

Open Manipulation

(based on The Innkeepers)

A scary movie makes you go places
You don't want to go,
You wouldn't ever go,
If they didn't make you.

They,
Not it.

I react inappropriately to a thriller.
My imagination
Keeps me up,
Even when no one else admits
To being frightened.
(I won't usually watch past noon.)

But in a crowded theater,
I'm often the only laugher
As the earnest blonde kid
Makes the dumbest choices
And dies the gruesomest death.

They tell you right up front
What they're going to do with you –
Open manipulation –
And I admit to ambivalence:
I see right through it
While, at the same time,
I'm easily led.

Now

(based on Father Clown)

If I've ever got
24 hours to kill
In a strange city,
I'm pretty sure I'll never be
The enterprising artist
Who creates a short film
As a reminder to
Enjoy the now.

Murder Poets

(based on Puppet)

“Cellar door”
Is said to be
Inherently beautiful.
The language itself
Or the way the
Phonemes fit together.
A murder of poets
And word-lovers
Standing around
Pretensing that
The poet is integral to
The enjoyment of the poem:
“You won’t really *get* it
Until you hear him *read* it.”

Oh bullshit.

Writing is a tool for
Communicating ideas.
If you didn’t *get* it,
It wasn’t any good.
An expert orator
Might charm us all
With a box of Frosted Flakes,
But that’s good speaking,
Not good writing.
A bird chirping
Without any ideas
Is as vain as that
Cellar door.

Through Weakness

(based on Holy Rollers: The True Story of Card Counting Christians)

You are a fuckup and a failure:
That's the first and foundational lesson of Christianity.

So when a person says,
"You can trust me – I'm a Christian,"
They've missed the point.
And they're probably selling something.

Expressing your Christianity
Isn't a declaration of strength;
It's an admission of weakness.

As the Bible teaches,
We're all fish in a barrel to temptation
And doomed to our shortcomings.
At best, the standard Jesus set is aspirational.

But only through weakness
Does the New message gain its power:
You're going to fuck up and fail,
But I love you anyway.

Curious MacGuffiny Thing!

(based on Without)

Unpacking is easy.

If maybe,
In the middle of this poem,
I introduce a
Curious MacGuffiny Thing,
But then I
Fail to give it any meaning,
Forgive me.

Repacking is hard.

Checkered Life

(for Bob Ingersoll, based on Project Nim)

Among animals,
An individual's power
Always extends to its limit,
Like Boyle's Law for gases.
Every adolescent asks,
Over and over:
What can I get away with?
If you won't stop me,
Then I must be bigger than you.
A winner and a loser.
But even the baddest chimp,
Can't bully Mother Nature:
Teeth and muscles
Are no match for
Hunger, illness, and death.

I heard the other day
That the bankers
Essentially voted themselves
The federal treasury.
I took a walk
And pointed out
A shimmering beetle
To a child
Who gleefully stomped it.

Snap

(based on The Robber)

If you stress the heart
By snapping it
Too hard in a direction
Other than
The way it was already going,
It suffers
An inertial condition
Akin to a concussion.
If handled gently
And incrementally,
This organ, capable of
Nearly infinite compassion, can
Accept and understand
Almost anyone.
When he told her
Those other things,
They made love
And she filed them away under
Complexity and frailty, but
When they told her
That,
She cried for two weeks straight.

Rabbit, Run

(based on Kidnapped)

I used to have dreams
Of being terrified of something –
It doesn't matter what –
And my fear expressed itself
By freezing me to the spot,
Hysterical,
No fight or flight,
Unable to move at all.
It felt awful,
Wanting to run,
Wanting to take action,
But out of charge,
And without command
Of my body.
It's never happened
In a real emergency,
And I like to believe
I'm sensible in a crisis,
Not prone to comeaparts,
But I can't know
It wouldn't.
The practical problem
Is that there aren't enough
Battles everyday
To wring sensible decisions
Out of me.
Most days offer just the
Unobvious, numbing paralysis
Of too many options.
Look,
Death is racing at me
Right now, and
I don't know what to do.

