

Poetry Series

**Ronald Shields**  
**- poems -**

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## Ronald Shields(2/12/1956)

Married father of 2, too young and broke to retire but I did it anyway. I am relatively new to poetry writing and analysis. Thank you for reading my work, if you leave a comment I will happily return the favor. Please visit my blogs or get in touch via Facebook or Twitter.

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# A Few Last Questions

Dancing alone is an art  
perfected in a dim lit room.  
The bottled air inoculates against  
intimacy and intoxicated memory  
confuses the day before and after.

Lovesick in the bathroom  
the women go home without  
tears or complaints.  
Except the last one who  
burns inside, red and molten  
as you plunge headlong  
into one last chance, one last dance.

The machine sucks at your blood.  
Keeps you alive and does not cry  
or lean over to caress your face.  
While you sleep I light a cigarette  
and try to take your place.

There are questions to ask,  
a few last questions  
-are there signs?  
Can you hear the hammer click?  
Is it bright, lonely, slow, quick?  
Are there spirits dancing in the room  
or do you dance alone?

Ronald Shields

# A Love Poem To The Higgs Boson

Well it won't write itself  
and that's the problem.  
I can't write it, it won't  
be written, and that  
most ubiquitous of subjects  
remains missing from my armory.

What to do when you  
haven't a clue how to  
write a love poem?  
They come on their own,  
the poems, in their own  
time and manner.  
I must go about my  
business and wait,  
not trying.

So where are the love poems?  
Is there is no love in my soul?  
How can a writer function  
without love?  
How can a human being exist  
without love?

Maybe love is like physics.  
I don't understand the science  
but I can grasp the concepts.  
Yes, love is like physics;  
understandable conceptually  
but only explainable at the  
subatomic level. A quantum  
world where reality blinks  
in and out of existence in a  
fog of fuzzy logic and chaos.

So perhaps there are only a  
few virtuosi who can understand  
the physics of love, or maybe  
only two, you know,

Hawking and Shakespeare.

I think I'll write an ode  
to the Uncertainty Principle.

Ronald Shields

# A Simple Dedication

What can be done for a love  
that is a driving force?

Release your strange heart,  
begin to know what you  
want in the aftermath  
of the storm.

In the bright finale of the  
sun between the clouds  
take hold of your dreams,  
draw them out into the  
open sky.

Hold them up, an offering,  
and be a child in your dedication.

Ronald Shields

# An Angry Poem, Because So Many Flags Are At Half Staff

The wreaths are piling up on the curb. Coffins line streets swept and stainless. Some one asks why, there are murmurs in the crowd. I am beyond curiosity, tired of the story that begins with Blood and ends in Glory. Glory, worshiped in the streets, feared in our hearts. Glory, bought with sin, greed and the end of innocence. Glory, balm for the living because the dead do not need soothing. Glory, an epithet hammered into gravestones. Glory in death -wrap that lie in a flag and praise it to heaven. We are false prophets and our blessing has cursed the dead with the Blood sacrifice.

Blood is paid for with youth, salvation, faith -everything, all they have and ever will. Blood is given (taken) in our name and we can only offer up sorrow, prayers, songs, statues. Blood should bring guilt, shame, truth, but we deny, deny, deny, and deny the abomination we have become. 2,000 suicides,3,000 dead,130,000 killed,6 million murdered,60 million casualties... the numbers do not lie. And we will go on counting the dead while rain polishes their headstones smooth.

So do not ask me why so many flags are at half staff. I will not give you the answer you want to hear. I will not mock the dead with vainglorious praise, Glory Glory Hallelujah! They are the mothers, fathers, sons and daughters who paid the price of Blood and I will honor them with the truth.

Ronald Shields

# Autumn

When there is nothing left to say  
I will brush the cobwebs from my soul,  
this rusted dented old soul.  
Unfurl it, let it catch the freshening breeze  
-a leaf waving goodbye to its season,  
gone to join its tribe on the last breath of autumn,  
waiting for the ground to break its fall.

Ronald Shields



# Axioms

The homey axioms, homeless in age; happy endings with nowhere to return.  
Gone with memories too shaken to grip the tree – peaches in a tempest.  
If they could flow like water they would stupidly run all the way to the ocean,  
become lost in its vast moving structure.

The virtue of age?

In an age when youth consumes virtue; where they live in large houses,  
heavily laden with utensils and alarms.

