

# **Were and Now**

Selected Poems 1978 – 2015

Ry Southard

## Improv Night

Oh la tee dah!  
Dancers amongst ye  
Arise! Arise!  
Be light on your  
feet  
And let loose the  
limber life  
Toes fly and  
pirouettes  
fluidate the space  
and color the  
harmonics that the musicians  
weave  
Cellos mellow as  
the bows flow  
Are there piccolos  
near? Let them twinkle  
in the flickering  
shadows of passing  
slippers

I want your life

you talk like a broken down dog  
hind leg limping  
across the wind swept plains of our conversation

your bone grey air is scuffed and unkempt  
hop scotched with balding and scabs  
no time for patience or primping

you hear me with gnarled ears  
nipped and chewed up  
from your thousand travels and enemies

but you would want no other life –  
of a languid cat  
or a business man  
or a tree to be pissed on

I want your life  
your history  
if you must go and die  
I will live for you

you laugh a glottal stopping cough  
your eyes are not tired  
gleaming, they tell me only of my own  
shallow insouciance  
a delta between us

Araxantha  
The Running Dream

From the away land of dog tribes  
I return  
Words of my Queen delivered  
Through me she speaks to all

I am Araxantha, messenger  
I am gazelle and wapiti  
I am the lope of the fox  
I am the beat of life

Spirit feather blessed foot skins  
Glance the baked earth  
They float, pad to pad  
Rhythm of my dreams, beat to beat

I thirst not  
The stone of water on my tongue  
A woven headdress shades me  
and bathes me in twilight air

I see my tribe  
I see my history  
I am my ancestors  
I am the egg and seed

My eyes scan before me  
They see nothing  
I run in the dream  
I run in the beat

## Awoken

The moon awoke me  
howling for attention  
the stars were distant, aloof  
a few gregarious, Gregorian twinkles  
made celesta accompaniment

lunar fugue  
a chorus of seas  
echo of my cathedrals  
trumpets and choirs  
the organist's foot pedals  
faster than tap

Did the moon not wake you?  
No tom toms, no Tchaikovsky cannons?  
Oh your serene dreams of a  
more melodious siren  
That is why I love you  
listening to the moon in your eyes

chalk

my touch is touch less  
my search extends beyond prisms  
refract and light up the night dear  
nothing to fear

how do I find you, my partner  
my life, so resplendent in the wind  
flags of glory and accomplishment  
banners without stripes or stars  
awaiting your embroidery

what is a poem yet unwritten  
laying in the dirt  
waiting for a trampling  
scores of playground school kids  
brown speckled wads of words  
wrapped in orange green gum

—

a couple of uncharted, anonymous syllables  
two legs of the foot stool  
wanting by the curb  
crooning to passing foot steps  
pick me, hold me

—

children on the sidewalk  
drawing circles with peg-sized pastels  
who better to know the circumference of life  
it is always perfect, even if not perfect

the chalk is of colors I only imagine  
beyond klee's theory  
my palette or vision

innocently ignorant  
i smudge the concrete canvass  
my fingers are rough with rainbows  
now ready to touch your dew

## For Our Ted

The color of Ted's life was blue  
an azure melding turquoise sky  
of designs and dreams  
an endless horizon  
conjuring life's rhythms in  
a distinctly penguin manner

The distance between two points  
was a second or a year  
or just a balloon  
dependent upon the cerulean mosaic  
he chose for the day

Were it not for the blue of him  
the other parts  
of our puzzles wouldn't fit  
indigo threads weave us together  
as friends and lovers and  
our laughter shines sapphire

A shift in the wind  
sprays memories of dazzling cobalt crystals  
drifting across the ocean

## About Magic

A quantum taste of joy  
hidden in a top hat

The wisdom of love  
up your sleeve

Tell me your story as  
you rise wingless  
above the stage

Let me make you believe  
in the vast unbelievable

Wave your wand and  
marry our kindness

Clapping we shout "encore!"



