

Poetry Series

Will Barber

- poems -

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Will Barber (1948)

The late (or nearly always late) Will Barber has a very interesting past. Not being sure whether the statute of limitations has expired, he issued this statement to the Poemhunter community:

'Who are you people? And why are you looking at me? '

Will Barber lives somewhere in South Texas, apparently. His favorite hobbies are eating, sleeping, and fooling around on the internets. Sometimes, he leaves the house. Angels and ministers of grace surround him, but he's not dead yet.

His most memorable quote: 'Who wants to go for lunch, then? ! '

'Everything was beautiful. Nothing hurt.' - Kurt Vonnegut, 'Cat's Cradle'.

Works:

'The Complete Works of Anthony Trollope', by Anthony Trollope.

A Chorale

Dew on the desert: idle dreams
Are nourishment enough, in youth;
Years demand deep roots: a man
Will thirst, pursuing idle truths.

Storms on the ocean: useless fear
For mariners whose hopes are gone;
The years demand light heart; the man
Will learn this, if he hear our song.

2006

To Duncan - fellow member of the choir

Will Barber

A Hymn of Praise

The keys and staves demark strait paths
The restless note must travel on;
The note's the beast that carries
The burden of the sound.

Music evokes a sympathy
In willing heart, the symbol of
A presence, constantly descending,
White wings of endless love.

2006

To Sandra

Will Barber

A New Lament, and New Hope

Who rules the master,
Who serves the slave?
Who tries to linger?
Who tries to leave?

Whose is the victory
When triumphs are done?
The Circus is empty,
the Forum forlorn.

Whose hero's boat
Hoists a black sail?
Whose bones are found
At Choisin Reservoir?

Why do we sigh,
Why do we mourn?
The evening sky
Shall take us all home.

Yet, as the sunset fades,
Friendships ascend:
Fragile words compass
Time without end.

2008

Will Barber

A New Song

My mind moves to a chorus,
My brain moves to a gong.
Sopranos catch subtleties,
Sometimes the basses get it wrong.

And yet, in one brief moment,
A balance may ascend -
One song, one pianist:
Music without end.

2008

Search: 'Robert C. Howard' at YouTube.com
For the First Movement of his Piano Concerto

Will Barber

A Rehearsal for a Song

If I could sing - my heart,
Then, never would be sung.
If I knew my heart,
It never would be shown.

If I could sing, no song could e'er express
What was written in that text.

If I sang at all, could I meet such test,
If I could heed the call -
If my words meant anything at all -
My ears would then be blest.

Only works of peace, betimes -
Only hymns of praise - deserve
Rehearsal, in these trying times.

Sing louder, then - and serve,
And wait - and sing
Of morning, day and night;
And praise our sight,
The endless light
Amid the night
In which we sing -
The endless ring
Unbroken, still sustained.

If I could sing my heart
While innocence remained -
However distant in the past,
Or in the world - if I so could sing,
My praise unconstrained -
If I had such art - so would I sing.

2006

Will Barber

A Song of

It's not how your life was formed,
It's not just how you reached the end;
It's not the songs or rhymes you made
It's how you sought to make amends.

What did you do? What did you say?
Why do questions go this way?
Search your conscience, search your brain,
The questions will all come again.

Every day may lead us forth
Courageously, upon the Earth;
Each moment has a coward's cry
If we but let the Earth spin by.

Grasp the nettle, sing of peace
The pleasures, pains the years bring forth:
But still repent; eternal doubt
Leads us to comfortable Night..

Night is not comfortable, because Dawn
Comes urgently to lead us on:
Hope intervenes, and makes us pause,
Dwelling betimes within this house.

Sing your hymns, recite your Psalms:
This is the path we travel on.

2008

Will Barber

Adonis

Where hope dwells, there the wolf
Nips at the heels of Arcadian
Legends. Send us dreams enough,
Minerva and Orion.

Adonis died upon the fall
From favor of Minerva;
He loved her not, and fell
The victim of her Furies.

Lord Jesu, grant
Us respite from
Legends, adamant.
A new day dawns.

2008

Will Barber

Alice

Alice, not trusting memory to betray her completely,
Set watchmen on far hills to light signal fires;
And every time the fires burned, she lost
Another memory, and cried a little more madly.

She had telephones installed in every room;
The people she hired took the messages.
She walked in the garden, trying to lose things,
And cursed the postman when he returned them.

She called for carpenters and ironmongers
And had bars installed in front of every mirror
Except the one in the nursery, which she
Had managed yesterday to forget.

Alice, has this not gone far enough? See,
Here in front of the mirror, behind the bars,
It is teatime every day at four o'clock
And you have forgotten to have the clocks removed.

