusive meadow  
where briars and muck would entrap me.

At last through the east ridge – as if substituting  
Depression-era plantation pine and a picnic shelter  
defaced by the broken glass and burned mattresses  
of adolescent raging –  
in place of my own destination,

I came upon a reservoir dam and intake tower:  
what I had seen from a distance as barn and silo  
had been blasted apart. Finally, in our second summer  
in that karst country, I would arrive by a western face,  
through violets, owl pellets, and a sunning black snake.

# READING THE INSCRIPTION ON A VANISHED TOMBSTONE TASTING OF SMOKE AND SHADOW

Vincent, disclosing the graves of two infants  
at the edge of his ravine:  
one headstone remaining, the other filched:  
the missing one dated in the early 1800s

now adorning whose dorm room or frat house?

Our pants and sleeves, covered with burrs  
resembling insects

*Our Four Nobel Plants, each in their season*

hickory  
    apple blossoms  
day lilies  
    daffodils

Union Baptist Church, plain cars still there at 1 p.m.

simple white churches, no stained-glass but all clear  
windows

the dual men's and women's doorways, plus outhouses  
set back from the road, their back to the road,  
facing the creek and hillside

or Hebron Valley Baptist, 1822

*all of this ground, then*

# THE UNDERGROUND STREAM EMERGES

Strolling rarely unlocks the strongboxes  
where maps, chronicles, and blueprint charters repose.

In the field, meticulous eyes gaze, patiently confirming  
inscriptions within rocks and branches, groves & springs.  
There are geodes and fossils to unearth and tote home,  
to pack cross-country later.

Knowledge waits to take form,  
as Richard says of fleshing out his own lust poems.  
Scholars' drawings & chapters will translate  
these tokens, to speak to others who steadfastly  
rediscover this ground. Chasms amid humus  
will whisper of caverns – karst windows  
and sinkholes, grikes & swallow holes –

diagrams trace Shirley Spring Cave,  
Leonard Springs Cave, May's and May's Annex,  
Keyhole,  
and other nearby chambers where NO TRESPASSING  
boards,  
target practice,  
or construction choke many openings;  
others are dynamited forever. Snarling beasts

are set upon geologists and dreamers venturing these  
grounds

wherever tobacco-spitters curse politicians.  
rifle shots percuss within limestone quarries  
beside Monon rails cutting through hillsides  
along Clear Creek. Still, when a pointer accompanies you  
the next five miles, no others will dare approach.  
At the tilt-window barn your wife envisions as a canvas,

you will detect a worn stone wheel  
set on end in the garden, carried up, no doubt,  
from hardwood valleys beyond their fences.  
Where the pointer turns back,  
soil will yield a rectangular flask  
drained of its antique medicine or whiskey.

A lavender haze on its round neck  
makes the glass appear aged by spring flowers.  
You will hear stories. A friend's patio stones  
came from Leonard's mill site.  
Neighboring farmers hauled out a fifty-foot waterspout  
for the state park's restored gristmill.

Speak names. Compare. Affirm our place:  
whatever goes around again.

# NEW YEAR'S DAY

private road at the edge of the wood, its gate open  
back into the shadows, one year rolling into the next

a shallow cave, fit for a monk  
to reclaim, reopen

rebuff broken bottles, the Sigma Nu emblem

back in, the roof collapsed sometime in the last century:  
from the sinkholes, this must have been an extensive  
cavern

gushing from holes in the earth  
an entire stream appears  
with blue-edged foaming and swirling

the rim above, restrains the wind

rumble arising from a chimney in the earth  
under an angle-trapped boulder,  
its mouth wide enough for me to fall in

bramble of the swamp downstream

# JANUARY, TURNING IN THE AIR

all about, vertical shafts of cold air rising and fogging  
reveal underlying caves or spirits

*or sometimes barnyard trash pits*

in the dark morning  
a sycamore fills with crows

I bow to my pillow three times

out beyond an old walnut on the fence line  
wind and ice splinter into cherry

# SIMPLE DIRECTIONS

Curry Pike  
Bean Blossom Creek  
Maple Hill Quarry  
Fluke Cut Stone Company

That Road  
Jack's Defeat Creek Road  
Fullerton Pike  
Lampkin Ridge Road

Victor Pike  
Victor Oolitic

L PHILLIPS RD on one end  
LEE PHILLIPS RD on the other  
not to be confused with T PHILLIPS RD

Pleasant Hill Church  
Mt Pleasant Church  
Pleasant Mills 1 Mi

or all the parading along Kirkwood

## TWO MILLS IN PARTICULAR

Undermining solemn contracts, the first settlers  
creep into the township. Charged with peacekeeping,  
federal agents evict aborigines. Only intruders remain.

