



Sans Fin

John Moncure Wetterau

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New Section

Sans Fin

poems

John Moncure Wetterau

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Author's Note:

Alberto Giacometti has been a life-long inspiration. These poems were written in the spirit of *Paris Sans Fin*, the collection of lithographs he made of Parisian scenes. I work similarly, from the outside in, finding in description, celebration and opening without end.

The cover image is a study for a carving that I made to stamp a limited edition of poems entitled *Straight Walker*. The following poem, from that edition, can be found in the collection, *On The Road To Dharamsala*.
J.M.W.

Named

Two women,
comfortably sixty,
"Oh, we see you
all da time walking.
Every day. We say:
look how straight he walk.
Straight walker!"
"Too old to bend over is why,"
I say. We laughing.
Only later I realize
what they have given me.
I am Straight Walker.

Kapaau,
The Big Island

Contents

- In a Hotel in Perajil
- For Andrew
- Giacometti
- Mangoes
- For Catherine
- The Last Supper
- Domingo
- Spanish Voices
- For Jeanne
- Vidya Niwas
- Untitled
- In a Yard on Island Avenue
- Ronda, Kevin, and Scott
- Solstice Party
- For Kathie
- Heading Out
- Quaker Ladies
- Kathie Walking Gwen
- Shelter
- Be
- On the Back Shore
- Nude
- Waiting
- Nancy 3
- For Finn
- Bonnie Bradley Bailey
- Brothers
- Seventh Grade
- League Meet—Quarter Mile
- Still Life
- SOS
- Yearning
- Dive
- Laird
- In Fall, Spring
- Now & Until
- Bricks
- Maria's Garden
- No Edge
- Presents

- Ruth
- Rachel's Story
- Anything Born
- Crossing the Colorado
- Remembering Woody Guthrie
- Woman at a Cafe Table
- Birth Song
- Parting
- Waltz
- Sunset
- Nor'easter
- For Will and Charles Winkelman
- 6:06 a.m.
- Lines
- For Ginny
- Sometimes
- Everything Is Taken
- In The Vast Pacific
- Dawn
- Out Of Recycled Parts
- Don
- Gunnel's Delight

for Ginny

In a Hotel in Perajil

Slide your money
 under a plastic shield
 for the key to Suite 1,
 Aqua Velva blue light,
 for full-on white,
 or two strobes flashing
 near the bathroom door—no dark.
 Red neon BAR in the window.
 Shouts, engines, horns blasting,
 disco thumping.
 Alone. Tired.
 Lie down.

And be quietly overcome
by grace—
understood, approved,
a part of all.
You only need
a handful of these moments
to get through life.

Panama City

For Andrew

At an intersection
in Panama City,
a young man
plucks a red apple ball
that slides slowly
down his arm. He
bends and turns,
saving it from falling,
offers it
to waiting traffic.

In Boquete,
by the plaza,
rows of earrings:
eloquent feathers,
shells, tiny curving
bits of basket.
The maker,
late thirties,
sits on her heels,
chestnut hair tied back,
dark blue eyes
waiting for the work
to speak.

Giacometti

I am in a small
French restaurant
in Boquete, Panama
on my 68th birthday,
describing the golden
mustard color of the walls,
the deep blue trim,
when Giacometti appears,
lined and rugged face
intense as always, concerned,
amused. Alberto!
C'est vrai.
I carry on
the work sans fin.

Mangoes

Ninety (at least)
heaped in two boxes
on the tailgate of a black Toyota—
red / yellow / pale green,
mango mountains.
An unshaven forty year old,
jeans, white T-shirt,
reaches up, balances
another cantalope
on the truck's cap.
In the lavamatico,

"Jaun: dos? Tres? Quattro?"
"Quattro, por favor," for my
laundry to be clean by four,
back in the plastic shopping bag.
The music in her voice
anticipates music in return.
"Gracias." Why talk
when you can sing?

Boquete

For Catherine

in Punaluu, standing
on black sand
with your mother,
where the turtles crawl
to lay their eggs,
ballerinas of surf,
vulnerable for this act
of birth—your cry,
caught in the throat,
fingers extended

(buying a turtle pendant,
Boquete)

The Last Supper

In Bistro Boquete:
twenty-two turistas seated

at a line of tables,
wild eyes searching
left and right,
a glow of unhappiness,
wine for lost chances,
servers like priests,
good humored, forgiving,
words falling
like Rio Caldera
from the lonely mountains.
Untouched, a clean glass
shatters on the bar.
The bartender looks at me;
I hold my Adam's apple
and imitate a soprano.
He laughs, shrugs;
it is beyond us,
like so much else.
Habla Inglés, habla Español,
all trails
lead to compassion.

