

Poetry Series

Phillip Erb
- poems -

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Phillip Erb(August 15,1982)

31 Cents

The work is done
God blew out the sun
And the stars are none
No soul braves the moonless black
The earth had enough of our 'fun'
our poison, our guns.
'We took a chance, ' Earth thundered
As she spun backward where time begun
'Humans? ' a dying star told me a fable
When I was but ocean and storm.
They lunched headlong into a flood
of their blood; too foolish to listen,
too proud to pray.

Phillip Erb

A Story One Bird Sang The Morning Peace Found

Sometimes during the witching hours
when the moon disappears over the horizon
and the sun is opposite the earth from me
I get so lonely I pull at my hair and it
Takes everything still human inside me
Not to punch through these walls and scream
My feet won't take the hint and each one keeps
Pounding the carpet like I'm running even
Though my ass is practically glued to the seat
And I keep pushing my heart so hard it beats
Fast then slow, strong then weak, like I'm a deer
Run down like a dog in the middle of the street
Bent unnaturally like a pretzel my chest feels
Just like a hundred pairs of razor sharp teeth
Are clamped down on my lungs I can barely
Force either to breath and no one is here to
Notice this intimate moment; it's seems funny
how I can feel so warm when it was so, so cold
When I locked the door and it occurs to me
That the trucker must've spilled his coffee
All over me just before we hit because I'm soaked
And everything is sticking to me, and somebody
Must be welding so dangerously close to me I can
Smell a curious copper on everything
When suddenly I cry
Though I don't know why
But I think of oranges,
And how beautiful
Colors taste and I remember
My mother's face and she
Smiles just like when I
Made straight A's, but Mom
the Sun's not near, it's so
Dark in here, shouldn't
You let me go back to sleep
So I'm not grumpy in the morning
I'm not the person I was going to be,
There's something important about this dream,
But it's too late and I can't quite remember why

I was thinking about something orange and round,
Give back my hand Momma, let me go back to sleep
There'll be plenty of time for talk come morning,
and you know I love...

Phillip Erb

Angel

A golden locket makes its way to the walk
After the chain that held it captive to a neck for so many a long and sweaty year
Snaps under the stress of time, salt, and gravity.
It catches the light thrown from the sun and sends the entire spectrum across the
street to me -
like the midnight mating call of a firefly high on electricity and lightning it winks -
God's finger arcs from heaven to the mud of Hell and Earth and sets the lawn on
fire, but
Not a lady's little locket (never to be again) . It's ghost smiles and sighs, though
most human eyes are altogether blind
to paradise, I wave my hand and smile back; silently praying the Devil won't find
her here tonight.
Through the hands of God my tears fall to the ground like rain.

Phillip Erb

Arse Poetica Pro Novus Aevum

Moon passes slow
When you measure the minutes until dawn
When're counting on another man's clock
Waiting for dawn to get on with your life
Sun moves so fast
When you're poor, water's never worth more
The tomatoes on the back porch thirst in silence
While the refrigerator keeps empty shelves cold
I lost the balance between life and misery
Now I'm not certain I ever had it to begin
Empty hearts write no poetry
They hollow once they forget love
They don't realize anything is even missing at all
Moon's getting low
My heart performs in the early morning night
For a gracious audience of mosquitoes
Please hold your applause
Until the blood has been drawn

Phillip Erb

At Sea

You can not really tell if his eyes are peering
Beneath a pair of lightly stoned-sleepy lids
If you're looking for him in or around
Where you are looking now, I'll be asleep,
or dusty bones.

He hums a tune
No one knows,
His words are never in time with the song
So he do not bother to speak
Until he makes it fit.

Phillip Erb

Black Oak

I spoke to a my parasite this morning
Trying to understand how it feels
Locked inside a chrysalis asleep
Seven suns after his last meal

The wind twists and bends my spine
But the action is fruitless and weak
Short of a violent spring thunderstorm
No breeze will grant me release

How long has he been asleep?

The wind dies silent -
The atmosphere grows
Tender, fragile, and still;
Come to a helpless rest
Suspended high off my branch
Dreaming of thunder
and praying for rain.

Phillip Erb

Bluegrass Dawn

Fog swaddles the morning
Softening the sun's flame
With each smoke gray breath
Exhaled by the lungs of ghost

Rousing to life sleep swollen
Servants of dawn
Dog-eared and jet-lagged
By the sweltering stress
Symptomatic of reentry

Phillip Erb

By Hare's Breath

I go beyond all recognizable
Boundaries of shame and decency
All for something hung-over from a dream
A meaning I'll never understand
And hardly believe

No one sees anything
But every one of them is staring
Straight through the misperception
I confidently believe
One line short a lie

Beyond the finish on a forgetful path
Ash and mud
One line short a lie

Phillip Erb

Chestnut Street

If you would walk on in
You must remove your shoes
Party members come in pairs, in threes,
at the neighbor's house next door
The choir is silent aside solo of
One lonesome bird calling home
She doesn't get an answer except the
Voice of some young man singing from a machine
A song written years and years before his birth.
Who is on the other side?
Who is behind the door?