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Sunlight turns the hillside green and goldenrod.  
We curl like leaves in that autumn dawn,  
take it as a sign of promise.

Ronald Shields

# Bee Watching

I said yes in April  
when you wanted to  
go to Arizona to find  
cactus flowers and  
Joshua trees. The  
crocuses had just  
opened their mouths  
to the first Yes! of  
Spring -some years  
it is the only sign of  
Spring I recognize.

We learned some things  
that Spring in the Mojave.  
Joshua trees can  
live a thousand years.  
The cactus flower can stay  
hidden until it is ready  
to bear fruit. Female  
bees search ghost flowers  
for ghostly nectar. The nectar  
is in its cousin, called blazing  
star. It is a game the flowers  
play, and the bees are confused,  
but industrious enough to  
beat the odds,  
eventually.

We learned some things  
that Spring; hope from  
the crocus, maybe patience  
from the Joshua trees, and  
reticence from the cactus.  
As for the ghost flower, we  
already know enough about  
deception. The bees? They  
taught us to look for nectar  
in every thing we see.



# Chirping

I have a story to tell. A familiar one of a kind tale.  
Colored by pigment and biased with a name.  
Breeding contempt or some other monstrous thing  
in hearts that pump fear as if it was life itself.

It's a story that comes in pieces, chunks or ragged whole  
cloth, though it can seem stitched into a tapestry, or  
quilted by an Amish maiden fresh as this morning's hay  
and full of lies.

It's a story that cracks my voice.  
About the cost of freedom.  
About these wounds in my arms  
bleeding secrets I once kept,  
staining my bones like a Maori tattooing ceremony.

It is a story about blind alleys.  
About mountains and trails meant for goats.  
About walking in light and shade.  
Learning to live in the light  
and rest in the shade.

It is the story of the years and how they burn the skin.  
The innocent days, and guilty nights  
when I am no longer young.  
About the grip of a force I cannot resist.

In the night I hear a cricket chirping.  
It reminds me of music from long ago,  
a well tempered riot of color and sound;  
the cricket is chirping, the music is playing,  
the torch is lit and I have a story to tell.

Ronald Shields

## Ci Oyate\*

The savage stick  
does not come softly,  
it is swift,  
full of vengeance  
in the white hand of justice.

The ravenous maw  
spits steel,  
turns thunderous herds  
into bleached memory;  
for tongues, for skins,  
for the sport of kings.

Comes the march,  
for death,  
for the red day  
passing into a long night  
where lost languages fester  
in spirits raw and dull.

The trail  
The tears

The Circle

The World remains a dream intact.

When brown hands  
wield the savage stick  
like a plowshare  
the earth will green,  
The People will dance  
and chant the world anew.

\*Lakota for The People

Ronald Shields

# City Of Stone

This City is old,  
wrapped in the skin of a  
maiden whose time is past.  
Abandoned by her ghosts  
-fled to the countryside  
where graves are tended  
and people remember.  
The buildings speak, no one  
listens anymore. The mortar  
has memory and stays true.  
The stones have integrity and  
stand up until young men come  
to build new truths and grind the  
stone to dust. They are young  
men with purpose searching for  
the promise of hope fulfilled and  
the end of age.  
The old men age with wine. No  
longer hungry, they have learned  
to be full on the only bread worth  
eating. Work holds them firmly in  
tow, at anchor in the harbor,  
content to miss the Sea.  
The women are full of grace  
except the young and beautiful,  
they are full of lust for the dance  
and men to hold their hands,  
hands that will cradle dreams  
keeping them alive in times  
of drought. The women of grace  
stand in doorways, lean from windows,  
hang washing, pasta and dreams.  
The children are lost.  
Lost to American dreams.  
Lost to music, names and the  
promise of hope fulfilled, the  
end of age.  
America where nothing is old, there is  
no memory, everyone has purpose,

grace, bread, wine, and truth is green  
water flowing from the rock of Moses.

Around the City water recedes  
exposing barren mudflats  
where even the clams refuse to dig.  
And when the wind shifts  
instead of salt air what it carries is sand.

The young men age while they sleep.  
Women become keepers of dreams.  
Old men disappear into the Sea.  
Children fly west to purpose,  
hope, truth, bearing the torch  
they so eagerly lit.

The City will sleep.  
Lie dormant with shallow breath  
until Her ghosts return,  
She sheds Her skin,  
is once more the Maiden of old.