Panama

Domingo

In the plaza, an Indian girl
in a red & white cotton dress
strums chords slowly,
searching for the harmony
she feels or wants, singing
a few words quietly;
her music, so simple,
heals like sunlight,
universal air.

Spanish Voices

Roasting coffee
from Boquete,
burnt earth, sugar,
rain on Volcan Baru,
steep rows of trees
pruned head high,
dark green, shining,
pit vipers, rainbows,
men and women in
hard-soled rubber boots,
picking red cherries—
sun, sweat &
Spanish voices.

For Jeanne

Lobster buoys
heaped on a dock
in melting snow,
bright bands of
red, green, yellow,
tangled lines,
high tide,
an American flag
hanging motionless,
March sunshine.
"A good painting,"
Jeanne said, "but

you could get lost
in the detail ... "
the beautiful ends of rope,
the chipped paint.

Peaks Island

Vidya Niwas

The pursuit
of love, sex,
fame, money,
forgetting,
enlightenment—yes, as
Arvind said one night,
"It's all bullshit."
He was seeing clearly,
standing by Vidya Niwas,
wheat on curving
hand dug terraces,
leopards hunting,
snow / moonlight
high above.

Dharamsala

Untitled

white blossoms / an apple

blown over
at the edge of wetlands
two hundred yards
from the sea,
bearing,
still bearing

Peaks Island

In a Yard on Island Avenue

weathered table
piled with pears
gray / brown / yellow,
four wooden chairs
evenly placed, one
holding a red scooter,
an orange flatbed
and blue plastic dump truck
parked by the pears,
a sense of composition,
the slow music
of tumbling fruit,
a hand
on a child's shoulder

Ronda, Kevin, and Scott

Ronda Dale
tells the truth,
tambourine to hip,
swaying, steady, smiling,

a one heart beat,
fresh as those
who marched to war
on a sunny day,
free as fate
accepted.
We rise to dance
while old mistakes
slip away
on guitar wings,
and the waves break,
and the wild geese
form and reform their ragged V's,
calling
to each other.

The Eighth Maine,
Peaks Island / fall

Solstice Party

candles lit
in paper bags
placed on the snow

path dancing
through dark woods

a Bach
violin partita
crossing time

creating
its destination

For Kathie

Below freezing
for a month,
snow, ice.
Dark branches reach
for a dull sky.
Moving slowly toward
open water,
an empty oil tanker,
red red red,
orange below.

January
Peaks Island

Heading Out

Low islands / muted colors,
dragger
heading out
past Bug Light,
open water, gray horizon,
the chance,
taken again,
to earn
return.

late winter

Quaker Ladies

The Peaks Island ball field
is green again.

In the outfield grass
behind shortstop,
tiny white flowers
with yellow centers
surround
the faded leather fingers
of a baseball glove
folded, palm down.
A chainsaw snarls
on the hill.
Beyond that,
waves curl against rock.

Kathie Walking Gwen

forward reach,
each step rising,
clear-eyed,
widening smile,
faint gray dazzle
around her upper body,
the dog pulling,
rapt with scent

back shore

Shelter

*... frozen to death
on Marginal Way, hands
still holding his cart...*

I see a bronze figure
in the park, oversized,
slumped forward, supported
by what he clings to.
The cart is solid with shapes
we fill as we will: a few
photos and a postcard
in a plastic envelope,
a box of dog biscuits,
bags of clothes,
bottles, cans,
an improbable Buddha.
Flowers and bushes surround him,
some seeded naturally,
some planted by the caring,
a home with no roof
or windows,
room for all of us.

Portland

Be

like an oak leaf
blown across frozen ground
or the first green
of a sunflower in mist
or the exhale
of a dying cat
be upside down be
a baby diving duck
be anything but
certain

On the Back Shore

crusted magma
whirling through
a starry sky,
wave sound,
beach roses,
night air shared,
the middle world,
where life depends
on dying for
beauty,
call it love

Nude

beneath clothes,

the warm brave body
upright, muscle
bone, nerve,
blood coursing
with star matter

imagination,
unbound by time,
the flower
in the vase

Waiting

They lie offshore,
low in the water
with children, husbands,
grandchildren, lovers
long gone, language
from another day,
family furniture,
their own horses, bikes,
baseball bats, songs
from high school,
anguish secured
in a deep hold

Nancy 3

Boat's in, crowd
streaming up the sidewalk,

the sound of an accordion
quickens feet—Nancy 3,
playing on the steps
of The Umbrella Cover Museum.
Fifty years ago in Cleveland,
she & w.cat were in love
with the same piano teacher,
a Lithuanian with fiery
noble eyes.