## Jump

Freefall into the cloud covered crevasse  
deepest hopes and wonders  
a scary ledge, spreading your arms wide  
standing alone over the abyss, not knowing  
a nail biter for sure  
But why not, was yesterday better?

Jump onto surprise  
fluffy soft landing  
mossy new turf  
futon of fescue, ferns or  
fertile clover, soil for imagination  
or a house foundation  
maybe a time for relocation

Fling possessions out the window  
Not really, as we don't want to litter  
Casting off need is a better description  
many might benefit from that prescription

Rescue a wish from a dream filled dish  
Cradle, cuddle and smother it with kisses and affection  
A wish unattended is one to be lost  
Your attention is needed to be a dream host

Nose dive inside your persona  
where did you land?  
Squeezed inside a clarinet, or your  
gawking neck stretched skyward in the  
Sistine Chapel, or your daughter's dilemma  
about her parent's break up  
Trying to paste the past together  
juggling conundrums, reassigning the present

Weave things that stop us in our tracks  
Roland Kirk's three horn wail  
Sacagawea on the trail  
Apollo Nine and your puppy's ever wagging tail  
Maybe even a Star Trek tale  
Merge history into your today's details

Now ready to crave the present  
Themes of fusion and connectivity  
joining together in chorus  
become an evangelist for yourself  
Hurl yourself into the score  
pick up the conductor's baton  
musically create more  
Soar

khoikhoi

a wish became a whisper  
then a reflection on our souls  
fields of ancestors  
breathing to now  
transfer

i am San  
i am husband, warrior  
village protector  
i am ready to die  
for family and cattle  
generations of toil  
my continent  
my breath

for you, my wife, Soo  
hectares of devotion  
sharing heart beats  
awaiting new champions  
our sons and daughters  
sighs of passion pass between us  
kissing each other in legacy

tempered by elders  
i hoosh the mongrel spirits  
punching demons  
spitting foulness  
removing disgraces  
from our land  
our history

flowers on the yum yum tree  
murmurs of future blossoms  
the act of holding hands  
our peace

Lion

In honor of Frank L Baum and *Wizard of Oz*

Dominifidus you rascal  
see my chest extended  
standing on my toes  
I am the big cat here  
so sit on your rear

Torskipantifylly you retort  
A sergeant in your arms  
Oops... at  
You fumble with your worlds  
I stumble over the folds  
of the curtain raised  
between us

Is there a reason here?  
Long lost grabbing apple trees  
had way more meaning  
Do we really need to coughnhack  
to justify

Lets realiquistballoo  
think this through  
I approach the curtain dropped  
perhaps there is more sameness  
than difference between us two

## Measuring Love

How do you measure love?  
A simple gesture, our eyes together  
My fingers trace hearts along your thigh  
the distance between your knee  
and our passion  
Is that love?

Can a slide rule define a life  
of fifty years of love together?  
Quick fingers on an abacus  
whisking beads up and down a stick  
still no clue  
I want to define "cherish"  
and go back to kissing you

Do you know love when it is there?  
Chalk board algorithms  
scratching desire on an unyielding surface  
yielding immeasurable equations  
of friendship and intimacy

Please help me with this sum  
You know the path of joy  
So apparent, so true  
You knew, I knew  
what do we do?

Do you want to join me  
on the scale of romance?  
A simple calculation  
like one

one hundred years

just a century ago we met  
in passing on a country road  
you on your painted horse  
me in my new jalopy  
we chatted as the dust settled  
the sky trickled toward twilight  
your smile mesmerized my eyes  
twinkled back to your ears  
we touched without touching  
knowing

then it was time to move on  
but you were embedded in my memory  
always part of each sunset

yesterday i saw you again  
it was as no time had passed  
a stream of forever love  
as we locked eyes  
and we knew

like a sand-less hourglass  
that never needs turning  
and joy always buoyant  
flowing mellifluous through  
memorable windows of dusk  
for a hundred years to come