Enterprise draws Robert Hamilton with Orion Crocker  
to mill logs and grain, starting in 1818. Over the crest,  
a commune springs up on Harmony Road

and wilts a year later. Distant storms recoil  
as a Holy Experiment splinters into Hicksites  
and the Orthodox, who hereabouts prevail.

Soon Wesleyan circuit-riders & Jacksonian  
vote-getters smoke their own logic.

In 1830 James Leonard sets two imposing

steam-powered burrs three hundred yards  
from the Hamilton Mill, which John Shirley rebuilds  
and refits the next decade, working it until Colorado

is a state eight years. Leonard boils  
through the admission of Washington and Idaho.  
At last the city runs dry and decides to reach further,

erecting an earthen dam & pump-house costing  
ten thousand dollars  
to flood bottomland to both landmarks.

By the First World War, still larger reservoirs  
unfettered by karst leakage mirror hollows  
the other direction from town.

During Viet Nam,  
two youths drown on Leonard Lake  
and this dam's breached. Its basin's abandoned.

Eventually, all scheming ends. A few stones remain  
an uneven row in sycamore leaves and moss. Still,  
water issues from Leonard Springs and Shirley's.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPTY SPACE AS A MARGIN

raining all day  
before  
lightning shreds the night

and see,  
she rolls over and yawns

that time, toward dusk  
limbs and sky appeared  
in neighbors' windows  
reflecting the chill

leaving the office just after sunset  
I heard the call and looked up to see  
a thousand crows flapping northward

all winter  
after the harvest

the woods enclose  
islands of open stubble

so much like the decision to cover the canvas  
or leave much of it open:

why, shoot, one corner's enough!

- *regarding the Chinese painting series,  
A Hundred Wild Geese, by Ma Fen*

# COMPASS ROSE

10 O'Clock Line  
a treaty  
like a time bomb.

Tecumseh's analysis hit target.

Last tribes: Wyandot. Delaware.  
Chippewa. Shawnee.  
Potawatomi. Ottawa. Miami.  
Piankeshaw. Kickapoo. Weas.  
Eel River and Kaskaskia.

Half the names of my birthplace are foreign.

Caverns. Springs. Stray flints. Limestone fossils.  
Grassy mounds. Rings within trees  
that shaped me.

## SOME REJOIN THE SURFACE

Hardwood forests ring a college  
where a kid from Chicago became a poet.  
Hearing him, you'd never venture Midwestern trees.  
He never strayed into thickets

until visiting the Olympic Peninsula,  
so he thinks getting lost  
requires a rainforest.  
You can get lost, okay –

just beyond the barn, even when the corn's parched  
– not far from home, by backyards or back roads.  
It's astonishing how quickly the countryside crowded  
and thinned out within a century.

Like a glacier, horse-drawn invaders  
transfiguring a continent in a hundred plantings  
left relics as incomprehensible as the wet breath  
of a bobcat sniffing along a silent speedway.

# SATURDAY

In a sinkhole I cannot see  
a neighbor  
shooting beer cans

hour after hour  
I hear his cows

# AN ARRANGEMENT OF APPLES AND ORCHESTRA

below the Shirley Springs, emerging water sparkles  
violin solos played on a marimba and then taxi horns  
at last, a break that allows us to sit without insects  
and I sometimes wonder, though I try  
retrospection climbing against  
a friend's arrival at midnight  
how crazy, all this circle, the news  
whose parents welcomed my twenty-eighth year  
I would ask, three decades after that afternoon  
the lengthy Kubrick flickering, by the lake, cold wind  
revisiting trails I hadn't hiked in eighteen years  
her eyes deep blue sky on Saturday, gray spring on  
Sunday  
and complications that obstruct authenticity  
arrived for a guitar recital only to find a full orchestra  
says this warm weather can't last another four or five  
weeks

yet Old Man Melton pressing his best apples into cider  
another four or five weeks, why, his tractor tires  
will be buried in mud or covered with a white dusting  
we could have fermented our own and then  
it always snows during the state basketball sectionals.  
stick it out, tax-free before stiff gusts and then foggy  
newspapers

plastered to wire fences raise questions

Do I love you? she weeps, probing  
I did everything I could – and then some – but see  
it's impossible after the temperature drops to zero  
for two or three days of an especially wicked flu  
relentless, then, comes the twisting discharge

