Poetry Series

Morgan Michaels

- 330 poems -

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Morgan Michaels

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Works:

'We Who Are Young'-poems

18

Always play fair: this
I say to you as well
as to the hangman.

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19

A fixed delusion:
if it works, let it be. Don't
tamper with success.

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20

Please do not sell my
information to any
bloody marketer.

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21

Daylight you bring me
hours of drowsiness; night,
hours of wakefulness.

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22

Beautiful ember
how brightly you burn. Yet you,
too, fade away.

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A Belloc

Chew the gum of no tree
sweetened with sugar or mint
rather, child, resist
the vile condiment.

Ground between the teeth
or wadded in the cheek
a lady chewing gum appears
in contest with a sheep.

While cousin to a goat
appears the feckless youth
unseemly and uncouth
who cracks it in his mouth.

Gum snapped on the train
or maybe on the bus
will soon disgust your fellow men
and alienate us.

And though the dentist fume
your father will commend thee
you frugal mother smile
to see thee caries-free.

Never, thoughtful child,
take up the habit of it
burn frankincense or myrrh
but quit gum-Arabic.

Morgan Michaels

A Belloc II

Tell no one that you love them
Or never so they hear
Tell them you're autistic
Tell them that you're queer
They'll sympathize, my dear,
But never, never, hear,

Tell some one that you love them
It's not a good idea
They'll come to think they own you
As does a brook the sea
Oh, misery and woe foresee
When once you've said so, so,

Tell no one that you love them
Lest days of peace you miss
Be compensated amply by
The items on a list:
'Do that, do this, do this,
But first a little kiss'.

Tell no one that you love them
Or end up in a zoo
Tell no one that you love them
And even though you do
Even though it's true,
Don't, I'm telling you.

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A Belloc III

From western councils turn your face
those salamander cells!
seek you councils in the east
where truth, a maiden, dwells.

Remember, where the sun shines first-
he rises in the east
and only when he leaves those courts
descends to western steeps.

His promises are pink and pure
and delicately given-
goldenly he holds the ear
and countenance of heaven.

He cannot help to further rise
and wane in warmth and light:
to those who see him in the east
a perfect second sight.

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A Belloc IV

Take no councils from the east:
old Eden was the place,
remember, where in arrogance
our parents fell from grace.

The east is where the sun crops up-
the young and callow sun
that friend and foe alike alack
so goldenly smiles on.

Yeh, so he rises in the east
and yes, his beams are pretty
but those that truck in such sweet yeast
shall bank but scorn and pity.

And, though he rises in the east
remember, mum, the west
is where, day done, his work complete,
he comes at last to rest.

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A Case

Mine is the case of a stolen car
abandoned in a road beside a fen.
Windshield battered, doors ajar,
tires lifted, slashed and burned within.
Headlights dimmed-their bright beams gnouted out,
antenna snapped, my thin, quivering ear,
Radio rudely jimmied from my throat
glovebox pilfered-all its tapes and gear.

Something criminal has occurred in me-
perhaps there is a body in my trunk
maybe some overturned complacency
sets your soul astir in such a funk-
makes you look and quickly race away
at twilight when alone you pass me by.

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A Dream Come True

Many who'd settle for a dream-come-true
Heaven showers with the what-will-do.

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A Jeremiad

As the swimmer propelled himself through the watery furrows
His arms thrashing admirably to clear a path
His legs churning admirably to push and be pulled
Into the vaccuum created by his sweeping arms
The cameras followed his course from every conceivable angle
Even-yes, even from below, leaving nothing to the imagination
The TV viewer being denied not a single drop
Not a single breath or gasp for air:
Such coverage is, indeed, admirable-
Nothing is left to the dull imagination:
To the dull imagination, thrashing away behind closed lids.
Nothing at all.
Soon, when there has long been nothing to imagine
When image replaces imagination, entirely,
When 'news' replaces reason entirely
When imagination is replaced entirely by technology
And reality by its virtual version
Imagination will prove an unnecessary, even risky, commodity
Soon the imagination will prove an encumbrance
And be forbidden completely by people with cameras and badges.
But please don't get me wrong, I've a camera myself-
In fact, my best friend is a photographer.

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A Jeremiad 2

Thanks, Mr. Mitt,
for your thoughts on Iran.
Now we know who to vote for.

Morgan Michaels

A Near-Drowning

Once, when I was a kid, I nearly drowned.
The sand of Old Orchard Beach was in-
dustrially pure, each grain
slipperysmooth and round.

Here, like a Ferris-wheel on its side,
to calliope strains, a horsey carousal
cranked itself dutifully 'round and around;
There, like a carousal on end,

while a Ferris-wheel fenced the horizon-
so far off none could hear
the wails of its coming-over-the-top riders.
its spokes shot glints of silver

toward the red perimeter. So clean, the air
could fry babies in minutes-
fresh and very Maine. Colors were brighter, then.
I stood at the shifting shoreline

having turned my backside to the surf
(which you should probably never do)
to watch the driftwood-colored seagulls
hover quaveringly in place,

when, from behind a frigid wave knocked me flat,
spinning and numbing me like the beginning
part of Blindman's Bluff.*
Certain I was done,

it began slowly to drag me seaward
clenched in the foaming
fingers of its sizzling grip.
'Shucks', I thought, 'I'm gone.'

But, never say 'never' I suppose.
Next moment, I felt the firm hand of my father
on my arm, contending with the wave,
warning it 'not so fast, '

and strong arms hoisting me skyward,
setting me, sputtering, on my feet.
Everything was suddenly shivery,
and swaddled in spotless terry.

We never mentioned it again, the near-drowning, thus,
watchfully friendly with the sea I remained.
In a house on stilts that night
I sniffed and ate peanut-butter and bacon sandwiches on toast-
but my snot was unusually salty for a week.

* a popular party game

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A Roo'

A large, red kangaroo
hopped into a bar on West 47th St.
and ordered a martini.

The bartender, polishing a
glass, really didn't
feel like being inter-active,

but ever the professional, remarked,
'We don't get many kangaroos
in this place-know what I mean'?

The kangaroo, a little miffed, replied
'No. And at these prices
You're not likely to be getting many more, either'.

Morgan Michaels

A Simple Awakening

Birdsong. From no lone singer but multitudes-
Breaching the shutters, the curtain's hem
Choristers of indeterminate hue, because viewless-
Canzone spilling over the sill,
A tree branched with pure gold, doubtless, their oratory,
Casting a silver shadow.

Another perfect day. Like someone still with air aplenty
Launched, flutter-kicking, from the floors of sleep
Through quivering blue toward a shimmering scrim
He cannot see past, I glide-
The distance not so great, no need to hurry.
Golden-that is the morning

I must enter, eventually, reluctantly.
Sleep was nice and full of visitor fishes, who
Vanish when you try to feed or obligate them in any way
But this is, after all, the novel day
Full of choices-chances to improve the past and
Tool the future.

You, who from above observe my passage
Through fathoms and smile elegantly when
My lives, tired of sighing, burst exhausted through the top,
Issuing invitations to breathe your empyrean,
Look, I am more than for it-
Look, I am awake.

Morgan Michaels

A Sonnet

Tear from the mother her wrinkled new one
order to the front the perfect only son
drive a daughter wailing from her father's home
swear the gods no more in heaven roam
carve in old columns blasphemous graffitti
quarter the vassal proferring the treaty
banish moonshine off the chilly tarn
bludgeon roses, stifle music's charm
gutter-decant a ten year burgundy
redden, tetra-ethylate the sea
blurt the blushful sins confided thee
arm yourself with smiling perjury
but never from your heart my love remove
all, to that, is little to reprove.

Morgan Michaels

A Troubling Moment

It was all very troubling:
after seven years of marriage to her whiny husband
with whom he exchanged a functional loathing
when their virtual twin-ship must needs be admitted
in spite of biological differences, by all involved,
when Fortune seemed to shine again,
his sister began to show; smiled mysteriously
informing the table at dinner one night, 'Yes, it was true'
confirming her first pregnancy at thirty-three.

He contributed to the round of clapping
the oohs and ahs of genuine delight;
too, tinked his water glass with a nearby fork,
the tedious wedding enacted again
in a smaller, more intimate version,
but it made him uneasy.
It was the usual thing: love-neutralized venom-
he didn't like it-it gave him indigestion,
the now-endless prospect of blame.

And then she raised her glass
and took a sober little sip of water
having given up table wine a month before
and looking sideways at her father swallowed
her eyes full of love and shared, secret triumph
in acknowledgement of their unassailable,
their special bond. She had done what she could:
the future was up to itself.

Morgan Michaels

A Will

What is the essence of a will?
Codicil on codicil
on codicil.

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A.M. Oversight

If I were God
and in passing, caught sight
of you, Manhattan,
on such a summer's day morning,
sparkling
divvying the waters
of the mighty Hudson like the rock you are,
in twain (in what else?) . If I...

...were God,
who is quite old-
bent over and not a little crotchety;
who long ago stopped having sex in any form
and who has only one child...and...

caught sight of you, Manhattan,
monkey's fist of glimmers and glares,
rayons and fountains
and finials of blinding light;

and your miles of highways
on which numberless cars
idle, gleam and fume;
and your banks of leaves, shimmering,
though only ginkos
though only locusts
and, not, say, the darkly-glowering, cloud-like trees of Rome,

looking down and out over all, I would say,
'nice going, Manhattan, even if only the handiwork of men,
you're looking good this morning.
But, you, little man, little barbarian, come back-
when you polished the Chrysler building top last,
see-you missed a spot.'

Morgan Michaels

Age: A Near-Haiku

A sneaking suspician
You'll never be comfy in
any position

Morgan Michaels

Albi ne doleus...

What good does it to fret and kick
over the latest indiscretions of a thoughtless girl
Albi, or churn out strophes on love's labor
lost to a younger man?

Behind her bangs Lycorida
burns with lust for Cyrus-himself unashamed
to worship Pholean, that slut, who claims
'Sooner will Apulian wolves

Shag Coan ewes than I that snake! '
Suchwise is brazen Venus pleased to vex us
yoking disparate souls in twain, then laughing
cruelly at her joke.

Why. I myself was wooed by a highborn lass
once, but fell to the charms of Myrtle, who in fact,
purchased her bonds, turned 'round and slipped
them smoothly on me.

Morgan Michaels

Almost An Epitaph

Eluded by Elizabeth
Stung and chastened, jealous Death
(who had some business in LA)
On riding out to Monterey
Was heard to say, beneath his breath
'I didn't want her anyway.'

Morgan Michaels

Almost An Epitaph 2

Searching daisies for her chain
Jane bestrode an adder's bed-
Arriving promptly on the scene
Death pronounced her duly dead.
'Well done, my pet, ' he commented
and stroked the adder's scaley head.

Morgan Michaels

Almost An Epitaph 3

From his sacerdotal bed
Looking Death full in the eye
(Who only smiled in reply)
A bishop, in succumbing, said
'Despite, O Death, our best surmise
You always come as a surprise.'

Morgan Michaels

Almost An Epitaph 4

Ashamed of stealing Gina's breath
Panic seized the heart of Death
Who, finger's shaking as he wrote,
Carefully composed a note
Then scattered valiums beside
To make it look like suicide.

Morgan Michaels

Almost An Epitaph 5

Leery what the Judge would say
When he had taken Jeremy
Death devised an alibi:
'Your Honor, I was taking tea
With the devil in Capri
As he can surely testify.'

Morgan Michaels

Almost An Epitaph 6

Seducing little Sarabeth
A penitent and teary Death
Struck the ground and bitterly
Bewailed his wretched lechery
Before he stretched the pretty fool
Among the violets, to cool.

Morgan Michaels

Almost An Epitaph 7

Battling so hard for Jeff
Aching and exhausted, Death
Sat on a rock, and, out of breath,
Mopped his brow with a handkerchief
Before he tossed the battered corse
Resplendent, o'er his boney horse.

Morgan Michaels

American Lit: Multiple Choice

Please Choose One Only: Emily Dickinson

1) was obviously schizophrenic

2) had an obvious personality disorder with obsessive-compulsive traits

3) was obviously color-blind

4) was obviously in love with her sister-in-law

5) none of the above, obviously

Morgan Michaels

An Eccentric

Be virtuous and you will be eccentric-Mark Twain

Yes, she was a countess, she said,
but being of a mind concise and thrifty
added 'that, and a dollar fifty
will get you on the subway-'
A long time ago, surely.

She rode to harriers
not like ladies did, side-saddle,
she said, but properly astraddle,
following the yelping, fanned-out pack
over the hills and back.

Later she studied at Trinity
getting a 'dispensation'
becoming a gynecologist-obstetrician.
'Leave from the crown'? I frowned, expectantly,
'No, from the bishop', she replied.

But she never practiced-
first there was the war; later the AMA
back home, dealt her the no-way.
And if you didn't ask her she would plainly say
'So I spent my life in marine-salvage.'

And she did. Comfortable with card-readers,
superstitious as practical,
once at dinner she told me she'd seen Michael
the Archangel behind a church choir stall. I just kept eating.
What he was doing there I didn't ask.

Morgan Michaels

An Eccentric II

Was she ever married? Surely you'll want to know.
Yes and no being the precise answer:
yes, to a man who died of colon cancer-
to him she proved a good and prudent wife;
but, no, it was all remedial. The real love of her life

was a viscount who vanished
during a bombing mission over the continent-
or was it the Pacific? T'was him lent
her life it's strange trajectory-
it's sad 'sic transit Gloria' quality.

No, she couldn't forget her lost aviator.
Wrote, you might say, till she was blue
the world over for a clue
to his whereabouts. Was he tortured?
Was he ever, mangled, found? Succumb to some

lonely impulse to leave his life behind-
including among it's jetsam, her?
she doubted it, but never could be sure.
His was the real, the true love of her life.
Can one, at heart, be wed to any other?

Each Thursday she served
lunch at the Center to people she called 'old':
some younger than her, if the truth be told,
age, for her, being a mere tendency to dependency.
In return she got discount tickets to shows.

Morgan Michaels

An Eccentric III

It took just a while to conclude
she lived on a pension that
even a cat would sniff at,
and SSI, of course, so when we went monthly
to Tir Na Nog, I usually paid.

A doctor suggested warfarin
for her atrial fibrillation.
'I appreciate the recommendation',
she replied, 'but I'll take no rat's bane
and what's more, intend to outlive you! '

So she compromised with aspirin,
dying at home, ninety-ish, years later.
Annoyingly, she'd say 'see you later alligator',
each time we parted. I understood-
folks get used to the idioms of their days.

She was cremated. At her uptown memorial
leaning my arms on an odd upsurge in the table linen
I asked her cousin Ellen
where her ashes were. 'You're leaning on them, '
she replied, slightly taken back.

And so I was. 'See
you later, alligator,
I said, and once again, 'see you later.'
Adding 'nice to know you.'
and so it was.

*Tir Na Nog an Irish restaurant. 'The Land Of Dreams'

Morgan Michaels

An Intruder

The screen door creaked open.
The plein-aire sun aimed blinding white shafts
at the plated seed-boxes, heating up their hulls.
Inside, Marcellina made her mournful confession
'Rinconosci in questo amplesso'
a laugh, no matter how often you hear it.
Hopping hot the terrace tiles:
southward, the city vanished in smog.
The ESB glinted dully in its hazy pellicle.
I stood blinking in the doorway
wearing a sweeping, snow-white cotton caftan from Connolly's,
its cowl down, looking much like the priest of Yoruba
who lives in the projects across the street
and strolls to the corner candy store on Sundays;
or, watering can in hand
like the ghost of the season, fleeing
or a Roman fertility deity, of priapistic leanings.
White is cool:
For some reason known best to God,
darks drink in sunlight repelled by whites.
This is scientific fact, I kid you not,
accounting for those dark lines under the eyes of footballers
and much, much more

'Hey', I said...

Morgan Michaels

An Intruder 2

'Hey', I said, aiming the hey downward
toward a pot wedged in the corner, carefully planted
two weeks before with seeds of batchelor's buttons
according to package guidelines
for time, depth, moisture, exposure, etcetera
and set by bushes, charged with yellow roses
nodding heavily to one another, which
thorns notwithstanding, I intended to douse.
'Hey' to a smooth, gray pigeon-
attractive enough as pigeons go
who'd turned the porch into a dove-cote
and a flower pot into a sort of nest.
We'd gotten used to each other
after it wore off-early mistrust,
like the quick wore off the planters
exposing map-like zones of tolerance
respecting each other's goals:
that being the most important function of tolerance:
to stay the hand while we get used to things;
and miffed I was at first,
to see labor lost, the sprouts all squashed-
expecting to see them instead like a hot stock
split and split and fill the pot.
Alarming but charming the way she made her shape conform
to the bed of dirt, bent on her intent
brood-hypnotized thoughtless,
pigeons not held to think much, anyway.

Morgan Michaels

An Intruder 3

Let me say straightaway, pigeons don't do it for me.
Maybe I've lived in the city too long.
If men can be called opportunists in the world of nature
Pigeons might be called the same in the world of men-
Having no clear role but to propagate the species
Which they appear to do with gusto,
Day and night, all seasons of the year, unlike men.
Unless perhaps to serve as falcon-fodder.
They speak no intelligible language, don't sing, and mightily puffed,
Drag their lecharous tails through the dust of August
Bill-cooing and straddling each other in a lovey-dovey way.
Their nests scarcely masterpieces of avian architecture-
In fact, they seem the air-buses of the earthier bird world
Weak-footed, bottom-heavy:
But this pigeon seemed different-
It was clean, pearley gray and, though motionless, industrious,
And bore a mirror of irridescence at its throat;
Minded its own business,
Bent, it seemed, on following the dictates of instinct
And wanting no trouble.
'Shoo, ' I said, firmly. It watched me in red-eyed wonder.
What to do? I felt like an intruder in my own home.
So I called Bob for some New Jersey council,
Across the river, soon after the pigeon moved in.
We talked for an hour-his opinion was very clear
But I didn't like it-it just wasn't me.
I am not...

Morgan Michaels

An Intruder 4

I am not superstitious. In the least.
But I found his suggestion to reach inside the nest-
However shambley-grab the eggs and sow them in the vacant lot next door
Over the rail, you know, among the standing tares and purple thistles
(Opening Nature's ring...slipping in the non-conducting link,
So to speak) wierd.
Barbaric. Unlucky. Un-nerving. Contra naturam. All that.
Also a bit crude.
And certain to have the same unwholesome effect
As opening an umbrella in the house, say, or
Failing to say 'gesundheit' when somebody sneezes,
Allowing a black cat to race across your path,
Separating twins and other indiscretions
Popularly (and, so, indisputably) held
To conduit disaster.
This, I recalled, was the new millenium. There
Was only one thing to do-get a second opinion.
'From many, one.' The more the merrier.
So I called my other friend Grey Wolf-
Part Shoshone-who better to ask?
Standing ready to act on his advice, which came quickly:
'Don't be silly, ' he said 'leave 'em alone, ' adding,
A little hungrily, I thought, 'unless you're going to eat them, that is.'
Fair advice.
So that was that.....

Morgan Michaels

An Intruder 5

But I wanted to be sure so I called my next door neighbor-
Not really a friend, but whose advice I entertain from time to time.
'Look, ' she said, 'there are plenty better things to worry about-
Every day more and more, thanks to people's gullibility,
And the disaster mentality created by the press.
(Daphne is fiercely anti-media) Haven't you noticed?
E.G. the same supplements that were said to promote longevity, yesterday
(And which cost an arm and a leg at the health food store, not incidently)
Now will kill you. Take anti-oxidants, for example. Take vitamin E.'
'Take what? ' I asked, not following.
'Surprise! ' People who take vitamin E die sooner. It's been shown.
The whole thing's a scam, cooked up by the pharmaceutical industry, for...'
I didn't know. But it made sense, now she mentioned it.
'You're sure? '
'Sure.'
'But what should I do? '
'Just eat a balanced diet.'
'I mean about the pigeon.'
'Oh, that. Forget it. I'm glad it's not my problem. I detest pigeons.
There's nothing you can do about it, anyway.'
'Maybe I shouldn't fret it.'
'I didn't say THAT. Just choose your obsessions carefully
so as not to waste time.'
That seemed very fair. 'What do you worry about? , I asked,
Like someone who admitted they needed instruction.
'Right now? The Greenland Ice Sheet. It's melting, ya' know.
Look, gotta run.' Click.

That night there was a terrible storm...

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An Intruder 5 cont.

That night there was a terrible storm.
The winds whistled like bombs afalling,
Seeking but not finding their intended
Targets, then exploding anyway,
sowing fluid ruin. It was neverever still;
Rain pelted the windowpane
With individual drops that coalesced
Into shifty-eyed gremlins, flattening their
Noses against the glass, emitting their tongues,
Rapping and demanding entry.
Lightning ripped the sky from the Bridge
Of Brooklyn to the Heights of Inwood
And made the room momently bright
With flickering, livid pseudo-daylight. Profundo
Thunder banged a kettle, now and then
Or rattled heaven's bowl, or
Sang jagged basso in the unholy choir of elements.
Great, sturgeon-like winds swam north to south
Nosing around shreds of red-underlit cloud (presumably)
And slipping about the tops of skyscrapers.
Something urn-like, made of pressed plastic
Rolled around hollowly in my dreams
Troubling them like a letter from a lawyer.
I imagined Pigeon in her flowerpot
The pot slowly filling up with rainwater,
The pale eggs submerged (mostly) and Pigeon
Protective wings outspread, trying desperately
But futily to shield them from the rain.

The first thing I did, next (actually rather nice)
Morning was to open the porch door and...

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An Intruder, cont, cont

The first thing I did next (actually rather fine)
Morning was to open the door and check on Pigeon.
I admire determination in man or bird
Even determination ventured for its own sake
There being no other course to choose;
That, notwithstanding, in all faith,
I expected to see Pigeon fled, the flower pot empty,
Her shambles of a nest gone, gone, gone,
Blown, stick over piddling stick under paltrey stick, to the four corners-
Swept away, like Giancarlo Giannini
In the so-named movie popular a few years back.
But (surprise) , weatherwise all was fine and morning-bright
Whereas the heavens were low and kvetchy, overnight,
Now they were high, preternaturally blue and cloud free;
Whereas, last night the rain made credible the flood-myth
Now the leaves were pliant, crisp and green,
Like the skin of youth, restored,
As though to show, despite the furor of the storm
They pulled through pretty good, anyhow.
Only some water stood placid in the bowls
To evidence the deluge of the night-
The bees already grazing in the buds
As though it never happened, the storm,
Nature being so resilient, usually,
Recovery, for her, just another part of the game-
Foregone, for granted taken, no big deal.
The stone was bathed in squares of yellow light
And barely any shade. But Pigeon? Prepared for the worst
And peeping between two parted fingers, hand
Otherwise shielding my eyes, I forced myself to look:
Ausgezeichnet! (or whatever the word is) there she was!
Quite unflapped and looking in fine feather
Sitting roundly on the flower-pot nest, half-sunk,
In that peculiar red-eyed trance
I called determination-if it wasn't just instinct working
Looking, if anything, cleaner than before,
Looking as if nothing happened,
As, indeed, nothing really had,
Storms unfraught with memories, correlations, remembered horrors
To those living in Nature. They simply are.

'Hi, Pigeon, ' I cried, quickly forgetting my fears, ...

Morgan Michaels

Anatomy Of A Song

The thing was finally strapped down tight and quite asleep.
drip, drip, drip, from the bag, thru the tubing, under the skin-
dewy fluids and a rapid, sliding bubble, round first, then oblong,
How thru its medium it squeezed, salmon-like!
graphs, monitors, stainless, blips, bleeps;
and, like camels padding a silk road, the up-thrown glyphs, evidencing life, tireless;
the easy purl of snoring:
snore, snore-this was anesthesia!
the gentle rise and fall of the rib cage.

'Let us begin', said the technician.
'Keep your eyes on the screen'.

In came the specialist, gloved green, who even masked, bore
an uncanny resemblence to Eddie Poe.
From a table she chose a scalpel and a pair of sterile pinking shears:
crunch, crunch.
Soon there were feathers-over the walls, on the floor,
sticky feathers everywhere; then flew out,
arpeggios, glissandi by the score,
groans and sighs galore but no proper blood.
diads, triads, quite a few fourths, some fifths,
sevenths, octaves, glorious augmentations.
and appogiaturas.

'My God'! she swore, in a sweat of wonder,
'the thing's all feathers! Suction, please'.
phytaphytaphytaphytaphytaphytaphytaphytaphyta

It was cold in the room
Everyone had goose-flesh.
Everyone had back-aches.
Photos were snapped
For home viewing, later.
After three hours or more
The boys were sick of the deever
So they closed with catgut.