Ronald Shields

# Closing Time At The Museum

Today is a wish,  
or a halfhearted promise of escape  
from the contrived hopes that scaffold my vision.  
In the cell of my heart,  
the hot tight center of my body,  
there is neither youth nor future.  
None of the contrivances of a public life;  
only the strong sweet warmth  
of a private life -  
the solitude of a landscape painting  
and a single detached patron  
at closing time.

Ronald Shields



# Comings And Goings

It comes and goes like a hummingbird  
or snow in April.  
When it goes there is a hole  
and when the wind blows everyone can feel it.  
When it comes the wind does not stop  
but turns warm and moist with promise  
like the landscape as Spring readies its empire.  
It comes with a grip - tight  
squeezing thought to a point  
It goes, leaving me to feel everything;  
until one day nothing comes or goes  
and the bright release is all that is left.

Ronald Shields

# Dust To Dust

The sky is parched.  
The landscape is scorched.  
Brown and gray hang in the air  
suspended on shimmering wire.  
At night the coyotes lament its passing.  
At daybreak life melts into what remains of shadow.  
Cool slips from memory  
water abandons the mirage  
green is consigned to myth.  
Soon memory, mirage, myth  
will lie face down in the streambed  
swallowing the dust where it all began.  
That night the coyotes shall remain silent.  
The Earth will breathe relief,  
and wait for the return of morning rain.

Ronald Shields

# Easy As Pie

No one eats the cherry pie.

Why?

It is beautiful

there on the counter

in its white

ceramic pie pan,

all crimson and purple

encased in a glistening

brown crust.

People used to stand in

line for a piece of the pie,

any flavor, any color,

even mock apple pie.

Then they stood in

line for cheese,

encased in white plastic

with the word

'CHEESE'

stenciled in black ink.

The cheese was a

kind of yellow,

unnatural for food,

manufactured,

mass produced the way

cars have been since

1910.

What do folks stand in

line for these days?

WIC Debit cards

Lottery tickets

Medical care

Security checkpoints

Jobs, always the jobs.

I don't need to stand in

those kinds of lines  
-hit the birth lottery,  
my parents did it  
so I don't have to.  
My kids will only  
stand in express lines.

Sometimes I get in  
a line just to find out  
what's going on;  
though nobody  
understands why  
the cherry pie  
is so unpopular.

Ronald Shields

# Eat

Cold and dark in the morning  
talk comes with a price  
it is a bargain for the waitress  
and diners get what they need.

The eggs are served with sympathy  
for another birthday missed  
the road is more than miles for  
the trucker who takes them over hard.

Booth number 9 is an omelet and oatmeal  
a preacher and acolyte looking for a church  
the preacher's collar is frayed and yellowed  
in service to a god who speaks too softly.

At the table by the door the farmers drink  
coffee and talk of weather tractors prices  
they have the look of a dying breed not because  
they are old -their sons are off to college the  
army the city or anywhere else  
daughters will wait  
not one of them will marry a farmer.

A young couple passing through  
sits in number 8 close almost huddled  
the boy counts his coins the girl looks cold  
the waitress brings hot tea  
'It's on the house honey.' They order toast  
to share, she slips ham onto to the  
plate when the cook's not looking  
'I'll take that outta your tips.'  
he never does.

The woman at the end of the counter  
tattoos a glass with her lips  
she is the blue plate special one egg  
one pancake two strips of hard salty bacon  
the long night gives her an appetite for  
comfort and something real before going home

to wash the haze of stale cologne out of her hair.

Street lights go out  
the sun promises warmth  
diners pay bills homage thanks  
and go out to live in the light  
the waitress cleans tables  
then counts her tips

She floats from counter to table  
to booth serving coffee water eggs toast and  
some things not on the menu  
reassurance hope sustenance for the day  
she takes their orders brings what they need  
and all of this beneath a sign that says EAT.

Ronald Shields

# Falling Down

It comes like snow in the night.  
The way June turns to July  
then August  
with its heat that  
sucks the culvert dry.

Like dirt under your fingernails  
it comes from things you touch  
and their touching you back.

Like layers of silt; like cold  
in your coffee...I can't drink it.

It does not come like love or hate  
sudden, fiery, electric, powerful  
to rattle your soul and bones. No  
it is subtle  
like falling out of love  
or losing hatred  
for someone you see  
everyday.

That is what it is like.  
Losing something everyday  
like the layer of skin that  
blows away and exposes you  
just that little bit more.

