

The Collected Poems
of Jared Smith

1971-2011

Jared Smith

NY
Q Books™

The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.
New York, New York

NYQ Books™ is an imprint of The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.

The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.
P. O. Box 2015
Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10113

www.nyqbooks.org

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First Edition

Set in New Baskerville

Layout and Design by Raymond P. Hammond
Cover Photo by Deborah Parriott Smith

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012930700

ISBN: 978-1-935520-51-1

Contents

The Uncovered Poems: The Early 1970s to Early 1980s

The Wolf Shadow	/ 23
Estuary	/ 24
Watching	/ 25
Death by Drowning	/ 26
Letter to H. S. Mauberly	/ 27
The Corridor	/ 28
Underneath	/ 29
Violins	/ 30
Promontory	/ 31
Searching the Horizon	/ 32
The Dover Gas Garage	/ 33
A Marriage	/ 34
Across a Continent	/ 35
<i>Animus</i>	/ 38
Destination: Hunting	/ 41
The Insomniac Groom	/ 42
The Wedding Night	/ 44
The Beehive	/ 45
The Tower	/ 46
Evening's Song	/ 47
4/26/72 and God	/ 48
There Is Something Soft in This	/ 49
The Blood of Wolves	/ 50
Eternal	/ 51
The Last Nightmare	/ 52
Solitudes	/ 54
Silence	/ 55
Dead Stalk Watercolor	/ 56
Within the Garden	/ 57
A Recurring Particular Day	/ 58

After Midnight / 59
The American Museum of Neutral History / 60
Departing From Portland / 61
Expectation of Six P.M. / 62
Looking Back on Having Left / 63
Meditation on Old Movies / 65
The Glass Forest / 66
The Spellweaver's Workshop / 67
The Young Success / 69
The Last Wedding / 70
A Silence of Wings / 71
A Time of Looking / 72
Dallas / 73
Only One / 75
Annelid / 76
The Turning Off of Lights / 77
They Did / 78
Where Nothing Gentle Survives / 79
Saturday Evening / 80
Coming on New Mexico / 81
Autumnal / 83
The Street of the Little Sun / 84
Elegy to a Beetfield / 93
The Only Man Who Lives / 95
Saturday / 97
Of Fire / 98
In the Dark of the Station / 99
Another Time / 100
Because No Space Is Now Mine / 101
Datamatatrons / 102
And All the Day / 103

Song of the Blood: An Epic

Song of the Blood / 107

Dark Wing: Book Two of Song of the Blood

Dark Wing: / 151

Keeping the Outlaw Alive

From the Rigging / 177

Keeping the Outlaw Alive / 178

A Man Screaming / 189

Fast-Food Lunch: NY / 191

The Wall / 192

Sitting Dark in Life / 193

So Far Descending / 194

This Town Is Young / 195

An Essay on Illuminations / 196

Impossibly a Businessman / 198

Give Our People / 199

The Mind / 200

If...but No / 201

This, Really, Is This / 202

When October Comes and the Wind Blows / 203

What Makes the Man Different / 205

The Wind in Winter / 206

As Evening Draws / 207

The Company We Keep / 208

Evening in the Heartland / 209

Autumn Is a Red Deer / 211

Nobody Writes about Children / 212

It Takes a Man / 213

Finding Love / 214

A Day in August / 215

The Incident / 216

Visions of a Pencil / 218

Morning Owls / 220

Exultance / 221

A Response to a Conversation with William Packard Where We Tried to
Define Poetic Craft as Practiced by All Schools of Poets / 222
We Are the Poets. We Live / 223
Hibernation / 224
Beach at Oceanside / 225
The Interview / 226
One / 227
Face of the Phoenix / 228
They've a Kind of Patronage / 229
Model for a Romance / 230
The Eyes Too Walls / 231
Evening Coming in the East / 232
Invisible / 233
Commuting / 234
In Memory of Strain / 235
You Cannot Write a Poem / 237
The Penitent Voyeur / 239
From Your Flesh / 240
For a Woman Dead in Grand Central / 241
The Paycheck / 242
For My Daughter in Moonlight / 243
Greenwich / 244
On the Official 40th Anniversary of the Dignitaries at the U.N. / 247
Modern Man, Artificial Intelligence, and Humanity / 248