## Pain

Pain is innocent, diaphanous  
No discrimination  
A wound for any scar  
Pain is not a cistern  
that remembers you  
when you return for  
an untainted drink

Knowing or not  
who delivers pain is guilty, marked  
Effusive recrimination  
Obvious as a gelatinous sore  
Teaching remembrance  
while incubating tomorrow's sorrow  
awaiting exorcism

Elusive pain  
Monotone, musty voices  
A pallid, horizon-less dusk  
Entranced, dull, illiterate  
A dust clogged window screen  
obscuring  
who's hiding in the bushes

## Pandora

How has it come to be  
Your urn converted  
to such antithesis  
squared upside down  
forsaken without a champion

My triremes sailed past you in the fog  
We did not know then  
the ruins of your desecration  
in the midst of your vast ocean of life as  
All Giver

It is so possible  
healing history and now  
for nine years  
for nine thousand years

God's dream was to create  
love untarnished  
fertile, generous, and desirable

a belly full of exuberance

How did we betray your fair vapors  
as you summon all of our prayers

Where do I taste your embodiment  
knowing  
I have sailed long past Calypso

Now we will return to you  
My men will wright your vessel  
to atone for our forefathers sins  
we so wrongly ignored

Send me a star to guide me to your refuge  
of painting and drama and song  
a cappella and with lyre  
recitals of love  
poems to be re-written  
manifestations of passion and pleasure

Come away with me Pandora  
as a true Goddess casting demons over the transom  
sharing fruits of joy with all who listen

plaid

patterns in cloth and music  
linear and acrostic  
oh wait a minute  
an alto sax overlays  
plaid on my nebulous

habits of sound  
buds squish out leaves in the wind  
honking coronet and geese  
in comfortable harmony and counterpoint  
lifeboats of Chopin await, just in case

the weave is andante  
just like you planned  
soft curving around our bodies  
modeled upon your grandma's pass-me-down

can fabric have lilt  
a trombone thread?  
a sound of whisper or clarinets  
as it oozes across skin?

I want your crux and sound  
show me your dusky tremolo  
twinge and tear  
stuff your sound into the midnight air

make crisscrosses I can understand  
texture of textiles from another land  
I wear the cloth and accept its sound  
each stanza astounds



## Remembering Peace

Is peace silent?  
or merely a whisper in repose  
    crisscrossed with  
    florettes of knowing smiles  
    gouached in shadow-less wisdom

Where is that continent of refuge?  
once had just by skipping stones  
    watching ripples  
    pondering nothing  
    it was that way

How do you know it?  
when you are not a child  
    now burdened with testimony  
    your particular truth  
    shaking more effervescence into a bottle

Why is the time  
not coagulating as demanded?  
    hoarse callings  
    across a motionless pond  
    seeking hushed witness

## Sanctuary

The last snow drifts dune shapes  
hummock to swale  
Geese alight on a half frozen pond  
honking off key as they do so well  
beaking the pond's edge for new grasses  
waiting for the final spring thaw

A fox circles  
in its own tracked perimeter  
Prancing and stopping  
scanning and more prancing  
waiting to spring  
on early morning prey

The sun shines later these days  
as eagles and ospreys soar lazy circles  
A blue heron's unmistakable flight  
blesses the sky  
Treetop nests are refurbished  
in anticipation

I walk and walk  
the hills of this west  
searching for you  
I have preened well  
and call out my song  
"will you join me"

Fragrance of fresh meadows  
beckon you on my behalf  
There is a cabin waiting to be built  
The shores of our lives will have nary a ripple  
A porch to overlook  
a peace that can be

## Séance

Join me in séance  
you and harvest moon  
quiet shining is  
our only ambition

This moment is not about the future  
eyes closed in sight  
etched images  
sensuous synapse  
sultry silent songs  
our sustenance