You know it is silent.  
You know it is coming.  
Before you see it  
you realize  
you can't get off the floor.

Ronald Shields

# Homeless In A Dream

Tossed on the heap  
I molder under the weight of a thousand gulls  
picking at my eyes, coveting my liver.  
Just another pile of bones  
leaking marrow onto the streets of gold.  
What is it about this place?  
-It's as if the sun will never show forgiveness,  
return to shed light and shadow  
into the darkness  
where I make my bed.

This back was not shaped to sleep on stones and roots.  
These hands were not fashioned to hold the beggar's cup.  
Once, the world was in my hands.  
Water ran through my fingers and  
whet the seed of my dreams.  
Then water turned to sand  
slipping through my fingers,  
every dream a grain of regret.  
Now I carry my spirit like a cross  
or a yoke  
-anything but the light it is meant to be.

Even the water of Cana has become poison  
-injected to kill dreams that refuse to die.  
Death is not the release I seek  
-it is a distraction-  
a mirror I wear around my neck  
to reflect the fear in averted eyes.  
There is no mystery in this potion  
only the numbing relief  
serving us equally  
without prejudice  
at opposite ends of the table.

The illusion of you and me has its purpose  
-a cloak for shame  
a fog to hide the ugly truth  
-we are the same



-from the same womb  
-joined in the same graceless fall  
-we are the two sides of madness  
-we are chained,  
bound by madness and fear in the fall from grace.

Bones, backs, spirits  
are not made to be broken.  
Streets of gold are not made of lead.  
Dreams are not sand.  
Water is not poison.  
Truth is not ugly.  
The illusion shows us what is real  
-there is no difference  
-no razor's edge  
-no one step away from the heap and the gulls.  
There is light  
shadow  
and the reflection in between.

Ronald Shields

# In So Many Words

She pulls on white stockings,  
steps into spongy white shoes.  
Except for the crest her uniform  
is white. Not cold or harsh, the  
color that keeps you at arm's  
length, but a careworn shade  
that says here is some one to  
comfort you. He pulls on a  
white undershirt, covers it  
with a blue shirt, his name  
over the pocket. The pants  
are the same shade, made  
of a material impervious to  
labor. There is silence.

Not the quiet before a storm,  
a quietude, a soundless  
conversation about the last  
45 years. About children  
grown and starting their  
own conversations. About  
the price of security, and  
the cost of faith, the value  
of holding on. About how to  
forgive, and forget what is  
forgiven, the balm of  
reconciliation, and the true  
purpose of time and healing.  
About laughing through it  
all, the joy of seeing it  
through and what's behind  
the knowing smile. About  
how to become satisfied,  
sometimes with too much,  
sometimes with less. About  
how to give space and  
when to stay close, finding  
a hand where it's needed  
and letting go when it's time.  
About the unprompted

caress, the unexpected  
embrace, the perfunctory  
kiss and the bond they cement.

About the ritual, the  
rhythm of today tonight  
today tomorrow today  
and the day before.

About staying in step,  
stumbling along, about the  
waltz of life and the rock of  
age.

And when they have finished  
dressing there is one last  
glance, the perfunctory kiss,  
the knowing smile, and the walk  
out the door with the life  
they have made.

Ronald Shields

# June Bug Love For Charles Bukowski

He is Hank to anyone who knows.  
When he drinks it is just enough to  
release something bright, alive (his soul?) ,  
or stifle something dark, putrid (his soul?) .  
Hank wears a shell - like a june bug.  
Shining blue, purple, red, green,  
reflecting light from a hard edged rainbow;  
up close, grotesque, spiny, monstrous.  
Trapped in a cold water room  
thump-thumping into window glass  
-buzzing, clicking, lethargic, ominous.  
Finally, someone opens the window.  
Releases him to hum at the porch light  
until the window closes and he returns  
to the comfort of rhythm, glass and  
the room he cannot reach.

Ronald Shields

# Lakeside

The grass is not emerald green.  
It is a thicker shade, more inviting.  
Welcoming as a field of poppies  
only more austere.  
The single tree in rustling witness stands  
to Nature's indifferent sculpting of the land.  
The ground is cool, moist with anticipation  
-a land of milk and honey, as they say.  
The barony of spring whets the last of winter's embers  
preparing summer's empire by degrees.  
The breeze disappears  
following the arc of the sun  
and I am one step closer to the water's edge.