I am sitting here on your chaise longue,
Counting the fingers on the gloves I hold in my hand,
And I am tired of waiting for you to certify the results
So that I may go back to the door and knock again.

Take another spoonful of this medicine, Alice;
You are growing older and older, and must die.
I will send the servants away, and call the doctors;
You, for you part, must decide, over and over, whether to scream.

1970

Will Barber

All Things May Move Joyfully

All things may may move joyfully,
Shimmering in the night we share -
All movements of the wind or sea
May bring us there.

All things shining lead us on:
Some to doom, some to salvation
In night we cling to hints of dawn
In mortal desperation,

Or anticipate better times. Alas,
'Tis like a story told to us:
Alice through the looking-glass,
Her eyes averted, tremulous.

Little time remains to try
Formulae of brighter days:
Time obtrudes, and passes by
Mortals' weak attempts to praise

The fragile Earth we earthlings share,
As in a dream. Come ye thankful ones
To sing vain anthems if you dare:
Silence is the cold response.

The stars wheel round the pole, and we
March onward to a different goal
Somewhere in the universe, we pray
Mercy may subsume all souls.

2008

Will Barber

Anecdote

A nameless one, who toiled alone,
And waited for the telephone
To ring, grew restless on a day
When winds blew all his dreams away

In gusts of news. No raindrops fell;
Nor did he cry, 'Farewell, farewell! ',
While drifting to the farther shore.
He hoped for nothing, nothing more.

When his boat beached on the strand,
Kindly natives lent a hand;
They carried him to hospital,
Where he exclaimed, 'Fare well! fare well! '

2007

Will Barber

Apostrophe

Why is it, do you know, that
Memories of you are silver,
And I stumble onward
Seeking your steep path?

Rough roots obtrude there:
My knees are bloodied,
Yet I scramble on - your glimmer
Easily eludes my grasp.

Scholars speculate:
Is perseverance a virtue?
Ivy twines marble eyes,
Red bricks entomb the words.

Always too late the truth,
Too fleeting the moment,
Too short the breath,
And beauty twists away;

Dreams of dreams,
Memories come again;
Your trace eludes me.
I reluctantly awake.

Another day to seek
A chance to fail, again:
Always the gentle things
Fly upward, and I fall.

2008

Will Barber

Be Here

Although the day was full of grace,
I frowned because your face
Was not there.

The sky was denim-blue,
The breeze redolent, but you
Were not there.

Summer comes apace;
I would rejoice,
Were you here.

Clouds close the sky,
Again; this is why I
Need you here.

2009

Will Barber

Beauty, As She Passes By

Some by scorn, some by sword,
Some in lust, some in fright,
Quarrel over dusty words,
Ancient wrongs, ancient rites,
Defending faith despite their doubts.
Beauty strides past, undisturbed.
Combatants fall on bloody ground;
Heroes cannot follow her.

Those who follow go astray
In mazy paths. Hear them mourn
In exile: 'I have lost the way.
Where has Beauty gone? '

You need not follow, need not strive,
But wait with unobtrusive eye:
Be ever ready to observe
Beauty, as she passes by.

2008

Will Barber

Before I Cross the River

There is a hill ahead,
And Death is behind the hill;
I urge the horses onward, onward....

There is a river here;
Always, there is a river
Just when Death scents victory....

White current seethes
About black rocks;
How fair the meadow is,
After crossing the water....

2006

Will Barber

Do Angels Guard the Gate?

Who guards the gates of paradise?
Dæmons or angels? And who
Sorts out the rubbish and the lies,
The gantlet that mankind runs through?

There are no guardians of the gate;
Souls gravitate toward light
Or to the dark; they self-select;
Some live in shadows, tenebrate.

Is any hour too late? I think,
Because our hopes are bound in love,
Because all mortals share a link,
This slight thread is just enough

To carry us to peace, and strive
To celebrate our common fate:
Echoes in the light of Days
And in the depths of Night.

2008

'We all arrive, or none' - Fyodor Dostoevski

Will Barber

Dover Beach, Revisited

Come praise unnecessary wars, although
Videos and narratives must disprove
Theses of conspiracy theorists, who
Govern us from their pretended love

Of Freedom, and Democracy. Rhetoric
Trumps reality, no facts must interfere
With their Dominion. Never dare connect
Belief with fact, lest then there should appear

Black helicopters, agents unidentified
Who confiscate your dreams, and then deride
Plain evidence. Time is not on your side,
You poets! Write of waves and tides

That echo on some distant, white-cliffed shore -
Rattling pebbles, gestures, winds - no more.