A girl stops, about four,
flowery cotton dress hanging
to her ankles, pink flip-flops,
serious, then surprised,
her face begins to shine;
she stands immersed
in the pouring gift:
the music that she is,
that she will grow
to pass on.

Peaks Island

For Finn

Born forty years ago
this morning on a sunny day.
Driving through Zena,
bringing you home
on your mom's lap—
Dave Mellert by
the side of the road,
holding his mangled arm;
I told your mom to wait
at the store, got Dave
into Kit's old Cadillac,
did a u-turn and burned

it for Kingston.
"Caught in the chipper."
Blood seeping, Dave weakening.
"Hang on."
We ran some lights;
he made it;
they saved his arm.
Three months later in Buckman's bar,
he came over, "Thanks John."
You don't talk much
in the mountains,
but you remember.

Bonnie Bradley Bailey

in purple satin,
standing silently
by the piano,
eyes upcast,
pleading
with onrushing time,
gathering the voice
to climb
from grief to grief
to wonder

at The Fifth Maine

Brothers

Back when Dewey's
was on Fore Street—
a fall weekend,

Andy & Manny
at the front corner table,
pints of ale,
high school stories, sports,
easy laughter.
Above them,
precious light slants
through high streaked windows,
turning dust to gold.

Portland

Seventh Grade

Next to their buses,
playing catch
in the early morning,
Pete's fast ball hissing
into Bart's mitt;
one drove through Wittenberg,
the other through Willow.
New school, a thousand
square miles.
I mostly went through Wittenberg
where Elaine Shultis got on
with her absolutely perfect
long blonde hair,
and Aaron Van deBogart
sat in back with Lester Shultis
laughing at everything,
but, sometimes
I went through Willow
with Gordon Walker
who looked quietly
out the window.
He was known

for waiting
to catch the guy
robbing his traps,
and throwing him
into the stream.

"School Bus" photograph by Victor Romanyshyn

League Meet—Quarter Mile

Bang! Spikes digging,
first in a crowd around the turn,
stride lengthening
on the back stretch,
my main competition beside me
running for New Paltz.
On the far turn, his friend passes,
cuts to the inside, slows,
blocking my lane. Stumble,
run sideways to get by,
finish two steps behind.
Wait out the urge to vomit,
the sky spinning slowly.
Every race is a small death,
the price of passion,
although I didn't know it
at the time, angered
by the cheat.

Still Life

Lingering
from edge to edge,
shape to shape,
rolling in color
as the blind
pass their hands
over a marble Venus,
absorbing,
until finally,
we see
that a coffee can
is a coffee can,
that sunlight
on a stack of books
is precious,
for night surely comes—
though the sun
will still be there,
and if not this sun,
another.

"Coffee Can" photograph by Victor Romanyshyn

SOS

O Love,
deliver me
to this moment;
let me be
with this bird
on a telephone wire,
heedless of the chatter

flashing through its grasp,
singing to its mate,
who also sings,
honoring the hawk
circling,
praising the red berries,
the blue waves
crashing white.

Peaks Island

Yearning

On a sunny September afternoon
in 1958 in the Hamilton library,
high above the tables
in the empty reading room,
a pure clear whistle:
*How can there be a cherry
without a stone?*
notes drifting
through gothic arches,
a single student
high in the stacks.

Gilbert was working
on a shrimper in the Gulf,
"Going along at night
where those brown mountains
come down to the water,
you look at the lights way up there,
and you wonder... "

Year after year we yearn
until we see ourselves

in another's face or
in the bright shoulder
of a cloud at sunset.

I am blooming, and
I've got no stone.
In those haciendas,
there is love
or there is not.

Dive

The Acapulco cliff diver
leaps, feet pushing strongly
against rock.
He falls forward, arms wide,
brown in sunlight,
all eyes on him
as he straightens,
plunging down
to the wave
rolling in to meet him.
Lost from sight,
decelerating, tumbling,
he is held, embraced
in an emerald quiet,
a moment before
a slow, peaceful,
kick to the surface.

Laird

on the 8:15,
big pickup loaded,
tarp and net tied down,
Colorado plates,
autumn chill in the air,
be warm later,
he'll be back next summer,
nothing goes wrong

his horses raise their heads,
they know he's coming.