Feeling peckish  
we share ripe  
figs from your garden  
toes touching  
effervescent tingles  
no time has passed  
no clock has advanced

Suspended dreams  
like fuchsia petals  
your nectar finds me

Our duet dabbles with dawn  
dollops of diligent dithering  
the universe is fully mesmerized  
memorizing our love

## Shish Kabob

Take a bucket of words that end in e  
Synonyms for peace, love and groovy  
Ready platters of sliced phrases that delight  
Arranged by even, then odd, words rude or polite

Marinade havoc, stir in a batch of dew  
Carve up paradise, separate money from you  
Batter some dingbats, dabble some commas  
Knead your mood ring into popover dogmas

First skewer then sew  
Pay special attention to  
persnickety and cardamom  
and the many meanings of blue  
Tourniquet beliefs, wrap caves in cavernous  
Twist syllables into dream pretzels then tie  
but please let all sleeping dogs lie  
Leave out cadavers and hubris, esoteric and cow pies

Stitch and splice contraries  
Furtive and trust  
Parchment to email, pillows of rust  
Heed not politics, nor consternation  
It's about word lust

Now test the fire, bright flames of existential fodder  
Smidgens of something flare and smolder  
Why not throw in a trite boulder  
Coal seams and embers fickle  
ignore fear of getting older

The bob is shished and seared and singed  
Tantalizing smells of succulent something  
Scents of estuaries, microbes and Saturn's rings  
Call for the guests, they hunger for garnish  
garish, goulash, and graciousness

The table is set for a fab frothy feast  
A toast is raised for the chef giraffe  
Tribute to words that make us laugh  
Now eat language and cheer!  
Let no rhyme be ignored, so pour more beer

sequestered

surrounded by time  
without a frame  
disturbed by absence  
motionless

riding waves of emotions  
using sextant as oar  
trying to count the stars before dawn  
another night with you drifting  
and then removed

throwing water at islands  
floating them higher  
watching the shoreline grow  
each new grain of sand drying  
no wondering of purpose  
or dreams of watery reunion

dusting bureaus of memories  
safe in folded order  
stored in each drawer  
there is a key somewhere  
on a chain like a forgotten trophy  
waving carrots over bad stew  
only increases separation

sea horses dance  
like bobbing synapses  
with no benefit of melody  
no hindrance or barrier  
toward a place of unadorned peace  
just another piece of ocean  
releasing channels of new life

sifting

sifting water through a colander  
sorting the past by desire  
interpreting a dune  
hoarding nothingness

chance waves undulate  
naught ought to be one  
now two  
tides rip then blend  
our fingers mix fluids  
and anoint sacred caresses

like precious saffron beads  
a delicious mountain rivulet  
you quench me so

## Signs

Wonder

Fulfillment

If just one wish

Cherish permanence

Love

Wander no more

Alight on this placard

Join me forever

Beyond print

For all to see

Entranced

You?

Burma Shave

soliloquy

standing before you  
naked my soul  
guises of cloth discarded  
I touch you my joy  
my eyes beckon  
if only for a smile  
mimicking your fingers in mine

like a totem's  
enduring statement  
carved, angular and defined  
solid, forever  
the patience of redwood  
I stand

in a place of quiet  
regal forest sanctuary  
tall somber giants  
expressive shadows  
misting hope  
glimpses of  
your truth  
my essence

echoes bounce  
cries of happiness  
needle to  
bark to  
root



Suburban boys c. 1963

Got you!  
I wave the gun  
You're dead!  
But make the dying spectacular  
writhing, groaning, squirming death  
wiping up the grass with your jeans

Stains of glory  
The power of victory  
so much better than you

Triumph  
my foot on your chest  
Reincarnation  
you arise laughing  
We go steal candy

## The Pharaoh's Circle

You return me to the time of my dreams  
when Egyptians sat mystically  
before the reddened sky  
When Aleuts trekked into the wind  
across an endless frozen horizon  
When words came to earth  
from the moon  
and rocket ships soared beyond  
the sun