Ronald Shields

# Lament For My Religion

How to be guiltless  
when penance is the sin?  
I am wary of a Redeemer,  
A Nazarene claiming all souls,  
even as he hangs on a cross  
-of his own will-  
each nail a sin  
every puncture a corruption,  
an indictment  
for grace not freely given.  
And the tongue of fire,  
failing to ignite  
the coldest of hearts  
-casting its light  
where radiance already abides.  
Is it a light that blinds  
and casts shadows on the wall?  
Or does it show the true sign of the Beast,  
the true color of Joseph's coat,  
the kingdom with its fortunate souls  
-will it unveil the way to the end of guilt?

Ronald Shields

# Magic

I see a child  
whose life is dying of thirst.  
I see a child  
chasing droplets of water  
in a storm of dust  
and black flies.

I see brown bones  
dangling haphazardly.  
I see a marionette  
at the end of  
invisible wires  
-an impossible tangle.

Someone said,  
'...magic persists without us...'.\*

Is there magic in this world?  
Magic cyclones?  
An Emerald City?  
I see a wicked land.  
I see desolate people  
watering poppies  
in Spring.

Ronald Shields

# Memories In The Old Brain

-the smell of water  
a scent hanging in the air  
a trail through parched, barren land  
now greened by rain  
in a time of plenty.

the taste of marrow  
fresh from the cracked bone,  
touched by a fire  
that lights the way  
to a time of plenty

the sight of a day  
over savanna grass,  
sight without mystery  
without awe  
or the art to feel the dawn  
and see the light with a new eye  
in a time of plenty

the sound of a wild call,  
a beast  
stirring the heart,  
a heart yet to be gripped  
by the savage's siren call  
to a time of plenty.

Memories deep in my core  
of scent, taste, sight, sound  
water, fire, light, howl  
-memories from a time undefined  
-before memory shaped  
light and dark into day and night  
-before memory became  
slave and master of time.

I am a child of these memories,  
before and after.



Dancing to the rhythm of time

I am old  
in a time of plenty.

Ronald Shields

# Moonlight Sonata

The Moonlight Sonata  
coaxes light through the window  
a warm glow is between us.  
Then air turns to ash and  
we close our eyes.  
Once when we could still see,  
there were hands between us.  
One a teacup, the kind saved  
for the careful company  
the other a nesting bird  
enveloping, gentle, weightless.  
I could feel in your arms  
steel bands that hummed  
with precision over a vast  
network of machinery,  
driving one day into the next.  
The smell of heat hung on you,  
white heat, blast furnace heat.  
Skin seared to ochre, a badge,  
medallion, a sign of your time.  
The heavy scent of oil, grease  
and solvents hung like  
a shroud around your shoulders.  
The shoulders from where I could  
see a world shaped by the will  
of your vision,  
the will of your back.  
I could see your hair  
black, curled, swept back  
by the wind or tide as  
you leaned in to stand your ground  
or go under for the third time.  
The leather chair smelled of  
smoke and grass. I could  
wait for you there while you  
slept, slumped, heavy breath  
moist, warm on the back of  
my neck.  
Then our eyes are open

you speak, finally, your voice  
is soft and hollow the way  
mourning doves purr as the  
streetlights go out. All the  
sadness and regret is in your eyes  
so your voice can carry across  
the room to meet the music halfway.  
I hold your hand like a teacup  
the taste of ash, the grit, on  
my tongue. I wish for wind  
any expansion of air so I can see  
light through the window and  
feel again  
the warm glow between us.

Ronald Shields

# Mystery

There was this once  
before the writing dried up  
and I became wet with beer piss.  
Once when the words  
showed up unannounced,  
dressed to kill the boredom  
between benders. They  
were holidays, stifling yawns  
on Monday at the office.  
Words came like young boys  
in the hands of young girls.  
Came like children on sleds  
in snowfall.  
Came like answers  
to prayer flags; to  
prayers on the lips  
of the old woman  
as the priest leans in  
with oil,  
the scent of almond  
on his breath,  
and an answer to  
the question she wants to ask.

Ronald Shields

# Mystery Date

You are a master of suspense  
Hitchcockian so to speak.  
The air is thick with confusion  
I don't know whether to breathe in or out.  
It is impossible to speak  
you tie my tongue in knots.  
The veil you wield throws darkness  
not a sliver of light escapes.  
There is a no vacancy sign in your eyes  
no room at the inn and  
the manger is spoken for.  
Your expression is not blank  
it is encrypted.  
You are a mystery to me  
and every clue a delight.

