

# Thirty-Seven Poems

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## Thirty-Seven Poems

James Francis \*

### Abstract

A selection of new experimental poetry: reworked versions of “classic” poems by Frost, Wordsworth, Whitman, Poe, and Longfellow; a trio of pieces about famous paintings; “fact” poems about electric guitars, contemporary Tokyo fashion, and Topanga Canyon, California. Et alia.

**Key Words :** Poetry, Modern Poetry, Post-Modern Poetry, American Poetry, Tokyo Poetry, Found poetry, Experimental Poetry, Fact Poetry, Imitations, Appropriations, Rewrites, Tributes: Frost, Wordsworth, Whitman, Poe, Hendrix, Longfellow, Joyce, Botticelli, Vermeer, Klimt. Fender, Gibson.

### Introduction:

The following pieces were written (or re-written or otherwise defaced, as the case may be) in the Spring and Summer of 2016. The appropriations of the canonical works— the sincerest form of flattery— are intended as appreciations, and as tributes. Fan art. As are the love poems, as I think about it. Applause!

### The Road Taken

Two roads converged in a yellow wood,  
Thus could I travel both  
And be one traveler, and long I stood

And looked down it as far as I could  
To where it curved in the undergrowth;  
Then took it, so fair,  
(grassy, wanting wear,)  
And aboveforementioned that morning lay  
In dry leaves no step had crackled nor, if moist, trod  
black.  
Oh, while knowing how way leads on to way  
I expected I should come back!  
I shall be reciting this with a theatrical sigh  
At a literary conference perchance, ages upon ages  
hence:  
Two roads converged in a wood, and I, I took it, the  
convergence, did I,  
And that has made no difference.

---

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(after Frost)

## Daffodelicious

I loitered crowded as a clod  
That lays low on vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a cloud,  
A host, a ghost, of golden cirrus frills;  
Upon the lake, above the trees,  
Fluttering funky and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as quasars  
that broadcast on the milky way,  
They floated never-ending  
Reflected on a conveniently positioned bay:  
Ten thousand thousand cubic meters of vapour saw  
I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads and waving their phones in  
sprightly dance.

The waves below them break-danced, but they  
Out-did the sparkling crests in glee;  
Neither a poet, nor a prosodist, nay, could not be  
but in the old sense gay,  
In such a jocund, overadjectived company!  
I gazed dazed crazed amazed but little thought  
What wealth the o'erarching show to me had  
brought:

For oft, when on my couch I potate  
In mood vegan or insensate,  
They twerk upon that inner disco  
Which is the bliss of being solo;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills, and tap-  
dances with bliss  
And dances with the daffodelicious clouds  
cumulocirrus.

(After Wordsworth)

“Song of Whitman” (from “Leaves of  
Whitman” )

1.

I celebrate Whitman, and sing Whitman,  
And what Whitman assumes you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to Whitman as good  
belongs to you.  
Whitman loafes and invites Whitman's soul,  
Whitman leans and loafes at Whitman's ease  
observing a spear of summer grass.  
Whitman's tongue, every atom of Whitman blood,  
form'd from this soil, this air,  
Born here of parents born here from parents the  
same, and their parents the same,  
Whitman, now thirty-seven years old in perfect  
health begins,  
Hoping to cease not till death.  
Creeds and schools in abeyance,  
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but  
never forgotten,  
Whitman harbors for good or bad, Whitman permits  
to speak at every hazard,  
Nature without check with original energy.

52.

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses Whitman,  
he complains of Whitman's gab and Whitman's  
loitering.  
Whitman too is not a bit tamed, Whitman too is  
untranslatable,  
Whitman sounds Whitman's barbaric yawp over the  
roofs of the world.  
The last scud of day holds back for Whitman,  
It flings Whitman's likeness after the rest and true  
as any on the shadow'd wilds,  
It coaxes Whitman to the vapor and the dusk.  
Whitman departs as air, Whitman shakes Whitman's  
white locks at the runaway sun,

Whitman effuses Whitman's flesh in eddies, and  
drifts it in lacy jags.

Whitman bequeaths Whitman to the dirt to grow  
from the grass Whitman loves,

If you want Whitman again look for Whitman under  
your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who Whitman is or what  
Whitman means,

But Whitman shall be good health to you  
nevertheless,

And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch Whitman at first keep encouraged,

Missing Whitman one place search another,

Whitman stops somewhere waiting for you.

1891/2016

(After Whitman)

### A Dream Within "A Dream Within A Dream"

One last kiss on your sweet face,

Then time for me to go away.