2006

Will Barber

Emily

All in the evenings, sweet Emily
Would walk by the water's edge, dreaming
Of a voice that might wake her forever
From such idle revery.
She trampled grasses down,
So blindly did she stride, musing
On the destination of the wind,
The sequence of history.

All days, in every season, Emily
Would walk to the river's edge, wondering
Whether she might not care to be
Part of the river's legacy
To the city of New Orleans.

1980

Will Barber

Empire

Be not surprised that Empire
Bestrides the world today.
You, see, Pocahontas:
It has always been this way

2008

Will Barber

Gifts of Plutus

Behold the surface of the Earth you see,
The grain of the green fields, fish of the sea,
Birds of the air, the cattle of the lands;
And you may gaze on it. Now, take my hand,
And follow me to marble halls of man.
You shall behold the Glory there within.
Passing the portal, see the trophies gleam
Bright on the walls, the brazen arms of men
Struck down in combat in an Attic land -
And this, but a taste of what lies beyond
Another door. This is the room of Empire,
Inlaid with emerald, ruby, and porphyry,
All things costly, gilt with gold, repleat
With coffers full of all the wealth beneath.
Come down this stairway to a further room -
Where all this wealth originates, the stone
Yields up its bounty - going down and down,
To find a greater gift. Here is black gold
Which flows to rulers' hands, that ruin the world.
Go deeper, to the heart of your desires.
The costliest gem of all I show you here:
Colorless, hard, the adamant symbol of
The Advertisements of your mortal love.

2006

Psalms 50: 10 - 'For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.'

To Uriah, who supplied the quotation

Will Barber

Green Dreams

I dream of you, love.
My eyes are downcast
When you appear in my dreams.

Sueño contigo, mi amor.
mis ojos bajan la mirada
al verte en mis sueños.

Y, ¿por qué soñamos así?
Why do we so dream?
Because night dreams may
Lead us to see

Love transcending time,
A glimpse of the beloved,
A glimpse of the the divine.

Te quiero verde, but not yet.
Much time may be left to us, love.
Flores nos reflejan.. The blossoms
Watch us from the meadows.

Ten cuidado mi amor:
Each step treads a minfield
Temorosos andamos
Our lips are sealed
No word could express
The dreams we dream.
Y los sueños sueños son.

2008

Dedicated to Luis Gil, who wholly improved my poem with his invaluable editing.

Will Barber

Haze

His last days, he remembered
Ouachita mountain haze
Where he sought his love
In former days:

She floated on the waters
Of Lake Hamilton, aware
Of nothing save the waves,
The wind, the air.

He cried out her name, once,
An unguarded moment, when
The pain grew too intense
But - as always - then

His lips clamped to a line.
He never would admit
How much love hurt him,
How he never got over it.

2007

Will Barber

I Was Not Taken

I was not taken by the claws of love,
Nor bound upon a bloody rock;
I heard no angels, saw no dove,
No eagle, nothing in that dark.

I called out in the night for truth,
As if the truth would come to me,
As if the universe had any
Truths left to say.

Go bid the winds to cease to blow,
Go bid the satellites to fall;
I cannot do another day
Of labour for the world.

1985

Will Barber

I Will Not Leave You (Yes)

Though the starlings mock you,
You must say, Yes
Though the long train of history leaves the station,
Though the children wave goodbye from distancing windows,
You must say, Yes:

Memory will have enough to do, without you
The future needs you not, nor any one,
But you must say, Yes, you
Have no right, not to follow on
In the wake of the green light,
In the wake of the red dawn
Following the pain or delight
That leads us on.
Confess: you must say, Yes,

No, I will not leave you,
I will not leave you alone,
We have gone too far
To part, now;
Oft I complained
And sometimes wept
I was beaten down
And lifted up before my time,
And again cast down,
But you forced me to say Yes.

And the tide rolls in, forever
Until the tide rolls out;
And I will not leave you
Even though you shout
Words of anger, or of fever
I bring sweet water to relieve you
On the long strand of a shore
Where we dwell forevermore
Hands clasped beneath the seaweed
Toes delving silver sand
Long hair flowing seaward
Fingers entwined.

And no, I will not leave you
This side of the moon:
A rising wind may blow
But we will cling here now,
In secret cove;
The tide swells on.
I will not leave you, yet, Love.

Have you seen, Love, how
The night rules our fate?
Sun came too early or too late,
And ne'er achieved the Now.

And no, I will not leave you:
Furture slain
Past, too
I will remain.

You must say Yes.
I whisper, Yes.

2009

Will Barber

I'm Cool With That

Come praise the stars, the wind, the rain
That course the earth; come praise the pain
And pleasure that the years bring forth:
Praise every particle of the Universe.