'Feathers' was the diagnosis.
'Too many and not enough'.
'One removed from craw'.

Morgan Michaels

Anniversary

The kitchen calender, impaled by a nail in the wall,
rifled by the breeze over the still-damp floor,
its gridded edges stamped with dates
under Fantin La Tour plates,
is the wind's rolodex;
the blue filled corners of each graven square,
like window boxes after April snow,
says it's been a week beyond a year
since your long, inelegant demise, O Mother dear.

I see you snatched from the doldrums of Providence
where the streets had names like Main, Mt Pleasant and Charles,
transported from the high-school football fields of Providence,
so quiet, one could recite rosaries unperturbed,
despair tweaked only by the ticking clock,
the lovliest orphan on the block,
trusting only in what's plain: God's choosey grace,
that awesome provost, his Holy Ghost
and your own sweet face.

Again, I see you up with the sun, shouting awake
the sleepers sleeping, keeping house, house
for the tough but worth it spouse you took to wed,
a vile privilege, no mistake,
disappointment a sort of natural glue:
life, never perfect, wasn't designed to be so.
The depths of your redoubtable pool of grace
dwindled sadly, as life wore on, and only God
so friendly, early on, to blame.

I hear you channeling tales that told us who we were:
the corn-pilfering deer that bounded from the barn at dawn.
The wolves that crept down and howled in the Vermont foothills.
The squaw that came calling and unlike Whitman's stayed.
The supervised rite of the campus dance
where future soul-mates met by chance.
You clapped when each year I unwrapped the sack-butt-playing
shepherd in yellow hose, who sat at the corner of the creche.
Niagara, when pop complained the Canadian side was bigger.

Morgan Michaels

Anniversary 2

Understanding comes in waves and whether waves come
too breathlessly fast or dawdle conscionably
out of the future or the past,
it doesn't matter, everything adding up and cancelling out.
From the golden fields of youth and Need
through the inexplicable let-downs of passing time,
evolve differently, often,
than the ways we expect them to.
Purity is all.

Mother, beauty
worthy to be sculpted by Pisano,
you thought you had a hotline to God;
in fact, you did,
via the cable of infinite trust.
Many imagine righteousness a bulwark against evil.
It isn't always. Still others say you get what you deserve.

Deserve? Ditch that awful habit
of saying what others deserve:
desert the moity of a harsher ethic
incomprehensible to the catholic mind.
In the end, who doesn't deserve salvation?
Faust, stepped out of glibness, held his tongue.
Nobody knows anything-you're a fool if you say you do.
There's remedy and reason for each transgression.
Mother, you did not deserve this.

Morgan Michaels

Answers

There are lots of questions
some good, none bad.
Time, overwhelmed,
and finally a little bored with so many questions,
answers all the same
not maliciously but frankly
because Time has found
the answer unvarying, always the same.
Time, the adjudicator
whose eyes are green stones, by the way, nods and gently says
'yes, Joy is real, but temporary;
entirely valid, it's case.
Go for it, go for it, whatever-
at all and every stage
All and every....stage', Time intones,
Then turning meditative
and almost forgetting the question,
'just do no harm.
But don't expect it to last-
that's fool's work;
and leave the furniture alone!
the careful configuration of furniture
cannot insure happiness. Much.
Happiness comes from acceptance
of the furniture as it is. Largely.
Everyone is good at something'.
Then Time, exhausted and sickened
by so much sanctimony, sinks back, sits up, adding,
a bit sadly, 'Remember, in the end
the answer is always the same'.

Morgan Michaels

Antigone

She lived in a bowl
On the kitchen countertop
At the end of a shaft of light
In the company of a waterwheel

Between the frill of the rim
Where the glass thickened to a lip
And the bowl's bottom, carpeted
With Perl mutter shingle

Aligned, more or less
To cosmic north and south
Jeweled with yellow beads
Like the windows of an airbus.

Balanced in her heaven
By fins that beat dimly
A mouth that sucked in water
As if fueled by a rubber band,

Her eyes like ebony pin-heads
Her form horizontally striped blue-
Occasionally emitting a single bubble
Or grazing at the waterline

She was a vertebrate all right
Highly evolved and alone
Little fish, little pond, big name-
Antigone. What became of you?

She lived in a bowl
On the kitchen countertop
At the end of a shaft of light
Antigone, what became of you?

Morgan Michaels

ASong

Many wonders disappear
never to return, so they say-
Tyre's towers, Minerva's spear
Ptolemy's library
And that paragon, the Parthenon
stove by a shell one day
But I don't care, let them disappear,
I don't care, I really don't care.

refrain

So they say, so they say, but I don't care, no
I don't, not a bit, let them go
I don't care at all what is gone or will come
I don't care anyhow.

Even Earth grows old
and trudges a little on her way
Her heart goes limping worn and cold
and duller every day.
Chorister lark is driven out
by starling, hardier kine-
But I care no more, what comes about
Is no concern of mine.

refrain

I woke in the dead of night
from a heaving, foul unrest
Somewheres I knew the Sphinx was a-move
howling and biting her breast
There on the day's rim
fashioning itself in flames
xxx
Rosa-Munda hung.

refrain

Someday a cloud will come
to cover the earth, so they say
There'll be fiery rain and icicle rain
The mountains will dance with the seas.
Famine will enter, counting his ribs
and Death, the equestrian
But I won't fear 'cause I don't care
I don't care, let them come.

refrain

Morgan Michaels

Augustinians In The Piazza

Footless. like birds of paradise, they course
bound for vespers? maybe just for dinner.
Thirty fingers mutely holding forth
Two comely novices, a grand monsignor.

Overhead the dual cathedral spires
close rank in mutual salute.
The swallows swarm. Upon this hour of hours
even our vast umbrellas tip hat.

We are the world they skirt
our tipsy tables caught by falling night
We watch them as they drift across the court
They watch our liquors catch the failing light

as though from our too-worldly wine and bread,
resplendent smile, there leapt a perfect arc
over which they resolutely tread
until they reach the portals of the park,

the cloister, darkening on the further side
where lemons glow within the deepening green
and unicorn and maiden still preside
and they are drawn into the what-has-been.

Morgan Michaels

Aunt Fritzi I

What she was is not exactly clear
but as often shown resting in an armchair reading the Times,
a journalist, perhaps? the way she looked
she could have been an ex-rockette.

It is natural and understandable
that she kept so firm a rein on Nancy,
her ward, troublesome child,
who lived with her for reasons

equally not clear; her parents dying
simultaneously in a plane crash? ; maybe her father
was a diplomat in a communist state;
maybe she had a learning disorder

or colic, and her mother,
kinder than an antique Greek, declined the exposure option;
or maybe the child was just impossible
in all the many ways a child can be

and her parents said: 'here, Fritzi, you take her
otherwise it's the orphanage'. And never
having had children of her own (maybe she just forgot to)
decided to make the supreme sacrifice.

It isn't clear, like most of life, even if
you thought it was, early on,
it isn't, and comely parts failing, you'll
learn to value a Fritzi,

Morgan Michaels

Aunt Fritzi II

always there, when-
ever Nancy came home from gallivanting with Sluggo
that sometime visitor from the other side of the tracks,
sitting vigilant, reading the paper

in smiling deference to Pascal's advice
to dodge unhappiness by sitting quietly in a small chair; what,
by lamplight was she reading, forever? The obits
the classifieds? maybe the funnies?

Anyhow Nancy, hush,
wash your ears, strap on your training bra, and
by the way, forget your allowance, you're grounded
till your homework's done, corrected to perfection,

or better, go to bed. TV,
that influential new medium, might as well be orbiting
the earth with Sputnik as far as your concerned.
The trouble started here,

and you, Fritzi, brilliant fake, meet another.
Out of those polka dots, now, and into some black. Live!
Get a baby sitter, gam lady, make yourself smart,
I'll pick you up at eight.

Morgan Michaels

Barbarian

He or she who blindly
follows orders from on high:
Who, jealous of any Past
ignores it, or worse, destroys it.

Morgan Michaels

Belch

Breathless, in a net, we captured you-
Ring around the yew tree
Threw you bright-eyed in a gilded cage
And watched to see what would happen next: Surprise!
You thrived and seemed happy enough.

At night you fluffed your feathers
And made yourself egg-big
For insulation-it was a nice trick:
Warmth to your remotest toes.

The kitchen light suddenly turned on,
Late, you'd be found head wedged
Under your wing, asleep for a sec,
Till you awoke, vigilant as ever.

Singing was not your forte. All day
Instead, you belted out your one sole note.
We'd hoped for better, but this was the
Way you registered your will in the world.

That human...

Morgan Michaels

Belch II

That human obsession, Liberty, for you,
Meant, not unbridled skies,
But freedom from assault, which,
Though you never suffered, believed
Eternally in the possibility of.

So day after day you sat tight
Depending on a cuteness you didn't even know
You had to impel your keepers to
Fill your twin cups with canary seed and tap-water.

Till the day you unaccountably
Fell off your perch, dead, your rubber band
Snapped, or unwound or something like that,
To the gravel floor of the cage,
Your belching days done,
There being no heaven for sparrows.

We fished you out, rolled you up
Carefully in cheesecloth, little mummy,
And buried you in the back yard,
Marking the site, never, with a cross, theless.

Morgan Michaels

Between

Between ourselves and the Gods
there is a void
so wide, so drop-off deep-
mountains on mountain stacked
cannot succeed to fill.

Between ourselves and the Truth
there interpose
an obfuscating maze-
an all-but-endless hall
called the material.

Between ourselves and the poem
there is a page
so blank, so white so long
that glyph by glyph
we undertake to scrawl.

Labor, Art, Grace-
these are the corkscrews given
all men by Dominion
to pick and plunder these
august mysteries.

Morgan Michaels

Bible Burning

The flames leapt higher and the fellow was dancing insanely about it when I arrived on the scene with my walkie-talkie and my fire
extinguisher. I jumped from the jeep before it stopped, kissed the driver and off she sped. I'd been sent by headquarters to look into a 'situation'. There, as expected, I saw a scene of unspeakable desecration. A grinning hulk of a figure was burning bibles in the little square before 'TICKETS'.
'Stop! Are you crazy? I said, running up. Do you know what you're doing? '?
'Yes', he giggled proudly, 'to both questions'.
'You are burning the Word of G

Morgan Michaels

Bible Burning II

'I'm sick and tired of this nonsense'.
'What do you mean 'nonsense. Those are perfectly good bibles. They cost alot'.
(I must admit this last point was speculation on my part)
'That's what I mean'.
'Wait. Have you no faith. Have you no respect for the price of things'? Do you think those are Qu'rans?
'Ha! What is faith'?
'Ah', I said, scratching my head, 'faith is the belief in things unseen. Hey, watch that match'!
'Pernicious, pernicious influence', he insisted, in a way that convinced me I was not going to change his mind.
'Pernicious influence, my.....foot. Every word of that book is inspired. Especially Deuteronomy. So put that in your pipe and....
Only too late I realized this was the wrong expression-
'....smoke it'.
'Ah'g'wan', he exclaimed. 'F-ing Republican'.
This was too much.

Morgan Michaels

Bible Burning III

'Look', I protested, 'I voted for Obama. And I probably will again. And I have a degree from bible school that I still owe for. So, there'.
The hulking form shrugged, mumbled something and continued dancing.
Someone, obviously a colleague, ran up with a wheel-barrow full of slightly worn Gideons', doubtless collected from the surrounding hotels. These he dumped alongside the raging bon-fire.
'More fuel', he cackled. 'Hey, is this guy botherin' you'?
'Nah, 'e's just tryin' t' get warm. We're havin' a conversation.
This, I thought, was fair.
'Oh, ok'.
And turning about he drove his wheel-barrow off.
S'Ah'g'wan. So arrest me, already.
'You couldn't afford a lawyer', I said, disdainfully.I will not have those bibles treated like Qu'rans.
'Lawyers', he cried, and spat. Lawyers think they're above the law'.
I had obviously touched a nerve.

Morgan Michaels

Bible Burning IV

'Once they get your deposit, there's no end of their 'little charges'. Pretty soon you're twenty-thousand in hock. And still no divorce.
He stirred the embers with a stick and began to feed the flames with the Gideons as if they were lobsters at a clam-bake. Then he lit a cigarette. His face was deeply scarred. He was missing two fingers of his right hand, which he used, anyway.
'No wonder', I thought. 'But the poor bibles. All that gold leaf'.
'Would you like to burn one', he said suddenly.
'Absolutely not'!
'Ah c'mon'.
'Well, maybe just one', I returned. Anything to be agreeable.
I picked up a Gideons' and laid it carefully on, thinking of my 'friends' and prepared to jump back. I must admit, nothing happened, though I won't say it felt good.
I sighed and looked around. Times Square had never looked more beautiful. There was nothing I could do to convince him of the depth of his depravity. So I took out my cell-phone, which has a hidden camera, and took a picture. Then I radioed my driver. Headquarters would get a full report.

Morgan Michaels

Briefs

Those darn Greeks were right-
Enjoy everything but enjoy
in moderation.

For Burns' birthday Duncan
Of Edinborough read.
Why have the imitation
when you can have the masterpiece?

The Past-morals and ideals
murky and opinioned
at worst, but for architecture
undeniably interesting.

Fluent in English, having impulses
and not knowing what else to do
Jon dubbed himself a poet-
gifting the world
with countless examples of his art.

Late for her tryst with Mars
Venus twinkles in-
Nightime otherwise calm and chill.

From fifty centuries of soiled morals
(read agricultural)
Edna struggles to be free
and has almost made it.

Morgan Michaels

Briefs 2

Time is an illusion
devised by taskmasters
To urge their agendas on others
for the sake of cheap labor
In hopes of obtaining riches.
Time-a necessary evil:
how necessary, how evil
depends on your needs
And the extant to which you rely on others
To make you a fortune
Even though they find sustainence in the process.
But paying little to make big fortunes
(even if in the end you are called a philanthropist)
Is always evil.

Morgan Michaels

Briefs 3

To those who have succeeded
I would say
Congratulations! Enjoy your millions.
To those who have not
and worry about it, I would say
'Keep trying'.

Morgan Michaels

Briefs 4

The universe is neither good nor bad
It is the glittering brushwork of God-
His creative energy gone purposefully amok.
That we might admire it
Or guess, therefrom, at the mind of its Maker
Dawned on Him in only the vaguest terms
Done, did he disperse Himself within it
Or abandon it altogether?
It seems, the answer, to make some difference-
To make some difference, which of these He did.

Morgan Michaels

Briefs 5

The Universe is neither good nor bad
Tho' many think it is.
Watched, the stars appear to move-
They do not, they sit still.
Men are beset by delusion:
It all seems a necessary evil
deeming this right and that wrong-
using one's own as a measure of another's anguish.
It would be comical were't not fatal.
The Universe is neither bad nor good
But we must scramble to make it so-
That being the eternal, conflictual task of humankind
That task distinguishing us from the animals.
The Universe is neither bad nor good.
What do you think? Talk amongst yourselves.

Morgan Michaels

Briefs 6

The Universe is neither good nor bad-
Good is mere cultural consensus
And what is profitable for you to think or do
As a member of a group
With an assigned role therein.
Good is what your parents told you was good.
Good is what your peers told you was good.
Good is what the Press told you was good.
Good is what your payer tells you is good
Good is what you wouldn't know was good
Had you not been told, for good is expediency.
And whatever determines the best chance of getting paid.
And if you can clothe expediency with idealogy, oh my-
Then you've really got something!
Good unallied with expediency? Well,
'Do unto others' is still the best code
for the man who wants to do the right thing.
Using this code you cannot go wrong.

Morgan Michaels

Buddhist Hell

Its own dark hills and dales
Make Dante's version look like a putt-putt
Whereas its flames make Hell's own plain
Seem snug as an electric blanket
And though, condemned there, you can get sprung,
So can you, thanks, from Purgatory.

Keep me, Lord, from a place
Where there's no parole, no peer-jury, no
Lawyers, phones (even a broken one) or leave;
Where it was nobody's fault but your own.
Just forget the insanity plea
You are guilty, guilty, guilty.

Why, a list of its offences
Include some of my favorite sins.
By it's tenets I have already earned
Eons of time writhing in its coils;
Nor can its multiplicities-eight, in sum,
Make me very eager to convert.

And though there may be some who call
Very earth Hell
(I didn't think so when younger, but au contraire
Thought very Heaven earth)
With my luck, I'd select some vice
Firmly attaching the Hell-string.

Listen, now...

Morgan Michaels

Buddhist Hell II

Listen, now. There's a Hell
For killing (includes mosquitoes)
A Hell for thieving (not for me!)
A Hell for sexual deviants
A Hell for liars (excludes tactful omissions)
A Hell for drunks;

Oh, and here's something-
A Hell for those holding wrong opinions-
Be careful what you say, though-
It lasts ten-thousand years and burns like-well, Hell;
And a Hell for murderers lasting a whole kalpa-
Don't even ask what that is.

You may return as a marmot,
A coyote, a rat, an eel, or a snake, take your pick,
And for sundry misdeeds
Be crushed, impaled, boiled, quartered, sawn:
A sort of pre-Wolfenden existence-
So count your pebbles carefully, and choose.

Oh, I am more than sure
There are fearful souls whose hearts quake
At the least allegation of wrong-doing:
Who never swear, drink, lust, litter the gutter
With offal, lie at all,
Yet deem themselves lost;

I am equally...

Morgan Michaels

Buddhist Hell III

And equally sure there're those who steal,
Lie, cheat, gouge for necessities, disdain,
Capitolize on vice, ruin faith, loll in adulterous beds,
Yet fall asleep convinced Signor God is standing near
Ready to bless their efforts,
And everything in-between.

Then, there's the Buddha, very Gotoma himself,
Sitting cross-legged, in a strew of lotus petals,
Smooth kernal, fountain of every flowing mercy,
Scented center of every center's center,
Smiling amidst the fires of enlightenment,
Lifting, assisting each thing born to its orb.

Forget it. Unh-unh, no,
I swear now, staring at the Morning Star
Who 'dare to be happy as you are',
Advises, twinkling with laughter,
'You as me, me as you',
There is little perfect.

One thing I...

Morgan Michaels

Burial At Sea

Into the purple sea, feet first
along the whale's black back
stuck with barnacles and whorls of worms
slips the man from the boat
who used be a priest, then a rabbi
buttoning his macintosh.

Kersplash!

The whale glides off, laughing and spouting.
The boat drifts off, the sun comes out,
the atolls drift and shift, the heavens popsicle green.

'Isn't it lovely, ' sputters the man
(who has lost his stove pipe) emerging
back in air. 'Isn't it lovely.'

Morgan Michaels

Carpe Diem

Years've passed. Hate and distrust expired.
Your synapses turn to something akin to wood.
You motor's slowing nicely, as it should-
Frankly, you're more or less healthy, love, but tired
Tired having seen so many kinds of folly, learning as you
Did, all spring from the same rood:
Genuine Greed, imaginary Need-
Awful, loving, now, all points of view
Awful, loving all, now, clothed or nude.
Necessary, illness, now, and good-
Even your teeth's, which presently grow forward!
God, an indemnity, as you trudge death's doorward.
All you had you now admit, indeed,
But having, now, admit no longer need.

Morgan Michaels

Censored

Your body has outlived great lovliness-
fallen cities, scarred battle fields
tell of tumultuous yieldings, wasted pride
altars where men in ritual died.

Here beneath its shining tide
gently gathering, falling, rising,
sizzling merchants have gone down
princely barges long are drowned.

Still to all its treasures proved
one unwilling to be moved-
one its treasure long defied.

I have sacked its final plain
heard its mistress groan in pain-
plucked the ruby from the idol's eye

Morgan Michaels

Centenary

If, in your life's dark night,
if, in your life's very center
racing from berth to berth,
asleep in your cot in the steerage
you hear waltzes tossed
into your dreams like banners from above
and feeling a little shudder
imagine you hear groans
of metal rent asunder
pay it no mind.

It is nothing, nothing.
Your stomach grumbling, that's all.
It is indigestion.
Return to sleep. Turn over in your bed.
Ignore it-draw the covers tightly
over your head. In the cold sky of night
the lanterns of the stars burn brightly
and though there's far to go
tomorrow's a new day, guaranteed
to dawn rosy.

And if your dreams begin to list,
having come this far, don't be a bit
upset or complain more than once-
that is the way of fugitive dreams.
And if they tilt some more
just be glad they haven't tilted further.
But heeling to a reckless pitch
salvage what's left or abandon them outright-
cry yourself awake
leap to an idle boat and haul away.

Morgan Michaels

C'est Dommage

Very few people, finally, will do
Exactly what you wish them to.

Morgan Michaels

Commonly

Commonly, in Harlem, a screen door opening implies
the buzzy, busy entry of one of those enormous flies.

Why are these bugs so keen to trade an outside that seems nice enough
(and chockablock full of crud unclean)
for an inside, full of pesticide and stuff?

It seems they'd rather bang their heads against a windowpane
and once in, jealous of the sun, complain 'let me out, for heaven's sake-
there must be some mistake.'

I, though there must be a lesson in this, suspect, re-
stored to the great outdoors, the ingrate,
a repeat offender, like its host,
would probably do it again.

Morgan Michaels

Consolation

Dear,
There is a poem for every audience
And an audience for every poem-
This may not be yours-audience, that is,
Or it may-
Poets are jealous creatures
And justifiably-
Self-absorption is not the same as selfishness
You can make a good case for it.
On line, as in life
People rarely get what they deserve.
Just as Truth is relative.
This I'm telling you, so you know.
Trust me, I'm a lawyer.

Morgan Michaels

Constellation

Starry assembly why
do some see a dolphin
motoring the sky
while others see
a murky mess-
indistinct at best.

Morgan Michaels

David

When he was young
people loved David at first sight-
loved him until they came to hate him, that is, ,
beauty often willing to bestow itself
but rarely to share.

When he grew old
people hated David at first sight-
hated him until they came to love him, that is-
having no more beauty to bestow
at last he learned to share.

Morgan Michaels

Decline And Fall

What radiance! Were those sea-borne
dolphins crowding the bow,
the sun just peeping up?
Or mist-drawn rainbow?

Sigma, alpha, pi, ego,
phee, omega, greeted,
arms akimbo,
the smiling lith on the beach.

At dawn we quit ship,
skipped town altogether, drove
to the far side of the isle,
there being 'way too many people in port.

Morgan Michaels

Decoration

Decoration in music is often only that;
Decoration in poetry is often the poetry.

Morgan Michaels

Democracy

'Wait a minute', she said,
like it was my fault,
'you mean the Titanic was REAL? '

Attention snapped open like a fan.
Her question made me uncomfortable.
I could feel her fingernails
dig themselves into my arm.

'Well, I thought it was', I shrugged,
'but, then, maybe it wasn't.'

Morgan Michaels

Diotima

'Diotima', I asked, 'what is truth? '

'Truth', she said, is the operation of logic welcomed by Sentiment so long as it upholds certain foregone conclusions.'

'Well, then, ' I continued, scratching my head', 'what is Sentiment? '

'Sentiment', she said, 'is the conviction of the majority that its conclusions have something to do with the truth.'

'Oh. Thanks.'

Morgan Michaels

Diotima 2 part one

'There, ' she said, clearing her throat,
shaking the hair from her face
and taking a sip of Aether-Aid:
'Now you have it. Your own sweet dream.
I hope you like it. Tell me it isn't
just what you wanted.'

'Like it? I LOVE it. Thanks, alot.
But I'm gonna' turn the light out now,
I'm kinda' tired and I have to get up early.
They're flying me to Albany.'
(I'd pulled a muscle at the gym and was in tremendous pain) .

'No, now! ' she said, turning the light back on.
'What's the matter. Do you think this was easy? '
'Absolutely not, ' I said, yawning and winding the clock,
'but it's a small plane.'

'Look how bright it is! '

'It's bright alright. Cure for blindness. G'night.'

I foresaw a quarter hour of fevered discussion.
Other men have girlfriends, wives, mommies. I have a muse.

'Have you listened to it? '

'Did. Cure for deafness. Good.'

'Should I turn it up? '

I sighed.

'We've been through this before.
The higher the volume the less I hear.'

'So you can hear it? '

My pulse raced. Dead art, indeed.

'Yes, it rhymes nicely, ' I remarked. 'Scans well.'
Voice-correct. Outlook-healthy, mood good
And not in the least political, thank God.
And not in the least religious.' Then, more critically,
'Actually, I rather like the time shift.'

'Yeah. And what about the adjectives? '

Um, ah, well, there don't seem to be any.'

'Exactly.'

'Well done. Congratulations. Excellent. A ten. Goodnight.'