Phillip Erb

Cigarette Shade

We share the shadow of steel and stone
Noble as two lions on savannah
Instinct introduced us and I get the feeling
We can both survive longer as a pair
Not haggled by doubt this time,
So long as we don't wonder why

We share the shadow of steel and stone
Forlorn as two refugees – strange pilgrims
Joined by oppression and the respite afforded
By this our temporary sanctuary
If each of us can swallow our unspoken advice on our own
We just might make it tonight and come out in the morning
With our hearts and minds intact, don't look at it too close,
Lest we go blind from the horror of not knowing why

We shared the shadow of steel and stone
Full of shame like two adulterous lovers,
Guilty only of cheating ourselves
Our bond wound solemnly together with thread of bad habits
Two speechless hearts broken beneath the burden of silence.

Phillip Erb

Collecting Time

Pairs of two, groups of three, all alone
Friends and familiar faces disappear
Over the hills into valleys miles away
Practicing for the last dance we'll share
On the side of this Kentucky hill
Rehearsing the turn of life
Riding waves crashing on the high tide
Dancing across the earth just like
A fistful of leaves cast into the wind

Phillip Erb

Commencement

Grab the images -
freeze-frame -
A fish eyeballing the bait
Circling 'round on its
Sunday afternoon swim
Nonchalant, looking down
at a life-long career's
Worth of academy awards
In a single scene
All the smiles and unassuming
Nods and waves among other
Effortlessly executed gestures
So polite, precise, and carefree
Convey no hint, nor the slightest
Suggestion to the schoolmates
That this catfish intends to
Skip the next lesson and move
Right on to lunch
The lesson is unsubstantial anyway
After all tomorrow's as good
a day as any to learn
about the mythical monster
the old ones call the Fisherman;
Salivating at the chance to indulge
One very minor, gluttonous sin
A mouth smiling fin to fin
Grins in victory snatching the worm within
Then reels in shock and horror
Realizing the hook plunged
Through the gill

Phillip Erb

Dear,

Hello Angel,

how are you today?
Sorry I didn't catch that,
You know my phone doesn't work well
At the house beneath the trees,
O no, O no you don't say, you won't
How about this weather we've seen?
Sure is getting cold, so cold,
I've known the cold quite well the whole of my life alone

I agreed to unload your hate and pay you back
For making a fool of myself at the store
And sorry still feels bad enough without the extra weight
The first day or two I thought you were only running behind
Days turned to weeks then grew to months
I watched the summer sun set, leaves turned and fell
Their skeleton arms wave at me as the rain turns snow
I guess you got lost or forgot
Even though I don't have anywhere to go
I sure as hell am not dying with my boots stuck in the river mud
So I'm leaving right after I finish here

Phillip Erb

December Mud

The pasture is home to a thousand
Mud puddles in the shape and size
Of horse hooves separated by
Strips of grassless swamp broken by
Islands of manure and molding hay

Inmates of the wetlands:

Two mares stand in place dismayed
By the sterile expanse of quicksand
Footsteps pulled back into the earth
Pop loud and wet like suction cups

The clouds cover the sun - that
mayhap otherwise dry sodden coats,
or foster brighter spirits; put back
the life into two pairs of marble eyes -
the wind doesn't move them.

Phillip Erb

Dismissed

On my knees praying
'Please God, release me! '
The moonless ocean of the void
Seems as if longing to speak
But the words our my own
Echo of blood, dirt and earth.

Phillip Erb

Dreams, Visions

Fog swaddles the morning
Softening the sun's flame
With each smoke gray breath
Exhaled by the lungs of ghost
Rousing to life sleep swollen
Servants of dawn
Dog-eared and jetlagged
By the sweltering stress
Of the atmospheric
Pressure

Phillip Erb

Echoing Loons

A dazzling diamond's spirited sparkle in the corner of the eye
Adds flavor to the tender tempered passion in a smile
A million men may walk a million miles to beat life tainted trial
Without ever finding the smile which enticed the traveling
Of so many cold and lonely miles

The rains came the same to bring a change to the sane
For the sane know not the pain of drowning in spring rain
Sickness sickens the strong for even the strong have gone too long
Under night skies with bleeding smiles and crying eyes awaiting dawn

She sings softly summoning surreal serpents from the mist
While echoing loons call to the moon and drunk men swoon in bliss

Mysteries washing from the seas on tides of thoughtless regret
Cause grown men to sigh and cry at night for what they'll never get
In these trees far from the seas deep in the forest of dark despair
Dead birds sing while dead men bleed and evil chokes the air

In the darkest corner a forgotten mourner silently sits and waits
For the proper time and the proper rhyme to create the magic he makes

All the while echoing loons call to the moon and high men swoon in bliss
While vagabonds and homeless souls who know they're never missed
Scrape the ground looking all around for a piece of Billy Clint's Negro piss

The dancing lights are quick to fright and plague the children in dreams
But what dreams mean a thing if they cease to be once the children learn to see?