## A FEW BASICS

sunlight on branches  
scattering  
on water

“you smell like the outdoors”

something just crashed in the woods

*when we needed*

a cluster of baskets  
woodblock prints  
deck chairs  
the table, its drop-leaves open

an all-day fire, right proportion  
of flame to coals

flames come clean, with little smoke  
over a good bed

*at the corner*

Rockport and Freeport roads  
would someday make me wonder  
who was from Maine

# MUCH FURTHER WEST

“road closed”

and a couple as shadow formed

the man retreating to one side

heavy petting? I thought of Kit again

the secret places we’d search out

and walked carefully past, down the lane

crossing a stream before coming upon a real trailhead

a glowing yellow-leafed maple forest stretching on

sinkholes, one with a good vertical craggy opening

another with a horizontal gaping I could have wedged

into

off the other way, the pathway rose between two gorges

and broke down where the creek switched back

as I returned to my car, passing the couple

who had opened the door – to tuck in their shirts?

He had just got back in, and she smiled at me,

a good-looking coed, the kind who would be fat

in another 15 years but oh-so-fine now.

Finishing off a bottle of wine, between her legs,  
she waved to me, responding to my nod and smile.

Later, when they passed me, she waved again and  
took a deep swallow, trying to empty it off.

Carefree in the afternoon, church-college kids,  
headed back to campus.

*White Pine Preserve, found by accident,  
as much as the Leonard Springs*

# MOMENTS OF TRUTH, HOWEVER MYSTERIOUS

Private, by reservation only  
the dough rises.

The Void, as a rocky mouth, summons aversion  
and the anxiety of exposure.

From many sources, a single stream. Watch,  
whenthe periphery folds into the core.

Light, illuminating the space behind the subject:

persimmons, paw-paws  
red cloth tied to dogwood.

# OVER AND OUT

Who could believe now, there'd been  
so many grain fields about  
to keep two adjacent mills in business?

An old farmer, digging a post hole, recounted  
what his father, now ninety, had known:

the teamed horses, pulling up-slope  
the pipe that would go down to the Spring Mill  
restoration.

On this site, the miller lived with his uncle,  
in a house since razed:  
living room and parlor had ceilings eighteen feet high;  
the kitchen ceiling, twelve;  
all built the same time as the Fullerton and Cazy places,  
eight hundred bucks apiece.

He was one of the few who could also work steam  
and later operated the gearwheels up on Popcorn Creek.  
In dry spells, he turned to a threshing machine.

Overrun, overgrown, over and out.

# HOOSIER MONDAY

seems every Saturday  
was raining

# LOCOMOTION

from clay and rock  
clear water

coming-to-be

the pathway closes behind me

III  
CORNFLOWER EYE

# IN CLEARING SAPPHIRE

*–for Ruby Lehman*

There are places to stand and revolve slowly  
admiring the smooth horizon  
in utter freedom. And peace.



An older friend has spoken of a grandmother in Iowa  
perhaps not feeble-minded,  
this was years ago, all the same observing  
heavenly scrolls that billowed  
in a beautiful script of an unknown language,  
holy and angelic.

Maybe there were rainbows, as well, in the clearing.

You could spend a lifetime preparing  
for such miracles. It beats  
staring at a TV screen in a nursing home.

Even half-hidden by a wall of tasseled corn  
this canopy engages the soil  
– brings water, now, and then opening –  
after the stars, a rare compassion.



Overhead, a band of contrails  
as leashes or  
unleashed gray snake skins  
keeps revolving  
while the wind rattles.

# FOR BIRTH, AN OPENING

Clear sky is not uniform  
but so varied the most intense blue  
appears as a pod moving diagonally

against an incandescent diamond.  
In a dome of winter,  
clouds mutate

through stars, moon, meteor shower  
– cardinal, blue jay, sparrow  
– commercial, private, and military aircraft

until frozen indigo fields  
arrive in a dark jade cup  
tumbling from long mountains.

Distant timber becomes dove.  
Natural phenomena,  
even a visual illusion

spin an icon in beadworks. Through it all  
winged torsos, fingers, a clasping  
silent rainbow streak through rock,

underground water and gray generations.  
Within a miraculous solitude breaking  
snowbound months

in forest clearings I cannot recall  
something nearby but beyond my touch,  
speechless ridges from a high window.

My seasonal quest invoked ancestry  
in an unadorned witness of Old Ways  
handed down in backbone hollows  
yet I could not name what called me  
to ancient meetinghouses,  
burial grounds, buffalo trails.

Perhaps my wife  
would be covered  
in a prayer cap.