I wanted to suggest she visit Phillip Larkin
but remembered he was dead and so probably wouldn't be interested.

'Diotima? '

'What? '

'XY is lonely tonight, I bet.
Why don't you run up and see him?
Hudson is beautiful this time of year. Very bleak.
There's a light on in his window, I'm sure.'

'He has house guests. I already checked. The benedictine is flowing.'

'I see.'

Morgan Michaels

Divine Courtesy

God, God bless him, is so polite-
We say what he thinks, will do or prefers,
And whether we're wrong or whether we're right
God never demurs.

Morgan Michaels

Doggerelle

To market, to market
Without a great sack
Of cotton or muslin
To tote your truck back
Is selfish and stupid
And decimates trees
And generates plastic
So pack one in, please.

Morgan Michaels

Dolphin

Where is the lovely dolphin
I used to swim beside?
We toured the sparkling grottos
or drifted with the tide
whereever fancy led.
My dolphins' eye was indigo
My dolphins' cheek was amber
Her back was dark as cuttle's ink
Her belly purple-silver
and her fins were lavender.

Oh, the waves are the laughter of water!

My dolphins' neck was supple
Smooth and sleek her sides
The purple sea behind her
would momently divide
and quickly fall behind.
I clung about her lightly
Or rode her like a mare
She gathered her beneath me
And leapt the wild waves over
Nor did she ever tire.

Oh. the waves are the laughter of water!

I told her I her love bore
She showed me where to find
The pearls and silted gallies
And how to sift the sand
for catcheted doubloons.

Oh, the waves are the laughter of water.

Morgan Michaels

Dolphin II

She told me tales of Arion
and the sly Ulysses
and filled my ringing ears
with sounding arias
of love among the fishes.

Oh, the waves are the laughter of water!

She dined upon the minnows
the whelk and such-like crill
but took from them contagion
that made her deadly ill
and gone, she's gone away.
Folly, say, and folly
for luxury to make
imperishable mischief
of every sea and lake.
So sadly short of sight.

Oh, the waves are the laughter of water!

Folly, cry, and folly
that loutish lucre makes
illimitable mischief
of every loch and brake.
So madly short of sight
Where is the lovely dolphin
that used to swim with me
along the gleaming torrents of
the vast, uncrowded sea?
the vast, uncrowded sea.

Morgan Michaels

Edna

Tweaking the nose of native
Puritanism
Edna said 'take that'
and 'Dominus probiscum'.

Morgan Michaels

Egisto

Founder of neither hearth nor home;
of sin and in sin conceived and born;
dreamer awake and scheming in the night;
letch, who'd bed only the king's wife;
neither lovely, poor wretch, nor lucky;
inheritor of only darkness.

Machado

Morgan Michaels

Either Or

'Take these tears', she said,
'remember them,
no matter what may come.
True love must be sworn
with either tears or blood.'

'Yes', he agreed,
(through his own) , I'm in.
A bit orphic, maybe, but true.'
And he remembered them
through thick and thin.

Cut it this way or that
a good man knows their worth:
blood. tears.
Knows there's no substitute.
A good woman knows he knows.

Morgan Michaels

Elephant's Graveyard

So, here it is:
the end of all journies, all that chilly sweat,
of quagmires breached, of tendrils torn and elbowed aside,
glassy centipedes, mosquitoes, sizy as birds,
that could drain small children-
turbine loud and wingeing with thirst;

Venomous snakes everywhere you step off,
pards clearing their throats, the glowing eyes
of hyenas circling the fire;
flying foxes, living caprices out some equatorial Goya,
with good, sharp teeth and copious saliva.

Malaria, fever, hunger, diarrhea-
Harkening to hearsay, it being found on no map,
in a language not your own, by a treacherous guide.
All the stuff of legend, rather, even fantasy.
Suddenly,

never before being there, you recognize the place-
a clearing un-phased by the fierce midday sun
where it's cool, azure-shadowed, and you hear the chanting of waters
like the heaven of Islam, and straightaway you see nothing.
The floor sparkles with blue diamonds.
All is preternaturally still.

But then...

Morgan Michaels

Elephant's Graveyard II

But then, almost imperceptibly, the boulders drift,
slowly at first, though with increasing speed:
here a bit, there a bit
the eye adjusts. Uncannily, they step through trees,

Till what you thought a mere wall of marl
proves an elephant's crinkled back;
what you thought an un-tenanted grotte,
pretty enough, if enamel-less,
is really the dark between an elephant's thighs-
between it's belly and the grass,

and you realize you have discovered a plot
piped by motherly trunks into pachyderm ears
assuring them there's a place they will go
if steadfast, in spite of lions and bogs-
though one must be careful to avoid both.

And suddenly, in the quiet of a grove
generations on generations of elephantine shapes
move, undismayed through a quiet, silencing event:
Silence flung out in billows like the sails of a ship
Quiet where a twig-snap sounds like a mine exploding

Morgan Michaels

Elephant's Graveyard III

Sanctified by elephants since time began-
elephants who accept their end uncomplainingly
with relief and nary a snivel
having long ago made it a point to live their lives well
and confident of this just repose.

'Oh, my God, ' you think, 'all the ivory.'
Ivory laying about, half-sunk, everywhere
strewn, grass-entangled, trip-you-up ivory,
because that's what's left of an elephant, after a bit-
after a century or so, that's quite all that's left,
a tusk of ivory bearing in this respect

a sharp resemblance to a man's poetic toil
or the opera-ticket stub found in his breast pocket
by his grand-child, rummaging in the attic
a century after the time when the music stopped
and stopped forever, never to again resume;

toppled stalagmites of ivory, some taller than a man,
cracked by the sun, washed by the rain, buffed by the moon.
Surely, someone would buy all that ivory for market
dice to make, dominoes, piano keys, dentures;
But how to get it home-would Swiss-Air take it?

stowed in sheaths...

Morgan Michaels

Enna

City where the hills recede
land at the horizons' end
what saint or poet did you breed
oh Enna.

Lo, the smiling vales descend
from the bird-enamored walls
that band so many graces in
oh Enna.

Fair and faintly green your hills
fall away, behind them rise
others fairer, fainter still
oh Enna.

O'er the chime-enchanted stair
a doughty brace of butterflies
agitates the drowsy air
oh Enna.

On your steepy mountainsides
light her foot and dry her tear
the new Persephone arrives
oh Enna.

And when the golden sun goes down
from hill to vale to hill ring round
the bells that call your faithful home
oh Enna? .

Then the clouds fill up the vales
and cool the throat and moisten well
the sere recesses of the soul
oh Enna.

City where the hills recede
land at the horizons' end
what saint or poet did you breed
oh Enna?

Morgan Michaels

Epitaph Of A Stranger

Liked the idea of many things
But actually did very little.

Morgan Michaels

Epitaph101

By this pylon Aurius
Aquits his solemn vow
To Helios
Clement and invisible

Morgan Michaels

Epitaph102

Hail you Lords of Tartarus
Publius Aelius Hermolaus
Lyricist and comedian
Out of lofty Pergamum
Lived five and twenty years, but fell
To hectic in three days-farewell.

Morgan Michaels

Equals

One rises, one falls.
They rise and fall
the pans of the balance
fear of anger
anger at fear-
one rises, one falls.
and it's not at all clear
how things will settle, finally.
One rises, one falls.
It isn't at all clear
as it stands,
how things will approximate.

Morgan Michaels

Erotification

Not rough like a train wreck or a car wreck
or loud like a cat fight or two neighbors
shouting angrily across an alley by night
about nothing much at all; but quietly, more

like rain perturbs the leaves, or falling snow,
or calcium hardening a bone
changing, re-arranging, like a diamond pressed from a coal
over eons, invisibly, underground,

do you proceed, gentle Erotification,
subtly filling the vacuoles of the father, the mother-love-
that Elder deemed by the shrewd child
a better bet for trust and apprehension

as hormones quicken (for wouldn't a foal rather run
proudly under the flick of a whip
then idle all the dull day in the barn
tied, unbroken, by it's parent's side?) ,

until the sea is fully changed, until
the chord, newly augmented, rings brightly out,
until the tree, dusted with dazzling snow, becomes
overnight the tenant of a hitherto secret season

which will endure a while
giving (or not) it's denizon the hope and skill
to be, in turn, a candidate for wise children to
worship and eroticize.

Morgan Michaels

Eustace Tilley In Heaven I

Insincere, they said,
Your heart is forever vanishing, going out of sight
returning each night to its violable branch,
its enchanted wood. Like a firefly it beckons. Ha!
I set my course. It disappears. Appears again
somewhere in the well, in a new direction,
then again, no longer the fire. Quark
dark and cold the altarstone, re-reminding me that I, too,
have lingered long on twilight benches in city parks
as the moon linked itself to the night,
tapping my spats lightly on stone to indicate-what?
Interest? Impatience? Let's have a drink, go to bed,
and then, perhaps, a good dinner.

In time I did die and went to heaven-surprise!
even a caricature must, you know, go in ruffs,
in discreet whiffs, up the nostrils of the gods.
There, toeing the mark, was Nature's advocate.
Here it is harder to be critical.
The butterflies are of a golden hue. Remember butterflies?
Here we reflect long days on past glissando
while the stars come on
and the fire-flower sinks in every human hearth.

Morgan Michaels

Eustace Tilley In Heaven II

God, you shall find, if nothing else, has a sense of humor
hard to explain. Like when a bird is not a bird
but a messenger, bringing in its wake
news of the day; or when a Perseus,
casqued and mirrored, an aphid clinging to his throat
hands immersed in feather, lost
in dissolving equiry, is none; or when he,
highly functioning, searching for an idea of order,
hands us merely a web-site,
teaching us that by future standards, we
presently leap and frolic like foals;
or then like when a boat is not a boat
but a sparrow sipping a mud puddle;
on it goes on. Just remember when you heard it from me
in future times, that song unheard, unheard.

Morgan Michaels

Eye-Openers

Regarding God and His relationship to the world
There are only two possibilities:
Either He became bored with His creation
And moved to a different part of town
Convinced he could do better in the new-
(In which case mankind
May as well be whistling Dixie
And the wars will continue-
The killing of our supposed enemies
For the sake of our supposed friends):
Or He dispersed Himself into His creation
Living now in the breast
Of every sentient thing, even worms;
We can never know definitely, of course
Reason tottering on the brink of Intuition
As it surely does and must surely do.
But enough of the Humeian diatheses-
Frankly, having enjoyed an easy upbringing
And never, so far, suffering physical mortification
(Knock on wood, Saints preserve, Heaven forbid)
Beyond a childhood tonsillectomy, that is,
(Even though no stranger to the psychic kind)
I prefer to believe....

Morgan Michaels

Eye-Openers, cont.

I prefer to believe the latter, because I find
The more you believe, the easier it becomes
To believe, that is, and that, operationally,
Doing good for others is the best way to become loved-
Loved and missed and needed, if only in name
And we all want to become that, don't we?
Alas, becoming loved-even that most human of needs
Is apparently an appetite and a goal of contrivance;
In any event, maybe we should wax democratic
And submit the possibilities to a vote-
Which is liklier, which is more desireable-
The world abandonee or the world habituee?
Maybe a very rich woman
Should patronize a television station
That matters may be simplified for the viewers:
Even to the point of unfairness, push
Her own point of view. After all,
You can sell anything you like on TV.

Morgan Michaels

'F'

F. Scott Fitzgerald
Sang 'Hark The Herald
Angels Sing'
Gliding around and around
The Wolman skating rink.

Gliding in train
And not to be outdone
Zelda his wife
Read from something called
'The Sporting Life'.

Morgan Michaels

Fa

You too, rich enabler, have slid into the gray of memory
with no captions and no forwarding address
convincing us that most lives lived before the fall of such
are mere decorations of themselves and therefore waste;
that only in life lived 'round the corner, in vacuity,
is truth, (always what we define it) makeable, so valid,
anyway, and truly affordable.
Still and all, of legacies chary, we've got to pay the bills.
We are well-worn trails, drinking small, Dutch beers from
styrofoam cups one could have predicted. Now what is
Truth, ducky? And whose shall we moon-like, reflect-
decide after hours of thinking isn't? Gone enabler, I am
yours: was, wasn't, year by year, am and am not, taking and
forfeiting crystalline youth, so hail you, dear, and farewell.

Morgan Michaels

Farewell To Skiathos

Farewell to Skiathos
maybe forever
maybe forever
ehe ghia!

Here in the steerage
Skiathos receding
into the mists
of fancy and time

Arms of the village
opening gently
beckoning brightly
bidding goodbye

Maybe forever
there on the billow
hovering brightly
scattering fame.

Now we are weaving
paths from your glory
darkness descending
mountainous forms

Pass to the starboard
pass to the leeward
soon in their splendor
blazon the stars.

When the moon rises
you will awaken
put on your brooches
of aquamarine

And donning your sandborn
sandals of cowry
leaving your mountains
dance on the sea.

Skiathos, oh, lovely
here from the steerage
maybe forever
vanishing now.

God, on the waters
you have cast islands
gifted with shadows
freshets and trees-

Maybe, oh, maybe
this is the fairest

Skiathos, oh, lovely
vanishing now

Maybe forever
farewell to Skiathos
maybe forever
vanishing now

Farewell to Skiathos
maybe forever
maybe forever
ehe ghia!

Morgan Michaels

Fate

It's the face in the mirror
milliseconds before your own
suavely bearded, neatly combed.

It's the man that stood
in the rain and dark
moments before the bus cranked up

whisking him away, forever, hinting more than he told;
keen to see more, you move to the pane,
lay your hand on it-

Too late: not Medusa's nor her nemesis', the tense face
hurtling through a funnel of dark-
ness toward the river, but surprisingly in-between.

Escape it? When you elude the faintly-tinted shade
clinging stubbornly to your heel,
gone long moments at noon.

'I will live a hundred years in perfect health and die
painlessly in my sleep. God loves me. Marrying well, making a mint,
I will seem to keep the laws and break many.'

All these things you may say and even believe;
But the mouthed face on the bus laughs and says
'No way, Jose! '

Morgan Michaels

Faust

The spell was broken. All that evil lay in shards
on the floor, like unseasonable scarves
shed along the backs of furniture.
Once-fiery little stones cooled and quenched underwater
each incantation unsung, each

Morgan Michaels

Faustus

The spell was broken. All that evil lay in shards
on the floor: unseasonable scarves
shed, unruly, along the backs of furnitures
Once-fiery little stones cooled and quenched underwater
each incantation unsung, each
dance undanced as if they'd never been
danced and sung. Exhortations
into the river flung
while on the banks the reeds
hiss-dress and kiss like departing lovers. Va!
Bards, dear, are not to be taken so easily.
Goodness has finally won
at the cost of so much sweat and candle-sheen;
from this known cosmos everywhere withdrawn
the keening demons of yore-never to return.
Never? Then why that path of stars
sowed, conveniently, to guide back tired feet-
those wailing demons that disdain defeat.

Morgan Michaels

Fee-fie-foe-fum

Fee-fie-foe-fum
Mans need to moralize random outcome

Fol-de-roe and fol-de-rol
so the uncontrollable seems controllable-

Fum-foe-fie-fee
Heinous and useful, both, then, morality

Fol-de-rol and fol-de-roe
What far less important than Who.

Morgan Michaels

Fifty Years On: for Bastille Day

The East was rent with sabor strokes
that bled a ruddy hue-
angry welts that opened up
to let the sun pass through.
Did we, the folk who lined the rue
or watched from upper stories
discern in this the birth of some
extra-ordinary glory?

It was the month of vintages
when tender grapes are thrown
into the hefty press and crushed
beneath the cruel stone,
give their juices to the sluice
and finding clarity
get racked in flasks and later tapped
to make a baron merry.

So still it was, the loud and dumb
had since reversed their roles
An awful quiet thrilled the scene
and filled repose with oh's
So loud and dumb, so right and wrong-
the murmured claims of some:
But I, from there, at any rate
could hear the tumbril come

a ways before it came in view-
the double clop of hooves
got shot from walls and window pane
and slung from shanty roofs.
The air of Vendemiare was clear
The lanes were morning-brumey
then by an angle in the road
we saw the party clearly.

Up, up the shallow hill
the lugsy tumbril came
till underneath my windowsill
but several meters down
I saw the figure of the queen-
Marie, the widow Capet:
the cap that bound her hair gone gray
of broadest kitchen-spun.

The axles creaked beneath her weight
the wheels turned slowly 'round
The oxen with delight did tote
a lighter load than grain.
The harness sang a merry ronde:
how soon in just a bit
the hated form would ride back down

without a crown upon it.

Morgan Michaels

Fifty Years On: for Bastille Day 2

Her hands behind her back were bound
as if they held a flower
Her cheeks were dry, her eye resigned-
it seemed an honest sorrow.
She seemed an urn of miseries
that someone overturned
some time before and just now drained
beyond the bitter lees.

At her back the sentries tramped-
(she didn't lack for footmen)
their muskets bright with bayonette
turned back the morning sun.
Around, behind the little cart
trooped citizons, newly coined
The shadows of their pikes and spades
fell forward on the ground.

Many in her could see the cure
to every ill that plagued them.
A few were maybe not so sure
the woes that man is heir to
could be so easily lopped away
or recklessly erased
or what new forms of tyranny
the older might replace

or thought it was the queen alone
that ought the piper pay
the toll of war both far and near
inflation, bankrupcy,
taxes, famine, hunger, plague
failure of the soil,
physiocrats and financiers,
the moment of the world,

the stars, the gods or just plain fate
combined to make their beds
Many, for anything she'd done
might substitute a head.
But she was queen-and Austrian-
to let her live was foolish
someone had to be to blame
so better she should perish

Morgan Michaels

Fifty Years On: for Bastille Day 3

It seemed to me the mortal wrong,
the crime that marked her wretched
lay not in anything she did
but what she had neglected
nor could the woes of centuries
be righted by this course
but die she must, for otherwise
she simply was to dangerous.

The tumbril slowly started down
her shoulders shook from view
through the mud the jeering crowd
followed in pursuit
I thought a moment-should I go?
but so much blood had flowed...
I had no special love for blood
and there was work to do.

Long ago that fateful hour-
today is fifty years
since centuries of hate devoured
centuries of fear.
Maybe better, maybe not
than fifty years ago
the world turns now-but I have got
no less of work to do.

Morgan Michaels

Fly

My grip upon the silken cord grows weak
I long as much to linger as to flee
(as if my ruined wings would carry me)
Have I been here a moment or a week?
The cordial poison courses through my limbs
I think it was a mighty dropp to drink-
Hot the wound, but worth it, now, I think,
and sweeter finally than my wildest dreams.
How wide the web extends itself about!
each cable seeming fastened to a star
as one by one my tiny lamps go out
like the candles of a candelabra.
How sweet to sink in spite of all intention
into the shivering ecstasy of extinction.

Morgan Michaels

Fly II

Cellophane wings that
thrummed the pane
oil-drained of vim
still on the windowsill
your bronzen engines
overturned
like a junkyard car
legs paired hairily,
scarily
clutching the air
eyes, brooches of compound red,
stare and stare
signs that all
correctly read
say 'sorry babe,
you're dead'.

Morgan Michaels

For Starters

It's a beginning we all love
more than a middle or ending
the impetus that prompted us
fails, itself expending.
Just as we jump up to see
the newly-risen sun
the heart rejoices ardently
its enterprise begun.
No one remembers the cities in embers
that ended the crusades-
but the way they started's abundantly charted,
the surfeit of fervor and grace.
Entropy compounds. The sea gnaws the shore,
the best knit nets snap and tear
Gods and empires in bogs go down
as Becoming trudges tiredly to Was.

Morgan Michaels

Fragment

Shall we be buried beneath the red earth, dear,
In the long, moist shadows of the evening
In the clear so blue, amidst gleaming marbles
(Terribly expensive, but requisite for burials) ?
Under the hollow hill
Mausoleum, cenotaph, family plots, all that,
Beside the pebbled paths
In the afternoon, so vast and overcast,
We the few, the many mourning?
Shall it cover us, too, as it has so many and so few?
Shall the birds not bellow their dismay
As immigrant fingers close the space above with clay?
Bust a clod, prior to seeing God?
As the pine trees wiggle-waggle?
As the cypresses bid adieux?
All so very, very Van Gogh?
Shall the magpies make the firs look finer
Preening their greens in the grottos of the boughs
Their pale and purple plumage like a poker hand outspread?
Shall we not ensue? Trail the hearse, the mourners few?

Morgan Michaels

Fragment from Sappho

some say.....
golden children....
a gracious wife....

a house on a hill
a summergarden...
slung with a hammock..

tillable land.....
cash in the hand....
no bills to pay.....

abundant health.....
a lusty life.....
free from strife....

good conscience....
a great body.....
the god's-peace

winning the lottery....
.....
.....

but I say.....
.....
.....

Morgan Michaels

Fragment II

As though we'd read the whole of Valery?
Imagining Baudelaire? Montparnasse? Vass?
Watching the wind run, not unkindly, the lemon grass through,
The eulogy politely borne, if not too long,
A bid to live-memento mori, honey-
Ah, you too?
Observe a silent moment for the dead
Give what we can give and hustle on
Back to the car
Like the good Americans we are?
Shall the sun not cover its face and wheel, fiery, away
Shall the sound not jar us to the bone?
The rain of loam,
Hiss, crunch...thanks, a bunch of violets at the head.
Shall we not do as so few and so many have done?
Noses rubbed in the gist of nothingness?
Sing a hymn? Boo-hoo.
Sorry, babe, I have another trust. Do you?

Morgan Michaels

Frankly

Frankly, pal, your poems are for the birds-
Too little said in too many words.

Morgan Michaels

Frankly II

But longer on matter, thriftier of words
On second thought, they'd still be for the birds.

Morgan Michaels

Frederick

Poor Frederick
astraddle his white charger, quite
a figure on the battlefield, once.
Now grown old
he mopes about the palace
in slippers, if he can find them,
barefoot, if he can't,
complaining about the dust,
bothering the staff.
Still, he rouses
at the sight of red and blue-gold braid
and, of course, a schako.
I would abandon the place, forthwith,
but he is, after all, king.

Morgan Michaels

from Marian

There she stood-but how changed!
Her shallow back toward me, behind my tree
Draped by the pleats of her pink housedress
A sallow crescent of chest showing
Her sandstone-colored arms hanging
Limp at her sides from pinkish sleeves
Bulky as expired beach-balls
Her face the color of pasta, cooked and drained
Cancre strewn, her
Carefully rinsed (not that I ever knew) pale blonde hair
Grown shockingly gray
Around those miraculous cheek bones
Her thin hand moved to her face
As if she were thinking of something.

Mom had sent me over to check on her
And learn if she was alright or needed anything,
That was the sort of thing women did, I knew.
Men got up, shrugged, shaved, disappeared,
Women stayed home and checked up on things-
Division of labor absolutely tribal
A late-century version of the agriculture thing
The bourgeois (so useful, so awful) in a nutshell.
It being summer and the weather good
I walked the half-mile horseshoe of rutted road
That connected our lawn with Marion's,
That speeding cars churned up cyclones of dust on
Grains of which found their way between your teeth
And which, (furthermore) took an hour plus to subside.
Bob-Whites (birds that say their own name) whistled merrily,
Pheasants, unseen, called each other in the brush
Blue-sulphur butterflies walzed each other straight up
Small, purple, yellow-centered asters-weedy flowers-
Oggled me from the for-sale lots. Across the road
Through an acre stand of athetotic trees
Glinted the lake, diamond blue, divotted by an isle
Of loden green, which foolish people said floated
But I thought probably didn't,
All capped by the mellowest blue sky.
As I kicked a stone ahead I questioned why?
How could sickness be in such a land?
And how could it fall to anyone I knew?
And what should I find to meet me when I got there?
I didn't rush but bravely soldiered on-
After all, when you mother says do, you do
Right? -mothers largely readying men for marriage
And the propagation of the species, no?
But mournful mission, merry morning, I
Being a good boy, did exactly as bid.

She didn't see me or know I was there
I felt that strange blend of guilt

And exultation known to spies alone.
Practice had taught me to move quietly enough-
It was almost subversive how quietly I moved.
So when a red-eyed horsefly lit on my bare arm
And rubbed its forelegs together hungrily
And waggled its sheet-metal colored abdomen
(oh, bravery from fear) I simply let it bite.

Morgan Michaels

Goethe In Dormition

Wine, women, song,
the laws are long
dry and learned beside these-
What best becomes a man?
Well, both, in kind.
One could revel in evil
eat, drink, fornicate,
so long as in the soul's shrine
Purity's flame burns;
If, refusing to abate
even in the darkest night.
Even through the wildest storm;
Or in the face
of the singlest distress
the inextinguishable flame
which bears the name
of goodness,
chief delight of men, burns on:
felt without as from within.
precious goodness that goes floating ships.
For so long as one may grasp the coal
sizzling in the soul
one may cleanse the world, no?
its often soiled lips
in between such sips
of wine, women, song
their eyes that love the light
and love, no less, the darkness, bright,
therefore seize the day:
Times's ribbon runs away
Never returning to the spool.