Ronald Shields

# Nature

I do not understand nature.  
Cannot not match bird to song,  
leaf to tree, petal to flower.  
Too much learned at arm's length  
the secondhand story that comes  
from the TV or movies.  
Out among the birdsong in all  
its seasons I am confused,  
out of my element, feigning  
disinterest, not knowing where  
to start. Reading poems about  
milkweed, poppies, or a thing  
as lovely as a tree does  
somewhat perhaps fill the gaps,  
or leave me empty  
-for what have I missed?  
What will I never know?

Ronald Shields

# Not Suicide

Like an elephant.  
Like the Man on Wire.  
Like anyone, I want it  
on my own terms.

Like a dog in your arms,  
a cat, or a lion in the bush.  
Like a bear in the mountains.

I want to die like a whale  
in the gulf stream  
surrounded by the  
warm familiar currents  
of my childhood.

Ronald Shields

# Problem Solved

The neighbor  
is clearing his driveway of  
snow too deep to shovel.  
He uses a machine  
to blow it up and out  
into his neighbor's driveway  
when the poor guy  
isn't looking.  
Well he doesn't have  
a machine to blow snow,  
his only blows leaves,  
into his neighbor's yard.  
So he makes his wife  
shovel the snow.  
Some guys just know  
how to solve problems.

Ronald Shields



# Promise Land

Boundaries are exploding.  
Lines once drawn disappear  
in a hail of wind.  
The sand is alive and talking  
telling a tale of triumphant woe.  
There is, or was, a wall  
where I once pressed my forehead  
against an unforgiving book written  
in the script of heaven's rage.

Now in a temple, in a city, on the hill  
a new history is foreseen and written by martyrs.  
There are new psalms to sing and  
mountains to climb, seas to part,  
valleys to walk through  
where shadows fall away  
and the land is full of promise.

Ronald Shields

# Saddled

A boy, hammered into steel.  
With an anvil for a mother,  
my father the sledge  
-his rage a fire he  
could not understand.  
Mine became a lesson  
strapped onto my back.  
A saddle to carry the  
anvil as I walk to the  
rhythm of hammer blows.

Ronald Shields

## Second Thoughts

The room is white.

A single vanity light shows the way. Her hennaed hand caresses a blue jewel on the necklace, lets it fall over the gown.

Lifting a single black hair stretched to its length she lets it fall to the silver floor.

From the magnolia tree, a leaf, edges curled, the slightest shade of gold; caught by a child.

Turning off the light she invites darkness.

It falls across her reflection as the last of the light lingers in the mirror.

A question inhabits the dark, tracing the arc of a demise; the shattering of a glassy mind, -paper thoughts fall like lanterns in the air.

Ronald Shields

## Some Amazing Grace

Going down to the river in ivory robes  
seeking sacraments  
and the white heat of some amazing grace.  
The Ghost is circling the congregation  
amid an orgy of Cherubim  
fresh from the sight of God.  
There is hunger for the flesh and blood  
and any innocent will do.

Ronald Shields

# Speeding Through The Rez

The sun beats down on tin roofs,  
a fist from God. The One who  
made the cactus flower and  
needles to protect it.

Two boys lock eyes at 70 mph.  
The bronze one stands still,  
surrounded by flowers and needles.  
The blue one flies by, protected from  
the fist and needles...if he finds  
God's open hand, it will pluck  
the flower from his grasp.

A boy can learn all he needs to  
know at 70 mph or standing still  
or running scared. A boy learns  
who is already lost and who will be  
in the end. He learns tomorrow  
is a block of granite, today is  
a ticking watch, and yesterday  
is for the dream catcher.

A boy learns on the Rez.  
He learns the future can be a souvenir,  
or a trinket, fool's gold, nothing at all.  
He will learn  
it comes like a blue jacketed bullet  
it comes like a bronze tipped arrow  
-like something dangerous  
speeding through the Rez.

Ronald Shields

# Station

Soaked in grey light  
oily blue puddles  
shimmer on the platform.  
The train is late.  
A man shuffles his feet  
paper folded under a  
brown woolen arm.  
The shine on his shoes  
would dazzle  
in proper light.  
A woman searches her  
purse -the fare is  
in here somewhere.  
Keys mimic the sound.  
Her dress clings to mystery.  
Children playing  
the way children do.  
Their innocence waning  
the way innocence will.  
The Porter checks his watch  
schedule folded under a  
blue woolen arm.  
Shoes worn with polish.  
Face lined with age and  
weathered without mystery.  
A grimace or a scowl or  
a look  
forlorn in the tedium of the station  
-trains coming going screeching.  
In his station  
there is nothing to do  
but wait.