Three crows cried out  
in a tongue I thought  
I knew once: their syllables

like my great-great-grandfathers'  
eluded my comprehension.  
They told me:

*Your strength is not your own.  
Your desires do not yet have prophecy.  
The hour will come: Go, prepare.*



Two years of prairie before  
I dwelled again under rises.  
I recollect hours spent in a salvaged chair

in front of sweating Victorian stained-glass  
as we gazed into snow-shrouded woodland  
where lonely headlights slithered down slope

for some unvoiced destination.  
No one could answer  
questions I had not articulated

until the guides appeared  
– both human and angelic  
passageway of doors.

My blessing comes now  
in walking this road  
whatever its season or markings.

# BLUE MIND

Five plums float on water  
reflecting clear sky.

Fireworks  
within her eyes.

One night overflowing  
with midday brilliance.



Five flowers are viewed from above.  
Five parachutists approach the sea.  
Five rocky isles break into ripples.



Just what other square  
extends a single spot to each corner  
while another assumes the center  
as the box shuts into place?

Pale vacancy awaits the command  
for blood to spurt into space.

**IOWA  
WITH LOTUS BLOSSOMS**

cloud lilies  
on green lakes

airplanes you can hardly see

# ACROSS THE WIDE MISSOURI

We were never quite Methodists  
until the merger.  
By then I was gone

from the elm tree  
the tulip tree  
sassafras  
red bird and blue jay.

In my tapestry flight  
I now wonder  
what was inside her cello.

# WEATHER REPORT

Clean clouds  
dirty clouds

“Let’s make  
a scene”



What we see  
or think we

see typically masks  
other matters



“What’s so great  
about sunsets?”

Just stuff it  
in your paint box

# BLUE EARTH ROAD TO RECOVERY

Quietly now, catch your breath  
and then children before the horns rise.

Wilderness and passion  
elude anything this squared

– houses and barns within windbreaks  
corn, soybeans, right-angled farm ponds –

squeezed tight until a hammer dulcimer  
saunters through lines of Swedish fiddling.

Inevitable yodeling erupts  
with raindrops, awkwardly at first.

Hands, circling beside you, burn  
with an obscure obsession

until your fields glide with whales  
rising from deep sleep behind the hog shed.

In your Viking past, only the sail  
would have been this square, this openly.

In the morning, you tally the symptoms.  
Fatigue, worsening the past twenty-four hours.

Fever comes and goes. Joints ache,  
intensifying as you sleep half of the day.

Under a severe intermittent headache  
you think you are drugged out.

There's no strength in your arms.  
A touch of dizziness. Some weight loss, yes,

tracing where buffalo stampeded  
through the crumbling straw.

# ROUNDS

an ear of corn  
a feather  
a kernel, an egg

rounded  
to come around  
again

of the air  
of the earth

we will feast, then  
and dance, lightly

# TRIPTYCH WITH ANIMALS

A sandpiper  
crossing Nebraska  
on foot wonders  
where the tide went.



Pisces  
“fish eyes”  
what did you expect?

another  
non-smoker  
on the imagined shore?



“Russian tortoises,”  
she said, repeating  
the classified ad.

“Yes, that’s what you need.”

# THREE PLACES IN WYOMING

far-off thunderstorms  
abruptly convulse our roadway

unfamiliar birds  
return to their roost

Table Rock Rainbow  
some find holy



When the wind pauses upon  
a pronghorn hour hand,  
striped faces sniff

hesitant half-light  
ash between sagebrush  
always this

wary, waiting  
slow turn, bolt  
and feathery

white bouncing.  
Chase, then,  
singing



Gillette a raw burn of strip mining  
and oil wells. A saloon in a trailer.

Neon gambling. Welcomes, at last,  
America's New West.

## SAFE PASSAGE

With me, she was the same age I was steering  
a U-Haul across the Columbia River  
under Horse Heaven Hills.

How much I'd already experienced –  
College. Binghamton. The ashram. Fostoria.  
A published poet, newly married.  
Social sciences editor.  
A Yogin among Quakers.

How much, too, she'd journeyed  
along her own secretive and tortured route  
in search of herself and a discharge.

But nothing like this.

## EASTERN OREGON

Where three smooth pebbles dotted endless blue  
ceiling,  
a beeline of overblown steel skeletons  
jaywalked across bands of tawny stubble and billowing  
golden barley far from any farmhouse or grain bin.

Ranchers and teamsters rolled yawning hours  
along flipside mappings to converge as if by chance  
in the shadow of a general store fillup  
and turn back or press onward, depending.

Overhead, the giant grandmothers hummed fearlessly,  
lugging buckets of current from shredded salmon.

After dusk we would sit with our portion  
of bread and beer and pools of light,  
ignoring how the watch continues.