Morgan Michaels

Goethe In Dormition II

Sing a good man, bear a fool
where needed, living well-
it doesn't matter what:
soul-transforming work that gets us bread;
and till your garden
number trees
seperate them, leaf and stem
analyze a stone
tracing back a form
to the mind of-Gott,
you can even love a worm
that with the sunshine and the rain
into your heart
may sink God's renewing pardon;
your senses-cultivate them
pour wine into your crop
until you nearly drop
place Beauty in your bed
but above all, all,
put Poetry in your head
and by its....

Morgan Michaels

Goethe In Dormition III

and by its world-transforming power prosper
Poetry, that cleaves the good man, well,
from the imposter;
Keep your standards high
but ease them with a sigh;
stare the devil blandly
in the face,
oft so comely and so full of grace-
it does not exist, disgrace.
Go with him a dance
minuet or cinq-a-pace,
dance your pants
off-in the end, 'unhand
me sir', say firmly, kindly,
'Would I never loved so blindly;
that will learn ye! '
Live with inimitable Art
that keeps us free of vice
kindling at heart
the voice
that bids us to be men.

Morgan Michaels

Gold

I am hot or cold
depending on your breast
I can grow old
but I cannot tarnish.
Alone, I'm the best-
needless of bead and varnish
Bend me, I'll bend
Dilute me with other elements
I'll just get stronger
more pliant, even, maybe, longer.
I am heaven sent
my glint survives the dame
I'm buried with. Your bones may break
but never mine.
Changing, I stay the same;
Loaded with stones
I'll take them, make them
mine-see how they shine!
But I've a limit, too.
I can gather dust but never rust
for put me in your drawer:
let ten minutes, ten years pass-
as before I am
a simple, complex thing-
but never fear
I'll ring for you and be
forever, truly true.

Morgan Michaels

Haiku

Little Speedo there
in the drawer you are not so
little anymore.

Morgan Michaels

haiku 2

sun medals of joy
speckle the winter bedspread
in a moment gone

Morgan Michaels

Haiku101

Over the pavement
Dragging itself through aether-
Singing butterfly

Morgan Michaels

Haiku102

from the banks of Styx
will I ever be popular
again wonders Freud

Morgan Michaels

Haiku103

all your whining, dear,
all your whining, dear, can not,
can not make a kite.

Morgan Michaels

Haiku104

'I too'm a mammal, '
nose twitching irritably
announced the camel.

Morgan Michaels

Haiku105

Making a man think:
really nothing compared to
making one smile

Morgan Michaels

Haiku106

My fortune stated
'Your dearest wish will come true.'
Wish I wish I knew!

Morgan Michaels

Haiku108

Life, death...mean nothing.
Your attitude towards them
though, means everything.

Morgan Michaels

Haiku109

Bananas, yellow
sprouting sable shadows-great
way to get your K+.

Morgan Michaels

Haiku110

bananas, yellow
as the sun, even your shad-
ows are yellow.

Morgan Michaels

Haiku112

Little Speedo, there
in the drawer, you are not so
little anymore.

Morgan Michaels

Haiku113

What should you do with
a man who loathes flattery?
Give him up, I guess.

Morgan Michaels

Haiku113a

What should you do with
a man who loathes flattery?
Keep trying, I guess.

Morgan Michaels

Haiku114

wondrous, no, how wine
enters dark, exits clear?
Kidnies are so smart.

Morgan Michaels

Haiku115

The Senate, the House-
lawyers, all. Why not housewives,
teachers, carpenters?

Morgan Michaels

Haiku116

They are human, too,
self-loathing alcoholics,
make the best of them.

Morgan Michaels

Haiku117

negativity
just needs a mechanism
and it's off, off, off.

Morgan Michaels

Hawk I

There was a hawk on the porch rail this morning
the span of your arm.
suddenly, out of nowhere it was there:
not unknown in Central Park, maybe,
but here in East Harlem-rare,
sitting asquat the gleaming, sun-licked bar.

You could see the projects over its wing-shoulder
the Babel-like water-tower.
You could see the cars parked down the block
like never because of mister or miss hawk.

Never have I seen a hawk so up-close.
I could feel the slight tilt of its reddish head,
its feral, yellow eye, led
it seemed, by genuine interest
to range along the neighborhood
sampling each scene as from a smorgasboard of views-
a bite of this, of this. An eye feast.

Morgan Michaels

Hawk II

I could see it turn, slightly-the sickle-like beak
over which it watched a handful of wrens
chatter mockingly in a leafless, nearby tree;
the umber thumbprints of its breast coverts
stenciled on to perfect scale, strung in bead-like arcs;
its tale from which the vivid spark of no fire leapt
when it turned suddenly into the sun. Just more brown
suggesting youth or a different kind of hawk;
see its talons aclutch the iron rail.

It looked a little untidy. Was it left behind?
Did it miss its friends? Was it sick? Welcoming new feathers?
suggested by those flakes of down stuck to its back.
Here it was November:
What time hawks fledge and fly away I forget.

Terrified, I didn't dare move a shiver
for fear the thing would flap away-a fear
seeming, for the moment, to outweigh
the fear that it would stay, people
these days being more comfortable
with Nature on the run
than any kind of Nature upper hand.

Morgan Michaels

Hawk III

Gradually, though, I relaxed,
realizing the creature's downy back was toward me:
that it couldn't see into the room, anyway,

couldn't see me on my tiger-striped couch
legendary eyesight despite
or if it could, had better things to observe
and, fearless, fell asleep and dreamed of wings-
spans and spans of them, dark and manifold,
so many, linked, they darkened the sky.

When I awoke, remembering the hawk
I looked out the window to the same spot.
It was gone-perhaps to another appointment,
or maybe South, but anyhow, gone, gone.

Morgan Michaels

Hawk IIII

So I sat up and stared at the place the hawk had been-
rose, shuffled to the window, in fact
the Barrio was still the Barrio, in every respect:
the Projects not going anywhere fast,
the cars still parked along the curb
yellow, black, red and green
the little tree empty of wrens.

'Well', I thought,
present or absent
a hawk makes nothing different.
Difference, the mis-en-scene, the meaning
being the human part, and up to me. The hawk
was just a hawk sitting in a place where you don't normally
expect to see a hawk, that's all.
But I couldn't help thinking of the way
the halk made the neighborhood quite wonderful-
here: a flyway, and gone,
just a desolate, hawkless tract.

Morgan Michaels

Hawk Revisited

Told of the hawk on the rail
friends wink.
'A hawk? In the Barrio'?
Not knowing what to think
they glance at each other, first, then at their knees,
stare at the vacant rail, then back at me
as if I'd claimed to see
an elf in Bermudas sipping a Sea-Breeze;
hasten to agree
concluding my mistake, if any, harmless-
the sort of thing that happens every day,
'Goodbye', say, and quickly slip away.

Till I conclude the raptor on the rail
the ruins of a burst balloon
snatched by the wind from some child's bouquet
caught, now, on the rail's disjointed finger;
or, drifting in place
an expirant shred of sooty plastic;
some out-the-window flung
sheer article of lingerie;
a wretched mistake-
an hallucination
a figment of imagination,
indigestion-
anything but the hawk it was.

Morgan Michaels

Hawk Revisited II

But there it was again-
glimpsed over the shoulder
today while shuffling the new mail
airborne this time, wings outspread
plain against the blue
by all who cared to see,
lazily burrining the air in
wide, invisible circles
deftly counter-pointing a
jet-plane out of La Guardia,
then suddenly seen to bank and climb-
a hawk, glistening.
You might note the skillful way it held to keel
veered into the brilliant sun, slip-slid this or that way
neatly balancing fore and aft, the toy of every draft.

Did it enjoy its light calligraphy? No one can ascertain.
Nor that you saw the wind ruffle the feathers of its head
or its burnished shins drag on the guazy air
with...

Morgan Michaels

Hawk Revisited III

with any but imagination's eye.
Yet nothing but a hawk it was
the hawk I saw just then-
and will probably see again
that loves its element and breaks no law
and, capable to start a dream or two
offers for itself its best excuse.

How should I conclude?
In the welter of opinion
your own is good and just as probable:
everything in time-
and loving truth, detesting lies,
even useful ones
know that what you saw you saw
and where and when and why.
What you see you see-
the next time people disagree
don't be so polite.

Morgan Michaels

Heavenly Muse 2

Heavenly Muse, hey,
Am I wrong to say
If somebody calls you psychotic, they
Should at least know how to spell it?

Morgan Michaels

Heavenly Muse 3

Heavenly Muse
Is it too much to ask
If somebody calls you psychotic
They be able to spell it?

Morgan Michaels

Hebe

Hebe had true glamor:
she cost a whole twelve dollars
at Cunningham department store's
bird nook in 1964.

She wore a stole of golden plumes
and peeped with bright eyes through the bars
of her little gilded room
decorated with a cuttlebone.

Sipped and shovelled
water and mill
from clear plastic cups
that were always kept full.

Of course we bought her right away
but pretty soon, at home, she opened her bill
and much, much to our dismay
uttered a loud, unexpurgated trill.

Grandma, who lived in the annex
and had mild diabetes informed us
to our shock that females don't sing-
that Hebe must, accordingly, be a boy.

Which news.....

Morgan Michaels

Hebe II

Which news threw the household
into dire confusion. She sang-
so now we'd need to rename
the bloody thing.

But what? Stevie, perhaps, or
Jeff, maybe, or Bill?
Imagine our consternation when
out from Hebe flew another trill.

What should it be?
Hannibal? Caruso?
Hourly, we badgered Grandma
who smiled, not unpleasantly,

pleased to be arbitor
in so delicate a matter.
She thought and thought
of what was right and meet

and finally, God-like, delivered her verdict:
'Let he be Hebe. Change naught'.
So we did as she bid-Hebe kept his name
but sang alot
and that was the end of that.

Morgan Michaels

Histrionic Personality Disorder

'If it exists, you've got it', she said,
closing the file and swiveling my way
so that the five-flights-up Italian sunshine fell in her face.
I was impressed. These old buildings have granduer. Windowsills.
This she said carefully, through a translator: 's'il existe, dunque....'
Her lipstick-lined lips mouthed the words. I've always liked Milan-
and its 'porcupine of a cathedral', as Lawrence called it...felt happy there.
It has an Alpine brace and busyness missing in the south. But 'disgratia',
The rest of her remark was lost. My Italian's not that good.
'Gosh', I thought, 'I'm talking to the world's expert on HPD-
(having flown halfway 'round the world for a consultation,
and, not incidently, to hear an opera)
But to the translater I wondered what she meant 'if it exists',
speculating that if I'd waited two days I'd have gotten a better fee.
He translated the question. 'Essatamente', she replied, coolly,
'E s'il non existe...' Exasperating! Italian doctors now seemed as vague
as their American counterparts. The translater seemed embarrassed-
He coughed and looked down. 'Allora'. 'But, but...'
Being the expert, she was supposed to know, wasn't she?
Looking at the floor, the translater clarified a point.
I noticed the way her suit turned her blue eyes green.
I'd read of the.....

Morgan Michaels

Histrionic Personality Disorder 2

I'd read of the plight of poor Sandusky. What rot!
Puritanism strikes again: where will it end?
I'd even googled the disorder. Took my sun-glasses off and read:
Defense today depending less on motive than diagnosis;
But I seemed to have all the symptoms: naivete, gullibility, low frust-
ration, strong dependency. The whole ball of wax.
After reading about it I did, anyway. And these were just the good things.
But how could I know for sure? Don't most have these traits? Somewise?
As for the causes, these were foregone:
turbulent both oral AND genital phases, in my case.
So the search for certainty'd brought me to this office.
As the expert, she was really supposed to know, no?
All I wanted was certainty. 'And, if it doesn't exist...? ',
I asked the translater, still staring at the floor
paved with lovely green travertine that felt good underfoot.
In reply, she just shrugged: these people are good at body language.
'Dunque, non'. That much I understood. She rose,
looked out the window, remarked, I think, about the good weather.
As she studied the sky I was impressed by her expertise.
'Would you like to have lunch? ' she asked, turning, in perfect English.
Flattered and intrigued, I stammered 'si',
wondering just how many euros it would cost me.
'What are you hearing at the opera? ', she asked.
'Ernani', I answered, ingenuously. 'Ah, an early one!
'You'll love it, I saw it, its wonderful', she said.
Together we took the elevator down, walked through an immense door,
and out into the broad, Italian sunshine.

Morgan Michaels

Horace I: 34

I, who kicked against the goad,
impiety, vain sophistry leave now,
vow to fear God and coming hard a-
bout now steer my little boat to

ports of righteousness; for today
Jove, making him honors of man's amaze,
through a sky of peerless blue his horses
drove from the murk of no piled thunderhead;

such that dull earth shook and brooks
shook in their beds; as Tantalus across the
gulf probably shook and Styx beyond earth and
the sea even to skyfall, past the pillars of Hercules.

Nothing is impossible so God wills:
His wonders multiply. He nods
and Fortunes tinkling fingers wisk
her coveted crown from that head to this.

Morgan Michaels

Houri

Morgan, the parrot, little grey houri,
flaps and shreiks on his perch-
He mistakes the eddy of sunlight on the bedspread
for a shallowyellow pool and wants to take a bath.

Morgan Michaels

Houri II

Morgan the parrot stares lovingly
at the yellow sunstream pooling in the bedspread
Will someone please tell him sunlight isn't water
and that his name is not Heraclitus.

Morgan Michaels

Hymn

There in that perfect vale
all will be shown
north, south, west
in vast Eden drowned.

Beauty obscured by beauty
truth from truth revealed
seamless unity
reverse the present world

Run, roustabout nation,
run to that assembly
where the God eternally gathers us
fast about his nucleus.

Morgan Michaels

I have...

I have four and a half inch teeth
And the strengh of ten men-
Ah, but you have toothpaste.

Morgan Michaels

Idol

I am afraid of the idol in showcase three
and want to walk quickly away, but can't;
the little fellow compels our stare-
my hair stands up, I'm rooted in place.

You have seen nothing so broad
as its smooth, pale, semi-recurvant face
stretching itself dreamily east-to-west,
eyeless, like the moon in space.

Crooked at the elbows and knees
threatening an attack from the back
as if taught by a boomerang:
shiny-pale, as if fashioned in the days

when whales slid between the Cyclades
grazing the Mittelmeer floor with
cetacean aplomb-gobbling little fishes,
breaching, showing their tempting backs

to the hunters, our ancestors, the troglodytes
who plied the waves in those
whateveryoucall'em-little canoes,
and, captured, yielded their teeth; or

maybe some sculptor blocked you in marble,
if marble you be, hazy in moonlight, and said,

Morgan Michaels

Idol II

'I must have you, come home with me,
I have such plans for you, you see, '! An equally

plausible theory, but which is true I don't know,
and maybe should decide, some day,
but evidence, alas, is lacking. Still and all,
you haunt me, little Cretan idol, you do,

and I am suddenly tempted to: dance wildly about you
as if you were a calf of beaten gold-genuflect, bow,
singing, down to you, whirl, twirl, and otherwise lose
control, but can't, for I know you're not my god.

Now what should we do? Worship? Call a guard?
Gestures, shouts, in dubious taste,
I suggest we leave-leave in all haste, and now-
I want to see the Meissen, anyhow.

Morgan Michaels

Illusions

When your illusions are gone your life is through
Mine not entirely-I've still got a few.
If you don't mind, if you have the time
I am more than delighted to tell them to you.

Morgan Michaels

In The Bistro

Valentine's day just a few days off
it was charming how after a hefty meal
of coq au vin and greasy frites
and wine enough to raddle a pancreas

you shot that loaded straw my way
me leaving, from your battery behind
the bar. Harmlessly the paper slip fluttered by
filled, assassin, with the breath of your lips,

before coasting to rest on the floor-
well before that fine day when Loves'
dart burns the air, seeking a warm breast
in which to rest and germinate song.

Discretely, though it was late and diners
few, I stopped, picked it up, flattened it out
drew it under my nose as though it were
a rose, a scented billet doux, and dropped it

on the counter back to you who merely
bent far, far back and shook and shook
darkly with gallic laughter. The gall!
graceful, turncoat scion of pig-farmers.

Outside I smiled in the cold that turned
huffy exhalations into cirrhus wreathes,
that prank having warmed my bones to the ruddy core-
We are all just peasants with degrees,

and vowed, the coming holy day night, to return
armed with a dozen straws or so to make of mine
enemy a laughing porcupine, my memory
for these vendettas only long, but that's about it.

Morgan Michaels

In The Museum

Quite something it was to see
how in the museum, around the famous image
by Monet, the poet of waters, running and still,
the Master of Givenchy, painter of green-running rivers,
yellow arches of bridges, wands of yellow willows
trailing their tips in the water's depths;
star-flowers sitting squarely a-squat flat pads
stems cork-screwing down into the water's velvety dark
above eel-grass undulant in swales below the current's jade,
shadows and reflections everywhere, mystery compounding,
shadows and glints of color there and here
the outcome and culmination of time spent
in the shrewd, impassive, life-long observance of Nature-
observance being essentially an act of worship-
taking time and reams of patience to begin to refine;
reflections that hint at the mind of the Creator,
reflections that make for the highest end of living,
reflections that poultrice the insult of living itself,
unburdened by any cloying bourgeois 'should'-
water, air.....

Morgan Michaels

In The Museum 2

water, air and sunlight fused infallibly into one lovliness,
water, air and sunlight invented by the deity
and dubbed by Him His best creations:
a feast for the eyes, therefore for the heart-
how the young museum goers
pushed each other out of the way, obscured each other's views
to what-take photos? Why,
instead of looking, enjoying, reflecting...
taking pictures?
do they think a camera capyures Nature better than a man's hand?
Maybe they mean to look later, when they have more time-
Why?

Is it more important to record that you've seen something
than to practice the mere exercise of understanding?
Slowly the cabal of naifs disperses, chattering.
Slowly the cabal of naifs moves on
without one among them beginning to see the first thing
of the item they've come so far to observe-
surely a dark age has come upon us:
unseeing, they pass on-
their cameras richly glutted.

Morgan Michaels

Inside Outside

She sat on the bed quietly reading a letter
Inside the room was sweaty and dark. Outside
it was bright and hot. Hoping it would get better
she read on. The birds sang a negligible reel

outside, while she half-listened to a flute on the radio
noodling through the sheaves of an accompaniment.
The letter never got any better. One by one, its leaves
slipped through her fingers onto the floor.

Done, she got up to go to the bathroom
and splash water on her face. Nice to believe
that what she decided was based on principle,
she thought, but she suspected it wasn't at all,

But rather on merest Need-like some old-time
marriages, which is a kind of principle, after all,
the mother of them all, the mother of all motives:
Maybe principle doesn't exist at all, she thought,

timidly, unallied to Need, as if the thought were a sin.
Or maybe it did. Anyway, this was not at all
the desired outcome, so she must flee, slip away,
never to be seen again.

Morgan Michaels

Irony

The guilty pleasure of perceiving
What we say is past believing

Morgan Michaels

It's True

Madame de Sevigne
Doted on her daughter
Sent her many artful, insistent letters
Many of which the ungrateful child read
But some of which she left unopened.
Which did she leave unopened?
Only the important ones.
How do I know? Unopened
Letters are the always the important ones.

Morgan Michaels

Jochanal (after Wilde)

Now, John was not a bad looking dude-
a smelly diamond in the rough. All the same
when he snubbed her in the market place
she burned with shame.
'Mama', she complained, 'he was RUDE!
and clearly at blame.'

She was nonetheless a bit surprised,
when Herod, shaking off his trance
smiled and pledged her 'whatever'
merely for dancing a dance,
and when Mama commanded
'Child, his head'.

What could she do?
She must, as the law bid,
study to be a dutiful daughter;
so, richly scented, grazing his leg, she pled
for the simple gift
of John the Baptist's head.

The king's face fell with regret-
that was not wise,
John oddly popular, after all-
but fearing if he compromised
it would be all over town
nodded, finally, sighed

And within the hour a guard in golden greaves
returned with the head in a pail
only it wasn't handsome anymore.
The king puked and grew pale
as she fetched it out, kissed it's lips
and danced it around the hall.

Morgan Michaels

John

Your eye was like a deep mountain lake
a nestle of blue, say, rimmed with leaf-green
over which clouds passed, reflecting,
though a boring person turned it instantly gray.

Behind it was a quarter-mile track, a whole gym,
around which towel-clad thoughts raced
every day, non-stop, effortlessly
toward an imaginary finish line

and it quickly resumed its cerulean hue
at the prospect of a sale. A sale!
provided the buyer knew just how much he was spending
relative to the worth of the purchase,

or, again, maybe, at some instance of human charm
(not rare in your specialized shop)
some bright, cute, knowlegeable kid,
for example, who pretended to know more than he did.

And so you had the privilege, the obligation, even,
of selling him his first photograph-
smiling only when your sensible, well-considered advice
was viewed either as a sales-pitch or a come-on;

Knowing it to...

Morgan Michaels

John II

Knowing it to be, in all liklihood, the start
of a life-long obsession, a collector's fate-
knowing the buyer would be back, better informed,
for the Horst, the Herb Ritts, the George Platt Lynes, the...

I remember your immaculate white shirt
and your spiffy hound's-tooth blazer,
your perfect features, gone to seed,
your carefully combed hair, your lop-sided smile;

Your trousers, impeccably creased,
your loafers shined and heeled like new-
you looked like something out of Gianni Schicci.
How you loathed bitter American cultural isolationism.

You knew all the good restaurants in Chelsea
and some that were not so good;
your openings entwined the best of politics and esthetics;
you moved on only when the market dried up.

John, where ever you are I want you to know
death alone will part me from my Von Gloeden;
where ever you go I want you to know
death alone will part me from my Olive Cotton.

Morgan Michaels

John III

My Cratsby, my Warhol, my Arbus, my Dugdale.
See, they hang happily on my wall, there,
unlikely ever to depart, a hope to my heirs,
testaments to a time when the economy was better,

when boys danced and ruled,
when the pre-digital genius of 35 mm
was the highest technology;
what future will oust present games?

You dreaded the expiration of your lease
little less than the expiration of your life;
both happened, one well before the other, Deo gratias.
I was sorry to read of your passing

And a ghastly honor it was
to send your long-term a sympathy E-mail.
I can't blame him for skipping the Armory thing this year,
Doylestown pretty far away, after all.

Morgan Michaels

Juvenalia I

They are the poems you found leatherbound
in a cedar drawer, decades later
dedicated to their 'only begetter'
the girl (where is she now?) you took to the senior prom
in your fathers' fancy, foreign luxury car.

Inhabited by Circes, Aphrodites, Maeves,
influences you never knew you had
none, mind you, awfully bad
employing every Italian form known
to occidental man, perfectly rhymed and sad.

some quite good and none, I stress, especially bad:
sonnets, odes, epodes, a tearful sestina
one parsed-out in queasy terza-rima
(English being a rhyme-poor tongue)
one boldly comparing love to influenza. (!) (?)

Nor are there French influences wanting-
viralays, rondalays, rondeaux:
there in the walled garden blows the tall rose
of Ronsard, beside the pretty orchard
of yellow pears ahanging.

Morgan Michaels

Juvenalia II

Some, like tranlations by Katherine Anne Porter,
ballades of ladies of times long by-gone-
'ou est Flora, la belle Romaine,
'dites moi'? N'en quell pays'?
in antediluvian type, dated, set in order;

some like Holderlin, the incomparable,
against whose head the hills rolled and burst like breakers,
and many another maker:
eager fakers, all, and showing the wages
of imitation mostly yellow pages.

Out wiggle-slips
a flattened rose. I sigh, press it to my lips
sliding closed the drawer on all that long-ago
but not before a moth ball, ghostly pale, bounces,
echoing in timely fashion, down the stair

insisting there was a time (hello)
pre-film, pre-TV, pre-PC
when people dreamed that form, folly, oh,
might make a message musical and clearer.
And so it often did.

Morgan Michaels

Keith Haring

If you see a man of a certain age,
hair still determinedly dark,
but having some time ago switched to khakis
striding Eastern Parkway Plaza
professionally proud,
a bit self-absorbed but unmenacing,
fireworks past,
backdropped by the pediments,
backgrounded by the friezes of the Brooklyn Museum,
its reassuringly old-fashioned pantheon
still reassuring, despite the heat,
and wearing a T-shirt a lighter shade of red than blood
blazoned with a baby, white but out-lined black,
palisaded with hatch-marks denoting radiance
or kineticism or both,

that would be me, for you see
I have just been to the Keith Haring show-
the Keith Haring show which ends soon.
What did I think of it, you wonder?
You will want to know the opinion of a man
wearing exactly that shade of red.