You're absolutely right to say

My life has been a total waste.

You are not wrong, who deem

That my days have been a dream;

And when hope has disappeared,

Who cares where?

All that we see or seem

Is but a dream within a dream.

Pounding waves and scoured sand;

Grains golden all fallen from my sunburnt hand,

Castles melted, footprints obscured—

To hear surf music nevermore.

Is all that we see or seem

But a dream within a dream?

(After, and with, Edgar Allen Poe and James  
Marshall Hendrix)

### Re-Decoration Day

Comrades; "sleep" and "rest"

Field, foes

Sentry's shot!

Cannon's roar, drum's beat.

"Camp" of Death

"Slumber"

No breath.

"Repose" and "Peace,"

Sod;

Battle,

God!

Sentinels

Silent tents

Flowers

Suffering

Memory.

Subtracted from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

(The Atlantic, June 1882)

Upon learning that the Celebrated Author  
was also an Accomplished Vocalist

I would like to have heard James Joyce's

other singing voices

### Tempera in Perpetuum

(Excerpt from "Beauties")

Heat the rabbit hide glue and size the big stretched

brown canvas. After it's dried, sand it and do it again. That should be smooth enough. Set it up on a heavy walnut easel.

Break the brown eggs carefully and separate the golden blobs. Puncture them and drain the yolk from the membrane.

Mix that with vinegar, or wine, (perhaps Champagne, and maybe milk and honey.)

Add your powdered pigments to that: ultramarine and malachite, cinnabar and verdigris and more—ochres and lakes, and lead white last for highlights.

Think about Apelles, the Greek painter, and his "Venus Anadyomene," ("Venus Rising from the Sea,") and his style, so different from modern styles. Think about Praxiteles, the sculptor. Think about Alexander the Great, and think about Florence. Wonder about life, and how you go from being a goldsmith to a painter. Shrug.

Chalk in your cartoon, then paint the sky and the sea and a forested shore. Use thin layers for a "transparent" effect, thicker ones for more "mass." Thin the paint to a degree that the brushstrokes disappear and the surface is like glass.

Work on the figures: on the left, an entwined pair of "wind angels," a flying nude couple, blowing pink flowers about, and on the right a woman holding a flowing robe at the ready.

Add some cattails and more flying pink flowers.

In the center, upon the waves, paint half of a seashell, in ivory and gold, and in those same tones fill in the body of the woman standing on the shell— not a woman, but the Goddess Venus, Love personified, pensive and pausing pregnant, her orange hair blowing wild in the wind; a woman who

is a pearl, come from the sea into the world.

Step back, and fall to your knees.

(After Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi, better known as "Botticelli," 1486)

1665, 44.5 cm × 39 cm

(Excerpt from "Beauties.")

From a deep glossy evergreen background a girl is looking over her shoulder.

A blue silk scarf on her head is a flash as bright as the sea or the sky, wrapped like a turban, with another of gold hanging behind, trimmed in Delft-like blue and white.

She wears, too, an indistinctly figured bronze satin gown over a white linen shirt, and a giant silver earring.

Her full red lips part.

This is, of course, one of the most famous paintings in the world, Vermeer's "Meisje met de parel:" so important that a Hollywood movie was made about it.

Her eyes are smiling, or questioning, and playful. Her eyes are like liquid ash.

There are mysteries in the folds and shadows of the fabrics of her garments, deceptively flat on the canvas.

Her blue scarf could be water or air, river or sea or sky; or a night view of a landscape or a city, some moonlit city of dreams.

The bronze-ochre gown could be earth, or anything,  
and what is the design on that trim?

Could that be a segment of a scalloped shell in folds  
of pale yellow silk?

What is reflected in that convex fisheye giant silver  
globe which is not a pearl, perhaps tin or glass, but  
something else as much polished as pearly. A  
white marble floor and window? Everything.

And what is in that gleaming forest background?

This is not a “portrait” but a snapshot or a freeze-  
frame. The pearl and scarf are swinging, there is  
a hint of blur to the highlights on the pearl, her  
bottom lip, and bottomless eyes; she is turning.

Where? She has paused, and she is turning back.  
She is turning back to look. She is turning back to  
look at you.

She is about to say something.

Pay attention!

Wien, 1908, 180 x 180 cm

(Excerpt from “Beauties.”)

Under a brilliant night sky of burnished gold leaf  
and lighter gold stars, a man and a woman are on  
their knees, face to face, wrapped in a golden cloak.