Still demons of the forgotten underground fell at the sound of what you and I
found
While grown men hide in darkness's shroud from the demons -
Their screaming echoes so loud

Moving mysteries of the moon make millions of men seek death
While those still alive claw out our own eyes searching for what is left
But what is there to see, to be, and to miss?
Just echoing loons calling to the moon
And us dead men whom swoon in bliss

Phillip Erb

Elizabeth

When rooms fall silent,
lights go down and out,
I miss the almost undetectable
pitter-patter of four tiny paws
leaping onto the covers,
nuzzling my side, and
purring in my ear;
I miss the unlikely shadow
following my footsteps,
watching from the window
as I pull out of the drive, and
roll down the street,
out of sight.

Phillip Erb

Entrepreneurs' Dream

Within the walls of a breathless instant, the entire world falls asleep
And another one becomes alive, opens its eyes, checks the clock and heaves a
sigh.

Fascinated with lackadaisical dream visions and the conversions with vague
Silhouettes
Gesture so vibrant and melodramatically to muddy the conversation,
So the vagrants are too distracted by the confusion to focus their eyes
On how damn thin the locals are, talk so loud while their voices don't
Make a sound
(the walking dead)

The waking world hasn't the faintest inkling that the there's a sleeping world
bustling about the business of the devil's bullying: hustling the rich children for
their lunch money and the poor for their books and their shoes.

"We take from you as you take of us – the ones doing evil are them;
There is no evil along the divide but no one ever goes there
– the Devil is alive and well and you look him in the face every morning as you
brush shave and wash and brush the other's teeth, "
the shadow man said.

While I was in the mirror he
He shown me I was him and got
To laughing and mocking how
How our worlds work off one
Another.

Spit in his face and struck both our names from the roll call
for the price of one soul.

Phillip Erb

Envelope

Had to push harder than
Sleepless body and soul
Fragmented, half missing,
Bankrupted heart to convince
Myself I had to keep running
And watching every minute
Listening to fractions of time
Today needn't worry,
But It left me nowhere to begin
Best to stay hidden
Love dangles precariously from the branch
Of a hollow tree over a sentimental fall
Three thousand feet short into the
Indiscriminant rock
And rest.

Phillip Erb

Essence

Sounds quiet
In the corner
Where the ghost
Distracts himself
His lips shape
Out the verses
Of a song
Without a breath
Hell is here
Where he pretends
They hear him
Always knowing
It's pretend

Phillip Erb

Fall

The spirit of the woods billows from beneath
Rolling hills of orange and brown leaves
A great, hot breath coughs ash in my face
My lungs collapse flat, His hand slaps me awake
Sneakered feet stumble up the hill and sink
Into the sponge of tilled earth, cup tips, drink spills,
Black coffee I carried down inside plain –
Intended to keep my eyes pried wide with its drug –
The soul of our forest loses breath and smolders under
Dust feather gray memory and coals never taken asunder
Feel no sympathy and show no semblance of sentiment
As another summer is harvested, return to earth life lent.

Phillip Erb

Feather In My Pocket

I was wondering how many sacrifices it would take
To hold you down locked in that simple moment
When you're looking into my eyes from across the room
I don't want to throw away the roses and cuddle warm,
Share the silence of trust, respect and love like
Butterflies in fields of wildflowers under the soft sun of a deep springtime sky.
The view from the rock over the creek
Under the red-yellow-brown-orange-gold autumn shower
Must have been from some other life
Which we loved each other in
With that again,
Could I ever really need or want?

A dove's feather fluttered into my lap from heaven
While I was in the alleyway smoking cigarettes,
Trying to understand everything that sweeps over me
Whenever I see her face
I put her in my wallet now I can ask her what to do
Could you go and somehow change everything in the world?
All's that traps me from living love that will burn strong through the storm,
Keep warm through the night and last me for the rest of my life?

Phillip Erb

Finger

Creeping through my window softly,
the morning is born again.
My computer is playing a sad song
about fake plastic watering cans;
I'm not really sure what it means.
As for me, I'm the same, old familiar person
I've been since first memory.
Sleep chases me to the chair,
and I hide hoping he never finds.

Phillip Erb

Fishing

Grab the images -
freeze-frame -
A fish eyeballing the bait
Circling 'round on its
Sunday afternoon swim
Nonchalant, looking down
at a life-long career's
Worth of academy awards
In a single scene
All the smiles and unassuming
Nods and waves among other
Effortlessly executed gestures
So polite, precise, and carefree
Convey no hint, nor the slightest
Suggestion to the schoolmates
That this catfish intends to
Skip the next lesson and move
Right on to lunch
The lesson is unsubstantial anyway
After all tomorrow's as good
A day as any to learn
About the mythical monster
The old ones call the Fisherman;
Salivating at the chance to indulge
One very minor, gluttonous sin
A mouth smiling fin to fin
Grins in victory snatching the worm within
Then reels in shock and horror
Realizing the hook plunged
Through the gill

Phillip Erb

Footfalls

A gutter runs down the brick outside the front door
I live in the room on the other side and count footsteps in the rain
I draw the blinds,
drape in the light,
open the screen wide,
rehearse lies and keep my eyes closed
because sometimes
dark is my only light.

Phillip Erb

Fortitude

Sky spread thin and sleep hides again
Its vague and fleeting face
"Sleep, " I call her aloud but there is nothing
Crouched behind black oak trees but my echo
"Sleep, " I call again, frustrated and hot,
My thirst grows, I drink and swallow, swallow
What manner of mean drink leaves me thirstier than we met?