'It brought back the era well-
the era to end all eras:
but a little Keith Haring now,
goes a surprisingly long way.'

Morgan Michaels

Kerkera

Kerkera, I'm leaving you, my love.
You know the reasons:
I can't fish, I can't farm
and I'm allergic to all tourists.

Adio, my native land
Where shall your like be found?
Where the sounds and soft airs?
There is a fourth Fate that governs income.

Up the saint of any other deme!
Captain, weigh anchor, malakia,
Keep, oh my friends, me, keep me
from Athens we sail for America.

St. Spiridon, St. Spiridon
money first, then
to the haven of your holy bones
light me safely home, again.

Morgan Michaels

Kosko Cat

1,3,2,4,1,3,2,4,1...

3....2.....4.....

stop, sit, scratch, slip
under the rail and disappear.

Morgan Michaels

Lament-O

I have lost you, that I know
all I know or need to-
one morning when my back was fro
you slipped away, you slipped away
and only quiet heard me call
that mocked and sent it to
a star, that slung it back, again.
If I could summon you to me
like the bird of falconry
acknowledging dependency
but unforgetful of the sky
captive both and amply free
happy, happy I would be.

When time and times run on ahead
and bring us all that times allow
and we are both at long last dead
oh, so many years from now
will I still see you flit ahead
through the aether, nimbly sped
unreachable, as I do now?

Morgan Michaels

Late August

Everything expires.
Even the cicadas seem
to run out of steam

Morgan Michaels

Lied

It came, the time, never coming, you knew would come
like night, suddenly eliding into day, firing off stars, mists,
crowding out the time that, never going, you knew would leave-
that strange, oxymoronic, dog-paddling cur of an existence
when, smiling, you and I compared impossibilities like fruits,
jealous only of which, apiece, was cleaner, plumper, sweeter-
victory so assured and foregone it was folly to tilt (it
not being the design of any designer to be having his model
lay gasping in the sand, bleeding, bluish guts piling out)
All now ending, suddenly or gradually. Laurels? Sure, why not.
and runcible good health? Ok. Gradually unlearned,
the follies and inconsistencies of our times, but meanwhile,
where the whine of the mower, the soft, gasoline-fume strewn air
the cry of the quail, flush from the underbrush?

Morgan Michaels

Lied II

How many times does a dog bark
in the night, the same two-tone bark:
black. red. black, black, red-unseen,
never tiring or growing hoarse, the
rope tightening about his throat an-
chored in eternity. Black, red, red,
red, black, red, red, black, black, black,
complaining it is cold or alone,
complaining its life's a bust.

How many times does a cab stop
in the light rain of a night
short, before a diaphanous screen door
to which a thick moth clings-
a little tire-shriek capping a faint
complaint of rubber against its condition
over a crunch of gravel, of course, and a slam,
waking the body sleeping within, who
sits up with a start and remembering nakedness
intones, 'Lovely moment, at last you have come? '

Morgan Michaels

Lied III

Like one of those toys
where you have one laquered figure
the which, unscrewing, yet another
find, and within it another still
and so on, each identical, smaller version
more charming and mystifying than the last
and so on and so on, to infinity.

Morgan Michaels

Life

It's like a roller coaster ride-
You dare yourself to do it
Feeling a little foolish, true,
But taking the trouble, usually conclude
It the right thing to do.

Morgan Michaels

Life, Liberty And The Pursuit Of Happiness

Policy should be shaped by universals
Universals should not be shaped by policy
Ability is peculiar to no group
Nobody knows this better than the able.

Morgan Michaels

Little Different

Spider, though you are small
and I am big, we're
undisimilar, pal.

From luna wings
and flies red eyes
and rays of white lamp light

you spin the thin web
of your livelihood
from leaf to limb;

while from bread-crusts
and aliquots of wine
and the salt of quiet

I spin prayers
disguised as poems-a
livelihood, sort of, to blow,

subtle as smoke-
rings, over the horizon,
across the straits of soon.

Morgan Michaels

Little Ode

Tufted like whips
vines taper down
in wobbly bliss.

Grapeskins
pulled so thin
one can see in and in.

Wine runs out
the spiggots and spouts
of this duchy.

The inn has no more rooms-
three, maybe four
sleep on the floor.

There has been a warning:
in a lamp of fog
a bell tolling.

All the grain is in-
the wind turns cold.
what shall I do?

Tu Fu,
Li Po,
where shall
I go?

Morgan Michaels

Love

My love for you is like the blackest pitch
that runs in a narrow furrow down a wall,
pools on the floor in a heart-shaped scrawl
or then again, like albumen-

white, pearlescent, watery-thick,
aglow in the fried-and-eaten dark
half-part scratch and half-part itch
my love for you is like the blackest pitch.

Morgan Michaels

Love and Need

As I go walking through the mead
I ask the heavens high above
How much, at last, of love is Need,
How much of need is Love?

Oh, there's a need bereft of love
That's not the one I'm thinking of:
I diss the cash I soarly need
And there's an un-enamored greed.

But is there love existing still
Beyond the house, beyond the will,
Where people say 'I think you're great, '
And mean not really your estate?

Was there ever, then or now,
A perfectly indifferent pal
Who answered you a simple 'wow'
To every triumph great and small;

Alike ignoring gain, gainsay
Emotional or any other-
And wasn't Jesus, by the way,
And wasn't, by the way, your mother?

Heaven often answers them
Who imprecate its azure, so,
It moved some clouds to spell 'ahem'
The answer that you seek is 'no'.'

Morgan Michaels

Love Poem Without Commas

Like twin ghazal of origin co-eval
each a brandish bound and confessional
falling satellite-like through the seven rings
of very little I quit balking to recall
futility of anything's everything:
the this-new-old-world-agricultural
all-clinging mache of meaning
dependable and workable

until until until
crossing the rainbow-constellation of you
then with a secret smile
space lit all its candles occultly colorful
as old crystal prompting an indefinite while.

Now I'm a cat up the tree of your good will
firemen circle the base-breath-taking some;
soon they'll try to fetch me. What a pill!
Over there's a truck red as the sun
I watch all through my diamond slits-
axes axe. Ladders climb-ascend
reaching clear to a heartthrob big as the Ritz
that pennants flapping, even I cannot defend.

Heart you're a billibong
ringed by a fetid strand
wider than long
on whose reeking rand
chuck themselves up more-or-less prehistoric fish
that gasp themselves out-melt into the sand,
fuming a stinking nimbus
that rising wick-like covers all the land.

Morgan Michaels

Lovebog I

Love has no truer likeness than a bog
dissembling with a superficial sheen
the thirsty come to sip-alas, instead
a greater thirst, pre-empting, drinks them in.
Lightly they descend from proven banks
lured by the waters undulating smile
'my lap is luscious and my bed is warm-
here you may lay and slake your thirst awhile'.
But straightaway, the floor begins to boil
agitato, such is the water's taste
the mire ups and claps them to the knees
and uncontented, sucks them to the waist.
Swim then who can, them that must sink must-
oh terrified cries and desperate looks to shoreward
the wily water sucks them to the jaws
exacting three steps down for one step forward.
In at the mouth, in at the ears it pours
down the throat the caramel river flows-
certain tubers manacle their heels
as over their heads the guileful waters close.
Say good bye to the sky, you who fall
and flail in those thick shoals and drown

Morgan Michaels

Lovebog II

Eels will peer shyly from your skull
carps will nuzzle mosses off your bones.
Over all the pink sands recompose
the stoma closes, neater than a mirror's
the water baits itself with glints and glimmers
Artful, evil, undetected snare!
Quicker, really, than a toad's tongue
the foggy sea has plucked off from its front
spar-clutchers, castaways, men set adrift-
now you see themm, now you don't
and in the briney angle of its arm
clippers ravished like a fuming Dis
now they bloom weirdly in the ooze
or creep before the gently shepherding tides.
But totalled, these are few-none practically
stars discerned with just the naked eye
beside the lone, un-numbered, countless troves
that tumble, dizzy, from the banks of Love.

Morgan Michaels

Mater saeva

Bring cruel Mother of scurrilous
desires and Theban Liber and
you, leering Licentia me
back now the jeering ghosts of all past

loves, for Glycera's body, paler
than parian stone, the graces, the
wiles it enfolds
haunts me-and she knows it, she knows.

Clearly the Cyprian means to ruin
me utterly and no prattle on
war or war's horses
may supercede her theme.

Morgan Michaels

May As Well...

I could deny the uttermost dominion
you effortlessly practice on my being-
cultivate the opposite opinion
cross your doorway stoney and unseeing.
I, no less, could, studying the part,
air indifference and cool laissez-faire
solely to my vanity impart
the issues of this silent, sad affair.
I could pretend my heart, that anvil on fire,
loathes the blows you give it and propose
to love the intervals between the blows,
dear-like any ordinary liar.
But you would guess my folly and despise
my case the worse for trudging in disguise.

Morgan Michaels

Melai

Melai, son of Hermaios
dedicates this stele
to the memory of himself,
his wife Artemeis, his son Hermaios
and his daughter Ge.

Morgan Michaels

Mermaid

Yet, there it as-
An image composed of droplets mustering into focus
Reversible. Itself of itself the watery isomer.
Idea given substance, however tenuous and fading-
Tail, head, tail, tail, head.
An ancient enigma, certainly not pretty
But in sum, bewitching.
Had it power over flesh, could it see me?
Only indirectly, I recalled, as in the water's mirror,
And I must desire it first.
'Choose', said the hologram, sternly, from its higher station.
It was as if a hand had suddenly cupped my head.
But what part of the mermaid was I?
The muscular tail that could knock a man clear
Across a quarterdeck, against the rail?
A treacherous tail with a fornix?
Dumbly pummeling the floorboards, waterborne no more,
Spectral hues revived with a bucket of sea-water
Sparkled like a Roman grotto?
Judgement recoiled from the notion.
No, I would not!
The sickening barnacles, sea worts, the loathesome remoras,
Flukes, raggedy, gummed with oily beads
Always needing combing, combing, combing-
I touched my...

Morgan Michaels

Mermaid II

I touched my knees for comfort, so deeply did I dread it,
I was not born for that.
To roll in the nets of men, to drown in air
Blister in the sun and rot, to the ditties of flies, flies, flies.
In the grasp of certain satisfactions mechanical
I rejected it with Lenten resolve, stroking my options.
Mine, rather, the arms, sinuous and slender,
Darted with fringes of diaphanous sea-lace-
Mine, the fingers that refused to evolve webs, unbinding the
Fingers to stop frets, to pluck the strings of psalteries
To swim the seas of sounding sea-organs-mine
The shallow lung that tired of its meal of air.

Morgan Michaels

Mirth

Mirth and flexability, flexability and mirth
these are the keys to a happy life:
small care how far your face falls
if you can raise it again with a laugh.

Morgan Michaels

Moderation I

Of all the many treasures
that fill my treasure chest
One of all I cherish
More dearly than the rest

Her name is Moderation
Moderation in all things
And men and Nature prosper
where she unfurls her wings.

She is fair as a flower
the dewy dropp begems
or like a morning pure and clear
the starry night indemns.

or even like the Morning Star
that pranks the new-borne sky
and flicks its beams more brightly-far
as nearby diamonds die.

The evening she presides on
is broken by the day
as breaks the wave on Baie sand
that's born on Baie's bay.

Her morning hours tick slowly
and dawdle pleasantly
as loathe to leave unladen
with fruits of husbandry.

Always clear her windows
Cream is sweet in the bowl
A maelstrom could not rattle
her servant's inward idyl.

Two smocks only has she-
one fine for Sunday wear
yet put her by the lily
and say which is the fairer.

She will shrink from nothing
no sport or raillery
or nearly none, repels her
but only its degree.

Morgan Michaels

Moderation II

She might converse with angels
as with a fool or clown
and might well chat with blackguards
but turns their mischief down.

And she might now a dropp taste
but knows what a cork is for
for every dropp admitted
resisted a score score.

Wise men entertain her
and though she owns no home
is welcome at their tables
whereever she may roam.

Her eldest child is winter-born
his name is Industry
Her youngest, May-born Mercy mild,
who speaks best with her eyes.

Time but improves her-
she is easlier lovlier now
than when I introduced her
some twenty years ago.

Oh, I'm a rogue and a scoundrel
and a pleasure-driven fool
but I love Moderation
she is my clearest jewel!

I love you, Moderation
and mean to love you more
and if it's blessed I come to be
it's you I'll thank it for.

Morgan Michaels

Mr. Hay

For I am Mr. Hay
My ways are not your ways
And I don't care a jack-straw
For anything you may say.
I've my eye on you
I'm so very grand
That if I were a crow
I wouldn't give a caw
I'd simply fly away
For I am Mr. Hay
Or am I Mr. Straw?

Morgan Michaels

Mule

Smarter than a horse
Hardier than an ass
Laughing exclusion to the rule
Unbroken to bridle, saddle
Mover, shaker, acre-breaker
Eager to work, loving the course
Minding not the goal
Loathe to foal
Ladies and gentlemen
Here is the mule: the
World looks different
Through his ears.

Morgan Michaels

Multiple Choice

One answer only, please

1) History is a record of the best in human affairs
2) History is a record of the worst in human affairs
3) History is neither
4) History is both
5) All of the above

Morgan Michaels

Multiple Choice II: American Literature

please choose one only: Ezra Pound

1) popularized 'He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother' during the sixties
2) was a famous scofflaw who collected over 500 parking tickets
3) was the first American to visit Venice
4) had a blistering affair with Isabella Stewart Gardiner
5) all of the above

Morgan Michaels

Multiple Choice III: American Literature

please choose one only: Walt Whitman

1) was queer and wrote Leaves Of Grass
2) was queer but wrote Leaves Of Grass
3) was simply queer
4) had a blisterig affair with Thomas Eakins
5) none of the above

Morgan Michaels

Multiple Choice: American Literature

please choose one only: Amy Lowell

1) played center for the Celtics in the sixties
2) conducted the Boston Symphony in a leotard, in the sixties
3) conducted the Boston Symphony, all in leotards, in the sixties
4) weighed 300 lbs. and smoked big black cigars
5) all of the above

Morgan Michaels

Multiple Choice: Australia

The huge roots of the Daintree tree are known as:

1) fortress roots
2) buttress roots
3) art deco roots
4) neo-gothic roots
5) time-to-rinse roots

Morgan Michaels

Multiple Choice: Australia 2

What kind of creature is the spectacled flying fox?

1) a bat
2) a glider
3) a bounder
4) a grifter
5) a coaxer

Morgan Michaels

Multiple Choice: Australia 3

Which disease decimated the native Aboriginal population?

1) cowpox
2) chicken pox
3) smallpox
4) AIDS
5) Judeo-Christianity

Morgan Michaels

Multiple Choice: God

God: please choose only one

1) exists and lives in heaven
2) does not exist and lives in heaven
3) is a very busy man, but exists
4) is in the details
5) all of the above

Morgan Michaels

Museum Of The City Of...

It beats Keats for frozen motion-
this gelatin-silver 8 by 12 glossy
from nineteen seventy eight or seventy nine
(ancient history in American time-
why, James Schuyler was alive and living at the Chelsea!) ,
of frogmen dropt from a low-hovering chopper
down into a stream of turgid riverwater
two, just off, suspended giddily in mid-air,
fuselage portals yawning wide behind,
one on either side, neatly clearing the skids,
like dancers in an aerial dance,
or human hieroglyphs
eternally outspread-while a third,
sleek noggin bobs below, already down in the drink,
(this, not, mind you, being the sea,
since off on the distant, further shore repines
the faint exosketeton of Queens;
and there where the isle of Manhattan nearest draws
it's Queenly Abydos-the ghostly tracery of
the Hellsgate.

Behind their...

Morgan Michaels

Museum Of The City Of...II

Behind their frozen forms, behind
the ribbed webs of their flipper-slippers,
in the distance dim
a stern-to-bow-with-garbage-laden scow
calmly plows the current-riven stream.
One unseaworthy old ark, 'way off-
(an obvious ancestor of the Circle Line)
triple-tiered and crammed with fun-seekers-
over whose rail a few vigilants hang
frozen in open-mouthed surprise-
(bringing to mind Auden's 'Musee des Beaux Arts',
but that's neither here nor there)
-to see three wet-suited men dropp from the skies:
eternally expecting a splash that never comes;
and wouldn't a bully pleasure yacht
cruising nearby reveal itself whole, but for that
misadventurous plunge into the frame,
cropping it in halves.
Up in the sky a twin-engine out of La Guardia,
props awhirl,
merrily shreds the clouds.
Then, there is the light shuttlecock of the chopper, itself-
compact, bird-like, blades atop stilled to stilettos,
it's saw mill tail a churning blur,
generating fanfares of light,
to a certain span the water beneath,
whipped to a low boil, a pockmark, an eschar,
like the maelstrom, seen from afar, a gameboard,
into which they imminently plunge.

What were they....

Morgan Michaels

Museum Of The City Of...III

What were they looking for, there,
so long ago?
a diplomat's corpse, bound, gagged and fish-mauled?
(for whatever it's current deficits, this city once had Edge,
and blossomed in the Deuteronium spritz of the Cold War,
til things...rent, got so expensive-Why?)
The soon-to-be end of a quest
cracked by a 'facilitated' confession in some precinct back room
under the kliegs,
by such means as would make New York Law And Order's look tame
and low-tech as a wrist watch,
from some Bond-type con with good legs,
sitting hands shackled behind him, erect in a swivel chair?
A chest of plutonium, lead-lined, of course?
A water-proof safe filled with numbered, stolen bills?
The crown jewels? And if so, who's?
Letters of transit issued to some Soviet spy?
dating from a time when America unabashedly bossed the U.N.,
as it should, no? ,
and people could travel with pride and impunity,
and gas cost 79 cents a gallon?

I doubt it...

Morgan Michaels

Museum Of The City Of...IV

I doubt it
though I couldn't rule out any of the above.
The picture tells no tales.
But it's probably something simpler-simpler and more routine:
A gin-soaked pleasure boater gone missing and overboard?
A simple suicide?
We shall never know, we, too, being in 1979
frozen in the throes of sultry youth
dozing in a hammock,
under the elms,
just trying to catch some rays.

Morgan Michaels

My Love For You

My love for you is like the blackest pitch
that runs in a narrow furrow down a wall,
pools on the floor in a heart-shaped scrawl
or then again, like albumen,

white, pearlescent, watery-thick
glowing in the fried-and-eaten dark
half-part scratch and half-part itch-
my love for you is like the blackest pitch.

Morgan Michaels

Nature

Nature cruelly tricked the human heart
with splendid feathers, well devised for flight
but feet denied it, by capricious Art
insuring that it never might alight
or nest content within its chosen croft
but always must shriek forth its fierce lament
weep and circle ceaselessly aloft
and scan the earth for haven without end.
Sometimes in the false limbs of the wind
it rests and breathes a transient respite-
so for one consoling spark of light
their shrunken eyes are battered by the blind:
then the wind folds that bore it on
the spark dies and all is dark again.

Morgan Michaels

Never

Never confuse Conscience with Regret.
for Reasons' comfort keep them separate
one guards the gardens' entrance, one the exit
one 'tenebrae' cries while one sighs 'lux sit.'
'Number the things you did or left undone-
these are the things that matter' grins Regret,
there is no salvation for you, none,
Redemption is the thing you might forget'.
'Steer clear the ruts that pit the road that on-
ward arches through the gloom till dawn:
respect yourselves and do nobody harm',
smiles Conscience, 'and against Injustice arm.
you may not go to heaven, this is true,
but heaven will be glad to go to you'.

Morgan Michaels

Non-Rose

Non-roses, yellow frills of breathing dew,
airy apparitions
flapping your stiffening petals like houris their dancing veils,
along the jagged thorns of a non-bush
I pluck you not.

And why not not?
There is much nought to pluck. Lots.
The blank book of life that shuts with a bang so full
of endless, dizzying doings,
of dynasties, stays obdurately open.

By your hand shield your eyes.
Don't stare. Ignore.
Bothersome muses of the void
before the collect

don't let your gaze
graze or take print
of this Veronica veil, the morning,
and to God
whose gifts aren't worth it
wheelbarrow them back.

Morgan Michaels

Not Again

Coo. Coo-coo. 'Unh-unh,
once is enough. Not again.
boo, shoo, begone.'

Morgan Michaels

Occhi Verde

Love, love, love
my dear, don't blush
look me in the eye
and say that.

Green eyes swallow many things beyond belief:
Love which prevents my answer
forbids your question.

Don't fidgit, dear, stand still.
Don't blush, don't go dumb.
Green eyes drown many uncertainties.
Confess the small crimes with hearty rue.
Let the big ones speak for themselves.

Morgan Michaels

Olimpia

'The way I look at it' she said
unscrewing the cap and rolling
a longish pill from a small vial,
tan and smooth, with rounded edges-
a girl-from-Ipanema of a pill,
into the palm of her hand,
'We are like thirsty houseplants
that curl up, sink into themselves
and wither-shrivel.

'What do you mean'? , I said.

'Bright, high-achieving dolls'
she continued, like that
talented chick in the Offenbach opera
but we run out of steam'.
'Cheers', she said, interrupting herself,
and onto her tongue slipped the pill:
her swallow muscles moved and stood still.
Don't think, just do-
Too much thinking messes you up'.

'What do you mean'? I said.

'Just add water', she gulped-
sparkling, ropey, New York tapwater,
and the plant lives to die again. Why?
who knows. Better not ask.
Voila! A flower.
Wind the tired doll up with a big key-
One, two, three noisy revolutions
and again she begins to dance and sing
and everyone is thrilled'.

'What do you mean'? I said.

Morgan Michaels

Oracle

The oracle said we would lose, its message was very clear.
'Abandon the bones of your fathers, your lands, businesses,
Round up your children, gather what articles of worth
Might feasibly be carried on your backs and get the heck out;
For the foe', it said, 'will descend like a whirlwind
Drink your blood and impress who's ever left
Into the vilest servitude.'.
Most believed and prepared to flee. Only one wise, old woman
Reluctant to leave her potato garden, shook a wise, gnarled finger
At the crowd and demanded a re-interpretation
(Which, of course, she got)
'Clearly', said the divines, 'on reconsideration
The oracle meant just to foretell the destruction of the foe';
We, ourselves, had nothing much to worry about
If we'd only take heart, think and manage our resources wisely;
Talk to each other with an extra measure of politeness and agree to agree;
Oh, and build a fleet.
Such was the re-interpretation of the divines.
That was ten years ago. Putting our faith entirely in the oracles
message;
As the divines bid we did, and when the foe invaded, won the day.
Truly these oracles have a way of changing that optimism never does.
Odd. Could it be that oracles are mostly a matter of interpretation?

Morgan Michaels

Overheard

A thug overhears, shrugs,
'What's in this for me? '

A prig overhears, swears,
'I'll tell all, I will'.

A lady, to the manor born, says
'But, darling, why say anything at all? '

Morgan Michaels

Owl

The owl in the barn
behind the house
is a bird of much cortesia
who, though he stutters,
never spoke an errant word
to anybody that inquired.

'Who? ' he'll sigh
endlessly or 'I
would tell you if I knew, my dear-'
a fine reply.

Then down he drops
in to feast on mice
that drift too near, that stir the leaves
detected by his perfect ears, his ochre eyes

Morgan Michaels

Pandora

Pandora, undone by her own curiosity according to the story, found Hope at the bottom of the fatal basket. Hope indeed had wings-and sequins, sang and was more or less green. She also spat tobacco juice when you squeezed her tummy. She had enormous eyes that peered in all directions.
'Hi', she said, sticking out her hand, 'I'm Hope'.
Pandora was taken aback, but shook her hand, not wanting to be rude.
'Pleased to meet you', said Pandora, politely. She came to put alot of stock in Hope.
'See you later', said Hope, suddenly taking wing.
'Where are you going? '
'Don't worry. I'll be back.'

But Hope was not the last item in the basket to emerge. The myth was wrong as myths often are and completely opposed to reality, which is never wrong, though...

Morgan Michaels

Pandora II

though many people prefer myth. No, after Hope, Empathy came out of the basket. Pretty as was Hope, Empathy made her look like Hans Christian Anderson. Othwise, she was completely naked, had a charming voice and complained of nothing but the cold.
'Brrr, it's cold out here', she said, precisely.
Greatly moved, Pandora handed her a tissue to wrap herself in, which she did, but it's perfume gave her a sneezing jag.
'I'm awfully sorry', she said, wiping her nose with a corner of the tissue, 'have you got a pseudophed? '
Pandora didn't.
'My name is Empathy'.
'That's a pretty name', returned Pandora, beginning to get tired of all this hand-shaking. Nevertheless, ...