Peaks Island

In Fall, Spring

September shadows sharp
on green grass,
the migration begins,
the flow south.
Light returns to Patagonia.
We stack wood, gather
seaweed for the garden;
we will live by fire
through starry nights,
crystal pageants of the heart,
while gauchos ride
open-shirted, singing,
to their señoras.

for Shunryu Suzuki

Now & Until

Darkening layer of altocumulus,
gray-green waves sliding in
under feeding ducks.

Chilly wind.

Beach roses, peas, asters,
clover—still blooming. They
know nothing of winter!

We don't either, really.

We love until we can't.

Peaks Island

Bricks

Bricks handmade,
fired red,
laid one at a time,
rising four stories
above a cobbled street,
blackened, cracked,
repointed over and over,
courses settled and bowed,
exhaling the centuries.

I wrote two novels
in this café,
whispers in the wind.

For Barry Shaw
Portland

Maria's Garden

House, fence, studio,
white, white, white.
Closely cut green grass.
Thirteen gray stones:
three groups,
gathered
to comfort and beget,
shapes hunched
with tenderness,
a memorial
to Maria's love,
a blunt guide—
if we survive,
it will be this way.

Peaks Island

No Edge

Sea and cloud,
a thin line
east to south,
faintly darker
through light rain.
A heron passes over
the wooded hill behind,
steady wing beats,
legs trailing,

seeing the other side:
the bay,
the small city,
the continent rising west—
hunting in a beautiful view,
part of it,
as am I,
and you.

Peaks Island

Presents

In the days when
I thought another would save me,
I worked to be worthy.
But you can't earn love.
Love is free as the stranger
who put a lei around me on
Kalakaua Avenue, her scent
and arms brushing my shoulders.
She walked away;
my knees began to shake; and
I cried for the first time in years.
Half a lifetime ago.
Now, five thousand miles
from Hawaii, a young woman
approaches wearing
a black bowler hat, white shirt,
dark pants, her face oddly pale.
Face powder, lipstick,
a clown or a mime.
I clasp my hands in the namaste
salute. She takes off her hat—
short auburn hair, delicate

features—and bows deeply.
She plucks an invisible flower,
straightens, regards it slowly
from two sides, smells it
with exaggerated satisfaction,
and presents it to me.
I inhale, hold it up to admire,
and toss it high over my shoulder.
Her eyes follow. She pulls from
the hat something held closely
in her fingers, raises her hands
to her mouth, and blows deeply
three, four times. She ties
an imaginary string around its base
and slides her fingers down as
the string rises above her head.
She hands me the balloon,
and I find myself lifted
to my feet and then higher.
I stand on the park bench,
my arm tugged upward
until I let it go.
She claps silently
as I jump to the ground, then,
with a sad face, she holds
the empty hat upside down
before me. Slowly,
I pull a fist full of coins
from my pocket,
and release them
into the hat.
She smiles, delighted,
and bows once more;
she has entertained,
been paid. But the presents,
the flower (a rose)
and the balloon (yellow)—
they cannot be bought;
they float freely;
they are descending

within reach.

Portland

Ruth

between orders,
waiting at the end
of the dining room,
long red hair, slim, pale,
lit by a quiet light from
within cupped hands,
keeping faith with
her unborn art
and children

Victory Deli
Portland

Rachel's Story

"I dreamed of whales
when I was pregnant,
deep powerful dreams.
This morning when
Cedar woke up,
still half-asleep,
he said, `Whales!
Whales, Mommy,
in the sky, with wings!"

It was his first dream.
I've been waiting."

She looked at Cedar
who had turned
at the sound of his name,
sturdy & blonde;
they swam together
a moment, and
he turned back,
diving as a whale dives,
tipping its broad tail up,
sliding easily
down the curve
of resolution
and least resistance.

Peaks Island

Anything Born

Each morning,
coffee, toast,
play Bach's
Prelude in C,
make a fire,
salute the sun.
Take a shower,
walk.

Give it up.
Anything born
is born naked.
The leaves
are dropping

from the trees.

Peaks Island

Crossing the Colorado

Cold morning in the desert.
One café open early,
great homefries,
rattlesnakes & Indians
on the wall,
carved bas-reliefs
painted red and black,
local talk, country music.

Hundreds of miles:
brown rocky ranges,
flat basins, dusty yellows,
scrub mesquite, juniper,
tumbleweed, a lifetime
for a stone to tumble
from a ledge.