# MOTIONS IN SOURDOUGH GAP

between rock and green  
threads bounce, twist, fall

a locust, grasshopper, dragonfly  
"can sew your mouth shut, kid"

ants amble over a silver snag  
size up a pear plucked far down the valley

hikers, berry pickers, fishermen, packhorses  
plod up the long incline

patiently, all slip away, out of sight

# OCULUS

what resolute  
unclouded eye reckons  
galaxies within grains  
of wood / of rice

the snow itself – & clouds  
delicate whirling  
of elementary  
universality

encompasses the void  
& the mind as well –  
one frog on a pond where stars  
& moon quiver proclaims his domain, yes

our thoughts are our own  
– when that rippled conch resounds,  
brother,

those who awaken in shining seed  
feast on swelling delight

## RITZVILLE RODEO

Wearing our pale blue protective mouth and nasal masks  
we never imagined such vast glaring  
white-headed barley or wheat  
until I realized I could never work for any pimp

no matter what the business:  
the corporation's ugly hand had reared  
such madness we left through whirlwind scablands  
and side road walls of half-mile-long dust

standing hundreds of feet high:  
all that time and space St. Helens had blinded.  
And it never rains.  
These cattle are not cows.

Maybe this wasn't such a strange place to encounter  
the Benjamin Britten Piano Concerto  
with the Cleveland Orchestra broadcast  
over Moses Lake its own kind of Brahma bull ride.

## SECOND EXILE

with eyes the color of Western skies  
and long hair, a field of ripe wheat  
or sunrise

I believed her promises  
and followed her  
further east  
rather than south  
to Georgia

# NEW POTATOES

a storm watch for tomorrow  
(so much for any intention of dancing)

a nor'easter approaches  
ground already covered  
with afternoon dusting

as for reparation, remember  
wilderness  
    is about clouds, too

this time over mountains  
    over fields of potatoes being dug free



while I traverse mid-October vista upon  
mile upon vista of yellow-orange and yellow-green  
mixed with dark evergreen

blurring the particulars of repeated sign invitations  
    *Mums, Pumpkins, Cider*  
that drive a sustained meditation  
    this time in Maine

bouquets for the eyes, for the nose,  
for the tongue itself

the way home

# BEARINGS

these days  
I'm not as aware  
of the moon  
or its cycles

the intense blue I encounter now  
is the North Atlantic  
on a clear day  
best viewed from the dune cliffs at Wellfleet  
or the Marginal Way at Ogunquit  
where you can detect the faint curvature  
of the planet

it makes me remember, all the same  
the inland ocean  
in the wind  
far behind me

# **BRIEFLY, ALWAYS**

Eyes glistening.  
Teeth glistening.

In the moonlight.

Her face glowing.

# CORNFLOWER

At last, this is the Yakima sky, I proclaim  
pointing to petals in my new wife's garden.  
The intense bubble of interior Far West  
out in the open, unconstrained, bone-dry.  
Treeless expanse. No one else in sight,  
excepting your own companions  
as I still see it.

Cornflower, she says. Or bachelor's button.

Basket-flower. Old-fashioned blue bottle.  
Blew-bottle. Mountain bluet.  
Ragged robin. Ragged sailor. Bluebonnet.  
(*Centaurea cyranus – et cetera*)

Chiron's balm for wounds  
– the healing power of herbs.  
An eye lotion, mostly, nowadays  
though it was thought to cure a scorpion's bite.  
Though nothing has cured me there.

We will harvest no ears from the cornflower,  
this European intruder of the grain field.  
A farmer's bane in the cereal planes, a weed  
where wheat, oat, barley kernels thicken.

The improbable name expands  
now, for me, as cornflower sky  
only to learn later, I'm not the first to associate them  
in what's a commercial term, in fact,  
          although no less true.

One of the few true-blue flowers, as bright as flax.  
          A certified crayon stick.  
Ink, officially, 59% cyan, 37% magenta.  
          No yellow, no black.  
Who knows what goes into the rest?  
          Photos bluer than memory.

          A deep, nearly solid color I now observe  
          mostly in cold ocean on a clear day.

How easily we overlook the tough, wiry,  
slender, furrowed, and branched blue-gray stem.  
The small white hairs.  
The fringe of brown teeth.  
Going for the star-like bursts of brilliance.

Deep blue, said the Shakers, is a color  
the devil detests. How heavenly,  
my God, upholding good sky.

In North America, from Colonial times  
these petals have been dried,  
retaining this pigmentation.  
So clearly, so pertinacious.

IV  
BLURRING INTO SMOKE

## AROMA AND SOUND

Another mossy forest stirs up  
the glen, the ravine  
at the back of our farmstead  
in New York mountains  
now within me.