Doubt denials of the flame
Which courses through the hearts of men:
The ones who lose, the ones who win,
Are indistinguishable, in the end.

The wretched and the fortunate
Will join each other in the dark
Those who were wrong, those who were right
Will join each other in the Light.

Light and Dark will alternate
Eternally: this is man's fate.
Come, laugh; come, commiserate.
Dance your day, and sing your night.

2006

Will Barber

Jacinta

Flee, Jacinta - to the caldera
To escape the floods -
Fly, fly away.

Miguelito, seek Jacinta
And bring her back
To the white village.

Banners fly beside the road -
Green, red, yellow, blue -
But not for Jacinta.

The mountaintop is grey,
The frogs are silent now.
Who will sing?

Miguelito, have you no words
To woo Jacinta
From her revery?

2007

Will Barber

Jacinta II

Jacinta, put your best shoes on;
There will be a fiesta tonight
I will dance with you,
Since Miguelito is in hiding.

The Guardia Civil watches,
But we must dance, Jacinta,
In order to protect
Miguelito's alibi.

I will pass you a note
Written upon fragile paper
When we perform
The pas de deux.

The note says, 'Flee, Miguel'
But is that a warning,
Or merely my wish
To dance with Jacinta forever?

Will I ever kiss you, Jacinta
Except as some part of
Some subterfuge?
Pretend to whisper to me.

Hide in the mountains,
Hide in the cities:
In hiding, there is no rest,
One never pauses in peace.

O, Jacinta! Jacinta!
May I have the next dance?
I have a message for you:
Miguel has acquired plastique.

2007

Will Barber

Jacinta III

There was no reason
No reason at all.
Jacinta wept,
For no purpose.

The noisy children
Made Jacinta shudder.
They threw rocks, and
Screamed when bloodied.

Jacinta looks through her album,
Photographs of Miguel:
Although he wore sunglasses,
You can recognise him by the scars.

Why is it that Oaxaca
Sank silently, unreported?
Jacinta turns the pages,
Her questions ignored.

I comfort her with fables,
Saying Miguelito may live
Somewhere in Chiapas,
His bright eyes shining.

It is difficult to visit Jacinta.
Her mother guards the door,
Fearing I bring trouble,
But I have a note from Miguel.

He says, 'Be brave, and wait.
I will come back for you! '
Jacinta, your asylum lies
Not in Oaxaca, nor Chiapas.

The AK-47 that you hide beneath
Your skirt - Give it to me, Jacinta!
I will avenge Miguelito
On the outskirts of Oaxaca.
Miguelito would be proud,
And I only lust for justice,
And one last bloody
Poem.

2007

Will Barber

Jacinta IV

Please, señor,
¿May I refresh your drink?

You sit redfleshed, hairy
Upon the veranda,
Staring at the locals.
Ignoring your wife.

I do not care what you want.
Your needs are unimportant.
Your wife seems to
Think the same.

I serve drinks to turistas,
But not for turistas.
¿May I refresh your drink,
As you grow sunburnt?

I am working for propinas:
¿See my white teeth?
But no, you ignore me,
I am mere scenery.

Please, señor, do not forget
To leave a tip in the propina jar.
Even a bartender may
Send remittances to Jacinta.

One may smile and smile,
While wishing for justice
To engulf resorts,
Y oficinas gubernaentales.

Please, señor,
¿May I refresh your drink?

I am Miguel. The Guardia
Seeks me in Oaxaca.
¿Una otra cerveza
Para su compañera?

2008

Will Barber

Jacinta V

Once again, Jacinta, I return.
Miguelito is not dead,
But he has changed his mind.

His white teeth flash:
How brilliant is the Sun
When Noon is near!

Ah, Jacinta, I dreamed
Someday we would dance
At the fiesta; and this

Happened, but events
Overtook us. Not in Oaxaca,
Nor even in Chiapas can

We find peace. Jacinta,
I am wounded. My legs
Will dance no longer:

It was not bullets that
Hit me, but the batons
Of the National Police.

Miguel is in Quintana Roo.
Every charismatic leader
Betrays his followers.

Will he be glad to see you
In your peasant dress
In the bar of the Hilton?

2008

Will Barber

Lear, and Darwin

The raindrops pound upon the nerves
The winds howl stringently, and sing
A song to fill a winter night, a surge
Of rage against a bitter fate, a king
Who wanders in the blustry snows
Naked to the icy blows.

Never, never, weep for Man.
Refuse all pity, for the pain
That drives him from his native home
Is driven by an urgent drum;
And those who try to save the race
Doom other species in its place.

Deride the dreams of childish ones
Who sing of hope in future times:
Look around, and praise the hours
That toll indifferently to a close.