They are on a violet- and yellow-wildflower-covered  
hill, and the man is kissing the woman’s face, pale  
white like an expectant moon.

The gleaming cloak is covered in geometric  
designs— the outside is mainly black and white  
rectangles, while the inside is circles or ripples.

The woman wears a gown that is mainly decorated  
with circles and flowers. Part of it is transparent,  
and a design of ivy blends into the flowers below  
them. The patterns seem abstract, or architectural,  
but there are rhythms, and writhings, within and  
between those shapes. The pattern is ascendant,  
and transcendent.

The hill is a peak or a ledge, and they are on the  
edge but in no danger.

The wildflowers are realistic, as are the parts of the  
figures we can see; her hands on his neck and hand,  
his powerful fingers tenderly touching her pale but  
passion-flushed face; her shoulder and arm, and her  
calves and feet, toes braced. Her lips.

She has flowers in her hair, and he is crowned in  
ivy, after the Classical fashion. They seem almost to  
be statuary, (but statues don’t blush like that,) and  
also iconic, or ikonic, with those squares and sprays  
of real gold.

This is “The Kiss,” (“Der Kuss” in German,) painted by Gustav Klimt in Vienna from 1907 to 1908. The original title was “Das Lebespaar,” (“The Lovers:”) more apropos. There is a kiss, occurring or immanent, but this is more. This is a rendition of the most intimate moment, the act of passion, and perhaps the climax. Possibly, even, conception.

Their faces float on their own bliss, and it is like the  
creation of the world.

They are ageless, and timeless, but as fresh and  
alive as the flowers upon which they embrace;  
timeless and new, and that is the feeling of love. It  
is the only thing that matters.

## White on White

Morning light on fresh-stretched canvas,  
stacks of gessoed pressboard and cardboard,  
(and some scrap wood and cigarette packs, too, for  
good measure, all primed, sized, and ready to go!)  
Paper, too: pulp and rag.

There is a crumpled, greying tarp on the floor, and  
a few paper napkins with dried titanium or zinc  
oxide on them, something smelling pleasantly of  
turpentine.

Clean, and pure, and I love to paint but some days  
I just want to run the rainbow back through the  
prism.

## Persistence of Graphite

Points, without reference, are meaningless.  
A straight line is neutral.  
Zig-zags threaten.  
Curves comfort or entice.  
A line is literally a distinction.  
“Form” is two views of “shape;” “significance” might  
be three.  
Color is just another kind of line, in a different  
direction.  
Letters are insects that sometimes crawl into your  
mind.  
All perspective is forced.

## (After cleaning a brush)

It occurs to me  
that there are few things  
quite as pleasant as  
waiting for paint to dry.

## Fude, Sumi, Hanshi (Suibokuga)

Brush, Ink, Paper  
(Instructions for a Portrait after the Chinese style)

Line over, line over (curves up,)(1, 2,) and two  
smaller ones below (3, 4.)

Between these, a curved line down, (5,) with a  
slight curve over,

(and perhaps a dot near there for a nostril.)

Line: curved line up above, curved line down below,  
(6, 7, 8,) smiling.

Moon-like sections of ovals for brow and cheek,  
chin and neck, (9-12.)

Bamboo, pine, and rice;  
Mountains, water, and air.

The soft shadow of her hair,  
blackier than ink,  
falls from the edge of the creamy white sheet.

*Ἑλληνες παρθενικό*

Fresh from a bath, Her Museness is drying her  
hair, then she pulls a tortoise comb through it and it  
shimmers like watered silk.  
(Shell-like ears, and waves of tresses? Surely.)  
(Polychromed marble.)

Wind ruffles the curtains, and a smell of flowers  
suffuses the room: lavender and rosemary, with a  
soft rustling, like the echo of the furthest distant  
thunder, or the very smallest storms.  
(Bronze with blue patina.)

She looks up and smiles, and when she speaks, her  
human voice is Song.  
(Invisible, everywhere.)

## Spring (April 2016)

Spring's hair is a bird's nest, (just on one side;  
the other is straight, long and black,  
but brown on the ends where it was a bob, dyed.)

Spring stayed out late last night,  
drinking beer under the carbonated stars,  
watching the bats (plucky leather petals) whirl  
around over the river,  
then dancing. (Salsa and tequila, and Bloody Marys  
at dawn.)

Spring yawns like a butterfly,  
and stretches, and pulls the clouds back over her  
head.

She's tired of me bothering her!