Something within summer woodland aroma  
revives my first jaunt down that evergreen glade  
when I rented a room behind blueberries.

Add to that mounds of decomposing mown grass,  
a brush pile, and a hay barn. I've learned  
a farmhouse smells quite distinct  
from an inner-city apartment.

Maybe a different kind of decay sets in,  
or it's a whiff of fruit and grain  
unlike a corridor's urine and dry rot.  
Or just the way I hear crickets.

# MILTON THREE PONDS

beyond the rope line  
stroking, as they say,  
in over our heads

to the circling raft  
and there drifting, eyes skyward  
or to the shoreline

in a slow rotation  
of cumulus clouds  
how long you can sustain this

before running to dive or leap  
in a rivalry of friends  
circumscribes youth or adulthood

as much as the ducks gliding past  
she tries to catch  
while swimming back to shore

# NO OVERNIGHT PARKING

dive into a rose and swim without surfacing  
which is nothing when straight horns burst  
summer's brief night and you ride silver lightning

with flaming mice atop swaying weed stalks  
with long bites, to scatter fluttering constellations  
grasp, yet that strawberry moon slips away



purple sky  
lightning

barking  
pale thunder

dogs out  
after rain



two zealous planets  
east and west  
outflank Orion's field

the muted jewels of Taurus  
confederate winter  
approaching

two streaks  
across the southern horizon  
spit their malediction

## LATE SUMMER SHEDS ITS SKIN

In that route I drove each day and evening,  
with each half-sleep discovery, I cursed  
bulldozers felling oaks and maple.

Here, one night, a dozen-pointed buck  
had obstructed my way: I squinted  
behind rolling headlamps. It was life,

after all, or an insurance emblem.  
A flash of barred owl glided through  
twilight and road work. Over traffic

a frog pond parlay of green  
insisted I was never quite alone  
in all of this desolation.

Where a ring-neck pheasant paused,  
a ring-tail raccoon strutted.  
A red-shouldered hawk curled

against the sun overhead. A fat ram  
regarded meadow and barn. Hummingbird  
probed blossoms and glass. Beaver leapt

into mud and then birches. Tallying  
omens, I posed listlessly. Moss.  
Wind. Especially, wind threaded

hemlock and beech. Jay cried. Late  
summer shed its skin. Morning-fog  
dew thickened sweet corn and tomatoes.

At last, at the car again, my hands,  
now stained with fresh blueberries  
two miles from those new foundations.

# DUSKY WALL

I took a rucksack of books and clothing  
to a troll hut beside autumn lake. For my meals

there was the camp dining hall  
or a drive to the village, depending.

Too late in the year for swimming,  
as I determined, diving from the dock briefly,

I'd still learn to canoe with a J-stroke  
and regard any breeze on the water.

Loll in an outdoor Jacuzzi or over-the-office  
meditation room, or summon a massage therapist.

Many tourists would object to the disrepair and decay  
of a rustic retreat I found more than adequate,

considering you could call it a spa, if you wanted,  
or a rundown resort out of season.



My drafty shed was four times wider  
than the door and maybe a third longer.

Had a fireplace but no flue, a toilet,  
cold-water sink, double-bed, sloping floor,

sliding shutters, three electrical outlets, four lights,  
and, best of all, a fold-away writing plank.

With its shutters opened on three sides,  
both mountains and lake appeared.

One long dusky wall converted  
into a private fire lookout perch  
catching flaming sunlight  
reflected in ripples.

Loons called hauntingly  
as I recalled my last lover.

At night, shutting myself in  
under worn quilts and comforters,

I read novel after novel  
beside a smoky fire.



Was this all that different from Walden?  
Wind rustled old boughs.

My fire crackled. In my own quietude  
I perceived long-neglected gossip:

a domestic conflict of chipmunks,  
the anxiety of a warbler. Henry David would walk.

to village center, have dinner with friends.  
For me, it was the lodge or drive out to highway.

Modern comforts. A brewpub, indeed.  
I had electricity; on his part, a woodstove.

His roost was bigger, likely better wrapped,  
while mine had screens in glass-free windows.

This night would drop to almost freezing, according  
to meteorologists just down the road, in their forecast.

I couldn't imagine feeling more aware  
of transient humanity.



This shanty at my end  
of one narrow trail  
remained weathered log.

You could barely  
discern it from a canoe  
passing by. Yet I

wondered about painting  
its sides gaudy blue,  
orange, green, or yellow as

Scandinavians do to survive

sunless winter bucking  
within braying pine crowns.

After dark, I could venture  
off to some town hall to dance  
a hambo or Norwegian polka

with neighboring girls  
who might take all this in stride  
while dreaming of escape

through the woods  
to the city  
or broad ocean.