Then weep a bit, and realise
These are the universal rules.

2007

Will Barber

Leaving

The thought of leaving
Left me, by evening.
'I will stay, ' I said, 'to watch the grass grow.
I will remain. When you hear the cricket,
Know that I hear it also, and endure.'

1978

Will Barber

Lebanon

A man whose wounds were healed, perhaps,
Grew restive as the seasons lapsed;
Faltering footsteps, one by one,
Led him to snowy Lebanon.

Ah, Lebanon! 'twas like the scream
Torn from the throat of Philomel
By every hand of every king,
Every voter in the world;

It was like the endless dreams
Of one in agony: she sings
Still, in the redolent wood
Where Lebanon was forced.

October, 1986

Will Barber

Lost in Snow

No matter what the dreams may say,
Mortal dreams must pass away,
Lost in sand and lost in snow,
Where all mortal dreams must go.

Mercy, fear, and hope contend
In memories of mortal men -
Wandering the years between
The Wars defining modern times.

2006

Will Barber

Love Song

See, I am full of clouds today,
Mists and winds and prophecy,
Living at the periphery
Of the holy ocean.

No words can comfort me:
'Tis words have brought me
To this subjectivity
And ceaseless motion.
Come sit beside me, then,
Late in the afternoon;
One glance will win me from
This idle passion.

1980

Will Barber

Mariners Brought Blossoms to Emily

Mariners brought blossoms to Emily,
Ribbons and bagatelles and candies.
She would reply in her head with a melody
She hummed under her breath, as she bore these gifts to the pantry.
Then, before she was aware, it was afternoon, then evening.
Small voices she had heard in the forenoon, whispering,
Gained volume, grew insistent, they would shout, 'Emily! '
Then it would be dark, and time for dinner,
And her mother would stand by the door, whistling;
And the stars would beckon and implore,
And all the world would be crying out for Emily.

1980

X*****

Will Barber

Migrations

Somewhere, far beyond the sky,
Fledglings by the millions fly -
Testing wings and tasting winds,
Preparing for the foreign lands.

Autumn will at last arrive.
Birds - and we - will just survive
All the travails of the sky,
Of the earth that passes by.

Every breeze, each breath of air
Shall guide our wings to lands afar.

Weep not, neither wait:
Wings and winds will guide
You to the southern gate,
Where in green meadows
You may joyfully reside
In white wings' shadows.

2006

To Susie Gharib

Will Barber

My Genes

I suppose she will never read these lines
I hope she is still alive, and thrives.

Her Mother never answers *72
Her Brother joined the Marines.

Martha, Martha, Martha
Please return my jeans.

2007

Will Barber

Natasha

'Natasha, Natasha, ' cried Old Grandmother,
'Run, call the geese, draw water from the river,
Because the moon is rising over the mountains.'
Natasha spilled the river-water, left her waterfowl forgotten;
She hid in the dark pines,
Shying from frantic moonbeams.

Then Natasha wept.
There were no angels, nothing;
There was no relief:
Her tears were completely foolish.
Then Natasha knew that nothing is forbidden.

'Natasha, ' cried Old Grandmother, 'Where are you gone?
Wicked girl, do you not feel the moon? '

1980

Will Barber

Night, and Dawn

Ghosts roam the night, to seek the sleepers out
And feast upon their dreams. Ghosts search the night
For old memories, the sound and sight
Of passions they have lost in silent ground.

Dreams roam the night air, seeking ones who wake,
Their beating hearts roused by contact with divine
Spirits who call them to arise, and shine,
And dream nobler dreams, nobly to speak

Of all the Earth's travails, and of the good that there
Lies 'round about the feet of those who walk
About her earthen walls, of the sweet silks
That 'round the ankles of her maidens swirl.

Ghosts and dreams recede westward, as the sun
Calls all the mortals to begin again.

2006

Will Barber

November Comes

I breathe, and then the moments pass.
All these breaths define the time
That I have left - short wisps, alas:
Inhale, exhale: these make my rhyme.

Every winter brings the death
Of solstice, soul, or Universe:
Just when gifts are given, freezes
Come for kidneys or for lungs.
The midwinter cold releases
Souls who now must seek the sun.

'Tis never wrong to say 'Goodbye, '
Or say, 'Hello, November sky.'

2006

To Sandra

With an apology to Kurt Vonnegut, for stealing a line.

Will Barber

Once in a Blue Moon

I wished upon the Moon, last night.
One never knows what She may do:
Deserts, and gardens of delight,
She rules. We lunatics pursue
Phantasms of harmony and peace.
Blue Moon wishes may come true:
A night with no need for police,
A glimpse of hope: the color blue.

