**SLOW BLINK**

 Slow blink of dazed-eyed sun

 Registers the psychic torpor born of the parched land.

 The now hate-trodden territory of back-alley and front-street devising--

 Carefully wrought on the buttresses of accumulated history--

 Lies in the shambles of a searing and crumbling trigger action in deadly play.

 The chatter of business and frolic of lively sport,

 The bee-busy exchange of market transaction and schoolyard negotiation in the

 hurried excitement of the game

 Have all gone to the harrowed silence huddled in the infernal protection of

 underground retreat.

 And the animals of domestic delight or wild-cage amazement

 Pace with frantic feeling the unhinged enclosures of disordered dismay.

 Again and again, in the relentless unfolding of time,

 The buffeting bullet and scourging scorn of a ceaseless insistence

 Pound consciousness into its only defense: a loosing of intensity,

 a blanking into dull stare

 As the sun, its lids now heavy and crazed, looks dazed-eyed with the weight

 of the aggrieved burden.

 **BUTTERFLY, BOTTLED AND PINNED**

 The bottled butterfly, of late the captive of heuristic schoolchild curiosity or scientific inquiry,

 Was a prized possession in a world of remarked variety.

 Its kaleidoscopic panoply enlivening the swept landscape with fluttering form

 As, from flit to flit, it loaded the earth with life-charged infusion of generating force

 Caught the imagination of both those younger and older wishing to pin the secrets of this

 propagating organism.

 It was the seeking of knowledge that propelled the impulse to fix firmly the fluttering

 winged wonder.

 Once cherished, this flighted form is now, however, confined.

 Once caught in the delighted astonishment of expansive desire to liberate the locked corners

 of hitherto natural secrets,

 This flutter in the unfolding of Nature’s panoply

 Is now the perceived threat in a world shaded down into monochrome vision.

 This colored richness is to be dulled into a single hue of benighted, fixed sighting

 in a single view.\*

 Variety and stretching promise, enemy to blinkered concentration in a blinding action,

 Pose threat to utter darkness in a now advancing myopia.

 But the world outside this degrading influence, this devolution into the blankness

 of blocked light and color,

 Awaits the day when the insidious prompt to a new, altered ambition for bottling and

 fixing this flighted form to the screwing place,

 When this dark reason for stilling the flutter of butterfly wing

 Gives way to the unpinned glory of a thousand blooms.

\* Reported on 23 January, 2025, is President Trump’s executive order “Ending Radical Wasteful Government DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] Programs and Preferencing,” thereby eliminating groups like the Diversity & Inclusion Council. According to Conor Murray and Molly Bohannon, two *Forbes* staff writers, the list of companies responding (by either rephrasing or eliminating their DEI policies) to this order includes, for instance, Victoria’s Secret, Warner Brothers, Goldman Sachs, Paramount, Bank of America, Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, and General Motors. So much for the polychrome of the beautiful butterfly!

**WASTREL ABANDONMENT**

 In the wastrel abandonment of autumn leaf to tree,

 A wanton disregard for its vital attachment

 Sends, in flaming-color flightiness, the brightly veined dancer into

 pirouette plunge.

 Untethered from its very source, the careless rebel, in wild reaction,

 Sweeps into a whirl of surmised showy aclaim

 While thinking its carefree, unpurposed performance will achieve a

 richer, more flashy end.

 Or is it the tree, nutrient-starved and shivering, that has loosed its grasp

 On the proclamation to the world of its lively, green, now golden or cinnabar

 presence?

 Either way, the bond is severed, the critical link, broken, in the more somber

 seasonal advance toward dead winter.

 Experienced thought can relax, even in the throes of rueful rumination,

 with reflection on the nature of cyclical return.

 Or can it?

 For a wastrel spirit, overlong in its profligate denial

 Of needed attachment to both the human and natural bonds in any imperative

 vitality

 So threatens now to overspread the actions of global attachment

 That, should tender leaf never reclaim, in renewed appearance, a rightful,

 sap-nourished hold,

 Should fragile, soul-filled friend never conspire in the happy collusion of a

 social security,

 Only the disregarded signs of inconsolable, irresolute, irrevocable abandonment

 will remain.