Morgan Michaels

Paranoia

is what besets
the man who
losing one glove
apiece from two
identical pair
is ready to bet
good money
the remaining two
won't make a set
when the chance they will
is actually fifty-fifty.

Morgan Michaels

Passaggieta

The great evening passaggieta was upon us.
Crowds of pedestrians thronged the esplanade,
many pushing baby strollers of the indestructible late type.
The sky was filled with pink and gold clouds.
We talked softly, reminiscing. There was alot to reminisce.
'The Past is different, ' I continued. 'It has color. Meaning. Why? '
We were sitting on a park bench after the bake of the day
talking and watching the sunset and watching the river go by;
watching blunt-nosed tugs trail wakes of gold upstream All very Glackens.
'You were young, ' she explained, with a sigh. 'That's why. Everything is better when you're young. The essence of romance, unfortunately,
is wanting what you can't have. And romance is a great colorist.
You know what GBS said-'
'It's wasted on the young. Yes, I know. But if you can't take it for granted, it isn't youth. So, no, it can't be just that. Life was better, then. Absolutely. The city was better, then. It wasn't filled up with....'
'Never mind, ' she said, quickly, reading my mind and fearing the worst.
...baby strollers, ' I finished, a little spitefully, hoping it would make the point.
'You can't blame people for being people, ' she laughed, ruefully.
'But we created it. Everything. And what do we get? Prices! Over-crowding! Gaucherie! And bourgeois thinking.
'Gaucherie? Why, I'm not even sure what that is, ' she said, bravely.
But I knew she did.
'People rush in whereever life is good. Especially if it's safe.
Everyone wants environment, even if few are good at creating it.'
'But nobody knows. Nobody cares. There's so much stupidity.
Abandoned to the pleasures of the moment, everyone forgets the Makers.'
'What you think is stupid doesn't seem stupid to them, she said,
her eyes following a steely stroller with double wheels and legholes for twins, that at the crank of a lever or the press of a button
might well convert digitally to a mountain bike.
'And vice versa. What do you want, anyway? '
I thought a bit, then said, slowly:
'A commemorative stamp.'
'Oh, ok, ' she laughed, 'I'll call my congresswoman tomorrow.'
'I hope you have a speaker phone, ' I advised.
'I do, ' she chuckled. 'Honest.'
'I believe you, ' I said.
And I did.

Morgan Michaels

Perugino

I am the greatest painter who ever breathed.
Any fool enough to dispute this claim
Should simply inspect my work in the Cambio
At Perusia, in the college of that name.
Or better, see my Ascension, which so pleased
the hosts et all at cleanly San Pietro.
Sure there's good work done in Florence, too-
Up there everything's Leonardo, Leonardo!
A few in Flanders know a thing or two
But no one, No One, beats the Perugino,
Present or past, in these Italian hills
So help me God. But yesterday, I swear,
I saw an angel of my young student Rafaels'
So fair-my God, I fear you love him more!

Morgan Michaels

poem

The shade of a bird
flew through my head
and like a needle
pulling thread
drew on its tail
a diamond wake
that woke my fancys'
placid lake.
The shade is flown,
the wake is closed,
the Fancy, too,
Is recomposed

Morgan Michaels

Pollywog

Divvying the bog
with its phlegmy flail
the wobbly pollywog
digesting its tail,
into a muscular frog
gears its porous omnibus
hauls itself on hardening limbs
aboard a slab of log with little fuss;
into night croaks
to no appreciable applause
cocks its spring
jumps, nabs a bug on the wing
and in the midst of splash slips, a days work
done, back into the syrupy, methane-breathing murk.

Morgan Michaels

Pool

The moon leant down, her fingers kindling
the lips of each little wave of the pool,
blue O, with watery fire, til it said 'oh' or 'Oh'.
Tight in the grip of its meniscus the water bound
forms of drowned moths, that wings
outflung, soddenly stalked our gleaming abdomens-
we beat them back in fear and disgust.
From somewhere in the yard there came a light.
How our feet were magnified in the water's glass!
There by the hose head the underwater wrinkled.
Another, flat like a snake run over
Pin-pricked like arteries themselves, shot piddlng arcs
and the night ran on and we ran back onto the stoop
our ankles now stuck with sticky blades of grass
as new-moon colored bands of pale convolvulus,
white un-ringing yellow bells a-swinging,
raced slyly about the cornice of the house.
Everywhere the lawn was alive with little frogs
'Let us in, let us in', all at once shouting.

Morgan Michaels

Praise And Blame

When women feel inclined to praise
they praise other women;
inclined to blame,
they blame men.

When men feel inclined to blame
they blame other men;
inclined to praise,
they praise women.

Inclinations that comment richly
on the foundations of both,
parental archetypes
and their respective bargains.

Morgan Michaels

Quis desiderio...

What boundaries ought modesty set upon
grief for so dear a soul, tell us, Muse,
whom the Father bids breathe through the
kithera fluent song.

So it's true, Virgil, my friend: the
sleep neverending hath taken our Varus:
Truth and Faith to Justice turn to learn
when such a one will come again.

Many mourn him bitterly but none
more bitterly than you, love;
worthiest to beseech them him, in vain you
threaten the heavens, for,

should your entreaties move even in-
sensible trees to tears, like Orfeo's, they
could never coax warm blood back to veins
of one the Shepherd of the

Dead marshalls to darkness, thick and eternal.
What can't be changed must be endured-
in that light temper grief with acceptance and bear
what must be borne with patient heart.

Horace i/24

Morgan Michaels

Rain

It rains on the redwood
that cover the mountain
The bark of them glistens
and darkens upon them.
I know the rain gladdens
The heart of the redwood
their branches all burdened
with numberless gems.

But what would they think, now,
these trees, if they knew
that the water they drink
was a poisonous brew
and the drops that accrue
to the needles and cling
were soon to undo them
and earthward-ward bring?

Oh, the forests are whispering
over all the vast land
'We are poisoned, O brothers
by poisonous hands.
Our children are sickened
and the last of our race
are pelted with sulphur
and poisoned apace.

So be mindful, O People
that the earth is an only
descended from father
to progeny born
and cannot be jetted
like the rind of an orange
like the hull of an acorn
for lack of a plan.

So, are...

Morgan Michaels

Rain II

Are we not men, then
my sisters and brothers?
and can't we be mending
our false ways and errors?
Must greed and sad lucre
be sail and be tiller
chart the course of the future?
Say 'no', oh say 'never'

For the forests are whispering
'We are poisoned, oh, brethren,
by treacherous hands, and
our children are sickened
and the last of our races
are withered with sulphur
and perish apace.

It rains on the redwood
that cover the mountains
the barks of them glisten
and darken upon them
I know the rain gladdens
the hearts of the redwoods
when branches are burdened
with unsullied gems

Morgan Michaels

Rainbow

Along a sky of jumbled gray
ominously underlit the hues of roses
a rainbow plied its spectral way
clean from Queens to Sheepshead Bay
tempting Wordsworthian apotheoses.

Numbering the bands
I stopped a sec to study it
noting its span
carefully on guard against elan
certain it would fade in but a bit.

Hadn't we seen this sort of thing before?
'Casual beauty stalks the town
only to strike and disappear! '
Awe to pay too dear-
nobody likes a letdown.

And there were still a million things to do
Time is money, money time
errands to run and places to go-
Wasn't the mundane the heavier of the two
weighed by the sublime?

'Yes', I guessed, 'yes, if we let it';
and summoning oppositional zeal,
dropped my boxes at my feet
choosing the fading marvel in the street
thinking it better, momently, to feel.

Morgan Michaels

Randolph

That night as Old Man McCoy fled through the woods, the trees in his path refused to budge. Their branches batted him like hands and smacked him in the face and chest and groin. Behind him the screams of his wife slowed his pace, as did the agonized pleas of his sons. Tears streamed down his face. But the gunshots urged him on faster, toward help, justice, he wasn't sure what. Over his shoulder he saw whorls of whitish smoke against the dark, and a corner of the sky lit up orange from the torched cabin. He'd known something awful was going to happen when he woke up, this morning. Lying in bed last night he'd heard two wildcats fighting. All day long it was too quiet. Then, catastrophe-fire and hot lead. After mid-night the trees turned to men and crowded in. As he ran the twigs snapped underfoot and he ran until the lights of the town came in view and he remembered it was New Year's. There would still be a few revellers at the tavern. He would round them up and return to what was left of the cabin. Nothing could persuade him not to. His poor wife! He was so ashamed. But, alive. Alive to make them pay. Alive to get revenge! So he ran on toward the light.

Morgan Michaels

Remembering Christmas

A small dark plane is parked outside the complex.
A span of wings hangs over the glistening snow.
On the fuselage Fox News or CNN or something.
Crewmen mill about arm-flapping against the cold.

The night is crossed and looped with beams and cables
Lense men decide the best place to pitch the cameras
Candles burn tall at a table decked with holly-boughs.
It has stopped snowing. All is merry and bright.

There on the terrace sits Mrs. Claus herself
Mittened, beribboned, wrapped in a fur-lined parka
The slightly-embarrassed focus of so much attention,
But growing momently more and more at home.

She is talking to an interviewer-no, a whole panel of them
Having decided-why not-in favor of mikes
Of which six whistle and crackle in an arc before her
Beside a platter of just-baked Christmas goodies.

Into the microphone she says 'Yes, I pack the gifts.'
Wrapping each in plasticene or muslin.
Yes, she packs the Mister's lunch and dinner
It's a long way, all around the world, no?

Including, yes, the beers-not too many or too few
To keep the chill off and make the travelling light
And steel him for that intercontinental flight
Dark and tumultuous, over the Bering Strait.

Yes, she adores the deer, laying in for each
An extra measure of hay, some carrots, persimmons
Before they fly, wetly kissing each ones nose,
Wishing the great creatures safe haven.

They lower their heads, snort, and paw the
Ground sheepishly, mindful of her concern
Then she smiles, waves, draws her flannels about her
As the caravan begins to race, the whip crack,

With a 'hey ho my hearties, ' over the frozen turf,
Faster and faster, much like a 747, faster
Until suddenly airborn, gone and flying past the moon,
leaving her alone in the shadowy stillness.

'No, ' she never...

Morgan Michaels

Remembering Christmas 2

No, she never wanted to fly the reindeer
Even as many times as she's seen it done
It's the Master's schtick-who needs it-
The turbulent descent, the wind, the ashes

In the tertiary bronchioles-forget it. Besides,
It's been years since she's been down a chimney.
It's his show. Then, they're expecting him, the old man-
Expectation being the essence of the season.

The light on the frozen snow is astral.
Overshining the meager sheen from the kliegs.
It reminds her of something that happened long ago
Darned if she could say what it was now, though.

The interview is over-the crew is packing up.
Now the plane is loaded, all hands aboard
Goodbye, goodbye. The co-pilot signals back
Over the tundra taxies the little plane

Faster and faster, then off! It turns, bisects the moon
Which spills a cornucopia of musical toys:
Tom-tom. Tin whistle. Kazoo-on the snow-capped peaks
Under polaris, twinkling directly above.

Onto the plateaux, onto the ghostly slopes,
Into the vallies between crags, the fir-tufted foothills
Skidding down icey jags, alongside riverbeds
Bearing black, moon-stricken torrents,

Coming to rest at her feet. She picks one up, toots
Experimentally, watches the plane til the red wing lights fade
Unnecessarily long, turns and goes in.
Time to go in. Claus will be home soon enough.

Morgan Michaels

Resolution

The cat jumps, a shadow falls from the wall
and pools on the floor
Not like the moon's but like itself, gibbous.
Into oscura, into what we fail to see
file fifers in time running on into meadows and on:
Can you blame them for seeing the beautiful use of things?
Good, the greater part of it, anyway, must somehow lay in
sanctioning useful delusion-
you, on whom these bloom and choir like birds,
isn't it so?
and you, maestro, strangely incredulous,
of shadow lorn as Venice at noonday,
living on garlic, numbers and sweat,
viewing even past blunders threads to a perfect eye,
say it is so it is so.

Morgan Michaels

Retort

My land is not for barter, sir
my land is not for barter, na
and there's to you ya silly foo
my land is not for barter, na

My people's not for buyin' sir
my people's not for buyin' oh
and there's your pipe for smokin', sir
my people's not for buyin', na.

They go to church o' Sunday, sure
they go to church o' Sunday sure
and I will be assurin' yer
they go to church o' Sunday, sir

They sing and praise their Maker, now
they sing and praise their Maker, now
and sure it is amazin' how
they sing and praise their Maker, how.

The grace o' God is on them, sure
the grace o' God is on them, yeh
and on their work and on their ware
the grace o' God is on them now

You voices join together, now
and every hand a fellow find
our land is not for barter, sir
and we are people not for buyin'.

Morgan Michaels

Riddle 2

What do you call
poems that eschew
the merely personal?

Poems for mature audiences.

Morgan Michaels

Riddle: What

charges by the hour
works with impunity
guarantees no result
seduces with prospects
advertises on the subway
abets victimhood
always needs more time
always needs more money
stands at the crossroads
of every human transaction
with their palms outstretched
prefers to settle
requires another to control
and stuffs congress...?

You didn't have to answer so quickly.

Morgan Michaels

Sappho

Really, I felt like Scheherazade or somebody.
'Tell me another stary', said the Shah.
'How was I to deal with this prickliest of characters?
'Do you have any interesting tatoos? ', I asked.

Morgan Michaels

Scarecrow

I am a scarecrow.
I watch the clouds
glide across the sky
to and fro
while the winds blow.

Rooks and crows
slide across the sky;
they fear me-
why?
being but paille and chapperal.

My head a bag of straw
Oh, the crows
cry cawcaw,
that's the only
song they seem to know.

My hat is a sunflower.
Seeds of the standing weeds
take their rest
in its nest
and sprout and root and grow.

Morgan Michaels

Sea Turtle

My specialty is minding my own business.
I can't help it, it's a choice.
For example, I'm not really writing this.
You, mind-reader, read it, nevertheless.
I am not harmless. No, I've a role to play, I'm
A link in Nature's game.
Somebody eats me (let them try)
I eat somebody else-that's the deal.
I accept my place in the food chain
And, unlike you, prize nearly total amnesia.
I just don't get why people want to remember things-
Especially the bad stuff-let it, already, go-
Memory the chiefest factor of what it means to be you-
or probably so.
Otherwise you're more or less interchangeable, aren't you?
Yes, more or less so.
Anyway, it's better not to think.
My mind's a blank.
I'm a big fan of instinct.
So I poke my nose here, I poke my nose there,
amidst hula-grass,
Bringing...

Morgan Michaels

Sea Turtle II

Bringing my bird-like beak to bear
Not sharp, mind you, but incisive,
On rubbery crustacea, caught,
To their embarrassment,
Between divots of sea-fern,
In open-waters, so-to-speak.
A lumber on land, whence I come, and need return
To to breed; surprisingly agile underwater,
The sea, the sun-glanced tide my element.
The waters love the shoosh of my bumpers. They reply.
Overhead pass albatross, like boomerang, also in their element.
Secret: ninety percent of flying is falling.
They make it look so easy. I admire them
As, hopefully, they do me.
It's a strange feeling, floating, eyes-closed, when
One of their shadows catches you.
But back to me. It's all about me a little once,
Me, no one else.
Shot at once, the bullet ticked off my shell-
Twice, the bullet sang kerplunk!
Into the...

Morgan Michaels

Sea Turtle III

Into the azure drink beside me and that was that.
I guess I should consider myself lucky:
I could have been soup, my shell slung on a wall
Sporting a tape-patched bullet hole. Ah, well.
And so I go
Like the sea-going thing,
Like the turtle I am, memory-bereft,
A dark sun, a discus,
Scuttling over the sea's bottom,
Basking in the moonlight,
Weeping, kvetching-out heaps of ping-pong eggs;
And-let this shock your dichotomies,
I really don't care what becomes of them-
I wish them well,
But I've done my bit. Let heaven manage it.
I only long to be
Wrapped once more in the arms of the sea,
Dissolved, all breeze-born memory
Acquired on land, that hiss and burn and kill,
And tell you where to go
Next. The sea that loves me.
(you can hold on to things too long)
Neither purposeful nor purposeless,
The sea is for me, it is, the sea's for me,
For the sea is me, it be, the sea is me.

Morgan Michaels

Secrets

A secret burns in my brain
like a glowing coal.
Yes, the secret lodged behind my eyes
sputters and mutters like a burning coal
pops and rocks through the long lights of York
singeing its tissuey bed
abashing its keeper.
How it longs to slip the keep of its living brazier
To impart to the world of itself at least a spark
perhaps, credence given, to start a small fire-
How it yearns, wee imp, to hatch out
timlily as a chick from an egg
and trot about the world crying 'peep, peep, peep.'

I, too, crave the rout of the secret
(which fidgets in there like a bean)
I, too, crave its flight
into the ears of a few.
So would you. It hurts. Its hot.
Its eremite existence serving scant purpose, at all,
saving secrecy, of course, a pretty dull thing,
pointless to all who might wish to know-
unfair to all who might otherwise be listening, wrapt,
on the telephone, propped on pillows, sipping myrthe,
to the enchanting music of the secret, the
serpentine strains, the instructive rondel, oboeing forth,
crossing itself, doubling back, this secret.

And this secret....

Morgan Michaels

Secrets 2

And this secret is a humdinger.
This secret is an anaconda. It is the Great American Secret.
All other secrets beside it would seem trifles-
would be shamed back into their coops;
this is a secret of the most delicate sort
concerning as it does a certain person from the Bourse
(a junior vice-president for the firm of Valentino
who is generally acknowleged a non-pareil)
in relative standing to a friend of our dear friend Larry
A secret of treble import and viral ongoingness.
guarded still, but for the solvent of strong drink
and confided me by Carl-his be the shame.
This secret bothers me now-
Barks, bays, rattles its chain,
Paces, ticks the bars with its tin, making itself a nuisance, wanting out.
insisting itself innocent.
Can the secret be blamelessly outed
in the eyes of, say, Fate?

I recall now once having read
in I forget which codex anticus
the sanctioned conditions, strict extenuations,
purifications, dispensations,
rites obscure and rubric byzantine, etcetera,
which can exonerate the teller
forced into a secret's needful disclosure:
conditions manifold and arcane,
pertaining to all secrets,
which may be essentially all
boiled down to three types
according to their natures.

First, secrets of State...

Morgan Michaels

Secrets 3

Secrets of state, said my codex,
classic examples of which would be the Ems letter
and (doubtless) Irangate,
may without blame be unbosomed
but not before the lapse of three moons.
Shall the deesse of secrecy, her complexion avocado,
her temples plaited with slender snakes,
awaken, pardon the indiscretion, then resume her trance-
during which time she listens, vengefully, the wide world over
for the seismic disclosures of confidences
to forgive which one must burn the stamens of gentian?

Whereas the second....

Morgan Michaels

Secrets 4

Second: secrets of (and this is hard to translate)
secrets of estate-water-fountain secrets-for lack of a better term
secrets which pertain to people in the flow of it all
unaffected by the course of desire
of woes never having never been earned per se
what might be an example? Let's see:
that so and so is getting a yellow slip,
that so and so is up to her ears in debt,
that someone is not well:
these must be conserved for half a year
under pain of the most abysmal Karma
and leaked to no more than two informees
themselves bid to secrecy for a similar time
the better to slow the secret's progress through a curious world-
the better to calm the snakes, to calm their hissing.
Conducting these secrets, one must burn the ghostly berries of mistletoe
Don't ask me why, I didn't make the rules,
I am just repeating what I read.

But the third kind of secret
is the heart secret-
bespeaking things that happen in the dark
between two or more individuals;
secrets which whisper of the wigglings of limbs
and cinematically depict the fissuring and collapse of the will
like a sanddune sacked by a seastorm, upon the mind's eye.
These secrets are considered the most sacred:
virginal. inviolable. beloved of the deese,
and while they are young
deserving to be.....

Morgan Michaels

Secrets 5

But the third kind of secret
is the heart secret.
Secrets, these, of things that transpire in the dark
between two or more persons.
Secrets which expose the inveighlings of lusts, the tightening limbs, and cinematically cast the fissuring and collapse of will
upon the mind's eye, like a sand dune sacked by a seastorm
These, of all secrets, are considered most elite:
virginal. inviolable. Patronized by the deese,
and while they are young
worthy to be held in utmost confidence
by any man who changes his socks daily,
who has a bank account
or hopes to see his children prosper.
Secrets whose telling may rend apart
the fragile liens of newly-weds;
interfere where serious troth is pledged;
that in their very unleashing
start household wars; burn down houses
wherein lives and livlihoods are merged,
and costly, new dining room chairs commissioned from Henredon.
These secrets must be kept a full half-year
following the indiscretion.
Speak them not!
the risk is vast!
the furies never sleep-
Sliding her black rainbow,
and pedaling her ball, comes Fate-
the snakes awaken
their hoods erect,
scowling. Howling.

Of this type.....

Morgan Michaels

Secrets 6

Of this type, the secret thst currently burns in my brain-
ah, drat,
which I shall guard fast,
telling not even Jane,
that bat-eared, tympanum of secrets
who is on perfectly good terms with the parties involved.
After all, I, too, change my socks daily;
for the sake of my investments, I shall not;
for the sake of my unborn children, I shall not;
for fear of the deese, I shall not;
as the festoon of red lights ahead blinks green
and the bus jerks into gear, I
shall not.

Morgan Michaels

Seven Basic Machines

'First the pulley. With these window-washers haul
themselves up to the tip-top or drop'.
'Yes', she said, with minimal interest. 'Next'.

'Then there's the lever. Useful for prising treasure'.
'Very well, she said, 'but I can't tell you how I try
never to pry'.

'Well, there's the wheel. Often invented, excellent for gliding
singly, in tandem, in trio or more'.
'Of course', said she, 'and number four'?

'Um', I said, starting to perspire,
and giving my brains a wrench-'the plane, if you desire'.
'I've never been inclined. Continue please'.

'The wedge', I said, recalling that
a wedge could not be beaten for
dividing night from day and dog from cat.

'Then there's the screw', I muttered, turning blue.
'Let's come back to that.
'Continue'.

'Lever, ah, pulley, plane, wedge, ah, screw, wheel,
What's last'? She thought and thought
and finally calmly cried: 'the high heel'!

Morgan Michaels

Seviglia

'As funny as Mozart
but without the 'trauma',
complained my opera-loving friend.
'Rossini's not my cup of tea'.
Frankly, I prefer the drama
of the heart's lament-
the thoughtful tune-behind-the-tree,
the mad, masked, moon-lit love chase
through the labyrinthine garden
where all dangers are mock
and the libertine gets his due-
What do you think'?
'Yes, yes, yes, perhaps, I agreed, 'all that,
but then, today,
Damrau is singing'.

Morgan Michaels

Show Tune

I never guessed it would be like this
You seemed so, so, so,
aloof.
so Blond and blue
so ivy, so Vassar,
or thought you'd go, go, go,
But kid you did
You made it easy, oh, so easy, oh,
it's the truth.

chorus

I never guessed it would be like this
Remember I, I, I
am just a coof
am just a caddy
So it was so, so, so,
amazing you
So la-de-da, so chin-in-air
so debonaire
Would let me be your daddy.

chorus

I never guessed it would be like this
You never know, no, no
do You?
Needing no reproof
A relative truth
In a world of grim reality
you didn't even mind
a laddie for a daddy
Did you blond and blue?

chorus

Just who do you
think you are-
frickin' Jordan Baker?
Now I know
You're a pretty show
Another lovely faker
Oh!

Morgan Michaels

Show Tune #4 I

You're the one
my heart dreams on
and I swear
that nightly bare
I want to see you
but if you say forget it, no way, hey,

I wouldn't blame you if you do!

If you said
'check your head
I think some parts are missing
I couldn't live
on what you give:
of huggin' and kissing'.

I wouldn't blame you if you do!

Then I might say, dear
riches' star
never shone my way, dear
and though you might be right, love
I can get new ones
when the war is over

So, I wouldn't blame you if you do!

So now you know
this old show
will soon be closing
and that fame
made my name
an anagram for nothing

I....

Morgan Michaels

Show Tune #3

What a lovely matinee
intermission long enough
but it's snowing, now, the wind is blowing-
well, you get my drift,
Baby, can I give you a lift?

Your way and my way
go the same highway-
the cabbie knows a byway,
I don't, so do say, do say
Baby, I can give you a lift.