Walking the Perimeters of the Plate Glass Window Factory

Lines Written in a Waiting Room / 253
Remembering the Union Dead at My Door / 254
Walking the Perimeters / 256
He Who Says the Name of God Will Perish / 259
In the Plate Glass Window Factory / 261
Not the Lone Ranger's Horse / 262
Then Gone / 263
Wondering What It Takes / 264

Some Primal Memory / 265
Believing That You Understand / 266
Pebbles in a Stream / 267
On Mr. Peabody's Estate / 268
The Reservoir in Drought / 270
In the Year of the Comets / 271
Ode to a Goose / 272
Walking the Shore / 274
Putting the Passengers Off in Small Boats / 275
Where Wind Shakes Our Bones / 276
Putting Your Money In / 277
And the Beat in His Chest Goes On / 278
The Board Meets in November / 279
Something Natural Happening in an Office / 280
Between Meetings / 281
A Memo Torn Along the Dotted Line / 282
Another Saturday Night with Cassandra / 283
Tales of Silent Men / 284
The Eyes on the Coin / 285
At Evening / 286
The Sun Finding Your Hands... / 287
It Has Started / 288
Sound of Late Moonlight / 289
I Wish That You Were Here in Spring / 290
Returning Home / 291
The Last Trip We Took Together / 292
Our Last Walk / 293
An Apology / 294
Andrea / 296
At Home / 297
Before the Fire / 298
In the Parking Lot / 299
Turtles / 300
Information Superhighway of Death / 301

Lake Michigan and Other Poems

- Getting Ready to Move On / 307
Passage from Home / 308
Mood in Grays / 309
Lake Michigan / 310
Controlled by Ghosts / 319
Seven Minutes Before the Bombs Drop / 321
Finding Oneself in an American Fairy Tale / 323
A Quantum Species / 324
In Our Attraction to Electronic Media / 325
Picking Up the Empty Packages / 326
Driving Small Town America / 327
Evening Along the Outer Banks / 329
An Erosion / 331
Erie / 333
Talking to My Son / 334
Eyes, / 335
Having Passed the Solstice / 336
Imagination and the Man / 337
It Is Time / 338
Reflecting on the Visions / 340
The Lessons of Millennia / 341
So Much Growing / 342
Within the Islands of Solitude / 343
Witnessing the Writer Who Tried to Raise a Family; Dark Matter at the
Beginning of the 21st Century / 345
The Endless Chairs / 349
Tossing Jobs Around Like Manhole Covers / 350
When All Is Said / 351
To Remember US By / 352
Wait / 353
When It's Time to Go / 354
Unhinged at Last / 355
Your Room by Candlelight / 356

The Perfect Mirror / 357
Trout Fishing Along the Allagash / 358
A Space Between Time / 359
Things to Remember / 360
Of Moons / 362
Coming of Age / 363
The Last Snow Fell / 364
Hollowman / 365
So, Here's, Then, to the People / 366
Brain Creature / 368

Where Images Become Imbued with Time

The Word That Had Many Voices / 379
Storm King Mountain / 380
Father, / 382
The Alchemist's Stone / 384
Why Put Up with This Anymore? / 385
A Mountain in a Suitcase / 386
Symmetries / 388
A Matter of Degrees / 393
—Twenty Years of Empty Spaces in the Rolodex— / 395
Unforgiving / 396
At Christmas, Just Before Midnight / 397
In Age / 398
Snowball, Gregory Corso, and a Village Stoop / 399
Translucence / 400
Dead People / 401
Being Born of Bone / 402
Fossil / 403
Full Moon Above Main Street / 404
Ka-ching! / 405
Stroke! / 406
Leaves and Spit / 407
Ramses Visits the Cradle of Democracy / 408