Then the Colorado—
fifty yards wide,
jade green, hints of white,
running like a stranger
between dry banks,
down from the mountains,
bearing love.

Remembering Woody Guthrie

Barstow to Tehachapi:
desert, then
lion-colored hills
naked to the sun,
four thousand feet
down to the valley:
oranges, almonds, olives,
hundreds of miles,
Woodie's ... *Garden of Eden,*
a paradise to live in or see,
but, believe it or not,
you won't find it so hot,
if you ain't got the do re mi,
still true.

Woman at a Cafe Table

face shining,
the double glow
of loved and loving,
all wrongs transformed,
gone like mist
from the mirror
of what is,
inside us
and out

Birth Song

Trust begins

in another's arms,
opening to warm hands,
soft truths—
the sun rises, yes,
pulling you with it
out of the sea;
morning
is your birthright,
love, your
lifelong song.

Peaks Island

Parting

Sitting behind me
on the stairs, while
I put on my shoes,
bumping down a step,
surrounding me lightly
with your legs and arms,
your hair,
delicate and shaggy,
resting on my neck,
sad, quiet,
no hero ever had
a better farewell,
or left
so sure of home.

Waltz

When your love
cannot be there,
and The Vienna
Philharmonic plays
The Beautiful Blue Danube,
you can feel bad,
or you can dance—
arms encircled,
formal, tender,
turning together,
turning with the sweep
of strings, the hopes
of centuries,
turning and turning
together forever.

Sunset

Orange sun
through birches,
winter whites & browns.
To the east,
a darkening
band of lavender,
Outer Green Island,
low, snow covered,
glowing upwards.

Nor'easter

Night wind roaring,
trees bending,

cracking, power out,
rocks swept
across the road...

Morning sunshine,
salt mist,
fountains of spray,
two gulls hovering
side by side,
heads turning,
scanning the after-break
swirl and churn.

Peaks Island

For Will and Charles Winkelman

Father and son
driving away,
framed in the rear window
of Will's blue pickup,
Charles, half Will's size,
beside him
in the center of the seat—
so similar,
the way they hold themselves,
compact, thoughtful, intent—
however lonely you become,
your teachers are still with you,
in your stride,
in the set of your shoulders.

Peaks Island

6:06 a.m.

orange sun,
pale blue sea,
chickadee
at the feeder,
a large brown duck
paddles grandly
in circles,
a he, I think,
proud with morning,
undefeated.

back shore

Lines

A floating Herreshoff dinghy,
the aria from Bach's
Goldberg Variations,
Giacometti's diving woman

last night
the geese returned,
honking, answering, encouraging,
invisible—dark against dark—
until they passed beneath
two blurred stars,
surging and straggling,
signing the sky,
a line

never to be repeated,
only echoed.

Peaks Island

For Ginny

Smiling shyly over
her cooking—Thanksgiving Dinner
made in a tiny galley—
a straight dress for the occasion,
dangling multi-colored earrings,
amused, irrepressibly radiant,
the best looking grandmother
on the Indian Ocean
now breathes easily beside me,
watching the video as
the Atlantic rises in the cove,
and I find that I loved her
years before I knew her.

Sometimes

Sometimes you have to
talk of terrible things:
cry of terror, strangling,
wordless, helpless,

rigid body crashing to the floor,
violent convulsions,
a minute or more,
subsiding,
gray-faced, retching,
bitten tongue bleeding,
dazed, broken, reset somehow.
Lying beside her, touching,
touching,
touching, together,
after a blow from the ax.

Everything Is Taken

5:30 on an April morning,
gray light softens the sea,
I must rise, leave
to avoid embarrassment,
walk along the shore.
A few minutes more.

Ten after six: brighter,
raindrops, a crow calls three times,
a Northern Oriole sings:
Figaro, Figaro, Figaro.

In The Vast Pacific

Slow and sweet
on stained concrete,

hips swivel and lift,
hands retelling history:
this is how we came here;
this is who we are;
tutus with ukeleles
keep the beat,
laughing, sitting in a row,
flowery mumus to their ankles,
Union 76 gas station,
men on the sidewalk, eating,
drinking beers, talking story ...
bursts of music and aloha
climb into the vast Pacific night,
flicker for a moment,
flash to the stars.

Dawn

across the gorge,
palm tree silhouettes,
charcoal on gray

cinnamon-rose
brushes one high cloud

a rooster crows;
another follows,
then another

tiny white-breasted swallows,
climbing, diving,
take their breakfast

on the wing

Ubud, Bali

Out Of Recycled Parts

Two black circles,
a turquoise triangle
pointing down,
pedals at the tip,
Cole's bike,
single speed,
practical, fast,
cutting through
confusion.