In the cab we'll gab
laugh and count the many ways
that life is like a Broadway play
you can bet I'll pay, I'm good for it,
Baby, can I give you a lift?

When you get home, bone-dry
you will invite me in
if you've a shred of decency
for a quick one, maybe, if,
Baby, I can give you a lift.

I'll say 'no, I've got to run-
oh well, ok, you win,
but, darling, have you any change'?
'Yes, I think so, hon'
and thanks so much for the lift'.

refrain

Cast off that umbrella
you don't need it anymore
just hop inside
Make me a happy fella!
funny how the weather
makes for such a pleasant ride
Hurry, the meter's running
Time is money, honey, ah,
it isn't even funny-nah
it isn't even funny.

Morgan Michaels

Show Tune #4 II

I wouldn't blame you if you do!

And if I said
'We're not dead
yet, are we, are we?
And if you
working, too,
said 'I do'

I wouldn't blame you if you do!

'What'!

'I didn't mean it'!

'Really, Frankie'?

'Yes, Johnnie,
And I promise to be true
what's more, Johnnie, honey
ain't nobody's
business
if we do'.

(bridge)

I wouldn't blame you, no sirree!
yet all the same, you see
it would be so alright
if all through the night-night
we could lay awake
in a cottage by a lake
under the rafters
somehow evading sleep
hearing the trout leap
waiting for dawn to break!

Morgan Michaels

Show Tune #5

When you walked into the room
My heart hit the ceiling
You were the one for me, you,
There was no concealing.
Something in your smile I found
So endlessly appealing
You restore my heart to
Its era of Good Feeling.

There was a time...

Your pumps were so, so pretty
In all the sparkling city
Maybe the prettiest-
Nifty the way they fit you
And your dress of whitest eyelet
That swung about your knees
Couldn't hide, couldn't hide
What was inside, inside it.

There was a time...

You didn't tipple, dear-
Oh, maybe just a little bubbly
Never was anyone so clever!
Never was there anything so lovely!
Like a melody by Stephen Foster
Endlessly, endlessly
You go through my head
Endlessly through my head.

There was a time...

Suddenly all at once we're dancing, sweet,
A thousand little lamps glisper
And soar as the basses lead our feet
Around and the cymbals sigh and whisper
On the ground or in the air
Love never lets you down
Heads you win and tails I lose
Never sounded better!

There was a time, oh, when
High brows was low brows
People little know they little know now
The way it was, the way it was
But we did, dear, and how
We're here to rock and roll again!
Never touch, ever, that's for lovers-
Save it for later.

Morgan Michaels

Show Tune II

That's the long and short of it
now you know
how I've been waiting all these years
where I'm coming from
that's the long and short of it.

That's the long and short of it
now you see
just how hot hot jazz was
how it turned about, my bookcase
that's the long and short of it.

That's the long and short of it
now you know
that my arrest record's
not my best record
that's the long and short of it.

That's the long and short of it
now you see
how the Past's like a love
you can neither leave nor live
that's the long and short of it

That's the long and short of it
now you know
it was no gun in my pocket
it was a rocket
that's the long and short of it.

That's the long and short of it
and you're wond'ring dear
how I kept so pure
hull, it was easy
that's the long and short of it.

That's the long and short of it
now you see
so bounce your head
into bed
that's the long and short of it.

That's the long and short of it
read the blues
in these tattoos
make a song of it
that's the short and long of it.

How I wish
there was a bridge-
then I could burn it;

or the train
of a refrain
then I could board it
but there isn't
but there isn't, no

Morgan Michaels

Sine Qua Non

Guiltworthiness. The essential thing.
Needed prime-mover of the minor gods
Harmonies ring for no maker without you
nor, lacking you, may one blot out and begin again.
Like a child abed one trembles and yearns
loath, even, to shutter his eyes
at the sign of the least, least infraction,
as the ember tip ascends the stair
clenched 'twixt the teeth of the Avenger;
sadly, holding the sole key to redress
via harmony, the myriad sins of the world;
lay, in an endless waking state, supine,
dreaming righteous moon-lit paths
through branches of impropriety;
for whom the Beautiful is only quite rightly
the absence of wrong's formal embodiment.
'Child-trembling at the end of this accusing finger',
Child, it is you.'

Morgan Michaels

Sleep

What can I tell you about my lover, Sleep?
Each night through locked doors she enters my room
Doorman never giving warning. Shoes in hand
She treads lightly down the hall, my
Chamber door opens noiselessly and quickly
Till in seconds she is sitting on the bed.
The corner sinks where she settles.
I do not want her.
But her moves are quick
She is like a windmill in the wind
Many-handed, tall on the brow of a hill.
I do not want her
But the fringe on her glove is so thick, it
Swarms with aromas, brushes my lips,
She holds...

Morgan Michaels

Sleep II

She holds a soft cloth over my mouth
Whispers it will be alright-my nostrils burn
Her lips are on mine. Her embrace is so close,
Massive, dark as every dark, heavy with the weight of all things.
I am born down and down, ears,
Nostrils, throat, into each orifice she runs
Like the sea into the ruins of an antique city,
Eddies in my belly, relaxes my limbs,
Her ckeek is not rough, her hair smooth and mink-like.
I can see her heavy-lidded, half-closed eyes
My eyelids fall shut, my mouth falls open
My tongue falls to the back of my throat, everything falls,
I do not want her. I regret my huge obligation
Yet it is good to be held so, immobilized,
But strangely free to range, the night is for us.

What shall...

Morgan Michaels

Sleep III

What shall I tell you about my lover Sleep?
Sometimes at night, the tent of darkness will shift.
She has left me, where has she gone?
Straining to penetrate the dark like Atlas
I see her towering above me. Along the range
Of her shoulders she bears the wheel of the sky
Slowly, it turns to an enchanting music.
Gorgeous lights are bonded to it, somehow.
Not surprisingly it trembles and steadies itself.
There is a light rain of dew
And a brief rain of stars.
She shakes from her brows rich drops of sweat
Which launch a strange wobbling race
Through intervening Space, their volumes
But not their masses changing until each
Distended, expanding, splashes
With a half-annihilating plash
On my face, say, or throat. If
My eyes can get used to the light
And are not obscured by cloud, they seek her face,
Her gaze fixed on mine. She wants me to think of her
Straddling the earth and sky, laboring for
That I might rest and lay to rest the griefs of the day.
'Mark what I do for you', she says,
And I cannot help but, for love, weep.

What shall...

Morgan Michaels

Sleep IIII

What shall I tell you about my lover, Sleep?
Sometimes the dews and the dawnlight
Find me with her still, possessive, I
Like a slain bird beneath her cat's paw.
Reluctantly, she says she must go. I say 'No',
And cling to her, but she purposely shakes herself free,
Leeps to the sill, and swathed in it's glow
Faces the new-risen sun. The
Diamond in her ear sparkles a little sec.
She nods farewell and momentarily I see, again,
The deep cleft in her chin. Spreading her wings
She sails to the nether-side of the world
For she loathes the depicting light-perversity
Of Beauty that cannot bear to be seen.

Morgan Michaels

Song

Now we will be happy, happy, happy,
and, lordy, lordy,
happy and happier still,
happy running down the happy hill

like two happy rills and more
hoarding the strands of their song
into a happy orotorio
falling down, down, down, headlong

running to calm cadenzas of pooled skill
run, run, run, run, run
if happiness, mind you, were the moon
I'd grab both its horns and hang on.

Now we shall be happy, happy, happy
and happy, happy, we'll
be happy and happier still
happy running over the happy hill.

Morgan Michaels

Song*

It's not my fault!
It's not my fault!
that the seas are soiled
with offal and oil
It's not my fault!

It ain't my doin'!
It ain't my doin'!
that trees are stained
with acid rain-
It ain't my doin'!

I can't do nuthin'!
I can't do nuthin'
It's past the command
of any one man-
I can't do nuthin'!

I don't make the rules!
I don't make the rules!
Exxon does, dammit,
with help from the Senate-
I don't make the rules!

You can't walk to work!
You can't walk to work!
And there ain't no train
so who's to blame?
I can't walk to work!

Morgan Michaels

SonnetX

In my Democracy a diamond's the same as an agate
So long as you section it, buff it, wet it
You'll be amazed at the light that pierces through it
As long as you never actually have to view it.
Why would any one venture to pay retail
While these little gems are everywhere for sale?
Love tropes, they say, before diamonds, were garnets
Purple and costly red as wine and blood
Why should diamonds not concede to agates
Which not infrequently have spots of red
Amid the green and brown and yellow-gray?
If I can get some funding, I will say
Agates are the new diamonds-and with this market plan
I shall die a very wealthy man.

Morgan Michaels

SonnetXY

What a long vacation I've had!
It wasn't fun-just tedious and long.
Was I sane was I sober was I mad?
Demon chatter vied with seraph song.
I don't know, but I wasn't shovelling sand
In castle fashions, waves to wash away:
You weren't wearing a pink sarong.
I wasn't sitting in a seaside chaise
Letting the waves caress my feet:
Spumes of the dazzling sea-sprays;
No, but I visited many a distant land.
Now, happy to be back where I belong,
Better can I check the lands I roamed
From the vantage of this simple, central home.

Morgan Michaels

Spider

Your grip upon the silken cord grows weak
you pluck them something now like zither strings
It must be strange with no employ of wings
to hang between the moon and quiet lake.
Time and times again we're warned of the web
the livid maw that lurks at the wild center
I conclude that what we love we dread
and what we dread we love and long to enter.
I open duty's circle with a kiss
and on the prison of the sky turn key
to show the vistas vast of nothingness
that, after all, our hearts long most to see
and seizing in a spider's dark caress
you apprehend, at last, your fantasy.

Morgan Michaels

Spring Cleaning

Rake your hair, shake the debris
into bags and store them beneath your eyes.
Paint your cheeks the azure of the skies.
Open the cupola windows-
it's gotten a bit close up there
having been shut all year.
(but what does that have to do with the price of gas?)
and into your winter-weary mouth slip teeth
that cleave fast to your god-given gums.
Let the syringa have its way with you.
Take your pills, give yourself a shot
flick a quarter to the bums-
not much, you, true,
but, baby, you're all you've got.

Morgan Michaels

St. George

Improbably he veers and peers at us
not the dragon-demon at his feet-
the argent steed, whose sire, Pegasus,
carried the Favorito, Perseus
down the wild, airy steep.

and pledges with his sapient, little face
the Rider, the amazing savior,
mailclad form of scarcely bearable grace
trust without measure, endless faithfulness-
so shall we pledge Jesus our Redeemer.

But this dragon is not the fish of tufa
that slid heavily barnacle-implanted
out of the pearl-stuck grotte
to menace pale, golden-haired Andromeda
while the king lamented:

this is the Fiend, the Evil One, the Liar
who prowls the world plotting the souls' ruin
who blisters forever in Ghehenna-fire.
all that stirs in the night, all that conspires
for chaos, void, ineffable confusion

Feels this wound-trembles and despairs.
Content, the kings' heart breaks. Perhaps he dies.
The Cross takes root. Exquisitely it bears.
The virgin may continue with her prayers
rapt, beneath his gently lowered eyes.

Morgan Michaels

Stuart

His birthday was the same as Shelly's.
He played John Field nocturnes on the piano.
Twice a year he supported public radio.
He knew everyone worth knowing in Philly.

He betook Hamlet, Denmark's mad prince
At Michigan or Harvard or some such place,
And his papered wall did grace
A signed page of 'Tiny Alice'.

His was the magic of making aspic.
Strange when the murk of fishy broth
And bays, clarified through cheesecloth
Emerged limpid as the dew in a crystal bowl.

His dinners were symposiums
Of the clever and the pretty, laughing-
Only right, for should such bums
Be dined and wined for nothing?

Every year or so, like clockwork, he wrote a book
Or two-publish or perish-that's the rule of thumb
In ivy-wrought academe;
If you didn't believe it, there they were-look.

Smoking he quit in a trice, overnight.
Scotch was never so easy.
His living room was oh, so tidybright.
His bedroom sombermessy.

When she grew old he brought his mum
From Detroit, to live in the spare room.
Rather than one kid he had many, thru
The miracle of substitution.

He was a generous, funny, civilized man
Who could take for granted the love of many,
But didn't. Never hope for a better friend-
Now he's gone, I heard.Pity!

Pity. How young we all were.
Pity how supply our knees did bend!
Death, when we lack the breath to mount the stair,
Why, instead of you, can't we just disappear.

Morgan Michaels

Take

Take as your mentor the warm south
Notus wind that never blows harm but
sweeps the air clean of Plancus cloud
sparklewarming it; cleanse each
pang and care in a wash of yellow wine
whether in camp the arching sky with
standards jammed or home alone at dusk
watching the Tiber darken;
Salamina fleeing and his fathers' wrath
Teucer supposedly woundbound his temples
with poplar sprigs...

Morgan Michaels

Take II

poplar sprigs and sunk in a hogshead of wine
addressed his bummed-out friends:
'Never mind, never mind, never mind,
Fate will show itself a better elder.'
Fate will levy us and carry the day,
I am Teucer. I command you. Fear nothing'.
So much the god has foretold: a time will come
when people ask 'Which Salamis'?
Having seen worse in my camp, lads,
drown your cares and make your hearts light with wine.
Tomorrow to sea, the wide, abounding sea'.

Morgan Michaels

The Cat II

Mice waltz down my throat
and birdhouse birds fly headfirst down-
More would but for this tell-tale bell
with which I'm collar-bound:
Forewarned, they scattersqueal
scurry downstairs to their comfy lairs.

Remember, I'm a cat.
Nothing to do about that.
Exhausting my nine ends
I'll straightaway ascend 'way up to kitty heaven
(a biggish sort of alley)
chockabloc filled with my old friends.

Cream me, kipper me, even
tax me with inoculations
You doing that
I may occasionally, occasionally,
(if the mood befalls me)
catch a rat.

Morgan Michaels

The Dirty Boy (and what befell him)

Jack, Jack, the Packer's son
was very fond of spitting-
and never under any terms
would hear a thing of quitting.

'I love to spit', cracked Jack, 'in fact,
I love its every aspec';
I like to do it privately
But even more in public'.

His mother pleaded 'stop that, Jack! '
But dared not whack the child
for that, she'd often read in books
would make him crass and wild.

His teacher said, 'Jack, please don't spit-'
the boy would spit twice over-
nor would he cease from doing it
on Sundays or Passover.

Serious John and little Mim
appealed as fellow kids-
they gently told him what was wrong
and of the harm he did.

'Spitting is evil', said John, and breeds
all kinds of diagnoses:
glanders, pinta and no less,
tuberculosis boves.'

Morgan Michaels

The Dirty Boy (and what befell him) II

'Spitting is dirty and crass', said Mim,
and isn't very nice
and by the statutes of this state
it constitutes a vise.

'So grow up, Jack', said little Mim
'So Jack', said John, 'get big'
But all that Jack would mutter back
was 'better pig than prig'.

'So here's to you, mate', shot back Jack
and here's to you-take that! '
and to the horror of them both
forthwith hauled off and spat!

Such the scope and depth and pitch
and tempo of infraction
that they hired a lawyer, (greedy witch)
and filed a class action.

The justice heard the case with awe
the jury with dismay-
in chorus near unanimous
they put the boy away.

Jack did no time, he paid a fine
(his too a canny lawyer-
but waiting, found, when he got home
a hiding from his father.

'Fair is fair', said little Mim,
'And fine is fine', said John
'and if you spit we should be pleased
to do the same again.'

Morgan Michaels

The End Of All Questions I

Every question ever asked had been answered.
Everything you'd wondered, staring at the night sky.
Where those shooting stars do finally go to
What, indeed, lurks in the hearts of black holes
Anti-matter, parallel universes, yes, the whole show.

Why the dinosaurs perished from this earth
The truth behind those god-awful conspiracy theories
What, exactly, the link between earthquakes is and fracking
Why all those jobs were packed off overseas
Why many suffer never-endingly for the gains of a few.

What the difference is between man and the monkey, assuming one.
What inspired the first man to climb the first mountain.
Why men eternally think themselves victims of women.
Why women eternally think themselves victims of men.
Why Americans believe in nothing they haven't heard on CNN.

Why population control is never, ever discussed except in Asia
(limited goods, unlimited demand-makes sense to me)

Morgan Michaels

The End Of All Questions II

Why men and women too often mistake sex for love
Why moldy ancient texts still inform peoples prejudices.
Why some people bash the past but can't let it go.

Why the dog wags the tail and not vice-versa.
Where to get the GPS that can take you to the rainbow's end.
Why the well of Truth is bottomless, bottomless.
Why the Spanish, spendthrifts of punctuation,
Insist on those upside-down marks at the start of each question.

Why, why why, what and occasionally where.
Just kidding, of course, but if every question were answered
Still one would remain of all those neatly laid
Out fitted with their answers at the bottom of the page:
Why I loved you from the very first moment of our meeting
And why I continue, in spite of formidable odds, to.
I think it must have something to do with 'character'.
Yeh, character. It must have something to do with that.

Morgan Michaels

The First Time

The first time I told my poor father
that I intended to become a poet, come what may,
like John Greenleaf Whittier and many another
it was the morning of the day.
The sun threw a bucket of light lightly
over the grey shale flags, a white screen for the leaves
to finger-signal. The trees shimmered and sang mightily.
It was the Main Line. He had made it.

All the greeny shrubs in the dark little plots stood stock still
listening to overhear what he might say-
The day lilies nodded and lent ear.
Would he be angry? Would he sing goddam?
Would he look at me like I was a fool, an abomination?
the despair of his life? Something to obscure?
Suggest, again,
with crisp, hopeful conviction
that I take flying lessons?
'Quem, tu, Melpomene, semel'
Lo. he did not swear, stamp his foot,
yell, or fill the air with terse, menacing cries.

Rather, he sat stock still and gave it a minute-
being in all respects a thoughtful man
who had seen his share of accident and misfortune
and who knew the link between them.

Morgan Michaels

The First Time II

'Well, well', he smiled, 'is that so'.
inviting me to look into his glittering, prescient, black eyes-
so much like mine, that said, like mine
'I am not what I seem'.
'I've written poems, too. We shall see'.
The shrubs half-exhaled in relief but remained vigilant.
He bellowed not, see.
No, he saw me in return
doubtless as a creature stuck in eternal, inarguable boyhood
like a fly fixed forever in amber;
boyhood like meanings, pictures that resonate and magnify-
amber like fun,
the boy who'd be the man who'd be Peter Pan
flight being one thing you can't argue with.

But he despared, I knew,
because I saw a cloud ascend his brow-
this was the suburbs after all.
'Whose fault...

Morgan Michaels

The First Time III

'Whose fault was this, anyway'?
'Nobody's', I assured him. 'Melpomene's'.
'Whose'?
'Melpomene's'.
'Oh, he slowly replied, content he'd had nothing to do with it.
Again, he nodded 'Oh', exhaling in relief,
as the shrubs in their beds relaxed their vigilance
and became inanimate objects, again-'oh'.
'Are you sure'?

Then we heard the gliss of a car pulling up
and the sound of tires crunching the gravel
in the driveway outside, and the car door open and shut
and the heavy footfall of my mother's high heels on the asphalt
returning from church, for it was Sunday, AM, late.
The sun hid itself behind a cloud.
Around it sang some angels.
The gate opened, the subject changed and we
by dint of secret understanding
began to talk about his boyhood in Boston
in such a difficult neighborhood.

Morgan Michaels

The Ideal City

Consider this marvel of Renaissance wit:
The Ideal City, by Lucian Laurana-
See how the canny master contrived in it
To lead the eye along the polished piazza
Back to a single point on the far horizon
By dint of planes, formed ny the great arcades
Of noble pallazi, their window-lit facades
Tinted shades of gold and green and dun;
At center fore, a temple, double tiered
Whose coffered, greatly-pedimented doors
Are gained by a shallow flight of marble stairs;
All around, the whole is pillastered
By half-coluns crowned by leafy capitals
While over the roof, so gently conical,
Capped with a charming, fluted filial
Is heaven's azure dome, sub-tending all;
The fore-ground, too, is decked with well-wrought wells
Calyced alike with steps octagonal.
No pollution, smog or plastic waste
Mars the sheer perfection of the place
All is open, peaceful, clean and clear
With Harmony and Truth presiding there.

But, world-acquainted traveller, take note
In the houses and streets no human can be seen!
Could the great Laurana have forgot
Or did he decline to limn one in?
The palaces, the fountains and the square
Unpeopled, quite, as daydreams sometimes are
Bask in a holy silence still unbroken
By racous laugh or flimsey promise spoken.
No despoiling image of a man!
Painter's irony? Mere poet's spleen?
Or is it, must it, be so then,
That the Ideal City's the city without men?

Morgan Michaels

The Ides Of May

The season fails, her petals fly
little clouds now blot the sky
gone the promise in the leaves
plumbed all golden mysteries.

Newborn heaven's pearly roof
has lost a measure of its youth
not so high, nor clear, nor fair
the limbic of the petalled air.

Meaner green succeeds to fill
the dark between the daffodil
earth and heavn together mourn
the passing of the undersong.

Even Love has left the land
and girt him in a wedding band
light the grassy hill has known
in your decline I see my own.

Nature, you and I must lay
away the blandishments of May
and, seperate estates to tend
be sad and happy for the end.

Morgan Michaels

The Night

Much can be said of the night-
its slow caravan of hours-
glyphs of chocolate smeared on wet, pink velvet;
black velvet
smeared with pink lipstick, its canvas punched
with small, silver holes, the stars
glinting like mirrors that catch in their glass
the humors of candles glinting;
utterly, utterly swept of polemic,
its hours all queued like patient horses at a Victorian funeral
harnasses close up, creaking,
soundless from distances,
creped, each, and nodding a black plume toward a certain horizon.

Quavery canopy pumped by the warmth of music
billowing, ballooning
to the riffs of a never-copyrighted duo for dove and siren-
you know it all, you do,
its crypts and villi, its mists, its yawning corner stores-
O numberless convenience stores of the night! Tears
turned to exclamation points,
Sheets left behind in damp, gray tangles,
Tawny eyes and bushy, black brows,
the moon its sole earring, whispering
in Spanglish 'Look here, look here, '-
all its golden fusions.

Much can be said of the night-
its barking ululations,
its aerial loops of doomed and sparkling wires
stretched invisibly dangling along the sky, or almost so;
its gunfire,
its sudden, brief and mystifying shrieks,
its zombie wheels, contrariwise turning within other, larger wheels,
its pearls, its walkers, its subways;
moirees, its sad, strange Doppler stuff, its dizzying
stops, recoveries and beginnings.
Much can be said about the night,
and much cannot.

Morgan Michaels

The Peanut-Butter Cookie

-So what happened to him?
-How should I know. It was long ago.
-A memory. Awful-is consciousness just circular memory? Is reality?
-Memory and will. And sex, of course, implementing both. Erase memory, you still have will. Reality is something different, though. I can see him like yesterday.
Are you sure you didn't dream him up? That what you told me wasn't a figment?
Yes, I'm sure. It's one of those things you don't forget. I was five, maybe six. It was frosty cold. Scalding cold, you might say-bearable if you had a stout coat. My breath came out in smoky plumes. It was New Year's day. Everyone was excited and hung from the night before. The sky was blue and cloudless. I was content.
-Hmmmm. Where was this?
Broad Street. Philadelphia.
-We were watching the parade. My first. There was something magical about it-those never-ending platoons of marchers in tights, all strumming banjos. The sun shone on their sequins and made them gleam....it was dizzying!
-Wow!
-...and the fake bird tails-peacock tails made out of fake feathers. Everyone had one. Like the tails of lyre-birds, they were...
-Of what kind of bird?
-and the banjos, strumming, strumming. And the curiously hollow horns.The sound came in waves, fading into the north and coming on again from the south.
-Jeez. Where were your mom and pop?
-I don't know. Suddenly they were gone. Maybe I repressed them.
-Gone when he came along?
-Exactly. I was standing on a curb in a crush of people...
-What was he wearing?
-An urchin suit out of Dickens. Out of Central Casting. He could have been Peter Pan's understudy. I have the impression he was barefoot, but that's hardly likely.
-How old....