Ronald Shields

# Take Care

There is power in seeming certain - danger also.  
When the Witch is dead you will be held to account for promises made.  
Dorothy and her companions, scarred and fresh from the kill  
demand something more than thirty pieces.  
They will clamor for truth, justice, hope - all the virtues  
held so dearly at arm's length.  
Take care Mr. Wizard.  
Take care to tread lightly where hearts and minds are concerned.  
Take care to speak softly, quiet as fog and clear as the call to prayer.  
Take care, take care.

Ronald Shields

# The Burn

Fire in the incinerator burns  
hot -hotter than poison  
that melts your soul,  
leaving behind a gleaming  
white skeleton.

The flames don't really know  
anything about convection, or  
kelvin, or thermodynamics.  
Flame is just a brute fact, like  
entropy or absolute zero.

Heat is the brain of a fire.  
Heat can tell you things  
the flames never dreamed of.  
It's heat that rivets attention.  
It is heat that opens your eyes.

Heat will burn holes and  
smooth imperfections.  
Heat teaches what you  
need to know. It will  
draw you in by degrees.

Fire lights up the corners.  
Flames shout for attention.  
They are only messengers.  
It is heat that consumes  
It is heat that says I love you.

Ronald Shields



# The Fall

He fell so gracefully  
for a moment it looked liked he meant it.  
The fall was perfectly balanced like  
the sweep of a dancer's arm in reverence  
or the endless curve at the base of a spine  
inviting the hand or head to seek asylum.  
The fall from grace can be subtle, a flower  
following the sun or sudden as the jerk of the rope.  
I never learned what caused his fall,  
something simple, a mere turn of the screw  
or complex as the port de bras.  
For me it was the arch of an eyebrow  
and blindness in a careless moment.

Ronald Shields

# The Hunt

Her face is a lightning strike  
with prowling eyes  
and razor sharp lips,  
her tongue a dagger for an unfortunate heart.  
She will kiss like an angel  
with a viper's sting.  
This is a dangerous love,  
a scent that will not be denied.  
Those hunting eyes pierce my swaggering shield.  
The blood is up.  
I am primed for the chase.  
Hungry for the kill.

Ronald Shields

# The Invitation

Something is between us,  
the eye of a needle,  
a bitter pill, a road  
with too many miles.  
There you are  
in your dervish world.  
I am in my room  
with a view of a door  
closing on the bright light,  
its final beam an invitation.

Ronald Shields

# The Photograph Album

We are looking at photographs.  
You study my posture, my gaze.  
I watch you change  
with children at your side.  
We look into the faded eyes  
-wondering  
why are we still here?  
Two people who no longer exist.  
What can we learn from them?  
What have we yet to learn?  
We know where we are.  
We know when we arrived.  
We know what we have become.  
We know who is at fault.  
Still, we do not know why.

Ronald Shields

# The Voice I Remember

I remember the voice. Quiet,  
soft as a caress on the back of my neck,  
coating my heart and mind  
the way dust settles  
when the air goes still.  
A landslide of light  
swallowing everything in its path,  
leaving all undisturbed, cool  
and dressed to face the sun.  
I remember the way his voice carried my name  
like a prince to the throne.  
The voice was strength and calm in the same note  
-the last note he ever sang.  
I remember the voice. I hear that note  
and I know the way home.

Ronald Shields

# The Weight

Against the day I am powerless  
so I rise  
to face it  
in the mirror.  
Finding  
a vaguely  
familiar face  
I wash it,  
shave it,  
prepare it  
for a world that will not see it.

The children are first off the mark.  
They are young  
and carry  
less weight.  
When does it change?  
When will they feel  
gravity as if for the first time?

My wife is next to leave.  
She carries  
the weight  
so gracefully  
it looks  
effortless.  
The strength  
of this Woman  
keeps it all  
from collapsing in on us.

The weight that is mine comes in pieces  
I  
can  
barely  
lift.  
They are  
in my chest,  
on my back,

arms  
and legs.  
Without crutches  
I am hopeless, cannot walk out the door.

This weight is not the same for you and me.  
This weight  
has a cost.  
This weight  
demands  
its due.  
This weight  
exacts its toll.  
This weight  
commands  
we each have our own price to pay.