My dreams are of you are  
of my life you are my  
dreams you are my life

For eternity  
I have dreamed of you  
like time  
always there, always waiting

I was the Pharaoh who summoned you  
I was the Pharaoh being summoned  
I was the lonely hunter calling your name  
into a silent, icy sea  
I was the commander whose starship  
went into the heavens for you  
and launched a million radio signals of love

Because of you  
the circle is complete from reality to dreams  
and around and around and

I am the one who sits before you now  
patient, passionate, determined, forever

The Road to Xian  
September 2, 2007  
8:15 pm

From the northwest a veil, occasional spotlights  
Swaying bus, the mantle fluid-like particulate fog  
Encompassing, suppressing  
noxious pall  
The living power of coal

Glimpses of dimly lit hovels  
a home?  
a storefront or shed?  
A fire or furnace always smoking

Sudden neon of characters  
blasting blaring cacophony  
Ghost patrons staring, drinking  
The glare multiplies  
frantically trying to shred the shroud

Roadside shops, gray and pallid  
Shirtless men sit motionless on stools  
cigarettes dangling  
card games play themselves  
Small Quonsets of survival  
the foreign of the foreign  
Children running aimlessly  
as anywhere  
but in the dust of death

to draw

how do I draw  
a pencil on the earth  
no straight lines  
or eraser marks allowed

looking at clouds  
wishing without wanting  
nodding sans knowing  
still hearing the whoosh  
memorizing swirls  
another kerfuffle

the kitchen table is a constant still life  
flat for unwavering lines  
but even now I can't draw  
except a vacuous conclusion about

you, me,  
are we?  
Chinese lanterns dangling  
on the veranda  
waiting, smiling  
silent though touching  
the dusk is sheer

light disappears  
gauzy pastel dabs on the horizon  
my hand is on yours as we smear  
color to fulfillment

torrid

fingers fumbling  
frantically frolicking  
sleuthing beneath  
your lingerie  
tantalizing thighs  
testing ticklishness

your lips  
my tongue tip  
bending waving  
luscious yours  
perfect

small kisses every  
sultry where  
then more  
sighs in delicious delirium

progression to closer embrace  
hands all hands  
fingers tease  
your breasts press  
so pleasing  
driving me to you  
directing you to me  
who's in charge here  
we are

union comes with curved passion  
coupled like Odysseus and Penelope  
a long time is no longer eternity  
but now

triangulate

the mountain's pinnacle  
its base  
and my heart

six times my pulse  
the circuit circumnavigates  
lights-a-runway flashing baby

nine days from now  
we kiss  
a triangular ring toss

kewpies fly angled from  
one point to two  
isosceles memorialized

oh wait a minute  
equal sides are what it's  
really about anyway

## Witchdoctor

Cure me doctor  
demons, loneliness, desire,  
passion, and of her  
My senses tingle way too much

Angel wishes are dreams pursued  
of caring and kindness  
platters for the alter  
Cast a spell, make sure to use smoke  
Spray leaves and herbs across the embers  
Chant words I don't know

Whisk up a brew, a tonic or two  
You know well the symptoms, you are the doc  
I need you to sculpt me a new way  
Create some omens, unravel my mystery  
Become the shaman of my new history

Touch and distance  
Lips and off to France  
Shaking up the hourglass, your job  
A map? forget it, just tell me truth  
With a relish filled spell  
make me well

You told me there were seven senses

color of Consciousness  
raspberry cream  
dripping in now

secretions of Desire  
stickily gathering delight  
palette of hope

aroma of Balance  
eyes closed in devotion  
fulcrum of forever

the swish of the broom  
metronome-ing the room  
Simplicity

pasting a dad's note to  
my daughter's wedding dress pictures  
Joy

making fingers type Truth true  
free from excessive ebullience  
and conjuring

ascension to a place  
of Home  
the wandering is over