- 31 May,2007

Will Barber

One Hopes

I am old enough to remember
So many things, so many things:

The blackbirds singing in the morning,
Cicadas taking wing,

The scent of thunderstorms,
The yellow-jacket's sting.

So much we leave behind, so much
Is fastened to us, unwilling;

Yet as the years advance, we learn that
Urgently we must sing

Of morning and the noon-hour,
Green, sacred evening.

May Time dole out some mercy,
To the young, as we are leaving.

- 2008

Will Barber

Political Science

The Law of Supply and Demand
Governs political enterprise:
Politicians sell such wool
As people need for their eyes.

2008

Will Barber

Pray for Dawn

Some fathers died, some sons were killed;
Some were afraid, and some gung-ho;
Some went back against their will;
Some lusted for the chance, to go

Into chaos, into fire,
Into unimaginable hell: to
Realms where friendly fire
Came from estwhile allies. Now,

Ring bells of victory,
Ring bells which bid farewell,
Ring bells which give warning:
Enemies approach: O, ring bells.

Somewhere, in small towns, neighbors,
Ones who knew the victims - these
Well-meaning ones offer their tears,
But there is no substitute for peace.

Ring bells, but whisper prayers:
For those left behind; theirs
Is the burden, to go on:
For them, pray for dawn.

2008

Will Barber

Prophecy

'Well, William, ' said my grandmother,
'You bear your grandfather's name.
He talks too much, and sits on the porch,
And you'll probably turn out the same.'

2007

Will Barber

Sing Anna Gadda Da Vida

The Japanese still
Try to steal our poetic forms,
Envyng our bombs.

2007

Anna?

Will Barber

Spinach and E. Coli: Musings

One who feared invasion from a foreign land
Ate a spinach salad, and that did him in.

And so it goes: each time we fear the past
The future supervenes, and we at last
Are left to pick up pieces of our myths
Without which we are lost; and now, with
Instant access everywhere, to news:
We might as well give over, sing the Blues.

Say, did you hear about George Washington?
Sweet Martha sang the Blues, when he was home.
Strangers came to dinner - yes! - and they
Drank heavily, until they toasted - 'Liberty! '

Then George would vanish. Later she would hear
He'd gone to Pennsylvania; she would fear
He might be dead, or dying. In the event,
He was guarded by Divine Providence.
His eyes aged, while defending 'Common Sense, '
And he became our first great President!

Some others, later, blundered: Asian wars
Led them to eat spinach. What are wars for?

2006

Will Barber

Stand Up

Rise up, you gentle heroes: rise up and sing a song.
Sing of the future, now: your dreams shall carry you along.

Ignore doubts sown by enemies who lead you to your fate: .
Destiny holds out a hand: seize it, do not wait.

Congratulate each other: you make a merry crowd;
Lift up your voices freely; sing both long and loud.

Drums fade, bugles sour: : 'twas but a futile dream.
Retreat, you craven subjects. Elections come again.

2008

Will Barber

The Archbishop in Arabia

The Archbishop walked in the garden
In the desert where he dwelt;
There were rumors of horizon
Which seemed to say farewell.

The light of the green evening
Reached deep into his dreams
And memories; he was given
No intimation of release.

Let there be choirs - he thought -
To bring my forefathers home
From the merciful desert,
Into undying flame.

The pale archbishop ascended;
His lips were like the night,
Guarding unutterable prophecies
That fail, or come too late.

He gave his hands to heaven,
That the words be given back,
That the dreams might leave him
To his living work.

1981

Will Barber

The Border

Along the border lurk our passions,
Along the border waves rush in;
Along the border come the humans
Thirsting, hungry, full of pain.

O when may we believe our hearts
Which beat in tune, over the earth?
Along the border the thesis starts:
Mankind separates at birth.

Pay the laborer his wages
Ere the sweat dry on his brow.
Fear not the stranger: time assuages
Doubt, and you must seek to know

The stranger's dance, the stranger's song,
The heartbeat that we share: mankind
Must love itself, at least. We wrong
Ourselves, in choosing to be blind.

Beauty cries from every point,
Every dimension, of the universe.
Come sing: let not your heart grow faint.
Love casts out profane remorse.

Come sing, and sing more joyfully
For every night that falls. I see
The stars wheel 'round the pole, and we
Are found and lost, eternally.

Interminably, the waves rush in,
And we are lost, and found again.

2006

Deuteronomy 24: 14

Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in the the land within thy gates.

Will Barber

The Bunnies go over a Cliff

Wow, man, you really drive good.
Wait a minute, dude! I thought you were driving.
No, man, I'm wasted.
Dude, you really need to slow down!
Oh, man, what's that funny-looking thing?
Dude! it's a dead-end sign!
Better stop, man!