They recall, to dwell in forest  
involves periods without power  
as you know it.

# SOUNDINGS

Sometimes, crickets alone  
ripple the darkness around stars.

Sometimes, a forest flaps in the wind  
or fills with lusty bird chatter.

Sometimes, with their urgency of prayer  
or eternity, loons call from the lake.



Barking  
    wild geese,  
    now  
closer than  
hounds.



Thud and recoil:

Hard dull slam  
    an unseen  
screen door.

# WITH A SINGLE STRIKE AS THE GOAL

Making do with what's underfoot,  
crackerjack zeal vows to dehydrate  
brushwood that's spongy as peat moss.

Nobody would pay good money  
for these chain-sawed butts  
the caretaker's abandoned in the forest.

Still, within some code-of-honor duty,  
I collect and reclaim this debris  
to cook over dry twigs and broken branches

hoping to stay comfortable  
over six icy nights. Proudly,  
I use only four matches.

Enticing the flickering to take hold  
requires multiple rounds of kindling  
before each stub begins hissing defiantly.

In the morning, when I walk away,  
flames erupt unbidden behind my back,  
taunting all frugality and science.

# WHEN THE RAIN CLOUD LIFTS

The mountain across the pond  
and the sun all appear together.

Once again, my day begins  
with the lunch bell.



All afternoon, I hear  
the motorboat anxiety,

target practice, and chain saws  
of men engaged

with their shrieking families  
in an early autumn forest weekend.



Late afternoon, I slip off  
to the brewpub at the tail

of Poland Springs Road,  
next intersection over.

Consider everything on my plate  
and a mottled sunset.

By nightfall, as the rain resumes,  
I'm one hermit tending his fire.

## BEAVER EVIDENCE BESIDE THE ROAD

Running waters, subside or swell.  
The wind gusts, ringing, and disappears.  
The woods and sky change throughout the day.

Noon, the pond surface calm, clear.  
    To whatever extent  
    one flows from the other.

Stand if you will, on an old lodge  
where a stick squiggling away  
halts motionless when you look

distracted by a dragonfly  
and is gone. Off swimming, a good guess,  
within the undulating surface.

Shiny unobserved divers sleep and hide  
in mud-and-stick chambers –  
come forth to frolic or fell trees and build dams

when your back's turned. Slap their tails  
on the liquid expanse when your eyes meet.

Sometimes they cause the Lamprey River  
through Epping and Lee to be impassible  
for kayakers and canoeists.

All the same, it beats junked cars,  
refrigerator hulks, even sofas –  
the usual stream of progress.

Near the road, much evidence extends  
to the vigilant stars: piles of yellow chips,  
newly girt willow and oak.

One birch, tangled in another,  
could fall  
in a splash of red maple.

# NEARLY UNDERFOOT

Pine-cone tokens of restoration  
in a logged-over clearing  
cloak a monarch butterfly.

Nearly underfoot,  
duff sparrows scatter  
in a multiform ripple.

# BANGING AWAY WITHOUT A DRUM

To ask if  
ammunition is really  
that cheap

retorts with  
an echo all Sunday

in shots  
every thirty seconds



A camouflage uniform  
bedecked with blazing

hunter orange  
accessories

is some Daddies'  
epitome of fashion



The male imperative  
goes banging with a hammer  
or shotgun  
or cannon, presuming  
no drum is at hand.

Banging, as we remember  
the sex act.

# HAMMERING IN NOVEMBER WOODLANDS

When rifles thunder, there are no blood rights  
for callous grandsons who invoke farmers  
who sold their ground. Don't assume any welcome.

At my kitchen window, I regard beavies of orange  
slinking into neighbors' land. If I follow,  
they rarely behold me. It's my game.

Recurring discharge spans early morning  
to dusk. Afterward, the hunters assemble for beer  
in smoky rooms for talk of ammunition and pigskin.

## SANCTUARY, INVADED

Through hunting season, the forest no longer  
offers any refuge. Cautiously, I enter, anyway.

Beech quiver, their daytime brilliance  
rippling behind dark hemlock.

With one rock gripped in a tight fist of root,  
each maintains its own essence.

Sixty yelping crows scatter across the lake.

A solo sentinel atop a white pine  
warns that I'm under surveillance.

Demands who should stay home.

## AFTER THE PELTING LEAVES

Red winterberry  
and wild rose hips  
punctuate white  
woodland and swamp

after pelting leaves  
and rowdy geese  
sweep past.

A cold rustle masks  
the flitting and snorts  
of occasional small birds and deer  
as they browse.