 **IN THE SHRIEK-PIERCED AIR**

In the shriek-pierced air of a South Dakota sky,

 Mingled lines of ancestry and ambition, attribution and affinity

 Come with the celebration of the Running Horse Nations.\*

 The intersection of ancient personhood and practice

 And modern tribal commingling in the forum of blood-felt hope

 Marks the point of risen salvation.

 A young man, latter-day warrior spirit, rides the relay of the

 horse-propelled motion.

 All chaos, cooperation, courage, and competition

 Stir in the kinetic dynamism of fetlocked and fierce-boned champion

 melded on the field of glory.

 Horse and rider become one, like modern members of the Thessalian

 tribe of the centaurs.\*\*

 Depicted on the walls of long-lived caves in the pictogram artistry of

 history’s hand

 Are the steeds of former fields of glory.

 In what seems stark relief, a red line arrow traces the heart line.

 And so this young, horse-mounted rider,

 in the innocent conspiracy of heat and dust and the happily ineluctable

 link of human and beast,

 This young man—before the wonders of this challenge on the field--

 Disaffected with and divorced from his alcohol-haunted and suicide-ravaged race,

 This young man finds in the heart line—between rider and ridden, ancient and present warrior--

 His own, re-inscribed self.

\*Shoshone, Crow, Blackfoot, Navajo, Sioux, and other tribes of the Great Plains are collectively known as the Horse Nations and compete in horse relays held periodically in various of the Plains States and Canada.

\*\*In Greek mythology, the half-human, half-horse creatures that lived in the mountains of Thessaly and Arcadia and were depicted as strong, fast, brave warriors with human-like emotions and intelligence

 **BREAK BOLD**

 Break bold the burnished boundaries of fond wish.

 Brush well the broadcloth of desire’s morning.

 Hold fast the aspirations of best-arranged inclination.

 This morning a fat, full-feathered and -breasted robin

 Consented to chirrup back to my salutation.

 Engaged in delighted conversation—of the creaturely kind--

 We cast some line from heart to heart, vital hope to hope

 Which worked to fill the room with well-furnished thought.

**A WELL-TREED WOOD**

Hushed hangs the air in the recondite retreat of a close-treed wood,

 A wood keeping protective custody of Nature’s secrets concealed in its innermost

 *sanctum sanctorum*.

 Beneath its cover of stillness, the arbored hold (in careful containment)

 Secures a flurry of deeper engagement in the actions of primal earth.

 The woodcock, sporting a besmirched beak, tugs at a reluctant worm

 Burrowing deep to wriggle toward its safehold in the dampened soil.

 The wily squirrel streaks the forest floor clogged with moistened leaf and pine nut

 To carry its recovered treasure to a storage house of hording habit.

 But to the outside world, tricked by a vision that does not pierce the canopy of

 containment,

 The wood shows only as a still form in prolonged stasis.

 Cloaked appearance can be canny in the art of deception.

 Like that close-treed wood protective of its secreted stirrings in an organic evolution,

 Thought, in the populated chambers of guarded action,

 Scurries to secure the seized treasure of forward linear or sideways lateral reflection.

 It pulls hard to retrieve a prize snatched from the resistant yield of deep-burrowing

 insistence.

 It runs deep and broad and wide to keep active, while protected,

 The enlarging collection in its *sanctum sanctorum.*

With placid expression, I sit in the center of a contemplative hour,

 Praying for the prolonged rush at the center of a well-treed wood.

 **BUNDLED AND BANDIED**

 Bundled and bandied about in the extracted line,

 Iamb and anapest, spondee, dactyl, and trochee, too

 Startle and amaze, console and flatter in the gambol or close curling of emotion fine.

 Burnished or dusky, blanched or sabled, the sting of claw or down of soft fur

 Pierce or clatter, poke or embrace to expose a matter or gently to woo.

 Tumbling out in exploratory ramble, bodies small and large to construe

 Seek the truth of the promised world, now finding knowledge, now tripping over

 insights that actually err.

 But again and again the forays go along

 The searches for just the right tone, just the right meter.

 The real ambition is in the adventure to prolong

 Before the quest, its energy to maintain, for reasons varied, begins to peter.

 For it is the strength, the aim of felt glory,

 The bustled stirrings of heart and mind, the whole inventory

 That send forth the animations of prosodic song

 Before the tumbling poetic brood, forays finished and search concluded for vital sap,

 Gather finally to curl into contemplative dreams in an assembled philosophical nap.