## Seed Front

A snow of puffs,  
(not a blizzard but light flurries,  
slowly falling...)

"Parachute dispersal;" like dandelions but not  
dandelion.  
Drifting banks of fuzz moving in.

They look like shrunken storm clouds.

## Meteorological

a round rainbow circles the  
near-waxed moon, lemony,  
over unwinding iridescent spirals of  
orange-peel clouds

a citrusy night...  
maybe listen to  
"Tangerine" or

Tangerine Dream.

20 IV 2016 8:01 PM  
Mitakadai

## Love Poem

Eyebrows rise in laughter,  
Fluttering eyelashes flirt— for lucky you!  
Shadows on her shoulder,  
and the barest trace of some delightful shampoo...  
Yuzu?

Spring has come, and love is in the hair.

## Kasuga Dori

At one end, the Tokyo Dome Roller Coaster.  
At the other, SkyTree.

Just the sight of this metal is enough to make my  
(warm, breezy, perfect Spring) day, and when I see  
Tokyo Tower later from a rooftop, everything will  
be perfect.

Giant steel stuff that makes me happy.

## Magnetism

From across a crowded room,  
or across an empty world;  
that invisible, magical, absolutely irresistible  
attraction between people...

There is only one direction, and a compass is  
pointless.

## Hose

I'm thinking about Einstein's postulation that  
"space" has mass,



and I'm thinking that that was easy for him to say, with that bad-ass moustache.

(It's OK with me either way, although it messes up a lot of my calculations, and I don't like to re-do stuff.)

I'm also thinking about vacuuming in a vacuum. That's an experiment I'd like to see. Tidy.

### Diminishing

Sometimes I think of them, "us," I mean, like bodies dropping out of the sky, but that's not it; it's like we're all standing around together and people fall over, these people I love, and they're gone, and there's nothing to be done.

### Defenestrations

A brown-and-black-striped cat that I know jumps from a ledge.

A woman's soft laugh—I wonder what it was about. Some cooking smell: seared meat; so nice. Sizzled. A few notes on a piano.

Sharp bark of a small dog, and childrens' laughter, which is also music.

An edge of a white curtain billows slightly out.

Later, a whole long street smells like soap and shampoo, because everybody's taking a bath at the same time. (Sadly, the local "sento" traditional public bath has recently been shuttered, where everybody could do it together, under a glossy enamel mural of Mount Fuji and big open skylights. Splashy echoes.)

I think of walking in San Francisco, (of drizzled Victorian gingerbread and misty leaded glass,) where it always smells like weed.

### Sanrio Moon

Tonight there's a "Strawberry Moon," so named because it's the best time to pick strawberries, which stands to reason.

It is also coinciding with the Summer Solstice, which is a rare thing, I read. Well, alright!

It was the prettiest Moon I've ever seen, a creamy pink rising on the horizon at dusk, a few hours ago. (It's still beautiful, creamy and slightly hazy, but the pink dripped off.)

Tokyo 20 VI '16

### Chiaroscuro Bumps

Sittin' on logs;  
campfire orange faces  
flickering traces.

Shadows and frogs.

### Rhapsody in Denim

(notes from "Tales of Deepest Topanga," some manner of California Chronicle.)

The flauting of the Ceremonies of the Chi warbles through the oaks and the fragrant, rustling eucalypti; incenses sacred and medicinal and Mendocinoal waft over the baked hilltops and through the verdant, shady canyon groves...

Among the trees the naked plants dance: mushrooms magical and the sacred Peyote, the Maize queen and Saint Sativa. (And it is even whispered that a stream flows herein of the sacred liquid of Owsley.)

Morning is herbal tea and tofu, afternoons hazy

and hashy, and evening brings dreams of soft strummings sincerest of folk guitars and the endless stars, stars, stars of endless California nights, nights, nights.

Macrame. Beads. Back to the Earth, man! Which is correct.

(This is where the Tongva people lived, next to the Malibu Chumash. "Topanga" might mean "Heights," and it probably doesn't mean "Bohemian Arts Colony.")

Joni. Neil. Charlie. Famous denizens, or infamous. Grave of Gwanji the iguana.

Woodie Guthrie lived here, and that's enough.

Love those dirt roads.

### Legends of the Six-String

(Notes from a work in progress, or phrases from a rough demo. "Annals of Organology.")

(1)

Fender:

The "Telecaster" is the shape of the political map of the United States, the pickups situated at the Appalachian and Rocky Mountains.