Why Not?

(based on Terrebonne)

Why not

Just take

The prettiest people you know

And film

Them in

The prettiest place you know?

The Hinterlands

(based on Sahkanaga)

Don't look away,
Says Hollywood.
Nothing good is happening
(Without us)
In the hinterlands of Georgia
Or anywhere else.
Look at this
Explosion!
Watch the stars
Fuck!
Keep your eyes
Here!
When you crave
Quality art,
You're trained (Sit! and Stay!)
To expect
SAG, ILM, CGI, and 3-effing-D.
Even our punks are polished
And processed –
Think Green Day.
We don't photoshop
Ugly girls. The fact that
We went through
All that trouble
Means she must be beautiful.
The fact that
You can't afford to have us
Airbrush your picture
Means you're not worth it.

Technology

(based on Catfish)

For some,
The only good use
Of technology
Is for US
To beat the snot
Out of THEM.
Future generations
Might laugh at Dr. Salk
For not charging us
To use our legs.

Persistence

(for Johnny Barnes, based on Mr. Happy Man)

Love mostly seems silly
In small doses,
Like my crush on
Today's redhead.
It gathers meaning
By persistence
Through spans of time:
Will you still love me
Tomorrow?

One Of Us

(based on The Barber of Birmingham: Foot Soldier of the Civil Rights Movement)

Thinking that Obama
(Or anyone else) is
One of us
Because of his color
Is as wrong
As thinking he's not
One of us
For the same reason.

Grown Men

(based on Walla Walla Wiffle Ball)

I'm all for
Giving grown men
A chance
To act like
Twelve-year olds.

An Inconvenient Youth

(based on An Inconvenient Youth)

Several generations
Have quietly internalized
The central lesson of
The activist sixties.
It wasn't
That the people
Have the power
To advance an idea
Through concerted activism.
No.
The insidious takeaway
Was that dissidents suffer
And still lose.
Look around:
Colored America
Has gained little ground
In fifty years.
Vietnam stretched out until
Everybody knew it was over.
The house always wins.
The only ones
Not yet accepting this
Are the inconvenient youth
Protecting the global poor
From our hostile environment.
But given enough time,
They will.

Flourish

(based on You Must Be Something)

Your scenic nature walk
Will completely change
When you realize
That any bushes
Which flourish
Were fertilized
With human blood.

Only Numbers

(based on Standardized)

Don't despair
If you can't take every trick
With a bad deal.
No one could, and
No one expected you to.
Just do your best.
High expectations
Rest just on those
Holding the aces.
But if you find,
Every time you play,
You're passed only numbers,
It's time to
Shoot the dealer.

Go Fish

(based on If A Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front)

Legal advice

Almost always

(See, there it starts)

Includes a "maybe"

Or "it depends."

About the only

(See, there again)

Hard and fast rule

Is to *never*

Under *any* circumstances

Talk to law enforcement.

No, you're not smart enough.

No, you're not charming enough.

No, you don't know how fast you were going.

No, you don't want to answer a few questions.

No, you don't want to help.

No, no, no, no, no, (politely) *no*.

Those guys

(Set an odd moral example and)

Are *allowed* and *encouraged*

To flagrantly lie to you,

But if they (for any reason) think

That you or your story smells

Even slightly fishy,

You'll regret it.

If they actually had the goods,

You'd probably

(See, one last time)

Already be arrested.

Go fish, Sir. Go fish.

Soap, Cars, and Insurance

(based on Page One: Inside the New York Times)

If 90% of everything is crap,
Then the wars
Are all in the editing.
How many new YouTube videos
Post every day?
What's 10% of that number and
How do I know to look at those?
If the government can release
100 proclamations on any given Tuesday,
Who'll tell me
Which 10 are important?
Will it be the White House reporter
Who comes back and says,
"Nope, not mine today"?
Seems like a bad idea for job security.
All I want is
A credible critic
To tell me what's good and
What I need to know.
But once you waste
My energy and goodwill on
Soap, cars, and insurance –
Bought and paid for like a whore –
You're not a credible source.