# SUNSET ON THE HILL RANCH

Far West, at the edge of bleached rippling  
stalks of desert flowers

the irrigated valley  
rich as moss  
in an embrace of wrinkled limbs

the ridges extend from an ashen moon

until a jackrabbit startles:

who fears rattlesnake?

just steer clear of that talus



with the sinking sun

alpenglow, one direction

full moon rising, the other

# SUNDAY, CONFINED TO AN EDGE OF ONE CITY

With the car in the shop,  
sit tight. Make do.  
It's a sabbath.

For any woodland  
releases mountains and rivers  
without end once you're quiet.

To know what's eternal and becalming  
in season will also appear stormy,  
black-fly infested, or thorny.

The advice is to dress right. Seek shelter  
in a cloudbank. In this quest for fitting balance,  
the countryside's never silent.

In a pine grove, then,  
sit on a boulder overlooking  
freeway and listen intently for what's neglected.

Not jungle or savagery, but  
how this world stitches together  
in particulars beyond accounting.

To celebrate,  
observe,  
and mourn.



Here, fiddleheads unfurl again,  
one last time before being bulldozed  
for housing construction.

In one sweep, I invoke wooded pathways  
atop freeway canyon, hurricane fencing  
along the Reistertown expressway  
in Maryland, a littered mountainside  
behind a Holiday Inn just outside Scranton.  
The irrigation ditch, too, and its ATV trail  
of smoke-pale Cascade Range viewed  
from desert orchards.  
The Monadnocks, from my studio window.

From piles of discarded Christmas trees  
the spicy aroma of Far West Olympics and Siskiyous –  
Sage / Rosemary / Marjoram, arise.

With the honorable integrity of seed or a gemstone,  
the great free wilderness will even fit in your pocket  
to be replanted and restored.

Rebuke the rushing constellation  
of American highway

and its noisy hungers.

Embrace the Jubilee alarm  
for just redistribution  
of wealth and opportunity.

Even my desire for homestead, poetry, vine, family  
– wood lot, wood fire – garden and homebrew –

circle back

to such a tiny house I inhabit, just to myself.

Two rooms, essentially a rented cabin with clutter.  
The same old story, lamenting a life on hold too long.  
Still, there are currents.

All winter's felt visionless – hopeless – dreamless.,  
yet after rain, the woods overflow with clear waters  
rippling, braided, shimmering in breeze and sunlight.

A motor will break down, the fenders rust away.  
A house requires maintenance.  
But a forest will restore itself, left unimpeded.

Ferns, reappear majestically  
as part of a home's garden.



For now, the carpet of undergrowth

holds more green than matted brown  
and peepers begin their glimmering ringing.

I could travel thousands of miles  
to behold this.

Entering a pine grove, to sit on a boulder  
overlooking freeway, the neglected  
faith returns.

*—for Chuck Crowe,  
Hoosier-in-residence*

# LATE WINTER RIDE

In the chattering  
blubbery glow

the antler or bugle  
stampedes

mating fanfares  
obsessed by brine

until straw floats  
in the rising.



Cattle, hogs, goats  
utter nothing through the ice  
window.

When the woman with dark lipstick  
examined his cards, she saw  
he had zero, though she told him

of private property  
posted KEEP OUT, with its  
busted shack and cocklebur.



At last, when the river clatters  
with flowing white boxcars,

each field decides  
which direction to glide.

Few sleep wisely through the jagged  
progression as their hands numb.

# WHAT'S IMPORTANT, IN FLASHES

I'll never explore  
all these trails  
in this lifetime.

Even the same pathway  
changes  
a month later

or for that matter  
the trip back.



lichen spots

of rose  
of lime  
of apricot

disperse and touch  
plates of granite



over a cloud  
red tipped leaves  
even red snow  
I traverse



the lessons, of course  
in fabrication design

shagbark hickory back there  
all the beech and pine here

so many details linger  
in selective flashes



It's a lesson in faith,  
this trusting in unseen others

who have blazed  
and repaired each pathway.

I still dread  
switchbacks

but plod on, anyway,  
clear to Cloudland

the wafting blue freedom  
with or without stinging smoke.

## About the Poet



The woods and wilds have long given comfort to Jnana Hodson, from his days of hiking, camping, and backpacking as a youth in the Midwest to his explorations of the mountains of the Northeast and Pacific Northwest in the decades since. These poems reflect the inward journey of those trails.

A veteran of four decades as a daily newspaper editor, he has also published widely in the small-press scene as a poet and author of fiction.

He resides in a small city in the northern New England seascoast and blogs at *Jnana's Red Barn*.

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