The "Stratocaster" is shaped like a woman's body, a seated nude seen from behind, bending forward.

(The Tele appeared in 1950, and was originally called the "Esquire." Soon, a second pickup was added and it was called the "Broadcaster." Then it had no name, but was dubbed the "Telecaster" in 1951, when television was a big new thing.)

(The Strat was unveiled in 1954, boasting what is officially called the "Comfort Contour Body," and who doesn't want that?)

The 1949 prototype for the Tele is called the "Snakehead," because the headstock looks like one. A rattlesnake head with tuners.

Leo Fender's later "G&L" guitars feature a headstock curve which resembles a cutout hemi-silhouette of a nude woman, breasts and hips in lovingly lacquered maple.

(2)

Gibson:

The "Les Paul" appeared in 1952, and is shaped like a guitar, which is shaped like a female body. Spanish curves, perhaps. (There is a "cutaway," to facilitate access to the neck, and that is also sexy. One does not want to neglect the upper bout.)

(As early as 1940 Les had begun a series of "Log" solid electric guitars, which might be more properly called "Planks" or "Beams," but he called them "Logs." So be it. Lumber and hardware, and the heavy door-hinges he used as tail-pieces look particularly good.)

The 1961 "SG," which stands for "Solid Guitar," features pointy "devil's horns," and later a "bat-wing" pick guard. "Solid," or "Satanic?" A Luthierian mystery.

The radical "Flying V," which is what it looks like, and the "offset" "Explorer," and almost non-existent "Moderne" appeared in 1958. These, and the "Firebird," from 1963, resemble the angled but not so angular fiberglass Studebaker "Avanti" automobile, or the animated green clay character,

Gumby.

## Tokyo Fashion Notes

(A Random Selection, June 2016)

Dusty hot pink is back and looking good— lots of tank tops.

Neon pink and black are also back— God Save the Queen! A revival of Madonnage will not be far behind.

Terra Cotta has been strong, and burgundy is this year's dark horse. One recalls Homer: "The wine-dark wine."

Denim/khaki shirt/dress and leopard pumps: best of show for today, and the fact that she is smoking Pianissimo cigarettes is just a charming bonus.

The cutest girl in the world, wearing an oversized Pope Francis t-shirt.

The coolest shoes I have ever seen: silver wingtips, with a mint-green linen and silk one-piece. Dorothy Gale, eat your heart out.

Navy linen dress and white sandals, orange nails. Oui, je t'aime. Tu le sais.

Denim has been surging.  
Cutoffs— the cut-offedest. Pleasures of the fringe.

Linen-lined lace dresses; delightful. Shorts, too. The lines and the curves, the intricacy, and the drape. Never enough lace.

Camisoles! Camisoles, camisoles, camisoles!  
It sounds like a ride, like "carousel." It must be French, I must be dreaming.

A long, sheer lace "fairy princess" overdress (scoop-neck black t-shirt and cutoff jeans underneath,) with a cute little heart cutout at the bosom, and white leather low-top sneakers. Like a fairytale princess, chugging a Smirnoff Ice on the train.

## Exposed Hold

Moss-knuckled roots clutching rocks;  
trees living on ledges,  
hanging from edges,  
like everybody.

I thought "Maybe like Angkor Wat, but maybe not."  
Not so many mangoes.

## Today's Trash Pick

(or "Trash Talk," latest in a series of Curated Debris, or Artisanal Garbage.)

In the gutter by the road, not quite washed into the sewer grate, are a toothpick and a soft contact lens. (I've never seen one of these before. On the ground, I mean. I don't wear them so I don't look for them.)

A line and a circle; a cylinder and a hemisphere: old wooden technology and a modern plastic prosthetic, both almost down the drain. Both "biohazards," too, at some point, although they seem benign now.

I wonder if they came from the same head.

## Black Nylon Beat

A dead umbrella in the street looks like a music stand,  
(the collapsible chrome kind,) but an umbrella is, properly, a percussion instrument.

## Canvas Bag

("Fragments from a," or "Text on Creased Textile")  
(on a train near Shinjuku)

NEI ORK  
IS APL HERE  
MIDNIGH THE  
SHANK OF EVENING

PARADTY  
7/2

AZUL USSY

## Protest Poem

There are not enough protest poems

## La chasse aux papillons

Poems and songs are a bit like butterfly hunting;  
they're flying around in the air, and you gotta chase  
'em down sometimes.

(It's important to not damage the wings, and display  
and presentation are important, too. Careful with  
those pins!)

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