As the winds change
Over time comes rain
Above all the clouds
I sky looks the same

It's easy to kill the pain
If sleeping could last night and day
And butterflies it brings to me could stay
So this head of mine would not spin and ache

I suppose that I could write you if I thought it would do some good,
Sometimes, I think should regardless
For uncertain flames are licking the chair
Developing a taste for rotten hickory
Wiping sweat from my eyes I think
I need to laugh more
Stop knocking at the doors of frozen hearts never home
Put off a few more chores and let time settle its score

Winds always change
Inside the storm clouds
I'll be waiting, just the same

If by then I can't sleep then you know
It's only me slipping underneath the sheet
Where peace builds homes
And the air can release me from
This disease

Phillip Erb

Graduation

Grab the images -
freeze-frame -
A fish eyeballing the bait
Circling 'round on its
Sunday afternoon swim
Nonchalant, looking down
at a life-long career's
Worth of academy awards
In a single scene
All the smiles and unassuming
Nods and waves among other
Effortlessly executed gestures
So polite, precise, and carefree
Convey no hint, nor the slightest
Suggestion to the schoolmates
That this catfish intends to
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One very minor, gluttonous sin
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Grins in victory snatching the worm within
Then reels in shock and horror
Realizing the hook plunged
Through the gill

Phillip Erb

Grief

Undercover,
Off the road,
Up the hillside,
Behind the tangled
Fingers of the wood
And a crooked path left
By water's blade
A man keeps watch over the past
Reverent stones remember where
Four of life's beloved paths ended.

Phillip Erb

Impeachment

Like a king about to address his people,
I look down at the world from my balcony
as she stares back boldfaced at me.
A blue lawn chair throne is my royal seat,
when I'm resting here my shoulders brush
with prophets and peasants, saints and sinners
The smell of water fills the air,
electricity arcs from the ground,
stretching gnarly fingers to the clouds,
and my cigarette chokes out faster than
a candle cast overboard into deep prehistory.
What is the meaning of this?
My smoke is gone, the old man quit me,
the rumors are true, the realm's in upheaval,
the people shout, "The king be removed! "

Phillip Erb

Jumper

The acerbic odor of urine and life
Enters her nose and heats her toes
She doesn't believe she can forget
To notice what she breathes
Then she doesn't and pink lips
Turn from blue to gray
As her shadow turns the other direction
Slowly she walks away
Blind and guided by a delightful chorus
Resonating from the swelling cleft
Separating the mystery from rapture
where the prodigals are all welcomed home
with love.

Phillip Erb

Lucy Lies

I cultivate a bad habit of forgetting all the wrong things
Once the wind is in my hair

I run off a cloud of steam so fast my feet don't
Touch the silver street

I'm chasing one bitch of a woman, more like a monster, and
What's worse? a filthy whore

I scream, "Lucy, you had better pray damn well that
You bleed again real, real soon! "

Missing: unable to breathe the air,
Grasping desperately for lucidity on the
Lazy side of honestly, for dear life,
Clutch a memory

I ask God to let me forget the way to your house,
And he answered.

I found a difference, but I lost the place.
The stoop of the front porch finds me sharing a smoke with no one
Waiting for the hounds to lose my scent,
I ice skate on the slippery surface of once upon a time,
and then I'm gone.

Phillip Erb

Make Believe

In the supermarket aisle
I found a girl who answered
All the prayers I offered up
I loved her and I'm sure
Deep inside she loved me
But every time I turned around
She grew wings and morphed
Into some form of insect
Of the likes I'd never seen
In a supermarket aisle
Hazy with the fog of dreams

Phillip Erb

Mute

A short, black skirt with blonde hair walks a mutt,
laughs aloud into a tiny telephone at this time everyday.
I wrote her an invitation - even though I don't even know
Her first name, how she spells it, what she takes in her coffee,
or if she is in love, but the thought never finds paper,
the question and I cannot decide on the words,
and we bicker back and forth like two senators:
in love with the argument and the filibuster.
Tell me what it is you feel about poetry
Do you wonder why the final lines rhyme
on their own, while nine others don't,
like a note on the side, they stand alone?

Phillip Erb

Night Watchman

One by one, two cars take turns on a road
softly aglow in the meek yellow glow of street lamps
that illuminate as much shadow as light between the rows
of houses staring blankly on the scene from dark eyes, fast asleep.

Phillip Erb

Nighty Dispute

The water's rushing
As a hurricane right
Beside my ear,
But I can still hear
Them screaming
The TV's growing tired
And submitting to the
Infomercial society
I'm sick of hearing
The same music even
When the sound is off
And I am
T I R E D
Of night's like these
Trying hard as Hell
To chase down ever-
Elusive sleep

Phillip Erb

October

Streaming, incandescent, amber light from the burning tip of my cigarette draws
/ My thoughts to the letter left on the desk that I swore today I was going to
send / As the Earth moves the calendar in a begrudgingly slow and painful pace
to pass / Through the sanctioned days of celebration to remember how blood
looked plain black / Instead of red beneath moonless night as it run over the
ground in the name of Revolution – when shadows lay alongside the soldiers
thick as mud.