Masks and Carved Animals / 409
Wallpaper Memories / 410
Rivers in the Ocean / 411
An Arborist's Taxonomy / 412
The Hand-off / 413
The Intensity of Light / 414
Proud Ilium, / 416
Nationbuilding / 417
The Gates Are Set to Close / 418
Little Cowboy Geniuses / 419
Fine Bone China / 420
Not Time / 421
The Little Things / 422
With No Return Addresses / 424
Helios / 425
What Light? / 426
Nanotechnology Man / 427
Roadhouse Restaurant & Grill / 428
Where Colors End, / 429
Observing the Constellations in Grand Central Station / 430
Asking Forgiveness / 432
Along Back Roads from Illinois to Pennsylvania / 433
After Sundown at Rye Beach / 434
Where the Farthest Galaxies Roar into Nothingness / 435
Best Not to Know a Town Too Well / 441
In the Beginning / 442

The Graves Grow Bigger Between Generations

A Silver Zipper / 447
Tea Leaves in a Chamber Pot / 448
Evening, Yes, but a Man Is Still a Man / 449
The Graves Grow Bigger Between Generations / 450
Tracings / 454

Life at the Margins / 455
Of Little Things That Carry Weight / 456
Having Never Wanted to Own the Business, / 458
Human Kindness / 460
Symphony / 461
To Be Alive / 462
Coping with Technology / 464
So You Say You Got a Job? / 465
Dark Machinery of Maybe / 467
Communing with the Dead / 468
Transparency among Ghosts / 469
Lowered Expectations in the Lower 48 / 471
Whatever Happened to Johnny Rebel? / 472
The Dirty Smelly Mess / 473
Poets / 474
Who Carries the Message? / 475
Fortress / 476
Learning to Breathe / 479
Looking into the Machinery / 480
Something There Is / 483
What the Gardener Knows / 485
The Renter / 486
After a Woman Is Removed from a Rome Necropolis / 488
For a Woman Minding the Store / 489
Finishing Work, / 490
Where We Lived / 491
Becoming Another / 492
Wafting Through Trees / 493
A Prayer in the Teeth of Time / 494
Pondfield Road / 495
Unsheathed and in Pain / 496
In Grief / 498
After Twenty-five Years / 499
With Sunsets / 500

What I Take to My Grave / 501
Night Heron / 502
We Are the Dawn People / 503
At Breakfast with All the King's Men / 504
Watering the Lawn / 505
Something New Is Hunting / 506
Poetry and Baseball and Pay-As-You-Go / 507

from Looking into the Machinery: The Selected Longer Poems of Jared Smith

A Trout in the Pick-up on Papago / 511

Grassroots

This Poem / 519
Not One Homogenous / 520
Knowing What Grows / 521
Grassroots / 522
Soaring on the Tectonic Waves of Time / 527
Living What the Mind Can Hold / 528
Monsoon / 529
Keeping Watch Over the Dead / 530
Camelback / 533
Do the Fish Drain Out? / 535
The Science of Expanded Understanding / 536
Petroglyphs Above *Mesa Verde* / 537
Among the Mystic Mountain Men / 539
American Hero / 541
The Eye of the Cyclops / 542
If You Squeeze a People / 543
Societal Psychosis / 545
What's in That Great Steel Belly? / 546
Wanna Be an Executive / 547
Perhaps That Too the Shadow / 548

Retaining an Empty Cell / 549
Not Cutting Too Close to the Root / 550
The Girl in the Coffee Shop / 551
In the Rooms the Motels Match / 552
Cold as a Politician's Tit / 553
People, Not So Much / 555
Know in Your Absence / 556
Flight 539 / 557
Mementos / 558
Inside the Municipal Building / 559
The Majority of His Life He Could Reduce to Movie of the Week / 560
What You Do When You Cannot Fly / 563
Why Real Men Don't Read Poetry Anymore / 564
If You Want to Write / 565
When You Stop Stroking the Machine / 566
One of Our Own / 567
The Making of Language / 568
Looking for the Foundations of Poetry / 569
Not Letting the Form Go On Another Generation / 571
The Things That Happen / 572
Things to Say in an Empty Room / 573
Mining Coal in Marshall / 575
Preservation Hall, New Orleans, and Gregory Canyon Beyond Boulder, CO / 576
Remembering the Touch of Stars / 577
Once, Beneath the Moon / 578
The Enterprise Mine / 579
Virtues of the Grassfire / 581

Seeking a Transrational Contemporary Postmodernism

Seeking a Transrational Contemporary Postmodernism / 585

Alphabetical Index of Titles

Index / 587

Not the Lone Ranger's Horse

I am the dark horse
you ride the fields of evening with,
but my eyes cannot see beyond the wood frame of this stall.
You have walked away
after pressing grains of the field to my mouth
and having pressed the scent of your flesh into my memory.
You have walked into the shadows beyond my harness
and left me to carry the night on my shoulders,
left me to support your world on my too-thin legs,
standing here wide-eyed at distant sounds while you sleep.