Dude, you're the one who talked me into a road trip!

Sorry, man.

2007

In honor of Democracy.

Will Barber

The DSL Bunnies

There was a family of orphaned bunnies that lived in North Carolina,
And rains from Tropical Storm Ernesto flooded their burrow.
They had just gotten a new computer, and a DSL line. A
Torrent of rain caused - is this possible? - bunny brows to furrow.

Do bunnies have brows or even eyebrows or eyelashes? Never mind,
That's beside the point because the bunnies are just metaphors.
Anyway, when the CPU was submerged, and the screen went blind
The bunnies started to wail. Do bunnies do that? Well, for

The sake of the story, we will assume they do, and continue.
They had just gotten the DSL service and were quite innocent
Of what they had done wrong with line filters. From the menu
They selected invalid options, and furthermore they went

To the wrong site on the world-wide-web. Astonished,
When the electricity failed, they watched their information
Sink beneath Tropical Storm Ernesto's wrath, and vanish
Wherever the light goes, when it goes out. Salvation

Came when a kind Esther-bunny-fairy from Maryland
Miraculously appeared, waving her wand, casting doubts aside!
Waters vanished! The computer dried out! All the land
Rang with praise! But the bunnies were electrocuted, and they died.

2006

reposted for: Esther

Will Barber

The Man From the Nether Lands

The man from the nether lands
Had such troubles on the mind,
He let his nose grow great
To sniff the winds,
He let his fingers spider
Out, to grimmer grasp,
He opened up the windows
In his narrow house.

I cannot, no man can,
Tell how the story ends;
At present, yellow butterflies
Flutter past arachnid hands
Uninjured, in the twilight
Falling softly on the nether man.

1979

Will Barber

The Man Who Cried

The man who cried against the wind
flew up through hurricanes of doubt
one season when the winter's rule
ran sternly; his arms were bright,
and bright his eye and gold his crown
and green right to the heart of him;
he cried against the winds at night,
he wandered back a million miles
through peril and delight, still hungering
although his cheek was fat,
although his hands had killed for meat;
the senses, unruly, wandering,
made him cry grimly in the night,
calling the ghostly ones back
through thorn and over sand,
under sun and under moon,
to cry against the wind.

1985

Will Barber

The Man Who Loved the Sea

The man who loved the sea
Had hands of iron;
By the time he came back from the sea,
His fingers were rusted to the bone.
No more shall he go down to the sea
In the foggy mornings.

1976

Will Barber

The Promised Land

The Promised Land is anywhere
Good men do not live in fear,
But a liar must take care
Lest the the neighbors idly stare
And suddenly avert the eye
When they see him passing by.

The Promised Land is any place
Where a thought may dwell in peace
In a garden - whether of
The Earth, the soul, or others' love.
When the brain grows calm, and free,
The mind may dwell there peacefully.

The garden gate is open wide:
Any guest may come inside
And see the blossoms there, that weave
Such symphonies - perhaps to leave,
Carrying, in unfettered mind,
Memories of the Promised Land.

2006

Will Barber

The Song of Arthur

On my second trip to Austin State
It was very, very late
I felt great relief, at last
When the police delivered me to my past.
After the body-search, a nurse led
Me to the same ward, to the same bed
I had occupied six months before.
Stumbling to the bathroom, I heard 'Hello, Sir! '
'Arthur? ' I asked, 'Is it really you? '
'Yes, Sir! ' he replied. Then I knew
All souls are connected. A link survives
From former tribulations. Arthur lives
In the periphery of my mind, always
As he rocks in his chair, singing
'I Feel Good! ' - and he sways
Constantly in Waco, bringing
Joy and alarm to relatives.
Tattoos adorn his legs, but not his song:
Gangs can never claim him, for he lives
Where 'It's all good! ' He is not wrong
To rock, and sing: 'I Feel Good! ':

Join him, if you dare: sing 'Arthur's Song.'

2006

Will Barber

This Moment is Forever

The universe is a vast river,
The rain is very cold;
There is no reason to persist:
This moment is forever.

Come, call the Master of Æthers,
Prince of the Air, sovereign;
Summon him if you need reason to go on
Although this moment is forever.

Lady in white walks by the river,
Beckoning me into the future:
Beauty impels me to follow,
Since this moment is forever.

1980

Will Barber

To My Friends, on Christmas Eve

One fit of pique
One bit of spite
May these be released
Tonight.

In the dark, a Child is born,
Offering mercy. Unless
We do the same,
No prayer is blest..

A Star, a prayer,
The angels' song
Bid mankind to mount the stair
Jacob's Angels climbed upon.