Phillip Erb

On The Quad

The most unassuming tree
Bares a full dress of parched brown leaves
Insofar it has succeeded in captivating stubborn denial
Silent laughter, flaunting the entire scene
Right in Old Man Winter's face
He only glares
Crippled, feverish
ā\$ senility

Phillip Erb

One

From the throne
In the corner
Sits a man
Afraid that
He will never
Love anyone

Like a machine
He counts the drops
As they slip off
From the lip of
The corner sink
Along with each
Breath he breathes

All the time
Wondering
If he trusts
The promise
Her words made
From a smile
That could mean
Near anything

There is a clock
He is aware
Ticks constantly
Throughout the night
Whether or not
He stops to check
How much remains
Before the sun
Begins to knock

Before dawn
As the birds
Leave their nests,
Find the worms,
Write a new

Melody
About life
And the hope
The light lifts
With a yawn

Comes the oath
Renewed anew
Upon the birth
Every morning
Fall to the Earth
From the Father
To his children
Made of the dirt
From cosmic dust
That every dream
Is worth some hope

The rain falls
Out of clouds
Onto ground
One by one
All at once
Gathering
Patiently
Into streams
Cascading
Down the hill
Flowing slow
To the wall

The night is cold
Enough to freeze
Stares on faces
The neighbors wear
Behind the smoke
Of cigarettes
Uncomfortably
Turning away
Before his eyes
Reach and share
Someone alone

A strange thought
In light of
All modern
Medicine
Knows about
How sickness
Spreads between
The noses of
Humanity
Shares the cough

It makes him wish
He never hurt
The only one
To ever mean
Anything more
Than just a dance,
Just a kiss left
Passionately;
Making him sick

He believes
There's nothing
Left that's real
In his life
On the Earth,
Left behind
After the light
Takes his dreams

Into the room
Where the shadows
Swallow all that's
Left of the sweet
Memory he
Holds by his side
Along with doom

So he prays
No one takes
Notice of

Him watching
Faith slowly
Drift away

Phillip Erb

One Too Late

I saw a man I once knew on the interstate today
The car was moving so fast it's hard to say for sure
The windows dark, the music loud
His hair is shorter now and
A new woman is keeps his side,
A cigarette butt flicked from his window landed at my shoe,
His brand of Parliament, burned down to the filter
I stuffed my hands into my pockets like there was
Something in there I was afraid to lose then turned away
I find it easier to lie to myself than anyone
I should have said sorry then to my friend
Before the sun set on anger
Now the words are just wind
Back then I didn't understand the danger
Of falling asleep on a pillow of pride
Under a blanket of words anger spent
Though the heart never meant
Old friend drives east and I walk west
The road leads us further away,
He doesn't nod and I don't wave.

Phillip Erb

Pillbox Dream

The helicopter's rotor pulses furiously
Thrashes the atmosphere into the ground
The meadow's long green hair lies flat beat down
Slaps at the dried-up earth
Stirs her from her dreaming
Clouds of drought dust billow up to Heaven
Until the earth pulls it back down straight through my nose into my lungs
Coats my mouth from the inside out as it fills my teeth with sand
The beast begins to lift my stomach twists and bends
My mind fills with fragmented images thousands of men and women
Who have met with death on the business end of .50 caliber
Certainly not forgetting the blood let loose in this very seat.

Phillip Erb

Prism

From colors three
Born is rainbow
Simple and alone
Mother and father
To 64 million
Sons and daughters
From these three
Which one stands?
Is he Grandfather,
Maybe he's a she
Difference remains
Insubstantial as ever
From the moon's perch
To the shadow of earth
One and four million
By sixty-four fold
Collide to form the perfect
Collage of personalities –
Descendents of light

Phillip Erb

Prison

My watch is broken, all the electricity is gone,
The batteries that powered the obligatory skeletons
Of technology are dead – neglected to the shadows,
Buried beneath the dust of a graveyard underneath
The bed.

Three years ago I was alone
Three years later no one's home
But me – three days now without sleep
I miss the ghosts I visit in my dreams
My eyes are bone dry and open wide
The hours are short, the minutes take
Days at a time when you wake up
And realize you have gone blind.

Phillip Erb

Purge

Mother's fuse turned ash,
She becomes frustrated
Now angry
Judgment is due
Where her fingers fall
No room for justice
During Vengeance Hour
Little time to lie, wait and hide
No secrets slip past her sight
Little time for love in a life
Consumed by death.

Phillip Erb

Quiet

Listless and lost
Vital and sad
Puckered and longing
Lonely and loveless
Smoking cigarettes he cannot afford
Wishing each square was something more
'How do you do, ' is all she wants to hear
But he's petrified and only says, 'Hello.'
He has himself convinced he must be the
Only one on Earth to feel this way each night
But that is impossible
Will he ever realize
He's not the only one.