Master, I am alone
bearing myself with dignity
on cold days when you do not come.
The dark earth calls to me of roots and of seeds
growing from last year's graves and bearing fruit,
and you parcel that out to me touched with your flesh...
For that I carry you over the evening fields,
but I would have carried you far away, so far from where you want to be
had you not closed me deep into this stall.

Eyes,

What have you done with the lakeshores
I have fished along each spring among the tall grasses
speckled with goldenrod and fiery purple loosestrife,
tinged with sunset swallowtail butterflies
 hastening each to each?

Wherever you have stored this
it is inside a hollow skull. Your hollow centers tell me this,
your round portals of hope leading into despair.
Yet the halos of tiger's-eye that border you
reflect the fringes of meadows that are always with you.

Why have I carried these vacant spaces with me
to fill them and carry them on mile beyond year if only to leave them here,
having no bottom and containing nothing or everything?
Why have you swept the horizons and stared into star-filled nights
and sought the inky darkness of words on pages written by the dead
if you are going to filter them into a bony bowl to be left behind?

Evening, Yes, but a Man Is Still a Man

When shadows grow from Chicago's alleys
and rattle garbage can lids with gusts of wind
that come in across the heartland,
an old man's attention flickers like a cigarette lighter.
He stubs the morning's sales beneath a worn boot heel,
and looks to stars that have not been seen for generations.
Babies are hung out to dry from fire escapes.
A truck becomes a German steelworkers' family
clearing their throats outside a vacant echoing oven in Detroit.
A broken hydrant leaks into the gutter, becomes a flood,
washes years from a plot where the pavement ends.

The man is a newspaper soaked into his own days,
where one page becomes glued onto another indelible
and indistinguishable from the stench of drunken nights.
The bottle to his lips has no name but darkness,
though it was filled from grains growing beneath the sun.
Call him stockbroker, and he will sell you a steer
with a wooden mallet buried between its eyes,
and he will follow you from city to city across our nation
offering up his family on every empty plate you come to.
Call him a tradesman, and he will trade every iron worker
for one closed out steel mill and a teenage soldier.
Tell him he is a product of the Rust Belt
and the infrastructure of every city will come uncoupled.

Do not try to sing his song on the radio.
Hunt for it instead in the loves he has left behind him.
Do not try to tell him what his interests are:
they can no longer be recognized for what they were.
Do not try to buy his wages or his time:
his is the Midwest voice newscasters dream of catching.
Tell him you're from Wall Street and you can offer a better living.
Tell him that, and he'll brick you in.

This Poem

What can you write that cannot be photographed?

I want *this* poem to go along the parallel lines of force
you have carried from the factory floor in your eyes on leaving work,
the heavy beams that shape everything you see sitting here
reading these words and adding to them the images you've seen.
I would have the images of the signal fires of forgotten cities find fire
and reflect along the linear tunnels of time inside your mind and meld
with the lovers lost, the songs sung, the dreams dragged to dust,
because they too are singing the songs of you across all time
and this is bigger than we have known since data shrank itself to data.
Volumes of Homer, Shakespeare, Archimedes, Einstein, and Plotinus
and grunting guttural lovings and semen in the night are not data dots.

I want this poem to flicker in the electromagnetic spectrum of your mind,
reaching across our darkness like a candle in a sawdust barroom inside
a plastic globe encasing a flame that reflects only from your eyes and
then goes out across the universe as light rays do in never-ending time,
without echo, without ever coming back, but leaving a trail to follow
 between stars;

I want this poem to be of many facets that flicker unexpectedly in the mundane.
I want its awkwardness to jangle in your pockets so that you pull it out
and think about the twisted pieces of metal and see how they light up the dark...
this to be human thought expanding for eternity even as the insentient objects
of our first being in the Big Boom expanded across electromagnetic boundaries
with echoes still seen that have meaning far beyond our understanding.