Morgan Michaels

The Peanut-Butter Cookie 2

-How old was he?
-About my age.
-Tell me about him, again.
-There's not much to tell. I was standing on the curb. I didn't see him coming. Suddenly, there he was. I found myself looking into his eyes. They were gray, I think.
-And?
-He stopped. He opened the paper bag he was carrying and held it out. Obviously, I was supposed to help myself. The bag was jaded and looked like it had seen alot of action, that particular morning.
-The cookies!
-Yep, the cookies. It wouldn't be nice to refuse. In those days, people still worried about such things.
-Courtesy is the most efficient form of coercion. Everybody wins.
-Be that as it may, I reached into the bag and took out-surprise-a peanut-butter cookie. I knew it was a peanut-butter cookie. It was sandy blond and had hatch marks from a fork on top.
-So you ate the cookie?
-Unh-unh.His hands were filthy, the little urchin, my doppelganger. But I waved the cookie around as if I was delighted to have it, and wanted, at that moment, nothing more. It seemed the nice thing.
-So what happened to him?
-How should I know? Suddenly he was gone.
Awful! Is consciousness just circular memory? Is reality?
-Gone. He moved on. Rejoined the parade.
-But he wormed his way into your menagerie of long-term memories-
-I guess.
-It's sad, you know.
-Why do you say that?
-Because he was so young and so poor. He's probably not even alive. He probably died of starvation. A protein deficiency.
-That's morbid. He may be quite alive and kicking. He may have won the lottery for twenty million and have eighteen grandkids.
-You're right, I guess. I just assumed...
-Don't. It tells more about the person making the assumption than about reality. People always assume tragedy.
-You're right, of course. How did it end?
-I heard my mother calling.Looking over my shoulder I saw the statue of Billy Penn-way up, the sun glinting off his hat. Then, there was my mother. In the flesh. Big as life. She grabbed my wrist and hustled me on. She was mad. Because I got away, I guess.
-And that was that?
-And that was that.

Morgan Michaels

The Plants

One sun becomes them all,
one heaven above.
Feet have all in common soil
different though they be
so oddly will they show their tolerance and love,
their eagerness to grow
tangle, mingle and divide,
bloom, if they can, conditions meet-
So have no fear-
give them room, the boon of water
sunshine's glinting glance
and there's little you can do to hinder,
even if you would, them;
watch them wind and tilt
and appose their lips
or lift their leafy wing tips
from an earth they cannot quit,
that down about them stubborn clings
good guests, good hosts
the least to do to make of it the most
and with nonchalance, perchance,
yield a flower or fruit
for our delight or table fare
or the hair of a lady.
Where they open up their eyes
the skies are blue and clear
the winds are balmy and there lurks no pain
harsher than the evening rain
may cause, while moths criss-cross the tilled terrain.
There is nothing you can do
to prove your mettle better
then take from them, give back again-
but if you fail in this
bitterness will follow bitterness
poison kiss will follow poison kiss;
yet if one of these
prospers by your husbandry
all men will love you and all woman miss.

Morgan Michaels

The Saints-For Bloomsday

If you thought them rare, or worse, extinct,
think again. Assure yourselves,
there is a land where they abound
like birds on a telephone line at enormous dusk,
preening and taking pleasure in each other's presence.

And you are almost there-
just another hundred miles or so to paddle
before that shore where you reach the beach the boat,
drag it over hot, pink sand, inverted, toward a stand of trees
near where rears an oddly quiet headland.

Out they slip, delighted to greet you,
from between trees, singing hymns in Portuguese,
hands clasped piously behind,
thin silks blowing like line-dried octupi, the golds
of their Olympian ideals slung about their necks.

E-mail home you have seen them
in short, tense clauses. Cc
everybody. Say that, yes, of course, you want to be in their number.
Only, for heaven's sake, delet the expletives.
Yes, delet the expletive.

Morgan Michaels

The Seagull

One day in the hot sun, under a mackerel sky
on a bench in a parking lot, waiting
for a bus to Kingston Station, wielding
fans, we found ourselves approached
by what? a lost-looking seagull-
bow tie-less, but in charcoal
tails and a light gray vest, nonetheless,
waddling formally our way.
'Now what, ' I wondered, pulling in my feet, and
sitting up abruptly, 'could it possibly want with us?
Spare change? ' So far from the sea
did we look like sardines? I watched as
its webs drily toed
the sun-softened tarmac; as it padded closer
on stalks half-lit like hollyhock stems
I saw in a painting once.
There was much to admire
in the feathery plush of its breast,
whitecap-white but whiter when the breeze blew it back;
I clucked at the way its level head swiveled
smoothly, side to side, like a rudder;
chuckled at the way its scimitar beak,
yellowed and notched, swerved
this way and that, like a tiller;

Morgan Michaels

The Seagull 2

laughed outloud at the way
the alarmingly large bird (two feet) ,
stopping short of our penumbra, studied us
from out one viridian eye with hope,
and alternately, from the other, with suspicion.
Strange. And still it came.
What did it see in us? We'd no wings,
popcorn, french-fries, doritos, the usual enticements-
so maybe it was just people-watching.
At any rate, looking it full in the current eye,
I shrugged, brushed myself off, stood stiffly up. It
squealed, wheeled, aimed itself at the harbor,
hopped a few steps, lifted its wings,
wobbled into the gray
uttering cries of defiance and alarm
and planed off over the cars, over the roofs
and canopies, green, tan and bone;
over the dozing heads of the would-be passengers,
bent over their timetables,
disappearing into the shimmer
just as the bus arrived-the sixty-four
again, the same beefy lass driving as before.
So we rubbed that bird, too, from our eyes,
gathered up our gear, boarded the bus
fed the fare box two bucks and wondered
how the meeting was important, certain it was.

Morgan Michaels

The Truth About The Truth

What for you is true
or isn't
usually depends on how many
choose to believe
your version of it:
Hence television. Hence Hollywood.
Human truth, alas, is local;
though most agree
gold will always be
a bully basis for a currency:
Truth being wearisomely,
equatible with usage,
practicality,
who has bigger guns,
and what is ego-tonic to believe.
'This is true, because it's always been.'
'God believes it, too.
Daddy served-why not me? '
In spite of any war, though,
In spite of banks and oil magnates,
and big-money types
who bamboozle you with idealism,
and stand ready to reap the profits,
without suffering so much as a scratch,
and wonder aloud
'You're not chicken, are you?
What kind of a man are you? '
in spite of people who ardently believe the drivel
and preach it, terrified of extinction,
all this has nothing to do with truth,
which is simply mathematical:
two plus two, you can be sure, thank God,
in this universe, at least,
will always equal four.

Morgan Michaels

Then And Now

My youthful mornings overflowed with joy,
the nights with tears. But now the years
bring fraught with doubt the dawn of each day,
Blessed and blissful evenings' dark descent.

Morgan Michaels

Theoretically

Theoretically I like you, lovely Democracy,
but guess your 'we' merely another 'I'.

Morgan Michaels

This Morning

This morning
on the train
a mouth so
troublingly wide
and eyes, in a flash,
there and gone;
that looked into mine
like flesh from flesh,
asunder torn, there
and gone

Morgan Michaels

This or That

That is that. And this is this.
And that was that.
And this was this.
And that was this. And this
definitely was almost that.
And that was pretty much that.

And this was definitely this or that.
And that will, in all likelihood, be this.
But it's too bad that can't be that
as, nice, awfully, if this was this,
because if that wasn't that, this would be
this, pretty much.

Shall that not be this?
'Only if you really want it to,
be this, that is, if not, not.
And if this is that
by law commutative
musn't that be this?

Once That said to This
'Though I am That and you This,
we are much alike.
Let us marry our differences and thrive'.
'Are you nuts'? replied This, 'let's,
in the interest of proximity, not'!

Morgan Michaels

Those Two

Humor has a merry mien:
he warms the blood and heats the soul
and percolating through the spleen
purges from it Envy's bile.

But Wit has on his sabor tip
the heart of many a paladin
who travelled far to challenge him.
He doesn't lose. He plays to win.

Morgan Michaels

Tinos

First, two roosters vying in the dark
cracked the fragile stillness of the night
then the sparrows deafening demot
spread the rift until a golden light
in rivulets fell and filled the window box
putting weak and timid dreams to rout
then the tuneful axle of a cart
kikiriki-drove the darkness out.
A screen door slammed, a first boat quit the sand
a donkey bawled, a whirling swallow swarm
fifed a fray in heaven's sounding bell
Night ran off, his sandals in his hand
Dawn turned into my waking arms
But that is all of Tinos we can tell.

Morgan Michaels

To-

What you do is not exactly murder
You could not be for murder penible
Yet I die and still you surely kill
This indifference carried any further.
Know you the doctrine 'Willful Negligence'?
Allowing harm that one could elsewise alter-
Learn this article for your defense
On this doctrine presently you falter.
Juries of the jilted will decide your doom
Palpable the silence in the room
As Love, the dread judge, enters to intone
The rendered verdict, banging gavel down
And in accents firm and clear and calm
States 'guilty as charged' and 'sentence maximum'.

Morgan Michaels

To A Lady

It's nice, beyond a certain stage
(merely a euphemism for age)
To leave behind the vexing task
of falling, three times a day, in love-
Often by the broadest light thereof.

And peptide driven, bear Love's cross-
Charming, awfully, the way
Secretions frack our mortal clay
Such as a shower cannot remedy-
Those ardors paid with future inanition.

Exempted more in practice than in theory,
Now. Then, I never minded, really,
My 'court the present, shirk
The future policy' retired, I recall one fact:
Love's alot of work.

Morgan Michaels

To II

Too long, my only, we have lain apart
Banished underneath your stern decree
The pillow that we shared is cold, my heart
And silent as it never used to be;
Sweetheart, start to remedy this hurt
Before this hurt surpasses remedy
Silence silence and disdainful banish
Bitter banishment, now and forever.
Ruddy oaths and odes eventuate
Surly silence sitting gagged and bound over
For, Banishment bound, company can flourish.
You are my impartial magistrate:
Softly judge, and these hard terms commute
That you alone have power to refute.

Morgan Michaels

To III

Nature gave you lustrous eyes, but weak
And lovely apricot ears, though deaf to hear
Weak to see the damage that you wreak
Deaf to hear my importuning air.
So, to fix this ailment of your eyes
I have hired a noted oculist
Consulting for your stoppered ears, likewise,
A noted otolaryngologist.
The first examined and pronounced you sound
Calling you blindness 'cortical' alas.
The second you for hearing perfect found
And swore the malady her practice past
Though neither thought the bug at hand was killing
And guessed I would recover, heaven willing.

Morgan Michaels

To The Muse

Heavenly Muse
Am I wrong in insisting
If somebody calls you psychotic, that they
At least know how to spell it?

Morgan Michaels

To The Muse: An Old-Fashioned Poem3

But, oftentimes, beneath your tree,
at morning's blush or at the eve's
descent, your voice among the leaves
will flood my ears with poetry

And oftentimes will you suspend
in fingers dim a golden bowl
that holds the image of a soul
perfected at the journey's end.

Powerful Muse of living fame
who often leads us to the grove
in praise of wine, in praise of love
I bear my sorrows in your name.

Sip this blessing from my lips
Mother, dragon, husbandwife,
you, my muse, as dear as life:
for I am honored with your kiss.

And gladly bear from its imprint
a seething wound, a vivid brand
through which strange, quivering chords are sent
and secrets of the holy land!

Morgan Michaels

To The Muse; An Old-Fashioned Poem 1

Swans were passing-foolish I
burned to fly and with them soar-
beat my limbs till they were sore
but rose no closer to the sky.

Harkening to their fading choir
Hope quick Anger turned into-
still to the horizon flew
those gorgeous minions of desire;

till they passed beyond my ken:
then did I, on either hand
curse the heavens, curse the land
wept and wailed the lot of men

Who fall behind their striving hearts
and tumble to the dust, alas,
the body's fabric at the last
dissolved, to prove his mortal parts.

But high within your mountain lair
you heard my weeping, saw my tears
and knowing them rare and quite sincere
jumped up high and rode the airs.

You strode the winds and sailed the sea
the earth beneath your sandal's heel
took print, until discovering me
cynical, beside a well,

You set your hands upon my head,
drew me backwards by the hair
hissed and whispered in my ear,
alternately threatened, pled.

I shrank in terror-terrified
to gaze upon your nakedness-
you breathed into my nostrils breath
that soul and body soon revived.

You took my...

Morgan Michaels

To The Muse; An Old-Fashioned Poem2

You took my hand within your own
the leftward one that grips the lyre
fetched a dropp of lyric fire
spread the mead my tongue upon.

Then did you my lips unchain
drew me closely to your knee
and dropped the seeds of harmony
in the furrows of my brain.

Said 'Child, you shall die
but if, by chance, these kernals root
blossom, come to erly fruit
your name will with the phoenix vie.'

Then you pulled pods and cuttings sharp
of roses from your mountain height
that flower in heaven's earliest light
grafted the briars in my heart.

Said 'Though the burden of your woe
is hard, this nectar has a cost-
much is gained where much is lost,
thorn blossom linked unto.'

Then often did you council me
told me stories at your feet
Time ran on, my eyes grew weak
youe feature could no longer see.

But now...

Morgan Michaels

Toast

'Toast', he said, (drily) , 'toast'.
Then a third time, 'toast'.
Only then did the quivering figure on the sofa seem to hear
How he wished it would stop, the quivering, that is,
And the babble of questions.
They were watching 'New York Law And Order'.
Not a good thing for his brother to be watching, perhaps,
Given his state-what had the doctors called it?
Psychotic depression, complicated by alcohol withdrawal,
Complicated by cocaine withdrawal, complicated by what?
Malnutrition? How could a person become malnourished
In America today? In New York City, with all those delis?
With all those pizzarias?
Johnny enjoyed the show, he told Timmy
Though the noise and violence were scary-
It had a strange way of getting under your skin.
(Timmy especially hated the sirens)
'Toast' is what Miguel would become, Johnny explained,
Soothingly to the figure propped sideways on the sofa
If he touched a hair of his head-here in Center City
Or home in New York, (where he belonged)
Oh, how he wished he'd go home-
He was beginning to get tired of all this
Three week-ends in a row now, but how do you tell
Your own brother to scram? It was a dilemma.
Frankly, ...

Morgan Michaels

Toast II

Frankly, he found them boring, Timmy's hallucinations,
Auditory or visual, no matter,
And it was a little creepy to see
The brother you grew up with in a state like that.
Just who was this Miguel, anyway?
Timmy claimed him the son of a Cuban war hero
Executed a long time ago for drug-running. Bizarre.
Just because their names were both Santos.
Didn't the fool know how many people named Santos
Lived in that country?
That's what he got for fooling around with that stuff!
That's what he got for fooling around, period!
Timmy was always a nervous bloke.
He looked at his brother, who seemed to be falling asleep,
Then down at the ice-cubes in his glass, at the peculiar way
They floated in Scotch, and he laughed.
Poor Timmy would faint at the sight of a white stretch limo.
Crazy bloke. All because he fooled around.
All because he got caught.

Morgan Michaels

Too Much

As a slave observes his master and so grows
Familiar in his ways (though still in fee)
I have studied Love to bend his blows
Hoping, eventually, to be free:
Meet his every visit with reproaches
When he calls you quickly, quickly tarry
Never seek him, wait till he approaches
Leaving banks where he is known to dally.
Learn to become the Master's master
Master cast as servant of the servant's
Remember Love evaporates the faster
Proportionate to how you offer urgence.
But if you're sick of peace and sanity
Feel free to disregard this monody.

Morgan Michaels

Toys

First unwrapped, each thinks itself best
prettiest, priciest, diciest,
to dress and undress.

Every year come more and more-
bumped from the shelf, they fall to the floor
and lay still.

Or get dropped
a purple while in the dark box,
musty, dusty, worn-out toys.

Only a few: the favorites,
peer year upon year, from the cabinets
unblinking, smiling.

Morgan Michaels

Truth and Opinion

Truth called opinion-a pity.
Opinion called Truth-a damnable pity

Morgan Michaels

Truth*

Truth is mathematics sere dominion.
All other truth is shear opinion.

Morgan Michaels

Truth**

How do you know that a thing is true?
By how many people agree with you.
Do folks object to how your truth is bent?
You're in the wrong environment.

Morgan Michaels

Unfinished

What a strange mood's looked me up
as if I had stared too long into the pond
of a moonstone and by its chilly light read
by night while the heater hummed
some overlong epic of a lady and a knight
quite to completion, as the hours fled,
sharing only with the cat my rumply bed.

Goldengreen flecks dance before my eyes
glancing off the slightly curvilinear crust of the
earth; vision flings itself coldly spaceward;
trajectories skip from its vertices
past asteroids leaded, brushed and ignored
by the fiery tails of comets you couldn't hope
to avoid. There on a stage, I

grasping and tragic, am doomed, spat-clad
Gatsby veering to gloomy Rodenka among
many things, or savagely-stricken Eurydice
at the crossroads of her undoing
tired, in the end, of songs, jaw attractively
set, jumping rope in the instant twilight, wrong
ly thinking she's supposed to meet Ulysses.

What do you mean, swarms of dreams
beside me on the floor? Will you come again?
No. Off, then, already, don't lean on them.
Look: out of my lies, and sighs and extra reams
of rainbow I have knit a kind of jerkin,
a clingy danskin, with a single wing,
a will-of-the-wisp, and mean to wear it well.

Morgan Michaels

Untitled

God made no
good fundamentalists.
Quite a few, though
believe he did.

Morgan Michaels

Uprisings

Up slides the blind and out of remotest heaven
from a perlmutter sky
falls the pure, the Brownian, upward drifting snow
casually but surely, in high-blown whorls;
on the rail has settled a bluish inch.
'It's cold', croaks the bird, on yellow, thin legs,

so I rise. Snow fills last years rifts and sifts
on sticks and galls and nodes of last years'
pride, the dormant window boxes;
Outside you can almost hear it breathe;
It seethes, that bush
that stays green all the winter.

A day. To pass. A day to pass
till sleeping time, again, and blinded once more,
to sleep between footboard and bedstead; only snow-
penniless, homeless, less all
those things that fellow in the Citroen specified needing
hurtling down-Rhine, years ago, breeding

melancholy accumulations
detestable, sweet,
difficult to translate: There is nothing to do but go on
Chaos death is, one hears, and, frankly I'm not ready.
So many winters in one guesses it's all good: the season, the falling
snow, the sleep.

Morgan Michaels

Valeria

Furfica Galene and Curtius
Diadoumenos, man and wife
raised this tomb
over gentle Valeria
who served them first as bond
then freed woman
in consideration of
her great merit.

Morgan Michaels

Valse

How like a game of musical chairs
these fee-for-service systems
where profit is the goal, not service,
and people do not ask
'what can I do for you', but
'what is it worth to you? '
What can repair the sentiment once,
honest and pure,
lost?

How like a game of musical chairs
when bosses, cold to peoples losses
underwrite their profits with their blood,
caring only for their own and their constituents' enrichment,
and greed dazzles need
through the blandishments of advertisement
tv and the movies.
fa!

How like a game of musical chairs.
These fee-for-service systems.

Remove one chair, ok, you can still play.
Remove two, be glad it isn't you.
Take three, take four,
how, you wonder, many more
need pick up and move away.
Just sit down.
This is the way that cities drown
In lethargy and fun-
The emptier the drum
the further it resonates
still the music plays!
Outsource for cheap labor and complain of China?
fa!
But, of course,
there will always be a chair for the boss.
And a nice one.
Not very poetic?
Perhaps not. But poetry is sometimes more than boats on lakes.

Morgan Michaels

Velox amoenum...

It sometimes happens that great Pan
leaving Arcady, roams these gentle hills,
enchanting the kine and suffering no
dropp of wet or seering sun to vex them.

At such times the milky brides of the foul
billies go calmly athwart the deep groves
trustful of their Lord, rooting up weak
shoots of tender arbutus and delicate thyme.

Untended, then, the kids may caper
impervious of snakebite and Mars' wolf-
constantly assured by the blue, long, drawn-out
flute note drifting across the vallies, down the stony

slopes of listing Ustica. At such times, Tyn-
dares, I sense the god'slove-incense to
them these verses intimated by the Muse; and
that they spill from Nature's bountiful horn

rustic riches aplenty for me, oh, and now for you.
Here in this mossy dell, sealed off from the
dogday dust, you may pluck out ditties of the one
love shared by Penelope and glittering Circe.

And here, couched in shade, sipping the
innocent crus of Mytinini, and rendered immune
via Bacchus from all chicaneries of Mars; and hav-
ing, moreover, completely outwitted

dull Cyrus' absurd suspicians, his
mawling paws, stay-rest; here you need not fear
the least distress to you freshly dressed hair
or fear to tear your freshly-pressed dress.

Morgan Michaels

Venus

'Venus! It's you! '
'You recognize me? '
'Anywhere! Is that your Meryl Streep look? '
'Very funny.'
'How did you get here? '
'Why, I took the train. It's the fastest way, you know.'
'But you're naked! '
'Oh, so I am. One should always travel comfortably, I believe.'
'You can't just go walking around town naked! -
not in January, anyway. Even you! '
'Don't be such a prude.'
'I'm not a prude! You'll catch pneumonia. You'll get arrested! '
'Nobody complained.'
'Look-you can wear your clothes lightly, but you can't go naked.'
'In my part of the world everybody does.'
'You're too much. That was a long time ago. Things change! '
'What do you mean, change? '
'Well, nowadays we've got-
'Got what? ...'
'Religion!
'Humbuggery! All of it! Forget it! '
'What! How can you say that? '
'Easy. Religion owes its very existence to me. You sound like someone else I know. Let me tell you.....

Morgan Michaels

Venus II

'Let me tell you something. More shrines have been erected to me than to any of my 'imitators'. And I've had more sacrifices, too. I do love a white dove. Just remember that! Put up or shut up, I always say. P-ss or get off the pot! '
'I can't believe you! And today the Sabbath. And tomorrow Sunday! '
'Believe what you like! Have you seen my boy? He said he was going to visit his favorite uncle-that's you, I suppose.'
'He was here, but I sent him along.'
'Aren't we going out? '
'No. Not tonight. I'm working on something. Besides, I'm exhausted.'
'Hmmph! Great! You know, one of these days I just might not be coming back.'
'Ah, I'll call you tomorrow. On your cell.'
'You'd better. Or else. Goodbye.'
'Goodbye, Venus.'

Morgan Michaels

Water

Blue as the Danube
Yellow as mud
Green as the rashes
Red as the sun
Golden as gold is
Black as the night
But, owing, finally,
To the machinations of the Word,
Colorless.

Morgan Michaels

What Soon Became Clear

Rumor came over the hills
like springtime, scattering shadow
and suddenly people knew
(odd amalgam of relief and regret)
Orestes was back! Oh!
There had been sightings here and there:
under the clematis-clad stoa,
a subtle finger of recognition, uplifted,
pleasant enough but dismissive-not friendly,
as much a waiver as a wave;
leaving the temple, a cool nod to an old friend
in passing, but he didn't stop, she complained,
to chat as he ought, being gone so long.
It was him, alright, but changed.
He no longer clowned in the agora with his friends,
drunk on privilege, pleased to be
a showy prince of the blood who shopped.
It was different, now, he seemed not to hear, when you said
'Hi, how's it going, man, do you remember when....'
He didn't seem to hear, but walked
Straight ahead, eyes fixed on the horizon,
Abstract, purposeful, dumb, a little scary,
answering minimally, questioned,
as if resolution, too, lay just over the hill
It was his destiny to scale.
Patiently, we waited
wondering where this change might lead.

Morgan Michaels

When

When I sweat the big sweat
Shut my eyes
Shudder, die and descend
To the Stygian shore
(which may look alot like the Hudson
Only darker-sliding) ,
I will quickly locate the ferry gate
And after a little wait
Offer its famous boatsman a poem
Explaining it my only fare.

Then, I predict, he'll sniff 'what's this for',
(having seen every past form of coercion)
Shake it out, briefly, and moving his lips
Begin to read it, leaning on his oar.

I further expect, as he reads, to see brightening
His tired eyes, and a smile
To race his dour face;
That finishing the now-damp poem
He'll look me appraisingly up and down,
Sigh, tip cap and say,

'All aboard, Sir, there's a seat for you here,
Estimable shade, your table is waiting,
People are expecting you, there,
On the other side.
No one said you'd be coming today-
How's the weather up there, anyway?
I sincerely hope you'll enjoy your stay
With us, and find everything here to your liking'.

Morgan Michaels

Why?

Unaccountably, while I was making a liverwurst sandwich
(with mustard and cornichons on rye)
the poem took a dive
off the countertop, I don't know why,

onto the floor and burst into words
which can be either blunt or sharp, God knows.
There was nothing to do
but vacuum it up
eat the sandwich and, and, and,
put on shoes.

Morgan Michaels

Winter

Why am I so knit up with aches, this morning
in every articulation that bears weight?
Maybe because it turned so cool last night,
the a.c. still running strong.
Great God-if this is winter's warning
of things it's like eventually to bring on
I'd rather skip the season, altogether,
or. better, move to Costa Rica.

Morgan Michaels