Phillip Erb

Relentless Machines

When will all of us sinners - staggering
Blindly through all the mazes of our own
Tiresome and so lonesome devices - open
Wide the doors to our dazed and tail-spun
Hearts and souls? How are we supposed to
Make everything fine and put down our
Weapons of selfishness without ever seeing
This decaying world with any one else's
Eyes - except for our own two red and
Swollen tearstained windows? Breathing's
Not as easy as it was meant to be; heads
Encased in smoked-filled plastic grocery
Bags that we stuff in the bottom of the
Closet and save along with the somber
Representatives of all our past mistakes
Bearing witness to the tossing oceans of
Pain that hold us here in the same place
Drowning in the unforgiveable and our
Commitment to never forget the past
So that we can change

Phillip Erb

Return To Sender

Continued my education for a while
On the road of fools; hell, it was easy,
There was nothing better to do
Mayhap, I made a wrong turn at the 21st century,
I was fighting fires with a bucket of water
On my left hand and a bucket of ethanol on the right,
The smoke burned my eyes and made me dizzy,
But that never mattered, it kept me busy.
This machine and I don't trust each other,
Keeps changing the numbers I enter
When I turn my back, it shouldn't be this hard to fix
Either one of us
I misplayed my youth running circles,
I could burn through the sole of a new pair shoes
In a month or two, and I paid extra for the cool name to boot.
I left something inside a spent pack of cigarettes
Didn't think twice before I launched it from my window
Don't remember why I was supposed to keep it
Hell, I don't know what it was but behind on the roadside
Between marker 82 and 99 is part of me I'll never get back
Long as we speaking openly and honestly
I tell you true I learned to become the finest liar.

Phillip Erb

Ripped Blue Pages

I'll bet my eyes'd be burning little
Less if I could see; Damned.
It's all right
If I just stay home tonight
How it must be nice to be
The one you come at night to see
Whom you wrap your arms around
When time come to lay you down
Lest this rhyme remain right here
On this battered page conveyed in
My uncontrollably sloppy pen
Take your time
Change your mind
Maybe then decide
How much longer you really
Want to stay this high

Phillip Erb

River Gwar

If you follow the Ohio river from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
South around the Appalachians and west to the Mississippi
You will see people who give you the finger who would
Just assume spit in your face as ask you how you are today
Your knees will get dirty and you will feel teeth beneath the water
Chewing on your toes as you dangle your legs over the boat
You can brush your teeth with the river water if it do you
So long as you take care not to choke on the rubbish and
Find yourself a good dentist who can take his pliers to your teeth
One by one and not make you jump in pain more often than necessary
You will understand the isolation and feel the sadness,
Lose your train of thought and the words you were just about to say
Until your tongue defies you and the curious lose interest
Long before they leave you alone and walk away.

Phillip Erb

Roads

I blink and the sun is gone
What the hell've I accomplished
Sitting here for forgotten hours
Now the day is over
Absent minds distract easily;
The comfort of false adjustment
Accompanies the venom -
The Serpent's deception into blood.
Neither here, nor there or practically anywhere
Will you find what, find whom
My passion bears
But the undersized people
Smoking cigarettes
Laughing beneath my window
Aren't the ones who care
For some reason the baggage handlers
Refuse to guide my luggage
Now my bathroom's a trap for dust
From Jupiter, or God knows where,
So I'm off to the store for another brush
Praying:
God, show me which one to buy
Help me scrape the poison off,
Help me spit it down the drain for good.

Phillip Erb

Roughshod

Seventy-two hours
I've been chewing my teeth
Plugging my face with the demon
I've been stabbing fingers
Down my throat to purge
Since I was a child
Wild-eyed and high chasing
Dreams on sleepless nights
The child bound captive
In the devil's belly
Keeps the company of a stranger
A man he knows so damn well,
Though he doesn't know the name.

Phillip Erb

Silent Seers

I've got a diamond-studded mirror
Made of sand and Plexiglas
And I can see something - vaguely
Unrecognizable in the fog.
Like trying to see the
Color of your eyes
In the reflection off of
A stagnant swamp under that
Pale green blanket of sludge
So now I wonder what it is
That I am supposed to do,
Pull up another sly'n quiet Vodou,
Out from under the sole of my shoe?
Who is moving up and
Who is moving down?
To the bed or toward the
Sewer-steaming streets?
Are you going to tell me?
Now what left have we to do?

Phillip Erb

Simple Things

There's a dove named Peace
Spreading her wings
Singing soft melodies to me.

First golden flames of dawn rise

She says,
'Be still and rest
in my arms boy,
my pockets have everything
you think we need.'

I've still got a
more to bleed
And this dream
I'm determined to believe

A horizon looming closer, closer
Than I have ever been before
In my chair, four minutes past six this morn
All alone in this house fighting cold
I quietly decide whether or to live or die
Today
I need to know
It's just another decision to make
The heavens can cry,
Spring floods hold mystery
Nothing truly breaks
Eventually Winter's misery
Whispers April dreams.

Phillip Erb

Sinking The Angela Marie

How would you like to hear me play a little number
With eleven of these ten unassuming fingertips?
Would you like to hear me sing along?
One tune in particular, or any thing at all?
Long as it is subtle yet strong
I won't play any notes wrong
I feel like this is something that belongs to me
Finally
But open your hand, it's yours, all you need to do
Is sing along

You sweat beside the fire
Then you spit in my eye
Just because I proved,
I knew you so well,
It was easy,
to catch you in a lie.