Peaks Island

Don

Standing, looking across the water
toward Portland—
usually I see him walking
to or from the boat, head down,
reserved, taking his advanced years
one step at a time,
a man of the cloth, retired,
still dutiful;
today his face is open,
sensing, pleased almost,
as though reuniting

with a friend of his youth,
the spring breeze.

Peaks Island
April, 2011

Gunnel's Delight

passing us
upright
on your bike,
head turned back,
eyebrows up, amused,
delight
shining through
the thinner sunlight
on the shore,
celebrating / sharing
love's no age

Peaks Island

From the same author on Feedbacks

Every Story Is A Love Story (2010)

A story of first love in Woodstock, N.Y. during the early sixties. Patrick, an army brat, and Willow, a musician from an academic family, drift separately into town and are attracted to each other in spite of their differences. The cast of characters includes Bob Dylan and Joe Burke, of "Joe Burke's Last Stand," Wetterau's first novel. The writing is sunny and clear. The author says, "It was an exciting time in an exciting place. I'm not Joe Burke, but I was there."

On The Road To Dharamsala (2010)

Note: reformatted with table of contents

Most of these poems are from the Big Island of Hawaii and from Dharamsala, at the edge of the Himalayas where the Dalai Lama and many Tibetans are rebuilding their lives, preserving their culture in the midst of traditional India. India is humbling and inspiring, dirty, dangerous, cheap, gorgeous, crowded, and intensely human. I am only beginning to understand how deeply it affected me. Thank you for reading these, for being there, too.

JMW

O+F (2010)

Note: edited for italics formatting and a missing paragraph at the close of Chapter 2. Sorry.

A solitary man in a diner on the coast of Maine. A tall beautiful stanger. A whip. A bronze heart. Hawaii. The Northwest ... How far will he go to face the truth about himself? ... This is a story about borders: between sex and love, between life and death.

Michelangelo's Shoulder (2010)

Note: 2nd Edition, added one long story.

"The line across her eyebrows and tapering along her jaw was

right. He'd left out a lot, but that didn't matter. If what was there was true enough, you knew the rest---like a Michelangelo shoulder emerging from stone."

Maine, Seattle, Hawaii, and India are the settings for these stories of late awakenings, integrity, and persistence.

Wild, Hard, Sweet (2010)

Harry is determined to outdo his smooth successful father. Charley is a local hero, an athlete, good natured, fiercely independent. They join forces in a drug buy and are busted on the Maine coast. Charley runs; Harry games the system, using his family's money and connections. This is a story about mavericks growing up. Sexy, visual, and honest.

Joe Burke's Last Stand (2010)

Joe Burke is handsome, graying at the temples. Divorce has left him wondering what's next. He throws a few belongings in his truck and leaves town to find out, a search that takes him from Maine to Hawaii. A powerful and joyful book about sex, love, art, and finding one's teachers.

The Book With The Yellow Cover (2010)

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This book is modeled on a book of Chinese and Japanese poems that I gave to a friend on the west coast. It was a very small book with a yellow cover, stapled together. No adornments. Just the poems, alive after hundreds of years. J.M.W.

The Shirtpocket MFA: Poetry & Fiction (2010)

The Shirtpocket MFA is for anyone who cares about writing. What is "Fine Art?" Who is a poet, and who is a storyteller? What is the writer's responsibility in publishing? This brief essay will remain relevant year after year.

The Shirtpocket guides were first printed and bound in a format that fit in a shirt pocket. They are written in the spirit of "The Elements of Style," (Strunk & White) and "The C Programming Language," (Kernighan & Ritchie), models for expository writing.

The Shirt-pocket Guide to the Market (2010)

The important things to know about investing and the market are in this book. How to apply this knowledge is up to you; no two people will (or should) invest in the same way. Investing is a voyage of self discovery. J.M.W.

The Shirt-pocket Guide to Enlightenment (2010)

A brief introduction to meditation and enlightenment.

Q: Why should you care about enlightenment?

A: Because life hurts.

Enlightenment is not a cure for toothache. It frees you from deep anguish, the pain of loss, loneliness, defeat, and (insidiously) of success that keeps you chasing for more, like a mouse running in a caged wheel. This kind of pain kills people every day. It puts lines in your face. We all suffer it eventually, unless or until we are enlightened.

J.M.W.



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