Ronald Shields

# Tinted Images

I remember tinted images  
yellow and stained  
in old wooden frames.  
The glass was scratched and wavy.  
They sat on a table next to a lamp  
painted with naked cherubs.  
The couch and chairs were covered in plastic.  
I never asked why.  
One day my father spilled his beer  
no one panicked and I understood.  
There were stories after dinner  
with coffee and cigarettes.  
I was young and don't recall them now.  
We don't tell stories after dinner;  
no one smokes anymore.  
I have pictures in polished frames.  
My couch is stained and the chairs are worn.  
On a table next to the lamp  
the one with naked cherubs  
are the tinted images in the old wooden frames.  
When the lamp is lit  
I can see myself in the glass.

Ronald Shields



# To Victoria Neale, Where Ever She Be

Victoria Neale is a true Nomad.  
She walks the land on well feathered paths.  
Her stride is long and bold.  
Her journey wide eyed and full.  
Yes, she is a mother - of children and invention.  
Takes them where ever she roams.  
Along the way she is not just seen,  
people take notice of Victoria Neale.  
Because the true Nomad is rare and on the wane.

She walks between seasons  
tracing the arc of the sun  
where open sky invites all those who dare.  
Where those who dare skip like stones on a marble pond.  
She does not follow the migration.  
The wake in the prairie grass is her own.

She is driven by the solution to mystery.  
There is always time for a tale.  
Her story grows taller by the year,  
time grows shorter by the day.

And when the sky finally closes in,  
when the feathers are trampled stiff  
and the marble worn away,  
Victoria Neale the Nomad  
will go beyond the hills time has made  
and rest in the shade of grace.

Ronald Shields

# Walking In Snow

The snow teaches me separateness,  
the ice to be hard.  
Though I was born in the desert,  
where the teachers are sand and rocks,  
I could not hear them for my youth.  
Now with youth spent I return to hear  
the sand admonish me for isolation  
and the rocks' rebuke for a hardened heart.

Now that the curls of time have been  
beaten out straight I seek a return to  
an earlier language – my own scrawny language,  
meager, unable to bear the weight of explanation,  
words too remote, isolated, underdetermined.

The years have turned my ears to tin.  
My tongue is the knot behind my teeth.  
With age isolation calcifies, lost love  
becomes a window in the heart,  
language an uncertain chant,  
youth a snowstorm on the high desert plain.

Ronald Shields

# Water Into Words

Like water they find their way to ground.  
So I have names to give, stories to tell  
words to whisper, words to sing,  
words of reason and madness.  
Some defy gravity, others carry the weight.  
At times my words stumble over unfamiliar ground,  
stutter, tie my tongue.  
Silence gains the upper hand.  
While the quiet gathers momentum  
I close my eyes  
and wait for the water to rise.

Ronald Shields

# We Know How Much A Man Contains\*

Seeds and miracles  
A mechanical spirit  
The Father, The Mother,  
sons of steel, daughters of the revolution.  
The will to pause at dawn, in the mist, or ruins  
to toast, sing, genuflect  
and not know why.  
Pity, like some thing in the street.  
Pride like some thing in the mirror,  
refracted by a lover.  
A stick to carry remorse, regret.  
Old rags sour with age.  
Virgin wool pristine with the memory of youth.  
Layers of knowledge, upon knowledge, upon knowledge  
-mortar between bricks laid piecemeal jointless  
in endless echoing vaults;  
and in these recesses  
where nothing can touch, light, or hold sway  
can we know how much a man contains?

\*The Hemorrhage, Stanley Kunitz

Ronald Shields

# What Would You Give\*

Kid fears bring comfort.  
To the no longer young  
they are faith in this world.  
To those who have become the stranger,  
the one whose gaze must never be met,  
they are the fears of a time passed by  
when the leap of malice has yet to come.

Ronald Shields

# Workshop

Too many people who know  
too many things. Could they  
possibly know it all?

Having read some poetry,  
having taken some classes,  
having memorized some poems?

They gently execrate  
each other using words  
like flow, meter, cliché  
(the most damning) ,  
craft and strophe.

Dissecting the poems  
while they still breathe.  
Unfolding skin,  
turning bone to  
examine tendons.

They will come for you  
if you ask.  
They will come.

And when it is done  
let your epitaph read,  
'He Believed In His Simple Voice.'

Ronald Shields