The in between you and me
Grows everyday a vast and salty sea
There is no denying that this place is ours
And ours alone
An empty bottle of beer floats past my splinter
The white man's already been here, love
What's new is the brokenhearted driftwood
Crusty with salt our tears have stained our lives and
The old tree retains the taste
After the feeling evaporates
You still carry the leather purse
I got for you from the old Indian woman
In exchange for my grandfather's watch
Now there's no one here but me
You use it like a rag to brush the dirt from your face
But it's useless now, there's nothing you can do to remove
Time's tattoo and the burden of love's given you a stoop

For a while we spoke through notes until
The water smeared the ink and swallowed our paper
You closed the window and drew the blind

After you and I stopped speaking,
you kept your heart, your soul,
Locked away in there just so I wouldn't see
Not you sit there quiet and smile and cry
The tears fall over your lips in a stream
Down the skin of your cheeks your eyes
Don't ever stop leaking and never in my life
Have I felt more responsible and
Empty for what broke

Phillip Erb

Some 10,000 Days

The wind steals my breath away
My words never weighed much to most folks
And nowadays I don't listen to what I say
Words can be so very hard to make
I've met a few who keep their lips moving so much
They disclaim all their promises
Before taking another breath
They have all the answers everyone's been looking for everywhere
But what I hear hurts me worse between my ears and above my eyes
It's too heavy for me to understand why people
Eat the same words for supper they had for breakfast yesterday
They keep right on talking long after there is nothing to say
Tongues grow weak if you never change what you chew

With time, light grows cloud from water one by one
The blue of empty sky turns from gray to black
Enough to shut out the sun and her belly rumbles
When she rains and the water's always falling somewhere
The wind delivers on his time and most every one has
Cursed him about his schedule once or twice
Nevertheless, the wind pays you no mind,
He makes no promises, tells no lies,
Never says a word.

One day may the wind rise strong enough
To steal all my breath away
Silence this tongue so its victims may mend
I'll turn to look Death in the eye
Only to see He was make-believe all along
From my bag of blood and bone
Come water,
Come earth.

Phillip Erb

Street Lamp Sunset

Drove down to the corner store -
Owned by a dark skinned man,
His wife, his daughter, and any
Passing kindred refugees
On their way to the promised land...
For vague motives misunderstood
And never known

Phillip Erb

Sun Shades

One moment mister, pardon me if I'm
Right in your way, in your place, wasting time.
I cannot afford to pay you mind, and I am so tired,
It's certainly possible I might go blind if I don't set aside
One moment - in the least, no more than two - to rest my eyes.
So many days and nights they've been open wide,
Now they sting, itch and scratch in the burning light,
Dried out and filled with sand; it hurts and who could cry
Right now if I tried, if I'm running out of time
To put out the fire: hold still, quiet the lies
I'll put out tonight despite how tight
I squeeze, shut the lid against burning light
And the fight is yours tonight.

Phillip Erb

The Steeple Guard

From her nest atop the church
A black bird peered down at me
Then swooped down suddenly
On me like a missile
Hammered headlong into my car
With a force enough to break her dead
A trail of feathers lofted slow from her nest
So I prayed what for
The northern wind picked up
For a moment I thought God took my call
Wind whipped leaves from October maples
Through my driver-side window and hit my face.

Phillip Erb

The War Behind Our Eyes

Just the other day for the first time
In a roundabout one million years drifting
She set her bottomless brown eyes on me
And said, 'Hey man... What's up? ' as the
Chains bound to my heart of souls began to
Melt as I was swept away in love's current
Rushing waywardly with unforeseen destiny
Through the narrow crevices, down the
Mountainside roaring with the full force
Of life and death; fate without a destiny
The rocks that line our beds are surely
What gives truth, meaning and beauty to our
Watery songs that we sing with watery eyes;
Under her moon I've made my bed, and
Under her sun my fire's rekindled; I'm alive
Then she says we're killing each other, and
The pause before she can say she loves me,
Makes my soul of souls scream; we're in war
With devils of distance, yet no history, or
Curses will win this time around the wheel

Phillip Erb

Thirst

Gravel veins link the quiet arteries of a ghost town,
From my roost, two or three scattered denizens
Wear faces bewildered - if not altogether lost -
Around in circles a young girl promenades;
Perhaps wondering when everyone left,
Where they went, and why they rushed away.
My signals go unnoticed from the belfry,
I claw at the spirits holding me hostage,
Pawing at my soul, I claw the flesh raw, but
Nothing will separate the bottleneck of
Hunger and thirst, longing and ache, burden and chain.

Phillip Erb

Tollbooth Tax

I began this song at four a.m. in an attempt to make friends
With an empty room, and lettered keys instead of my pen,
You know it's hard as ever opening myself to someone new
Most time I just leave the room like there's something to do
My legs are restless, and they each have a mind of their own
They walk some, mostly they run, by the time morning comes
I realize before I open my eyes that the faces have changed
Each person is someone different, but the people are the same
The price of knowing all the back roads from here to Rome
Is a pair of shoes to carry your heart, it can grow quite heavy alone
When it weighs this much I think I'll just set it down before I go
Should the wind cut through my clothes and make my bones so cold
I don't make it back to pick it up before the curtain calls me to the show
At least I'll still have a soul, though truth be told he and I never spoke
A word since I started all of this walking, I think he misses home.