This holy season
Know ye this:
Our Fellowship
Has brought me bliss.

12/07

May all your years be blest.
Your friendships have been a blessing to me.

Will Barber

Toleration

Tolerance is tyranny, postponed:
Indifference to one man, alone.

Tolerance is conditioned love,
Jettisoned when seas grow rough.

Tolerance never set man free.
Seek ye human liberty.

2006

Will Barber

Too Soon

So soon, the green wing faltered so soon
As the shadows grew short on the lawn -
It was more than the phase of the Moon,
More than the flight of the dawn -
Time for the lovers to leave, so soon -
So sudden, the green wing has flown.

1990

Will Barber

Trojan Horses

Little did we know that bugs
Would come to rule the internets;
But now the tubes are clogged, and rubes
Buy bandwidth from the vipers' nests.

Do those who sang, and those who sighed,
Do those who merely cursed the times,
Share the same path? They all slide
Down steep slopes of time. The Norns

Weave, and unweave the webs of fate.
Those who curse are different than
The one who sing, who celebrate
The chorus of mankind. Amen.

2007

Will Barber

Valentine's Day

Is love ascendant, or cruelty
When gradeschool kids empty their sacks?
Floods of cards for some, some lack
Requisite popularity.

Couples may part because
Insufficient flower were offered
Chocolates were not proffered:
Such loves demand rich rewards.

Diamonds, roses, babies' breath,
Bouquets, proposals, jewelry
Feed the fatuous fantasy
That spell Love's death.

2009.

Will Barber

Who Walked With Sorrow

There was a man who walked with Sorrow
As though Sorrow were his love,
And he seemed to court her gently;
He was very well-behaved.
So, Sorrow came to live with him
In the twilight of his youth;
In the evenings she would hold him
Till he could not breathe.

'Sorrow, Sorrow, ' said he,
'This love is worth than life.'
Then he turned on the TV,
And surfed the violet wave.

Will Barber

Winter's Man

Winter's man had a thousand tasks to do,
And every errand baffled him; he sought
To rise up early in the morning, though
He had no notion that it did him good.

Every message carried great import, yet
Each left the winter man in doubt; he knew
Less than before when he had read the lot,
Until he thought no eye could read it true.

The world no longer asked him for his labor;
Nobody wanted to know the things he knew;
He westered in September and October,
Embittered by an early fall of snow.
He feared he might think this way forever
In the darkness coming on him now.

1986

Will Barber

Wising up Sophia

When the game was nearly over,
Sophia threw in the hand;
The old man laughed, incontinently:
Such a dirty, dirty man.

'Such is the lot of gamblers, '
I heard the old man crow,
'If you didn't know it Sophia,
You know it now.'

So, off she had to wander,
Minus her pearls and fan.
She couldn't help but think,
'My god, what an awful man.'

1985

Will Barber

Yesterday, I Thought Of You

Although I do not love you any more,
I wish that I had news of you:
Whether you are happy, sad
Or in confinement.
Is it to even an ancient score
That I still think of you
Staring, shouting, mad
In a dank basement?

Have you found a new love, now?
Have you goaded him to beat you?
Did he yield to temptation,
Or refuse you the satisfaction?

Although you never loved me,
Although you did not know me,
Although you played my enemy,
I hope you are happy.
Time, they say, may mend
Many sorrows; and
You were my friend,
Once. In the end,
We married.
Tragedy
Is carried
Forward, by folly.

2008

Will Barber

You Are Like a Ghost

You: you are like a ghost
Fluttering, pensive, in my memory,
Skirting the well-lighted rooms in which I read.

You: you are like a ghost;
I feel you inhabit
Those rooms where I must no longer go.

How events mock one, I am tempted to say.
You: you would smile ironically,
Your smile would be ghostly in your violet rooms.

You: you are life, you are death,
I always have to follow,
Thought I sometimes do not know the way to go;

You must not ask me any more,
I must not hear you any more
Unless you want me to....

You: you are my ghost,
My violet phantom,
My rumor, my regret.

1976

Will Barber

You Must Be an Earthling

You will have to cry, by and by; you will have to cry;
You will have to pay for your mistakes; you will have to wait;
You will be encumbered by your trade; your doubts will make you hesitate;
You will have to cry. By and by, you will have to cry.

1979

To Susie

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Will Barber

You Must Remember

'Alice, Alice, you must remember, '
I said to her when the evening began to leave,
'What have you done to your apron child?
And where will all these travels lead? '

She looks at me, and I repent.
'After all, she is very young, and pure,
And must be allowed to experiment, '
I say to the social-worker at the door.

1980

Will Barber