**PROTRACTED VIEW**

 Protracted view of the Springtime hour

 Snatches glimpse of the meadowlark’s bower

 As sprightly it sings at the door of its secreted place

 With desirous trill to keep with its world apace,

 Indeed, to announce its undisputed holy space.

 And, with a heart full broad and whole and high

 It signifies the rest whose home centers in the vital wish held far and nigh.

 But enters now the west wind seeking to blight the fertile land.

 The meadowlark, the bladed grass, the cherished hand

 Tremble with thought of the cruel command in the imperious sweep

 Of blusterous blow wielded to unsettle and savage once fecund form

 And render the round world a meaningless heap.

 The remains speak only of crumbled dream and lost gain and all that would

 ill inform

 The once great aspiration in a cherished land.

 But murmurs rising from a degraded stand

 Give rising spirit amidst now melted wish

 A saving grace to quench the noxious flame of odious ire,

 To block the blow of the impious hand raised to flatten what was left to admire.

 With waxing strength and firming hold, the crusaders, to restore what true humans cherish,

 Go bold onto the embattled field,

 Look smart toward the golden yield

 Of a new, upturned flower

 Sheltering just beneath the protection of the meadowlark’s sacred bower

 Again safe in the promise of an early Spring.

**CHIAROSCURO**

 Slow slide of light across the wooden sill

 Records long-angled day as it relinquishes cosmic bright sway over the earth.

 Perplexed into the glaring action of a stark scene in the mind’s eye,

 Blinkered perception holds only opposing ends of possibility

 In its calculation, in its two-toned rendering of reality in a harnessed view.

 And so the slide of light, the nuance in the interleaving of revelation and obfuscation,

 In the oscillations between one extreme and the other

 (Sometimes so quickly trembled into motion as to blur lines of demarcation)

 Is missed.

 No optic penetration to the shading influence of a lingering light on even the

 heaviest darkness

 Can broaden the limited sight of a prescribed vision

 That presupposes only glaring contrast.

 No hint at an alternative suggesting enlargement of that vision

 Holds any more sway than long-angled day over encroaching night.

 The delicate degrees of calibrated conception,

 Of fine shading are lost to a single, diametric measurement.

 Arm propped on the wood sill—an arm melded with the wooden plane--

 I keep close watch on the interplay between light and dark

 From the shadow edge of an eternally changing chiaroscuro.

 **TANGLED ECSTASY**

 More sure-footed progress possible—my having hopped, frog-like, from solid patch to patch

 Through soggier portions of the local fen and having trembled over the cobbled clusters of forest floor--

 Apparently, I had crossed some invisible line onto the smooth meadow surface of cultivated

 land.

 Here the hedgerows kept in check the once jumbled array of Nature’s offering.

 As in almost prim order those rows assured that territory would hew to the property line,

 They marked division between *meum et tuum* on parcels of appropriated and delineated earth.

 Concentration on bodily care now turned to speculation about the clarity those hedgerows

 afforded.

 For in what seemed almost rebellious response to the careful shaving of property into discrete

 parts and of those markers into close trim,

 Hollyhocks asserted a showy defiance of the effort in neat blade to hold the neat division in the

 *meum et* t*uum* tug-of-war.

 And history, both past and to come, testified to a parallel tussle in the changeable fortunes of

 the claimants on that land.

 Clarity, I suppose, is to be much prized.

 A definite line of boundary allows a certain lucid understanding.

 The dividing edge between one hold and another, body and mind, natural and human working

 Seems to permit perceptual order wrought out of chaos,

 A manageable arrangement wrought out of tangled confusion.

 Troubling this assurance, though, is the contrary surety that all is in flux.

 No more can mind keep clear of body, body of mind

 Than can one field maintain a strict territorial integrity in its bounds from another,

 packed as both are in the transgressive vicissitudes of tumbling time.

 Nor can trimmed hedgerow resist the glorious incursion of the hollyhock.

 While boundaries have their place, blurring of the lines heralds the alteration come with

 irresistible progression.

 The line cannot forever hold.

 As I lie in the confusion of thought—lost in a tousled chaos of covers on a once

 smooth-sheeted bed--

 Head, body, heart succumb to a tangled ecstasy.