Phillip Erb

Toys In The Attic

Life dumped an anchor on my lap
Crushed my legs to the bones
Now I might have seen it comin'
But my eyes were getting heavy,
I prefer sore feet to dead numb
Consequence finds me here again
King of this dusty corner of Earth
Eyes map the webs of dead spiders
'If not sleep, then sopor shut 'em, God, ' I pray.
I suspect if God listens,
She's like to hear something original once in a while
Melody echoes between my ears
Beat-up man wears bib-overalls,
Dredges to a beat-up '88 Ford,
As rusted as his hollow cough
A woman that might have been his wife
Yells out the door at his back
The wind steals the words but I think she says,
'Go on and get the hell on get lost, lose the road,
So I can tell the kids you are gone
And not have to make any more excuses for your sorry ass.'

Phillip Erb

Tributaries

If that was you standing in the fog
Out on the street's corner in the dark
Waving a monotonous hand at me
With the other thumb in the air
Picking up a stranger's ride
Away into the night
Then won't you send a postcard
Or something down to this rotten town
Where the mayor shrouds
The homeless sleeping on the ground
Around here we could sure use a sign
To let us know
That even though
We cannot go
There are some places
Where all these rivers
Eventually flow

Phillip Erb

Umbrella's Experience

Falling over and done
befitting ancient history.

Thin as the images of a dream's foreign scene
populated with unnervingly vague and frequent faces;
their ghostly, bluish-gray, all but translucent lips engaged

in voiceless conversation conveying carefully calibrated confusion contained by a
completely mislaid context of disquiet and memory...

But the speech of sleep and dreams grows distant
Echoing ever more quietly back to me
In the wake of eggs, coffee, newspaper, and cigarettes

Phillip Erb

Unspoken

Did I happen to mention in passing the first time I left you
Why I had to get in the car and drive down the road without
Stopping until I could no longer see the shore in the rearview?
Must have been a damn good reason, I'm certain - though
I admit thinking back finds an empty dusty drawer,
Overrun by hungry spiders and their empty cobwebs,
Successfully entrapping dust bunnies of hollow memory
Certainly, the reason's power and righteousness
Appeared plain and self-evident at the time.
Must have been a damn good reason, I'm sure - after all,
I traded my brothers and sisters, my friends, for a vast
Assortment of one-dimensional acquaintances;
The obverse smiles, nods, and sometimes waves,
Before me they disappear like paper until I see the reverse
Their eyes dart around my perch fogged in blue
Cigarette smoke.

Phillip Erb

Waiting On Winter

Some boy will always let
Their hair grow long
While the rest of the young men
Shave their heads bald
To get it off you know
They simply cannot wait
Some people often complain
About the temperature
When it's not even cold
I'll keep the windows down
Every now and then
A cool wind is the only
Reality that clears my mind and releases
Me from thinking about all the whole
I'll never have as well as everything
Else I absolutely must get done today
In Kentucky the sky only becomes
This shade of blue when Halloween
Stands alone between today and Thanksgiving
The leaves turn colors painting the
Forests ever so brilliantly just before
Winter's frost steps in to stay
At the ass end of another year
Sneaking out the back door of December
The future is somewhere behind me
Once again; leaving my bones hurting
To the earth's rhythm - pulsing from
The beginning to the end
Of each line and every verse

Phillip Erb

When The Jays Fly Away

Blue jay perched on my flagpole
The only color contrasting against
A fall gray making haste to
Chase summer skies away
My winter's coming this Sunday
and there is nowhere to run from the nature's blunt revenge
Why's it so easy to learn the hard way?
This cyclone life trails the slippery tails of memory
Will there ever be a way to make yesterday alive?
The fading light smolders from the last the day's cigarettes
and does little to illuminate the door of my cage

I wish I could say no one ever warned me
about the power of disobedience
and the consequence of losing innocence
in the dark where purity's light has been blown out
The only decision left is the pain of smiling into the face of cold wind
The sinner's mistakes decay and fall apart around my feet
Where heaven's tears have turned the earth to mud
Life is simple when you can count each one of your chances
in a matter of seconds as they dance like fleeting dreams after the alarm tolls
Each choice stares back into your face before the Fall's tongue sucks them down
Winter's throat.

Phillip Erb

Whisperers

Train your eyes to see through the midnight darkness and above
the miasma of fatigue, choose carefully which scenes of sleep's cinema to
believe,
because the God of the New Age doesn't reach out through prophecy
it is more likely the voices that speak through the passing dream
see humanity only for the bone and meat, their devotion is act of
sanctimony, they sit down with one arm around justice and spit in
the face of truth every time during the commercials
new clothes, gold, and something flashy to enervate on rock and road
pecksniffery doesn't advocate a new morality
so listen carefully and be wary
of the fruit these days
when God no longer speaks.

Phillip Erb